

# **FOUR 1985 CITIES**

a short story by

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dedicated to

those who launched the library

*(first draft, 1978)*

### **TO THE READER**

For some time now around Canton I have heard the cries for architectural preservation. I have even been asked to contribute money to the Preservation Society. In this story, I would like to present an opposing point of view.

## SCENE 1: PARIS, FRANCE

A Parisian taxi rolls quickly down the dark, curving Rue du Bac. The passengers in the car are four architects. Seated next to the driver in the front seat is the famous Arabian architect, Calib Abjet. In the back seat tightly squeezed together are the Spanish architect, Ricardo Bici, better known as "Rici" Bici<sup>1</sup>. On the opposite side of the back seat is an unknown American architect Guthrie Pone. Between these two is seated the great French architect, Monsieur Pierre Escargot.

The four architects have just finished dining in a small bistro, and toward the end of the meal wagers were made as to which of them lived in the most beautiful city in the world. As the Peugeot taxi ramps down onto the Quai, the darkness of the narrow street is behind them and the full Baroque splendor of the architectural landscape across the Seine draws their attention as the opulent buildings are reflected in that city's great river with an illumination so brilliant that it almost appears to be daylight. The city of lights captures the attention of all.

The great French architect speaks, "Mon amis you wager that your city is more beautiful than mine. But now surely your eyes can perceive the beauty of Paris, and I will gladly cancel the bets and not take your hard earned fees."

Guthrie Pone, "How's the fishin' in that stream?"

The taxi is now passing the Île de la Cité. The stately form of Notre Dame rises from its exquisite gardens.

They proceed through many small streets and broad avenues viewing the glorious historical architecture of the city. (Paris a big city; but a Parisian taxi driver can make it seem much smaller).

Next to speak is the Spanish architect, Ricardo Bici, "But, amigo mío, although I am impressed, your great city lacks the personality of our Barcelona. That city was designed

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<sup>1</sup> [I hope I don't have to explain the vernacular nickname... The real person behind the nickname may be architect, Ricardo Bofill. Bofill & Co. still appear to be going strong. His sensational piece, "kafka's castle", Barcelona, 1968 was known to Marko.]

not for rattling taxicabs and Napoleonic armies but for romantic pedestrians. You all agreed that after this tour of Paris, we would catch the first plane for the great Catalan city."

Calib interjects, "And then, together, you will see the greatest of them all, Casablanca."

Guthrie Pone, "Would y'all like to come to Canton, Ohio?"

## **SCENE II: BARCELONA, SPAIN**

The French Jet from Paris at 6:10 has already touched down at Prat de Llobregat. The architects have taken the electric train into and under the city of Barcelona, and at this moment are climbing up the stairs from the station at Paseo de Gracia. An hour ago those steps were hand-washed by street crews and there is not even a paper wrapper showing in the station. The last three steps bring their heads above the level of the concrete balustrade, and their eyes look up to what is almost a forest of trees on the broad sidewalks of the Paseo. Through the trees may be seen stately rows of Baroque and Art Nouveau architecture, in the midst of which stands Casa Milá, the undulating masterpiece in stone by Antonio Gaudí. It is almost 9 AM and the sidewalks are animated by Spaniards hurrying to work.

Ricardo Bici, arms outstretched, exclaims, "Ven vengut a Barcelona! We shall stroll down to the seaport."

Pierre Escargot, "Monsieur, a lovely walk but too many Spaniards."

The foursome walk through the hundreds of pigeons resting on the vast terrazzo paving of the Plaza de Catalunya, and start down the Ramblas under the low umbrella of thick tree branches. The numerous kiosks along the way are selling newspapers, flowers, and even monkeys and parrots.

They pass the opera house and Plaza Real. They tour the “Bario Chino” and the “Gothic Quarter” where, at many places the foursome must pass single file, as the streets narrow to a meter’s width and the flowers on balconies overhead almost join.

Tired, they finally stop for an aperitif and review the paintings at the Bar Pastis.

Guthrie Pone, “Well bless my soul...white lightning!”

Calib Abjet then speaks, “My friends, you both have interesting cities, but, in my opinion the wine is better. I have been “Gothicized” and “over-Baroqued” this day. I shall win the wager because you have not yet experienced the intriguing vibrancy of the Casbah in Casablanca. The boat sails shortly – you may see it through the trees there. The greatest treat awaits you!”

Guthrie Pone, “Does anyone want to see Canton, Ohio?”

### **SCENE III: CASABLANCA, MOROCO**

Evening finds the four architects dining on the afterdeck of “La Ciudad de Valencia”. The white ship slows as she approaches the harbor of Casablanca. They disembark and take two horse-drawn carriages to the Casbah. Once through the north gate, Arab music blends with the chatter of multitudes of vendors selling their wares. Beneath a stucco archway spanning the narrow street, a group of three exotic dancers perform. Small deeply shaded alleyways open into sunlit plazas of varying sizes and shapes.

If it were not for their leader, Calib, the others could never find their way. Now an almost impassable sidewalk steps down into a large street merchants’ plaza. Hundreds are negotiating around the vendors for anything from food to copper trays.

Calib Abjet, “Come, we shall go up to my apartment.”

The group climbs a stone stairway cantilevered from thick walls, across rooftops and up another stair. Inside a small, dark hallway where a fountain bubbles Calib opens the door of this “house”.

Guthrie Pone, “Jest like in Humphrey Bogart movies.”

Calib walks past the wicker and brass furniture, much of which hangs from the ceiling on chains. He raises a wide persiana on the wall, bathing the room in brilliant sunshine.

Calib speaks, “Monsieurs, if you will step onto my terrace you may view almost the entire city.”

From this vantage point the extraordinary forms and great continuity of the Casbah may be appreciated. The geometry is pure white and extremely varied. Looking down, the architects may readily understand the complex street system they have just left.

Calib Abjet, “It takes months for a person to become familiar with the Casbah...it is therefore not a boring plan.”

Pierre Escargot, “Monsieur, it is of interest, but I do not intend to spend many months in the midst of these Arabs. I suggest to you that I have won the bet.”

Ricardo Bici, “Senores, I suggest you exchange your francs for pesetas, for surely I have won.”

Guthrie Pone, “Does anyone want to see Canton, Ohio?”

Pierre Escargot, “Allours! Qu’est-ce?”

Calib Abjet, “Mother of dogs!”

Ricardo Bici, “Que es un Canton, Ohio?”

Guthrie Pone, “No pay off till all the cards are played. I reckon we can be there in a few hours.”

## SCENE IV: CANTON, OHIO

The transatlantic air ferry settles down vertically on a grassy plateau near Canton, and the architects pass directly into a six-passenger acrylic cab on an elevated concrete single beam. The American architect opens a small panel in the cab and punches on a keyboard to indicate the vehicle's station destination. There is a slight jolt as the cab rises vertically on a cushion of air over the beam, and its lineal induction motor engages. Slowly the people mover accelerates down the median strip of a 1970 interstate highway. Then it veers off through the park system, which has been extended radially from the hub of the city. The elevated cab, which allows almost a 360-degree view, now passes through the high tree limbs of the park. Beneath them wind bicycle trails, footpaths, and streams. Now there are no cars or trucks to be seen...the only noise is music from the cab's lyphonic sound system. The Canton Symphony, with string background and electronic ensemble, is playing a classic version of "Shortnin' Bread".

In the midst of the park, Ricardo Bici sights a building in the trees and enquires, "That building appears to be an old monument, no?"

Guthrie Pone, "Yep, it's the last piece of old architecture here."

Pierre Escargot, "It looks to be the stone fire hydrant of democracy."

Guthrie Pone, "Actually, it's a mausoleum<sup>2</sup>...buried there is a 1978 pick-up truck with camper and bumper sticker...the last automobile to drive in this city."

The elevated cab begins to ascend a little higher and as it reaches over the tree tops the first view of the city of Canton spreads dramatically across the front windshield.

For a moment no one speaks. It is Pierre Escargot that breaks the silence, "Sacre bleu!"

Calib Abjet, "Great Allah!"

Ricardo Bici, "Dios mío!"

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<sup>2</sup> McKinley Monument [ACM's footnote, and dig at the clunker in Canton  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/McKinley\\_National\\_Memorial](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/McKinley_National_Memorial)]

The view is of a spectacular geometry of gleaming pure-white solids, and extraordinary sloping planes of semi-transparencies. The park reaches before them intertwining between and entering into the buildings themselves.

Some of the structures appear almost as space age pyramids, which allows sunlight to completely envelop each building.

As they approach closer, a panel opens automatically in the side of the first structure, and the quiet transport cab penetrates the building. At first there seems to be little change of scenery. Trees are growing within, and gardens of farm crops step upward on broad steps between open platforms of office areas. Business people may be seen working all over.

Natural light and sunshine in the interior are modulated by turning vanes of solar energy collectors on the sloping, southern façade.

Pierre Escargot, "Monsieur, it is a paradise!"

Ricardo Bici, "Toma el dinero."

A similar panel on the opposite side opens, and again, the cab is outside.

Guthrie Pone, "That was an office building. Each building provides its own energy and enough food for us to make it through the winter. We call these "universal buildings" because the basic concept may be repeated regardless of use."

A striking sight now appears. High above the architects, a tower rises surmounted by an iridescent, metallic, blue sphere. Below them between the buildings, the land may be seen stepping downward to lower outdoor plateaus. Workmen appear to be enjoying their lunches.

Ricardo Bici, "Y esto?"

Guthrie Pone, "Beneath us on the lower level intermingled with the park system are located the great factories of Canton, Ohio. On that tower within the sphere is the power source for them and the city. Microwave energy is received from outer space on those

panels, but the tower also contains a hydrogen engine for backup power requiring extreme heat.”

Pierre Escargot, “Monsieur, it does not pollute?”

Guthrie Pone, “Its only emission is water which is used to irrigate the gardens below those trees around us.”

Ricardo Bici, “And the extraordinary building over there? What crops do they grow within?”

Guthrie Pone, “That’s our city hall, and right now you can see them harvesting a crop of corn.”

Calib Abjet, “Like a cultured pearl. The city is man controlled nature...and the building over there?”

Guthrie Pone, “That is our community’s library. The tower you see on the building is capable of disseminating information from a host of sources and into the home of anyone in the community. Even school is taught over the air waves from its infinite resources.”

Ricardo Bici, “Senor, I concur with my colleagues that your city has won the bet. But how were your citizens able to create this heave with such obstacles as preservation societies?”

Guthrie Pone, “Well, back in ’79 they was all down on East Tuscarawas Street next to an historical tavern studying the possibilities of preserving 1918 manhole coverings, when the whole tavern collapsed around them.”<sup>3</sup>

Pierre Escargot, “Bon ami, I hope they were not hurt!”

Guthrie Pone, “Nope, they hadn’t been in the bar yet.”

Calib Abjet, “But, my friend, you had poor emulations of European architecture here, what happened to things like the old library?”

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<sup>3</sup> [may refer to [Bender’s](http://www.bendersrestaurant.com/history.html) <http://www.bendersrestaurant.com/history.html>]

Guthrie Pone, “We made a great deal on that. A Greek shipping tycoon came over, dismantled it completely, took it back to Greece, and re-erected it as a playhouse for his daughter.”

The cab continues passing over and occasionally through the extraordinary geometry. It is like a capsule circulating through a giant sculpture. Near the south side of the city’s core, the people-mover begins to descend toward a platform station floating on a giant lagoon. Fantastic double-hulled ships are moored nearby. Great rigid vanes above the ship’s hulls are adjustable for wind propulsion. The cab comes to a quiet stop, and the architects exit and seat themselves at an outdoor café before the yacht club.

Pierre Escargot, “How can these boats sail in this landlocked countryside?”

Guthrie Pone, “Well, back in the seventies during the energy crises, we remembered that the cheapest method of moving anything is by water. We had old existing canals and by renovating and widening the system, Canton now is a seaport...you can sail to Florida from your front door.”

Ricardo Bici, “But your extreme winters?”

Guthrie Pone, “The protective railing you see along the side of the canals is also a solar heat collector with just enough capacity to prevent the water from freezing. It continues along the shipping channels of the Great Lakes.”

Calib Abjet, “This is a great occasion. Let us celebrate with a bottle of wine.”

Guthrie Pone, “Waiter, a bottle of Court 1825.”

Pierre Escargot, “That is the year, Monsieur?”

Guthrie Pone, “Nope, that’s the address of the building where the grapes were grown.”

Pierre Escargot raises his glass in a toast, “Long live American creativity!”

Ricardo Bici, “Viva el futuro!”

Calib Abjet, "To Canton!"

Guthrie Pone, "Here's lookin' at you."

