

TOMORROWVILLE

THE ISAAK COLLECTION

DAVID T. ISAAK

Tomorrowville

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Four Million Nine Hundred Ninety- Three Thousand Six Hundred Eighty- Four Dollars and Eighteen Cents

In the dream, he fell through the air until he hit the asphalt with bone-shattering impact. A moment of blindness, a glimpse of a shiny black shoe, and then he died.

That's ridiculous, part of him insisted. You don't die in dreams, you always wake up first. *So wake up...*

...and then he'd be off again, tumbling from the balcony, slamming into the asphalt...

Finally, a light, a blurry focus, a face leaning over his. "Blink slowly if you can hear me."

Toby blinked, long and slow.

The—Nurse? Counselor?—whatever she was, beamed. "Excellent. I'm Karen Carruthers, and I'm here to get you *oriented*." Her hair was parted just above one ear and combed sideways over her head in a huge swoop. It was a style he had seen before only on balding men, but her hair was full and puffed up. It must be a look.

Toby realized he had a huge tube down his throat, taped in place around his lips, and he started to panic. He was on a ventilator. That could only mean full-body paralysis. He tried to talk around the tube and found his lips would barely move.

"Now you just stay calm. I know things are strange. We gave you some mood enhancers a bit ago, but I'm afraid *you* went and surprised

us all, and woke up just a *little* early!” She talked like the host of a children’s show.

He was definitely in some kind of hospital bed, but the place was awesomely high-tech. The bed frame was surmounted by a huge panel of readouts and displays, like a canopy bed designed by Intel.

Ms. Carruthers said, “Now, if we feel up to it, I’d like to teach you a way of talking to us for the next couple of days. It’ll only be just a couple of days, and then we’ll be *all* better again.”

She reached up and tapped a button on the canopy above, and a flat screen descended on a long arm and positioned itself before his face. The screen brightened, and big bright letters showed the alphabet and the numbers zero through nine.

My God, he thought, I’ve died and gone to first grade.

“Now what I want you to do is spell something. Let’s spell the word ‘yes.’ Now what you do is look at the letter, focus real hard, just squinch up your eyes, and then relax and go to the next letter...”

Toby saw the glittery red of twin ruby lasers at the top of the panel and stared. *I don’t believe it.* It had to be Eye-Convergence Monitoring, the focusing device they’d been working on for RatBot. *Somebody beat us to it, and we didn’t even hear about it...*

He moved his eyes. *Y—squinch—E—squinch—S—squinch.*

She glanced at a smaller screen by her elbow. “Why, you just figured that out right away, didn’t you?”

He kept going. *I—I-N-V-E-N-T-E-D—T-H-I-S.*

“Did you! Well, isn’t that *nice*.” She brushed back her hair. Her eye shadow was bizarre, orange to the right fading to blue on the left, but identical on both eyes rather than symmetrical. “Are we feeling any better yet?”

He was. In fact, he was beginning to feel positively cheery. *Y-E-S.*

“Good. Now, we don’t have a huge amount of experience with this, but what research we have shows that the clients always do best if we just get right to the point. You had an accident. Do you remember it?”

M-A-Y-B-E.

“Oh good. Often the trauma... Well, I have some *very* good news for you. The injuries you suffered were extensive at the time, but they can *all* be repaired! Isn’t that wonderful?” She studied him. “I can see

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you don't believe me. But in just one moment you will, because the other big surprise is that it's now the year twenty-eighty-eight!"

Toby would have laughed if he had control of any motor functions. He felt fine, just fine. He spelled, W-H-H-A-T.

"You do remember that you had an account with South Coast Cryogenics, don't you?"

That? It was more of a joke than anything, a voluntary matched deduction from his paycheck at a firm where the owner was a confirmed loony. If this was a practical joke, it was just too funny. If it was the truth...well, that was too funny, too. Y-E-S.

"You were lucky. You were declared dead, but your bracelet got you rushed to South Coast. Now most people who were frozen back then were...well, they're frozen. But a few lucky ones happened to have consumed cryopreservatives. Do you remember what you ate and drank that day?"

He thought. E-G-G-S—T-O-A-S-T—O-J. He considered a little longer. G-I-N—T-O-N-I-C.

She actually clapped her hands. "There it is, then: juniper berries. What a lucky young man you are! We can't bring many back, you know. But with the advances in medicine since your day, we can not only bring you back, but restore your spinal cord. In fact, that's what's happening right now—and the reason you're being kept on artificial respiration for a while is so you don't start moving around while the nerves regenerate."

G-R-E-A-T.

Her attitude cranked down a notch or two. "Now, I'm afraid there is a minor formality. I'm going to certify you as mentally stable and sane. But as soon as you are certified mentally stable, federal regulations require that you be notified of certain things. It's really *your* rights that are being protected." She stood. "Mr. Metcalf! Mr. Simmons can see you now." She gave Toby a smile, and said, "I'll be back to check on you after you've had your meeting with Mr. Metcalf."

Mr. Metcalf took the nurse's place at the bedside. He wore a green jacket with huge lapels. His hair was cut very short and seemed to be greased down, but his little Hitler-style mustache was unruly, like the tobacco from a cigarette butt disintegrating in the sink. Metcalf squared

his shoulders and cleared his throat, not looking at Toby. “At present you are uninsured and indigent. With no current source of income, the United States of America has paid for your hospitalization.” He cleared his throat again. “The people of this country have undertaken a significant financial burden on your behalf. This will have to be repaid. The amount of your debt and accrued hospital expenses as of your official revival time of”—he consulted his clipboard—“11:26 a.m. this morning, is four million nine hundred ninety-three thousand six hundred eighty-four dollars and eighteen cents. Of course, this is simply an estimate, and additional charges are likely to accrue during your period of recovery, and neither the government of the United States of America nor this hospital warrant the accuracy of this information, nor does a discrepancy between this information and any actual accrual owed to any party diminish your debt obligation.”

Toby was high, cruising on whatever they had given him. Mood enhancers. Whoa. Mood orgasms, more like. Four million something-or-another indeed. He spelled, I-N-L-A—N-O—I-N-F-L-A-T-I-O-M—N.

Metcalf read it off the screen at his elbow and said, “On the contrary. You died in, what, 2003? Net inflation since your day has been essentially nil. You missed The Great Deflation. No, this is a substantial debt, Mr. Simmons, a very substantial debt. Normally, when a debt of this size is due from an unemployed person, the only remedy is a work-prison; but in exceptional cases such as yours, certain allowances can be made by the court. You should understand that your continued freedom is a privilege, not a right, and is revocable at the pleasure of the court.”

Inside, Toby swelled with laughter, but all he could do was spell, N-O—D-E-B-T-O-R-S—P-R-I-S-O-M-S—I-N—U-S-A.

Metcalf stood. “There, my friend, you are wrong. There are no penalties for owing monies to private parties, more’s the pity, but that isn’t the case here. Keep in mind that it is the US Treasury that has paid for your revival.”

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He held a sheaf of papers in front of Toby's face, and Toby scanned the top of the page stupidly. "No," Metcalf said, "down here." He tapped his finger at the bottom edge:

Due and Payable in Full Upon Receipt
Internal Revenue Service
United States Department of the Treasury.

David T. Isaak (1954-2021) was an American author of both fiction and nonfiction.

Dr. Isaak held a BA in Physics and MA and PhD degrees in resource systems. His professional work spanned the globe, taking him to over forty countries. He co-authored three technical, nonfiction books on oil and international politics, and wrote numerous papers, monographs, and multivalent studies.

David had an eclectic life. His first major in college was music, and he played piano and flute. He was a certified Bikram yoga instructor, an accomplished vegetarian cook, a creative mixologist, and an avid reader of fiction and nonfiction alike. He was driven by great characters and story, original voices, and especially by his love of the craft of writing, all of which are reflected in his own writing.

David passed away in April 2021. The five novels he left behind are as diverse as his life. These novels comprise ***The Isaak Collection***.

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