

MAUDE MOLD

#51

by Stanley Lieber

ANTIGONE'S PLACE IN ALL THIS

Long ago.

Spiro found himself deposited at Granny's. Not much different than most days, except that today his father was actually at home, next door, sleeping off an unplanned production surge. Dad was at home, but Spiro was here. The injustice burned, it was palpable, and it would not fall by the wayside, ignored in favor of slashing budgets, shipping units, domestic tranquility. Dad was going to wake up.

Everyone was supposed to call her Granny, but Spiro never did. The woman was actually his aunt, his mother's sister, Antigone, and she was hardly old enough to be anybody's mother, let alone their grandmother, a revered figure in their family hierarchy. Her stature in the neighborhood was unearned. The other kids at her daycare weren't blood relatives, and probably wouldn't have noticed the discrepancy even if they were. Spiro accepted that this level of inattention was, historically, the norm. Without automatic identification friend or foe it was no wonder there was so much incest in the world.

"Come to Granny," Antigone said, after spying Spiro frozen in the doorway, hesitant to come in. She reached out to him, awkwardly, her shawl an extension of her frail, spindly arms. In Spiro's mind, a dead tree shrouded in a yarn tarp.

He could see down her shirt.

He entered.

MILLIONS DEAD

Spiro lay on the living room floor behind Eugene's chair, face pressed against the register. The heat whistled as it ablated his cheeks.

It was hot, down there.

Eugene was home from work, no explanation asked or given. But that meant he controlled the tele-screen, the lunch menu, and all other variables of the domestic battlespace. He'd already thrown out Spiro's comic books, even the ones he'd stolen from under Eugene's son's bed. Scotty was going to be pissed when he got home from school. The joke's on you, Gene.

Something about black mold on the telescreen. Everyone on Mars had to deal with it, sooner or later. Some people got sick. Eugene had lost his hair at the age of thirty. Maybe the fallout was moving again, and that's why everyone was home from work.

At lunch Spiro made an ill-advised crack about [something] and Antigone had hauled off and slapped him across the face with the fly swatter she carried around holstered in her belt. He'd seen it used in anger before, but never expected to take a shot from her himself. He knew his mother would only take Antigone's side of any perceived conflict, so he didn't say anything when he got home.

Even so, he let himself out the front door while everyone was washing up. Careful not to slam the screen or rattle the floor boards on the porch.

Wandered next door to his house, his nighttime home, where his dad was still asleep.

Threw rocks at the window until his dad woke up.