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LIVIU RADU

“DIGITS ARE COLD, NUMBERS ARE WARM”

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The *International Speculative Fiction* is proud to present “Digits are Cold, Numbers are Warm”, a short story by one of the best Romanian speculative fiction writers, Liviu Radu. Liviu Radu has recently been distinguished with the “2012 Galileo Award for lifetime work achievement”, for the “extraordinary stories that he gave and still gives us...”

[“Galileo Awards” Link](#)

I would like to thank Liviu for his contribution to ISF, and Cristian Tamas for all his hard work promoting Romanian Speculative Fiction.

The Editor in Chief,

Roberto Mendes



Liviu Radu

(Romania)

Digits are cold, numbers are warm

*English translation by
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Of course, they're all saying Teddy was a good man. He was. They don't even know how good he was, and how much it had cost him to be a good man. What an ordeal his goodness meant to me. Yet I'm really afraid those guys are only saying nice things about him because one does not say anything else in times like this...

They are all in a hurry. Nobody is really grieving. I'm trying to restrain myself, to not show the despair that is slowly, slowly getting to me. What am I going to do without Teddy? The burden will be too heavy for me to carry alone. It brought him down, the kindest and most responsible of us all. I only made it this far through his support. How am I going to cope now?

Editor in Chief: Roberto Mendes

My face is twisting; I am about to cry with self-pity. However, I catch the unforgiving look of young Joshua and realise his sarcastic expression is yelling: What has got into this crone? She'd better spare us with her hysterical fits! Young people are dying, people that had the entire life before them! That decrepit husband of hers should be glad he was put out of his misery, that the Lord took pity on him and took him to the land of light! If only she would rush to follow him so that we could be rid of the old hag once and for all!

The Lord is kind; he will take pity on me and let me follow my mate. He knows I've earned my right to rest and He has punished me enough for what I did. Yet who will take care of these insolent young people? Who will bring them the light, who will prepare their rest?

Reverend Stillwater, who has taken over the parish, is trying to perform a decent service. Indifferent, but decent. Teddy deserved better...

Did he? My poor ruffled chaffinch! A stranger to this world yet so willing to be accepted by it! And so right for me! You know what they say, "birds of a feather flock together." Teddy who had been made of the stuff martyrs are made, willing to sacrifice himself for the world, and the world laughed at him and spit on his sacrifice! Of course, from my point of view – which is subjective if judging it cool-headedly – Teddy would have deserved the highest honours and a funeral at Westminster Abbey... Yet my beloved husband, the late reverend Theodore Michener, Teddy Bear and Teddy-Teddy, would have backed away in horror in the face of such honours.

He knew that the good done to mankind could only be rewarded with the lack of acknowledgement. Oblivion. Silence. Ignorance.

How can one explain the greatness of his sacrifice? Such a thing can only be done by someone who was completely involved at his side. Yet the true exploits seem like such rubbish when you try to explain them, when you try to justify them. Heroism makes no sense; it is proof of imbecility. Or of overworking glands.

The tragedy of man is that he cannot be understood by his neighbours. The only one who can understand him is our sweet Lord.

What if Jesus turns out to be a stranger to my worries? What if he feels, in his divine wisdom that I was wrong?

Then it means my existence was a terrible mistake. That there is no redemption for me or for my dear, dear Teddy, that we will find each other in the eternal flames.

I'm shaking, terrified by such prospect, which I try to remove from my thoughts. Yet that Joshua bastard notices my start and whispers something to that peasant of a wife he has. God, I know these are not the people, *not the only* people Teddy sacrificed himself for, but had we known what fate had in store for us, would we have tried to play God?

My dear Teddy Bear! My dearest! You are now lying stiff, cold, and distant, with a bit of a frown on your face, without that gentle embarrassed smile that charmed me the moment I first saw you...

What a strange thing fate is! I first saw you at Aunt Sarah's funeral, an old hag nobody in our family loved... There you were, a young and enthusiastic vicar talking about her as if she had been a saint. Such conviction about you that I wondered, and still am wondering now, if maybe you knew Lady Bellington better than her own family did. And now I see you for the last time in the same cemetery, among the polished marble stones, in the same monotonous murmur expressing false regrets and boredom.

That stupid Maryanne Sargent is looking terrified at the sky. It seems she has developed some sort of phobia after that Zeppelin's visit; she is talking about aerial bombardments, about the destruction of London all the time... The others are no better than that, pretending not to take her seriously, but they are shaking in their boots. As for me, nothing scares me any longer. How could the human-made fire raining from the sky be any more terrifying than the heavenly fire that awaits me?

Teddy used to say we had no reason to fear, but how am I not to believe God has become angry with us? So much has happened to us that looks nothing like a reward...

Teddy had always hung between two worlds. He did not feel at home in this world, which he left in the end. He felt he had a job to do and did not shirk from it. The poor in the parish had good reason to be grateful. They thought he was rather naïve, rather stupid to put it bluntly, but what man takes charity without making fun of the one who gives it? There never was any gratitude, let us not delude ourselves, but they cared for him, they felt he was different from the others.

Our life was going calmly, walking the trodden paths of the dull existence full of events that could be foreseen a long time ahead, of a priest and his wife, from just another parish with no particular problems. My ruffled chaffinch was full of tenderness and understanding. Now, judging it cool-headedly, our marriage had nothing to build on. It could have successfully failed. He understandingly overlooked all my flaws, my weaknesses, the fact that I was unable to give him all that a man wanted from a woman...

Yes, Teddy was a special man, an unearthly good man. A true representative of God on Earth...

The moment Mrs. St. Matthew had been waiting for has come. She has suddenly bloomed, she feels at home. After a few words befitting the occasion about the activity of the deceased she has broken out. She describes in great detail the activity of the Association for the Redemption of the Repentant and Unrepentant Sinners. She's got the audience interested, I must admit. Especially men are listening to her intently; you can see them trying to remember places, names, fees... Reverend Stillwater looks embarrassed. I see on his face the same signs of the struggle between the will to serve his neighbours and the disgust towards the same neighbours I had once seen on my dearest Teddy's face in the beginning. He'd like to intervene, remind that lady that she is at a funeral, not at a meeting, yet he dares not...

Well, it was good while it lasted... Until the day Teddy sorted out the parish papers and found the journal of the priest that had come before him, Reverend Knocksmith. And the curse of the numbers along with it.

Strange story, Knocksmith's was... He had been a priest in various places from regiments stationed in Burma and Ceylon to the Newgate prison before landing in our parish. While striving to help the sinful souls, full of remorse or vain, that were carrying out their punishment in this world, he had heard the confession of a lady, Catherine Wilson. The woman, who had been a nurse in Spalding, a town in Lincolnshire County and in Kirkby Lonsdale, in Cumbria, had taken care of elderly people between 1853 and 1862. Although nobody had noticed anything unusual, people had started to assume her patients had not died of natural causes, especially after her husband's death, Dixon. She had been tried and cleared, then arrested again, charged with other murders and eventually sentenced to death and executed.

Nurse Wilson had adamantly denied her alleged guilt. Before the execution she had opened her soul to Father Knocksmith, who, bound by his oath and, maybe, convinced of how futile revealing that confession would have been, had settled to only write down what he had been told in his diary. God damn him for such an idea, because if he hadn't done so, Teddy would have remained the man I had known, and my life would have been completely different!

That Wilson woman did not know much about causes, only about actions. First of all, she had confessed to some of the murders, others than those she had been charged with, albeit even in those cases she regarded herself as an accomplice rather than a murderer. Her husband, Dixon, had been the murderer, she said, who had eventually killed himself in remorse. In his young days, Dixon had been a friend and disciple of an important murderer, whose crimes had been publicised by the newspapers, one Thomas Griffiths Wainewright, a gentleman coming from a good family and with a good education. This man, suspected of having killed some relatives, had fled to Paris and stayed out of England between 1830 and 1837. He had then returned after getting in trouble with the French police, and had been arrested for forging some papers. He had been sentenced to life imprisonment. Dixon had gone with him to Paris and helped him in his endeavours, terrifying actions, which that nurse could not understand. The woman had only understood and told Reverend Knocksmith that Wainewright had committed murders and crimes beyond the wildest imagination, out of sincere belief that he was saving mankind from an imminent danger by doing that. He had conveyed his belief to his young disciple, who, many years later, had felt he had to continue his master's work. Except there's a long way from an idea, irrespective of how crazy and antisocial it is, to the action itself. The image of old people dying a terrible death had haunted his nights, until he had no longer been able to bear it and had taken his own life, leaving his wife to carry the burden of suspicion and the hatred of the victims' relatives. The Wilson woman had adamantly denied any guilt – she regarded herself as completely innocent – just that the fate had played a nasty trick on her by having her convicted of something she had nothing to do with.

Judging from the diary, Father Knocksmith appeared to have been convinced of the nurse's sincerity. Yet it was not that which marked the end of my peaceful life. It was the fact that the confession of the murderer must have aroused in the priest the wish to find out the reason why some nice educated people had started committing acts against nature, for which they had paid with their freedom or lives. Surely, the world was full of murderers and assassins, yet few are those cases when they actually pretend to be saviours of mankind!

The diary also contained the lengthy description of the vicar's attempts to find out more about Wainewright. Of course, after so many years it had been difficult to uncover anything more than the papers of the time had written. He had, however, succeeded in finding that when that guy had been arrested, there had been books among his seized personal property which had been later sold at an auction. The vicar had thought that he might find some clue if he could track down the convicted man's library. Enviably tenacious, he had collected every possible information and had repurchased or at least got to browse all the adventurer's books. After having studied them, he had reached the conclusion that one book held the key he had been looking for so stubbornly. That was Arab Abdul Alhazred's *Necronomicon*, translated in Latin by Olaus Wormius. Oh, the lip servers are done, those chatterers that only wanted to be noticed!

Joshua seems tired, he looks at me worriedly – am I holding on? – a concern caused not by some human feeling towards me but by the cold calculation that he will have to take care of the old woman. I quickly roll my eyes as if I'm about to faint, and then give him a languorous smile. He's mumbling something in anger. He's probably swearing at me. Of all the curses that have fallen upon me, the constant presence of my nephew who hates me is but the least.

Reverend Stillwater begins a eulogy of the deceased. He is honest, poor lad, but he knows almost nothing about my good Teddy, so he's improvising with talent. He keeps to general things.

I wonder what this stuck-up gathering would say if I told them what I knew about Father Michener...

Teddy had shared his discovery with me from the very beginning. We would read Knocksmith's diary together and discuss it. To us it seemed to be the early display of the madness that had driven the author to bedlam and then to suicide.

We had noticed a few interesting facts from the beginning. First of all, the two assassins had been punished for other crimes – which they had not even committed; then there was also their conviction that they had done something commendable. Their means had shocked poor Dixon and had led to his suicide, yet the man had truly believed his master had uncovered an overwhelming secret, which had made him act the way he did. One more and very important thing: both of them had been convinced that they had done mankind no harm, that they had rid it of unimportant or even harmful elements, with Wainwright picking his victims from the Apaches of Paris and Dixon from the incurably ill elderly people his wife was taking care of.

Teddy had learnt from a former Oxford colleague of his that Abdul Alhazred had been mad, that his work had been, indeed, written during his delusional states, when he was convinced that he was getting in touch with another universe, which his followers believed was true. After reading part of the *Necronomicon*, which we had found in the books left by Knocksmith, together with my husband, I realised no sane mind could have produced such an atrocity that filled you with disgust and revulsion towards the entire universe. That moment I felt, for the first time in my life, the doubt that God really existed. How else could he have allowed such horrors? Through a lucid analysis, however, Teddy convinced me we cannot comprehend the ways of the Lord and that we need to have faith if we want to be redeemed. God gave us free will, we can choose our path, we are forced to distinguish between good and bad. If the world is the way it is, isn't it so that the valley of sorrows can truly be a proving ground?

Similarly shocking to us was the name of the translator, Olaus Wormius. Olaus could have come from Olahus, therefore Vlach or from Nicolaus. The initial term could have suffered a deformation, an abbreviation. Did that deformation serve a different purpose, as well, besides concealing the name of the real translator? Wormius suggested the fellow was Anglo-Saxon in origin, and nothing more than that. The name could have been everyone else's that regarded himself as a worm on the face of the earth. You could almost believe the humility of the translator who had transposed the contagious madness of the Arab into an accessible language was real.

After so many years I wonder if that poor man had not actually felt like a worm under the burden of the immense knowledge, of the importance of the imminent danger uncovered by chance, a secret that had to be told to others, to some people willing to take action.

I admit that Reverend Knocksmith's notes, may his tormented soul rest in peace, were of great help to us in understanding the Arab's work.

Stillwater is done chattering... There comes the final part of the sorry show, the Bible quotes and ritual phrases. I'm staring at poor Teddy's wax-like face. I realise I haven't really thought of the atrocity I'm living: now that Teddy is gone, I will never see his gentle smile, I will not hear him cough shyly, embarrassed about his weakness... He tried to carry his illness unnoticed, without inconveniencing anybody and died as if apologising for being such a bother...

When I see those gathered around his tomb I realise we were the remains of another world, some kind of dinosaurs lost in another era. Extinction was our only salvation. I, too, will pass away soon...

That Alhazred had stumbled upon the discovery that from time to time our world was haunted by creatures of horror, demons that lived in another universe. Evil demons with amazing powers... Their appearance bore no resemblance to humans, as neither did their logic resemble the one which we are all accustomed with in any way. They could not be defeated, but could be appeased, tamed, calmed for the moment... They had the power to influence people's judgement, and if the sacrifices they wanted were not given willingly, they would get them themselves hundredfold and thousandfold.

A portal would open between our universe and theirs and the nightmarish creatures would sneak into our world. Powerful wizards could use their inhuman powers, albeit at the risk of losing

control of those bizarre creatures, which would have led to the immediate destruction of those too bold. The only salvation, the mad Arab said, who pretended he had dealt with the monsters many times, was to indulge them as quickly and as fully as possible to make them docile or willing to go back to the hell they had come from. As their logic was not similar to ours, one had no way of knowing how they would take the requests of those trying to contact them. The fearsome inhabitants of the other world could be generous, giving more than they had been asked for, or, on the contrary, would take offence at trifles, in which case the connection with them would turn out to be fatal.

On the other hand, the creatures from the other world had the power to convey their thoughts, to alter the structure of the human mind, turning it into something resembling theirs, that is full of cruelty and violence, prone to war and destruction. And that transformation would not only become a lasting one but was passed on to others, spreading like a plague across the entire Earth.

Mankind's only salvation was to send the visitors from the foreign universe back as quickly as possible, before they got a chance to alter the human way of thinking. Fortunately, that alteration was not permanent, it would fade in time and people would gradually revert to what they had been before the monsters' intervention.

From what the mad Arab was saying, the two universes, ours and the monsters', would intersect according to a simple yet interesting rule. These universes would seemingly come closer and apart because the portals would open in one year and then twenty-two years later, twenty-three years after that and then after twenty-four years and so on with the interval between the visits of the horrific creatures increasing by one year until they would be thirty years apart. From that moment on, the interval would start going down by one year, with the contacts between the two universes becoming increasingly more frequent. When the distance between two appearances of the sinister beings reached twenty-two years, it would start going up again...

So, if we were to believe Alhazred, the Earth was under the periodic influence of the sick, inhuman minds of those alien beings, for which destruction was the only way of life.

Next in that bizarre book was a part I could not understand, full of complicated calculations related to star positions. Those calculations were meant to help detect the time of the horrific creatures' next appearance and the time frame within which Earth was open to the evil influences. Because the monsters would not come for an hour or a day, the time our planet was left for them to plunder would change every time, ranging from days to months.

We were terrified to learn of those things. I felt touched in my faith, in the opinion that God had made us from clay to do his will. If God was leaving us fall prey to those demons coming from their hell, if mankind was periodically subjected to evil influences of beings that could not be defeated, that could shape our thoughts and will to their liking, where would the free will to seek redemption, as the Church was teaching us, fit in?

Now, while I'm sitting powerlessly and looking at the soulless carcass of what used to be my only love, I'm thinking maybe our punishment was not that meaningless, as I had thought for a long time. Jesus had chased away the demons. The divine might was surely greater than that of these fiendish beings. We should have sought salvation in the teachings of the one who had been crucified for Man's salvation. Yet we, after suddenly getting that information and terrified of what we had learnt, afraid and ashamed of talking with others that they might consider us mad, did not even try to find out whether there was a way of banishing the demons, of closing the gates other than that suggested by that mad pagan, damned be his memory! I am now wondering if his damned work wasn't actually those demons' work, intended to lure naïve earthling souls...

But no, that cannot be, my Teddy did not sacrifice himself in vain! I am convinced there is another way, of the light, although the mad Arab had been honestly preoccupied with saving his neighbours, but had found a way that suited his pagan education.

However, at that time, we had been disgusted by the sick imagination of the Bedouin wizard and less convinced of the truth of his words. The conviction came some time later, after we had played with the numbers. Because even though words have their role in convincing people, their subjective character leaves a shred of doubt in the listener's mind, by definition.

Digits, however, are dry, cold and impersonal. Some abstract signs, with no image attached to them. This is why they leave the impression of objectiveness, of something that cannot be denied. "This results from calculations" is an unbeatable argument. Neither I, nor my darling one, were that good with mathematics so as to know if there were any subterfuges – if there really were any! – to cast a doubt on a calculation.

Our true conversion, however, began only after we had attempted to check the validity of Alhazred's calculations.

Curiosity killed the cat. And ruined our happiness. Had we stopped at that, the horror story of the demented Arab and of his followers in 19th-century England, the century of science and industrial development, would have seemed just an interesting figment meant to trouble dreams and we would have forgotten about it after a while. The misery of the world would have passed us by, accepted with people's usual fatalism: it was meant to be. It didn't happen that way! The story in the *Necronomicon* had caught us so deeply that we allowed ourselves to drift with it.

Teddy contacted a friend of his who taught astronomy at Cambridge. He gave him the necessary information, without explaining where he had obtained it.

The result didn't tell us much at first. We were within a 27-year interval and going down and the moment of the future contact was somewhere in 1888. It was 1886... Two more years until that time. At the moment we thought we had forever...

A simple calculation showed us that the previous visits had taken place in 1861 and 28 years before that, in 1833.

The strange thing about this was that although wars and revolutions had taken place during those periods, they had only been local, non-fundamental conflicts that had not changed the fate of the world substantially. Moreover, those years coincided with the times when those people who had started it all, Catherine Wilson and Thomas Griffiths Wainwright had committed their heinous murders, which they said had helped save the world.

Taking calculations further back in the past, we found that 1833 minus 29 made 1804, the year when Napoleon had been crowned.

Teddy had exclaimed with conviction:

"Of course! Napoleon the emperor puts an end to the French Revolution; from that moment on all the wars he would fight would have a different purpose, would be meant to expand and consolidate his own empire and not spread the ideas of the revolution!"

His remark had seemed logical. The Napoleonic Empire had, indeed, caused a great massacre. The other states could surely not be considered innocent, with hatred and obstinacy manifest in their most acute forms. We can accept for the sake of the argument that 1804 had been a year when the demons coming from the depth of the universe had induced a wave of violence on the planet. The Napoleonic wars had not been not local; they had expanded throughout the world like a plague...

We resumed our calculations. 1804 minus 30 gave 1774. Bewildered, I browsed the contemporary history book.

“Nothing special! Darling, I think the whole story’s just a practical joke!”

“You’re wrong,” my Teddy mumbled with a sombre expression on his face. “On the contrary, this figure is more convincing to me than the other. It was 1775 when the wars of the colonies against England started. The so-called American Revolution. An event whose implications have never been fully analysed. The French Revolution that would start within less than one decade from our colonies’ conquering their independence was inspired by that successful example. The royalty concept had been dealt a heavy blow. A certain type of society had been proven possible to destroy. And revolutions started with their bloodshed, abuses, dispossessions and all...”

“But the war began in 1775...”

“My dear, the war *was indeed started* in 1775, but if we analyse the facts in detail we will see violence had actually arisen in 1774. Because the war was the way to manifest that violence which had filled people’s souls. The plan for violence had emerged before it started. Nothing is spontaneous. The mind needs to be prepared to accept something for that something to happen. And the revolutions that made the world bleed were actually started the moment the idea, which probably came up at an earlier time, was accepted by a large enough group of people. The date seems reasonable...”

The years resulted from the calculations were either significant dates or not matching any important event. This could mean that in the years of contact between the worlds, when nothing had happened on Earth, certain people had intervened and blocked the fiendish actions. Or that the entire scheme was nonsense...

As for the future, interventions were forecast for 1888, the date Teddy’s friend had found from the astral configuration, and then for 26 years later, 1914 and for 25 years after that, in 1939.

Yet those years meant nothing to us, as the future could not be verified. We could believe world disasters were in store for us at that time or that nothing would happen.

Things stopped at that stage for the time being. The story was interesting and convincing enough but not so convincing as to make us dig deeper into the the mad Arab’s dirt and his followers’, who either were murderers or had ended up in a bedlam.

Once having started to rummage though the books left by Knocksmith, Teddy kept on researching those tomes hoping to find more interesting and amusing things.

He discovered among all those breviaries about spells and black magic a small book written by a certain Menonius Agrippa, who claimed he had had access to Pope Gregorius’ manuscripts. That Pope, a great mathematician – also considered a wizard by the people of his time, because of his skill in doing all sorts of things with numbers – had been interested at some point – the author of the book said – in the symbolism of periodical events. It seemed that the duration of the intervals between two events could indicate the type of the ensuing event.

“Here’s what this man says, basing his fallacies on the authority of that semi legendary pope,” Teddy told me one night when we were together in the library. He was hiding among piles of very valuable ancient books that had become the property of the parish after Father Knocksmith’s unfortunate death and I was sitting comfortably by the fireplace. “If an expected event is preceded by an event of the same type, and the distance between them calculated in years is the cube of a natural number, then that event will have a catastrophic effect. The events that are preceded by an interval representing a multiple of thirteen or the power of a prime number have negative effects, as well. The prime numbers suggest that the events to come will be ordinary, without

anything, either good or bad, to single them out amidst those of the same kind. An even number, which is neither the cube of another number nor a multiple of thirteen, forecasts events that will end in a positive effect, albeit such events might seem particularly bloody or tragic at first..."

Of course, there was an entire ramble about series of numbers, about what can be considered a row of periodical events...

Somehow I thought it was only natural that a number which contains within it the seed of the number thirteen should foretell death and trouble. A long tradition contributed to that conviction. I, however, could not understand why the cube of a number signalled something catastrophic. The author did not explain this, either. He merely stated it.

"Why does a prime number foretell something ordinary and its power spell havoc? Why does an even number predict something good and its cube a disaster?" my ruffled chaffinch was wondering, raising the eyeglasses on his forehead.

I had no idea what to answer him and I don't think he was actually expecting an answer.

"The only explanation would be," he went on with his monologue, "that each number has a negative potential in it, either greater or smaller. By multiplying with itself this potential expands, becomes greater in value. It would be something like incest, where negative traits amplify, as they are not kept in check by fresh blood... The more times a number is multiplied by itself, the bigger the evil seed grows and becomes dominant... I suppose," he added, after pondering it for a while, "that Menonius Agrippa's opinions are based on ancient knowledge, predating Christianity. At one time I thought they were cabalistic in origin, because I didn't find a positive meaning in the trinity-related numbers in his work. But he is not a cabalist, because number seven does not have any special meaning! I am surprised by his mention of the number thirteen... This guy might have extracted his knowledge from who knows what mystic Egyptian texts, left by the secret worshippers of Aton. Do you know Moses is believed to have been a harried priest of this monotheistic faith?" he asked me. "Jews might have taken the essence of the Mosaism from that forbidden religion, or they might not even have been a specific people enslaved, but a group of Egyptians, believers of the faith the priests and the pharaoh had prohibited. Led by a priest who would not abjure his credo, they ran away in the desert and in time were assimilated by Semitic shepherds wandering through Sinai. They gave the latter the monotheistic faith and the stubbornness to not change their belief, thus forming a people that has lasted for thousands of years..."

Nice theory, right, I thought at the moment, without paying it too much mind. I was preoccupied with something else. The time frame between two openings of the portal between the two universes, ours and the killing monsters' ranged from twenty-two to thirty years. Which of the numbers from 22 to 30 were among those that soiled little book of Agrippa warned about? I made a quick calculation and found that only three were part of the baleful group: 25, which was the power of 5, 26, which was a multiple of 13 and 27, which was the cube of 3.

I was tempted to sigh in relief at first as only three numbers had a very serious influence, while the rest foretell relatively bearable events! And then I noticed something that had eluded me at first: 25, 26, 27! The three periods were connected, regardless of whether the universes were coming closer or coming apart! In the absence of somebody's intervention, countless disasters would befall the Earth for almost a century! We were in the twenty-seven year period, brought to rest by the intervention of the Wilsons. The twenty-six year period was next and then the twenty-five year one.

I rushed to share my findings with Teddy. My husband paled but did not say anything. He stood there lost in his thoughts, and I did not dare bother him. I felt that this time, the Teddy that lacked practical sense, who would forget to eat were it not for me to call him to dinner, was about to make an extremely important decision for us and for mankind.

He eventually told me, "Tonight I'm going to pray as hard as I can. I'm going to ask the Lord to enlighten me, to send me a happy inspiration!"

The service is over. The two gravediggers are closing the lid on the coffin. I got to see the noble face of my mate that now displays a sad seriousness one more time. The tremendous grief that is taking me over is full of self-pity. What I am going to do? The burden is too heavy for one person, especially for a weak one such as I... Teddy Bear got away. The Lord was correct in his judgment. He was the better and the kinder of the two of us, he deserved to be put out of the misery first. In a way, I'm happy for him. My dearest dearest! Life sure sees to it that people like him are forced to carry the burden of the sins of the world!

The gravediggers are nailing down the heavy lid and I realise for the first time that I will never see his beloved face. Teddy never blamed me for anything. I hope with all my heart that the understanding he showed me was sincere. His love for me had a drop of pity in it, that I know, but it didn't bother me. I needed his love. And he gave it to me unconditionally, without holding back...

Nobody knows what a great soul he was...

The next day my husband came home from the church with a worn-out look on his face and circles around his eyes when I was making breakfast. He waited for me to lay the table, and then told me before we started eating:

"The Lord did not speak to me directly. He did not send any signs to me. I somehow find this normal. It is not possible that God would urge you to break his laws... On the other hand, the decision must be mine. I must take responsibility for my actions. My dear, after having prayed long and hard and meditated, I came to the conclusion that there is no other way for me. I must act and prevent the destruction of our world!

I wasn't expecting anything else. I was proud of my Teddy!

"Let's clear up some practical details, my dear... I have less than two years at my disposal. During this time I need to find out what I have to do and prepare my interventions. They will most certainly be some atrocities, if we remember whom those Father Knocksmit identified as saviours of Earth in 1831 and 1833 were and what crimes they were accused of. I would like to keep you out of this in any way. This is why I believe it would be best if you moved in with one of your sisters. We should at least stay separated for the fatidic period..."

I was touched by his concern. And I answered him right away:

"I'm not going anywhere. Only death do us part!"

Yes, only death did us part! The heavy coffin is going down slowly, held in place by ropes, to the moist bottom of the grave and worms are getting ready to feast. Don't stuff yourselves, you disgusting things! You'll soon get another helping! Not even death will keep us apart for long, Teddy! I will keep you company wherever you are, because we both committed the sin, if that's what it was...

Honestly speaking, I doubted Teddy would have managed on his own. He had a special soul, a gentleness out of this world and that would have prevented him from doing things that were so little in line with the Christian morality. He was a man of books and an analytical mind, yet he was totally lacking practical sense. He needed me. He had always needed me...

The following period was dedicated to studying the terrifying book of the mad Arab. What we had read in the *Necronomicon* up until then was nothing compared with the filth we were forced to dig ourselves into...

Abdul Alhazred's recommendations were clear: the demons in the other universe could not be appeased by anything other than human sacrifice, which needed to be made during the period when the monsters had access to our world. Depending on the moment the two universes were joined, on the time since the previous appearance and whether that interval was longer or shorter than the one before it, the sacrifice had to be made in a specific way; a certain ritual had to be observed. The mad Arab was giving all the necessary indications...

After going over the text we calculated what our obligations were, according to the algorithm set by the Arab. And we were terrified when we found out what we were supposed to do. But we had no choice. We had willingly decided to do whatever was necessary. We could not turn back. Not that we wanted to.

Yet our determination would not lessen our disgust towards what we were about to do...

Had it not been for those numbers and their related interpretations more or less possible to verify, we would not have let ourselves be convinced. The realisation of how big the difference between digits and numbers is has always amazed me. It's nothing like that between letters and words. Words are combinations of letters, of course, but letters alone can mean something, can have a life of their own. Single digits are cold, distant, avoid hinting at anything. Numbers, on the other hand, are full of implications, stating openly that they are more than a mere quantitative abstraction. They are alive, they change their potential; the same number can mean various things depending on circumstances. To me, the numbers turned out to be warm.

Because they had the warmth of blood.

The coffin was deposited on the bottom of the tomb, the gravediggers pulled out their ropes... One more ritual ensues before leaving poor Teddy alone. Reverend Stillwater takes a clod and lets it fall into the grave. It makes a muffled sound upon reaching the coffin. I startle, imagining – I don't know why, that the sound could bother my poor helpless husband...

Next, Joshua comes closer to me, gives me a handful of moist dirt and pushes my wheelchair to the edge of the tomb. I am carefully pouring the dirt in the grave, with a keen sense of loneliness. Mine and Teddy's...

To divert my thoughts elsewhere, I'm looking at the palm still soiled by the moist dirt. And remember another moment when I got my hand dirty...

I had fallen, slipped on the wet asphalt, using the palm of my hand to lean against the stones in the macadam. When I got up, looking at the mud on my fingers in disgust, Teddy had already started the real dirty job. He was cutting through the body lying on the ground, reciting sinister incantations in a voice cracked with emotion, which did not resemble any known language, the meaning of which not even Alhazred probably knew...

It was at that moment that I realised what a strong spirit poor Teddy had. He, who had not slaughtered even one chicken in his life, who didn't even know how to cut a turkey for Christmas, was performing that satanic ritual without rushing, methodically, painstakingly observing the recommendations.

Teddy was indeed worthy of admiration.

Only God knows what must have been going on in his soul. He never complained, he never regretted it.

Anyway, the biggest effort for him was sending those demented letters to Scotland Yard, signed with a pathetic alias. I used to watch him write them. I could see disgust on his face but that was an obligation mentioned by the mad Arab and my husband had decided to go all the way, to observe the instructions completely.

I had had some trouble with him when I had informed him I wanted to come along in his nocturnal errands. He had fought it as hard as he could, had threatened me to drop the whole thing but in the end he had to comply. I had been right, as usual. With all the hysteria that had taken over London, no patrol had dared suspect a respectable couple like us. If Teddy had wandered the streets alone, some guy with a sicker imagination might have wondered what a priest was doing in the dark. Yet a priest accompanied by his wife... That guy's imagination should have been really sick to make any connection with Jack the Ripper!

The funeral is over. I am sitting upright in my wheelchair, like a queen on her throne and those who came to see Teddy to his final journey are now coming one by one to present their sympathies. There's Mrs. St. Matthew... What a chatterbox she is!

When we had first planned the whole thing, one of the main problems was the selection of victims that were to be sacrificed. Our predecessors, the Wilsons and Wainwright, had used dying old people, whose disappearance was somewhat imminent or thieves from the slums of Paris, whose elimination was a positive thing.

We didn't know how to do it, what environment to choose those people from whose killing would drive away the danger that was threatening our world. Then Mrs. St. Matthew came along, with her idea to establish a charity in order to help prostitutes with social reintegration. At first I only thought of the fact that my Teddy had to do his vicar duty, as well, that he could not refuse to participate in such an activity and occupy his mind with only the bloody ritual he was to perform. It later turned out my intuition worked flawlessly. Teddy thus found a pitiful world, wherefrom we could extract five people without the society actually losing anything. A world that was living in dark streets, in the middle of the night, thus allowing us to act without fear of being caught or without having to bother luring the victims to our homes and then taking the trouble of getting rid of the bodies afterwards. Teddy learnt many secrets of that world, secrets which came in useful when the time to act came. St. Matthew never imagined how much she had contributed to the panic that had taken hold of London from August till November 1888...

Joshua comes and pushes my wheelchair to the carriage. He's doing it nonchalantly, without hiding his relief. Was he afraid I might do some embarrassing scene? How little did that boy know me... And how little did we know him!

It all had ended well, 1888 had passed without any major crisis, and mankind had kept rushing towards what it regarded as progress... At first we were so pleased with us that we almost revealed ourselves, told the entire world of our marvellous actions. Yet the more time passed, the more meditative Teddy became and the more he kept to himself. I couldn't bear to see him like this. One day I took the courage and said to him:

"My love, you have nothing to blame yourself for! On the contrary you have something to be proud of!"

"My dear, I am not blaming myself for anything. Yet I cannot help but think that time passes and the next term will arrive before we even realise it..."

Indeed, what's twenty-six years? One had already passed. But the future still looked bright to us. We were young, in twenty-five years we would still be strong and could do again what we once did...

Only that in our ignorant joy, we had forgotten there is a God that was judging things differently. Later, in those long years when all I did was think, I realised murder is murder, regardless of its purpose. Our predecessors in diabolic rituals had ended up in prison, on the scaffold or killing themselves. They had paid for their crimes. They had no children. God felt their seed had been cursed.

And the punishment fell upon us, too. God does not squander miracles. An ordinary accident can be his instrument, as well. And I turned into a crippled, helpless being...

Many years after that, when all hope for a cure was lost, Teddy confessed he did not think he was able to complete the sacrifices without my help. I had known it for long, but did not want to offend him by telling him that. The only solution was to turn to somebody else. It was only then that Teddy remembered of a nephew of his that had gone astray. A violent and impetuous nature, he had been imprisoned for attempted murder. We invited Joshua to live with us and Teddy started to gradually prepare him for the task before him. The new century had already arrived...

Joshua turned out to be obedient and intelligent. Everything seemed to be going in the right direction. Until the day Bishop Carrell came along.

He mentioned the appeal of numbers and series of events during lunch... He even quoted the *Necronomicon*, as one who had closely studied the work of the mad Arab. Teddy, who was convinced – as I was, after all, that he was dealing with someone who possessed the knowledge, started telling him about what we had learnt from that evil book. Fortunately, he did not get to reveal to him that he had made sacrifices to the demons coming on the other world. The bishop listened carefully and asked various questions. At night I talked with Teddy, wondering whether God had done a miracle somehow and brought us support to appease the hungry monsters that were soon to arrive.

Yet it did not work out like we hoped it would. One day after the bishop left, Teddy was forcibly committed to a health institution of the Church. He lived there in good conditions, I was allowed to spend time with him and bring him comfort with my presence but he was kept under heavy guard until his life came to an end. I later found out the decision had been made by that Carrell bastard, who, having been informed by our nephew that Teddy had gone crazy, paid us a visit to check out the information. And he had come to the conclusion that Reverend Michener had become a danger to society!

Well, they did see what a danger he was! Because they thought he was mad, mankind entered the most dreadful war ever, a true world war. And instead of five victims, millions were sacrificed to the demons from another world...

We're home. Joshua and his wife are taking my chair out of the carriage and carrying it inside. They are putting me in bed and make sure I am comfortable. I cannot say that they are bad, that they are not taking care of me. Yet it clearly shows they don't like me, they are afraid of me. I will set them free as soon as possible. I can see that my presence is an ordeal to them...

The bed is cold. It will get even colder during the night, without Teddy there to keep it warm...

My dear Teddy Bear! How cold you must be, poor you, in that moist grave!

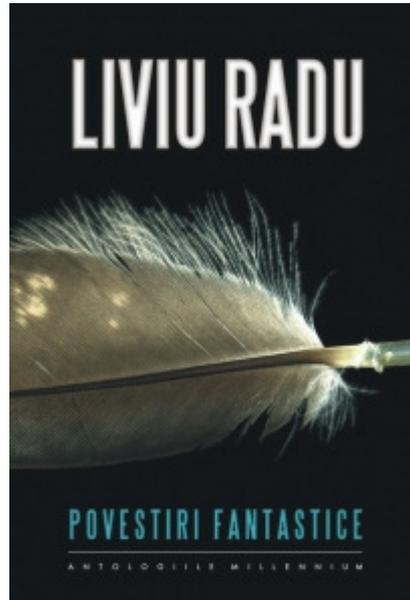
Maybe if I hadn't known all that happened so well, I would have suspected my Teddy was a sadistic man, who had kept his criminal instincts in check for as long as he could and then snapped, after having found a way to justify his vice.

Poor Teddy! He sure did butcher those creatures, as the ritual required. That was all he did. Because, the moment he had to stab his first victim, he dropped the knife and started to cry. Lucky I was there...

English translation by

Loredana Frăţilă-Cristescu

Original title : „Cifrele sunt reci, numerele-s calde”



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Novels:

“Trip-Tic” (1999), „The Option” (*Opţiunea*, 2004), „Fears” (*Spaime*, 2004), „Waldemar” (Fantasy, 2007), „The crooked blockhouse” (, *Blocul câş*, Fantasy, 2008), „Afternoon with beer and fairies” (*După-amiază cu bere şi zâne*, Fantasy, 2009).

Short stories volumes: „To Jerusalem” (*Spre Ierusalim*, 2000), „Constanţa 1919” (2000), „Babl ” (2004), „Digits are cold, numbers are warm” (*Cifrele sunt reci, numerele-s calde*, 2006), „Fantastic Stories” (*Povestiri fantastice*, 2008), „Alone on Ormuza” (*Singur pe Ormuza*, 2010).

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