



“Contemporary Illuminati”

My father had four older sisters when he had grown-up in Baltimore, Maryland in the early 1900s. Born in Posen, Michigan in 1908, a small village around twenty miles northwest of Alpena on the Lower Peninsula near Lake Huron, dad’s family had been engaged in the very difficult logging business, renting timberland acres from the government and harvesting trees to be sent to thriving sawmills to be converted into lumber.

In 1912 a raging forest fire completely devastated my Polish grandfather Adalbert’s timber camp and also his home, and without insurance coverage, being mentally and emotionally depressed, the paternal patriarch succumbed to pneumonia and soon died a year later. Out of financial necessity, Adalbert’s wife Hedwig then moved her five children to East Baltimore, Maryland traveling by steam train to live with relatives who had coincidentally settled in the growing metropolis. But in the fall of 1918, a horrific influenza epidemic had descended upon major East Coast cities, and my grandmother (whom I had also never known) perished in 1918 at age fifty-three, and the enormous pandemic was so severe that Hedwig had to be buried in a hastily excavated flu-victim mass grave.

Aunt Genevieve was my father’s eldest sister who instinctively assumed the responsibility of raising her four younger siblings. As far as I can recollect, everyone casually called her “Aunt Jenny”, but when the very strict woman was in *my* presence, she was always very formally and courteously addressed and referred to as “Aunt Genevieve”. Born in 1897, my father’s revered sister was quite fastidious indeed in her complex mannerisms, for I recall from the early 1950s that the family matriarch would never allow children (including me) to sit in her living room inside her handsomely-furnished upscale home located on Taylor Avenue, just above the tranquil Overlea section of North Baltimore.

Austere Aunt Jenny was married to Uncle Henry Curtis, a very successful, reputable construction engineer in the 1930s and ‘40s. She accompanied “Uncle Hank” on his various business adventures to Egypt and Saudi Arabia where her ambitious husband was involved in important building projects in regard to erecting profitable manufacturing and oil refining facilities. But much to their mutual dismay, Aunt Jenny and Uncle Hank never had any children during their many years of marital bliss.

Aunt Elsie was my father’s second oldest sister. She had married Uncle James Miller (a bread delivery man), and the middle-class pair had one son Milton, who had been a bombardier on a B-29 in the WWII Pacific Theater. Unfortunately, my Cousin Milton had encountered a mental breakdown from his gruesome war experience and died in 1955 from debilitating brain cancer. Suffering from grief at losing his only child, Uncle Jimmy died three years afterwards, and in 1960, Aunt Elsie married vociferous Uncle Al Albert, a Jewish

entrepreneur who owned two prominent fur stores that catered to wealthy women on Grace Street in Richmond, Virginia.

My father's next sister in line was Aunt Lillian, a beautiful lady who had married Uncle Philip Saunders, an affable postmaster in North Baltimore. Worrisome Aunt Lillian suffered from heightened depression when Uncle Phil was away serving as an Army Lieutenant in Germany during WWII, and she sadly died as a patient in a Maryland mental institution in 1953. Uncle Phil and Aunt Lillian had one daughter, my favorite cousin Carol, who died of multiple sclerosis in 1988. Soon thereafter, plagued with grief and despair, my dear Uncle Phil passed away in 1989.

Aunt Veronica, my father's fourth sister, had married Uncle Lester Wilson, an East Baltimore police sergeant in the mid-1930s. The twosome had four children: David, Stephen, Mildred and Catherine. Uncle Lester and Aunt Veronica lived in a modest row home on Fleet Street, just south of Eastern Avenue. All four Wilson children married, but both Mildred and Catherine passed-on in the early 1980s, the former from a heart attack and the latter from breast cancer. My cousin David married but never had children, but Cousin Stephen had a very industrious son named Frank. Regrettably, humble Aunt Veronica and convivial Uncle Lester dually died in Virginia in 1969 when a vehicle approaching in the opposite direction on a two-lane highway impacted their automobile while the couple was on their way to visit Uncle Al Albert and Aunt Elsie at their resplendent summer home situated near the confluence of the Potomac River and the Chesapeake Bay.

Aunt Genevieve had revealed to my mother on several occasions that I had been her favorite nephew, and so I always believed that I was in competition for a massive inheritance with my adversarial cousins David and Stephen Wilson, who both perceptibly appeared to be artificially cordial towards me at venerable Aunt Jenny's Baltimore wake and funeral that had been held in early May of 1992.

A full month later, I received a legal letter from Otto Hernandez, Esquire, informing me that I was to attend a meeting for the purpose of the "Disposition of Mrs. Genevieve Curtis's Will", and the family conference was scheduled to occur in downtown Baltimore at 11 a.m. sharp on Wednesday, July 1st. Naturally, from previous conversations with my mother, I was quite excited about the prospect of being the principal heir to Aunt Genevieve's rather lucrative estate.

I had stayed the night of June 30th at a motor lodge just off I-95 in Edgewood, Maryland, a placid town that was about a thirty-five-minute drive south to center city Baltimore. After enjoying a hardy bacon, eggs and home-fries breakfast at an area diner, I nervously navigated my red Nissan Murano through the Harbor Tunnel, remembering that the Patapsco River above flowed west near Ellicott City, where Aunt Genevieve and Uncle Henry Curtis had lived after moving-out of their Taylor Avenue abode. The well-to-do relatives had purchased a large ranch home in an exclusive, high-end estates' development just off of Route 40, west of Baltimore City. I anxiously stepped on the SUV's accelerator in anticipation of learning about the prospective essential provisions in Aunt Jenny's will.

Attorney Otto Hernandez's law office was on the third floor of the downtown Transamerica Building, 100 Light Street, so after parking my car in a high-rise garage, I took the appropriate elevator down to ground level and proceeded ambling two blocks to my prescribed destination. In the lobby I entered the 'UP' elevator and after three other visitors entered the crowded cubicle, ascended to and exited on the third level. I confidently introduced myself and my reason for being there to a general receptionist, so then the seated-and-polite blonde-hair woman directed me to advance down the hall to Mrs. Caroline Straus, Barrister Hernandez's private secretary, who then professionally escorted me into the lawyer's attractive, walnut-paneled bailiwick.

At exactly 11 a.m. I was immediately greeted by Mr. Hernandez, and then my presence was instantly recognized by my first cousins David and Stephen Wilson, who each eagerly shook my right hand. Steve's only son Frank was also in attendance, so I automatically presumed that the fledgling Army First Lieutenant would be another beneficiary that had been announced and identified in Aunt Genevieve's will.

"This proceeding should be relatively brief since there are only you four recipients mentioned in Mrs. Curtis's last will and testament," Lawyer Hernandez formally indicated before imbibing a sip from his bottled water. "I trust that the four of you understand this common circumstance for assembling in my office and that you are

willing to commence with me enunciating the simple details and the accurate dispensing of assets and properties that have been specifically outlined in your deceased aunt's final intentions. Are there any questions?"

David, Stephen and Frank Wilson along with myself all concurred with Attorney Otto Hernandez's preliminary assessment by simultaneously nodding our heads in agreement. I sat comfortably in my red leather chair as the by-the-book lawyer reviewed the particulars, which were carefully stipulated upon the paper from which he was reading.

"To David Wilson, you are to receive the sum of five-hundred-thousand dollars represented in a certificate of deposit at the main office of Bank of America, 100 Charles Street, Baltimore, and to nephew Stephen Wilson, your money inheritance is quite identical in nature to that of your brother David: you are to receive five-hundred thousand dollars in a facsimile account established in your name at the same banking institution."

Both David and Stephen smiled in reaction to hearing the very favorable oral deliverance. "And to Stephen Wilson's son Francis, better known as Frank," Barrister Hernandez emphatically stated and then paused, "your very generous Aunt Genevieve lovingly leaves her Ellicott City home located on Clearwater Drive in an estates development just off Route 40 west of Baltimore City. And Francis, all of your beloved aunt's furniture, appliances, garage equipment, jewelry and wall fixtures are also included in the finalization of your most propitious inheritance."

Cousins Stephen and Frank seemed to be exceptionally receptive and compatible with the ultimate disposition of Aunt Genevieve's home, but First Cousin David gave the impression of being more-than-slightly disappointed, avaricious and jealous, judging by the grim, wrinkled expression being shown upon his face.

"And now for the fourth element of Genevieve Curtis's rather elementary will," Otto Hernandez articulated before consuming several additional ounces of semi-cold water from his plastic bottle. "I'll have to now stand and walk over to my personal closet."

The lawyer next opened the louvered brown door and removed a five-foot-high, antique-looking, standing lamp from inside the dark enclosure, which he then gracefully carried with both hands over to his huge mahogany desk. "This Sir is what your deceased Aunt Genevieve wishes for you to have," the suave-but-encumbered estates' lawyer quite diplomatically and almost-apologetically communicated. "Mrs. Curtis declares and directs in her last will and testament that *you* should amply admire and appreciate this marvelous, extraordinary lamp of Egyptian design, especially the unique brass head of Queen Nefertiti that's now conspicuously ornamenting the lamp's exquisite canopy."

I momentarily glanced to my left and incidentally observed that my three cousin companions were alternately snickering and chuckling at my rather peculiar inheritance, and even Mr. Otto Hernandez seemed quite out-of-character being amused at my unexpected gift that I had traveled 110 miles from Hammonton, New Jersey to gratefully acquire. The lamp itself was exceptionally ornate, and I recalled from my youth that the singular "conversation piece" had remained stationary while situated in a remote corner (and adjacent to the bar) of Uncle Henry and Aunt Jenny's fabulous Taylor Avenue club basement.

Ten minutes later, feeling more-than-moderately embarrassed and humiliated, I quietly left the premises carrying the decorative lamp, all the time thinking that childless Aunt Genevieve had promised my mother that I had always been her favorite nephew. However, at *that* awkward ten-minute interval I felt extremely stupid and excessively mortified as I clumsily transported the unusually odd item down the busy central Baltimore thoroughfare as seemingly myriad fellow pedestrians stared at me carrying my most bizarre and eccentric recently obtained possession.

"This Egyptian lamp must have been purchased when Uncle Henry was conducting official business while being corporately assigned in Egypt," I defensively surmised. "Although the lampstand has an electric cord, the object is almost entirely covered with green patina, and I guess that the artifact must have experienced progressive oxidation evolving over many decades," I further theorized. "This' precise visual observation leads me to suspect that the "Nefertiti Lamp" that's now securely and horizontally positioned inside the rear compartment of my Nissan Murano had been meticulously manufactured by Egyptian craftsmen several centuries prior to Thomas Edison and Nikola Tesla ever experimenting in their respective laboratories with DC and AC electric currents. Knowing Aunt Genevieve's flair for stellar curios, this special lamp must engender some other esoteric or arcane function besides basically only furnishing normal living room or club basement illumination,' I wishfully speculated.

As I drove east across the Delaware Memorial Bridge into New Jersey, I further ruminated, 'I'm rather certain that this exotic ancient lamp had been skillfully modified and altered, perhaps a century ago, and then through modern science, the metallic thing had been eventually transformed into an operating electrical device!' I imaginatively conjectured. 'The lamp itself seems to have some inexplicable mystical quality about it!' I hopefully concluded as my mind negatively recalled my three narcissistic cousins being lustily entertained when Attorney Otto Hernandez had announced its physical existence and presented its final transfer to me. 'Oh well! It's now back to good old Hammonton and the implausible explanation of all of this strange inheritance to my always-skeptical wife! And if I ever were intrepid enough to tell my spouse the entire day's story, Barbara would proceed to have me evaluated for swift admission into nearby Ancora State Mental Hospital.'

Arriving home at 4 p.m. on July 1st, and according to a phone conversation with my wife the night before when I had been staying at the Edgewood, Maryland motel, I remembered that Barbara would be away at choir practice at St. Joseph Church on North 3rd Street in downtown Hammonton. Her coincidental absence allowed me sufficient time to cautiously remove the inherited Egyptian lamp from the rear of my red Murano and deftly station the estate relic in the corner opposite the two-story colonial house's entrance, positioning "Nerfertiti" directly above an armchair in my home's living room. A curved bay window separated the aforementioned red and light brown striped chair from its duplicate counterpart. A sofa with small, red diamond patterned fabric was beneath the living room's north side wall and situated below a large oval mirror, and a stand-up piano along with a tan Queen Anne chair and an accompanying vertical glass and wooden curio finished-off the room's physical appearance.

Much to my immediate delight, I plugged the lamp's cord into a convenient electrical socket, and the circular bulb inside the black shade instantly emitted a rather powerful illumination. As I closely peered at the intense stream of bright light, I soon heard the right-side garage door raising, meaning that Barbara was arriving home from her church chorus rehearsal.

"Hi Barb," I greeted as the woman-of-the-house entered the laundry room from the two-car garage. After applying a huge hug with my arms around my spouse's svelte waist, I facetiously asked, "Was your friend Alice Mazzagatti present playing the organ this afternoon?" I foolishly joked, deliberately referring to the fact that Hammonton, New Jersey is often regarded as the U.S. town with the highest percentage of Italian population.

"No Hubby," Barbara matter-of-factly answered with a forced grin. "Alice was asked to play for a Baptism at St. Nicholas Church over in Egg Harbor, so Rosalie Pinizotto was her reliable substitute and I must tell you, she performed quite admirably."

"Well then, were your soprano friends Marie Costa, Roberta Franchetti, Anita Perna, Josephine Marinella, Antoinette Penza and Millicent Colasurdo present and singing on-key?"

"Yes," my wife affirmed, realizing that I was still making a weak attempt at verbalizing ethnic humor. "And altos Anna DeMarco, Laura Giacobbe, Angelina Mortellite, Sophia Battaglia, Roseann Fitipaldi, Rita DiFilippo and Monica Berenato were also in attendance, and we all were harmonizing together beautifully. And after practice," my wife further elaborated, "Father Pete treated us all to a surprise social in the church basement featuring chocolate cake, tasty homemade cookies, delectable cannolis filled with ricotta cheese along with delicious fresh-brewed coffee!" the former Barbara Francine Curreri replied.

"Well Barb, my mother was Sicilian, so I suppose I'm eligible and qualified to join the infamous Sons of Italy Garibaldi Lodge; that is, if an audacious member has the necessary courage to ever sponsor me into that notorious club!"

"Tell me, how did things go down in Baltimore? Did you receive your mammoth inheritance that Aunt Genevieve had promised your mother you would get? How was your long-awaited rendezvous with your cousins?"

Feeling remarkably chided, I suddenly resented Barbara's cavalier, condescending attitude as immensely represented in her contentious preface. Waving my right hand, I half-heartedly led my wife into the commonplace den, up a step to the familiar kitchen and then down the short hall to the living room where the Egyptian lampstand existed with royal Nerfertiti seemingly guarding-over the formal red and light brown striped comfortable chair.

“What’s *that* atrocious eyesore!” my soul-mate boisterously exclaimed. “How come there’s all that hideous green corrosion over most of it?”

“That’s called patina!” I calmly-and-patiently educated. “It’s a natural oxidation of brass or copper that occurs over time; sometimes over centuries. You’ll see the same brown-to-green coating process on outdoor statues all over Washington D.C. and even evident on the Statue of Liberty.”

“I think I should sit down in order to listen and fully comprehend your fantastic story concerning this oddball lamp!” Barbara exaggerated, feigning mild dizziness. “Yes, I think I need a sedative or a powerful tranquilizer tablet right about now!”

My marital partner slowly sat in the striped chair next to the bay window and then concealing my excitement, I nonchalantly flicked the rotator switch underneath the pitch-black shade to the “on” position. Being satisfied that the Nerfertiti lamp was still excellently working, I reluctantly resumed my nondescript narrative.

“Barb, the image here at the top is that of an ancient Egyptian Queen, her name is, or should I say ‘was’ Nerfertiti,” I academically began my preposterous monologue. “The figure depicted is rather famous and often imitated in various art forms!”

“Yes, I know,” my wife sternly responded. “I’ve seen *that* unique image in mall gift shops and also being sold in several specialty retail stores in Atlantic City casinos. I was familiar with the portrayal but not acquainted with the ancient woman’s name.”

Then something totally weird occurred that incredibly defied all aspects of human scientific logic. During the moment of silence that had ensued, my wife’s voice and words were somehow telepathically transmitted in my direction without her lips ever moving. I hypothesized that the light originating from the oval bulb above her head was capturing and interpreting her secret thoughts and then incredulously beaming them to my receptive mind, all transpiring in some magical phenomenon that I could not even remotely fathom.

‘John, you are either a silly dunce or a complete dolt, absurdly thinking that Aunt Genevieve had favored you over your Baltimore cousins,’ Barbara mentally signaled. ‘You would occasionally visit and see her maybe once a year; I’ll bet that David and Stephen were filibustering and lobbying for her favors almost daily.’

“Barbara, I know that you believe that I’m naïve and gullible in regard to this unique Egyptian lamp, I mean, driving all the way to downtown Baltimore to get this really neat memento,” I self-consciously admitted. “I recall Aunt Jenny once revealing that this outlandish-looking lamp had been purchased from a curio shop in Alexandria, Egypt.”

‘Could have been cheaply bought at a shabby pawn shop in Alexandria, Virginia for what this tin-piece of garbage is actually worth in real dollars and cents! It’s a true hunk of junk that belongs on a rubbish heap. The Goodwill Store would probably sell it for scrap metal,’ sarcastically thought and challenged my wife’s all-too-critical readable mind. “Now John,” my suspicious female orally continued her contrary train of thought, “what did your three cousins genuinely inherit?”

“Well, David and Stephen each had gotten terrific bank certificates of five-hundred-thousand dollars each, and Steve’s son Frank, my fortunate second cousin, inherited Aunt Jenny’s Ellicott City mini-mansion, which is valued at a half-a-million also!”

‘You are a stupid quixotic idiot!’ Barbara’s cynical brain broadcasted in my direction via the priceless lamp’s prodigious supernatural wizardry. ‘You are indeed an undisciplined John Foolery; Tom’s mentally deficient twin brother! Your three cousins have always been greedy and now they’ve seriously taken advantage of you, probably by maliciously changing your aunt’s will!’

Soon I again heard my better-half’s contrived, sanctimonious voice. “Well John,” my lady partner’s unimpressed natural tone uttered, “you can turn-off this hot lightbulb that’s burning a little too-intensely over my head. It’s almost as annoying as your melancholy inheritance story. Perhaps tomorrow we can take this deplorable white elephant over to the antique dealer or 12th Street and be lucky enough to have it appraised for maybe five measly dollars.”

“Okay Honey. I’ll consider your noteworthy suggestion the next time majestic Halley’s Comet decides to encounter and harass our precious Earth!” I defiantly countered.

The first Saturday in August I received a surprise visit from garrulous Cousin David Wilson, who claimed to be stopping by on his way to a gigantic merchandising exhibit show occurring at the refurbished Atlantic City Boardwalk Convention Hall. After egotistically divulging to me that Stephen, Frank and he were perfectly thrilled at the revelation of their abundant inheritances from Aunt Genevieve’s seemingly biased will, I shrewdly

turned-on the sublime Nerfertiti lamp, thus activating the magnificent “psychic bulb” and then convincingly asked all-too-talkative David to sit-down in the fancy striped chair.

“Where’s Barbara?” my inquisitive relative asked. “I missed her at Aunt Jenny’s viewing.”

“Her sister came down with a mild summer cold, so my wife’s now over in Waterford making Eileen a bowl of hot chicken soup,” I all-too-sincerely explained.

“Tell me John, what do you think about this crusty-old, lackluster Egyptian lamp?” my rude, covetous cousin superficially stated. “I felt pretty darn bad witnessing and then hearing about your paltry inheritance at the downtown Baltimore attorney’s office. I’ll make you a gentleman’s proposition you can’t refuse. I’m willing to take the less-than-mediocre monstrosity off your hands by giving you a reasonable consolation of ten thousand dollars from my inheritance if you’re willing to graciously accept my offer!”

“No thanks Dave,” I solemnly declined. “I truly love this outstanding lamp and respect its historic legacy tremendously. I believe that I’ll honorably treasure my nice Nerfertiti keepsake for as long as I shall live.”

Suddenly, my perceptive mind detected Cousin David’s distinctive voice being esoterically delivered by means of some uncanny brainwave communication. ‘You pathetic, moronic imbecile. I just only came to your house to see and relish great envy in your eyes. And now I realize that you’re even dumber and more impractically knuckleheaded than I had ever reckoned you would be. No wonder why Aunt Genevieve treated you like the pitiful numbskull you actually are in her last will and testament!’

“Er John,” haughty David Wilson neurotically spoke in order to interrupt the apparent void of extended silence, “if my memory is correct, this strange-looking lamp behind me had once occupied a corner of Uncle Henry’s club basement out on Taylor Avenue that now I distinctly remember ever since I was a kid.”

“Yes Dave, our beloved Aunt Jenny told me back in the early 1960s that Uncle Hank had purchased the novelty from a back-alley curio shop in Alexandria, Egypt. You must confess; the intriguing item does possess a degree of charm and dignity.”

“It sure does John,” my all-too-devious cousin falsely attested. “How about if I up the ante and offer to buy the crusty thing from you for twenty thousand? Honestly, I’m willing and happy to share a small portion of my recent fortune with you!”

“No thanks Dave,” I stubbornly answered. “I’m rather euphoric about owning something special that Aunt Jenny always took pride in having. I want you to know that this Egyptian lamp is much more than a mere fascinating souvenir to me! It has tremendous sentimental value!”

‘Asinine ignoramus! Dopey blockhead!’ my conscientious brain adroitly intercepted from my cousin’s corrupt cerebrum. “Say John, can you please turn-off this rusty, dilapidated lamp? It’s wickedly burning a hole right into the bald spot on top of my skull!”

On Labor Day weekend, to my chagrin, I was unexpectedly visited by my insufferable and arrogant first cousin, Stephen Wilson. “Where’s Barbara?” the stealthy, self-centered rogue inquired as I answered the front doorbell. “I missed her at Aunt Jenny’s wake.”

“You just missed her again right here,” I confirmed. “She’s out grocery shopping at Wal*Mart and then going to ShopRite!”

During our initial dialogue, David Wilson’s junior brother was not at all modest, monotonously bragging about his colossal half-million-dollar bonanza. Just like *his* all-too-conceited older brother, ‘unbearable Steve’ disclosed that he intended to use his newfound wealth to buy two spectacular vacation condos: one on the bay in Ocean City, Maryland and the other in sunny Vero Beach, Florida.

Sitting beneath the regal Nerfertiti lamp, Stephen selfishly boasted, “And John, my son Frank has just been promoted to Army Captain. The energetic kid’s going to go far in military life, right to the ceiling! Just look at how successful my dynamic boy is already!” Then my reprehensible and repulsive cousin nastily thought, ‘And you John remained a lowly school teacher these past thirty or so years. No wonder why Aunt Jenny loathed and disfavored you so.’

“Where are you heading?” I peevishly inquired, realizing that our fragile discussion had reached a massive impasse. “Are you en-route to the tourist trap A,C. casinos?”

“No John. I’m on my way to Manhattan for a joyful New York University class reunion. I haven’t seen my zany college roommate and my obnoxious fraternity brothers for at least a decade. Cousin John, can you please turn-off this terrible lamp that’s making me perspire like a squeezed sponge? I feel like my delicate scalp is about to ignite!”

“Your wish is my command,” I frivolously replied, pretending to be the fabled genie of Aladdin’s astonishing lamp. “I’m most pleased to be your grateful servant!”

‘Ha, ha Johnny Boy! You empty-headed ridiculous cretin! You’ motley, simpleton clown!’ my despicable, ruthless Maryland cousin diabolically contemplated and unknowingly transmitted. ‘You truly deserve owning this wholly disgusting, obsolete, green-corroded piece-of-junk lamp!’

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The Wednesday evening after Labor Day Barbara was out of the house diligently and faithfully attending her bi-weekly Women’s Civic Club meeting over on Valley Avenue. The night before, my mercurial-behaving wife had been complaining about hearing a mouse aggressively doing some scratching above the hall closet ceiling, so being a brave loyal husband, I furtively plotted the creature’s demise by smearing peanut butter as bait and then creatively setting the designated trap underneath the dignified Nerfertiti lamp, which ideally had four short brass legs, each one elevated three inches above the living room hardwood floor.

After carefully setting the brand-new trap, I cleverly determined that I should conduct an impromptu experiment by switching-on the Egyptian lamp and next sitting in the red and light brown striped chair beneath it, just to see and ascertain what the sinister effect might be and feel like. After assuming my position in the chair, to my frustration, three seconds later the magical light shockingly extinguished. Being perplexed, I immediately rose from my seat, frenetically unscrewed the oval lightbulb and then thoroughly examined it.

‘There aren’t any markings on it whatsoever,’ I astutely observed. ‘Not even any watt number or descriptive language I.D. I suppose that as of now good old Nerfertiti has permanently lost her astounding psychic communication ability!’

After school on Thursday afternoon, I eagerly brought the expired lightbulb to the town’s largest lighting distribution warehouse, but the knowledgeable proprietor firmly insisted that he had never before ever seen such an unusual bulb. I returned home in a disconsolate frame of mind, so then, out of pure curiosity, with both hands I gently lifted the Nerfertiti lamp to notice whether or not I had successfully caught the persistent rodent that had been mischievously disturbing and bothering my wife.

‘Barb’s still doing her secretary thing over at her boss’s real estate office, so let’s see if I’ve outsmarted the pesky rascal with this new mouse-trap I had set in the center of the lamp’s four brass legs.’

Much to my satisfaction, my flawless strategy had sagely caught the feisty pest, but before I could adequately celebrate my major accomplishment, I observed that the furry nuisance was still alive with its right leg and tail ensnared under the spring-triggered hinge as the small mammal frantically attempted to escape its painful predicament. Then, when I had inadvertently elevated the lampstand to inspect my frightened capture, my alert ears had heard a subtle, low rattle-sound originating from inside the lamp’s base.

I gingerly lifted the trap from the living room floor as the doomed rodent rotated and scrambled about, endeavoring to emancipate itself from its agonizing incarceration. Feeling a sense of urgency, I quickly carried my wounded foul quarry to the downstairs powder room and then tossed the trap face-down into the toilet bowl with the expressed intention of drowning the furiously wriggling mouse.

I hastily sauntered back through the den, the kitchen and the short hall and next paced to the living room to comprehensively investigate the mysterious low-rattling noise that my keen ears had discerned. Lifting the lamp in a very deliberate fashion, I laid the cherished object horizontally upon the arms of the red and light brown striped chair and in the process, again detected the internal rattle coming from inside the lamp’s base, which my peering eyes perceived as a faded, colored scene of the incomparable desert Sphinx shown with three dull, illustrated pyramids along with several caravan camels in the background.

Being motivated by my ongoing discovery, I speedily rushed into the laundry room to remove a screwdriver from the wall cabinet. After finding the useful tool inside a plastic container, I darted into the adjacent powder room.

The obstinate-and-exhausted home intruder was still alive and amazingly had managed to partially ascend the wet and slippery side of the white ceramic bowl, desperately squirming and dragging the trap with it. Gaining new respect for the mouse’s desire to live, I impulsively grabbed the trap, stepped to the mudroom’s side door and employed the utilitarian screwdriver to mercifully liberate the struggling rodent from its precarious

entrapment. The tiny, maligned animal slowly maneuvered its fearful path to freedom, scurrying between a large rhododendron bush and the home's external red chimney bricks.

My next task was to inspect the enchanted lamp's base by using the ordinary screwdriver to remove the eight rusted screws that had fastened the faded Sphinx/pyramid/camel-caravan illustration to the mystical lamp's interior frame. Much to my bewilderment, a square-shaped second lightbulb (loosely held to the lamp's underframe) was soon coincidentally discovered. 'So that's what was causing the rattling sound to occur!' I inferred and assessed. 'This second bulb was probably knocked loose when the mousetrap had been sprung and consequently snapped and flew upwards with the weight of the attached rodent providing more upward force. The accidental impact caused this square lightbulb to be slightly separated from his bracket mounting; the jolt had jarred the second bulb a trifle loose, just enough to make it weakly rattle inside its tethering bracket.'

Being instantaneously inspired, I methodically screwed the square bulb into the socket located beneath the black lampshade, and to my sheer ecstasy, light was soon splendidly projected onto the bare wall above and behind the upright piano that Barbara had inherited from her Aunt Mildred. And to my further befuddlement, a wondrous coded message appeared, being revealed partly in hieroglyphics and partly in Egyptian Arabic.

Being in a trance-like stupor, I assiduously sped into the kitchen, opened the brown rolltop desk and frantically obtained a writing tablet along with an accompanying ballpoint pen. Then without hesitation, I daringly sat-down in the striped chair and very methodically copied the myriad Arabic letter symbols along with the numerous hieroglyphic drawings that had been starkly projected upon the opposite wall above and behind the upright, flatback piano. Ironically, the inimitable square projector-bulb had burned-out a minute or so after I had finished recording my valuable notations.

I never felt obligated to share my almost-miraculous Nerfertiti lamp adventure to my predictably apostate wife. 'I'm just like Daniel in the Old Testament of the Bible during the Israelite captivity in Babylon,' I marveled and lectured to myself. 'I've literally seen the mystic writing on the wall!'

Requesting a "Personal Day" from the faculty's administration, I took the next day off from my teaching responsibility at the local middle school for the purpose of conducting *more relevant and significant* business that definitely required my immediate attention. I drove my red Murano to Stockton State College in nearby Pomona where I presented the carefully recorded Arabic and hieroglyphic information to my dear Lions Club friend, eminent Professor Edmund Evans, Ph.D. Thirty trying minutes later, I was absolutely staggered and almost physically paralyzed at hearing Dr. Evans' impeccable interpretation and magnificent deciphering of the distinguished scholar's revamped coded missive.

"Well John, the Arabic contained in the translated message is written in Masri, a frequent and popular form of Egyptian colloquial language. When added to the associated hieroglyphics, the cryptic passage reads and states, 'Congratulations my dear nephew John: you are about to inherit the sensational sum of 1.5 million dollars currently on deposit at the National Bank of Egypt in Cairo. All you have to do is present your driver's license, your passport and your social security number to the NBE in order to firmly secure your well-deserved inheritance. Love: Aunt Genevieve!'"

'Oh my God!' I exuberantly thought as my heart raced in rapturous appreciation. 'My wonderful inheritance from Aunt Jenny equals that of Cousins David, Stephen and Frank combined. I now truly consider myself to be an honorary member of the modern-day Illuminati!'

The Psychic Dimension: Part One by Jay Dubya

Cold Coffee 5 Star Review: The Psychic Dimension (Part One) are a group of very well written short stories that deal with fictional psychic and paranormal experiences.

Author John Dubya has divided this book into 26 novellas. Let me briefly describe five of them.

Corporate Sabotage: "Three government men were casually discussing the amusing theory that their boss Chief Inspector Joe Giraldo was indeed one hundred percent psychic, or perhaps one hundred percent

“psycho.” But as the trio would soon discover, the astonishing case of “Corporate Sabotage” virtually confirmed their suspicions about their boss's seemingly paranormal cerebrum.”

Music Psyche: “It has often been said that music soothes the soul, but Dr. Thaddeus Gilmore, eminent professor of Psychology/Psychiatry at the University of Pennsylvania, recently found-out through a revolutionary research breakthrough

The Table Drawer: “Where did you get that weird table that's now up in the computer room? It looks like it was obsolete decades before John Wilkes Booth had entered Fords Theater and evilly assassinated President Lincoln!”

A Day to Forget: “A Day to Forget: Ever since adolescence, Jack Cooper hated anything associated with frivolity and revelry. The shy man didn't like football games because of boisterous crowds, deplored raucous celebrating, and despised rock and roll along with rap music, and the man vastly abhorred obnoxious, irritating behavior at New Year's Eve parties. Anything noisy from Fourth of July and Halloween parades to carnival and circus atmospheres greatly disturbed Jack's super-sensitive psyche and sent his volatile emotions completely out of kilter. The only things that the “mercurial man” really dearly loved were peace and quiet.”

Each story is independent from each other which makes this the perfect book to carry with you to read on the go. For the sake of this review, let me focus on two stories.

In the story of Triple Jeopardy, Inspector Joe Giraldo and his wife Gina go on a senior citizen's bus tour. Their first stop is at the Michigan Grand Hotel, where their vacation takes an unexpected turn. Let me quote:

At nine-thirty a loud frantic rapping upon Room 132's door rudely interrupted Joe Giraldo's peaceful coffee consumption. The FBI man opened the portal and the occupant was somewhat astonished to perceive the normally debonair suit-and-tie head hotel manager impatiently standing in the hallway.

“Mr. Giraldo,” the exasperated hotel executive exclaimed all out of breath. “I'm Giles Martin, the Grand Michigan's chief operating officer. May I come in?”

“Why of course!” the surprised Inspector replied, closing the door behind the unexpected visitor's hasty entrance. “Is everything okay? You do appear to be more than a trifle alarmed!”

“I understand that you're an experienced inspector with the FBI. Our dependable desk records indicate that much, Inspector Giraldo, and I've already verified that formerly confidential information through our local island police department, which incidentally also drastically needs your immediate assistance.”

“Mr. Martin, in all due respect, exactly what is wrong?” the now thoroughly interested hotel guest asked. “What's of so much paramount importance and concern?”

“A most serious epidemic of colossal proportion has broken-out among the horse population here on Mackinac Island,” panic-stricken Giles Martin boisterously disclosed. “Just about all of our six hundred horses are terribly sick with colic and influenza symptoms, and our town veterinarians are going crazy attending to all of the afflicted animals. And besides that,” the agitated and worried hotel manager impulsively expounded, “the entire transportation system on the island has been shut-down. This is a colossal nightmare dilemma in progress Inspector Giraldo; an unimaginable worst-case scenario and its basic origin, or should I say ‘its real cause,’ we certainly find exceptionally baffling. That's why I'm here to both request and solicit your skilled expertise.”

Inspector Giraldo's experience and instincts are aroused and it looks like their vacation might be interrupted. To see what happens, pick up this book.

Now let me share a small portion of the short story Contemporary Illuminati.

Aunt Genevieve had revealed to my mother on several occasions that I had been her favorite nephew, and so I always believed that I was in competition for a massive inheritance with my adversarial cousins David and

Stephen Wilson, who both perceptibly appeared to be artificially cordial towards me at venerable Aunt Jenny's Baltimore wake and funeral that had been held in early May of 1992. A full month later, I received a legal letter from Otto Hernandez, Esquire, informing me that I was to attend a meeting for the purpose of the "Disposition of Mrs. Genevieve Curtis's Will", and the family conference was scheduled to occur in downtown Baltimore at 11 a.m. sharp on Wednesday, July 1st. Naturally, from previous conversations with my mother, I was quite excited about the prospect of being the principal heir to Aunt Genevieve's rather lucrative estate.

Flash forward: The lawyer next opened the louvered brown door and removed a five-foot-high, antique-looking, standing lamp from inside the dark enclosure, which he then gracefully carried with both hands over to his huge mahogany desk. "This Sir is what your deceased Aunt Genevieve wishes for you to have," the suave-but-encumbered estates' lawyer quite diplomatically and almost-apologetically communicated. "Mrs. Curtis declares and directs in her last will and testament that you should amply admire and appreciate this marvelous, extraordinary lamp of Egyptian design, especially the unique brass head of Queen Nefertiti that's now conspicuously ornamenting the lamp's exquisite canopy." I momentarily glanced to my left and incidentally observed that my three cousin companions were alternately snickering and chuckling at my rather peculiar inheritance, and even Mr. Otto Hernandez seemed quite out-of-character being amused at my unexpected gift that I had traveled 110 miles from Hammonton, New Jersey to gratefully acquire.

Why did Aunt Genevieve leave John this ornate lamp? Was the gesture a cruel joke or was it something more? If you always wanted your long-lost great aunt to leave you something in her Last Will and Testament, this story may or may not change your mind.

With each story comes an internal struggle where there are decisions to made and consequences. Each one of these stories could be their own book in their own rights. I hope you find these Novellas as interesting a read as I did. I purchase this book from Kindle and this review posted on April 29, 2019.

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About The Author

Jay Dubya is author' John Wiessner's pen name. John is a retired New Jersey public school English teacher, having diligently taught the subject for thirty-four years. John lives in Hammonton, New Jersey with wife Joanne and the couple has three grown sons.

Counting London: Lashed, Lacerated, Lamped and Lambasted, along with its companion books Twain: Tattered, Trounced, Tortured and Traumatized, Poe: Pelted, Pounded, Pummeled and Pulverized and O. Henry: Obscenely and Outrageously Obliterated, John has written and published thirty-seven total books. Pieces of Eight, Pieces of Eight, Part II, Pieces of Eight, Part III and Pieces of Eight, Part IV all contain

short stories and novellas that feature science fiction and paranormal plots and themes. Nine New Novellas, Nine New Novellas, Part II, Nine New Novellas, Part III, Nine New Novellas, Part IV, One Baker's Dozen, Two Baker's Dozen, Snake Eyes and Boxcars and Snake Eyes and Boxcars, Part II are short story collections all written in the spirit of the Pieces of Eight series.

Other Jay Dubya adult-oriented fiction are the works Black Leather and Blue Denim, A '50s Novel, and its exciting sequel, The Great Teen Fruit War, A 1960' Novel. Frat Brats, A '60s Novel completes the action/adventure trilogy. Jay Dubya also has produced two irreverent Biblical satires, The Wholly Book of Genesis and The Wholly Book of Exodus. A third satire Ron Coyote, Man of La Mangia is a parody on Miguel Cervantes' classic novel, Don Quixote published in 1605. Thirteen Sick Tasteless Classics, TSTC, Part II, TSTC, Part III and TSTC, Part IV are satirical works that each corrupt thirteen classic stories from American and British literature and from Greek mythology. Fractured Frazzled Folk Fables and Fairy Farces and FFFF & FF, Part II satirize and corrupt famous children's literature stories. Mauled Maimed Mangled Mutilated Mythology is an adult-oriented satirical/parody work that pokes fun at twenty-one famous classical myths. Finally, Shakespeare: Slammed, Smearred, Savaged and Slaughtered and Shakespeare: S, S, S and S. Part II lampoon the famous works of the great playwright.

The author has also penned a young adult fantasy trilogy: Pot of Gold, Enchanta and Space Bugs, Earth Invasion. The Eighteen Story Gingerbread House is a collection of eighteen new children's stories. And last but not least, two Jay Dubya non-fiction works are So Ya' Wanna' Be A Teacher and Random Articles and Manuscripts.

Jay Dubya's books are available in hardcover and paperback formats at Amazon.com, Barnes and Noble.com and Booksamillion.com. Kindle versions are available at Amazon.com. Jay Dubya's e-books are available at Amazon Kindle and at Barnes and Noble Nook.

Jay Dubya (John Wiessner), author of 56 books, gives a biography of his life.

Born in Hammonton, NJ in 1942, John had attended St. Joseph School up to and including Grade 5. After his family moved from Hammonton to Levittown, Pa in 1954, John attended St. Mark School in Bristol, Pa. for Grade 6, St. Michael the Archangel School for Grades 7 and 8 and Immaculate Conception School, Levittown, Pa. for grade 9. Bishop Egan High School, Levittown Pa was John's educational base for Grades 10 and 11, and later in 1960 he graduated from Edgewood Regional High, Tansboro, NJ. John then next attended Glassboro State College, where he was an announcer for the school's baseball games and also read the news and sports over WGLS, GSC's radio station.

John had been primarily an English teacher in the Hammonton Public School System for 34 years, specializing in the instruction of middle school language arts. Mr. Wiessner was quite active in the Hammonton Education Association, serving in the capacities of Vice-President, building representative and finally, teachers' head negotiator for 7 years. During his lengthy teaching career, John had been nominated into "Who's Who Among American Teachers" three times. He also was quite active giving professional workshops at schools around South Jersey on the subjects of creative writing and the use of movie videos to motivate students to organize their classroom theme compositions.

John Wiessner was very active in community service, being a past President of the Hammonton Lions Club, where he also functioned for many years as the club's Tail-Twister, Vice-President and Liontamer. He had been named Hammonton Lion of the Year in 1979 and in 2009 received the prestigious Melvin Jones Fellow Award, the highest honor a Lion can receive from Lions International.

John also was a successful businessman, starting with being a Philadelphia Bulletin newspaper delivery boy for two years in the late 1950s in Levittown, Pennsylvania. After his family moved back to New Jersey in 1959, John worked at his grandparents and his parents' farm markets, Square Deal Farm (now Ron's Gardens in Hammonton) and Pete's Farm Market in Elm, respectively. He later managed his wife's parents' farm market, White Horse Farms (Elm) for three summers.

Also, in a business capacity, for 16 summers starting in 1967 John Wiessner had co-owned Dealers Choice Amusement Arcade on the Ocean City, Maryland boardwalk and also co-owned the New Horizon Tee-Shirt Store for eight summers (1973-'81) on the Rehoboth Beach, Delaware boardwalk. In addition, he was a co-owner of Wheel and Deal Amusement Arcade, Missouri Avenue and Boardwalk, Atlantic City. And then, for 18 summers beginning in 1986, John had been the Field Manager in charge of crew-leaders for Atlantic Blueberry Company (the world's largest cultivated blueberry company), both the Weymouth and Mays Landing Divisions.

After retiring from teaching in 1999, writing under the pen name Jay Dubya (his initials), John Wiessner became an author of 56 books in the genre Action/Adventure Novels, Sci-Fi/Paranormal Story Collections, Adult Satire, Young Adult Fantasy Novels and Non-Fiction Books. His books exist in hardcover, in paperback and in popular Kindle and Nook e-book formats.

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