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Approximately words

TODAY AND TOMORROW

Author's Note: A Look At The Present.

The helicopter droned through the Southern California skies on a mission of mercy.

Inside the flying machine were two men, George W. Mason, District Supervisor for the Los Angeles City Department of Animal Regulation and Ray Schutte, Helicopter Pilot for the City's Bureau of Transportation. Strapped outside the undercarriage of the 'copter and securely attached to the frame were twelve boxes, each containing a live wild animal that had been trapped humanely in the City. The flying cargo consisted of four oppossums, six raccoons and two foxes.

The aircraft was headed northeast out of Van Nuys Municipal Airport, and bound for the wooded retreats of Angeles National Forest, 35 miles away.

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The animals had been trapped in the City areas of Encino, Eagle Rock, Westwood, Sun Valley, Mount Washington and Hollywood. They involved the latest contingent of 835 wild animals rescued from unnatural and perilous surroundings, and scheduled for release in a natural habitat. Mason and Schutte had been making the trips since September, 1969.

The unique Los Angeles conservation project is called Animal Airlift and is the brainchild of Robert I. Rush, General Manager of the Los Angeles Department of Animal Regulation.

Rush is aware the Airlift, by itself, isn't destined to save the animal world from threatened extinction, but he believes it's a finger in the leaking dyke against the day when animals cease to flourish.

It's the consensus of wildlife experts that the animal community is rapidly disappearing. S. Dillon Ripley, Secretary of the Smithsonian Institute, has said we could lose 75 to 80 percent of the world's principal wildlife forms in the next 25 years. Roger Caras, an author of acknowledged experience on subjects of environment and ecology, says 889 species and sub-species of wildlife are currently endangered to some degree, and that these species could vanish in the years immediately ahead. According to a survey in Los Angeles Times' West Magazine, out of 1,600 wildlife species identified by zoologists, 36 species of mammals are extinct along with 94 species of birds. Another 120 species of mammals and 187 other bird species are now in danger.

"Los Angeles' Animal Airlift is an isolated municipal conservation effort," Rush says, "on one small level of animal preservation. However, it is a positive action, and, we hope, serves to focus attention on the plight of wildlife everywhere.

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"Corrective steps, primarily legislative, must be taken universally, on large, small and intermediate scales by governments and the people if our animals strains are to survive," Rush concludes.

Author's Note: A Look In The Future?

The wait in line was long, but it was worth the price of admission.

At least Linda thought so. She was nine and had begun her studies at the routine age of two. Her grasp of mathematics was reasonably good. Physics, fair. She had computed the magnetic forces employed in basic neo-geometry, but had failed miserably in hard-core tests evaluating the power thrust per engine recently needed to boost the manned ship Columbus from the US-SOV space station to Venus. Colonies already were being constructed on the Moon and Mars. Venus was the next stop.

Linda, in all truth, thoroughly disliked mathematics. Her forte was animals. She knew animals and their history since the days when the dinosaur ruled the earth. She knew the fish of the sea (27 varieties) and the birds of heavens. Her special was the sparrow. Why? Nobody knew.

Linda thought the line at the zoo would never lessen as she moved slowly by the side of her grandfather towards the cage that housed the animal prize of the twenty-first century.

Linda's grandfather, Ed Granger, was less impatient. The years had taught him that time was the master and that man was a fool to wind the clock and wish for either tomorrow or yesterday.

The zoo was filled with spectators and excitement.

Despite his 107 years, Ed Granger felt good. His transplants were functioning normally and his outlook was bright.

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The familiar growls of the lions and tigers, speaking their perennial hunger, rose from the distant confines. The trumpeting of the elephants stirred one's very soul with the majestic thunder of the primitive veldt. The sweet clear music of a thousand birds came through like a rhapsody rehearsed in breasts filled with God.

Granger estimated maybe 300 people ahead before he and Linda could see the Prize. Thousands of people had preceeded them. Evidentally, he calculated, when you arrived at the cage, you had to look quidkly and drink it all in with one large eyeful. Like downing a neat brandy. Granger could see a number of uniformed attendants some distance ahead pushing the onlookers along as if fearful someone would tarry and disrupt the flow of the human tide.

Granger held Linda's hand and wondered about his pride, and if it showed. He wondered if people were staring at him and whispering the way people do when they see an astronaut or a man with six transplants. Granger had only the normal three transplants--heart, lungs and kidney--so his case was unpublicized and routine. Everyone, over 25 years of age, had at least one or two of the primary transplants because of the "smeth," a bastard phrase, concocted by someone Granger had forgotten, pertaining to the polluted air--once called smog--and an early death. Most of those who survived, like Granger, for example, were on their third pair of borrowed wind pipes.

But Granger wondered if people were looking at him for reasons other than organic. Did they know his son had been instrumental in placing the Prize on exhibit at the zoo? Granger felt he could sense people nudging each other, furtively pointing to him and saying in soto voice: "That's

Ed Granger. His son, Senator Granger is the one responsible for the Prize."

Why shouldn't people talk? It was printed on every household wall screen in the country. Everyone had been reading about it for days with their morning breakfast tablet ration.

With pride, Granger tightened his grip on the moist hand of his granddaughter. As the line shrank, Linda'a heart began to pound a little faster. She knew she was a lucky one, being the daughter of such a famous father. But she was a little disappointed because she had to stand in line. She thought she should be treated as a special guest, and had so advised her father before coming to the zoo. But the senator was a stickler for the new Common Law which decreed that everyone was equal. A pauper was as good as a king. And since there were neither paupers nor kings, everyone stood in line for everything.

When the Prize was discovered (first sighted, reportedly, by an eight-year-old boy in Mississippi) there had been a great hue and cry over its destiny. Scientists, medical researchers, conservationists, ecology experts and politicians screamed at one another over the potentials of the controversial Prize.

Suffice to say, the Prize was captured and caged. It was the cool head of Senator Granger that prevailed in the end. The government decreed at his urging, and with a congressional tide of support, that the Common Law should abide, and that before the Prize was committed to any special group, all the people should see it and experience the personal thrill of its exposure.

The prominent zoos of the country were scheduled as places of exhibit, starting on the Pacific Coast with Los Angeles.

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Thus, Linda and her grandfather, according to the Common Law, had to stand in line.

Granger's thoughts wandered. He had oiled his fishing reel in the morning, checked his fiberglass line and saw to it that his clothes and gloves were properly impregnated with the anti-radiation compound necessary for the fishing trip he had planned tomorrow. The boat trip, as always, was the ultimate in fun and relaxation. But as in the old days--the beautiful days of the 1980's--the outing posed a problem. Play cards and drink away the night enroute to the fishing waters, or relax in the limbo of self-hypnosis to awake fresh for the angling challenge at dawn? Hypnosis was quicker and deeper than natural sleep, and promoted a comatose condition said to favor the elderly with transplants.

Granger smiled at the prospect of an alternative. At the age of 107, going on 108, he had a choice? And he marvelled that he and others did have a choice. Transplanted organs, fresh from youth felled in non-atomic phases of battle a long way off, were transported home almost daily aboard airborne supersonic freezers. Be that as it may, temperance at the present, was Granger's philosophy. Long ago he had learned that a bad night at cards and the high price of booze could wipe out the receipts obtained by selling his mercury fish to the government.

Granger was a better than average fisherman. His usual catch was eight or ten mercury groupers per trip. The fish weighed twelve to fifteen pounds. You had to load your line with plenty of lead and go to the ocean floor for action. When the mercury was brought to gaff, its belly was swollen to obscene proportions, its eyes were popped from their sockets, and there were no scales. It was skin naked and blood red.

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The mercuries were exchanged at a fish processing plant on shore in return for food tablets. The fish were promptly converted into fertilizer and used in nurseries to encourage the growth of stunted saplings. Reforestation projects were high on the popular ecological agenda. Granger could remember a long time ago when the term "woods" meant something other than golf clubs.

Forests now were non-existent.

Granger's reverie was broken. It was Linda.

"There it is!" she gasped.

Time was short to absorb the total magnificence of the living, pulsating creature in the cage. It was a Prize, all right. Granger, with a practiced and meticulous eye for intimate detail, memorized every line and contour of the living animal.

The reptilian body bore the scales of a dinosaur. Its front legs were short and hinged in the middle like the elbow of a man's arm. The back legs also were stocky and seemingly packed with responsive muscles that could propel the body at will. The head and face were hideous with bulging eyes and a menacing snout that housed a crescent-shaped slit for a mouth. Only once did it open its mouth during Granger's abbreviated observance. And the witnessing crowd laughed like nervous children when its tongue split the air for a dazzling fraction of a second.

Linda stood speechless beside her grandfather, until they were ordered on. The guards kept the line moving, and the spectators gave ground reluctantly as if passing the bier of a loved one.

The sun was dying, and the pall of approaching twilight hung heavy over the city as Granger and Linda, hand in hand, walked away in silence.

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Once at home, Linda shamefully put mathematics, physics and equations out of her mind and related the day's excitement to her pets, always waiting her return. Granger had named the pets (they resembled twin dogs) Tommy and Jerry during a gay Christmas Eve, five years previous. They had been a present to Linda. And they were good listeners to all sorts of adventure. They were always waiting for Linda for they had no place to go. They were carved from stone.

Back at the zoo, as the gates were closed and the throng dispersed, the roar of the lions and the tigers, the trumpeting of the elephants and the sweet music of the birds ceased abruptly as if choked from existence.

In the maintenance office, the property man had turned off the sound effects. He replaced the bird music tape. He alternated tapes every third day to insure the lilting quality of reproduction. The telephone rang. It was the new curator complaining of chips in the alabaster of the elephant's trunk in Section C of the African Safari display. New curators were always reporting old scars.

Carefully, the guards covered the cage of the Prize with a soft green chamoise. The cover was draped over the cage and its legend: "TODIGE--THE LAST LIVING ANIMAL ON EARTH."

The zoo, with its alabaster and stone and plaster and wire and Twenty-first Century sound effects was quiet.

The sun and the crowd were gone. The toad closed its eyes. The chamois dealt the Prize a sense of comfort. Tomorrow it would be in San Francisco, then St. Louis, Chicago and farther east. London, Moscow and Tokyo would have to wait.

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