

Grant Cogswell

Agamemnon and Clytemnestra Find Themselves in a Mexican Prison, ca. 1910

They're here again, in the Yucatan Gaols for the murder of their daughter, Iphenia Aquiana, with a knife, on the cutting block in the kitchen of their house, the finest in town. Soon, she will be acquitted, and will have to find a 'lover', she will hire a paisano, and come back to the Gaols with a net for Agamemnon when he is in the bath. They will kiss, and hold each other for a moment while the paisano watches, then he will help her throw the net, Agamemnon will sink in the bathwater. It has always been this way, except in France in 1479, when the Clerical Guard found the books of retrieval and reincarnation in the high house; they both burned for being witches, with baby Iphegenia too.

So the next one is like this: On a summer day in 1947 in Abrams Bridge, California they each appear into the world on Highway 85 on opposite sides of town and walk to the center where they meet, all passion in front of Caleb Sumer's lemon grove. They buy a house in the West Bridge, and Agamemnon (Calvin Parris here), an old warrior who studies these things in the news, knows that this world is one which may be plunged into fire soon; the neighbors make plans to store food, line their basements with lead. Then this is the last life, they decide. And if the gods cast them into the dark forever after, they will have led a quieter life, once. Agamemnon does not want to have to slaughter Iphegenia in her cheerleading uniform as an offering to any god—and maybe those gods are dead. And they will grow old here, with the sun and the dry hills, a place not unlike Achaea, and cars are fun.

Caleb, Living on a Big Planet

“It’s for a killer strange hot sunshiney day out there, Caleb,” he says to me, “You comin’ out?”

He’s at the door in his flight jacket and the dust is falling in layers out there on the wide low horizon. It’s such a big planet, and everything is so far apart. The horizon is a thousand miles away, so you can see everything, all the tests. One last week was a doozy, in the North, a big red ball that just appeared and sat, we called the Hendersons across the Plate to ask if they’d seen it, they had and said it was nice.

You can hear the distance, even on the phone. It is the silences that are bigger than all of this; bigger than the fusion shots, bigger than the sky all around us, so that it is even bigger than him in the doorway, smiling and his eyes shock blue from always watching tests, saying, “You comin’ out, Caleb? You comin’ out?”

Three Years Later, He’s Back This Night And I See Them Touch

The night I came up from the field there was a trailer in the yard, one of those old bullet ones, aluminum tapered down to the end with the license plate, PENNSYLVANIA.

She was inside with him, the both of them swaying in the soft light to music I couldn’t hear, me in the yard with the crickets and the hum of the road.

Swung once, twice, and took her down, there was a few noises and they stood out, but other than that, not much. I wondered how, after three years it was so quick, to fall into those old ways and rhythms.

Like the Sdwang, and their dream-religion taking up the Liberian settlers from South Carolina like back into the fold, and

then the missionaries coming thirty years later and finding their cousins, a new Sdwang, spearing the pale fish in underground caves, playing harmonicas in tattered cotton dresses and black-cloth coats and singing a Blues for Africa; them dancing on the hillsides and smoking the dried skins of caterpillars.

So I know how it is and have felt it, a pull at your core. When the full moon rises in your head, and there is nothing to stop it.