

# matters familiar



e. g. fabricant

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## **DEDICATION**

For Frank and Betty, for the gifts of life and love—theirs,  
mine, and ours—and  
For M. A.; BeeEss; Tomiss; Jerome; J. L.; Fuffy; and The  
Brat, for helping me fill in the blanks.

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## 8 Meridian



Light came over him, slow, dappled, and indistinct.

It was the gauze that bordered his eyes thickly, along with a single layer draped loosely over them, which accounted for the lack of luminary definition. It seemed the strongest source was to his left. He turned in that direction; hot pain shot from his trapezoids through the cords in his neck to his temples. Its shock tensed him and the exertion, combined with his drugged and weakened state, relaxed him just as abruptly.

“Brace own yuh nehck.”

Startled, he tried to focus on the area from which the words had bolted, somewhere just above and beyond his feet. His pupils fought with the cotton web, laboring to make out the high-contrast details of the figure seated against the wall. *Hat?* As he groped for more data within the “thing-on-top-of-human” concept, he catalogued its details. Construction: textured substance, dark lines cross-hatched against general gray; protuberance above...*face?* Its rear half was en

circled by a loose flap tied up into the top-center.

Below the face, a garment similar in coloration but less severely textured covered the upper limbs; the center torso was interrupted by a dark, heavy panel supported by metal clasps and thin straps of the same fabric as the panel. Some kind of framed-glass object was partially hidden by a stitched-on enclosure. The bed rail behind his feet masked everything below there. His attention drifted upward. Wide dark eyes shone beneath full, angled brows as light as the gauze framing them, against darker, deeply lined leather. The grizzle of high contrast mustache and stubble and a halo of thick hair hugging the head under the hat completed the picture. The lips parted and a tongue wagged out of the darkness between rows of brilliant ivory.

“Thet aron thang keep yuh head fum toinin’ round. Much payn?”

*I...don't...understand.* He signaled an extremity and a...*hand?*...appeared before his face. He turned it slowly, wiggling its fleshy digits arrhythmically. *Left?* Through them he saw the figure glance in that direction and rise abruptly. Pressed into its thick middle was a zippered bag, its dual handles looped around hands and wrists for...*why?* He tried to track the movement but another stab of pain put his lights out.

The sensations of warm breath and cool taps against the gauze at his temples revived him. His eyelids fluttered. He started and recoiled slightly until he managed to focus on a pair of rich umber irises and black pupils; they receded, joined by soft angular facial bones and a full smile.

“Don’t pay him no mind; he’s crazy.” She arose from his side, dark hair falling away from her bosom. The starched cap distracted him until she straightened fully; he traced her from her shimmering hairline to

her slender waist. Ganglia came to pleasing life in the center of his body, giving him confidence that at least one piece had been added back to his puzzle.

“Can you talk yet?”

*Talk?*

She touched his barely exposed lips gently. That sensation activated another sector and he heard himself rasping. She tapped his lips again and wagged a finger. He stopped.

“That’s all right; let’s not rush it. I know you’re in a lot of pain.” He watched her turn a translucent dial on a snake of tubing above his head. She smiled broadly again and a warmth bathed his sharpened present. *Hopeful?*

“You rest now.” She placed two fingers against his wrist and looked at the metallic object on her own. She turned and he followed the rhythm of gluteals undulating beneath her uniform skirt; his pubic nerve endings fired again. After she was gone, he turned away and wallowed in this state of satisfied confusion until the edges bled away into narcotized slumber.



Another specter came into his focus—different. The effect was startling, since it became apparent to him that the gauze had been removed. Her hair was shiny black too, but there was no cap and her face, while pleasant enough, was broader with flatter features. He felt her rough, strong fingers creep past his cheekbones and down the sides of his neck. Her palms slid across his shoulders, their warmth penetrating the gown; she monitored his eyes and facial muscles for sensation. She seemed satisfied. She arose and receded toward his feet, gently uncovering them. He lifted his head slightly to watch and was surprised, happily—no pain. His range of motion told him that

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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