

Conversation Pieces
Volume 22

De Secretis Mulierum

A Novella

by

L. Timmel Duchamp





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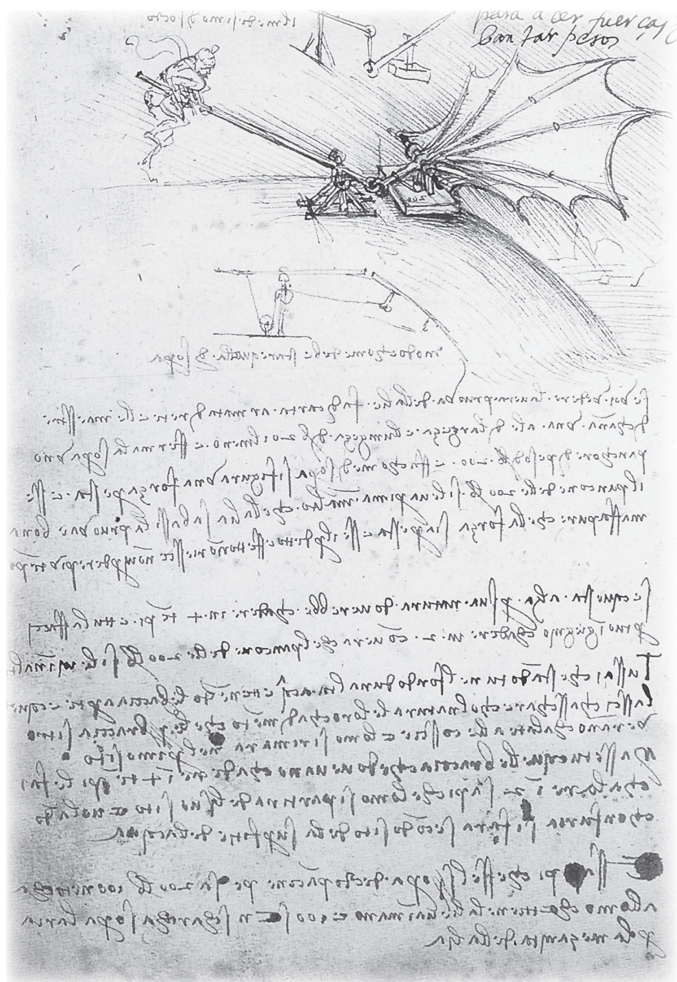
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section from Manuscript B, f, 88v, flapping wing



Manuscript B, f, 83v, aerial screw

Those who resort to authority to win
an argument privilege rote memory
over intelligent reasoning.

—Leonardo da Vinci

Elena,

Two months ago you emailed me a request for access to journal and diary entries, notes, letters, and any other documents that might shed new light on the first historical research projects to use the PSD and the disputes they engendered. As an historian, I should be the last person to impede another's research project. Consequently, my conscience began to prick me soon after I refused you, and before I knew what I was about, I found myself immersed in all the pertinent personal documents in my possession, revisiting areas of my memory I would have thought long gone.

And so on those days when my health permitted, I undertook to dictate a rough, colloquial account to my computer. The enclosed is the result. I hope you find it useful (though as you will see, it is sadly unpolished). I believe when you've read it you will understand why I could not open my journals, notebooks, and other computer files to you.

You have my permission to excerpt passages for direct quotation, but I must ask that you allow me to reread and correct such passages as I deem necessary. (I shamelessly

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plead health problems as an excuse for the sloppiness of my prose.)

I would like to take this opportunity to express my confidence in and pleasure that such an astute and meticulous an historiographer as I know you to be has taken on this project.

Wishing you all good fortune for your work,

Jane Pendler

THE PSD WARS IN THE INTERNATIONAL HISTORICAL ESTABLISHMENT: THE OPENING SKIRMISH

by Jane L. Pendler

If countless numbers of people throughout history have wished for an early menopause, probably no one wished more devoutly for it than Thomas Aquinas. No doubt he literally *prayed* for it morning, noon, and night. A picture comes to mind of him kneeling in his cell, pleading with the Virgin for release from a burden even Job hadn't been forced to bear. Somehow, some way, he managed to preserve his secret in an era lacking any conception of privacy (or rights thereof). Perhaps he considered that despite his having been born female God especially favored him. For it surely must have seemed a miracle to him that his deception escaped detection.

I made an admiring observation to this effect to Teddy Warner the night of the afternoon we discovered the “ugly but fascinating truth” (as I once heard Judith Lauer, the prominent medievalist, characterize it). The man just didn't see it, though, and snapped at

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me that if I couldn't appreciate the fact that the whole project had been thrown into jeopardy, that this second "impossibly devastating revelation" was "simply catastrophic," I should at the very least keep my silly face-tiousness to myself.

What he meant, of course, was that I should keep my mouth shut and give him "some *empathy* for chris-sake" (which is the second or third most important thing graduate-student lovers are for). (Lovers? Rather, I should say, sporadic sexual partners. Did he think of me as his lover? Probably not. Probably he used [in the privacy of his own thoughts] something jazzed up, like "mistress," or tacky, like "girlfriend." To which I even [or especially] all these years later say: YUCK.)

I've often entertained the disloyal suspicion that if the PSD Lab hadn't been packed with an international spread of luminaries, Teddy would have tried to hush up this second revelation of "mistaken gender identity" (a term that had already been coined by some fool in an article in *Past and Present* and not only stuck, but along with the more economical "gender-disguise," made it into the popular vernacular by way of the *New York Review of Books*' series of pop essays on Past-scan Device issues). Though his spouse Marissa was present at this grand soirée, I happened to be at Teddy's side (along with the three PSD groupies he'd picked up from Princeton, Yale, and Harvard since that first PSD venture—peeking in on Leonardo—came down). Like everyone else, I had my eyes glued to the stage (which the physicists called "the holotank"). Holocorders were

poised and ready to shoot from all sides. And as all of us historians waited, Marissa and her colleagues, seated at their keyboards, mice, and monitors, played (it seemed) at being SF-movie scientists. Then, suddenly, there he was, Thomas Aquinas, at mass, on December 6, 1273 (or so we all hoped, since the ostensible reason for peeping on him was to find out just what the hell *had* happened to him during that mystery mass). A great, collective sigh went up at his so verititious, life-sized presence on the stage before us. Who could mistake the man for anyone but the sainted theologian? He was gargantuan, of course. (Prior to the scan, everyone's favorite anecdote about him concerned the hellish time the Cistercians had getting his corpse down their stairs after his death.) The awe-inspiring sight overpowered me. I remember thinking it was lucky light waves don't carry odors: but then the raunchy stench of pre-modern times is one of the details with which we pepper our students to erode their godawful romanticism about certain overly Hollywoodized areas of the past, and so it might not have been strictly his dingy, greasy appearance that provoked such an irreverent thought.

We watched with bated breaths, some of us literally on the edge of our seats. (Three persons, at most, were allowed at any given time to move around the perimeter of the stage, since any more than that would have blocked the view for the rest of the observers.) Every now and then I would tear my eyes from this vivid image of medieval reality to snatch glances at the renowned and eminent historians sharing the moment

with me. Several had declared themselves skeptics, particularly the French, who Teddy claimed were annoyed at having been outdone by mere Americans, who the world had begun to assume were dead in the R & D department. And though Teddy himself could not take the credit for this fabulous example of American R & D, his wife had had a great deal to do with it. Still, the stage held us transfixed, skeptics and believers alike. Most of the younger members of the contingent muttered incessantly into the mikes of their pocket terminals. (I didn't dare, of course, since I held the place of honor beside Teddy.) Each gesture was noted for future analysis, every piece of clothing scrutinized and committed to memory. In those early days, we lapped up every drop and crumb the lab allowed us because we feared each scan might be our last.

The PSD belonged to the government then (as it still does today). Any technical explanation of how the PSD functions would be over my head—presuming the NSA ever allowed it to be divulged. In those early days, as far as we historians were concerned, the PSD might as well have been magic. But because it was so high-tech, we were all aware—or should I say afraid—the PSD might malfunction. Most high-tech systems and objects, after all, eventually do.

Our attention riveted on the stage, we saw the mass through. If old Thomas A. had a vision or a breakdown, it was not apparent to us. Of course we had known before we started that the date might not be right. One can expect medieval dating to be off some-

times by a year (meaning modern calendars don't always match the old ones), and though we had a specific date, we had no way of knowing whether it might not be our December 6th or 8th. Time used to get all jumbled up back then, and every now and then a few days would be tacked on here and there, or erased, to make the mess right.

Marissa approached and, bending over Teddy, said very quietly: "Do you want us to keep tracking him?"

"Sure, why not," Teddy said. "Might as well get a look at how the Dominicans lived." His tone was so casual I shot a look of incredulity at him. But when I saw he was grinning, my breath whooshed out in an explosion that nearly ended in the giggles. And so for the next few hours we watched Thomas pray, eat, think, and write. The holocorders ran the entire time. Eventually we wearied of sitting for so long and began taking short breaks (for coffee, food, the toilet)—excepting Teddy, who could not bring himself to leave the room for even five minutes.

The moment of revelation occurred about five hours into the scan. Thomas lumbered into a stone cell bare of all but a pallet on the floor, a crude table consisting of a pile of rocks topped by a thick, unsanded slab of wood, a crucifix on the wall, a sconce holding a torch, and a prie-dieu in the corner. Two young boys followed, bearing on their shoulders a pole from which hung two huge steaming buckets. These the boys left in the cell. Thomas then not only shut the door behind them, but also drew a bolt.

“My god!” Teddy said. Like me, he was taken aback at the very idea of a bolt on a monk’s cell. Others exclaimed, too, and soon we were all up there (in violation of the rule), circling the stage. Teddy leaned sideways, so that his mouth was near my ear, giving me a whiff of his personal (to me sexy) smell. “Private quarters for VIPs of Thomas’s stature is consistent for the Dominicans, but a *bolt*! Still, I suppose a towering intellect like Thomas attracted his confreres sexually like a magnet attracts iron, and so perhaps it was necessary.” Trust Teddy to cite Warner’s Law #3: *Genius is power of the intellect and is therefore an aphrodisiac*. “At the limit,” he would often lecture, “consider how Gertrude Stein, an old, fat, ugly dyke, had young soldiers panting after her. Don’t let anybody kid you: Essex was after more than the perks Elizabeth’s favoritism could get him. When it comes to power, it makes even the physically most unattractive man or woman utterly irresistible.” Never mind, of course, that Teddy himself reacted badly to women in positions of authority and had a real problem with the superstardom Marissa had achieved as a senior member of the PSD team. But there he stood, shaking his head and chuckling, so beside himself he nodded and winked at his colleague and rival Barry Bayle.

I nudged Teddy’s arm with my elbow. “What do you suppose the sainted father is going to do?” I whispered. “Masturbate?”

Teddy cackled loudly, proud of his protégée’s grand irreverence, probably hoping Bayle had heard.

But Thomas didn't masturbate, no. He bathed. And he did not take off the robe, but merely shifted it around. (Well, it was cold. And thirteenth-century religious considered it sensually tempting to see one's own body.) He started by slipping the robe down to his waist. Then layer after layer of binding he unwound from his chest, and clearer and clearer it became that his breasts were the size of *watermelons*! In seconds I grew so hysterical that I became terrified I'd burst out laughing. I remember holding myself all scrunched up, my chin tucked low, *shivering*. I kept thinking, *I can't believe I'm seeing this*, while my mind scrambled for an explanation. *Perhaps a combination of severe obesity and a hormonal disorder?* I remember thinking that medical historians would soon be writing dozens of papers speculating on the possibilities... And so we all watched him wash and then rebind his breasts and draw the robe back up over his shoulders. And then... Oh god. Even now, decades later, I have a hard time with this. (I remember this part so very clearly.) It was such a *shock*. We should have been prepared after Leonardo, but... But really, this was different. Leonardo was lovely, graceful, physically fit. And not menstruating. But Thomas, well, he suddenly, before our very eyes, became this mound of flesh stripping off a thick bundle of bloody rags from between his legs. According to my journal, my first thought was that he'd castrated himself. (The idea being that the vision or breakdown had already occurred, recently, and he'd taken a knife to his genitals in consequence thereof.) But no. No. As

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he removed the last of the rags, it became indisputably clear. Though exceedingly obese and forty-seven, both of which conditions might be assumed to have interdicted it, there could be no doubt that Thomas was female and that the blood on the rags came not from castration, but menstruation.

In the case of Leonardo, I'd been so gleeful and exhilarated to find that his sex had been female that I'd just about laughed my head off with pleasure. But this...somehow this was different. For one thing, the coincidence was troubling. For another thing, one could find nothing joyful in this furtive scene involving a bolted monastic cell, bloody rags Thomas washed on the spot, and bindings meant to conceal his true secondary sex characteristics from the world.

The whole thing made me sick. I wanted to leave the room, but knew better than to try. Teddy cursed and cursed only half under his breath, and all around us people carried on low, tense conversations that I suspected were precursors to screaming matches. By the time Thomas finished washing the rags, the water he wrung out of them was running pink. He did not hang them to dry, but refastened them to his crotch. I suppose that was the worst, thinking of that wet mess between his thighs, no doubt chafing them badly in the chill, dank December air. I swear you could see see him shivering. My own body shuddered with tension, and my jaw ached, and I felt a fleeting twinge of cramping in my uterus, as though in sympathy.

Afterwards Thomas sank onto his knees before the prie-dieu. We could not hear his words, of course, since the scan doesn't pick up sound. But I could imagine his weariness, disgust, and despair. When oh Lord shall this burden be lifted from me, I could easily believe he prayed (in Latin, of course). Staring at him, I realized he'd practiced a lifetime of unimaginable deception. Later, the awesome achievement of it impressed me. But that afternoon, watching him in the thin gray light of the cell, I felt instead like crying.



Teddy spent the evening at my place. Marissa usually worked late and always did so after past-scans, since in the first hours following a scan her team methodically made an evaluation and analysis of its technical aspects and combed through the data they referred to as “telemetry.” Though the Thomas Aquinas project had been a concession to Teddy’s campaign to get the historical community at large to accept past-scanning as a legitimate resource of the historian and not of particular interest to either his or my own research, he and I did a postmortem of a sort, too.

Of a sort: namely, while I stood at the stove sautéing pancetta and onion for *pasta alla carbonara*, Teddy paced in the hallway outside my tiny kitchen and railed furiously about “the godawful mess we’re in now!” “Did

you hear that bitch, talking about American hoaxes?” he demanded of me as I turned the flame under the sauté low and lifted the top on the pasta cooker to check the water.

“No, I didn’t catch that one,” I said, breaking eggs into my cherished copper bowl. “My French ear only works when I’ve got subtitles for confirmation.” I hefted the whisk and bounced it lightly against my fingers. “Anyway, I suspect that anything so mindlessly derogatory must derive from simple jealousy.”

“Jesus! You really didn’t get it, did you! Do I have to spell it out?”

I knew I was taking my career into my hands with my answer, but glancing over my shoulder, I said, “I would have thought you’d be doing dinner with them tonight. I mean, it’s wonderful, your being here, but maybe you’d have a chance at changing their opinions of the PSD if you talked a little with them?” The voice in which I said this came out disgustingly timid and innocent. I *should* have chided him boldly. After all, he was always on at me about taking every opportunity to make myself known to those in the field “who count.” I applied the whisk to the eggs, beating them furiously.

He missed the irony, of course. (He always did.) He glared at me. “My conversational French is terrible. I can ask for the toilet and a room and archival documents, no sweat. But my accent sucks. And you know the French. Anyway, they’re Barry’s colleagues, not mine.” He snorted. “Did you see Barry? He just sat there gaping at the holotank, like the proverbial peas-

ant getting his first glimpse of the city.” Teddy sagged against the refrigerator. He looked so distraught I stopped beating the eggs and turned and gave him a hug.

“Just remember, you’ve got Science on your side,” I said softly into his ear. “There’s no way they can dismiss the PSD out of hand simply because they don’t like what it’s throwing back at us.”

Teddy sighed. “You poor, dear, naïf.” He stroked my face. “What you don’t yet understand—for all that I’ve been trying to din it into your head since the first course you took with me—is that legitimacy is a consensual construction. ‘Science’ is a belief structure. And though the national security guys and the physicists may all think mathematical theorems provide the last word on truth, that’s not how it works in the humanities and social sciences—which is to say, in the Real World. By itself, the Leonardo thing could be taken as a fluke. All right, so we’ve uncovered one of history’s bizarre little secrets. What we knew about Leonardo meshed with the revelation. So Leonardo was female? Aha, everyone says, that explains all those peculiarities of character that even Freud was driven to try to elucidate. But Thomas Fucking Aquinas?” Teddy turned away, to resume pacing. Laboriously I rubbed a hunk of Parmesan against the smallest holes of my clunky metal grater. “Aquinas was a toweringly brilliant mind—and a misogynist to boot. So where do we draw the line, Jane? What if we go again, and the PSD shows us *Descartes* was just pretending to be male? Or *New-*

ton? It's so obvious, something's not right. It's simply impossible to know for dead certain that what they're showing us in that holotank is *really* from our past."

I looked at him, to see if he was serious. "Then where could it have come from? You know Marissa isn't playing with you. And they'd need a team of historical experts to have created that kind of detail." I forgot to pay attention to what I was doing and shredded my finger. I dropped the grater and cleared the cheese that had blood on it out of the bowl. Then, cursing, I charged for the bathroom (and collided with Teddy in the hall, of course).

While I washed and bandaged my fingertip, Teddy said: "I'm not saying there's a deliberate hoax. But when you start thinking about it, you realize any number of crazy explanations could be dreamed up that would still sound saner than this shit about both Thomas Aquinas and Leonardo being women pretending to be men. It would be more credible, for godsake, to claim that aliens were sending us these pictures!"

"All those old rumors of Pope Joan," I said half under my breath, knowing I was just asking for a lecture on the sexually inadequate fourteenth-century cardinal and his reasons for inventing the tale.

He stared at me as if I'd gone mad. "You're *thrilled*!" he accused me. "You just *adore* the idea that two of the most brilliant minds in European history were women!" He shook his head. "It's not going to make a damned bit of difference, Jane. Even if people did accept past-scans as legitimate, it wouldn't change the

way they think about women.” His eyes pitied my simplicity. “Believe me.”

I stepped out of my one-person-max bathroom into the hall, making him back most of the way into the living room to let me pass again into the kitchen. “Just suppose,” I said. The water was boiling furiously, so I broke linguine into it as I talked. “Let’s play ‘what if’ for just a second. What if the past-scan showed the real truth. And what if, moreover, we were to discover through additional past-scans that other ‘towering intellects’ were also women masquerading as men. We know already that a number of women disguised themselves as men throughout the middle ages, early modern period, and into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Some of them were even soldiers.” I threw him a grin over my shoulder. “In the earlier period, we know of instances from the very few that were unmasked and punished—sometimes with death and banishment, since those were typical penalties for women caught wearing male clothing. And in the later period, when death and banishment weren’t the penalties, we know of particular instances because women sometimes revealed it when it wouldn’t harm them to do so. But suppose the people who washed Thomas’s body for burial were so horrified to discover his true sex that they decided to keep it secret, since the very idea of a woman being so brilliant was too threatening to allow out? And ditto for Leonardo and anyone else who may have come down to us as men but were really

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women?” I poked the strands of linguine apart with my wooden fork. “Just ask yourself: *What if?*”

“Preposterous!” he said. “Absolutely preposterous!”

I smiled as sweetly as I knew how. “But we’re playing ‘what if,’ Teddy. Granted, it’s preposterous. But stretch your imagination: what if it were all true?”

The long and the short of it was that he wouldn’t play that particular “what if.” The very idea of it exasperated him beyond bearing. In fact, only the chirp of Teddy’s personal phone saved us from one of our increasingly frequent gender-issue quarrels. So while he took the call in the living room, I poured myself a glass of Chianti and rushed through the final stages of the *carbonara*—contemplating how unlikely it would be for Teddy and me to be still “seeing” one another if he weren’t my advisor and I his student.



I can hardly think of a single area of our lives in which Teddy Warner and I agreed. He wanted a disciple, not a maverick, for a student; I wanted an advisor, not a guru. I loved wine; he eschewed any substance or activity (other than sex) likely to threaten his control. He loved goopy-crustied pies with sickeningly sweet fruit fillings; I thought red pepper was the neatest thing since sliced bread. He grooved on Wagner and all three

Strausses; I was a Beethoven, Mozart, and Bach freak. But all these things were simply a difference in personal taste, you say? All right then, let's get down to fundamentals: Teddy Warner thought history is all about men being virile, dynamic, and getting their rocks off (whether literally, metaphorically, or symbolically), and that every event and conceptualization thereof is best expressed in the terms of a phallic metaphor. I, on the contrary, believe that history is the story of struggle and resistance against and sadly often a submission to domination, oppression, and the constant pressure of stupidity, greed, and inertia. Ideally, I'd like it to be a record of a few brave souls fighting the status quo. Teddy had always been a declared "social" historian. But when push came to shove—as it had with these revelations of gender-disguise—Teddy proved to be more Catholic than the pope. He'd spent years putting down the Old Guard's Great Men/diplomatic approach to history. But that night of Thomas Aquinas's unmasking, it became obvious that Great Men were Teddy Warner's bottom line.

"That was a producer at CNN," Teddy said when he'd finished the call. "They wanted a comment on the report that another prominent historical figure had been revealed by the PSD as a woman passing as a man." His mouth twisted into its most sardonic version of a smile. "I wonder who thought that up—'passing.' And they wanted to send somebody to interview me, and requested a holofile—though when I asked which part they wanted, a shot of the tits or the

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bloody rags and crotch, they couldn't back down fast enough." He cackled. "It apparently hadn't occurred to them that showing definitive proof wouldn't fly on a family-oriented network like CNN."

I handed him the bowl of pasta to carry into the living room. "How did they find out? Somebody must have been busy. Did they say who called them?" Though the first scan had been jammed with media reps, the only journalist I had noticed present for Thomas's unveiling had been a stringer for *Science*.

Teddy grimaced. "The *News-Gazette* put it out on the wire." I followed him into the living room with my glass and the bottle, and settled onto my knees across the low round table from him. "I forgot they were even there. One hardly thinks of the local rag as a representative of the media at large."

"Are you sure you wouldn't like some wine?" I said, only half to needle him. Too busy chewing to speak, he shook his head. "So when's the interview? Tomorrow?"

He raised his eyebrows at me. "I declined," he said haughtily. And lofted another mess of pasta into his mouth.

I put down my fork. My appetite tended to be low-to-nonexistent when I ate with him under circumstances that passed for ordinary with us. But this announcement floored me. Teddy Warner giving up the chance to appear on CNN? I stared at him as he ate, at his luxuriant auburn hair, eyebrows, and neatly trimmed beard, at his bright green, thickly-lashed eyes, at his heavy white coarse-skinned hands and grubby

nails. I'd been assuming he'd been avoiding his colleagues in a sulk. But Teddy Warner give up the best chance he'd ever get for publicly asserting the PSD's legitimacy as a tool for historical research?

He caught me watching him. "What is it? Did those bloody old rags wreck your appetite?"

I shook my head and took a big gulp of wine. "I don't understand. Doing an interview would have given you a chance to plug the PSD. So why aren't you doing it?"

He smiled at me as though I were a silly child too clever for her own good. "It's simple, Jane. A: I'd have no control over the interview or what they'd do with it. And B: The sooner I can dissociate myself from the damned thing the better chance I have of escaping being labeled a crackpot." His smile grew bitter. "Which is to say, I'm hoping that though I'll be taken for a dupe, I'll be excused as one who eventually saw the light." He dug with his fork and spoon into the pasta bowl to get another serving, but of course the strands of linguine all glopped together into a clinging mass he found impossible to manage. For almost a minute he fought vigorously (dare I say manfully?) to control the mess. I had to lower my eyes to my plate as his struggle grew comical. The last thing I wanted was to get him pissed off at me for laughing inappropriately. "You've got too damned much cheese in it," he fumed. Actually, the only thing wrong with the pasta was that I'd forgotten to grate nutmeg into the egg and cheese mixture. Settling for a much larger second serving than

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he wanted, he glared at me. “Anyway, the sooner you drop that Leonardo project, the better. At this point it’s just a waste you’ll have to write off to experience. A pity. I imagine it’s added a good six months to the time you’ll be taking for the dissertation.”

I felt the blow viscerally, in my solar plexus. If before I’d been too excited to eat, now I was too nauseated. “You’re serious?” I said. “You actually intend to dump the PSD just because it showed you something you didn’t want to see?”

“It’s quite obvious it’s phony,” Teddy said between bites. “What we saw today was somebody’s idea of a joke—a bad joke. You’re probably too young to recall, but there were once these pair of...chemists, I believe they were. Who thought they’d discovered a cheap, simple method of inducing fusion through a simple chemical reaction. They went public prematurely. You can imagine the media circus they created by doing so. Studies started coming out against it when other scientists couldn’t reproduce the experiment in their own labs, but they continued to insist they were right. And they got the entire scientific community against them for it. In the end, they were relegated to crackpotdom. If I stick with the PSD now, that’s what will happen to me. Which is to say I might as well kiss my career goodbye.”

What Teddy wanted most in the whole wide world was the “call” (as he put it) to Harvard. He longed for it the way little boys and girls long to be first picks for kickball teams rather than among the last few players neither side’s captain wanted. It had never occurred to

me that such a desire could impair Teddy's sense of adventure or his integrity. Teddy Warner, playing it safe? No way. His work had earned the reputation of being dangerous, bold, and imaginative. In European history, Teddy Warner *was* the cutting edge. So how could he back down now, just because he feared being labeled a crackpot?

I downed the wine left in my glass and poured myself more. "Are you saying you doubt the technology?" I looked him in the eye. "The NSA doesn't seem to have a problem with it. And what about Marissa? Has she expressed doubts? Surely you can trust *her* to tell you the truth!" From all that Teddy had told me about his wife and from the few occasions I'd spoken with her myself, I knew she was as arrow-straight as they came. Even if she discovered Teddy was screwing around (which he claimed she'd never notice because she was too wrapped up in her work), Marissa wouldn't exact vengeance by using the PSD to perpetrate a hoax that would humiliate him. (It would imperil her own career, for one thing—even granted she would do such a thing, which I simply could not conceive.)

Teddy scowled. "Who knows what the NSA is using it for? All we know is they've gotten the President to ban civilian access to scans less than three hundred years in the past. Maybe it works for more recent history and goes haywire for scans of earlier history. Who knows? And frankly, at this point I don't much care! It's plain as the nose on your face, Jane. The damned thing's unusable!"

It was like arguing with a child! Only unlike a child, he could not be made to submit to reason and was in effect in the position of parent here—telling me that he was going to take away my shiny new toy because it was too exciting for me to play with. In the hours since Thomas's true sex had been revealed, a thousand new ideas and questions had been crowding my thoughts, affording me a tantalizing glimpse of a revolutionary way of doing history, which I now saw could never be the same. Except that Teddy wanted to see to it that it *would* be the same. I read it in his eyes, how deeply the day's revelation had shaken him. And how all he could think to do in response was to deny that anything had been revealed. I began to see that it wasn't the fear of being taken for a crackpot that upset him, but the idea that Thomas Aquinas had lacked...testicles.

"The earth is flat because everybody says so," I said softly. "Right, Teddy? What happened to scientific truth and experimentation? It was you who insisted that we couldn't go wrong with scrapings from the bones of the dead, that if the scan showed that Leonardo was really female, we had no choice but to accept it and work from there."

Teddy put down his fork with exaggerated deliberation and leaned halfway across the table toward me. "With Leonardo, it made sense." His eyes looked strangely, almost frighteningly, flat, and gray rather than green. "It was easy to believe he was a woman. After all, everyone always took him for gay. The personality and behavior that had been puzzling became suddenly

comprehensible. And Leonardo's father, when his first wife failed to produce not only a son but any child at all after three years of trying, probably had some crazy idea about boosting his reputation for manliness by passing his illegitimate spawn off as a boy. Comprehensible, if not entirely understandable. But Thomas Aquinas? That's a whole other kettle of fish, my dear. And even if you could convince me to swallow it, you'll never in a thousand years get other scholars to believe it. And if one can't believe any particular scan, then he can't believe any. It's that simple." His eyes kindled, blazing a wild green rage at me, making me shiver a little. "And if you want to continue in history," he said, "you'd just better learn to accept it." I'd never been on the receiving end of his direct anger before. But I knew, looking at him, that if I persisted I'd be getting a full no-holds-barred blast of it.

Teddy's phone chirped again, breaking the moment. Thinking it might be Marissa, I snatched up my plate and the pasta bowl and made for the kitchen. While I packed the linguine into a plastic container and washed the bowl I wondered what it was about Thomas Aquinas that made the revelation so "impossible." Teddy kept referring to him as a "towering intellect." Was that the key to his distress? Was it the belief deep in his heart that only men could be *that* brilliant that made Teddy need to cast doubt on the past-scan? When I thought of all the articles he'd been firing off, about "trusting Science" and not "going the way of the dinosaur," I had to wonder.

I finished washing my plate and the bowl, started on the pasta cooker, then went on to the copper bowl and whisk and finally the sauté pan. I mused on what little I knew about Thomas Aquinas and was startled to recall he had studied for a while under Albertus Magnus—to whom had long been (falsely) attributed *De Secretis Mulierum*, a much reprinted collection of superstitions on the dire properties of menstrual blood.

“You could say that that call just put the finishing touch on an outstandingly lousy, rotten day,” Teddy said as I was just about to start drying.

I turned to look at him leaning against the doorway in his best forlorn-little-boy style. “What is it?” I said, thinking that nothing could be worse than Teddy’s ditching his project and insisting that I ditch my own.

Teddy sneered. “The Vatican apparently has decided to stick in *its* two cents.” “Imagine, His Holiness was *outraged* at the aspersions we’ve cast on the great sainted Thomas.”

“So? What does that matter?”

“What does that matter?” Teddy repeated incredulously. “For starters, it means he’s intending to forbid all clerics—which means bishops on down to the lowliest parish priests—from letting us take scrapings from the bones of bodies buried on Church property. Which is bad enough. But it also means that if we were to continue with the PSD we’d have to spend a good half of our time battling a constant barrage of attacks from Church-supported scholars and publications around the world.”

Most of the remains of Italian and French people were to be found in Church crypts and cemeteries. Though Teddy's specialty was France, because of the Leonardo case I'd more or less switched my focus to northern Italy. Neither of us, though, would likely switch to Germany or England just to chase the PSD. "From how many remains have we already taken tissue samples?" I asked.

He shrugged. "Maybe half a dozen. Which the Pope can't stop us from using now." He grinned briefly. "Hell, knowing the Vatican is against it is almost enough to make me want to go on with it to spite the assholes."

Hmm. Would this be something to play on, to keep him from bailing? The thought raised my spirits, and I laughed. "You know, I didn't pay any attention to the pair of Dominicans who were there today watching. Wearing suits they look just like anybody else. I suppose they were the ones who passed on the word to the Vatican."

Teddy nodded. "And there were a couple of Jesuits, too. And you know what? They probably loved every second of it. Jesuits are a breed apart. Always causing trouble in the Church, from the word Go. I'd be willing to bet they weren't the ones who tattled to Papa."

I groaned dutifully at the pun so that he would know I got it. (With Teddy I always had to be working to maintain my rep, no matter the situation, time, or place. People like Teddy never stop assessing everyone around them for wit, intelligence, insight, and

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knowledge, and god help the person who forgets for a moment who all the Popes were during the Great Schism and the dates and places Councils were held to try to heal it. A fetish, I thought of it. Not quite as bad as having to take prelims every other week—but close.)

“Christ, it’s been a long day.” Teddy’s words rode a sigh. He opened his arms wide, the signal for me to come close. I moved in and pressed my body against his, letting myself be drawn into a typical Teddy-kiss. Always he held his lips tight, as though to guard his mouth from my tongue while he thrust his own into my mouth. But wasn’t that the story of our sex-life? Still, the very smell and feel of him excited me, and so I as usual tried to trick him into opening his mouth wide, first by engaging aggressively with his tongue and then, when that failed, by stroking and squeezing his balls until his penis was hard.

Which made him pant and shake (though not open his mouth wider) and pull away to say: “Hey, lady. Feel like some well-earned sexual recreation?”

I tightened my grip on his balls (carefully, though, aware that Teddy would hold it against me if I inadvertently caused him to cramp). “How did you guess?” I murmured. He loved hackneyed dialogue during sex; I’ve no idea why. The first few times we went to bed I tried to resist it, but eventually had to give up. Teddy liked to have his way and was used to getting it. Unless it was important, it was better not to aggravate him.

And so I didn’t.