

Women and Men: Two Stories

by

James Frazier

One by one they were all becoming shades. Better pass boldly into that other world, in the full glory of some passion, than fade and wither dimly with age.

- *James Joyce, "The Dead"*

The Sapphire Anniversary

by

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As tight as you can bear...

“As tight as you can bear.” Nilima reassured herself tying the strings of her petticoat, “it keeps everything in.”

A tightly tied petticoat was the necessary first step to putting on a traditional sambalpuri saree. The saree that Mr. Thakur procured for Nilima was a radiant sapphire and purple. The dress cost at least 20,000 rupee. Probably more.

When she was a girl, Nilima read about American weddings. At her core, Nilima knew she'd never have an American wedding. Yet, she read that Americans celebrate wedding anniversaries with various gifts and gemstones based on the number of years married. Americans apparently gave each other clocks or pieces of paper to commemorate one year of marriage. Eventually, if you stuck it out long enough, or even loved each other, it didn't matter, you started to get gemstones. Sapphires after five years. Then silver after twenty five years, all the way up to gold and diamonds. Nilima thought those gifts sounded very American and very romantic.

On her fifth wedding anniversary, Nilima did get a sapphire dress. A radiant and beautiful sambalpuri saree. A traditional gown hand woven from unique threads. The colors made Nilima's light skin glow with an almost ethereal light. The sapphire and purple in the sambalpuri saree would never fade.

Better up here than down with the leopards, Nilima comforted herself. It's crazy how

they climb into your house for food. On top of it. Everyone waited in the house while Uncle scared it away. Chacha told me...Chacha...I stopped calling Mr. Thakur uncle. I'm very proud of myself for this improvement. Yet, I don't like the name Ramesh, but Chacha says I'm getting used to it. Technically, Chacha is my mother's brother so he's Mama. They're all uncles. Uncle, my mother's brother who scared the leopard introduced me to Mr. Thakur. They're all just uncles.

As Auntie began wrapping the saree around Nilima's waist, Nilima weighed her options. Being a mail order bride in America was too risky. First, Nilima's English was poor. Second, Mumbai was a dangerous city. Traffickers were real and even more dangerous than leopards. Although Nilima sometimes fantasized about going crazy, fleeing to America and naming herself after a car. Porsche, Ferrari, or Lexus were all fun ideas. Yet, Mr. Thakur afforded Nilima with family, security and this wonderful sambalpuri saree.

Auntie folded the pretty end of the saree over Nilima's shoulder after the fabric was wrapped around her waist. Nilima spread the sapphire fabric regally over her midriff, completely covering the exposed skin. This made Nilima feel protected. Secure.

For the pleating, Auntie stood behind Nilima. "They all need to go the same way." Auntie was correct. Yet, Nilima wasn't bothered by small imperfections with her perfect dress.

"You're eighteen and a full grown woman now. You've been this for quite some time. And still, I'm making sure that your pleating matches and is all done correctly. You must be more conscientious."

Nilima appeared to thoughtfully consider Auntie's reprimands. *I've been married to Mr. Thakur for five years Auntie. I'll look so perfect and doll like in this dress. Angelic. And, that'll make Mr. Thakur so bumblingly awkward around me that he won't notice any issues with my pleating. Is what I wish I could say. Yet, Auntie puts so much stock in Mr. Thakur's opinions of me. I don't want to upset her.*

Nilima nodded at Auntie's reprimand and began to anticipate celebrating her five year wedding anniversary.

Nilima's fifth wedding anniversary was a triumph. The party was made at Novotel in Juhu Beach. The food was especially wonderful—the paneer cheese

pakora was spiced just to Nilima's liking. Before she ate, Nilima cleaned her arms and legs with a damp cloth. The meal caused Nilima to sweat which made Nilima comfortable enough to dance at the party.

Nilima married Mr. Thakur when she was only 13. Mr. Thakur was much older of course. Because of that, they had to rent private halls for parties and events. Yet, Nilima was eighteen now and this event was by the big swimming pool. All of the guests at Novotel could look out from their rooms and see Nilima in her sapphire sambalpuri saree.

Vidya Balan probably lived like this everyday. *This will be my Bollywood night!* Nilima declared to herself as she took the dance floor. Nilima was happy to see that her assessment of Mr. Thakur was correct. Indeed, Uncle watched as Nilima moved around the dance floor. Nilima daydreamed about Silk Smitha and *The Dirty Picture*. Then, she remembered Prashanth and his Audi. *He was only one year older than me. Yet, his parents let him drive around in an Audi. If he crashes it, he says his parents will just pay a bribe to the court and then buy him a better car. Of course I wanted to go for a ride like that. And now, this is my Bollywood night. That was five years ago. This is my night now. And, these thoughts are a distraction.* And they were.

Nilima put them out of her mind.

Mr. Thakur had done very well to obtain the Novotel as the venue for the party. Supposedly, Mr. Thakur helped some of the senior staff at the hotel locate apartments in Mumbai, at reasonable prices. For that kindness, Mr. Thakur made use of the Novotel for various business and personal functions, including his wedding ceremony. Dhandho.

Nilima enjoyed the rest of her Bollywood reception at the Novotel.

Nilima was fast asleep.

Ramesh Thakur, leaning on his elbow, looked for a few moments unresentfully on her tangled hair and half-open mouth, listening to her deep-drawn breath. Arranged marriages were a strange operation. Ramesh knew that affection in marriage grew out of formality and propriety. Although Ramesh had always been shy and clumsy, the Thakurs were a good family who were happy to welcomed a beautiful young girl like Nilima.

Ramesh Thakur studied Nilima's face kindly. She did look like Vidya Balan—classically beautiful. Her beauty was even more radiant in the sambalpuri saree. That would never fade. Some of Nilima's more ethereal aspects, also would persist like the color of the fabric in the sambalpuri saree. Yet, Nilima's face was hardening with time. Ramesh Thakur did not like to say even to himself that Nilima's face was no longer the face that made Kumal Sonawala's son wreck his brand new Audi.

Ramesh thought he knew most of the story. The boy, Prashanth maybe, picked her up in a slum. They drove around as teenagers are want to do. The marauding couple caused a three car accident involving two Marutis. *All Maruti makes look the same.* The wreck killed three peasants. *The girl's family was outraged. Reddy is a common name.* Yet, the girl was astonishingly pretty. *Boys will be boys.*

The marriage placated Nilima's family and put them into a much better situation. *Additionally, it preserved the arrangement made for the Sonawala boy and the Shah girl.* Ramesh Thakur needed a beautiful wife and had a great deal of money. Dhandho.

Although the marriage was positive for his business, Ramesh felt an unspecified remorse during some private moments like these with Nilima. Positivity would improve things and being fun helped. Unfortunately, something wasn't quite clicking. As evidenced by these moments.

Ramesh Thakur retired to sleep as Nilima did the same. Mr. Thakur's dreams are a private matter. Although the embarrassment would be overwhelming for him to admit, Mr. Thakur dreams about Silk Smitha sometimes. Mother scolded him for keeping that picture on his wall. Better to be polite and modest in formal and professional relationships. Mumbai was large and anonymous. Entertainment could be purchased anywhere in the city.

Nilima continued to sleep, dreaming about fast cars—Porsches, Ferraris, and Audis.

War Ethereum Crisis Simulator (WECS)

by

James Frazier

Author's Note: this piece of speculative fiction is written in advance of the launch of Ethereum 2.0 in July, 2021. It makes some reasonable assumptions about the proof of stake process proposed in the new upgrade. If these events don't materialize, please consider it proved that the Mandela Effect is real, yet, we aren't in the darkest possible timeline. Or, something.

Whenever I'm wrong about something, if that ever happens, that's also proof of the Mandela Effect.

“Get ready boys, on this raid, we'll finally kill Vitalik Buterin!”

It was a very good joke and it always got the men fired up before a raid. Every training exercise, every raid, every bombing would finally be the operation that killed Vitalik Buterin. Except, Vitalik Buterin already died in his sleep in 2078.

In 2278, this was an even better joke and it never failed to get the men excited before an attack against a stakeholder. What if humanity could travel back in time and assassinate the person who invented oil? Or, what if we could travel back in time and kill the person who realized war raises oil prices? Now, readers can begin to understand why the vast majority of the citizens of Moldova in the year 2278 want to see Vitalik Buterin's head on a spike.

Military service is compulsory in Moldova now to defend against the Republic of Transnistria, an established global super power. Moldova adopted

compulsory conscription requirement as part of its uneasy alliance with the United States of the Western Hemisphere—no one feels good about it—yet, the people understand they must defend against the encroaching superpower. Transnistria is home to several stakeholders of ethereum. One such stakeholder is, hopefully, foolish enough to live in a border town called Grigoriopol which is just east of the Moldovan capital, yet, very comfortably within the enemy republic.

The ethereum we know and love, just more scaleable...and it was necessary to power a \$640 trillion derivatives market. Ethereum 2.0 was launched in July, 2021. The upgrades allowed derivatives traders to implement their contracts seamlessly. Ethereum 2.0 was the gas that fueled the operation of every derivatives contract traded worldwide. And, ethereum was overseen and managed by human stakeholders and their equipment.

A stakeholder could, theoretically, intervene in the operation or implementation of any derivatives contract. Stakeholders could stop payments, force sales, override orders—stakeholders were a big deal. And, the Republic of Transnistria was home to several stakeholders thanks to their early contributions to Ethereum 2.0. A benevolent network of stakeholders could have facilitated several positive outcomes. Yet, ethereum was priced similarly to oil and natural gas.

Deflationary pricing of ethereum created volatile markets that could be influenced by several factors. Demand could drive prices up or down. Yet, the number of stakeholders on the network also influenced ethereum's price. In addition to intervening in special circumstances, stakeholders also used their mechanical equipment to power the network. More stakeholders meant a more powerful and more efficient network.

At first, there were many stakeholders and the network was very efficient. That was before they dropped a bomb larger than Severny Island on Xinjiang. For fun, they also eliminated Moscow and Seoul. Americans called the last one the Kimchi Bombing. Jokes aside, the United States of the Western Hemisphere and the Eurafrican Alliance both experienced substantial increases in their currencies.

Loss of the stakeholders and their equipment in Xinjiang, Moscow, and Seoul reduced the speed of the ethereum network. Yet, demand for derivatives fuel remained constant. This caused an increase in ethereum prices, and gave more power to stakeholders in the United States of the Western Hemisphere and the Eurafrican Alliance.

The United States of the Western Hemisphere, the Eurafrican Alliance, and the nation of Moldova now collaborated with soldat Ion Albot and the rest of his platoon to capture a stakeholder in the town of Grigoriopol. And so, Ion listened as the leader of his platoon shouted: ““Get ready boys, on this raid, we’ll finally kill Vitalik Buterin!”

The United States of the Western Hemisphere and the Eurafrican Alliance sought to use Ion Albot and the platoon of Moldovans to obtain physical access to the stakeholder in the village of Grigoriopol. If the Moldovans were successful, they would recapture their former land. Additionally, Moldova’s western allies would support and defend the Moldovan people’s newly obtained stakeholder status. In the event of any negative outcomes, the United States of the Western Hemisphere and the Eurafrican Alliance would maintain plausible deniability related to any potential wrongdoing.

The Moldovan platoon, including Ion Albot, approached the border of the Republic of Transnistria. Currently, that border was located just east of Chisinau where the Malaiesti River meets Balabanesti and Malaiestii Noi. Before crossing into Transnistria, the platoon would organize into a convoy to march on Grigoriopol. The convoy would consist of one march column, that would contain one serial comprised of one march unit. That march unit would be Ion Albot’s platoon.

Ion Albot daydreamed as his platoon formed their convoy. Although, Ion Albot participated in the formation of the convoy with the rest of his platoon; Ion Albot also remained preternaturally apart from the other men. Indeed, the soldat possessed a unique mental ability that is rarely seen outside Tibetan monasteries or Buddhist temples. As a result of his unique perceptual acuity, Ion Albot was able to focus his mind with perfect clarity on a given outcome. And, Ion Albot began employing this power as he and his platoon formed their convoy.

I’ll be a conquerer like Stephen the Great before me. People will look at the statue of Stephen the Great in Chisinau, and, there to the left they’ll see my statue as well. Ion the Indomitable. Next, the great conquerer envisioned his role at next year’s Capitol Day in Chisinau. They’ll bring me viorica. The wine and the girl. I’ll put sparkling viorica on a pretty redhead’s tits. I’ll call the redhead, Viorica! One could make uglier plans. Further, all

of the other men in Ion the Indomitable's convoy observed and were frightened by the approaching Kronstadt Sirius UAV.

The new and improved Kronstadt Sirius UAV deployed automatically upon detection of a convoy at the border of the Russian exclusive economic zone (EEZ). That zone included the Republic of Transnistria. Unauthorized border crossings weren't permitted. Violators were destroyed on sight. The technology worked very well. The Kronstadt Sirius UAV successfully released its payload, deftly eliminating the single march unit that was Ion Albot's convoy.

There were no survivors. Yet, due to his unique mental abilities, Ion Albot died on October 14, 2279, in Chisinau next to the statues of Stephen the Great and Ion the Indomitable.

“The physical hack was unsuccessful. Well, then just fry it. Yes, blow the town.”

Approximately 32 seconds later, a drone deployed a large explosive device that leveled the town of Grigoriopol which was completely destroyed. There were no survivors and all equipment powering the stakeholder's operation was successfully neutralized. Although the Moldovans were unable to recapture the town and the stakeholder's equipment, the operation was nonetheless a tremendous success.

The market reacted almost immediately to the decimation of Grigoriopol. A massive bull run for ethereum with gains across the board. As high as 17,000% for some skilled traders. All of the stakeholders within the United States of the Western Hemisphere were of course well protected. Although recapturing the facility would have been better, the annihilation of a stakeholder adverse to the interests of the United States of the Western Hemisphere was an outstanding result.

