

Michael heads to river's edge, finds questions about toasters

Chapter 5.

Lloyd, a homeless economist
In Chapter 4, Michael decided to follow some 'signs' (a pair of kings, the color green) as a test of Sarah's philosophy of trusting the universe.

The Emerald is printing "And the Dew is Our National Treasure" in serial form, with an installment every Tuesday in the Pulse Relax section.

I emerge from the blackberry swamp near Oaks Park, cross the Sellwood Bridge and meander along the developed side of the Willamette River toward Portland. I have no food, water or money, the day is warm and I'm thirsty. At 1 p.m., I'm in a leveled industrial area still two miles from the ubiquitous drinking fountains downtown. I rest on a creosote log beneath a hazelnut tree and wonder how any of this relates to Kerensa.

"Hey, there."

I come out of a heat-induced sleep and squint in the direction of the voice. A man, about 50, unshaven, stands in the shade. He wears a jaunty smile. His faded shirt is tucked neatly into ill-fitting pants so that the buttons line up with his buckle and his fly. Gray hair, clean and brushed, hangs beneath a greasy hat that he wears at an angle. From each hand hangs a heavy plastic shopping bag. "Hi," I answer.

He sits beside me as though we've been friends for years. "Ya look tuckered."

"I am."

He pulls a dented Calistoga from

Where's Kerensa?

one of his bags.

"No, thanks" I say. "I'm fine."

He holds it before me until I take it. I drink some of the warm water and pour some on my neck.

"Homeless?" I ask.

"Nope. Houseless."

I learn that Lloyd usually sleeps in the doorway of a bakery, which he sweeps in the morning for day-old rolls. His other shelter is here in the blackberries along the river.

"Most food comes from the Dumpster," he says.

"That should save money."

"It saves the food from bein' thrown away. And the plastic and glass and aluminum and tin from bein' wasted. I recycle it all."

"Really." I pretend to care.

"It's 'right livelihood,'" he says.

I must decide whether to stay here in the shade and listen to Lloyd, or walk a couple of miles in the hot sun to the city. I won't find Kerensa either way. I stay on the log and look across the river.

"Money's weird," he says. "What if the CEO of GE took the \$23 million he gets every year and gave it to the guy playing a harmonica in the ghetto, what would be the effect?" I toss

a hand in disinterest. "Almost none; no consequence. The \$23 million is still in the economy, and the harmonica man is still playin'. But would the CEO still make toasters if he wasn't bein' paid?"

I finish the Calistoga. Lloyd takes the empty bottle and tucks it in his bag.

"Money goes to the doin' people," he says, "and the doin' people get money for doin' it to the bein' people. And the bein' people get done to. And the animals get done to. That's why they're disappearin'. There's no money in bein' an animal. And they can't be CEO. They're in the environment, and the CEOs rip up the environment and make toasters out of it."

I tighten my laces. "I don't suppose you've seen my sister: tall, medium-length dark hair, stands straight, never wears makeup, natural-looking?"

"Nope," says Lloyd. "But the berries along the river are natural. And when you see the CEO, tell him that an economy that uses up limited resources is limited."

"Sure," I say. "And thanks for the water." As I walk north toward the city, toward order, I curse this waste of time.

Peter Wright is a printer living in Portland. He received his bachelor's degrees from UC Berkeley, served in the U.S. Navy, worked as a stock broker and taught at Stanford University. © Peter Wright, 2002. All rights reserved.

Munchies

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Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese, black pepper, flour and herbs — were easy to mix, but I'm ashamed to say the shortbread emerged from the oven tasting something like sugary Play-Doh. Maybe it was the recipe, maybe it was my pathetic lack of skill, but the "snack" left something to be desired. Had I accidentally made the cat treats instead?

Appropriately, the milk toast in the "Comfort Cooking" section turned out a little better. A sugary-

sweet concoction that only called for a little cinnamon sugar, bread, milk and butter, was far more edible, and all I really had to do was toast the bread. (OK, I know I said that was cheating earlier, but I was desperate at this point)

I didn't discover the secret "joy of cooking" that day, but the entire experience was interesting, if not productive. If you're up for some late-night adventure and a fun read, I highly recommend this cookbook. However, those looking for a mouth-watering delicacy should find more sophisticated fare. As for me, I'm sticking with

my Count Chocula cereal.

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