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ALPHAVILLE REVISITED

They had come at him in the morning. He was looking out the window at people on the street hurrying to work. It was a lovely late spring. The leaves in the trees below were still pale and fresh. There was a delicate scent of flowers in the air, as well as the usual exhaust fumes from the busses and the smell of coffee from the hot dog stand across the street. He was thinking about coffee, remembering suddenly: he had thrown the maid out, yelled at her just an hour ago.

They had gotten a key somehow and they moved in on him quickly. They had done this many times before. He fought as hard as he could, hitting and kicking, and screaming curses the whole time. But there were four of them, and his body though tall and imposing no longer had enough strength. In the end, they wore him down, lying on top of him on the dusty floor. One of them jabbed the needle silvery and cold into his arm, and that was the end of it. They abducted him from this world.

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The next thing he knew, he was tied to a chrome metal bed, his hands roped to the sides with bright blue ropes, his feet to the end. He bucked and struggled, but the restraints held. Someone came from behind a curtain. A hissing sound, another shot, and he was gone.

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A blond young man and an older one in a white lab coat were standing next to him. The older man was speaking to him. He could not understand the words, wondered if he was hallucinating, but suddenly he was exhausted. He stopped struggling against his restraints and he began to weep. He was alone.

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He woke, groggy. The curtain had been pulled back and he could see another bed. A gaunt old man lay in it gasping and staring at him wordlessly. A woman, nicely dressed sat in a chair beside him. She looked over and smiled pleasantly in his direction, then turned back to watch a television screen mounted to the wall. The old man did not move.

On the television young people and their parents were shouting angrily at each other, egged on by a leering man with a microphone while an audience of ordinary middle class people cheered and booed.

In spite of the din, he found he could not understand them at all. It meant nothing to him.

Beyond the couple, there was a window through which he could see nothing but a cloudy gray sky. As he stared at it, he felt overcome with an sheer emptiness, and he fell asleep. For some reason, the taste of sour pickles filled his mouth.

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It was dark, and the room was lit only by a glowing globe as the bedside of the man next to him. The man was alone and silent, staring at the

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ceiling now. Outside the room, there was the clatter of crockery. A slender energetic black man with a beard and wearing a three piece suit ducked into the room, looked at him, nodded, smiled as if they shared some kind of secret, and left. He could not tell if he was dreaming.

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He woke in the night. He knew what had happened. When it had begun and what it was now.

Perhaps it was as long as seven years ago. He had been at a dinner party. The food was very good, and the conversation was bright. All the people were younger, good looking, quick and clever. Their conversation was up to date and full of promise. His own remarks were sharp and his aphorisms witty, but there was a moment when he knew that he was a visitor from a different time while those he addressed were in their element. This was their time. It filled them and gave them strength. They could not imagine a world not shaped by their own interests and ambitions. He was still a welcome guest but it was no longer his time.

He had made a mistake then in letting this happen. It opened a door through which he was taken from his world and time. Now, they had come and brought him here and taken him from time altogether.

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The blond young man was sitting beside his bed, wearing glasses now and reading a poem to him. He didn't notice the first part, but then he heard.

*"Dyed in the brittle multi-colors of this age
Not holding fast now, he swims upstream
Through the dark river of ancient ink
To the elusive instant of release
Or source,
By way of remembering
As his own memories slide off
And elide with Homeric History
Or dream.*

*Falls then of its own luxurious waste
As of a high shelf
A bolt of night-black silk,
Rustling softly to the floor
In enveloping swirls."*

Who wrote that? he wondered. Pleasant enough, but not really true. But the young man had brought a box of cookies. That was something. Another hallucination no doubt.

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He was surprised a while ago to find that questions, riddles, enigmas, puzzles, mysteries no longer intrigued him. He was not interested when younger people would come to interview him, to ask him about his past

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and the many celebrated people who had been his friends. These were the riddles they asked to solve the ambitions of their time.

One day he watched from his window as high school children mobbed the cart of a Chinese ice cream vendor who had appeared there every day for years when school let out. While the man shouted and futilely waved his arms, children who had been his customers stole everything he had, and he never returned.

From his window he watched this, noted the absence. Memories were the mere record of such absences. There were no further conclusions to be drawn. His mind was unravelling, moving into the holes in the fabric of his existence, a deep substrate of connections for which there were no words

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They liked to walk him through sparkling modern corridors, filled with the gray wrecked remains of human beings, some sitting vacantly in wheelchairs, some lying immobile in their beds. Hulks abandoned on a sea shore. They too were removed from their time, and it was now the possession of others. They were living in dreams. The visitors. The staff were showing him this.

The attendants kept up their cheerful banter, giving him pills which made them sleepy and quiet and placing him in front of television sets turned up too loud. They were showing him that he should not have any nostalgia for this place. They were pressing him into some stranger voyage. He knew what they were doing and would not cooperate. This resulted in more drugs, and he resolved not to acknowledge any of it or say anything more.

Sometimes they seated him in a sun-room opposite a woman who stared at him in unwavering silent fury, paralysed in the futility of her rage. He understood this all too well.

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No thought interested him any more. They merely came and went like thin clouds in a pale sky. But somehow he came to imagine that he was going to move to a place neither old nor new but out of time. There, as he imagined it, on the coast of the Black Sea was a colony of Russian poets who, like him, wrote in Greek. He knew that such a place never was, but he luxuriated in conjuring up the salty breeze of the shore and the flat dark sea, a velvet night, salty olives, sour red wine, breezes scented with thyme, and the company of exiles who also had made a difficult passage to arrive there. Who had voyaged to other realms and now, beneath an endless sky filled with galaxies of swirling stars, hid their presence and their works from the rest of the world.