



# The Felicity Maker

**I**t was a dark and stormy night outside the Weatherdome. A steady downpour of rain fell on the reverse side of a clear, sunny day. The rain slid smoothly to the bottom of the Weatherdome and was collected and purified for the use of the city within. Occasionally, lightning struck, and an electric sheen appeared on the Weatherdome. Energy traveled to the top of the hemisphere and was sent through the Weatherdome to power the sun within. The excess went through wires into the Administrative Sector, the Industrial Sector, the Felicity Sector, and finally to Thirty-first Street of the Residential Sector and into the home of George and Margaret Henderson.

The Hendersons' street number in the Residential Sector was thirty-one, but it was actually only the thirtieth. Thirteenth Street had been eliminated long ago due to complaints of unluckiness. Unluckiness, it had been argued, established an unfavorable reputation, and this could only diminish the happiness of the street's residents. So Thirteenth Street had been changed to Fourteenth Street, Fourteenth to Fifteenth, and Thirtieth to Thirty-first. But all this had occurred before anyone could remember. And in any case, street names were not what was on George Henderson's mind.

George was in the comfort of his Comfort Chair, thinking about birthdays. It was, after all, the twins' birthday today. They would be home from their Felicity Sector schooling in fewer than ten minutes.

George stopped thinking. It would be an awful shame to get up from his Comfort Chair; it was one of the many pleasures of life inside the Weatherdome. Its ultra-padded covering provided automatic rocking, massaging, and optimal coil resistance. Besides, the birthday preparations would be handled through computed administrative procedure. The twins would receive a random gift to stimulate felicity, as they had for the past twelve years, twelve months, and twelve days. There was no telling how old they really were, for George and Margaret both were the same age as the twins. The very thought of old age had a way of depressing residents of the Weatherdome, and to stop counting after the number twelve seemed as good a time as any.

It was at that moment in George Henderson's dormant thought process that Margaret and the twins entered through separate doors. George glanced at his watch, which was always the right tightness and never left red imprints of the wristband on his wrist. It was twelve fifty-nine: time to cycle back to one.

"Happy birthday, Jennifer!" exclaimed George in the extremely felicitous tone with which he always spoke. "Happy birthday, Thomas! Happy birthday,

By Dan Kahn



Margaret!"

They all echoed his tone to each other and to him. It was, after all, everyone's birthday today. Just like yesterday.

Without further ado, they proceeded from the spacious living room where most of their interactions occurred to the special gift room with festive gift wrapping for wallpaper. With felicitous anticipation, they reached into their respective present boxes. George had received a set of several attractive and unique stamps to complement his collection. No one knew what purpose a stamp held, but the collecting of stamps was deemed by all to be a safe and felicitous hobby. Margaret's hand met with a bouquet of dew-covered white roses. Jennifer sighed. She had received only a deluxe box of imported chocolates. Again. Had she not been a tiny bit disappointed and had she searched the box, she would have found no origin of importation anywhere on it. Thomas's eyes grew wide as he beheld a long green-and-yellow tube. The Hendersons had no term to describe and no appropriate felicitous feeling to accompany this strange tube with the words "Super Soaker" displayed prominently in a large, explosive font.

Thomas had barely taken hold of the thing when a hole appeared in the center of the gift-wrapped ceiling. A tractor beam emerged and shuttled the troublesome object to the confiscation room, where a large incinerator pit lay waiting. After a few minutes, the incident was replaced in their minds for the time being by more felicitous thoughts.

It was nine-fourteen in the evening. The thunderstorm on the outside had finally ceased one minute ago, at nine-twelve. The sun was directly overhead, as it had always been, and no clouds could be seen in the bright blue sky. And speaking of weather, Margaret Henderson was, at that moment, at the library in the Felicity Sector. She was looking for a book on the weather.

"Where might I find the meteorology section?" she inquired of a library clerk who looked particularly good-tempered on this fine sunny evening.

"Modern or ancient?" asked the clerk, smiling.

"I don't know. How about ancient? Which would you advise?"

"I'll write down both number codes for you," replied the clerk resolutely.

"I beg your pardon? Both number codes?" asked Margaret, befuddled at the slip of paper she had just been handed.

"Yes, both books. Modern and ancient meteorology."

Margaret broke off the chat and set about looking up the books. The chat had been bordering on making her appear stupid, and that would have been most infelicitous.

Of course, there were only two books in the ten-story library on meteorology. What a narrow, boring topic it was! But whatever her motives, she was now committed.

Margaret took the elevator to the third floor, where the modern meteorology book was located. She found the number in no time. Opening the very slight volume, she beheld three incomplete sentences on the only page.

Sunny. Clear skies. Seventy to seventy-three degrees.

Now Margaret Henderson was truly puzzled. Why had she chosen meteorology, of all topics? And what had possessed her to look up modern meteorology? Any child knew that it was always sunny with clear skies, and with highs and lows from seventy-three to seventy degrees Fahrenheit. Shrugging off these troublesome thoughts that were bound to lead to infelicity, she again boarded the elevator and instructed it to go to the ninth floor.

The ancient meteorology book was as large as the modern one was small. She decided to check it out, pressing the button labeled "C" that was found on the back of all library books. Instantly, an identical book appeared next to the original. She picked it up and walked home.

The walk was not necessary, but it was very pleasant in the sunny, seventy-degree weather. She was thinking of children at that moment. The novelty of twins was finally wearing off and she was considering the appeal of triplets. Not three new children, obviously, but two more Jennifers. She had agreed with George long ago that their future children should be mainly girls. Triplets would make life so much more interesting. This time, she would take the easy-install option. Custom install could be so bothersome, after all. Why should she and George waste time customizing their new children—as they had with the first two—when easy install could pack in all the memories and experiences

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instantly? She would definitely bring this up with George later that night, or the next day—whenever they decided to retire.

George and the twins were in the yard when Margaret returned home. They had spread a red-and-white checkered tablecloth on the ground and waited for Margaret before opening the mysterious picnic basket which had been randomly selected from a host of meals. The twins now tore into the basket with ravenous hunger. It con-



tained four quite ordinary slices of mega-chocolate cheesecake, which had been refined and fortified years earlier to contain all essential nutrients but retain its unhealthy taste. Margaret joined them, and they ate their cheesecake in silence.

## The Hendersons had no felicitous feelings to accompany this strange tube with the words “Super Soaker” displayed in a large, explosive font.

Silence, as always, bred dormancy, which bred drowsiness, and soon they had all fallen asleep where they sat.

The visual scanning mechanism of the surveillance cameras noticed the opportunity, and the brain-wave probing mechanism confirmed it. It was not often that such an opportunity arose, where all witnesses to a relic of the Infelicitous Ages had fallen asleep simultaneously on the same lawn. Such opportunities were usually generated, as they so rarely occurred naturally.

The opportunity was sent through the wiring immediately. It passed down Thirty-first Street and the Residential Sector, went straight through the Felicity and Industrial Sectors, and proceeded cautiously into the Administrative Sector. Even such abstract things as opportunities had to be cautious inside the Administrative Sector. Felicity was its goal, but not its means of achievement. The opportunity came to rest with hundreds like it inside a computer that was not the only one of its kind. This wealth of opportunity was housed in a nondescript, windowless skyscraper and overseen by Martin.

After seventeen years, Martin could say in all honesty (although it would stimulate no felicity in others to boast so) that he was good at what he did. He had just returned from correcting the faulty memories of a meddlesome youngster who had been sure she had seen graffiti in a back alley of the Industrial Sector. Even with the sector’s reputation for lagging behind the times, such evidence of the Infelicitous Ages was unheard of. Martin found it intriguing that however many steps were taken to ensure the grip of felicity on the masses, something always slipped through. Anyhow, the little girl now realized how very wrong she had been. She had not seen any evidence of violence or vandalism or vulgarity. No, Martin corrected himself. She had not realized anything. She would go about her felicitous existence as though nothing had ever happened. What a thankless job, working for the Department of Opportunity!

The next case involved some faulty technology in the Department of Birthdays. He would speak to his superiors about that. The encryption employed by the Department of Birthdays and sent to the Industrial Sector had been created after the Infelicitous Ages. Still, one recipient had received a greeting concerning old age and drooping body parts. Yes, it really was odd how these things kept slipping through.

Martin would finish this next case and have lunch. It would be an early lunch, before midnight, but this case would be a quick one. Not nearly as difficult as the graffiti. With all luck, those poor slumbering fools would not have the slightest idea about the original purpose of the “long green tube.”

Thomas popped one eye open. It was a beautiful sunny morning, or was it still night? He glanced at his watch. No, it was morning—quite late, in fact. They had slept past four. But time didn’t concern Thomas Henderson, for he was feeling more felicitous than he had in months. He leapt up and roused the others.

The picnic basket had been mysteriously refilled during the night and now contained chocolate éclairs. Thomas ate his breakfast hurriedly, as he professed desire to be off to school. Jennifer declined to make the journey with him, but Felicity Sector schooling had no time constraints; students came and went as they pleased.

Thomas proceeded in andante fashion down the street. He was unencumbered, as usual. Whatever materials he required for learning would be provided in the



### Shakespeare

Shakespeare, did you live in the sea?  
The beauty of the salty, unsmooth waves is yours  
beating roaring rhythms on the shore  
where tides have come and gone.

I am caught by your waters  
that shape their path through stone.  
The wind drives them into a hundred  
tumbling, hurtling curls of thought.

Shakespeare, were you ever haunted by a storm?  
Or did you laugh with calm lapping,  
flowing with a foamy lightness,  
leaving a crescent imprint on my sand?

—Joanna Hearne,  
Tenth grade, Lincoln Park High School,  
Chicago, Illinois



Felicity Sector.

The Felicity Sector boundary was clearly marked: it was where the colors became freer. It was not uncommon to see a scrambled rainbow of buildings on any given block in the Felicity Sector. Another sign of the change was the presence of more andante students, wearing felicitous smiles.

One particular student caught Thomas's eye on this particular morning. The girl was several years his junior, and looked away when she sensed Thomas's gaze. For some reason, she reminded him of something that, for one reason or another, lingered at the back of his mind and refused to come out.

Intrigued, he made his way through the throng of students that was thickening as it approached the school, but by the time he got to her location, she had wandered off. He banished the thought from his mind.

The schoolhouse, being the only one of its kind inside the Weatherdome, was a far shot from the one-room schoolhouses common to the Infelicitous Ages. It was a good thirty stories high, with floors separated by topic.

Entering a small elevator (there were several dozen), he turned to find the girl making her way toward him. He held the elevator long enough for her to board, then quickly pressed the "close door" button.

"What floor?" he asked her simply. As he said the words, his eyes locked with hers, and he noticed that, while gleaming brightly in a felicitous manner, her eyes seemed to portray a felicity that was only superficial. He had never heard of an unhappy person before, so he quickly discarded that laughable prospect as a trick of the dim elevator lighting.

"Writing," she replied.

"What a coincidence," he said, lying. He had been

The teacher was a hologram in the center of the ring that faced all angles. It would show any images required, and used a built-in voice that had been designed to be both soothing and engaging.

Thomas and the girl took adjacent Comfort Chairs and waited for the ring to fill up with students. As the roll

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neared completion, the hologram in the center began to whirl.

"Writing is a most rewarding pastime when carried out in a selectively felicitous manner," said the voice. The hologram flashed images of smiling children writing felicitous literature.

"Today we will be studying a technique called 'remembrance'. Instead of recording present or future felicity, I want you all to record some felicitous events that occurred yesterday." Words appeared on the hologram as the computer went about its writing. No one was excused from the assignment, as doing so would diminish fairness and felicity.

What felicitous events had happened to Thomas on the previous day? He had been cleverly diverted for many school hours, eaten several deliciously unhealthy-tasting meals, and fallen into a blissfully dreamless sleep on the sunny lawn. All were pleasant thoughts, and Thomas began setting them on paper. None tarried in their instantaneous flow to the monitor in front of him, save one: his birthday gift.

After fifteen seconds, everyone had finished. Writing was a carefully honed skill that involved none of the frilly philosophical and depressing psychological analyses that covered thousands of pages in the Infelicitous Ages.

It was then time to critique.

The hologram displayed each student's entry individually, and students were allowed five seconds in which to offer their input. The hologram always gave the form response, "Your writing is an inspirational work of felicity worthy of your pride." The five seconds was merely formality, as the eloquence of the computer summed up all aspects of the work.

Thomas experienced his second bout with the concept of infelicity when the girl's writing was displayed on the

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planning on spending the day in the clever-diversions section of the felicity-break floor, but he punched the writing button anyway. The elevator surveillance cameras detected his lie amongst other transactions, and sent the information along to the Administrative Sector for storage.

The writing floor was the same as it had always been, with its Comfort Chairs behind a ring of student desks.



hologram. It was a blank page. The hologram delivered its form response and quickly shifted to the next entry, a piece on an especially felicitous birthday, but the girl appeared visibly shaken and entirely infelicitous at her failure of recollection. The last time Thomas saw her was the next day, when she wore a broad smile and was obviously oblivious to the previous day's discontent.

## **Martin found it intriguing that however many steps were taken to ensure the grip of felicity on the masses, something always slipped through.**

It was unfair. How could Jennifer Henderson be expected to share her living space with two new siblings? One would have been one too many... but two? It was all the fault of her materially insecure mother and her indecisive, incompetent father.

Her grumbling was bordering on infelicity, so she ate a pint of ice cream and closed the inner debate. There was no use disturbing herself; her parents made their own decisions without her input. Besides, the siblings were already on their way. In fact, they had just arrived.

They were late—three seconds past the five-minute guaranteed delivery. She would make sure her parents claimed rightful compensation for the injustice.

"Mother! Father! We're home!" chorused the new twins in a naively felicitous way.

Jennifer decided on felicitous courtesy and entered the living room, where Thomas and her parents had been waiting for five minutes and three seconds. She took a seat in a Comfort Chair and tried to establish an air of superiority.

The new twins entered, equipped with their own airs of superiority that had been easy-installed several minutes earlier. They had reason to be every bit as snooty as their clone, who had spent twelve years, twelve months, and twelve days being custom-installed; the new twins had accomplished all that and possibly more in just five minutes and three seconds.

"Jennifer! Jennifer!" exclaimed Margaret. Six eyes turned toward her, but she chose not to notice. "How felicitous to see you! I dare say you were worth every bit of the extra three-second wait!"

The easy-installed twins both gave their parents a hug and sat down in the two new Comfort Chairs that had

been delivered after Margaret placed the order for the twins. They took their seats in the same tired, relieved fashion as the custom-installed twins, a triumph of modern programming which helped ease the transition anxiety of the parents.

"I have planned a relaxing evening at the Felicity Sector Circus for tonight," burst out Margaret, eager to finalize and smooth over the filial transition. "I hope you four can put aside your petty installment differences."

All professed desire to attend and a lack of interest in perpetuating lines of installment distinction, but the custom-installed Jennifer secretly could think of no more pleasing fate than the removal of these impostors.

Martin did not like to be kept waiting, but this special circumstance required his patience. He had been waiting over three hours for the Felicity Maker, a clear indication of the balance of power between the two. Martin felt especially privileged because (in his own mind) he was not being summoned; he had requested the meeting personally because he felt that his carefully worked-out conclusion transcended normal protocol in which he would forward all information to the next level of power in the Department of Opportunity. After all his extensive following of opportunities, he had come to the conclusion that all these infelicities slipping through were the result of a massive computer encryption error which would require urgent addressing.

"Enter!" said a booming voice.

## **Writing was a carefully honed skill that involved none of the frilly philosophical and depressing psychological analyses of the Infelicitous Ages.**

Martin wasted no time in jumping out of his non-Comfort chair and scurrying through the great gold doors, where he immediately prostrated himself at the foot of a solid-gold table.

At the head of the table sat an ageless man. Through daily rejuvenation sessions he had managed the longest benevolent reign in all history—some two hundred-odd years. Rejuvenation, although a top priority during the Felicity Maker's natural life span, was withheld from the



general public for fear of overpopulation. The general public's engineered ignorance of mathematics—aside from the basic reading of street numbers and clocks—would ensure felicity in the case of overpopulation, but (luckily) the Felicity Maker had been educated in the Infelicitous Ages. He alone had foreseen the trouble math might cause in the future. The formula for the continuance of a benevolent reign required that all a person's views be changeable for a felicitous outcome. As long as the public had no knowledge that one times one makes one, the Felicity Maker could make the product two or zero without diminishing greater felicity.

"Martin, I have been hearing great things about you," began the Felicity Maker in a tone Martin decided harbored distinct ominousness. "I have watched your career for a very long time, ever since you were easy-installed thirty-nine—I'm sorry, twelve years, twelve months, and twelve days ago. You have become very proficient at your work in the Department of Opportunity. Tell me ... do you enjoy your work?"

"Yes, Felicity Maker," intoned Martin, without raising his head. "Serving the greater felicity in general and the Department of Opportunity in particular gives me great pleasure."

The Felicity Maker nodded. "And would you continue to do so?"

## Congratulations

I guess I should say  
Congratulations.  
You're the only guy who's ever made me feel  
Like a week-old filly  
I saw in a paddock  
With oversized, knobby knees  
And tiny pointed hooves  
A short neck  
And donkey ears  
Who couldn't get her feet in line.  
So all her spindly legs went  
Every which way  
Except forward.  
She wobbled along  
Trying to coordinate that ungainly body,  
To find a rhythm in her steps,  
And I wondered if she was embarrassed  
That the other foals could run and jump  
While she was still learning to dance.

—Jennifer Bedell,  
Twelfth grade, Blue Valley High School,  
Stilwell, Kansas

"Oh, yes!" said Martin without reservation. "Nothing would be more felicitous!"

"I shall respect your wishes then."

Martin ventured a glance at the omnipotent figure at the head of the table. Could it be that he had detected a hint of tiredness in that ageless and indefatigable voice? For one instant he became the first in many years to meet eyes with the peculiar man at the head of the table who, inside

**“The secret that must never travel beyond this room is that absolute felicity is an impossibility.”**

the Weatherdome, was the very essence of omnipotence. And what he perceived in those horrible, deep black eyes shocked him.

"Yes, Martin," began the Felicity Maker in a soft, chilled voice, shifting his gaze to the golden table. "I know why you are here. Your half-baked theory is not entirely correct."

There was a long, awkward pause. Martin could hear the Felicity Maker sighing and softly moaning, as if deliberating a great risk. This went on for several unbearable minutes, and then his pains were rewarded by more talk.

"I am going to do something to you that I have never done to anyone before, Martin: I am going to confide a great secret in you. Your theory is partly correct. There is a glitch of sorts, enabling all sorts of minor infelicities to fall through. But the cause of this glitch is no encryption error and exists despite two centuries of attempted eradication. The secret that must never travel beyond this room is that absolute felicity is an impossibility."

The Felicity Maker looked at Martin to see what seismic impact this statement was having on him. Martin was guarding his thoughts very well, but his mental fortresses were no match for the technological ingenuity of the surveillance cameras. The Felicity Maker knew he had confirmed one of Martin's darkest fears.

"Oh, certainly," he went on in a more casual tone, "certainly we may work toward the goal of absolute felicity—as we have done for many years. We have managed to achieve perhaps 99.9 percent felicity, thanks to the constant vigilance of the Department of Opportunity and constant innovations in the social departments and Felicity Sector. In another hundred years, perhaps we will have 99.999 percent felicity, but we will never achieve 100 percent, however close we may come. Forgive me for using mathematical terms, but am I not correct in my knowledge of your illegal self-instruction on the subject? Ah, I thought



so. I do not hold it against you. Perhaps, in this final hour, you may reach a better understanding than I. I only understand the concept vaguely: Nature is somehow creating infelicity. It will not allow us to reach the absolute felicity value. The closer we come, the more we are working against nature.”

Martin was now visibly shaken by this confirmation. He was experiencing true infelicity at that moment. All he wanted was to escape this hopeless, meaningless life. His wish was deferred to the Department of Opportunity.

“What a marvelous circus!” exclaimed the easy-installed Jennifers.

The circus was a giant, ten-ring affair. It contained everything from a clown juggling fifty random objects (an elephant was not uncommon) to “Fluffy the Flying Ferret.” Needless to say, the entire show was produced by holography.

“I’ve seen better,” remarked the custom-installed Jennifer in a confrontational tone, which was recorded by the surveillance cameras.

“Well, so have I!” said an easy-installed Jennifer defensively, the desired effect sought by the other Jennifer. “Though I have only just entered this family, my past experiences are no less significant than yours.”

## A Perfect Specimen

I caught a dragonfly today.  
Its wings were veined in silver,  
eyes iridescent,  
each leg properly attached.  
A perfect specimen.

It struggled with frantic energy,  
scrabbling for freedom  
to flit and gyrate over limpid lakes,  
to dance with Terpsichore.

I cupped my hands around it,  
clutched its fragility.  
Still it flung its frail body  
against my palms,  
unwilling to surrender,  
unafraid of a foe  
who could crush it in a fist.

I deposited this delicate hero  
into a jar to slowly suffocate.

—Dorrie Karlin,  
Eleventh grade, Hopkinton High School,  
Hopkinton, Massachusetts

“But you have no experiences.”

“Have you?”

Fluffy the Flying Ferret made an especially low dip that neared the Hendersons, and both children ceased their chatter. In the closest ring, a dazzling array of acrobatics was taking place, acrobats performing dizzying leaps and stunts unaided by trapezes and safety nets.

The custom-installed Jennifer refused to talk with the impostors bearing her name, which was of no concern to them.

It was of concern to George Henderson, who was befuddled at all this seeming infelicity. He had never heard of it. Certainly children in his day would never dream of behaving in such a fashion! What of morals? What of respect and integrity?

Margaret was looking again at the acrobatics ring. The fringe around the ring was a series of spikes that resembled the ancient meteorological symbol for a “cold front” (she had been digging around in her meteorology book of late). How sad that the only weather she would ever know was sunny, clear skies, seventy to seventy-three degrees.

As Margaret Henderson brooded in her roomy circus Comfort Chair in the Felicity Sector, massive amounts of electricity were being consumed by the holography. This was of no consequence: there was an especially violent thunderstorm releasing shard upon shard of high-voltage lightning on the reverse side of a clear sunny day. An electric sheen was omnipresent on the surface of the Weatherdome. Energy traveled to the top of the hemisphere, and was sent through the Weatherdome to power the sun within. The excess went through wires into a hospital in the Administrative Sector, where in room 507 Martin was sleeping soundly, dreaming of opportunities and his approaching birthday. There was still a good deal of leftover energy, so it proceeded out of the hospital, through the Industrial and Felicity Sectors, and finally to Thirty-first Street of the Residential Sector and into the home of George and Margaret Henderson. When he awoke in the morning, George had only one thought: It was the quadruplets’ birthday today! Margaret thought of dew-covered flowers and how pleasant a diversion the previous day’s circus had been. The custom-installed twins thought of deliciously unhealthy-tasting meals and felicitous schooling, and the easy-installed twins did much the same, to the greater felicity of all. And the house of the Hendersons was felicitous once more, and that was good. ★

