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#17

by stanley lieber

He smelled solder. Something in his room was burning. But he had already checked out; nothing could be burning because there was nothing there to burn. He pulled on his jacket and left.

The ship crossed the country in a handful of minutes. This was not in the manual, but he and the ship went way back, their mutual understanding transcending any supposed laws of nature. They were meant to be.

The sky was fluid mercury as the ship set down in New York. He docked with the Chrysler Building's airship terminal and disembarked for the gift shop. He'd pick something up for the ship before continuing on with his task. His brother could wait.

Waited in line longer than he had planned, but he was certain now that he'd been spotted. The building, at least, had recognized him, and flickered the lights in the gift shop accordingly. He'd have to work with it.

T never showed up to greet him. It turned out the elevators were out of service. Perversely, T had moved his office to the 61st floor observation deck, so it was down, down, down, many flights of stairs to the family reunion. Okay.

"Brother," T said, as the former chief of the west coast branch of the company strode silently into his office.

"I'm not your brother," he said, staring directly into T's visor.

"Fine. But do have a seat," T said.

He remained standing.

"Please. You're making this more difficult than it needs to be."

Conceding the point, he raised his weapon and squeezed the trigger.