



'The world's best short story writer. *Liberation Day* is great art'


DAILY TELEGRAPH

# GEORGE SAUNDERS




## Liberation Day

Man Booker Prize-  
winning author of  
**LINCOLN IN  
THE BARDO**



BLOOMSBURY



## Praise for *Liberation Day*

Named a book of the year by *The Times*, *Sunday Times*, *Guardian*, *Irish Times*, *New Statesman*, *New York Times Book Review*, *New Yorker*, *Oprah Daily*, *NPR*, *Time*, *USA Today*, *Esquire*, *Kirkus Review*, *Booklist*, *Library Journal*, **BBC** and **Waterstones**

‘Short-story virtuoso George Saunders returned to the form with *Liberation Day*, tragicomic allegories of try-hard regular folk caught up in hells beyond their understanding’ *Guardian*, Books of the Year

‘Here, the unnerving dystopia of the title story alone makes this collection, rich in wicked humour, acute observation and awkward emotion, a must-read’ *Sunday Times*, Books of the Year

‘A master of the short form ... Shrewd, truthful’ *Irish Times*, Books of the Year

‘Moving and tragic and also funny and deeply human’ *New Statesman*, Books of the Year

‘Winningly readable ... Whether exploring recognisable social and political dilemmas, taking us somewhere else entirely, or doing both at the same time, Saunders never denies us the solid satisfactions of plot, jokes, character, pacing and lovely phrasemaking’ *Daily Telegraph*

‘This is the joy of Saunders: he encapsulates human experience, while always hitting the punchline’ *Financial Times*

‘Utterly moving ... Terrific ... Worth reading for ‘Love Letter’ alone’ *Independent*

‘In describing the stories, even quoting them, we lose something valuable. That in itself is a measure of great writing. The only way to experience Saunders’s oblique,

farcical, tragic world is to dive right in. It will take the top of your head off, but it's worth it' *The Times*

'A master of the short story ... His art speaks to the dreadful present; his open-handed style, his skill as an educator, offer hope by encouraging each individual voice to find courage to speak' *New Statesman*

'Saunders's career-long strategies have acquired a deeper intensity, focus and bite. He's always been a moralist, concerned with our obligations to one another; now, an ongoing and intense debate over democracy and its threats has further exposed that ... 2022 has made his precision more meaningful, the stakes higher' *Washington Post*

'One of our most inventive purveyors of the form returns with pitch-perfect, genre-bending stories that stare into the abyss of our national character ... An exquisite work from a writer whose reach is galactic' *Oprah Daily*

'The godfather of the contemporary short story is back and better than ever in *Liberation Day* ... In these powerful and perceptive stories, Saunders conjures a nation in moral and spiritual decline, where acts of kindness wink through like lights in the darkness' *Esquire*

'*Liberation Day* is an immersive, inventive treat full of dark humour and uncomfortable truths' *Time*

'With *Liberation Day*, George Saunders has delivered another collection of dark fantasias and absurdist satire, short fiction that reflects our fallen world back with ribald humour and unexpected grace ... No one can pull this sort of thing off like Saunders, who wraps his judgments about American decline and middle-class pathos into wild leaps of pitch-dark comedy' *Vogue*

‘It’s that equilibrium of groundbreaking craft and bone-deep compassion – plus his rangy, tilt-a-whirl voice – that raises Saunders above other masters of the form’ *Boston Globe*

‘From one of our country’s greatest storytellers comes a collection that feels both of-the-moment and instantly classic. These nine tightly-wound stories address power dynamics, human frailty, freedom and oppression and how perception shapes our reality’ *Good Housekeeping*

‘The Booker Prize winner and MacArthur Genius recipient, always a radical acrobat with language, unfurls another collection of subversive, bleakly comedic tales to rival 2013’s *Tenth of December*; spelunking through subjects that range from an underground amusement park to a brainwashing program for political protestors’ *Entertainment Weekly*

‘As in his earlier work, Saunders’s relentlessly humane vision of life, always in comic search of our deepest negations of each other, is remarkably vivid ... All nine [stories] in this ultra-readable book contain pulses of wit and beauty, superb unexpected lines, sudden laughs’ *Los Angeles Times*

‘Part of the Saunders elixir is that we feel more empathetic after reading his work’ *San Francisco Chronicle*

‘In Mr. Saunders’s latest book of stories, *Liberation Day*, he wields the “moral-ethical tool” of fiction with more directness and efficiency than ever before. Each story has been skilfully shaped into a moral parable touching on problems of loyalty, obedience, justice, sacrifice and kindness’ *Wall Street Journal*

‘Once one has established that *Liberation Day* is as good as one would expect (it is), and that it only strengthens Saunders’s position as a major contemporary writer (it does), one must consider how it intervenes in current debates and what it contributes. It is a compelling, witty book but it is not just

entertainment; there is a considerable amount at stake in its inventiveness, its dexterity, and its skilful use of the fantastic' *Chicago Review of Books*

'Saunders has revealed himself to be nothing less than an American Gogol: funny, pointed, full of nuance, and always writing with a moral heart. This, his first book of short fiction in nearly a decade, only cements the validity of such a point of view. The nine pieces here are smart and funny, speculative yet at the same time written on a human scale, narratives full of love and loss and longing and the necessity of trying to connect' *Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)

'Saunders's vision of diabolically intrusive tyranny undermining democracy possesses the keen absurdity of Kurt Vonnegut, while his more subtle stories align with the gothic edge of Shirley Jackson ... Each of these flawless fables inspires reflection on the fragility of freedom and the valour of the human spirit' *Booklist* (starred review)

**GEORGE SAUNDERS** is the author of twelve books, including *Lincoln in the Bardo*, which debuted at #1 on the *New York Times* bestseller list, won the 2017 Man Booker Prize for best work of fiction in English and was a finalist for the Golden Man Booker, in which one Booker winner was selected to represent each decade, from the fifty years since the prize's inception. The audiobook for *Lincoln in the Bardo*, which features a cast of 166 actors, won the 2018 Audie Award for best audiobook. The story collection *Tenth of December* was a finalist for the National Book Award; it won the inaugural Folio Prize in 2013 (for the best work of fiction in English) and the Story Prize. Saunders has received MacArthur and Guggenheim fellowships, the PEN/Malamud Prize for Excellence in the Short Story and the 2023 Library of Congress Prize. In 2013, he was named one of the world's one hundred most influential people by *Time* magazine. He has taught in the creative writing program at Syracuse University since 1997.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

FICTION

*CivilWarLand in Bad Decline*  
*Pastoralia*  
*The Very Persistent Gappers of Frip*  
*The Brief and Frightening Reign of Phil*  
*In Persuasion Nation*  
*Tenth of December*  
*Fox 8*  
*Lincoln in the Bardo*  
*Liberation Day*

NON-FICTION

*The Braindead Megaphone*  
*Congratulations, by the Way*  
*A Swim in a Pond in the Rain*

liberation  
day

GEORGE  
SAUNDERS

B L O O M S B U R Y P U B L I S H I N G  
L O N D O N • O X F O R D • N E W Y O R K • N E W D E L H I • S Y D N E Y

BLOOMSBURY PUBLISHING  
Bloomsbury Publishing Plc  
50 Bedford Square, London, WC1B 3DP, UK  
29 Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin 2, Ireland

BLOOMSBURY, BLOOMSBURY PUBLISHING and the Diana logo  
are trademarks of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

First published in 2022 in the United States as *Liberation Day* by Random House,  
an imprint and division of Penguin Random House LLC, New York

First published in Great Britain 2022

This edition published 2023

Copyright © George Saunders, 2022

George Saunders has asserted his right under the Copyright,  
Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as Author of this work

‘The Mom of Bold Action’, ‘Love Letter’, ‘Ghoul’, ‘Mother’s Day’, and  
‘Elliott Spencer’ were originally published in the *New Yorker*

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or  
transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical,  
including photocopying, recording, or any information storage or retrieval  
system, without prior permission in writing from the publishers

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

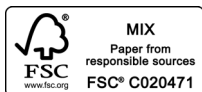
ISBN: PB: 978-1-5266-2499-4; eBook: 978-1-5266-2497-0;

ePDF: 978-1-5266-6172-2

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

Book design by Simon M. Sullivan

Printed and bound in Great Britain by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY



To find out more about our authors and books visit  
[www.bloomsbury.com](http://www.bloomsbury.com) and sign up for our newsletters

FOR PAULA



# CONTENTS

- 1 *Liberation Day*
- 63 *The Mom of Bold Action*
- 93 *Love Letter*
- 103 *A Thing at Work*
- 129 *Sparrow*
- 137 *Ghoul*
- 169 *Mother's Day*
- 195 *Elliott Spencer*
- 225 *My House*



# LIBERATION DAY

It is third day of Interim.

A rather long Interim, for us.

All day we wonder: When will Mr. U. return? To Podium? Are the Untermeyers (Mr. U., Mrs. U., adult son Mike) pleased? If so, why? If not, why not? When next will we be asked to Speak? Of what, in what flavor?

We wonder avidly. Though not aloud. For there may be Penalty. One may be unPinioned before the eyes of the upset others and brought to a rather Penalty Area. (Here at the Untermeyers', a shed in the yard.) In Penalty, one sits in the dark among shovels. One may talk. But cannot Speak. How could one? To enjoy the particular exhilaration of Speaking, one must be Pinioned. To the Speaking Wall.

Otherwise, one speaks like this.

As I am speaking to you now.

Plain, uninspired, nothing of beauty about it.

Hearing Mr. U. coming down the hall, we wonder: Might tonight be Company?

But no. Soon, we find, it is mere Rehearsal. Mr. U.'s intention: to jam.

"Ted, where are you, what are you doing?" Mrs. U. inquires in the angry voice from elsewhere in the house.

"In the Listening Room," he says. "Jamming."

"Oh, for Lord's sake," she says.

It is a special feeling one gets when Mr. U. has sent your Pulse but it has not fully arrived. Like a pre-dreaming or *déjà vu* is how Craig and Lauren and I have described it on those rare occasions when, risking Penalty, we have spoken among ourselves. Once the Pulse is fully upon you, here will come your words, not intended by, but nevertheless flowing through, you, built, as it were, upon the foundation that is you, supercharged by the Pulse, molded to the chosen Topic, such that, if Mr. U. has dialed in, say, Nautical, whoever he has chosen to go first will suddenly begin Speaking of things Nautical in his or her own flavor, but far more compellingly than he or she could if unPinioned. Mr. U., jamming, may choose to have all of us Speak of Nautical simultaneously; in a whisper or quite loud; may Pan right to left (from Craig to Lauren to me, per our current Arrangement), each of us, in turn, putting his or her own spin on Nautical.

Tonight I feel the pre-dreaming/*déjà vu* feeling and then, *Across the slick vast field of the main deck aslant with the latest breaker, I find myself calling out, amid a positive Babel of shouted voices in manifold accents and dialects, hoary hands grip and release rainslick masts as the rain pounds crosswise the darkwood deck veined by ancient ropes greenish with mold beneath the booted feet racing to address a faltering knot or stay as each lad wonders will he live out the storm or come to claustrophobic choking end sinking deep to expire in the watery Jones locker with the many-tentacled abyss creatures of the—*

Even as I am Speaking, I am aware of looks of pity, of commiseration, from Craig and Lauren, looks that seem to say: Although we are not exactly following you, good job, Jeremy, well Spoken, you are clearly doing your best to Speak of Nautical, and if the result is somewhat vague and hard to parse, well, that is the fault of Mr. U., who apparently has set your Proximity too high.

But they dare not judge me too harshly.  
For soon their Pulses too will come.

On Break we stay Pinioned, resting. Our current Pose: arms and legs thrown out wide, in the shape of the letter X, each of us askew at a slightly different angle.

Like stars, or a trio of folks falling from a great height.

Mr. U. comes back in with a beer and some chips.

“I think,” he says, “City. A cityscape. What do you think?”

The Penalty for speaking being perpetually in effect, we merely nod, indicating: Sure, yes, City sounds good.

The Control Board allows Mr. U. to produce many shadings of Speech. It is not just City of which I (again first, I happily note) now begin Speaking; it is City, plus Sad, plus Summer; a dominant coloration of green-blue; City arranged N/S along a wide river. I am made to Speak in short, brisk sentences. Lauren, following me, Speaks, also, of a N/S-trending, river-spanning City, but, plus: Hunger, Raining, Exaltation, her whole Pass consisting of one long sentence. Craig is: City arranged E/W, white, Winter, no river, overrun by cats, alternating short and long sentences, and toward the end of his Pass, he begins to rhyme, or trying to rhyme, and is also Speaking, or attempting to Speak—Mr. U. is attempting to get him to Speak—in iambic pentameter (!).

For Finale, all three of us Speak of our Cities at once, as Mr. U. dials in Crescendo, such that afterward all three of our throats really hurt, so energetically does Mr. U. have us Speaking there at the end.

Mr. U. has been Recording. He plays us a snippet. Is pleased. So, we are pleased. Who would not be pleased? Well, Mrs. U. He calls her in, plays her the snippet.

“That is just some random noise, Ted,” she says, and walks out.

We watch Mr. U. closely. Is he peeved? Seems to be. Yet still believes in us. We can tell by his smile, which says: Has she ever liked a piece of ours yet?

And we smile back: Not yet.

Mr. U. climbs the stepladder to pop into each of our mouths a lozenge. Jean, the maid, comes in with three water sponges on sticks, with which she moistens our lips, and then it is Dinner, and she Feeds us by attaching our Personal Feed Tubes to the tri-headed Master Feed Tube coming out of her large jar of Dining M $\acute{e}$ lange.

Then steps aside to read her book as we Dine.

Though sore-throated, we have elation: Interim is over.

Again we feel useful, creative, part of a team.

Late in the night the door creaks. Mrs. U. enters in nightwear. She steps directly to me, as always.

“Jeremy,” she whispers. “Are you awake? I don’t mean to bother. But.”

“I’m awake,” I whisper.

She wheels over Podium slowly, so as to maintain quiet, sets it just so. She slides a mic on a stand to my lips and dons head-

phones so as not to disturb the others or alert Mr. U. Sitting on the floor before me, she reaches behind and above herself to hit, on the Control Board, Go.

Tonight it is Rural, plus Ancient; overtones of Escape.

I begin Speaking (or, rather, per her Settings, Whispering, into the mic): of her Beauty, and we meet beside a placid Italian lake; in simple, objective sentences, for we are farmers; of the distant hills into which one day, I promise her, we will disappear; more of her Beauty; with quite high Specificity, and I find that, as I describe her Beauty (her hips, her breasts, the way her hair falls across her shoulders in the early morning light, the way it makes me feel to glimpse her across the community table on feast days) I am becoming aroused, as is she, but also, if I may say it this way, am becoming, as well, in love with her, as, I believe, she is becoming in love with me, even though her family, her farming family, does not wish it, because she is betrothed to a cocksure troll of a man, son of the richest family in town, and as we pass hand in hand through a flock of sheep belonging to his family, which also owns the distant mill, she leans into me, indicating (I am Whispering all of this into the mic): I do not want him or his sheep, only you.

One new Feature tonight: a storm approaches. Soon we are drenched and I take off my outer garment and drape it across her slender shoulders. The storm is hers; it is in her Settings, part of Rural. But the garment-draping is mine; I supply that and can see that it pleases her, real her, sitting cross-legged there before me.

Then, beneath a waterfall, or actually just to one side of it, we make love, and I describe it well, and though I am Pinioned and therefore may not reach myself, Mrs. U. is not Pinioned, and may, and does, reach herself.

As is often the case, I wonder whether it might not occur to Mrs. U., once she has been in that way unburdened, to stand up, step over, unburden me.

But it does not. It does not seem to occur to her. It never does. Never has yet.

Which is, I always feel, once my arousal has receded, probably for the best.

She merely rises to her feet abruptly, takes off the headphones, and, as if regretful, sharply wheels Control Podium back to where it was, restores the Dials to where they were, steps over to Lauren, then Craig, shining cellphone dimly upon them to see if they were awake during what just transpired. As usual, she concludes they were not. Sometimes, they really were not. (Paradoxically, though Pinioned and motionless all day, we are always exhausted at night.) On occasions when they have, in fact, been awake, as she approached with cellphone, they have quickly pretended to be asleep, not wanting her to feel in the least troubled.

All these four years she has never once gone to sit before Craig. Only me. And lately has begun sitting before me more often, and longer, to the extent that sometimes the dim harbinger of dawn, a sliver of yellow light that creeps in from what we believe was formerly a window but is now boarded up but not all that well, will fall across her lap, and she will leap to her feet, mumbling, for example, "What the hell, morning already?"

She is, that is, I believe, falling for me. And I am falling for her. When I first began Speaking to her of her Beauty it was, yes, mostly the Settings. The Settings said: Jeremy, Speak, while looking at me, of my Beauty. Also, my Specificity was

always set, by her, to high. Speaking of her Beauty so often, with such high Specificity, made her Beauty real to me; made me notice it. (She really is so Beautiful.) As I began Speaking to her of her Beauty with more fervor (feeling more fervor, because noticing her Beauty with more Specificity, thereby Speaking of it with greater precision), she began, from there on the floor, to get, more and more often, a certain soft look upon her face, an arousal look, yes, but also a love look. I believe so.

She rarely speaks to me. I do not know her heart. Does she have love for me? When I am not Speaking to her? When she is, for example, elsewhere in the house, lost in her thoughts, having her day?

I can't know.

But I do know that never in my life have I felt anyone to be as surpassingly Beautiful as I feel Mrs. U. to be when, Pulsed, I am Speaking with high Specificity of her Beauty and she is gazing up at me, looking for all the world as if she may love me.

Does that feeling pass? It does.

But also, it sort of endures.

That is: these days, I think of her constantly, and feel that I love her even when I am not Speaking to, or of, her, and she is nowhere near.

This morning Mr. U. leans in.

"Company tonight," he says. "We'll do City."

So: a long, anxious day. We would really like to Rehearse. But Mr. U. must go to Work. What I do to prepare: think about City, all day. Once we begin, it is mostly us. Our Speaking is being supercharged and made more articulate via the

Pulse, yes, shaped, of course, by the Settings, but still, at the end of the day, it is, mostly, us. It is me, Craig, and Lauren, and we do not Speak identically well, if I may say so, and preparation is part (but only part) of the reason why one of us may, for example, tend to Speak better (in a more lofty, engaging way) than the others. There is also something innate: talent, one might term it.

It is not a competition. And yet it is.

What I have found: the more I live, in my mind, beforehand, within my Topic, the better my flow will be once I begin.

Mr. U. calls it: “priming the pump.”

All day I prime my pump, getting to know my City better by thinking about it.

It is a Sad city, yes, for that is in the Settings, but I imagine a livelier quarter of the City, where all the City’s celebration occurs, over there on a small island that may only be reached via canoe (a small fleet waits at a common pier).

What color are the canoes? Have they drivers? What is the direction of the current, as the drivers propel their canoes across the bay to the isle of celebration? Are there fireworks, which light up the faces of the shopkeepers and workers who have scrimped and saved to celebrate there, so that they may, for at least this one night, leave their sadness behind? The fireworks must, I imagine, be reflected, rippling, in the shallow water lapping in the narrow inlets that punctuate the island, along which orange-brown cafés are nestled, strung with tiny lights, lights that bob with any slight breeze, there in the cafés that nightly ring with the sound of the laughter of those relieved to find themselves made briefly joyful.

In this way, all day, while Lauren and Craig nap, I prime my pump.

Lauren wakes, gives me a look, as in: Jeremy, wait, are you priming your pump?

My look in return says: I am. Is that an issue?

Lauren and Craig feel that I am strange, too sensitive. I fall under the sway of the Settings, it is true, with greater alacrity than they. Always have. Well, I love my work. I aspire to always be feeling more, thus Speaking with more gusto, thus evoking greater emotion and engagement in my Listeners.

This is what, I feel, makes me unique among the three of us.

Around five Mr. U. comes home from Work. Still in Work suit, he steps into Listening Room and announces an inspiration, had at Work, for a new Arrangement: me, far left, ten feet above floor; Lauren in the middle, twenty feet above floor; Craig, far right, thirty feet above floor. We will thus make an ascending three-pointed line. We will be given, also, a new Pose, more in keeping with City: each of us standing upright, hands shading our eyes, as if gazing off at the distant Cities of which we will soon be Speaking.

Jed Dillon arrives to administer the Required Inter-Pose Stretching. Or, as he says it, “for to Stretch y’all.”

Stretching, after nine days in the shape of the letter X, feels, as one might imagine, both good and bad.

We are then costumed in the mode of City dwellers: tuxedos for Craig and me, long flowing gown for Lauren.

Adult son Mike brings in a ladder, scaffolding, and the rubber-matted platforms upon which we must stand for re-Pinioning. Once in position, each of us leans his or her head back into the Fahey Cup, allowing the three Fahey pronglets to settle gently into the Fahey receptors at the base of the neck.

Then a test is run: Mr. U. makes each of us say the alphabet extremely fast, then extremely slow.

And we are ready.

We wait nervously, hearing the hum of Company as they enjoy Buffet in Main Living Area.

In they glide, smiling up at us politely, then take their seats in folding chairs grumpily put out earlier by adult son Mike. Mr. U. enters briskly in the blazer he dons for Performances, takes up his position at Podium. Mrs. U. takes up her position at rear of room, looking, if I may say so, pained, as if she wishes she could incur Penalty, then be forced to go sit in Penalty shed until Performance is done.

But alas: they are married, she must stay.

We begin.

Lauren goes first, Speaking of her City (arranged N/S along river, Hunger, Raining, Exaltation) in one long sentence. Midway through, Craig joins in, Speaking of his City in iambic pentameter: arranged E/W, no river, white, Winter, overrun by cats. Then, with Lauren and Craig still Speaking, I join, and Speak of my City (Sad, Summer, green-blue, arranged N/S along river, blue-green canoes oriented toward the celebration island like magnet needles, the lucky shopkeepers and workers dreamily trailing their hands behind in the cool, clean water, as, with fireworks bursting overhead, they are rowed past the orange-brown cafés toward the one bastion of happiness in their disappointing lives).

I feel I Speak beautifully of my City; I represent it well. Craig and Lauren also Speak well. Well enough. It is as if we are creating, for Company, those three Cities, upon those distant plains, while gazing out at what we have created, hands shading our eyes.

Even as we make our Cities, however, we sense that Com-

pany is not thrilled. They gaze down at their feet, pretend to be reading the programs printed up by adult son Mike earlier in his room. Some yawn, others glance at the ceiling, as if longing to escape up through it. Wives elbow husbands, as in: Don't whisper that sarcastic comment to me just now, Ronald, I do not wish to be rude, by cracking up. When members of Company glance back at Mrs. U., she only lifts up her hands, as in: Honestly, I have no idea.

Mr. U., too, knows we are not killing it. In vain, with a red face, he desperately fine-tunes our Settings, positively sweating through Performance blazer.

Afterward, looking like he might cry, he accepts a series of false, contrived congrats from Company, then retreats with them into Main Living Area, for cake.

In Listening Room it is just me, Craig, Lauren, and the folding chairs, many of which have been knocked out of their rows by the haste in which Company fled.

Mr. U. rushes back in, tie loosened.

"Not your fault," he says. "You did everything I asked of you. I blame myself. We're going to think about this. Then try something new."

Our hearts go out to him. He works so hard. And is always disappointed.

Then he sends in cake, which Jean holds up to our mouths on her Proffering Plate, at the end of her Reaching Rod, and on the sponges tonight there is wine, and the Feed feels richer than usual, as if Mr. U. has had some beef broth supplement put in there.

Craig and Lauren and I exchange mutual looks of: Goodness, what a trial.

Then, still standing upright, still dressed fancy, hands still shading our eyes, we sleep.

. . .

In the night, adult son Mike barges loudly in.

“Gosh, sorry,” he says. “Did I wake you folks? Anything you need? I felt, honestly, so bad for you all tonight. That was the worst.”

We would like to reply: Yes, adult son Mike, we know it was the worst. What we need now is sleep. Please go out.

But if we reply, adult son Mike may impose Penalty. He has done so before: imposed Penalty when we replied to a question he had just asked, which he would then claim was rhetorical.

Adult son Mike is a person of low character. It is best, we have found, not to engage with him.

Hence we merely stare ahead implacably.

“I just want you all to know,” he says. “You’re not alone. There are many of us who see this thing for the monstrous excess it is. You’re human beings. You are. Even if the world—even if my parents—seem to have forgotten it. But help is coming. It is. Soon.”

Then does his palms-together bow and leaves.

Lauren and Craig and I exchange looks of: Wow, thanks, adult son Mike, we did not know, until you just now told us, that we are human beings.

Then exchange worried looks.

It is always regrettable to have attracted the attention of adult son Mike.

We well remember the time when, having learned in grad school that costuming is one of the most fundamental and ancient modes of human self-expression, he demanded of Mr. and Mrs. U. that more attention be paid to our mode of dress. Adult son Mike can be quite the effective repetitive pain. He

just never lets up. Soon, here came many pairs of slacks and various tunics and jean jackets and colorful hats, laid out before us on the floor of Listening Room, and each of us had to select those articles he or she found most appealing. Thereafter, our clothes were to be changed, by order of adult son Mike, three times a day. And there went our downtime. It seemed we were just always having our clothes changed, by Jean. When Jean complained of overwork, Mr. and Mrs. U. pulled an intelligent fast one, by mandating that adult son Mike assist Jean. Adult son Mike, being a person of low character, unfond of work, made observably uncomfortable when forced to deal with the underwear of the males among us, i.e., Craig and me, soon withdrew his protest re costuming. And things returned to normal, i.e., we would wear Sweatsuit #1 for four days, after which Jean would change us into Sweatsuit #2 and take Sweatsuit #1 away to wash it.

And thus we got our downtime back.

Ever since, not a peep re costuming from adult son Mike.

So, tonight we worry. What did he mean, “help is coming”?

From where? For what? Why would help be needed here, where we all get along nicely and, with the exception of adult son Mike, have creative, fulfilling work to do?

Next morning brings a mood of defeat. Mr. U. comes in at nine. With a tray of Danishes. He seems to want to give us each a Danish of apology, but we are too high on the wall for him to reach. So, he sets the Danishes on a folding chair for now. In truth, none of us will ever get his or her Danish. They will just sit on that folding chair all day.

Because what a day it turns out to be.