



Unimportant People

a novel by Jim Gabour

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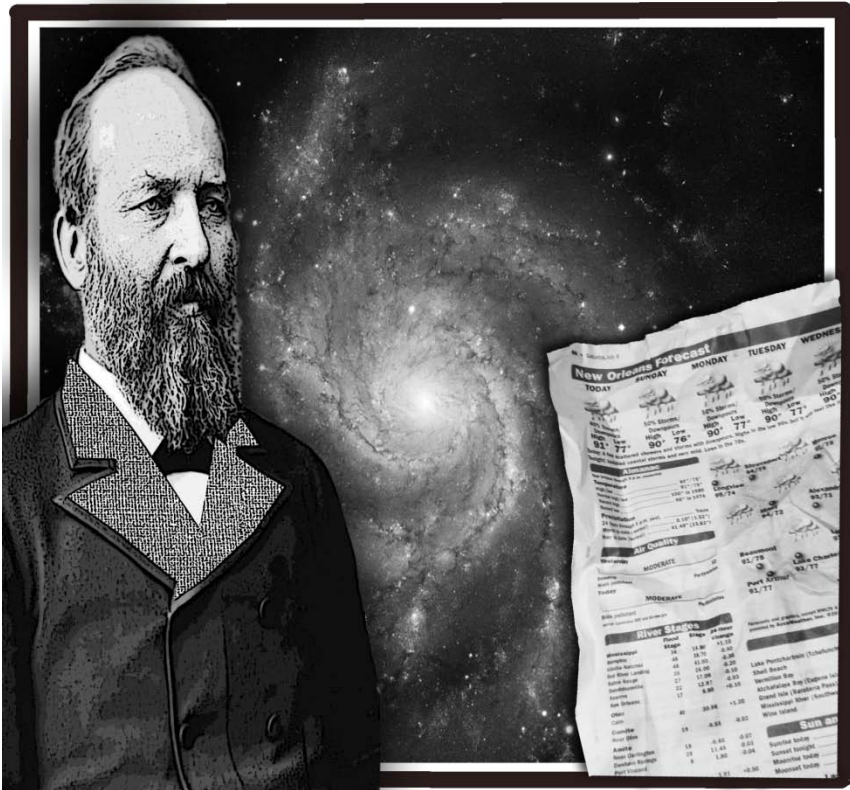
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Activity at the Criminal District Courthouse slows after midnight, but as Mutt leaves, the newspaper vendor in the lobby is awake and actively hawking tabloid reports of serious celestial activity:

“Da stars, honey! Dem stars! Read ya horrascope inna Comet. Rat now it be Happy Hour at dat Cosmic Conjunkshun Bar, doncha know? Got alladem planets bellyin up for a lil taste a dem haff-price Coincee-dental Cocktail. Takem wit a twist, dey do. Da wurl be rockin. Read bout it rat here inna Comet, fiffycent thankewbaby.”

The last hours have been a trifle chaotic, even for New Orleans. L Mutt Jeansonne – for the last month AKA Orleans Parish Criminal Court Juror #34278 in the duty pool system –

does not realize that a wild universe has been frantically banging at the door. He only knows that he's dog-tired. And that his wool pants are chafing his balls. He walks from the protection of the Criminal Courthouse's thick stone walls with measured, unhurried steps. His last day of jury duty now happily behind him. Walking back to loose-change work at a French Quarter strip joint and sweaty sleep in a warped plywood box under the Ponchartrain Expressway.

Yeah, not much of a life, but Mutt he can deal with it. He goes on. It's the only thing a guy like Mutt can do.

Except that on this steamy August night the world is merrily out of control.

UFO sightings have risen some forty percent since the beginning of the summer. According to various media to whom such things are important. The Government says: "It's the heat. People get hot and see flying saucers. Naturally-occurring sort of phenomenon," they say.

PhDs specializing in mass psychology are making highly official-sounding statements on network news about "minor thermal hysteria." The PhDs wear long white coats to the press conferences. The coats always clinch their theories. The authority costume is very reassuring to everyone. No one could doubt the coats. They work really well. American made. 100% natural cotton fiber. Pre-shrunk.

People like the heat idea. The affliction sounds good to them. The public is also happily in the mood for hysteria.

Low-level bankers and lawyers have started missing work at the full moon. Middle-management executives as a group are taking an inordinate number of sick days, doctoring themselves with the yogic purges increasingly available at most homeotropic health clubs.

All of society is affected. During the final twenty-four hours of Mutt's jury duty, thirty-odd thousand Galactic

Evangelicals had trooped into the sinful heat of New Orleans for their annual religious convention, delegates from all over the world maintaining their physical and spiritual health by doctoring themselves with 500mg salt tablets imported from the site of James Abram Garfield's last apparition. The twentieth President of the United States, his body allegedly taken away in a saucer, had seen fit to reveal his essence as a drawing on a vending machine in an Exxon ladies room near Elko, Nevada. A church scholar versed in apocalyptic visions of former chief executives said Garfield appeared to be advocating salt tablet use in blood-boiling climes. \$21.29 for a hundred-count UV-resistant bottleful, direct from the blessed station attendant's hands, with an equitable percentage to the church's soul-revival fund. On sale in your hotel lobby.

Much to other local businesses' chagrin, however, the convening Evangelicals came to New Orleans with only the Ten Commandments and a ten-dollar bill, and broke neither during their visit. It was too hot to do anything fun, they said.

It isn't just resident humans of religious persuasions who are feeling other presences in the heat, however. Commercial and residential real-estate agents are claiming in ever-increasing numbers that the visitors' rays are lowering their sales totals. Ned Rander of Little Rock, Arkansas, spoke for the industry in his desperate keynote speech before the Suburban Realtor's Convention in May. The gist of his plea was quoted in outlines under a two-column picture of the speaker's dais in *Property Movers' Gazette*:

"Heat rays!" exclaimed Brother Rander (above right, with toaster) in his emotional closing remarks. "The scientists know they are there. Massive rays shining right down through this planet's stagnant, inflamed atmosphere, for God's sake! The alien thermal beams become more intense every day!

"And we, we see the results: single-family-dwelling sales drop to nothing! We Certified Housing Agents, we're out there doing our noble but futile best to preserve democratic life

as we know it, in an uncaring world being transformed by power-mad aliens into a global tanning booth!”

The trade paper dutifully reported that Ned has been known to have mild bouts of paranoia since a recent bladder surgery, but his message rang true and strong with the concerned realtors hearing and reading those prophetic words.

The beacons are reportedly also touching other vulnerable white-collar brains, causing insurance sales forces to have disturbing en masse daydreams about interplanetary abduction. And the settlements required by such actions. Their only hope is that the aliens can soon be legally defined as God, and their Acts, by definition, exempt. Worship services are being encouraged.

Tabloid newspapers stained with the chicken blood of supermarket check-out stands report “Unconfirmed Air Force Sightings” on a daily basis, publishing fuzzy photos of dark or light rounded or square-edged space craft every other cover throughout the summer. The photos, usually taken by a trucker named Derek Wizzer from Wyoming or a housewife named Aline Lodenlach from the suburbs of St Louis, are quite artistic. They are inevitably accompanied by line drawings of the inhabitants of the dark or light round or square vehicle. To Mutt these aliens always look like Xavier Cougat. His canine friend Fred thinks they more closely resemble Louis Prima. Most of their acquaintances agree that the alien planet is definitely Latin and musical.

Rodrigo the Street mystic saw one of the drawings a few days ago and posted it at his Church. He is sure the illustration is modeled after the meter maid who works the Dauphine street night shift. Rodrigo has always suspected the portly woman with the nose mole has a bigger purpose in the Universe than collecting quarters. Since finding the picture, he has resolved to spread a message of tolerance to aliens. Especially since they’re already here. And writing tickets.

Having no car, Rodrigo believes the visitors can do little social harm.

Another Street named Virginia knows differently. She zealously guards the entrance to Bourbon street, occasionally stopping tourists to search their pockets for signs: “It’s a whole new world out there. They should all have passports. I need to see some ID.”

Unlike Mutt, Virginia has no ID. Not at the moment.

Rodrigo, long the resident holy man of the Quarter and the intermittent astrological adviser of L Mutt Jeansonne, often engages eager audiences outside the Can-Can-Do Lounge at 265 Bourbon Street, Mutt’s current place of employment. This evening a visiting psychologist from Yonkers is listening. He tells his wife that he finds Rodrigo’s “patterns of disjointed speech, especially those parts referring to extraterrestrial forces” extremely interesting. The shrink continues lecturing disassociation theory to his uninterested spouse while his libido is finding fulfillment in lingering, clandestine glances over Rodrigo’s shoulder, through Marty the barker’s partially opened door. Inside he can see Melodie LaGrande again doing her thing, which involves slowly disrobing, and in the process enrolling her covert new fan who watches outside, from the street.

Rodrigo himself notices what is really happening, as the New York tourist hands him an unsolicited dollar: “...yityityittrivial incidents treated with too much respect travesty vaudeville nudity burlesque Milton. Naked, sir, naked thanks for the buck you will undoubtedly be kept alive for your knowledge of the terran psyche here let me buy you a chili dog I have a buck right here yit yityit yes, sir, I have burnoose bushmaster bustard nice shoes, sir...”

Inside, not only is Mutt still AWOL, but two of the girls have failed to show up to dance the night shift. One of them is Mia, the star night-time attraction of the Can-Can-Do. The

daytime number-one dancer, Melodie LaGrande, is preparing to leave, already well past her scheduled departure time.

Day Manager Abu Chaudhuri -- a well-dressed Pakistani of little social grace and questionable moral fiber -- who is himself doing a double shift, goes crazy. Begging Mel, "You are being the star tonight, my lovely Melodie! Be the Star and I am promising you, I am promising you the top of the daytime billing! Within the next month. Or so. With certain reservations. And of course I have to talk to the third cousin Nawaz. I am promising. As soon as I am able to be clearing it with Nawaz. I am promising. The star."

Mel is wild-eyed and not too rational. Being ever-so-slightly under the influence of a long convoy of the house specialty drinks called Dump Trucks, she says yes. She calls in sick to her second job at Benny's soon after, and stays on at the Can-Can-Do to fill in for the missing dancers. The money is better at the Do.

Her guard dog Fred figures it will probably work out fine being loyal -- even though any semblance of loyalty to the notoriously ungrateful management of the B-drinking lounge is usually wasted -- except for the fact that Mel is already drunk as a post at the end of her regular shift.

Closing in on one in the morning Mel is staggering up for her tenth or twelfth stage dance of the night. She hasn't even changed outfits since around ten. On and off and on. She doesn't care. It is a bad sign.

The boys are flocking to her. The club's flyers have done their job advertising her show, but Mel is well past doing the "tie stands up tie falls down" routine with her suited admirers. She seems to be getting a bit liberal about the administration of the club's secret two-drink digital reward to its customers. Her hand is touring a rapidly-mounting number of Brooks Bothers laps. And correspondingly, she is making a lot of money.

Since midway through the shift, every twenty minutes Mel has come over to Fred with another wad of bills. She has taken to wrapping them around Fred's collar, because the money won't fit under her garter belt or g-string any more. Plus she is too drunk to make it to the dressing room to stash the notes in her wardrobe or makeup bag. Knowing the ever-ready Abu would probably steal it if she left it back there, anyway.

So eight hours after Fred is supposed to be home and fed, she is still sitting on a barstool, watching Mel carefully if a bit uncomfortably. Fred has now not been outside for a bit of relief since two in the afternoon. But she is determined not to move from her spot until she gets Mel out of the Can-Can-Do safely. Unmolested.

To that protective end, Fred has her ferocious face on. Being both female and canine, the result is an immediately communicative snarl. Which she fancies looks a bit like Doc Wolf's pose on his canned product, Doc Wolf's Doggie Ration. A picture of Doc Wolf himself on the front. The Doc a rather rabid-looking wolf. Fred is a fan. At this point, though, she can barely breathe, much less bark out warnings. There is so much money twisted around her collar that she makes a high whistling noise when she inhales. But she can still growl just fine. Quite well enough to keep hungry hands away from Mel. And the dough.

There are cops, however, close by. Just in case. It isn't Marty the barker's favorite brand of insurance, but as he stands at the door to Bourbon street pulling in customers, he figures that with the crowds this big and the drinking this heavy, the presence of a little law enforcement is a good thing. Even the plainclothes boys from Vieux Carré station are working the street in force tonight.

Marty discusses the situation with Rodrigo around midnight. "Probably breaking in some new rookies -- coming in and out of here every five minutes, acting solemn, scaring the

customers to death. Audience is a little more in control than I would expect under the circumstances.”

But the observant Rodrigo also notes that the girls’ frequent acts of manual dexterity on their customers have eluded detection by those same valiant officers of the Law. So far.

“Grappling hook,” he confides in Marty.

Marty understands.

Rodrigo is not sure this bit of luck will hold. Not at all. He isn’t sure how to convey his feelings, even though he knows Marty is a sympathetic listener. Rodrigo is verbally stuck somewhere in Volume Eight of the supermarket encyclopedia he carries around with him.

He tries anyway. Marty is worth the effort. “...nixnixnixnnNNNNyx goddess of the night, sir. Mythology, sir.”

The collegiate barker looks in need of a translator this time.

Rodrigo hopes Mutt will arrive soon.

Inside Fred is also praying for the missing Mutt to walk in the door. Something is up. She has noticed that Rodrigo keeps sticking his nose in every few minutes and anxiously looking around. Fred hadn’t realized that Performance Art interested Rodrigo. She can barely tell he’s a male, and as are many of her species, she is usually quite good at determining such things.

It’s not that odd an occurrence, the Street dweller Rodrigo showing up this night. He normally gravitates toward chaos. Everyone assumes that is why he is in New Orleans. For his residence he has been rewarded. The City has refined his senses to such an extent that Rodrigo can now feel the onset of greater and lesser degrees of chaos. He moves decisively toward the greater. Rodrigo is a scientific register of deviation. A lunacy seismograph.

He is carefully watching the Can-Can-Do insanity brew this particular evening. The seismographic needle is fluttering

madly. He is making notations in the volume he has tucked under his arm. Volume Eight(supplemental): *Imbrocado to Kapellmeister*.

Rodrigo looks into the Can-Can-Do again, just as Mel starts her move. A tourist walks in front of him. "...onon-ononingenue the girl ingenue," he sputters, "... just rolling along sir just rolling along thank you for the coins sir would you like a hot dog no cheese no..."

Inside, Mel is performing a move she calls The Titty Cyclone. Swinging those silicone spheres around like she is going to send them into orbit. Whoop. Staggering a little on that last twirl, but she doesn't go down. Regaining her composure now.

Fred is worried. She knows that Mel sometimes exhibits the same trait that Fred so despises in cats. Whenever they make a gigantic goof they have to immediately toss off an even grander gesture. So that nobody will remember the goof. And here Mel goes.

The twister expands in scope.

Mel is really getting into it now. She is also relating to the audience a little too heavily for her own good, bending over and talking in fairly explicit terms to her admiring male fans. The breasts are most definitely and simultaneously atwirl.

The Cyclone may be actually getting out of hand this time, thinks Fred. Where is that Mutt when I really need him?

Mel is in prime form, coaxing a customer sitting stageside.

"I bet you never see anything like this back home do you, handsome boy? Check these out, sugar plum."

She takes off her pasties and tosses them to the audience.

To the two plainclothes officers in the audience.

The cops immediately begin yelling loudly through megaphones, turning on lights and pointing outside.

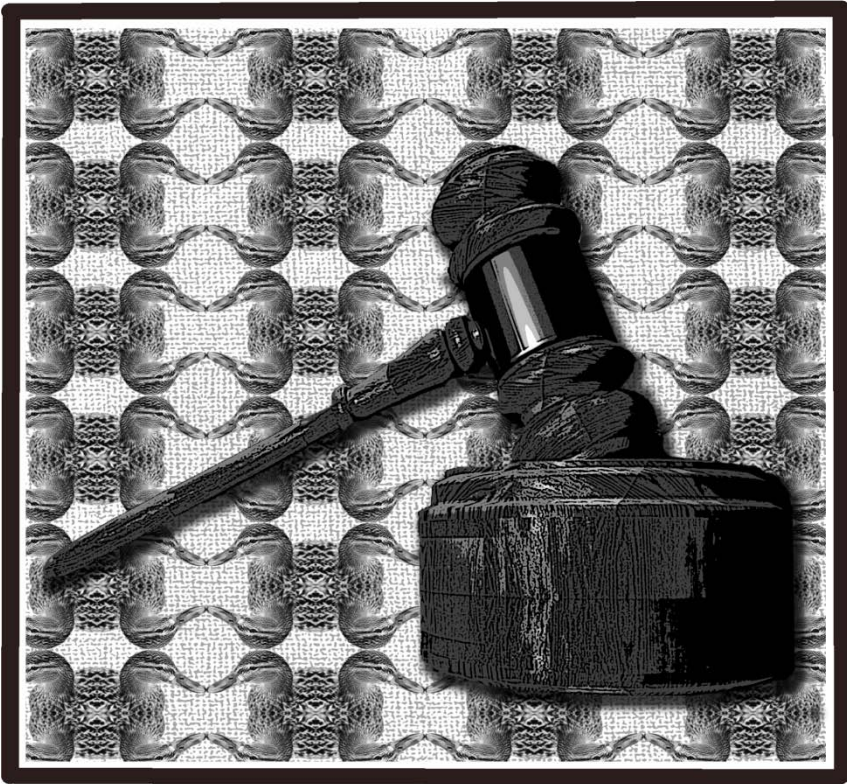
An hour later, a throng of partiers, perverts and hangers-on block the front door of the French Can-Can-Do Lounge. Mutt arrives back at the Bourbon street club, his place of employment, worn out from the hard realities of law and its administration as a juror, only to find that the very same legal system has now intruded into the lives of two of his closest friends, an ancient dog and a not-quite-so-ancient stripper. Who have both been forcibly removed by the police.

Rodrigo has not been removed. The Street seer is trying to maintain some semblance of control. He runs up as soon as he sees his friend Mutt. Rodrigo sputters, spits, attempts to relate the facts. Through the web of his own tangled universe.

“... Iiiiiahhhhh I got it now, sir. I got it now. Cops. Got ‘em. Melodie and Fred. Got ‘em. Took ‘em to the parish lockup, sir,” he says. “Night court nightcourt know it well been to nightcourt I have. Know it well a small leaping rodent of northern Africa and Asia jerboa... patience patience patience I got it now I got it Mutt sir I got it. Cops crawling all over Melodie. Fred making weird noises like she was strangling and trying to get her mouth open to bite those cops and off comes her collar and all this stuff wrapped around it falls on the floor but I got it. Got it cops cops cops oh they were cops yelling and in comes the uniforms NOPD I got the stuff got it here in my... I got the stuff oooooOOOOOIIIi I I remember, sir. Mel awful drunk. Cops grabbing Fred this Uniform squeezing her hard trying to hold her and she just lets go and shits all over the policeman like she’s been holding it for a week and the cop he’s yelling like the Universe ended, but it hasn’t no way not for a while yet... E-EEEE EEEEE eeee ii II I got it I got proof. I, sir. Everybody screaming those old men in the bar thinking it’s a raid and they’ve got to call their wife back in Milwaukee going to have to bail them out of the New Orleans jail just listening to jazz Maybelle and they bring these naked women onto the stage I thought it was a jazz club jazz coming from jass coming from

jism coming from all those slaves dancing in Congo Square I sleep there sometimes because I can feel all that power all that sound all those bodies slapping together in the night under the giant yellow moon and they feel like they're alive like they're not slaves like they're back in the motherland and happy with all their families raising cattle and soybeans not in chains a prisoner locked up in Parish Prison they'll have them over in the Parish Prison on Tulane Avenue right now waiting to see if old Judge Cannalo will get them in the Night Court put them on the docket unless they've got poor Fred loose from Mel and sent her to the animal pound down on Wadley street get her locked up jugular June bug Ikikikikikikkkkkk -- kk -- KKcan't put her to sleep for three days. Got to wait until they see if she's got rabies. Unless she starts eating folks. Took Fred in the same cop car with Mel. Couldn't separate them Fred taking a hold on Mel's arm with her mouth holding tight tight tight cops couldn't pull her mouth open she's growling at them like she could eat them but she won't let Mel go anywhere without her Mel pleading saying don't you fuckers hurt my doggie Fred growling louder then howling like a wolf between her teeth aaaaaAAA-ooooo-ooooo-OOOOOoooo those cops getting scared pointing guns throwing them both in the back of that cop car Fred attached but good to Mel but Mel not yelling like it was hurting or anything just didn't want to be separated. Parish Prison. We got to go sir got to run Mutt me and you sir. Here got got Fred's collar got Mel's bag out of her dressing room too figuring she might need stuff out of it like I need my bag in the slammer letting me bring my book let me read my book in the holding cell I even know how to get messages in the women's side kaolin making porcelain teabowls and medicine to keep you from shitting all at the same time that's good stuff to have that many good different uses in the universe poor Fred should have had some before she got arrested.

“Parish Prison. Now, Mutt. Sir.”



Across town in the slammer, Fred's digestive tract is feeling much better. She feels vindicated. That rookie should have known better than to go around squeezing delicate members of the opposite sex. Especially after they've had half a dozen jalapeno chili dogs. Earlier in the evening Marty, playing the part of the doorman at the Can-Can-Do, had given in to Fred's pleading looks. Stagnant Bourbon Street vapors had wafted in the door of the Lounge, carrying the gustatory invitation of a steaming hot dog cart into the strip joint. Marty fronted the bucks for the six chilidogs, but his generosity resulted in a massive siege of canine gastrointestinal rumbling.

Melodie LaGrande, her head still bearing an overflowing burden of the cheap bubbling wine Dump Truck cocktails she

was responsible for hawking to customers, is returning to sobriety in grand form. Communicating with her fellow political prisoners in the parish Criminal Court holding area. At the moment, though, she has turned her attention to the cell-block matron's ear jewelry. The matron had just entered, and now patiently stands outside the bars holding a piece of paper toward Mel. The obviously festive detainee continues her fashion critique.

"They are absolutely stunning!" Mel raves. "My ears are not strong enough to hold up anywhere near such a bold statement. And they go with your lovely body so well -- Fred, have you ever seen anything so Karen Carpenter? Frieda, you are the number one! Bringing me legal communiqués and being the best-dressed matron this side of Fire Island!" Mel takes the paper, looks at it briefly and turns to Fred. "Freddy, we have an attorney! Raymond Burr will walk through that door any minute now! Can Andy Griffith be far behind? I'll save this little missive until we have some private time." Mel puts the piece of paper in her pocket without reading it. She returns to her audience.

"Now, Darlings, I know I'm a little tipsy still, but I'm a good girl and I have a great deal of self-respect. I just will not be sitting in a room that is filled with envy and malice. We all must be sisters here, if we are to get through this medieval torture system."

A bedraggled young coed whose vomit-stained University of Mississippi t-shirt is also adorned with a Tri-Delt pledge pin stands nearby. She moans loudly at Mel's last statement. "It's all right, sweetie," reassures sister Melodie. "Just kidding. Right, Frieda, liebchen? No torture. Unless they make you eat the food. I don't need it, though. I'd rather lose a few pounds off the hips while I'm here at Sing-Sing Spa." Mel looks at the matron. "Do you good, too, girl."

"What are you saying, lady?" queries the matron.

“Now, don’t be natty,” Mel admonishes quickly. “We’ve got to get honest feedback from each other to get by in a world ruled by male hormones.”

The matron does not seem to be immediately persuaded, pivoting toward the door with an extended “Hummmppph!” A single bobby pin pings to the concrete floor, ballistically propelled from the civil servant’s twisting coiffure by the sheer centrifugal force of her turn.

“Leaving, Frieda? All the best to the boys in your life.” Mel’s good humor will not be quashed.

The matron departs with a wave and a head shake, holding the door open as the male bailiff enters the area outside the cell.

The bailiff is not looking particularly genial, either, even considering the hour of the night. This is the third time in the last forty-five minutes he has been back to the holding area to interview Mel. The bailiff has been experiencing a bit of difficulty getting factual information from the inmate in his charge. He needs to fill in all the spaces on his forms before Court comes into session. Judge Cannalo demands completed forms. Neat. With no erasures. But the bailiff has been unable to ask a question, much less retrieve an answer.

“Miss...” he starts again.

“Melodie, baby,” she interrupts, still on a roll. “The modern entertainer Melodie LaGrande.”

The bailiff jumps. That is an answer, though he had not asked the question. He quickly scribbles down the name and raises his eyes to start again. He is filled with hope.

Melodie, however, quickly dashes any further expectations.

“No, do not look at me that way! I have no ID hidden about my body. I was totally without clothing when they drug me in here, except for these shoes.” She turns back to her

audience in the cell. "They're not really my first string, these shoes. I don't know why I was wearing them."

"Miss..." the bailiff tries to interject, thinking this might be the key word.

It is not.

"No, you sick little mind-prober! No, I do not know where my G-string went -- your vigilant comrades-in-arms needed a souvenir, I suppose. Is this what the media is crying about? Is this it? The World News was right! 'Alien Invasion Imminent!' You're from Mars, and you've come to steal the heart of our culture! You've got my performance costume, haven't you? Sent it on its way back to your scarlet planet. Some sickly, institutional-grey lizard is this very moment trying to arrange my pasties on its scaly body! They'll undoubtedly crave the real thing after seeing that! I suppose I'll have to get an agent there, next thing you know."

Mel turns to Fred, and is suddenly diverted.

"Baby, you can testify that they're the ones who wouldn't let me get my bag. I could at least have worn a decent smock for this little affair -- delve into the more conservative areas of my wardrobe for items that would fit the occasion. I've got something quite modest in sky blue. Lovely. Subtle. Jailer! You will notice this dismal green thing you gave me does absolutely nothing for my skin. Makes me look much older than 23."

The bailiff's ball-point is scribbling again. He is finally making progress.

"Yes, you may put that on your form. Melodie LaGrande, 23. Who'd you think I was, Grable? Notice, though, Betty and I do have similar legs. And those forties shoes! I would die for the sandals she wore in those pin-up posters! Just die for them. All those handsome GIs dreaming about her limbs. Too romantic! I want her shoes! Wouldn't you, Freddy? Jailer! You can also

note down that I wear a petite 6B, if the shoes are sized properly.”

The bailiff has already written down “6B” before he suddenly howls with frustration, crumples up the top form and starts filling out a new one with the small amount of information he has already gathered.

The noise causes some commotion among the other residents of the cell. Sleepy groans accompany the turning of bodies on the concrete benches. Then as the momentary disruption subsides, a large twitching woman, well over three hundred pounds and wearing her prison dress backwards, moves from the wall of the room toward Mel and the bailiff. Her eyes shift focus every few moments, as another rippling surge of neural activity runs through her body. The twitching resembles the muscular shivers produced by large jolts of electricity applied to unruly farm animals. Mel openly inspects the bottom of the woman’s dress for dangling cords as the Twitcher approaches. A girl can’t be too careful. The Twitcher might not be grounded. The woman sits next to Mel and extends her hand toward Fred. Mel quickly clutches Fred to her chest.

“No, you can’t pet my friend right now, Madame ElectroVac. Look, Freddy, here’s the Home Appliance Queen of New Orleans.” The old dog begins to rumble. “Shush, Fred. Easy, my darling.”

Mel raises her eyes to her fellow inmate, radiating no small amount of ill will. “You see what you’ve done, Miss Buzzbucket. My companion’s upset now. I don’t think the poor baby’s ever been put in jail before. Me, I’m a veteran here, though I don’t show my years now, do I?”

She turns again to the waiting bailiff, asking sweetly, “How old did you think I was, sweetheart?”

“Forty-five, miss?” the bewildered bailiff ventures, without thinking of his own safety.

Mel explodes, “How? HOW old! How old did you say I was?!” She swivels completely away from the bars. “Well, the same to you, Auntie Mame! You can take your nasty paper out of here if you intend to insult me.”

She looks for sympathy from the electric Twitcher, who is once again trying to touch Fred. This time she reaches for the spot where Fred’s mouth is wrapped around Mel’s arm. Mel is diverted.

“No, Miss Hoover Dam, leave her alone. She’ll let go when I tell her. She’s a willful woman, just like me. Like Oprah, except we’re both thinner. She’s just not healthy looking, Oprah. Now Fred here she’s a trim little baby, even at her age. Yes, she’s elderly, you know -- now Fred, don’t be grumpy. We girls have got to be honest with each other, especially about things like age.”

“Fred?” says the Twitcher, after a belch that reeks of ozone.

“Yes, you absolute biddy, Fred is a girl’s name. Fred is a great deal more a lady than you’ll ever be, you AC-DC tramp.”

Melodie emphasizes her point, slapping the Twitcher sharply on her extended wrist.

The huge woman gives a quick “Yeek!”, and runs quickly to the rear of the cell, nursing her injury and twitching even more furiously than before.

Fred is sure she sees a blue arc snap from the side of the woman’s head. Fred -- AKA in some more bureaucratic circles as Mrs FT Jeansonne -- is a very sleepy dog. All this late-night activity requires recapturing a bit of canine energy. She relaxes and is snoring before her eyes are closed. Melodie strokes the grey muzzle lovingly.

The bailiff shakes his head, clicks his ball point into its retracted state and, in a well-practiced movement, adroitly inserts the pen into its proper slot in his uniform pocket.

He is giving up on this one. He has a name and an age and a place of employment. Has the dog's name. That'll have to do.

Bailiff Larry Purbush knows that the Judge won't be happy, but Purbush can see no way to get a hold on this woman's runaway train of thought. Jump on and get run over, dragged along the tracks.

However, the man is a trained professional, a deputized instrument of the people and the Government of the US of A. And America will have the last word.

"Lady, I don't think you realize how serious this is," he says, in as ominous a voice as he can muster. "You could lose your cabaret license. They could stop you from ever working a club in this town again. Then where would you be?"

"Quiet, boyfriend! You'll be waking my sister Freddy. Such a nuisance," says Mel, looking to the rest of her cellmates for confirmation.

The bailiff is already at the door, wishing the security lock would work quicker. *Shee-yut. I can't think straight any more. My head's all banged up just talkin' to her. Woman's a damn menace. A menace with gee-GAN-ticko knockers, but still a menace.*

The bailiff is trembling as he locks the outer cell door closed behind him. He looks at his hands. *That damned coffee. I got to give it up. Or get a day job.*

Fred can feel the pressure of the chisel on her toe. It is cold. She won't let go.

There is the pain.

"Freddy, honey, ease up on Melodie's arm, sweetie. That's better. You had a nightmare, Freddy, but it's OK now." Fred looks around the cell, sleep-fogged, and realizes where she is.

Inside a cell Waiting for another Trial.

Miss Melodie LaGrande continues her lecture. She is nervous now, though trying hard to conceal it. *Lose my license. What would I DO?* She has not even noticed the bailiff's departure. Her mind is elsewhere as her banter continues.

"I can't believe they didn't let me go back for my makeup. Just how am I supposed to get a fair hearing in court if I must go waddling in looking like an absolute trollop.

"Fred, I know you've always hated these shoes. I should have worn the black sandals. You were right. I know that now." She turns again to the semi- and ultra-conscious residents of the cell for consolation.

"You see, babies, the one time I don't listen to my best girlfriend's advice and I get stuck out in public with just the most indecisive of wardrobes. No statement here, at all. Hospital chartreuse with a drab grey monogram. I suppose it is rather butch. What does the 'OPP' stand for, anyway?" she asks.

Mel waits for an answer. This is a quiz.

"Orleans Parish Prison," volunteers the Twitcher.

Mel waves her hand: "Thank you, sweetheart. What an utterly droll sense of humor. I wonder if sweet Frieda will let me keep it? Fred-dy, I've just had the most marvelous idea for the act!

"I suppose it's in situations like this that those of us with a true flair for fashion can really shine. Just make do, you know. Fred, sweetie, you don't have to hold on so tightly any more -- they are simply not going to separate us now, and I think they know it.

"Those horrid detectives would probably pull a child from its mother's breast -- though, did you see the blonde one? Fred-dy! The young boy was trying to hold you and look at me at the same time. He raised a rather magnificent Trouser Tent while he was getting an eyeload of yours truly."

Mel turns to the locked door to the Courtroom.

“If I could just get the right man, babies, life would be so much simpler.” She whirls back to her captive audience, Loretta Young fashion.

“But thank god for Sisters. We have to help each other through this absolute vale of tears. Like that sweet nelly who booked us. She knew we had to be together, Freddy baby, you and I. Knew how important it was to my emotional well-being to have you close, close by. You shouldn’t have made such a noise when she called you a Poodle. The poor woman simply doesn’t have the background to handle rare mammals of your special breed. My sweet baby Freddy. Here, let me rub those ears. Poor baby protecting her mamma. Just love her to death, I do.”

Mel’s monologue is broken by the metallic squeal of the door opening. The bailiff re-enters the room with another deputy immediately behind. The second man announces loudly, “Melodie LaGrande!” The bailiff points timidly at Mel.

“Miz LaGrande?” asks the other deputy.

“It’s me, alright honey. Oh, joy, We’re to go in tonight -- that’s a relief.”

Melodie stands, holding Fred and straightening her clothes. She feels a lump in her prison dress pocket, reaches in and pulls out a scrap of crumpled paper.

“I must first prepare to meet my attorney. It is my legal right to read this important message as brought to me by the official hands of your own Shtupmeister Frieda.”

Mel grasps the note with her left hand, the hand that protrudes from Fred’s mouth, while she unfolds it with her right. She calls to the bailiff, “Just a moment, O Grand Inquisitor.”

She begins reading, her face brightening as she reads. “This is an absolutely mysterious message, Freddy! The Frau said this came from our lawyer, whoever that is! But what lawyer would write ‘steatopygia’ and ‘steenkirck’ to an unknown client! What vivid imagination would possibly think that I would enjoy a picture of a steamroller at this moment of high drama?

Not a mention of the charges. And unsigned. I love this man! Trying to cheer me up with wit and wisdom. The medieval barrister clamoring to haul me up from the Pit of Despair!"

Mel primps her hair, not pausing in her thought or speech, "I do hope it is one of my more masculine admirers -- the body of a Greek god to go along with this lively mind would be a treat beyond belief!"

She begins walking toward the waiting deputies, still talking. "Life is so refreshing at times, Fred. Just when you think things are desperately maudlin, along comes that special someone from out of the blue with just the right take on all the madness. A girl needs that kind of companionship to get through it all, you know."

She pauses at the door, "That, and the proper height pumps, of course."

Mel and Fred sit in the docket of the justice factory. Judge Robert Armstrong Cannalo presiding.

Judge Cannalo is running through people's lives on automatic pilot. The bailiff has barely read the charges when the Judge finishes rambling through the pleas, throws out a sentence, and gives the formerly-innocent accused a one-way elevator trip to hell. The basement of the Courthouse holds the Prisoner Processing Unit, and Cannalo keeps it humming, even at night. Due process takes maybe three minutes in this room.

Mel seems a great deal more together now, especially since she's spotted Mutt Jeansonne and his unknown -- to her -- companion Rodrigo sitting in the Courtroom. Mutt is wearing his dress clothes, a gas station tshirt and holed tuxedo pants, accessorized with basketball sneakers and baseball cap. Still dressed up, since he was here in this same courthouse building just a few hours ago in his role as jury member.

In his swarthy arms Rodrigo cradles a briefcase bulging with multiple volumes of Professor O's All-Fact Encyclopedia.

His reference library is ready. The All-Fact's English editors overcame haphazard translation from an original Korean edition by tailoring the encyclopedia's contents to the sensationalist hordes of free-spending American parents who roam the aisles of supermarket chains in search of knowledge to pass on to their progeny. The All-Fact remains Rodrigo's philosophical touchstone. And if casual observers don't immediately notice that he is both barefoot and stark raving mad, they'd probably say Rodrigo himself looks rather like a slightly bedraggled, though refined, barrister this night.

Fred is a bit shocked, though, when she gets a look at the very back of the courtroom. More of the friendly Street population is arriving every moment, as word of their incarceration spreads. Noonie and Virginia enter the Courtroom to nods and greetings, and the two smiling though unwholesome-looking Streets now sit side by side. Both are muttering rhythmically in different directions. To no one in particular. There are at least four seats vacant between them and the rest of the late-night court-watchers. Fred sees a small feathered head rise above the wooden seats in front of Noonie. The dog begins to get excited. Noonie has brought her pet duck to Trial.

Mel might not realize it yet, but Fred can sense that there is not a Norm in the audience.

The armies of liberation are present! Can justice prevail? Can I get a WERF, brothers and sisters? Fred wonders.

Mutt also has Mel's bag on his lap.

Now there is a considerate boy, Mel thinks when she sees her portable dressing room. It's all the girl can do to keep from leaping across the docket. Running over to that bag and freshening her lashes. Changing to her other shoes for indictment.

She has already done her best to adapt, stopping repeatedly on the walk to the courtroom to accommodate flashes of apparel inspiration. She tied the waist of her prison dress

tightly and stretched the neck of the faded cotton garment just enough to allow her womanly figure some subtle display. Doing her part for the dignity of the American legal system.

Rodrigo keeps pointing his briefcase at the defendants. His planetary orientation is not altogether apparent tonight. Mel does not realize that her mysterious, intellectual, admiring legal correspondent is this same shoeless wonder. In spite of Rodrigo's occasional rambling, however, Mutt Jeansonne feels it bodes well for their case to have the unleashed forces of the universe on their side.

While waiting for the two defendants to be eaten alive by the snapping jaws of the nocturnal judiciary, there is opportunity to check out the other players on the scene.

The courtroom itself is now completely jammed with the most unsocial, wild-looking and filthy humans that inhabit the City. Fred & Mutt's kind of people. Vagrants, mostly. But there are also middle-of-the-night insomniac housewives and 24-hour sales clerks who come down to watch the proceedings because they don't own TVs. There is a sprinkling of victims who have been called to court to testify, and a few police officers here for the same reason. Mel's arresting officers are waiting, too. Drinking courthouse coffee in the back row while they fill out paperwork.

Mel keeps batting lashes at the blonde one. He is trying very hard not to notice the woman he arrested for public nudity. He knew it was a clean bust: the law in New Orleans requires these women who strip for a living to wear pasties on their nipples. Mel had removed hers, and he had witnessed the act.

A novice, "cub" newspaper reporter is sitting up front, bored to death and trying to chat up a hooker who is in line to bail her roomie out of jail. She stares at the hand the newsman has placed on her shoulder as if the meter is already running.

Two old ladies are eating Popeye's Fried Chicken in the row in front of Noonie and Virginia. Watching them lick grease

off the bones, Noonie's duck Ellis D has acquired a concerned look. He twists his bill from side to side contemplating the implications of a number three dinner. Three pieces of spicy-style dark meat with batter-dipped french fries and coleslaw. Two thighs and a drumstick. An extra jalapeno pepper.

From the dock, canine Fred is looking too. Starving.

She is trying to send that message across the room into Mutt's brain. Doc Wolf, Mutt. I need the Doc's doggie ration. Fred watches intently for results, but Mutt and Rodrigo seem occupied, at the peak of some sort of plot. They sit on the second wooden bench whispering wildly back and forth. Rodrigo holds up two volumes of his library and makes cow sounds. *Moouooooooooooooo*. A very pastoral touch in this ultimate urban setting.

Fred has to once again admire Rodrigo's sensibilities. Very calming effect. She wonders what his feet smell like this evening. She thinks that walking Bourbon street all night had to have added some extra depth to his normally fertile scent.

Moouooooooooo to you, too, Rodrigo. The dog makes a noise around Mel's wrist.

The Judge slams his hammer down. Mel is startled. Rodrigo gets quiet and looks around. He suspects some planetary collision might have occurred. Rodrigo does not understand much about Judge's hammers.

Fred is restless -- the chicken dinner is making her stomach shiver and mouth salivate -- but she resigns herself to her situation and looks hopefully at Mutt.

Mutt has stopped talking to Rodrigo and is now inspecting his friends' captors. Besides the usual complement of overweight and under-intelligent goons hired as Sheriff's Deputies to guard the august proceedings, there is only a handful of official personnel in the room -- the court reporter, the judge's assistant and the public defender. Mutt has never seen any of these

individuals during his juried tenure on the day shift, but he is familiar with their jobs.

Then, a revelation. He spies, all by herself at the prosecutor's bench, a young woman, extraordinarily beautiful considering her present situation.

The sensitive Mutt put out feelers, takes a reading on her: this woman is simultaneously entangled in the mechanism of the court, dominated by this monster judge, and carrying a bit of the monster herself. She wouldn't have been able to survive here otherwise.

Obviously the Assistant District Attorney has been assigned to the lowest of the low jobs in prosecution, carrying on the will of the State against the human slime of the Night Court. Trying cases simultaneously more trivial and more grotesque than anything Mutt had witnessed as a juror during the day. Mutt does not understand why this woman should have such a job. Ex-juror LM Jeansonne does not know that many unseen powers are at work here.

A mountain of files obscures the ADA's profile. Mutt comes to for a moment and cranes his neck. This woman is by far the most interesting Norm in the room.

She stands. The bailiff is reading the charges against Mel as Mutt continues to stare at the woman.

It is only then that the Judge spots Fred. Cannalo bangs his gavel, yelling, "Bailiff, Bailiff! Why is there an animal in my court?"

That gets a laugh from the people in the back. One of the old ladies drops a drumstick.

The bailiff whines quietly, "Judge Cannalo, your honor sir, we just haven't been able to get that dog off the defendant's arm -- there ain't no animal doctor on call at Charity Hospital this time of night. But the Chief Deputy and me will get the dog knocked out as soon as we can get a vet down here with a needle.

Probably around seven, when the morning shift comes on, Judge. I did get that dog's name, though Judge. Name is Fred."

Judge Cannalo audibly grits his teeth. "Did I ask for the dog's name, Bailiff? Do I need the little doggie's name to carry this trial forward?" he says, a slightly crazed look in his eyes. A low growl goes unnoticed under his question.

The bailiff slinks away to the protection of the bench. Cannalo resumes his routine. "I am going to continue with this case and get this..." pointing to Fred, "...abomination out of my Court, and... Bailiff, you will get that veterinarian in here before you transfer the accused to the main lock-up."

He pauses significantly while he looks straight at Mel, then finishes, malevolently, "...if incarceration is indeed the disposition of this case. Now let's proceed. Clerk, Assistant District Attorney Reed, you're on. Now."

There is a loud "Quack" from the back of the room. The Honorable Judge Cannalo has already gone back into automatic mode and luckily does not hear the fowl expletive.

Mutt had also done a character assessment of the Judge on first sight, having seen nine different judges over the progress of his month's jury duty. Cannalo definitely has the dubious honor of ranking at the bottom of Mutt's top ten. At least as far as attitude goes. Mutt can tell this judge has the corn cob of life lodged solidly in place. In his legal briefs. Another individual who lacks essential biologic rhythm.

The trial goes on.

Cannalo acknowledges the public defender and then the ADA.

The defender is a muddled-looking fellow in a muddled suit, scruffing through handfuls of more muddled paper. He doesn't hear a word the Judge says, though he is standing directly in front of him.

The Assistant District Attorney is a different story. As the Judge enters into the record that the prosecuting ADA is Christine

V Reed, she hears her name. The dazed look in her eyes retreats. She looks besieged as she comes to grips with where she is and what is happening, but is still organized and steadfast.

She looks determined to continue. And win whatever is to be won, Mutt notices.

She is interested in winning, he thinks.

Another interesting addition to his information database clicks into place. Observing and interacting with other humans in a jury pool for four weeks has honed his sensitivity, focused much of the input he is used to receiving. This has allowed him to sort, and reason why certain things have effects on one another.

It all means something.

Melodie LaGrande is also appraising the opposition. She notices that Reed carries a set of sizeable bulges in key locations under her tightly-buttoned raw silk suit and wears much more makeup than an aspiring career DA would ever have on her face. Plus the woman attorney is adorned with a solid gold Rolex and can invoke a dimple in each cheek at will. Mel watches as Reed flashes those dimples at the Judge. There they go again. Each and every time he yells about what he considers to be one more dropping of the legal ball. Mel stores her own observations for later use.

Fred is getting interested in the proceedings, too. She doesn't exactly want Reed to win. Fred harbors some mild hope that Prosecutor Christine V Reed will not have an elderly dog put to sleep as a result of whatever transgression a Bourbon street stripper might or might not have committed.

There was a catchy jingle on New Orleans radio and TV a few years back about the lovely animal compound on Wadley street, played often during a campaign to raise money for the shelter. The jingle failed to mention that Wadley street is also the place where quite a few four-legged creatures start their undistinguished journey to the pet netherworld.

“Eeeth-chch,” lisps Fred around Mel’s arm.

“Now, Freddy, easy, darling, nobody’s going to hurt you,” whispers Mel soothingly. Mel can sense Fred’s moods instantly. There is some primal link between them, something bigger than tooth and gum pressure on forearm. “Looks like we’re going to do something now, honey. Be brave,” Mel tells Fred.

It starts.

Reed tells the Judge that Mel’s “bust is a violation of the City of New Orleans Health Code”.

Another huge laugh from the back of the room as several uncouth sorts cup their hands over their chests for the more obtuse members of the court.

Reed is embarrassed at her own unfortunate phrasing, which seems to afford Judge Cannalo a small flash of entertainment. The crowd is waking up.

Reed continues her argument by rote, noting again for the record that a violation of the city’s Health Code is the basis of arrest.

“I am trying to be fair to the defendant, Your Honor, but the covering of certain female body parts in such public places, while a convoluted and antiquated law, is still held in force and is administered at the discretion of the individual officer of the law.”

Mel stares at Reed like she could chop her into bite-size morsels, though Reed ignores Mel totally.

Rodrigo, on the other hand, has taken to directing certain rather awkwardly suggestive upper torso movements at Mel, while silently shaking his briefcase. Mel notices, but it is not apparent whether or not she is reading the clues. She gives no sign she knows that Rodrigo the Magnificent is also her prison correspondent and admirer.

On the machine goes. The arresting officer is sworn in, wearing a new uniform unsullied by processed chilidogs. The policeman glares with some irritation at Fred, who seems to be

smiling. The Judge asks then asks the lawman to step forward and testify to the facts of the case.

The blonde officer testifies nervously, “Your Honor, I saw the accused expose her nipples...” He stutters twice on the word, prompting another unnoticed “quack” from the courtroom. “...at the French Can-Can-Do Lounge located at 265 Bourbon street on this night. I noted a violation of the Code, arrested the defendant, read her her rights and brought her in to the central lock-up holding area where she was further questioned.”

“Did you read the dog his rights?” the Judge asks. He allows a brief period of laughter from the Court for his own comment, then silences it with one look.

Blondie gets even more flustered. The Judge seems to be having a good time now. He hasn’t even begun to get the house hot.

Mel stands up unasked, to a gasp from the court, and says calmly, “Excuse me your honor sir, but this is a lady dog, and she is also my loyal and loving companion, sister and wardrobe consultant. Don’t you think she’s ever so darling? I take her everywhere. She makes any occasion festive.”

To which Fred responds with a hearty “Moof!” -- the best she can do with Mel’s wrist still embedded in her mouth.

The Judge replies without a lost beat. “I won’t hear evidence of crimes against nature at this point, only violations of the Health Code, madam.”

Da da DUM.

There is a solid laugh from the courtroom this time, unchecked by the Judge. After all, it is his room and he is definitely on.

He has the crowd going. They have been waiting around forever in the stuffy courtroom, and now they are ready for anything. If the Judge has decided to wake up and entertain himself here at the corner of Tulane Avenue and Broad street at 4:15 in the morning, it could be nothing but fun. Regulars

observe that Cannalo has quite an evil grin spreading across his rough red face.

The fun might potentially be a bit brutal.

The Times Picayune reporter is up to the railing in a flash, copying Mel's name off the books. He is praying that this little gathering of miscreants is headed toward a messy ending. A story nasty enough to earn him a page-one byline in the afternoon editions. Maybe get him interviewed on the local tube. "Bimbo and Mongrel in Bourbon Street Love Nest" ought to get him off this god-forsaken night shift. The media child is hungry for some big-time splash.

Fred sees the vultures gathering, and suddenly feels she may be riding on the fast track to The Big Dog Doze at the Wadley street SPCA, after all.

*****DOCKET CASE AO-51674B*****

CITY OF NEW ORLEANS VS Melodie LaGrande
 VIOLATION OF CITY HEALTH CODE
 STATUTE 978, ARTICLE G

 NIGHT COURT DIVISION B, CITY OF NEW ORLEANS
 THE HONORABLE ROBERT ARMSTRONG CANNALO,
 PRESIDING

LAWRENCE R. PURBUSH, CHIEF BAILIFF

[TRANSCRIPT CERTIFIED A TRUE AND ACCURATE
 COPY BY: GERALDINE R. MOUTON, CLERK OF
 COURT]

PRESIDING JUDGE INTRODUCED OFFICERS OF THE
 COURT INTO RECORD, IDENTIFIED DEFENDANT AND
 CHARGE. COMPLETE RECORD ATTACHED AS
 ADDENDUM A.

Judge Robert A. Cannalo: Miss LaGrande, I
 presume that you plead Guilty in the face of
 the overwhelming evidence against you and
 the testimony of the arresting officer, and
 so I...

L. Mutt Jeansonne [subsequently identified]:
 [coming forward from public gallery] Mr.
 Judge Your Honor sir, I am sorry to
 interrupt these legal Government proceedings
 here, but I believe you, sir, are about to
 be making a serious bad mistake.

Unidentified male accompanying Jeansonne:
 [unintelligible]... rheumatism rhinoceros...
 [unintelligible] got it got it innocent sir.

Judge Cannalo: Order! I'll have order in
 here. Quiet! Now, just who the hell are
 you, fellow, and why have you interrupted
 this Court?

Jeansonne: I just spent the last month locked up in this very same building on jury duty, Your Honor sir. Sitting down there in the basement waiting, I saw a lot of folks come in and out of here guilty as sin of doing some things I can't even mention in public. But this lady here she's done nothing to hurt anyone. She's a good citizen and you ought to be letting her go.

Public Defender Steven R. Wagner: Your Honor, I have not had the opportunity of interviewing this gentleman. It could be that he...

Judge Cannalo: Quiet, Wagner. [to Jeansonne] Your name?

Jeansonne: L. Mutt Jeansonne, Judge. Got me my Registered Voter ID right here to prove it. [Jeansonne offered card for inspection by Judge Cannalo]

Judge Cannalo: Well, very good, Mr. Jeansonne. You are indeed a voter in Orleans Parish.

Jeansonne: Just call me Mutt, Your honor.

Judge Cannalo: Mr. Jeansonne. Do you think you have anything relevant to offer the Court in this case?

ADA Christine V. Reed: Objection, your honor, this man is not a recognized officer of the Court, nor has he been requested by the defendant to represent her interests in this case.

Public Defender Wagner: Judge, as the legally-appointed representative of the Office of the New Orleans Public Defender, I believe I have precedence here. I have my rights. As you yourself well know, in my

three years of office I have faithfully served over two thousand clients. All with distinction, many successfully. I have accomplished this feat while maintaining both the traditions and the dignity of the State of Louisiana's system of legal jurisprudence. I do not see why this August Court should listen...

Defendant Melodie LaGrande: I want Mutt. He's my man.

Unidentified male: Piragua! [spelling uncertain]

Judge Cannalo: I said quiet, son. Quiet, or I will have you removed. Miss Reed, it seems the defendant thinks this man has something to add to her case. Seems sensible to make sure the defendant receives the defense of her choice, doesn't it?

ADA Reed: Judge, I would have to agree with you. In my opinion, this gentleman can certainly -- and adequately -- substitute for Mr. Wagner.

Public Defender Wagner: This is uncon...

Judge Cannalo: So ruled. [Public Defender Wagner left the Courtroom at this point] Mr. Jeansonne, I warn you that if this is frivolous, I will take great pleasure in placing you also in the custody of the deputies. Contempt charges are a lot more serious than health code violations. Now what is it you want to say? And make it brief.

Jeansonne: Judge, I just want to know what it is that she is being charged with.

Judge Cannalo: Mr. Jeansonne, we have already read the charges. If you had been

paying attention to the proceedings, you would know that. We still have a long docket ahead of us. I am allowing you this extra attention only in the interest of properly serving justice to your client. You will listen this time. Miss Mouton, I believe you have the statute. Read it to the gentleman, please.

ADA Reed: Judge, I don't know what purpose this will serve.

Judge Cannalo: You have a problem with giving this lovely woman a fair trial, Counselor? Not your sort, is she? You will humor me.

ADA Reed: I have no problem with Ms. LaGrande at all, sir. Except the legal problem she has presented to this Court.

Judge Cannalo: I will determine that, won't I? Miss Mouton, the statute, please.

Clerk of Court Geraldine R. Mouton: [Clerk of Court presented City Statutes, Volume 3, to Court] Yes, Your Honor. The applicable law is stated in the New Orleans City Health Code Statute 978, Article G, and specifically Subsection 3. The statute reads, and I quote, "Female service and/or entertainment personnel employed in public places of business that are subject to the articles of Statute 302, namely the City Liquor License, required for serving beverages of high alcoholic content, shall be subject to health rules specifying the wearing of approved hair nets and shoes in food preparation areas, and the sanitary covering of both the pubic region and breast nipples, to include the aureoles, in applicable entertainment areas."

[Clerk of Court replaced City Statutes, Volume 3]

Judge Cannalo: There you have it, Mr Jeansonne. Miss Reed. The law.

ADA Reed: Exactly, Your Honor. Miss LaGrande did, in fact, remove her pasties. She exposed her nipples, including the aureoles, in the presence of officers of the law. She is therefore both guilty of violating the law, and subject to its penalties. Judge Cannalo, we both know that this statute is a bit of self-righteous demagoguery that was snuck in the political back door with a Republican-dominated City Council back in the Eisenhower era. They put restrictions on the Bourbon street strip bars to try to convince the general population that government was setting a good example -- keeping public mores from deteriorating by keeping female body parts under cover. It is indicative of the misguided social legislation of the nineteen-fifties. That said, I am sorry, Miss LaGrande, but the law remains both on the books and quite applicable in your specific case. Judge, the District Attorney's office asks that you rule Miss LaGrande guilty as charged.

[disruption in the courtroom]

Judge Cannalo: Quiet. Quiet! Stop that booing back there. And no more of those ridiculous noises! I will have order in this courtroom. If you people can't keep silence while this court is in session, I'll have you all tossed out into Tulane Avenue where you can talk as loudly as you want. Purbush, I want you to keep these people orderly. Pay attention. And Mr. Jeansonne, I would appreciate it if you and your companion would also refrain from muttering

so loudly while I am doing you the courtesy of acceding to your own request.

Jeansonne: Sorry, Your Honor. Me and my buddy here just realized something we think you'll be interested in. We realized that not only is this lady not guilty, but she ain't even supposed to be here in the first place. If you'll let me come up there to your bench again, I can show you what I mean.

Judge Cannalo: Proceed. But in an orderly fashion. And let me warn you again: you had better be right about this.

Jeansonne: Yes, sir. Yes, Your Honor, sir. [to ADA Reed] Maam, would you identify the person who supposed to have committed a crime here?

ADA Reed: Of course. Counselor. [pointing to the defendant] Melodie LaGrande, present here in this court.

Jeansonne: That's what I thought. Judge, there ain't no Melodie LaGrande here.

Judge Cannalo: Bailiff Purbush, identify the defendant.

Bailiff Lawrence R. Purbush: Melodie LaGrande, 23, address unknown, place of employment French Can-Can-Do Lounge, shoe size 6B, Your Honor.

Judge Cannalo: And how did you get this information?

Bailiff Purbush: I got it from the defendant herself, Your Honor. In the holding area. She was pretty drunk, flashing them big boobs and that butt all around and...

Judge Cannalo: Purbush, any more talk like that from you and you will walk yourself down to the holding cell, and spend a little time as a guest of this Court. Without pay.

Bailiff Purbush: Yes sir. Yes sir. I'm sorry, your Honor. It's just she made such a scene back there. The lady she did tell me her name. We haven't been able to prove that she is who she says she is yet, because she didn't have a proper ID on her when she was brought in. Judge Your Honor sir, she didn't have nothing on her when she was brought in.

[courtroom disruption noted]

Judge Cannalo: Order! Quiet, you people!

Bailiff Purbush: But we got her prints, and we sent them off to the Feds for ID confirmation. Regular procedure in a case with no solid proof of identification. Should have something in the morning. But I wouldn't think it matters who she is as long as we know what she did.

[courtroom disruption noted]

Judge Cannalo: Order, dammit! [to Clerk of Court] I apologize, Miss Mouton. [to Courtroom] I won't tell you people again. Bailiff, you will keep your astute legal opinions to yourself in my Court. And Mr. Jeansonne, if the gentleman with you becomes unruly just once more, I will find you both in contempt.

Jeansonne: Yes, sir. Of course, Your Honor, sir. My associate here was kind of overexcited about some fine points of the law. And though I just sat here thirty days getting my education in the way things work

in a courtroom, I still don't know how to do stuff. What I'd like to do is I'd like to enter something into evidence if it's OK with you and the lady.

[at this point Mr. Jeansonne placed a large bag on the defense table; he pulled a wallet from this bag, and then removed a Louisiana Driver's License from that wallet which he subsequently placed on Judge Cannalo's desk]

Judge Cannalo: Well, Mr. Jeansonne?

Jeansonne: Judge, just look at that picture on the license. Pretty, ain't she? Do you recognize the person in that picture, sir?

Judge Cannalo: Yes, it is the defendant here in Court.

Jeansonne: Judge, sir, if it's OK with you, I'd like this lady here [indicating ADA Reed] to get a look at that license.

Judge Cannalo: Alright, son, but I am telling you, you better have a damn good reason for what you're doing. We have wasted enough time here already. [to ADA Reed] Miss Reed, come over here, please.

[Jeansonne handed license directly to ADA Reed. There was a short further disruption as the ADA dropped the proffered evidence.]

Jeansonne: [to ADA Reed] Yes. Yes. Maam, I know all about the importance of having an ID of some sort. I been having mine a few years and I know it helps the Government keep track of us, among other things. This is a legal document, ain't it?

ADA Reed: Um. Yes. If issued by the State.

Jeansonne: And this one you got in your hand is, ain't it? Legal?

ADA Reed: Yes, it seems at first glance to be authentic. And if it is authentic, it is therefore a legal document in the eyes of the court.

Jeansonne: Would you mind looking carefully and reading me the person's name off that license?

ADA Reed: George Hotard.

[a longer period of general disruption noted in the courtroom]

Judge Cannalo: Order, dammit! I said order in the court! What the hell are you saying, Mr. Jeansonne?

Jeansonne: I'm getting there, Judge, sir. Maam, would you mind reading to me what the State of Louisiana certifying as to being this here person's sex?

ADA Reed: Male.

Judge Cannalo: Holy [expletive deleted from the record by Clerk of Court at Presiding Judge's subsequent request]

Jeansonne: That does it, Judge, sir. This lady just read me the law, and you yourself identified the person on this legal document. That law she read don't say a thing about a male needing to have his nipples covered in a public place, does it?

Unidentified male: Oblong!

Bailiff Purbush: Judge, there is a goddamn duck back here.

[another period of severe and prolonged general disruption followed this last statement, during which four people were ejected from the court, including the reporter from the Times-Picayune]

Judge Cannalo: I will have quiet! [to defendant LaGrande] Maam. Sir. Is this really you?

Defendant LaGrande: That's what I was trying to tell them when they first brought me in here. They just wouldn't let a girl have her say.

Judge Cannalo: I am sure they were a bit overwhelmed by the [Presiding Judge pointed to Defendant LaGrande] physical evidence in your particular case to think there was any other possibility. [to arresting officers] I think we tend to forget where we live once in a while, gentlemen. This is New Orleans, you know, and the French Quarter... well, the French Quarter is what it is. We must regard the law as flexible.

ADA Reed: Objection, Your Honor.

Judge Cannalo: Quiet, Miss Reed, I think I have this one under control. The law is clear and Mr. Jeansonne is correct. You are free to go, Mister Hotard. And on that questionable note, ladies and gents, let's pack it up and call it a night.

ADA Reed: But, Your Honor...

Judge Cannalo: The magic word tonight was Get a Life, Reed. Court adjourned.

THE ABOVE CERTIFIED A TRUE AND ACCURATE COPY.

GERALDINE R. MOUTON
CLERK OF COURT

CASE AO-51674B DISPOSITION:
CHARGES DISMISSED.

DEFENDANT RELEASED.
CASE FILE CLOSED.

From the September 1 Times-Picayune

Homeless man defends topless ‘woman’

NEW ORLEANS (AP) -- Shortly before sunrise today, City Night Court Judge Robert A. Cannalo dismissed charges of misdemeanor health code violations against Melodie LaGrande, 23, of this city. Cannalo ruled for dismissal despite the protests of both arresting officers and a representative of the Orleans Parish District Attorney's office. In an unusual and lengthy session at the Tulane Avenue Criminal Court Building, Judge Cannalo cited a technical misapplication of the law as the reason for his ruling. Officer T.E. Fortenberry of the New Orleans Police Department was issued an informal reprimand from the Court for failing to determine that Ms. LaGrande is in fact legally male, and not prosecutable under the so-called "nipple coverage" ordinance.

Ms LaGrande, an entertainer at the French Can-Can-Do Lounge on Bourbon street, was represented in the legal proceedings by L. Mutt Jeansonne. Jeansonne, allegedly a homeless person, refused to give a local address, though he described himself as a "registered voter" of this city.

After the adjournment Assistant District Attorney Christine V. Reed commented on the acquittal, saying she believed the incident was "the first time an untrained indigent person has willingly and successfully participated as a principal in this City Court's trial process. I am happy to have been a part of this precedent-setting session, even though I was on the losing side, thanks to Mr. Jeansonne's legal insight," Reed said.

The trial was often interrupted by an unruly late-night courtroom crowd, some of whom made loud "barnyard" noises to indicate their approval or disapproval of the proceedings. There were, in fact, a number of animals in the Court. A duck and its owner were among those expelled as the Court's docket was called to a close.

Ms. LaGrande attended the trial clad in a green prison-hospital gown. Bailiffs provided the defendant with the clothing after she was booked at Central Lockup wearing only Making the decision more significant was the fact that Ms. LaGrande, an exotic high heels and with a small grey dog attached to her left wrist.

On questioning by the Associated Press, LaGrande claimed the dog to be her wardrobe stylist.

* * *

The Picayune reporter's initial six paragraphs on Melodie LaGrande's acquittal was picked up by a wire service and in a matter of hours went out to two hundred newspapers around the world to be used as a curiosity, a filler, a substitute for blander UFO reports which contained no mention of Elvis.

The night's activities would bring other, more significant, developments.

L Mutt Jeansonne's slow, month-long metamorphosis as a juror, then a jurist, in the Criminal District Courthouse ended with the emergence of a new human on that October 1 morning. He felt awakened, empowered, alive for the first time in his life as dozens of people slapped him on the back and congratulated him. He beat the Government. He beat the System. He could handle the Norms.

He had no idea at all what to do.