

Mrs J

(Written for an epistemology and metaphysics class which had been discussing laws of nature, determinism, and the like. Someone in the class had quoted Einstein's "he doesn't play dice." And someone else had quipped "less plausible if your god isn't masculine." So this is an exercise in feminist metaphysics.)

Putting her cigar down on a plate Mrs J turned away from the table and opened the oven door. There were thirteen pies inside and she should decide when to take them out. They looked neither undercooked nor burned. A delicate business, as she explained to the other members of the valhalla poker circle. Cook it too little and it comes out bland, boring from the inside as well as uninteresting to consider. Cook it too much and it suffers, all the pockets of inspiration and joy turning to cinders. So she made each one different. A thicker crust protected the fillings of some, more cinnamon livened the apples in others, some even had a touch of lemon juice. You never knew what music, math, or romance would emerge; you never knew what misery, disappointment, or boredom either. She reached for a pie, just lightly browned and with a whisp of steam emerging from a crack in the crust, then paused and closed the door again.

"We'll see who wins this hand", she announced. "If I do I'll take that one. If Juno does I'll take the one to its left; if Freya does I'll take the one to its right, and if subtle Shiva has aces up her many sleeves I'll reach right back and take a brown and smoky one from the overheated rear of the oven." She dealt, and they began the new hand.

They had hardly gone round once when the door opened and Mr J came in. He waved his hand in front of his face, as if to clear a breathing hole in the

clouds of supernatural smoke. Mrs J knew, though. He was hiding his disapproval. Games, chance, randomness: not the old guy's style. At least he approved of baking.

The smell of ripe crust finally penetrated the cigar smoke. The round warm odor of effort and accomplishment, sulphurous hints of malice and a little tang of unsatisfied need. Mr J strode towards the oven. "When did it go in?" he growled "smells done to me." He pulled the door open and paused, amazed to see the baker's dozen instead of one.

Mrs J was prepared. "Juno, Freya, and Shiva want one each, and some for their menfolk." A warning glance at the girls, an eyebrow arched. "And I do know which one is **it**." Another look at the table: "distract him". They began to call and raise.

It wasn't going to be that easy. "They all look different, even ones right beside one another. Can't you follow the recipe?"

Mrs J turned calmly round in her chair, her face settled now. "Of course they're different, J. We wouldn't want any mistake about which is the uneaten one. It's the one in the middle with the crack and the steam. All the others are the different ones. And look at the timer; it has three minutes to go, so close the door and get back to your billiards. Dear."

Mr J sighed and turned, never equal to Mrs J alone. And this time there were four of them. He stomped off back to his predictable sport of angles and impacts.

As soon as he was gone Mrs J rose. The game was ruined anyway. They cleared away the cards, the ashtrays, and the bottles. The oven door was opened and thirteen dappled pies graced the table, each one different and each as unpredictable as the next. When they had cooled one would be chosen for exhibit. No telling which.