

Quantized

by Craig Lancaster

"Okay, so tell me what happened." I didn't expend a single syllable of small talk. I'd asked him, then implored him, then pleaded with him to tell me by e-mail, and he had refused me flat. He wanted to have that conversation publicly, with a beer in his hand. So there we were.

"Okay, so you know the show *Friends*, right?"

"Everybody knows *Friends*."

"Okay, so you know how Ross and Rachel were together, and then they had a fight, and Ross had a little fling thinking they were 'on break,' but they weren't, according to Rachel?"

"I'm familiar."

"Well, that's what happened."

"You had a fling thinking you were on break?"

"No, she did."

"And you said you weren't on break?"

He squeezed the lemon into his tea and tossed the rind into the drink. "Let me try this again. Have you seen the movie *Midnight Run*?"

"No."

"It's not important. Good movie, though. You should totally see it."

"Okay."

"So, anyway, Robert DeNiro plays a bounty hunter. Only he wasn't always a bounty hunter. He used to be a Chicago cop. And he still loves his wife, but she's married to a crooked Chicago cop who ran Robert DeNiro out of town."

"So you're Robert DeNiro?"

"For purposes of this story, yes."

"And you're saying that you still love your wife, but she's married to a corrupt Chicago cop now?"

"The cop bit isn't important. I'm just using this particular movie to set up a parallel situation."

"Okay, but the part about still being in love with your wife, that part's true?"

"Well, sort of ... not exactly. You know what? I'm not really doing a good job of explaining this."

"No, you're not."

"Let me try again."

I poured a second glass of wine. "Okay."

"So, have you seen *From Here to Eternity*?"

"I love *From Here to Eternity*."

"Isn't it awesome?"

"It's my favorite movie."

He sat up a bit straighter and smiled for the first time. Also for the first time, I was glad I'd come. "Mine, too," he said.

"But what about it?" I asked.

"Okay, you know how Burt Lancaster and Deborah Kerr are in love, but it's forbidden love, because she's the wife of his commanding officer?"

"Yeah."

"That's what it was like."

"Wait—"

"Yeah, that's it."

"Wait, so you're Burt Lancaster? You're not tall enough to be Burt Lancaster." I popped a hand over my mouth. Wine as truth serum would do me no favors.

"No, I'm the commanding officer."

"You're an uncaring, callous leader of men?"

"Again, the actual occupations and personas in the movie are of little matter," he said. "I'm just trying to illustrate the situation in a way that's accessible."

I topped off my glass and winked at him. "And doing a damn skippy job of it."

"This is frustrating," he said.

"Look at me," I said, and he did. "I think you're making a mistake trying to liken this to movies and TV shows. Why don't you just tell me, in words you choose, what happened."

"I don't think I can."
 "Of course you can. You can speak, can't you?"
 "Yes."
 "So what's the problem?"
 He looked down at the table and drew geometric patterns in a spilled packet of sugar. I drained my glass of wine and filled it again.
 "She quantized my heart."
 I set the glass down. "What?"
 "She quantized my heart."
 "What does that mean?"
 "Quantized. You know ... quantized."
 "No, I don't."
 "It's where something large and continuous is constrained down to something discrete."
 "Such as?"
 "Well, okay, are you familiar with the James Bond movies?"
 "Of course."
 "Okay, there have been a lot of actors who played Bond: Sean Connery, George Lazenby, Roger Moore, Pierce Brosnan, Daniel Craig."
 "You forgot Timothy Dalton."
 "OK, him, too."
 "No, don't just casually throw him in. Timothy Dalton is hot. Say it like you mean it."
 "Right. Okay. Timothy Dalton, he's in like flynn. Better?"
 "Totally."
 "So, what if we had all these Bonds, but we wanted to isolate the one who was born in 1930 in Edinburgh, what would we do? We'd have to quantize them."
 "Connery?"
 "Right."
 "That's so ... weird."
 "How so?"
 "I asked you to use your own words, and *quantize* is what you came up with?"

"Quantize is a good word."

"Quantize is an obscure word."

"Not if you're a physicist, it's not."

"You're a physicist?"

"I am."

"This explains so much."

"It does?"

"Yes. You're a physicist. And you like movies."

"I am. And I do. Is that bad?"

"I don't know."

"Are you willing to find out?"

I considered my glass, which I'd drained. Again. "Are you willing to buy me another bottle of wine?"

