

The Truth Hurts
#28 Genre: Science-Fiction, 988 words
By Frank Cortazo

“The fight with Apophis is not over...not over...not ov...”

Those words echoed with a flash of light in front of Forest’s eyes. Blinking, he looked around.

Everyone had vanished.

Within some white, misty area, stood two figures.

“We found him, Parisia!” said the gray-haired man to the slim, golden-haired woman beside him.

Disoriented, Forest recognized the familiar, but much older, face of his...

“Father?” he stammered.

“You’ve given us quite a chase, young man,” said the woman. “Your father and I have been searching the time-stream for you.”

Forest looked perplexed.

“Time-traveling *without complete* mastery,” said the man, “has given you some memory loss. And, with your current state-of-mind--”

“State...of mind?” asked Forest.

“We are your parents!” said the woman, “It took a while to track you down. We’ve come to take you back. Forget about this business with the Sassafras seeds.”

“I must be dreaming!” said Forest.

“We’re *real!*” said the man. “I should *never* have told you that story about the Sassafras flower when you were little. I didn’t think you would remember it. After you vanished from the sanitarium, we knew you had used the time-travel technique your mother had taught you.”

“You two cannot be real,” said Forest, smiling. “You must be holograms! Clones! Androids? Wait! I’ve got it! You’re *Crawlmares!* You’re working for Apophis! Me, I’m here to save---“

“Grace,” said the woman. “From her eventual fate at the outcome of the Apophis affair.”

“You remembered the Sassafras story,” said his father. “An almost-forgotten legend. After talking to Ronnie that last time you mentioned it to him. Even without his approval, you took matters into your own hands. You became obsessed with that story. The flower, being rare, could *only* be found by traveling into the past, to *that* time in history when a group named Apophis sought to obtain it. There, you hoped to save Grace...for Ronnie’s sake. To ease the guilt that he felt those years afterward. I know how you must feel but...you *must* stop this. You *must* let this time in history run its course. Already, just by your presence, you may have caused rifts. *There* could be dire effects!”

“*Mother?*” he asked, looking at the woman. “I... I’m...sorry but...I *had* to. Ronnie, he...he means the world to me. I’d do anything for him...for his peace of mind. Grace...the

memories...have haunted him for years. I couldn't bear to see him so...but...I've...been careful...*not* to say *anything* which might affect the time flow. Things like a 'Second Civil War...' that I just think about at the moment. Grace having another daughter? Things like that. I, even, took the last name of Wang from that sanitarium lady doctor."

"And interacted with the Sprites *and* the Farm," said his mother. "Nature spirits are everywhere. Their existence, though, is known only to a select few. Those like myself *can* enter the Farm through that secret dimensional 'doorway' between Santa Monica and San Perlita, the 'Land of the Enchanted Forest.' The place of my birth which I named *you* after. Being a 'nature spirit,' I sensed this. And...Old Man. His power is great. *He* might, also, have sensed you as a time-traveler. *He* would be aware of the risk to the time flow *if* he were to acknowledge you and..."

A look of concern filled her face.

"Forest, you *must* come back with us!" she implored. "Please! You *cannot* prevent the inevitable!"

"But, I am so close, Mother!" said Forest. "Don't you see? With just the *knowledge* from one seed, I can save Grace! Ronnie will have his peace of mind and be rel---"

"And change the *inevitable*?" asked his father, with a stern tone. "Will *that* solve everything for you? What about the consequences which might, or *will*, occur? And your memory lapses when going back. What about *that*? No, Forest. I know the truth hurts, but you need to stop this nonsense! Now! Or it will be too late! Not only for *this* time in history but for *ours*! Please! Come back to us!"

"No!" said Forest, lifting his hands. "I'm sorry, Father, Mother! I *want* to do this! I *need* to do this! It is *the* only way! It is the *only* way!"

"Forest, wait!" shouted his father, holding out his hand.

His son blinked his eyes and vanished in a flash of light.

"Can you track him again, Parisia?" he asked his wife.

"I'm trying, Eric" she answered, eyes closed and concentrating. "It will be more difficult, now, though. He *knows* we are here, and that we are on to him. He *might* be able to 'sense' us and evade us."

"We *must* find him!" he insisted. "I will never forgive myself if anything happens and---"

"We *will* find him," his wife reassured him, holding his hand.

"We *must*, also, do everything we can to prevent *anyone* from this time period knowing of our existence," he said, "*particularly* our own past selves."

"Who, at this *particular* moment in history," she said, "are destined to meet at a hospital---"

"---when I contract the Coronavirus," he finished, smiling, "and a beautiful nurse, a 'nature spirit' with the power of time travel, nurses me back to health!"

"And the rest is history," she said.

"Seriously," said Eric, "*we* are *the* two players in all of this who no one else thought

about. If only Forest hadn't remembered that Sassafras story! He, always, *had* an active and vivid imagination."

"He's your son," said Parisia, sighing.

"No, my dear," said Eric, smiling and winking at her. "He's *our* son...whom we love very much. And he will do *anything* to get Ronnie cured of his breakdown and released from that sanitarium. Now, let's go and find him before he causes *any* more trouble to the time flow."

With the snap of a finger, they both vanished in a flash of light.

Retired elementary school teacher Frank Cortazo became interested in writing at an early age after watching such shows as Mexican western movies, 1940's serial movies and classic horror movies. He has written numerous short stories and 'rhyming narrative poems. A former president of the Valley Byliners writers group, he had several of his writings published in the group's "The Rio Grande: A River of One Thousand Tales" anthology. He also had one children's story published in the "Perceptions Volume 3: Friendship" anthology from Inklings Publishing in Houston Texas. Being a part of two segments of the "Let's Write a Story" writing project has been a fun and unique way to see how a variety of different authors write and develop one lengthy tale from beginning to middle to end.