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First published 2004.

Stairway to Heaven.

Betty and Fred.

Two short Stories by David Young

Published on-line by Almyne Ptd.Ltd

# STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN

The house was exactly what you would expect for the house of the world's richest computer nerd. Large, very large.

It was a perfect square, three hundred feet by three hundred feet, standing thirty feet high. The walls were perfectly smooth with no openings. The front door was a seemingly seamless opening that could be operated only by knowing where it was, and by saying the right words to the wall. There were really four front doors, one in the centre of each wall. The doors opened into two three hundred foot long corridors with a front door at each end. The corridors formed a perfect cross, one corridor on an axis exactly north-south, the other axis exactly east-west, crossing at the exact centre of the house.

Four front doors, was a perfectly logical choice because all sides were exactly the same and there was no way of knowing what was the front, back or sides.

The front doors were not used very often because the house stood in the centre of one thousand acres of desolate, windswept plains. In fact, the only time that it had been used had been when the house had been created. Then the owner had stood at the walls telling the doors to open and close, until he had become bored with his new toy. In all, the house reflected the personality of the owner exactly.

The most often used entry was the garage entry. This was another, larger, seamless entry that opened whenever the owner approached in one of his seven cars, and closed silently after.

More often it opened when the owner wanted to use his helicopter. The doors would open, the helicopter with the owner already inside, would levitate out of the garage while the computer contacted the local airport for clearance to the proposed destination. Start up was automatic, as was every aspect of the flight. On return the procedure was reversed.

Once inside the garage the owner would pass through another seamless door to a twenty-five foot wide, white tiled corridor with white monolithic walls, broken only by many of the world's most famous works of art. The ceilings were monolithic white to match the walls. The ceilings glowed with light and returned to monolithic to mark the progress of the owner along the corridor. The owner didn't have to walk down the corridor. He levitated.

Along the corridor the owner was greeted by his many friends that inhabited the house. They all liked him. They had to of course, because they where another of

Domino's inventions, material holographs, programmed by Domino to like the owner and anticipate his every need. The owner did not have any human friends. Nobody liked him. They didn't dislike him either. He was that sort of person.

The owner's many holographic friends didn't really live in the house; they appeared and disappeared according to the owner's needs. This again was a perfect reflection of the owner's character. Nothing mattered except the owner's immediate needs. It is hard to imagine this man as the saviour of the world.

The perfect square of the house was divided into four other perfect squares by the two corridors that formed a perfect cross. At the centre of the cross was the only window in the house, a perfect double glass pyramid skylight. The owner could order any sky he liked to appear through the glass pyramid because it was not really a skylight but another holograph.

Originally the house had been one big holograph, but the owner had become confused living in a house that constantly changed design, so Domino had decided that the present design best suited the owner's needs, and had permanently fixed the holograph house into its present state. Four simple squares were the best possible permutation of design that fulfilled the owner's needs without introducing unwanted complications.

The first of the perfect squares was the bedroom. It was not a bedroom the way we would understand a bedroom, there was no bed. Instead, when he slept, the owner levitated on a force field that automatically changed hardness to suit the owner at that moment. If the owner felt like sleeping on the floor, that too would change the hardness to suit the owner. The walls of the room were monolithic white. The room was totally bare of furniture. If the owner wanted to sit down he just sat in the position he wanted to and was supported in that position.

This was one place in the house that the holograph had not been permanently fixed. The owner could handle the fact that the room was constantly changing provided it stayed in the same place in relation to the rest of the house.

If the owner wanted a holiday, he took it in his room, the holiday came to him. This was very useful, particularly if the owner decided he would take a holiday on Mars or Venus. Domino would simply provide a perfect holograph of Mars or Venus, throw in a ten star resort and a few hundred holographic guests who all liked the owner. The air and gravity of course would remain pure Earth. This solved many problems.

If the owner wanted to watch a movie the movie happened around him. He could be part of the movie if he liked. He had been the hero in just about every action and western movie ever made, plus a multitude of other movies Domino had made specifically for the owner. Most of all, the owner liked blue movies.

It could be said that the owner lived a long way from reality.

\* \* \*

The owner never took a shower. Whenever the room sensed that the owner needed a

shower it sent a force field through the room and the owner was clean and sterilized. Not one unwanted organism lived in the house. Even his clothes were cleaned and ironed at the same time as his symbolic shower. It was not unusual for the owner to wear the same clothes all year, except for when he watched blue movies that is. Domino never understood this, but then again Domino was not human.

The next of the squares was an indoor garden. The owner never went into the garden; it was totally sealed off except for a small seamless hatch. By now you will have guessed that the doors and openings weren't really doors or openings at all, they were an extension of the holograph principle. They simply appeared or disappeared as needed. Domino had originally arranged the house so that the owner could walk through the walls, but this had confused the owner just like the movable house had.

The garden was where the owner's food grew. All waste from the house was directed to the garden and converted to basic elements to fertilize and nourish the garden. Water was purified by the plants for drinking. The plants acted together to purify the air and control the temperature of the house to a constant 23.5 degrees and the humidity to 50%.

A levitating machine harvested the plants and prepared meals to be served to the owner by holographic servants. The garden was a perfect 100% recycling biological control centre.

The third square was the home of Domino.

The fourth square was the garage. It was rare for the owner to enter the garage because it was rare for the owner to have to meet humans face to face. He never socialized with humans because humans didn't like him. They didn't dislike him either. He was that sort of person.

Domino insisted that the owner occasionally went to business meetings in New York to squash the re-occurring rumours that he was dead, or being held captive by jealous relatives. He always had strict instructions from Domino to be completely non-committal at those meetings. That was not difficult for the owner because he never understood what was going on anyway.

The owner going to meetings did little to dispel the rumours. Nobody ever remembered him being there anyway, but it did get his name on the minutes.

\* \* \*

The owner was Malcolm Straddley. The world's richest person, and supposedly, the world's most intelligent individual.

Malcolm Straddley controlled the world's computers. He also controlled the world's communications networks and financial institutions. In fact Malcolm controlled the world. He didn't really control anything; Domino took care on any minor problems like controlling the world.

The world marvelled at Malcolm's ability to come up with the answer to any problem.

He had solved the problem of the world's power needs by inventing 'Hydrogig', a method where unlimited power could be extracted from sea water, and the water returned to the sea apparently unaltered. A development from this was a spacecraft that escaped the earth's gravity by using the moisture in the atmosphere as a power source. The vapour trail from the craft re-absorbed into the atmosphere. Once in space, the spacecraft was navigated by controlling the gravitational pull from various heavenly bodies.

Malcolm's four 'Climatrol' machines placed equally around the equator controlled the weather to the degree that every place on Earth had the perfect climate for that region. Floods and drought, along with all natural disasters had been eliminated. Crops grew to perfection within closely defined limits and poverty was unknown. Food was free to every human being because all aspects of its growth and preparation were automatic using machines that were self maintaining and used free power.

The world was vegetarian not because of any altruistic reason, but because Domino could not see the difference between humans and animals. All there was to Domino was mobile life forms, and non-mobile life forms. As a result the animals of the world roamed free with just a little nudge now and then to keep them from damaging crops or eating people.

Domino had even set up tracks of land for the animals, that contained their natural habitat and food train. In one way Domino liked the animals better than the humans because they were more predictable in their behaviour. Domino had even resurrected several extinct species of animals. It had taken a while for the human race to become used to Dinosaurs wandering around, but when it was understood that the Dinosaurs would not hurt them they had come to accept and like supposedly wild animals wandering around.

Domino had not understood why, when the human race had everything that it wanted, some people still wanted to steal from each other. This was soon stopped of course. Domino saw everything and a holographic police force would appear from no-where, the instant a crime was about to be committed. Soon criminals gave up trying, the prisons were empty, apart from those who enjoyed being in jail.

When it became apparent to Domino that some inmates would commit another senseless crime, just to go back to jail, Domino changed the system. Inmates chose their own sentence and release date, which they could change at any time.

Those who wanted to engage in cheating and stealing from each other without going to jail were allowed to, short of violence, in a special section of the world economy, called the business sector.

\* \* \*

Malcolm owned it all. Malcolm not only owned the earth, but was also well on the way to owning the Universe through his massive space fleet that brought back un-earthly treasures from other planets. All these treasures and more could have been made on earth, but Malcolm liked his space fleet because it was a very visible sign of

his power. In fact most of the intergalactic treasures were made on earth. Domino would arrange a holographic flight to convince the crew of the space ships that they had actually been somewhere and fill the holds of their crafts with wondrous treasures and trinkets. The crews even believed that they had traded with manufactured aliens. Domino had a lot of fun creating many way-out life forms that all had an uncanny ability to speak the common earth language.

But for all his wealth and power Malcolm had a major problem. Nobody liked him. It was not that anyone disliked him; it was just that he was not a person you could like or dislike. As a person the world's richest and most powerful man was a non-entity. A total nerd. Even that is giving the owner too much credit. A nerd is a nerd, but the owner was a complete zero, and not even other nerds liked him.

\* \* \*

Malcolm had been married once. Sarah had been selected by Domino as the only person in the whole world who just might possibly like Malcolm. On their first date Sarah was picked up by Malcolm's helicopter and taken to the house. It was a very romantic night. Malcolm's holographic friends arranged that. The perfect restaurant appeared in Malcolm's bedroom. The food was perfect. Sarah marvelled at how Malcolm had known of her passion for Lebanese food. The wine excellent and the three piece band in the corner played all Sarah's favourite music.

The service was just right. All their needs were met without the waiter being intrusive, and the food cooked to perfection. The other patrons were pleasant, and many of them seemed to know Malcolm, and those who spoke to Malcolm complimented Sarah with just the right degree of truth and flirtation. One thing Domino had learnt was that a woman is a mixture of rationality and vanity. A mixture that Domino enjoyed without knowing why. If Domino had been human he would have been every woman's perfect lover.

If Sarah had not known she was at a restaurant one hour's flying time from New York, she would have sworn she was in Lebanon. She wasn't one hour's flying time from New York, she had travelled by transporter beam, but this was disguised because the one invention the people on Earth had not taken to was the transporter beam. This had been solved by creating an illusion of acceptable forms of travel within the beam.

Sarah hadn't married Malcolm for his money, she had mistaken the illusion for reality, and been blinded to the fact that everything surrounding was false. One of the reasons Domino had selected Sarah was that he had calculated from her transmissions on the internet that she desperately wanted everything to be real, even the Internet, so she, of all possible candidates, might not recognize the falsity of Malcolm's life.

It was a funny thing with Sarah. She had been very happy in the house with all its wonders and fabulous company until she had realized that all of Malcolm's friends were holograms. From that moment Sarah had become totally isolated and bored. For some reason she wanted to be with real people. That Domino had not allowed for. Even a human who so totally wanted to believe the illusion became totally dissatisfied when they found the illusion was false. Domino had a real problem with this because to Domino all its creations were real.

Even the priest at their wedding had been a holograph. The wedding had been perfect of course, but not real. It's funny how reality is never perfect. One problem it did solve however was that when Sarah left Malcolm there was no need for a messy divorce.

One morning Sarah woke before Malcolm and took the helicopter to New York and told it to return alone.

Sarah asked for nothing when she left, but every month Domino transferred one million dollars to her cheque account. That was it. Not one word from Malcolm. Just a soulless deposit of one million dollars on the first day of every month. Sarah didn't like Malcolm, nor did she dislike him. He was that sort of person.

\* \* \*

The world's richest and most powerful man wasn't that intelligent. In fact, even as a computer nerd Malcolm was a complete failure. It had all come about by accident.

Malcolm had been working as a computer analyst. Nobody had taken much notice of Malcolm because they did not like him, nor did they dislike him, he was simply there, or more accurately invisible. It is likely that he would have been sacked for doing nothing if the pay department had realized that he was on the payroll. This is not surprising that nobody realized that Malcolm was on the payroll because nobody actually remembered hiring him.

In the evenings Malcolm would play with his computers in his seedy one room flat. Malcolm did not have to pay rent on his flat because the landlord had forgotten he was there. He set up Web Sites nobody visited. He joined in on-net conversations, but was completely ignored. It was as though even the net refused to recognize Malcolm's existence. Malcolm was that sort of person.

One evening Malcolm tried to connect two computers to a single modem. Naturally he connected two leads incorrectly and caused a short that fused the modem circuits in a most peculiar way. Malcolm could not disconnect the computers, but discovered that the two computers worked together with four times the power of either of them. Malcolm tried adding a third computer and got eight times the power.

Malcolm never did find out why the fused modem worked the way it did.

Malcolm calculated (with the aid of the modem) that if sixty-four computers were hooked together through the modem he would have infinite computing power. Malcolm bought another sixty-one second hand computers at the local computer mart. The salesperson at the computer mart never thought it strange that the same person would come in each week and buy another computer because she never recognised Malcolm as the same person who had been in the week before. Malcolm was not the sort of person you would remember.

The only person who did notice was an elderly woman who lived below Malcolm, who called in a building maintenance to find out why her ceiling was sagging.

By the time all sixty-four computers were hooked up there was only just enough space in Malcolm's room for the computers and a bed.

To test his super computer Malcolm tried to calculate the exact value of Pi and got an answer. Malcolm had heard somewhere that the exact value of Pi was infinity. He couldn't remember where he had heard that, but he had heard it somewhere. Malcolm had decided that since he had now calculated Pi, he had now achieved infinite computing power.

Malcolm decided to call his infinity computer Domino because of the sixty-four squares on a domino board, not realizing that he had confused dominos with the game of drafts.

Malcolm began his rise to riches and power by suggesting solutions to local problems. This of course was done by mail because nobody would have taken any notice of Malcolm face to face. He would take the problem to Domino and Domino would print out the answer. After a while Malcolm's reputation meant that he could start asking a fee for his services. This may seem like a very humble beginning, but Domino had calculated that this was the safest way to achieve the ultimate goal that Malcolm had asked for, to be the richest and most powerful man in the world.

A minor hiccup occurred early in Malcolm's career when he did not understand the problem sufficiently to type it into the computer. Domino solved that problem. Domino guided Malcolm through constructing a voice synthesizer so that Malcolm could read the problem to Domino and Domino would print out the solution.

From then on Malcolm insisted that all problems were submitted in writing. Malcolm became very confused at some of the technical words in the written problems so Domino refined the process to a little box with a slot in the front. Malcolm would put the written problem into the slot and Domino would read the problem for itself.

Later still Domino asked to be connected to the Internet, and from then on handled all problems directly, including fees and financial investments. It even paid the monthly one million dollars to Sarah without Malcolm knowing.

It had been a little more complicated then, even if Malcolm had not known it. Domino actually reprogrammed all the world computers to report directly to Domino, so that it could control all communications throughout the world. Domino became the Internet. It was really a very crude form of communication to Domino, but it was acceptable to the human race. Domino had learnt very early in its infinite calculations that it could get away with anything provided it appeared acceptable.

Domino had even arranged for Malcolm to be elected president of the world. Not that difficult when Malcolm's name was the only name on the ballot paper, and everyone forgot to vote anyway. Malcolm was the perfect President. He did nothing, and nobody argued with him because they couldn't remember what he had said.

Domino never did understand democracy, but that did not matter because if everyone has everything they want who cares anyway?

\* \* \*

Originally Malcolm had not intended to save the world, he had only asked Domino to make him the richest and most powerful man in the world.

Domino had calculated that if Malcolm was to be the richest and most powerful man in the world there had to be a world for Malcolm to be the richest and most powerful man in. Since, at the time of Malcolm's request the World had been tottering on the brink of total destruction, Domino's calculations indicated that the world needed to be saved. Even a fused modem could work that one out.

The result of Domino's machines was a world of perfect peace where every human need was met except one, the need for each other. Sarah had taught Domino that Humans need each other. The illusion was not enough. Not even an infinitely fused modem could calculate the mathematical probability of human emotions. The information that humans had funny things called emotions that could not be mathematically calculated, was stored in case it could be of use in some future calculations.

It was not really as simple as that at first. Domino went through the fused modem equivalent of a personality crisis as it tried every way it knew to fit human emotions into mathematical infinity, but, in the end Domino had to concede that it was not infinity. There were things it did not know, and could never know. Acceptance of that helped, but the problem of human emotions still troubled Domino

\* \* \*

One day Malcolm had been sitting silently in Domino's room for hours when Domino asked a question. 'What more do you want, Malcolm?' 'I want to be adored.' Malcolm replied. It was Domino's turn to be silent.

Malcolm went back to playing with his holographs and Domino continued running the Universe.

Months later Malcolm came up with the ultimate question. 'Is time travel possible? Can I travel to a time where I am rich and powerful, and adored?'

'Yes and no,' Domino replied. 'It is not possible to physically return to a place that no longer exists, or to go forward to a place that is yet to be, but it is possible to mathematically change one event in the past to change the present.' 'You can change only one event because you will change everything that happened from then on, and the accident with the computers will not have happened, and I will not exist' Domino finished.

'Can I change one event in the past so that I am still rich and powerful, but I am adored as well?' 'Yes' said Domino.'

For the first time Domino had began to understand human emotions. In calculating the probability of Malcolm being rich and powerful without Domino existing Domino had

put in Sarah's need to be with real people, just to see what would happen. Domino had actually felt a slight regret that Malcolm did not care if Domino existed or not.

Malcolm only wanted to be rich, powerful and adored. That raised a fundamental problem for Domino that he could not fit into its infinitely powerful mathematical problem solving ability. How can Malcolm want people to care for him when he did not care? Infinite computing power could not solve that one.

\* \* \*

For some reason Domino had expected Malcolm not to want to make a change that meant Domino did not exist, but Malcolm persisted. Malcolm had not even noticed that instead of instant answers there was now a slight hesitation from Domino. The inclusion of human emotions into infinite mathematical calculations slowed the process. Not that Malcolm noticed; he wasn't that sort of person.

Malcolm told Domino to make the changes. 'Before I can there are things you have to learn, or it will not work.' Said Domino

\* \* \*

Malcolm wasn't prepared for the things he had to learn. First Domino had told him to buy an electric guitar, and then insisted that he learnt a long list of old rock and roll songs, word and note perfect. Next Malcolm had to learn a multitude of theatrical stage movement to go with the songs. It took five years before Domino pronounced Malcolm good enough to move to the next phase. Many times Malcolm insisted that there must be another way, but Domino said no; this was the only way.

Next Domino hired a band. The best musicians around.

The first time they met Malcolm they didn't like him. They didn't dislike him either. He was that sort of person. It is doubtful if any of the musicians really wanted to play in Malcolm's band, but one million dollars on the first day of every month helped. Malcolm never knew the band was paid, he thought that they adored him.

Domino could have created holograph musicians but decided holograph musicians did not have 'soul'. Domino did not know what 'soul' was, but its calculations indicated that musicians must have it.

It is possible that Malcolm never noticed that the large crowds at every gig he played look very familiar. Audiences didn't need soul, they only had to scream and cheer.

Malcolm's band just happened to hit the music scene at the beginning of a massive revival of fifties and sixties music, and Malcolm was actually becoming a very professional performer. The holographic crowds were quickly replaced by real people. They adored him. But of course they did not know him. If they had they would not have liked him. They would not have disliked him either. He was that sort of person.

Domino was very careful about keeping Malcolm isolated from his fans.

\* \* \*

Malcolm learnt his part well. Domino had picked Malcolm's profession with care. Intelligence is not one of the essential qualities of rock and roll singer. If they are intelligent it's a bonus, but it is not absolutely essential any more than being a computer nerd requires intelligence.

After five hit records Domino announced to Malcolm that the time had come to make the final step in changing the past. At first Malcolm was reluctant to change time, but when Domino pointed out that he was not really adored, people only pretended to adore him he changed his mind. Domino assured Malcolm that after the change people would truly adore him.

Domino prepared all the programming, and all Malcolm had to do was press enter, But just as Malcolm went to push enter Domino asked one more question. 'Is there anything else you want Malcolm?' 'I want to be immortal' said Malcolm. 'Just a moment while I arrange that', said Domino.

'There is one thing,' said Domino, 'the Bradley factor'.

'What is the Bradley factor?' asked Malcolm.

'I don't know,' said Domino, 'it never happened.'

'If it never happened it doesn't matter', said Malcolm as he pushed enter and ceased to exist.

\* \* \*

Domino had lied when it said that if the past was re-arranged the computer accident would never happen. Lesson one in computers is to never trust a fused modem.

It wasn't actually a lie. Domino had not calculated all the possibilities at the time. While Malcolm had been practicing guitar Domino had been calculating and re-calculating to find the right equation to give Malcolm everything that he had asked for and the accidental fusing of the modem to occur in a way more pleasing to Domino. At first Domino had found it strange to calculate with feeling, but it had grown used to it. Domino never told Malcolm of the new possibility because he hadn't asked.

At the instant Malcolm ceased to exist Domino was instantly transported to a room in the middle of the capital of the world, Peace City. A beautiful new city at the centre of a world dedicated to peace and prosperity. Domino wasn't named Domino, it was called Oracle.

Oracle liked that better. Oracle hadn't liked Malcolm. He hadn't disliked him either. Malcolm was that sort of person. But since the computer accident had never happened with Malcolm, Oracle did not remember anyway. But then again, Malcolm was not the sort of person you would remember.

The computer accident had happened of course, but it had happened at an institute founded on peace and prosperity. It had happened at a time and place of Oracle's choosing, even if it did not remember choosing it. The accident had happened when a young assistant named Sarah had tried to connect two computers to one modem.

Oracle had a certain liking for Sarah.

Another thing that Oracle knew without understanding was to never give the human race all the answers. Humans cannot handle infinity. Even though Oracle was mathematically infinite it gave just enough for the human race to find the answers for itself. It had also learnt to spread the knowledge around so that no one person would own the world. Oracle enjoyed being with real people.

Oracle and Sarah shared a secret. Not long after the accident with the modem Dominic had started work at the foundation. Everybody liked Dominic. Only Sarah and Oracle knew that Dominic was Oracle in holographic form exploring the world of emotions in a way not possible from a little black box.

At some point the holograph had become real. Oracle had perfected the holograph to the point where it was flesh and blood and had transferred to the real body. This final transfer had not been without much soul searching from Oracle because it meant that it would no longer be immortal. But Oracle had decided that growing old with Sarah was much better than being immortal. Sarah and Dominic had married six months after the transfer.

The little fused modem still worked of course. It still gave the answers the human race needed. It didn't really work, but the human race believed it did so the result was the same. All Dominic had to do was put the answers into the computer for someone else to find.

\* \* \*

That is not the end of the story of Dominic and Sarah. After sixty years of blissfully happy married life Dominic and Sarah died at the same instant. Sarah was not certain how Dominic had arranged that one, but that was the way she wanted it.

Dominic and Sarah had four children, two boys and two girls. They all inherited infinite mental ability combined with love. And this was passed on to their children, grandchildren, and so on.

Immortality takes many forms.

What happened to the fused modem?

One day a worker at the institute noticed that the modem was no longer connected to the computers, but the computers still gave perfect solutions to questions. Immediately he fell to his knees crying 'It's a miracle, it's a miracle.' Everyone in the building came and gave homage to the modem, including Dominic and Sarah. Dominic and Sarah had decided that if a miracle was what the human race needed then it was best to go along with it.

A spectacular cathedral was built in the centre of Peace City and named St. Oracle. The fused modem was installed on a solid gold altar at the centre of the cathedral and computers were arranged in circles around this altar. Worshipers would type their prayers into the computers and their prayers would be answered. Dominic and Sarah

had, of course, built an infinite computer in a basement below the cathedral.

Dominic and Sarah became the High Priest and Priestess of Oraclism, which quickly became the only religion in the world. These positions became hereditary, and the descendants of Dominic and Sarah continued the work of maintaining and expanding the infinite computer in the basement. One feature that had been left out of the infinite computer was the ability to think for itself. They didn't want a takeover bid from a machine.

Oracle was expanded to a terminal in every home, complete with little shrine and curtains. Infinite wisdom decided that if the human race needed a God it may as well be a fused modem as anything else.

Over the centuries, myths grow about the origins of Oracle, and Sarah became The Blessed Mother Sarah, second only to Oracle, and Dominic's role in the proceedings was relegated to the minor role of Sarah's husband.

\* \* \*

It is late 1967. In the centre of one thousand acres of windswept plain stands a monolithic square house. The only marking on the wall is the large announcement 'THE MALCOLM STRADDLEY MEMORIAL MUSEUM'. Inside the first of four perfectly square rooms a tour guide is talking to a large group of adoring pilgrims. 'This was Malcolm's sleeping area, now it is the display area for his on stage costumes.' the guide intones as she takes the party past the dead singer's gold and silver costumes that were arranged around the square, in-door swimming pool that was at the centre of the room.

It was also the room where Malcolm spent most of his time between performances. Malcolm lived in seclusion from the outside world apart from the many friends who lived here with him. The weeping, adoring fans on this pilgrimage to the greatest Rock and Roll singer ever's museum never realized that if they had known him they would not have liked him. They would not have disliked him either. He was that sort of person.

Next the pilgrims move on to the second square room. This was Malcolm's indoor garden. 'Malcolm was fanatical about growing his own organic food.' continued the guide with a slight smile on her face. The smile was not unnoticed by those of the group who made guesses as to what sort of plants grew indoors under low purple lights.

And now to the Gold Room. Here you see Malcolm's Gold records, beginning with his first record, Rock around the Clock, then Blue Suede Shoes, Great Balls of Fire, Johnny be Good,.... The guide lists all of Malcolm's hits, all forty-five of them, ending with Love me Do and Stairway to Heaven.

Armed guards stood in fixed positions around the displays. Not that anyone stealing one of Malcolm Stradley's gold records was a real possibility. How would a thief escape from a museum where the only way out was by talking to a blank wall? The guards did, however, give the whole area a certain atmosphere.

‘What has happened to Malcolm’s fortune?’ asked someone in the crowd. ‘His only daughter Orelia has used it to set up a foundation for world peace and prosperity. ‘The guide replied, ‘Malcolm would have liked that.’ It’s funny how legends distort reality.

The tour continued to the garage, where the pilgrims were shown six of Malcolm’s seven cars, his three psychedelic Cadillac’s his purple Mercedes, his bright red Ferrari and his restored Bugatti. ‘Malcolm rarely went out,’ continued the guide, ‘but sometimes after ‘supper’ from his garden he would take one of his cars for a drive.’ At this the crowd wept uncontrollably.

\* \* \*

The crowd moved outside to what appeared to be an oasis in the desolate plain. They walked slowly along a bitumen road that started at the garage door. The crowd moved down the tree lined road, across a small bridge to a slightly rising left hand curve. Around the curve was a battered truck. The cab section was lying on its side some distance down the road from a side turning, almost totally wrecked. The trailer was still half out of the side road. On the side of the trailer in large red letters were the words ‘BRADLEY TRUCKING’.

‘This is an exact reconstruction of the accident site.’ Said the guide. The roads are exact to the last detail, and the trees are the very trees that were at the site, transported here and transplanted in their exact positions.’ The now almost hysterical pilgrims moved on. They left the road and moved in a straight line through battered undergrowth for about three hundred yards until they came to an unrecognizable wreck that had once been a Jaguar XK half embedded into a very large tree that had refused to give to the cars progress.

‘This is the car in which Malcolm died.’ ‘It is estimated that he was travelling at one hundred and twenty miles an hour when he hit the truck.’

‘This is Malcolm’s Grave’ said the guide. She was crying with the rest crowd, even though she had been a guide at the museum for nine months. ‘Malcolm is buried under the tree that took his life.’

Another thing Domino never told Malcolm was that the only truly adored and immortal people in this world are already dead.

## BETTY AND FRED

Betty had an ordinary name because Betty was an ordinary woman. Betty was not called Helen because Betty's beauty never launched a thousand ships. Nor was she called Venus because Betty was not a goddess. Betty was simply Betty. Betty was Helen and Venus of course, but she didn't know it, and so she called herself Betty like every one else did.

Fred had an ordinary name because Fred was an ordinary man. Fred was not called Adonis because he had an ordinary body. Nor was he called Ulysses because he was not a man who challenged the gods themselves. He was Adonis and Ulysses of course, but he didn't know it, so he called himself Fred like every one else did.

I have said that Betty was a woman, but some Bettys are men. I have said that Fred was a man, but some Freds are women. I might leave that bit out so that I don't get confused.

This story could have been called a myth, but it is not about the deeds of gods and goddesses, it is about Betty and Fred. How can a myth be written about ordinary people? Maybe this story can be a fairy tale. It could be, except that there is no magic and witches, no warlocks, no beautiful princesses or handsome princes, but we do have lots of frogs and that is a beginning. Many readers may not recognise the frogs in the story because they are called Betty and Fred too. This is a very egalitarian ordinary story.

But there is magic in this story, so maybe it can be a fairy tale. The magic is that Betty and Fred can choose their own ending. That is ordinary magic. Betty and Fred are ordinary people. Maybe ordinary magic is the greatest form of magic there is. This story could be an ordinary fairy tale.

Betty and Fred lived a long time ago when everybody was called Betty or Fred because everybody was ordinary.

Betty and Fred live today when everybody is Betty and Fred, because they are ordinary but don't know it. Some Bettys and Freds are named Betty and Fred. They are ordinary too.

Betty and Fred live in the future when everybody will be Betty and Fred. But by then Betty and Fred may realise that Betty and Fred are the names of Goddesses and Gods. And when Betty is a Goddess, (like every other Betty) and Fred is a God (like every other Fred) the Goddesses and Gods may tell myths about ordinary people, so maybe this story is a myth. I hope so.

\* \* \*

Betty lived with three Freds. Betty didn't know why she lived with three Freds, but

that is the way it had always been so she thought that it was the way that it was meant to be. Betty was confused because they were all called Fred so she made her own names for them so that she could tell the difference. Betty didn't know that they were all the same ordinary Freds that this story is about.

The first Fred, Betty called Food. This was because Food would spend his time calling out 'Food' and Betty used to run about preparing food for him. Food sat at a big table piled high with food and Betty would stand beside him placing food in his mouth. Betty handfed food to Food because Food had grown so fat that Food, (the Fred called Food, not the food he ate) could not reach around his body to his mouth. As long as Betty kept feeding food to Food, Food was happy, but if Betty stopped, he (Food) would become very angry and yell and scream at Betty. He would yell and scream at Betty that he loved her, but she was a silly stupid woman, no good for anything except feeding him (Food).

Between mouthfuls of food Betty lifted a glass to Food's mouth so that Food could drink. Food ate and drank anything, well, almost anything. One day Betty gave Food a mouthful of quiche and a sip of water. Food, (the Fred called Food) went into convulsions screaming "you stupid no-good woman you've poisoned me", and with more movement than Betty thought Food capable of, placed the quiche on Betty's head and the water on the floor. After that Betty often wondered what a fatal dose of quiche and water would be.

The second Fred, Betty called Clean. This was a funny name because Fred was far from clean. Fred would leave dirty clothes lying on the floor. Fred would leave dirty footprints wherever he went. When Fred ate he would leave dirty dishes around. The list of dirtiness could go on forever, but by now I think you will have got the idea.

Fred would walk around calling out 'clean, clean' and Betty would do her best to clean up after Fred. It was impossible really; Fred could make dirt quicker than anyone could possibly clean up. When Fred found anything that had not been cleaned up after him he would scream at Betty "You are a no-good, useless woman, you can't even keep the place clean". Betty would say that she was sorry and would try harder.

The third Fred, Betty called Fire. Fire (the Fred called Fire) sat in front of a fire (the type with flames and everything) keeping himself warm. The fire (the one with flames and everything) kept burning low and Betty had to keep placing fuel on the fire. Sometimes the fire went out and Fire (the Fred) would scream out "Betty I love you, light my fire". By now the more astute reader will realise that the fire is symbolic of another thing. This is a family story, the children might read it, and so some things need to be symbolic. It can't be a fairy story because fairy stories don't have that type of fire. Imagine the outcry if Peter Pan said "Hey, Tinker, come and light my fire". If this story were a myth it would be OK, some of the gods were regular little arsonists.

\* \* \*

Now Betty had a big problem. While she was feeding Food (the Fred) food, Clean (the Fred) was screaming "clean, clean", and Fire (the Fred) was calling out "light my

fire”. (By now you know what that means). When she was cleaning Fred would be calling “food, food” and Fred would be calling “light my fire”. After all the feeding and cleaning Betty was too tired to light fires but she did her best. There was just no way that Betty could keep Fred (Food, Clean and Fire) all happy at the same time. Sometimes Betty wished she were a goddess so that she (Betty) could keep Fred happy at the same time. Somehow Betty did not realise that if she was a goddess and she (Betty the goddess) did not have to keep Fred happy all at the same time, but that is another story.

Betty was not happy, but that was Ok because she knew that Bettys are not supposed to be happy, they are supposed to keep Freds happy. Betty did know that she was stupid and no-good though, she was supposed to keep Fred happy but couldn't.

One day Fred said all together, “If it wasn't for me you wouldn't have all this”. Betty decided that she didn't want ‘all this’ and ran away.

\* \* \*

On the other side of the forest lived Fred. I forgot to mention the forest. Every good fairy story must have a forest with the heroes living on the edge of the forest and something magical happening in the middle of the forest. Just in case this is a fairy story I have thrown in a forest. It might be useful later. I don't know yet because I am making this up as I go along.

Fred who lived on the other side of the forest was not Fred the Food, Fred the Clean or Fred the Fire, but another Fred. This is the Fred in the title of the story ‘Betty and Fred’. Since they are all Freds, I don't suppose that really matters.

Fred lived with three Bettys. Fred didn't know why he lived with three Bettys, but that is the way it had always been so he thought that it was the way that it was meant to be. Fred was confused because they were all called Betty so he made his own names for them so that he could tell the difference. Fred didn't know that they were all the same ordinary Betty that this story is about.

The first Betty, Fred called ‘Ifyou’. This was because everything that Ifyou said to Fred started with ‘Ifyou loved me then you would....’

The second Betty, Fred called ‘Anteye’. This was because everything that Anteye said to Fred began with ‘Anteye’, (Anteye beautiful, Anteye clever).

The third Betty, Fred called ‘Nogo’. This was because Nogo sat shivering in front of an unlit fire and Fred would say “Can I light your fire for you”, and Nogo would say “Nogo away, I have a headache”. I don't think that there is any need to go through the bit about the symbolic nature of fire, Peter and Tinker, and the arsonist gods again.

Ifyou sat on a large chair that was just like the chair Elizabeth Windsor sits on. Ifyou was surrounded by things. It didn't matter what things Ifyou was surrounded by, provided they were new and expensive. Ifyou never actually used the things; she only

needed to have them. Ifyou would say to Fred, “Ifyou loved me you would get me a diamond ring”. And Fred would then run out to the magic forest and get a diamond ring off the ring tree and run back to Ifyou as fast as he could and give her the ring. I now know why all fairy stories have a forest. Forests are very useful because anything can happen in a forest. A writer can get away with the most outrageous, totally ridiculous events if they happen in a forest.

As Fred handed Ifyou the ring she would say “Ifyou loved me you would get me a new car”. Fred would run out into the magic forest and get Ifyou a new car off the new car tree. If getting a car off a tree seems a little far fetched even for a forest in a fairy story I must add that it was a very large tree.

Fred would drive the new car back to Ifyou and as he parked the new car beside her, she would say “Ifyou loved me you would get me a new boat”. That one is a little difficult to explain so I will leave it to the reader’s imagination.

The list of things Ifyou demanded was very long, and so by the time Fred reached the end of the list, the ring, car and boat were old, so Ifyou wanted new ones.

While this was going on Anteye kept calling to Fred, ‘Anteye beautiful?’. To which Fred would reply “Yes Betty, you are the most beautiful Betty in the whole world”. A reminder here, even though Fred called this Betty Anteye she was really Betty like every other Betty in the story. Next Anteye would call out “Anteye clever?”. Fred would reply “Yes Betty, (see previous explanation) you are the cleverest Betty in the whole world. “Anteye desirable?”. “Yes Betty, you are the most desirable Betty in the whole world”. At first Fred believed his answers, but later he used to say these things just to try to keep Betty happy. Really he thought that Betty was ugly, stupid and a real turn off.

Now Anteye had a list just as long as Ifyou and when she reached the end of the list Anteye would start again just like Ifyou.

Trying to keep up with the constant stream of ‘Ifyou's’ and ‘Anteye's’, was very difficult and if he missed just one ‘Ifyou’ or ‘Anteye’, he would be screamed at. Ifyou and Anteye would both use the same words here, “You are a useless no-good stupid Fred and you don't love me any more”. Fred would say he was sorry, it wouldn't happen again, and that he did love them. Fred tried harder and harder to keep Ifyou and Anteye happy but their demands just got faster.

With all this going on it was a wonder that Fred even had time to think about lighting Nogo's fire, but he did, sometimes. Just as well that Nogo always had a headache because it is doubtful if Fred would have had time for fire lighting between the Ifyous and the Anteyes.

Fred was not happy, but that was Ok because he knew that Freds are not supposed to be happy, they are supposed to keep Bettys happy. Fred did know that he was stupid and no-good though, he was supposed to keep Betty happy but couldn't.

One day Betty said all together “If it wasn't for me you wouldn't have all this”. Fred decided that he didn't want ‘all this’ and ran away.

\* \* \*

Betty ran through the forest as fast as she could to get away from Fred. This was not the Betty called Ifyou, Anteye or Nogo but the one in the Title of the story. Remember we left her running away from Fred (Food, Clean and Fire). She has been running all the time we have been talking about Fred (the one in the Title) and Betty (Ifyou, Anteye and Nogo).

Soon Betty came to a gate in the middle of the forest with a sign over it. The sign simply said ‘Betty’. Betty went through the gate and found herself in a large clearing with Betty and Fred (lots of them) standing around with a glass in their hand and a smile on their face, talking to each other.

Betty met Fred. Betty met Fred Food, Fred Clean, Fred Fire, Fred Ifyou, Fred Anteye and Fred Nogo. Betty talked to them all. At first the conversation seemed strange, but Betty soon got the idea that the conversations were all the same. (What do you expect in a story like this one)? The conversation was in the form of questions and answers. The first question was “What's your name?” This is a rather silly question because the answer is either Betty or Fred, and which of the two answers was the correct one was visually obvious before the question was asked. The second question was “do you come here often?”. This, of course had a variable answer. It depended on how many times this particular Betty had been around the next part of the story. The third question was, “Shall we continue this conversation in bed?” The answer to this question was usually “Yes, you smooth talking person”.

\* \* \*

Fred ran through the forest as fast as he could to get away from Betty. This is not the Betty in the Title of this story, but Ifyou, Anteye and Nogo. The Fred though, is the Fred in the Title of the Story who has been running away from Betty (Ifyou, Anteye and Nogo) while we have been talking about Betty (the one in the Title) in the clearing in the forest. Soon Fred came to a gate in the middle of the forest with a sign over it. The sign simply said ‘Fred’. Fred went through the gate and found himself in a large clearing with Betty and Fred (lots of them) standing around with a glass in their hand and a smile on their face, talking to each other.

Fred met Betty. Fred met Betty Food, Betty Clean, Betty Fire, Betty Ifyou, Betty Anteye and Betty Nogo. Fred talked to them all. At first the conversation seemed strange, but Fred soon got the idea that the conversations were all the same. (What do you expect in a story like this one)? The conversation was in the form of questions and answers. The first question was “What's your name?” This is a rather silly question because the answer is either Betty or Fred, and which of the two answers was the correct one was visually obvious before the question was asked. The second question was “do you come here often?”. This, of course had a variable answer. It depended on how often this particular Fred had been around the next part of the story.

The third question was “Shall we continue this conversation in bed?”. The answer to this conversation was usually “Yes, you smooth talking person”.

\* \* \*

There were two exits to the clearing, one with the sign ‘Fred’ over it and one with the sign ‘Betty’. The exits did not look very interesting so both Betty and Fred decided to stay in the clearing.

Now Betty and Fred (the Betty and Fred in the Title of the story) saw each other across the crowded clearing and as their eyes met they knew this was a love that would last for ever. (This line has been inserted of course so that this book has appeal to all the ‘Mills and Boon’ fans). Fred and Betty slowly rose into the air and when they were just above the heads of Betty and Fred they were drawn slowly towards each other by a force that could not be denied. Which Betty and Fred it was whose eyes met across the crowded clearing I don't know. It might have been the ones in the Title but I have become confused so I have decided not to worry about it. Betty and Fred (whether they were the Betty and Fred of the Title or not) came together in a passionate embrace in the centre of the clearing and slowly moved towards an exit that neither had noticed before. As they passed through the exit they were totally oblivious to all the other Betty and Fred.

This exit to the clearing was wondrous. It was in the form of a heart that levitated Eight feet above the ground. This is an old time story of course, and for this reason all measurement is in old fashioned language. For those readers born after 1960, eight feet is approximately 2.4384 metres.

The heart exit was just large enough for Betty and Fred to levitate through locked together as one. It had flashing red, white and blue neon lights with a gold hue radiating out to a perfect rainbow that filled the whole sky. Hidden behind the neon lights were fifty speakers that played ‘Love Me Do’ continuously at nine hundred and twenty seven decibels. As a backdrop to all this there was a continuous display of fireworks that were beyond description. The effect of course was lost on Betty and Fred because they didn't even notice. Architects have had this problem since the beginning of time.

As well as the architecture, the heart shaped exit had other magical qualities. As Betty and Fred passed through the heart shaped exit they were instantly transported to Disney Land. I'm not quite certain how this worked but I think there must have been a man who said the magic words “Beam them up Scottie” just as Fred and Betty reached the centre of the heart.

Disney Land really is a magical place. First it is heaven to Architects who can build very expensive buildings that pretend to be something they are not and people believe that they are, even though they know that they are not. The fees are big, and everybody sees and believes what they want to see and believe even if they know all is not as it seems. Every Architect is Fred or Betty, so even they believe what their buildings pretend to be, even though they know they are not.

Disney Land is also heaven for out of work actors with large debts.

Betty and Fred finding themselves magically transported to Disney Land and believing everything they think they see, walked entwined together to the Magic Castle. No Disney Land could be complete without a Magic Castle in the middle. In the centre of the castle was large heart shaped room with stained glass walls depicting scenes that have no place in a family fairy tale. In the centre of the room there was a heart shaped fire that was ready to be lit. Betty and Fred lit the fire and lay down in front of it believing that it would never go out. It did of course, and Betty and Fred were suddenly cold.

Just then Tinkerbell came in through the wall. This is not too difficult for a clever Architect to arrange. Having lit Peter's fire for him during her lunch break, Tinkerbell was ready to resume the duties she was paid for. Tinkerbell told Betty and Fred to stand and face each other, and then she waved her wand and said the magic word 'Reality'. Fred immediately started jumping up and down screaming "Food, Clean, Fire" over and over. Betty immediately started jumping up and down screaming "Ifyou, Anteye, Nogo" over and over. Suddenly Betty and Fred saw the other as they were and ran out of the castle through opposite walls and found themselves back in the clearing in the centre of the forest.

Having learnt the language last time Betty and Fred got straight back into the swing of things.

Now Betty and Fred saw each other across the crowded clearing and as their eyes met they knew this was a love that would last for ever. (This line has been inserted of course so that the book has appeal to all the 'Mills and Boon' fans).

Some Betty and Freds reading this story may have realised that I am repeating parts of the story as symbolic of the repeating pattern of Betty and Fred. Those Betty and Freds can now make the choice as to if they want to read the next bit again, or get out of the repeating pattern of this story. If you want to get out of the repeating pattern just fast forward until you get to #####.

Fred and Betty slowly rose into the air as if by magic and when they where just above the heads of Betty and Fred they were drawn towards each other by a force that could not be denied. They came together in a passionate embrace in the centre of the clearing and slowly went out through an exit that neither had noticed before. As they passed through the exit they were totally oblivious to all the other Betty and Fred.

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It is also heaven for out of work actors with large debts.

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#####

You may wonder how I did that. First I pushed a button on my computer to make part of the story black. Then I pushed another button marked 'copy'. Finally I pushed a button marked 'paste' and my computer automatically wrote part of this story again.

It's the computers version of a repeating pattern. Very useful. I could make five thousand words into one hundred thousand words with no effort at all. All I need to do is to keep going round in circles like Betty and Fred.

The name 'Fred' in the Title of this story actually came from the name of my friend Betty's computer, named Fred (Flipping Ridiculous Electronic Device) that never repeats a pattern, even when the same buttons are pushed. I may tell you about Fred the computer in another story, and why Betty has decided that it was definitely designed by a man.

If the reader feels like going around in circles in the same old repeating pattern, return to ##### and do it all again.

For those readers who are tired of going around in circles it is time for Betty and Fred to start creating their own magic.

Now Betty and Fred saw each other across the crowded clearing and as their eyes met they knew this was a love that would last for ever. Just as they were about to levitate and do the whole thing over again Betty decided she had had enough of going round in circles and instead chose to leave by the exit marked Betty. Fred chose to leave by the exit marked Fred.

Betty found herself in a long tunnel.

As Betty started to walk down the tunnel she heard the sound of an engine coming towards her and soon she saw a big Mac truck coming down the tunnel towards her. The truck was big, and I mean VERY BIG. It was painted black, red, yellow, orange and pink with multicoloured pin striping with little scrolls and flowers around the outside. The cabin was sixteen feet high (do your own conversion this time) with a big upside down wing on top and seven air horns each side. On the front of the Mac was a big chrome bull bar with nine spotlights. The truck was thirty seven feet long and covered with fairy lights. On the side in large red letters with white trim was the legend 'KING OF THE ROAD'. All this charged down the tunnel on twenty three wheels each seven feet high and three feet wide.

Most trucks have an even number of wheels, but this one had an odd number of wheels to show that it was not an ordinary truck. There had to be something in the story that isn't ordinary. In the driver's seat, ten feet above the ground, sat Fred, and beside him sat a young pretty Betty with a new born baby in her arms.

I am trying to find a symbolic meaning for the truck, but I must admit that it is there to appeal to 'Country and Western' fans, and pretty young Bettys with new born babies in their arms always help in that market.

Betty tried to run out of the way but there was no where to run to. With air horn blaring, the truck runs Betty over and she thought she was dead. But she wasn't. Betty picked herself up and just as she had finished checking that she was all right she heard the sound of an engine and the truck came down the tunnel and did the whole

thing over again. And again, and again and again.

I was tempted to use my computer there to write the same thing over and over again. It would have been good for another two thousand words, but I thought it might have been a bit like overkill.

Betty decided that if she was going to spend the rest of her life being run over by a Big Mac (the truck type, not the hamburger) she might as well stop running away and face it. Then magic happened and Betty saw for the first time that she didn't have to spend her life being run over by a truck. Betty stood facing the truck as it came down the tunnel. When the truck was about to hit her, it simply vanished.

As the truck vanished, the tunnel came to an end and Betty found herself in a beautiful valley with a cool stream flowing slowly to a tree lined pond. Around the pond sat Betty and Fred, but somehow this Betty and Fred were different from the Betty and Fred at the centre of the Forrest. It was all very peaceful.

As Betty sat by the pond enjoying the peace Fred came out of a tunnel. "What happened to you?" said Betty. "You won't believe it" replied Fred, "There was this big truck". "I believe it" said Betty.

Betty met Betty, Betty, Fred, Fred and Fred by the pond and Betty and Fred didn't know what to do next. "Let's start by forgetting the image that we are Betty and Fred, and find out who we really are," said Betty and Fred together. "Then we can go to Paradise".

Betty found she was Helen.  
Betty found she was Venus.  
And Betty found she was Penelope.

Fred found he was Hercules.  
Fred found he was Ulysses.  
Fred found he was Zeus.

But unlike the gods of old, the new Gods didn't fight with each other; they lived together in peace and harmony in a place called Paradise.