

Accommodation

by James Lynn Smith

Ginny looked across the breakfast table at her husband. “Why don’t you call your sister. It’s been a long time.”

“We have almost nothing in common anymore. She’s rich, urbanized, and reads stacks of new-age stuff because she’s bored. To her I’m a backward, chuck wagon cowboy living on a ranch.”

“Aw, she’s not that extreme. Our kids are away at the university now. Invite her to spend a week with us.”

“Lord, I’d have to make up excuses to get away from all that chatter about her latest gigolo—er, I mean guru.”

Ginny tried to hide her smile. “Now was that nice? Call her anyhow.”

He rose from the table and ambled to the living room toward their phone on the end table. After sitting a while, he punched in the number. It took several rings before an answer.

“Celestial planes of joy to you, seeker,” the voice said softly.

He rolled his eyes and took a breath. “Bonnie? It’s Sam.”

“You’re on my cell’s speaker phone while I do yoga. Who is this again?”

“It’s Sam, Sam Woods.”

“Listen you, I don’t know any Sam.”

“I’m your *brother*. Remember, we were hatched on a farm with the chickens. Had a

mother and father, too. The whole bit, flesh, blood, diapers.”

“Why are you—” she hesitated, quelling the iciness of her tone, “How are

you two, Samuel?”

“We’re okay. I wanted to touch base since it’s been so long since we spoke. Are you doing all right? Your alimony still coming in?”

“I’m moving toward ultimate fulfillment. Remuneration is beneath my concerns. The universe provides.”

Yeah, long as you have a rich lawyer for an ex. “So you are well, and nothing is humdrum nowadays.”

“Absolutely... mostly... Well, sometimes my spirit guide sends a challenge.”

“Such as?”

“Yesterday, my health product store was closed, so I went by Wal-Mart to get something close to the aloe vera sunscreen I use. There was this long line, and the woman in front of me had some problem paying her bill. The checker person called for help, but it was taking the longest time. My spa’s massage therapy session was about to start, and this customer’s problem was delaying me. I needed that massage, and shouldn’t have to wait on financially incompetent people like that.”

Sam mocked a sigh. “So, you’re having a lot of stress, after all.”

“Yes, I get headaches and evolving to higher planes is difficult.

“Sounds like you need to get away from it all. Come spend a week with us.”

“Oh, I couldn’t do that.”

“Why not?”

“You two live in a different world; you both eat dead animals and animal products.

“I sure as hell don’t eat ‘em when they’re on the hoof.”

“I mean the animal has to die first. To me that’s an abomination.”

“As kids say, ‘Duh.’ If we don’t abominate animals, we would starve while they overpopulate the land.”

“My spiritual principles don’t allow eating the flesh of animals nor their body products.”

“Like milk, I suppose.”

“Yes, and eggs, and cheese.”

He shook his head. “According to your spiritual principles, I’m a sinner, headed for hell.”

“I didn’t say that. Your karma will impact you until you have a change of heart and evolve to a higher level. That may take several lifetimes.”

“Higher levels, wow. How do you know about all this stuff?”

“I’m a student of Swami Probabilata Hanshanta, the enlightened master of several yoga practices.”

Sam had no response. *Sure you are.*

“Ouch,” she yelled.

“What is it?”

“I’m in a yoga position on my back with my legs up and feet wrapped behind my head. My toenail is caught in my hair.”

“That sounds serious. You’re tied in a knot despite the Swami’s calming instruction.”

“Don’t make fun—Oww. This is serious. I can’t breathe deep like this, it’s meant to be a transient position.”

“Call on your Swami Probable Han-something. *Probably* he can send a clean karma your way.”

“Bastard, this is not funny.”

He grinned. “If I were there, I’d want a camera.”

“Cut it out, I’m in distress.”

“You don’t want your picture on facwitter? Be interesting to see your puss with feet for ears, looking down toward your—”

“You’re impossible! And the word’s ‘Facebook.’”

Sam stifled a laugh. “Your underwear doesn’t have holes, does it?

Remember what Mom told us about being ready for accidents.”

“Will you shut up?”

“Just concerned about the scene when the paramedics come.” He heard her struggle.

“Damn! I pulled out a wad of hair getting loose...And you were no help whatever. Did you learn to become amused by castrating animals?”

“Only bulls, makes ‘em steers,” he said.

“You’re a barbarian.”

“Thanks for the compliment.”

“Ginny probably blows through a cow horn to get you in for supper.”

“Actually, it’s a conch shell. But we’ll eat anything from steer to giant sea slugs.”

“Ee-yuck. I wouldn’t let you peel a peach for me. Your sense of hygiene is an affront to the civilized world.”

“I wash up to my elbows,” he said. “Even if I only clean out the stall. You underrate me.”

“You were underrated at birth. Mom told me your head was shaped like a fruit jar.”

“Ouch, a little anti-rube abashment, is it?”

“I’ll admit, you *seemed* to shape up after I came along but that was before I learned to be discriminating.”

Sam grimaced and said, “Aside from all that. Would you like a week out here? We can feed you spinach and carrots, so you don’t have to eat road kill.”

Please say no. He crossed his fingers.

“Hmm. I’ll have to consult Swami P first. I’ll let you know tomorrow.”

After the call, Sam went to the kitchen and announced that Bonnie would probably come. “You can smile, Ginny, but I’m wishing they had something for my ears like those glasses with open eyes painted on them. Then I could snooze without the annoying hums as she penetrates nirvana or makes noisy hawks to dispel unclean spirits.”

“You exaggerate, really.”

“I read that one master taught ‘chaotic meditation catharsis.’ Pupils might grunt, jerk, and twirl around to sling neurosis from their ears and noses.”

“Be glad you care about her anyway, Sam. Having family that’s different stretches our spirits.”

“With Sis around, I want a *bottle* of spirits. But I’ll try to be civil. She needs approval from her swami before she comes, anyhow.” His mouth widened to a grin. “May he’ll say no.”

The next morning Ginny answered the phone, “I’m doing well, Bonnie. The swami said what?...Oh that’s wonderful. When can you get here?...I’ll be sure to tell your brother; he’ll be so pleased.” She hung up and turned toward Sam.

He looked up from his breakfast with sad resignation and said nothing.

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Two days later, Sam was on his front porch and saw the white SUV come tearing down the long driveway from his gate just off the highway. A cloud of yellow dust followed the vehicle until it reached the paved portion and screeched to a halt on the concrete pad in front of his garage.

Ginny came out onto the porch and put her arm around him. “It’ll be okay,” she said. “Just be positive.”

The SUV’s door opened and a slender, near-thirtyish woman with tight stretch pants and floral top got out. “Haay,” she called. “I made it, despite bad drivers in my way.”

Sam stepped off the porch and approached Bonnie. After an awkward hug he said, “I’ll get your luggage upstairs now.” He lifted the back hatch and grabbed two large bags.

Ginny stepped down, embraced Sam’s sister, and kissed her on the cheek. “My, you’re still skinny as all get-out. And you’ve done something to your hair.”

“I’m letting it grow out and turn its natural color. For years I died it black. Now it’s brown, and draws prana from my crown chakra.”

“Sam’s is beginning to turn too. Except his color doesn’t come from a crown. If stubbornness is gray, that’s where he gets it from.” She tugged lightly on Bonnie’s arm. “Come inside and let’s get comfortable.”

After three trips from the SUV to the upstairs bedroom, Sam came into the kitchen where the women were sitting.

“Waiting on you,” his wife said to him. “Bonnie, would you like tea or coffee?”

“No thanks, I am trying to purify my body by drinking water.”

“Good. I’ll get you some.”

“I brought my own. It’s better at conducting chi than ordinary water.”

“What’s different?” Sam asked.

“The molecules of this water are hexagonal. I have cartons I ordered from *New Thought Awakenings* magazine.”

“All water is the same liquid,” he said. “Clusters of *ice* molecules viewed from a certain angle might form hexagonal shapes but believing—”

“That’s interesting, Bonnie,” his wife said. “Get your water and we’ll refrigerate it for you.”

He shook his head as his sister bounded upstairs. “Yes, yes. Be nice, you say. I might live on a rural estate but I did go to college, and when the laws of physics are misrepresented by flim-flam artists selling ordinary stuff at high cost, I

get steamed.”

“I understand,” Ginny said. “But measure the importance of her knowing sterile facts against the hope and joy she gets from the fantasy.”

“As long as fantasy doesn’t break her sizeable bank.”

Soon Bonnie came down with five bottles of water and put them in the refrigerator.

“What was in the big plastic sack I dragged up?” Sam asked.

“That is my sacred space. Area rugs, candles, my mandalas, incense and so forth. Only problem is the space for setting it up in that bedroom.”

I don’t want to hear where this leads. Next, we’ll need a pagoda. He stood up. “I’d better go see about the horses, they like grass, but I feed ‘em a little hay too.”

In the barn, he refurbished his hay net, knowing a gradual transfer to hay would match diminishing grass as winter approached. Stalls were open to the corral which led to a pasture beyond where he saw the new foal close to its mother, munching grass.

He thought about Bonnie. What would entertain someone so different? She had always been unique. Extremely flexible as a teen, she could bend over backwards, touch the ground with her palms, and get back up. He, on the other hand, felt like a tin soldier with little range of motion. He was also solid in mindset, whereas Bonnie was buoyant and flighty.

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The next day Sam showed Bonnie around the corral and taught her to saddle Minny, one of his horses. He also gave a brief lecture on equine care. “...and too much grain feed all at once could cause colic. Now let me show you our few head of livestock. All this may seem too earth-bound to you, but it’s real life and you need to appreciate it.” Her unenthusiastic nod was all he expected.

Late in the afternoon, Ginny struck a metal triangle on the front porch and they went in for supper. The meal was steak, bread, sweet potato, and spinach, with the tofu and nuts Bonnie had brought. Iced tea and bottled water from the refrigerator were the beverages. Throughout the meal, Bonnie was quiet and seemed remote.

After eating, Sam went upstairs for medication he kept in the master bedroom.

“Dear, are you all right?” Ginny asked Bonnie.

She took a deep breath. “Yes, I guess.”

“Doesn’t sound very convincing.”

A loud crash followed by a string of obscenities from the hallway atop the stairs interrupted them.

“What the hell is this?” Sam blurted. I stumbled over a damn, brass Buddha on a throw rug, for Christ’s sake.”

“Be careful, hon,” Ginny said. “Bonnie’s sacred space was too cramped in the bedroom. Turn on the hall light near her room.”

“Why can’t space around the bed be sacred?” he asked, frustration in his voice. Then he remembered the need to be more accommodating. “Oh well, I can always walk with a cane.” *Damn, that only made it worse. Time to shut up.*

*

The next morning, Sam had to run errands in town. He arose before Ginny, dressed, ate cereal, hopped in his pickup and drove off. After loading supplies in the truck, he ate a light lunch, gawked at store windows and started back. It was mid afternoon when he stopped in front of his garage.

Ginny was sitting on the porch steps, shaking her hands as if in panic. When he opened the truck door, she rushed to him.

“What’s got you upset?” he asked. “You look like you’ve seen—”

“Bonnie’s missing,” she said between sobs. “This morning she was gone when I got up. A few minutes ago Minny came wondering back with an empty saddle.”

“I’ll saddle up Prince and go look for her.”

“Should we call the sheriff?”

“Later, if I can’t find her. I don’t want people traipsing around, messing up evidence I might be able to track.”

“Be careful, we have no idea of what you’ll find. And put on your leather jacket, a cold front is moving in.”

*

Sam nudged his horse gently, following tracks and trampled grass. He thought about Bonnie. She was ten years behind him. Another sister came after her, but had died in an accident. After their father later passed away of a heart attack, their mother remarried and moved to Canada. *Probably Mom doesn’t hear from Bonnie any more often than me.* As a teen, Sam had been protective of Bonnie. He remembered other kids in a stone-throwing battle when a rock went astray and hit her in the head. After chasing down and thrashing the boy who threw it, they were more careful around her.

But why had their lives then gone in different directions? She was highly motivated and found a husband in college, but later divorced. After that, her contact with family became less frequent, and her interests drifted farther afield.

The trail changed from dirt and brush to one through rocks and boulders, and tracking became a guessing game. He needed to get into her head, think like her. Once, before she divorced, she had visited his ranch. He had saddled a young filly for her and they went riding together. *What region would have attracted her?*

Nudging Prince towards higher ground, he felt a chill in the air as he came to an area replete with boulders, caves, and occasional mountain lions. He gazed

outward and saw darkness on the horizon. Distant branches of lightning flashed.

During the past visit, she had suggested they dismount at one particular place. It was at a high overlook where a person could see for miles. He sat with her while their horses grazed, and she told him of her dreams. Those dreams were not of what would come, but what was inside her head. Being polite, he listened and nodded. But *only now* was he beginning to understand the importance of her intense feelings of flight, conversing with celestial beings, seeing flora with intense color, and details sharper than everyday reality. Most of this is lost as we mature. Rightfully, she wanted to capture and express those dreams but something, maybe within herself, seemed to interfere.

Sam zipped up his leather jacket against the cold. *Bonnie, there's beauty in your mind.* Looking ahead, he mumbled, "But something else is in there too." Guessing at the direction to the place where they had stopped, he pulled the reins to the left and Prince complied.

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Arriving at the overlook, he slipped on gloves and gazed outward over the escarpment. In the distance, under a heavy canopy of cloud, rain streaked down. *Maybe mixed with sleet.* It was getting colder by the minute. Sam was about to call out when he heard a sound. It was faint, and came from an area slightly above his location. He dismounted and led Prince upward. Ahead, an outcrop formed a roof over a cave and the sound of weeping came from underneath. Approaching, he saw his sister lying on the ground.

He moved toward her, taking a blanket he had brought. "Are you alright, Bonny?"

She slowly sat up, shivering. Her lips trembled and in a quavering voice said, "I wanted to jump off... Can't even do that."

Her shoulders shook as he placed the blanket around them, and her sobs

rolled out as ripples in a stream.

Sam felt a need for calm, rather than scolding. He stood, moved away and made a call on his cell phone. “Found her, Ginny. Rain’s coming so we may be awhile.” Sam gathered scraps of wood and brush for a makeshift fire.

The cave was large enough to bring Prince underneath and to one side. Though the weather was raw and windy, they were sheltered and huddled around the fire.

In time, Sam said, “We were worried about you. Did you fall off your horse?”

“No, just wanted to jump off the overlook and end it.”

“By ‘it’ you mean—?”

“End me,” she blurted. “I’m ugly and hate it.”

Taken aback, he said, “You are *not* ugly.”

“That’s how I feel. No matter what I do, I see them looking away from me with disgust.”

He hesitated, trying to fathom her comment. “You mean our parents? Your memory of them?”

“Guess,” she said with a sullen tone.

“When you were born, they were so happy. And then came sister Judy a year later. So much hustle and bustle about you two, *I* felt like the ugly duckling. You were Dad’s marvelous little girl.”

For a moment, a faraway gaze came to her eyes and her brows lifted. “Ah, I had forgotten.” Then with a more pensive expression she said, “But that all changed.”

“When Judy died?”

She nodded weakly. “Dad always told me to look after her. I was just a kid, but it made me feel important. When it happened he blamed me. I wasn’t even

there.”

“I heard they sent you and Judy to summer camp where you were separated into different age groups. How could you watch over her when each group’s activities, including swimming, were at different times? Camp counselors could only apologize profusely and call her drowning a horrible accident.”

“Dad shouted at me, ‘How could you let it happen?’”

“Even if you were there, you might not have been able to save her. It was the counselors’ responsibility.”

She looked upward. “Before now, I hadn’t realized that was when it all started. Dad seemed angry whenever I came into the room he was in. Then he would turn away or jump up and leave. Mom would give me a brief glance with that ‘poor dear’ look. I felt repulsive, like some ugly pest.”

“Not true, and it’s time you realized you internalized that message as a child. Probably, Mom and Dad were expressing their pain to you—as if you could stop it.”

“I was just a kid.”

“Some parents don’t realize they are dumping a burden kids can’t handle. Pain and anger can be misinterpreted by children and haunt them when they’re adults.”

She hesitated and nodded. “Guess I need to review this period with an adult’s eye and somehow get past it.”

“A therapist could help you let go of this—or talk to a spiritual advisor.”

“Swami P?”

“Better yet, see a chaplain. Don’t go it alone. Nowadays, spirit works through people, not burning bushes.”

Bonnie seemed lost in thought, her eyes focused far away. “I just realized something. The problem between me and my ex might be connected. He wanted

children to carry on his name and I didn't. I'm beginning to see how an inner tension about this parent-child interaction might be why I was *afraid* to be a mother."

Rain and sleet pelted the ground outside the cave. Sam dropped more wood on the fire to generate heat. But he also felt warmth from his sister—and realized that it mattered.

"You're not the only one who sometimes feels off." Sam said. "I have this annoying feeling I will become *numb* to life. That my zest will fade away, and I'll become a grumpy old codger."

She smiled. "Seems like you need a lift in the seat of your pants."

"What do you mean?"

"Kundalini starts in the lower base chakra, the muladhara, and rises through others to the crown chakra in your head. There, inspiration becomes expressed. There's a power of prana down there, ready to be released."

"Glad you explained that. I thought it was hemorrhoids."

She rolled her eyes. "You have a plebian mindset."

"Thought I was a barbarian. Like Attila the Hun."

"He died on his wedding night."

"Carnal excess?"

"No. Got drunk and strangled on nosebleed. Look it up."

Sam rubbed his chin. "Damn, I was about to start an Attila club for potbellied ranch owners."

"Call it anything, but teach them the significance of muladhara."

"That word again. Mul-what?"

"The difference between the base chakra and their butt."

He chuckled. "Touché, I think my sister's got her gumption back."

The weather eased up. Brother and sister laughed, hugged and even sang

until the fire went out. Then they doubled up on Prince and rode back as dark was falling.

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Ginny ran out to the corral as Sam and Bonnie rode up.

“Thank God,” she said, as they stopped. “I was so worried about you two. Are you okay?”

“Couldn’t be better,” Sam said. “We’ve arrived at a plan, depending on your approval.”

“What’s that?” Ginny asked.

“To have the swami give a session here. We can join Bonnie in sending invitations.”

“What kind of session?”

“It’s yoga,” he said, “but for local appeal we could use a subtitle.”

“How about this,” Bonnie said. “Yoga for Those with Their Prana Stuck in their Muladhara.”

Ginny grinned and raised a brow. “I don’t know what that means, but it sounds like something that’d drive neighborhood gossip for a year. I’m all for it.”

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