

The Hermaphrodites

Gordon Blitz

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Chapter 1

July 4, 2076

In honor of the 300th anniversary of the founding of the United States, rockets circled the globe three times, once for each century. The red sheen emitted from the rocket ships evolved into skywriting with the words *SACRIFICE*, *COURAGE*, *PASSION*, *DANGER*, and *BLOOD*; all the cornerstones of America's brand of democracy. *The Fabulous Invalid*, a term coined by George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart's 1938 backstage play, had included yearly obituaries about the demise of The Republic, yet it had always bounced back.

As Sue and Luke Windward watched the rockets punch holes in the atmosphere, Luke said, "It's kind of amazing that our Francis Scott Key had the insight to include the line, *the rockets' red glare*, when he wrote The Star-Spangled Banner, as if he knew that one day rockets would become the major form of transportation."

Sue corrected him, "Francis saw the British siege during the War of 1812 where the British launched seven hundred rockets."

Sue and Luke were celebrating the birth of the nation along with the impending birth of their first child. At their last visit, the doctor had told them, "The sonogram looks fine. I just want to be certain about you not wanting to know the sex of your child."

Sue responded, "Correct. Everything else in life has become so predictable. No surprises. All our needs are being taken care of by

IED, Income Equality Deposits. That means that it's a level playing field for everyone. No poverty."

As she spoke, Sue realized the fallacy of those words. Life was far from perfect. Disease was rampant. Scientists had been unable to keep up with variants so as to prevent any breakthrough infections. One did not need to worry about going bankrupt from medical bills, but death still could kidnap you. The child she was carrying was an accident. Why would they bring a child into a world that pretended to be perfect? But both had taken an elixir of optimism when they had read, "For fifty-six years we've struggled with finding a real preventive vaccine, and it has finally arrived. Fully tested, no known side effects. A group of scientists living on the moon has discovered the ingredients on one of their expeditions. So, roll up your sleeves and get ready to be inoculated!"

Luke's initial reaction was, "We've heard this so many times. What makes them think this is different?"

Sue answered, "The fact that it was found on the moon. Finally, all that money spent on shuttling back and forth to the moon may be paying off. It never made sense to me only as a refuge for overpopulation."

"Well, it sure is fun for a three-day getaway. A Disneyland for the 2070s!"

Both Sue and Luke got inoculated and despite using birth control, Sue became pregnant. And so now before the end of 2076, Sue and Luke would become parents.

On their last visit to the doctor, Luke had explained, "We have a list of names that can be used for either sex—*Moss* and *Drew* are numbers one and two. I know it's so old-fashioned, but we like it that way."

It had been a battle fighting off the new technology in large cities; moving sidewalks, driverless nuclear cars called “mobiles” and low-flying space vehicles. Open spaces had gone the way of dinosaurs. Sue and Luke moved away from Los Angeles to Spring Wells, a half hour from Palm Springs. The community of 10,000 pledged to live as though time stood still – back to 2029. Through a quirk, the desert areas were less susceptible to climate change and the abundance of sun provided enough solar energy that far exceeded other cooler regions. Spring Wells benefited from arctic freeze helping the average temperatures to drop. Even though homelessness had been eradicated, there was not a housing shortage and affordability was not an issue. Sizes of apartments and houses were glorified cubby holes. Although the population had been decreasing at alarming rates, unlivable cities were on the rise. Seattle, once the kingpin of the most desirable place to live, had plummeted to last place on the West Coast.

Both Sue and Luke’s careers comforted them because they could live in the past. Luke taught history that covered the 20th century while Sue tackled history in the 21st century. The speed of the last fifty years surpassed the entire nineteenth and twentieth centuries combined. It had become a race for Sue to finish the 21st century up to 2076 within a year. The speed in which space travel had increased by leaps and bounds along with robots in most people’s homes were examples of the quick pace of the Twenty-Second Century.

Having a robot as a teacher’s assistant helped Sue, but keeping students attentive was challenging. Even with speed reading and ADD pills given out like candy, teachers had to act like magicians to trick the students into concentration. Sue and Luke constantly battled with new technology being forced upon them, a compromise relating to being a robotic midwife.