

Chiral Nature

“Jump, man. Jump!”

“You might fly! You never know!—”

“Yeah—go for it! Jump, you stupid jerk!”

Harry could hear the voices clearly from the crowd below his perch atop the ledge of his eighth floor tenement building in the South Bronx. Some of the people’s comments were very cruel. Others were kind assurances that things were not as hopeless as they seemed. Actually, Harry didn’t feel the slightest bit of hopelessness. He felt at peace, in fact, even slightly elated.

As far back as he could remember, Harry never felt “normal”—whatever normal was. Instead, Harry felt like something was missing. Although he had no idea what was missing from his life, Harry had assigned a name to this mysterious emptiness: he called it the "minus factor." Harry’s therapist thought the minus factor was nothing more than simple depression and after just three office visits she wrote Harry a prescription for an anti-depressant. Harry never filled the prescription. A short time later he stopped going to see her altogether.

Harry didn’t really believe he was depressed, or even damaged. He was simply “different.” Lately, he had developed a new theory to replace the minus factor. Harry had come to think that he might be of a different “handedness” like those left- and right-

handed molecules that exist in nature. Most of the people in the world were no doubt “right-handed” while he, Harry, was “left-handed”. It explained why he never received sustenance from the “normal” sorts of things in life that right-handed individuals thrived on—things like relationships, sports, hobbies, and a professional career.

Harry didn't have pets. He didn't like dogs or cats. Harry did own a parakeet once. The bird gave him great joy. But, alas—after a few short months it died. He suspected that the bird was already sick when he purchased it at the pet store. He was so upset over “Arie's” death that he never bought another bird.

The only activity that seemed to bring Harry happiness these days was his frequent visits to high places. Every day on his lunch hour, he would go to a different building and visit the upper floors. He'd already been to every building in Manhattan that had a public observation deck or restaurant with a view. Harry befriended many a janitor and concierge in order to gain access to roof tops and high floors that did not allow public access. After 9/11, though, he had found gaining access to rooftops was increasingly difficult. It seemed everyone was suspicious of any individual who wanted to be on a roof. Especially an individual possessing left-handedness.

After a particularly frustrating day at work and a difficult commute home on the Transit, Harry arrived home only to be subjected to yet another one of life's pleasantries: a stifling hot apartment. The air conditioner had stopped working.

That's just perfect, thought Harry. A perfect end to a perfectly miserable day.

Earlier, Harry had been bodily dragged out of the lobby of a 14-story office building on the Lower East Side. It had been one of his favorite lunchtime haunts. He got

along famously with the concierge there—a guy named Jack. Jack and Harry hit it off; so well, in fact, Harry suspected that Jack, too, might possess left-handedness.

Today, however, instead of seeing Jack, Harry encountered a new fellow on duty that he called Mister McNasty. Mister McNasty rounded the corner just as Harry was headed for the service elevator and to his usual rendezvous with a roof-level garden terrace. The man didn't even bother to ask Harry what he was doing there. McNasty grabbed Harry by his shirt collar and belt, and dragged him towards the lobby door. Resistance was futile, and Harry had no choice but to submit to the humiliation at the hands of this right-handed Neanderthal.

Harry changed into more comfortable attire, popped open a beer, and headed up to the roof. If he was lucky there might be some sort of a breeze on this sweltering August evening. And besides, he liked to feed some of the pigeons that frequented the southwest corner of the roof. The pigeons had fashioned some nests there.

Several hours of quiet contemplation on the roof passed without incident. Quite suddenly and for no apparent reason, Harry felt the urge to climb up on the short ledge. It was a splendid idea. He enjoyed the feeling of freedom and the lack of constraint being where he was. One thing led to another, however, and a passer-by at street level noticed Harry on the edge and called 911. Five minutes later, a crowd had gathered and the fire department arrived. Harry casually observed the fireman as they disembarked. The tiny figures below methodically sat about doing what they do when someone is about to jump off a building.

Now, this is strange, thought Harry. I have no intention of killing myself. Why do

these people think I want to go 'splat' down there on the pavement? He speculated that one of the passers-by recognized his left-handedness, and assumed the worst-case scenario.

“Okay, buddy. Relax. Calm down, now. Okay?”

It took him a moment to realize the police officer at the roof door, one of New York’s finest, was speaking to him—Harry. At first, the remarks were puzzling to Harry since he felt totally calm and relaxed. In fact, he felt slightly elated.

Down below, the crowd had grown to nearly 50 people. It was a diverse crowd—blacks, Latinos, whites, men, and women. There were young people, old people, people with two arms and two legs, people with only one arm and two legs, people with perfect vision, and people with two broken eyes. But Harry sensed one trait they all had in common: they possessed right-handedness. Harry felt no kinship with any of the individuals on the sidewalk below.

With a sigh of exasperation, Harry stepped off the ledge and disappeared from the view of the horrified policeman.

Below, fifty or so people of right-handedness saw the man-bird flap his arms in a relaxed fashion and fly through the air.

As he circled the building for the second time, Harry wondered what the weather was like in Maryland. Accompanied by a curious sea gull he headed south for Maryland’s Outer Shore.