

## from *Pattern Makers*

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### Tiré de 'Pattern Makers'

*Dans cet extrait tiré d'un roman, Jane, qui vit dans sa carapace de tortue, et Yvonne, qui a abandonné le frigo dans lequel elle vivait chez elle, se réveillent toutes deux dans une grotte. Après un échange enjoué et excité sur le temps et le manque de temps dans leur situation présente, elles voyagent ensemble dans un paysage désert où elles sont arrêtées par une phalange de réfrigérateurs. Les lumières et le bourdonnement rassurant de leur chef donnent à Yvonne qu'ils attirent l'envie de laisser Jane et de grimper à l'intérieur mais une grosse araignée qui leur tenait compagnie s'enfuit avec Yvonne. Jane protège leur fuite de sa carapace en faisant tomber le frigo, ce qui l'immobilise.*

*When Yvonne climbs out of her fridge in which she's been living, the fridge and the house disappear. As she trudges through the desert, she is followed by a very large hairy spider and then meets Jane, a 250 pound sea turtle, in an oasis. By now Jane is becoming increasingly suspicious that their landscape is Yvonne's creation.*

When they awakened it was light again. The spider sat on the ledge outside, its back legs folded, front extended, watching Yvonne, waiting. How close had it crawled to her, how long had it been watching her? Sleep was so private, she'd never thought it fair to watch a person sleep – 'Time to get going,' she said to Jane.

Jane groaned. 'Every part of me hurts, even my shell. I wouldn't have believed a shell could hurt.'

'You'll limber up. My legs don't hurt today.'

Jane thought Yvonne uncompassionate, glared as she rotated laboriously toward the doorway. Yvonne saw the look, returned a small smile of amused sympathy.

'Good morning, Spider, you look like you want us to get going – is it morning?' Jane asked Yvonne. 'What time is it?'

'Seven-thirty.'

'That's the time it was last night. You're right about your watch not working.'

Yvonne led the way down from the cave, glanced back at it – a nice cave, sorry to be leaving. 'What time would you like it to be, Jane?'

'Bed time.' She laughed, then groaned.

'Bad time?'

'No, I said bed time – oh. Wrong time.'

'Over time.' Yvonne laughed.

'Out of time – that's what we are,' Jane said, 'out of the time of your watch, anyway. The sun's more like noon – again.'

'Out of time in the other sense, too? Let's hurry, let's get out of this desert.'

Jane waddled a fraction faster. 'Maybe there isn't an *out*. Maybe it goes on forever.'

'Don't say that!' Yvonne's tone was sharp. Her fear as well. No abysses just now; ridges, dunes, gulleys, and blowing sand.

'I'm amazed there's so much desert. You'd think we'd hit some mountains or the ocean soon. Where did it all come from?' Jane looked up at Yvonne. 'Did *you* make it up and we're going around in circles?'

'What would you make up a desert for?' Yvonne shoved her hands in her pockets, found a loosened thread, rolled it between her fingers as if rolling up her irritation. Jane was so suspicious, so – complaining. 'We're not going around in circles because we pass different things. You're too close to the ground – your view is limited. We haven't seen that before.' She pointed to a rectangular, box-like object – a long, flat hill perhaps, perhaps a ridge or mesa.

'Maybe not that one,' Jane conceded, 'but the topography does have a repetitious similarity. Except for a notable lack of oases. Which, my dear, you *assumed* we'd find.'

Yvonne made an exasperated tongue click. 'Don't rub it in.'

'I'd like to rub it out. The desert.' Yvonne thought of the Pink Pearl eraser she'd left behind, but Jane meant the sand in eyes, her nostrils, and her mouth. She tried to spit. 'Would you please rinse me off.' Yvonne did, had a drink as well.

When Jane could see again, she said, 'I take back what I said about

circles, and we must be making some headway – that hill is much closer now.'

Their path, which they defined by walking on their shadows, was angling them toward the hill or ridge, so now instead of its being to their right, it was ahead of them, and they would pass by its farthest corner. 'At least we won't have to climb it,' Jane said, noting its change in position.

'We must have speeded up. It's a lot closer suddenly.' Yvonne thrilled: excitement.

They saw divisions now in the perpendicular plane of the ridge, vertical lines or cracks, and the occasional horizontal one. Beside each crack something shone, or reflected the sunlight, and their eyes hurt in the brightness of it. They stared at the ground, lifting their heads only to check their progress, Yvonne shading her eyes as she did so.

Now for each step she and Jane took toward the ridge, it seemed to have moved three steps toward them.

As the distance between them and the ridge narrowed, the wind ripples and heaves in the sand flattened into some sort of pattern: wallpaper or floor tiles or a picture of blown sand. It looked bumpy but felt smooth and Jane slithered slightly faster. 'What's going on here?' Her voice high with sudden fear.

Now they were one hundred metres away, now fifty, and now they saw it was not a ridge –

Yvonne took another step, dragged her foot, stopped. Her lips parted, she breathed in rapturously, let it puff out. 'Fridges,' she formed, but only the fragment of a whisper escaped.

'Oh god! No!' Jane retracted every bit of herself so fast her shell bumped on the ground. She was awash with terror, it was flooding inside her shell, drowning her, she couldn't move, couldn't look – they'd walked toward these refrigerators, should have gone the other way – so many, an army, lined up with sides abutting, the sun reflecting off each handle, each nameplate. They'd never get away – *fridges* – *Yvonne! Oh No!* Jane peered out.

Yvonne had drifted ahead of Jane. Between her and the appliances the sand rose in wafts and swirls, all brightly coloured. The air was filled with a low humming that hurt Jane's ears, but also compelled her to listen.

One refrigerator lurched forward with a four-cornered swaggering motion, and Jane shivered at its menace. Didn't Yvonne see it? What

was she doing? The refrigerator's door swung open, revealing a blue interior. Now a bronze fridge with separate freezer compartment staggered forward, and then a very old, round-cornered one, its enamel yellow with age.

Yvonne took a step, another step. The coloured swirls of sand parted in front of her to make a path, and the humming intensified. The first fridge lurched closer, its door opened more, exposing egg racks, butter dish, ice cube trays, shelves neatly positioned. Its light was on, a glow from the rear, and the control dial almost shone, its very roundness emphasizing the strict angularity of every other line.

'Yvonne! Stop! Come back! Don't go any closer! They'll kill you!' The humming drum-rolled lower, more loudly, steadily, as the line of fridges behind the first three tramped toward Yvonne. Jane extended her legs and flipped forward as fast as she could, cursing her shell, the fridges, Yvonne, cursing.

At Jane's voice, Yvonne turned somnambulant. Her slightly parted lips were curved in a small smile, and around her eyes were rapture, adoration, excitement. She raised her hand, palm outward, waved it twice, either a pat or a benediction. 'It's all right, they've come for me, they want me, see how they're shining? We belong together. Never should have left.'

Jane blinked with doubt, yet was soothed by Yvonne's tone, her conviction, compelled to believe her almost against her will. She looked toward the lead refrigerator now three metres away, a *fridge*, so innocuous, so bland, so familiar, in a desert promising relief from the glaring sun, the dry, gritty sand. Maybe there'd be one for her as well.

The light shifted for a micro-second, an invisible cloud in the way of the sun – or perhaps Jane blinked again – and she saw the colours fade out of the sand, saw the hard, cold, unyielding enamel of the ranks behind the three foremost fridges, saw the old, round-cornered one shudder, open its door wider in a malevolent grin. Everything was as before, except the shudder skipped over the sand and into her shell. She was shaking, trembling, cold herself.

'No! Stop! You'll be trapped forever – you'll die! Yvonne! You said you'd find me the ocean! Come back! Now! Please!'

But Yvonne took another step toward the fridge whose door swung wide in welcome.

'Oh Yvonne –' Jane started to cry. Couldn't do anything, what could a turtle do? Couldn't open a fridge door – they'd take Yvonne away,

she'd never see her again – Alone. She'd be alone in the desert, they'd both die. 'Yvonne –!'

A scabbling, scuffling noise behind Jane, beside Jane. Thought it was another fridge, pulled in her legs and neck. Panic screamed her. But the scabbling continued past her and the spider reached Yvonne. Grabbed her around the thighs with its two front legs, bit its mouth down on her shirt. Yvonne's scream echoed Jane's as the spider pulled her away, swung her around and threw her across its back. It staggered under her weight, and her dangling arms and legs obscured the spider from Jane's view. The refrigerator's light dimmed, its door half closed, and it lurched toward them. But the spider was scabbling away, Yvonne bouncing on its back, still screaming.

Jane slithered nearer to the refrigerators, drew in her head, closed all her apertures, held her breath. A mighty crunch that reverberated even in her teeth, a thud, and shock of pain. Jane gasped, dimly registering Yvonne's screams fading in the distance. She opened her eyes and peered around. The fridge had toppled over her, lay on its side in the sand, hinges broken so its door was askew. She pulled her head in again, wished she could wipe the tears that tickled her face, and waited for the rest of the attack, waited for her shell to be cracked by the fridges' heavy corners, waited to become a vulnerable, naked pulp, waited –

Silence. Her fatigued muscles relaxed. She forced them tense again. Silence. She opened her eyes, peered out. The lead fridge still lay in the sand, a discarded, used appliance. The others had turned and were marching back the way they'd come. Only the old one lingered, its humming faint and mournful; soon it too turned to join the battalion. Jane watched them gain distance, shrink, again close up and become only a desert ridge. She looked in the opposite direction: Yvonne and the spider a bump on the horizon.

Jane hurt all over. She'd be a mass of bruises – this was too much, deserts, *fridges*, of all things. She sniffed, wiped the tears off her cheeks with her flipper, found herself looking at it, mottled grey-green liver spots, had she aged, being a turtle? She extended and spread her fingers – webbing between each one, and no thumb, but she'd learned to hold her eyebrow pencil between the first and second finger. She'd awakened to discover she was a turtle, and so she wanted to be a turtle, didn't she? Find other turtles? Right. The ocean. Right.

And then it hit her, as hard as the fridge: she was alone.