

## MARY

by William Richmond

Mary arose from the camp stool and folded it while gazing out at her surroundings. Dusty dry-pack and leafless brush stretched to the low hills which rose to the pink, purple sky. A hot wind blew hair into her face and continued on to create a small dust devil. It dislodged vegetation and made tumbleweeds that scattered about or raced before it.

She closed her book and put it down on the small folding table next to her. She had read through the book, word for word, three times, reworking many of the formulas in the margins, even though she knew them by heart. She was educated to understand the concepts. She had advanced degrees in Logic, Physics and Astronomy. She held a Fellowship at a famous university. She was esteemed for her publications on a variety of subjects. She had argued and theorized with the greatest minds of the world about universal theoretical concepts. Black holes, worm holes, space-time warps, superstring theory, parallel universes. She knew them all as well as anyone.

Eventually the work had led her to wonder about life, itself. Is there a God? Is there a Heaven? Is there Reincarnation? If we are all simply bits of information, or even holograms of bits of information, cannot all these things be possible? Cannot alternate universes be possible? If matter/energy itself, these bits of information, cannot be either created or destroyed, cannot Eternity itself be possible? In fact, must not alternative universes and what we call Eternity be real, be absolute? The question began to consume her. She looked for others with similar questions.

Joe had come to the field of theoretical physics from an engineering background. His uncanny knowledge of how things work provided a perfect foil for the flights of fantasy that often arose from his colleagues. It was Mary's insistently logical approach that gained his admiration. They became close friends and often collaborated on research and publication. Rather than being consumed with the science of the universe, its origin, and the proofs of its various theories, the *Theory of Everything*, Joe had, like Mary, come to wonder about the meaning of the theories as they pertained to humanity. They often talked of life and death, or "passage", as they called it. If superstring theory was correct, then "passage" was the correct word, but passage to what?

It was during their deliberations that they met a young genius named Will. He was full of energy and enthusiasm, ready to try anything. He, too, was a humanist, and dove into the work with them.

They started at the beginning with Einstein's *General Relativity*. Consistently remaining humanly centric, they studied Plank and Higgs, Kaku's original *String Theory*, Hawking and Susskind with their Black Holes, *M-theory*, the 26 dimensions of *Superstring Theory*, and the development of the theories of parallel universes, together with Plaga's suggestions for a machine to communicate with other universes.

"Wormholes will not help us. Theoretically they lead only to another place in our own universe."

“I find the *Tree Branches of Reality* theory intriguing. The idea that every choice creates two possible branches of reality is kind of fun. Think of it, there might be an infinite number of you somewhere.”

“Yes, but at least one of them is dead, if the theory is correct, and that can’t be if we are eternal.”

Three years of work reinforced their belief in some kind of connection between *String Theory*, parallel universes and the idea of eternal existence, but the proof they sought eluded them. They decided to take a month on the French Riviera to cleanse their minds. They were fortunate to have access to the villa of a friend near to Nikki beach on the Cote d’Azur. The place came complete with a staff of five, including a chef whom they agreed was “merveilleux”.

One day, while Mary and Joe read paper-back mysteries under a large “parasol”, Will dove into the famous blue green Mediterranean and disappeared for an hour. When he came back, he emerged from the sea like a God, his long, blond hair clinging to his muscular body, glistening with salt water droplets. He turned many heads and had no trouble flirting with many of the beautiful, scantily-clad women.

Wiping himself off, he said to his partners, “I certainly enjoy this particular reality!”

“Yes, it looks as though you could have your pick of a dozen lovely ladies tonight,” said Mary, looking over her sunglasses.

“That’s it!” cried Joe.

“What? Half naked women?”

“No, no, different realities. We accept different realities, we don’t try to prove they exist. We know they exist. We don’t need a *Theory of Everything* to prove it. We’ve spent all our time trying to prove it when we knew in our hearts we were right. What we really need is a way to see or communicate with another universe, like Plaga suggested.”

“Perhaps we should take a more aggressive approach,” Will said. “Why not build a machine to TAKE us to a different universe? Wouldn’t that prove that we are eternal?”

Joe laughed. “It is one thing to theorize. It is entirely different to build something.”

“Why? You are the world’s foremost engineer. We are some of the world’s most outstanding thinkers. We have something of a start with Plaga’s machine.”

“Well, we do have that and some theories about particle transmission. What do you think, Mary?”

“I think Will is onto something. If we succeed, think what it will mean to mankind.”

Mary folded the camp table, too. She put the book under her arm, carried the table and chair and opened the hatch. She put the table and chair in stowage, strapped herself in the main seat, and put the book in the seat next to her, opened to the operating instructions page. She wished that Will hadn’t left, saying that he had to explore and that he might return someday. She looked forward with great excitement to seeing Joe again. Her stomach felt strange. For a moment she thought she might get sick. Anxiety, I suppose. Funny I should be anxious now. She followed the instructions, and finally, pushed the start button.

The machine hissed, trembled for a moment, flickered and vanished.