Winter 2017

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The Spy Who Came In From The Heat Or Why The Neighbors Would Rather Fight Than Schwitz

A Story by Marleen S. Barr

Marleen S. Barr is known for her pioneering work in feminist science fiction and teaches English at the City University of New York. She has won the Science Fiction Research Association Pilgrim Award for lifetime achievement in science fiction criticism. Barr is the author of Alien to Femininity: Speculative Fiction and Feminist Theory, Lost in Space: Probing Feminist Science Fiction and Beyond, Feminist Fabulation: Space/Postmodern Fiction, and Genre Fission: A New Discourse Practice for Cultural Studies.

Barr has edited many anthologies and co-edited the science fiction issue of PMLA. She is the author of the novels Oy Pioneer! and Oy Feminist Planets: A Fake Memoir.
I had no choice. I had to spritz an entire shaving cream can on my upstairs neighbors’ apartment door. Liam and Wong Foo Muldoon-Fats had the legal right to keep their air conditioners running from May to September. I mean without stop. I mean that I could not go out on my terrace without hearing incessant whirring from hell. Liam and Wong Foo, who were residing in their primary home, a Long Island waterfront estate, ran the Manhattan pied-à-terre air conditioners for every moment of the entire summer. My only recourse was to aggravate them into submission—that is to say, nudge them to death. I took the shaving cream can in hand. I went up in the elevator. I stood outside the Muldoon-Fats’ door. I pushed down on the shaving cream nozzle. With my years of summer camp hijinks in mind, I let loose with a giant squirt. I turned the door into a white tornado. I came, I saw, I spritzed. I did not conquer the air conditioners. I would just have to try to convince these machines to be on my side.

Professors do not behave like campers. Once upon a time pre-professor prepubescent moi spent years in summer camp. From going on raids to boys’ bunks, to short sheeting beds, to stealing the counselor’s bra and hanging it on the flag pole, summer camp is the ultimate training ground for obnoxiousness. I learned my lessons well. No one would think that eminent feminist science fiction scholar Professor Sondra Lear would act like a kid in summer camp.

In this vein, my neighbors J. R. Ewingwitz and his wife Miss Yetta, two elderly and very well dressed Jews from Texas who divided their time between their Park Avenue apartment and the Dallas spread they called Shetlfork Ranch, couldn’t believe that I was the shaving cream spritzer. Since I thankfully had nothing against Mr. Ewingwitz, the shareholders would be spared from asking Ali Bhabha the doorman who shot J.R. I was in the lobby when the shocked couple approached me.

“Did you hear what happened?” asked Miss Yetta while removing her designer sun glasses and running her hand over her skin tight leather pants.

“No. Are you going to tell me that you slaughtered a Shetlfork cow and had your pants made as a result?”

“Not at all. I am referring to the incident. I am referring to the vandalism. I can’t believe that there is a vandal running loose. Do you know who perpetrated the deed?”

“Please be more specific.”

“Shaving cream. Someone smeared shaving cream all over the Muldoon-Fats’ door.”

“I am sure that the schmearer had a very good reason for schmearinig. I do not define putting shaving cream on a door as vandalism. It is property enhancement. The shaving cream made the door cleaner. The door is better off for the experience. She told me so yesterday.”

I took a more direct approach. With my lascivious French Canadian husband -- art historian Pepe Le Pew--in tow, I rousted Android the nefarious Super from his post supper snooze in his apartment and demanded that he turn off Liam’s and Wong Foo’s air conditioner. Android insisted that he had no legal right to do so. For once Android was right. Since we had no means to contact Liam and Wong Foo, Pepe insisted that Android use his cell phone. Pepe, with uncharacteristic assertion, grabbed the phone. “You’re upsetting my wife. Why can’t you turn off your air conditioner when you’re not home?” Pepe yelled into the phone. He got nowhere. I became the phone grabber. I was very clear. “If you do not allow Android to turn off your air conditioner immediately or not sooner, I will kill you.” I knew that my utterance was legal. A verbal threat is not criminal sans a reasonable expectation that it can be carried out. No one ever engaged in phone call murder. The phone assured me that she would
not testify against me. She agreed to say that since she was privy to so many conversations, she would forget about my benign threat.

I did not chill out when I saw Liam in person. Going out of my mind from noise torture, I had to be more forceful than usual. I resorted to a disguise. I wore a black wig and followed him into the lobby mail room. Because Liam could not open his mail box, I had time to figure out my best approach. Using another summer camp prank, I had put wire in his mail box key hole. I revealed my identity. “If you do not turn off your air conditioner, this will be your life. I will scream at you whenever I see you. I will scream at you forever. You will have no peace. Not ever. All of your machines and electronic devices will torture you too.”

“I can legally keep my air conditioner on. You can’t make me turn it off,” insisted Liam.

I put my fingers around his neck using a circular configuration which did not touch him. President Bill Clinton did not inhale; Professor Sondra Lear did not squeeze. We were cheek to cheek and chest to chest. Like a lover, I could feel him breathing. Love and hate are very close. Lucky for him, this was life—not art. I have read Leslie Fielder’s *Love and Death in the American Novel*. Fiedler, who had recently passed away, was on my dissertation committee when I was a graduate student at the State University of New York at Buffalo. Perhaps an intention to protect someone who was following in his footsteps as a maverick literary critic caused him to materialize in the lobby mail room.

“Leslie, you’re dead. What are you doing here?”

“I put a great deal of effort into educating you. You are a prolific and needed a feminist science fiction scholar. Don’t throw away your life and your career. Sondra, disengage from this guy’s neck immediately,” said Fiedler as he disappeared within the smoke of his trademark cigar.

Realizing that I should listen to one of the most eminent literary critics of the twentieth century, and appreciating the fact that someone who I had always emulated came back from the dead to order me to do the right thing, I realized that I was too close to Liam for comfort. He remained calm. Since I really did not want to choke him to death, I removed my hands from around his neck. I would later figure out why he could retain his composure during an attack. I immediately realized that Liam was not garden variety enemy. He could stand up to moi in full force fight mode. No one had ever before done so. I did not then know that I was using Sondra force against a United States military Special Forces officer. Sondra force has a limit; a Special Forces officer is the limit.

The war continued. To disturb his sleep, I routinely climbed up on my bedroom dresser and banged pots together. I yelled at him through the bathroom air vent. I used the blood from my last period to smear a blood stain on a sheet of paper. I put the paper under his apartment door. This prank even shocked the door. Sentient doors do not menstruate. Nothing worked. The noise continued. Peace and quiet were no part of my life.

I will explain the history of this terrible situation. I will return to the past. I will describe Liam Muldoon’s predecessor.

Although I am a postmodern theorist, I never realized that I would ultimately define life as being post-Thwackaddle. Because she was very cheap, Mrs. Hilda Thwackwaddle, the widow who initially lived above me, never—even in heat emergencies to die from—turned on her air conditioners. My problems began when Mrs. Thwackwaddle died.

The post-Thwackaddle era to die from began when the new residents of her apartment enacted what was to me an equivalent of the shot heard around the world. Mrs. Thwackwaddle’s successors—Liam Muldoon, his svelte and snobbish Chinese Harvard business school
educated wife Wong Foo Fat, and their three young sons--walked into their new abode and began to schwitz. Then it happened. They turned on their air conditioners. I heard them. I heard the whirring. I heard the sound which would permeate my home life in the manner of the pounding heart in Poe’s “The Tell-Tale Heart.” Like roach motel denizens who check in and never check out, the Muldoon-Fats turned on their air conditioners and never turned them off. I informed Pepe that I would wage a war to the death to silence the machines. The air conditioners assured me in no uncertain terms that this war was necessary. His response: “You are my wife. Good-bye city life as I knew it.” When I complained to Coop Board President Gomorrah Horecock and Managing Agent Cruella Rob that the incessant whirring was preventing me from living in peace, they told me to move to the country. “The Muldoon-Fats have the right to run their air conditioner 24/7. We cannot help you,” they said.

When I asked former Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer and Commissioner of Buildings Rick D. Chandler for assistance at a public event, they listened sympathetically and gave me the same answer. I brought my case to then Attorney General Eliot Spitzer when I saw him in the lobby of the City University of New York Graduate Center. Surely Spitzer could help a shaving cream spritzer. He listened intently before echoing everyone else and explaining that he was late for an appointment. All the human officials were failing to help me. It was clear that I would eventually have to plead my case directly to the air conditioners themselves.

Why would Spitzer care about Liam’s insistence upon apartment frigidity when he was probably having a hot affair with a prostitute in a hotel? I can certainly turn the situation into something analogous to a McLuhanesque treatise on hot and cool media. My theoretical acumen, however, would get me nowhere in the face of the law not being on my side. I could do nothing about the fact that the Muldoon-Fats were hell bent on their decision to fight rather than schwitz. Settling with them proved to be as intractable as solving the Israeli Palestinian conflict. What to do? Simple. I became a Jewish Park Avenue co-op intifada fighter. I acted as if I were confronting terrorists intent on using a bazooka to topple the Empire State Building.

The intifada analogy is no exaggeration. I used Palestinian tactics in my own inimitable way. I escalated the attacks, progressing from shaving cream to mayonnaise. I brought out the Hellman’s to counter noise hell. One evening, when I was feeling exceptionally feisty, I used a ketchup and mustard combination. The door said that this pairing was especially tasty. Even though the mayonnaise could not raise her cholesterol because doors do not have triglycerides, she still preferred the more healthful mustard. Move over Jackson Pollack. While on the subway, I contemplated how best to make the Muldoon-Fats’ congenial door resemble a Subway sandwich. The incessant beat of the whirring air conditioners went on. I was obsessed. I had to murder the air conditioners. I would do so without even telling them why their end was necessary. Intent upon committing air conditionericide under the cover of darkness, I stepped on to my terrace, turned on the hose, and pointed it right into the offensive mechanistic maw. I didn't care about the air conditioners’ lives and rights. I didn't care if I destroyed my own apartment via death by water air conditioner leak. I didn't care if I had to empty the entire Croton Reservoir into the Muldoon-Fats’ air conditioner. After a half hour Niagara-esque assault, although it wasn’t really dead, the living room air conditioner was very sick. The whir whir was now a mere wh wh ir ir ir. I exalted in the relative new found quiet. The air conditioner was not so happy. She explained that she was just doing her job and I should not try to drown her. Self-
Title: "STEAMED"
Photographer: Paul Lubaczewski
The sound onslaught reprieve was short lived. The whirring returned to full force. I upped the ante. To kill the second air conditioner dead, I sprayed *Raid* into it.

Just as the shaving cream enhanced the Muldoon-Fats’ apartment, it did so for the roach spray. I did them a favor. I killed all the roaches who called their air conditioner home. Cold roach corpses could be scattered beneath the very alive and well and still whirring air conditioner. I could not chill out. When I heard contractors working in the Muldoon-Fats’ apartment, I knocked on their door and told the workers that the air conditioner was disturbing me. In retrospect, I should have just asked the door to let me in. But lost easy opportunity aside, wonder of wonder miracle of miracles, the workers allowed me to enter and turn off the air conditioners.

Clarence’s Thomas’s “high tech lynching” manifested itself as my mechanistic acoustical rape. I was obsessed with the fact that a mere flick of a switch could end all of my suffering. Again turning to a page from my obnoxious summer camp behavior play book, I short sheeted their bed. As I exited their apartment, I basked in the glory of winning one battle in the air conditioner wars. Consummate snoop that I am, I could not help noticing that, with the exception of the single bed used by a family of five, the Muldoon-Fats’ apartment was devoid of furniture.

I could not believe that I was not making any progress. I am a middle-aged Jewish feminist ballabusta par excellence. Bella Abzug is my hero. How could goyim withstand my full warp factor ten Jewish Feminist Ballabusta Power? The Power had never failed me before. Twenty years ago, I drove Black Hole State University nuts when I fought and won a feminist tenure battle. How could a mere two people prevail under this onslaught? In the face of failure, there was nothing to do but to do even more. Since shaving cream and the entire Subway sandwich menu’s condiments failed to be effective, I turned to McDonald’s. I entered the elevator armed with two all-beef patties, special sauce, lettuce, pickles and onions on a sesame seed bun. The door salivated. What could raise triglycerides and cause death could not fail to raise the Muldoon-Fats’ hackles and convince them to eliminate their air conditioner noise. With wrapper off and hand drawn back ready to smash the Whopper against the hungry door lock, I abruptly stopped when I heard the fire staircase door opening. I was about to be caught red handed with the ketchup sodden burger. Thankfully my friend nineteenth floor resident Gaston Parapluieberg appeared.

“Would you like a hamburger?” I asked.
“No. You are obviously trying to turn the Muldoon-Fats’ door into a fast food restaurant lunch. These people are obnoxious. I sympathize with you. But whatever your reasons are, you must stop. I heard them say that they installed computer driven motion detectors behind their door. They also put surveillance cameras in the windows above your terrace and in their hallway. Android is monitoring the surveillance equipment. Do not come up to this floor again or they will get you.”

“Does that mean I can’t try pizza smashing?”

“Don’t even think about it.” The door was disappointed to hear this. She liked pizza.

“All I want is peace and quiet and I have to live in Stalag 17. I don’t know how I can ever thank you.” Overcome with emotion, I looked as Gaston’s cute body to find a place to decorously kiss. I opted for his hand. “Thank you, thank you,” I said as I covered his hand with lip smacking kisses. The door felt like a voyeur.

I knew that it was enough already with the hand kissing. I could not be accused of attractive French shareholder vestibule rape. Oy, as if I didn’t have enough trouble living under terrace surveillance cameras. What if I was out there kissing my husband and one of the young
Muldoon-Fats sons decided to put the surveillance tape on the Internet? Oy, now I have worry about being subjected to Paris Hilton mode sex tape tsuris.

I returned to my apartment and tore up the two hundredth threatening note that I was about to deliver to the Muldoon-Fats. Too bad that they would never read this text: “Surrender Liam and Wong Foo. With hate, Sondra.” I phoned more New York City agencies and hit more brick walls—until I contacted Mimi Horowitz-Berkowitz, the Mayor’s special noise consultant. I kissed the ground when I discerned that Mimi was someone who could finally help me. She is a feminist sociology professor who started a Women’s Studies department. Mimi fell in love with me at first complaint. This acquaintance of Bella Abzug could be my savior. But it was not to be. Professor Horowitz-Berkowitz wrote a letter on my behalf to Cruella and Gomorrah. She related the upshot in her Jewish patrician accent. “My husband and my daughter are lawyers. They never saw such a nasty letter as the one I received. Your building sucks.”

You’re telling me. I went so far as to stand in front of Cruella while whirring. ‘Whir whir whir,’ I said to her while questioning the legality of impersonating an air conditioner in the public building areas. I told Cruella, that, since I now speak fluent “Whir,” I wanted to go back in time to re-take my Ph.D. foreign language requirement exam. I offered to give Cruella my apartment free of charge if she could rationally explain how her statement that the noise is not a problem supercedes a noise consultant’s statement to the contrary. I stood in front of Cruella and the song I wrote to describe my frustration: The lyrics: “one expensive apartment, two whirring air conditioners, three stomping children, four irate shareholders in a pickle because their sympathetic door resembles a salad, and five undisclosed surveillance cameras. True, I only knew about three cameras. But I just bet that two more were hidden somewhere. The door insinuated as such.

“A salad sodden door? I hope that you didn’t do anything illegal,” said Mimi. “I once helped someone who shot his noisy neighbor dead. While serving as an expert witness, I was able to reduce his sentence from death to life imprisonment. Calm down, Sondra.”

“But Mimi the door enjoys the food fight.”

“What?”

“Don’t ask.”

Even though Mimi convinced me to end my salad days, I still entertained door attack/feeding mode food for thought. Deploying tomatoes would have had amazing tactical possibilities—and maybe the door needed to add more fiber to her diet. I could never throw eggs at the Muldoon-Fats’ windows and blame the yellow and white splat on a gaggle of passing pregnant seagulls. (Three sea gulls really do fly around Park Avenue in the early evening. I named the birds Irwin, Stanley and Sheldon. If I attribute pregnancy to them, I would have to change their names to Shirley, Shelby, and Myra.) Instead of thinking about lost opportunities, I decided to focus on reality. I concluded that Liam and Wong Foo, the owners of an apartment with straight shot proximity to the Empire State Building, had to be either terrorists or spies. They could wish for the Empire State Building what I wished for their air conditioners: immediate destruction at all costs.

I absolutely believed my conclusion to be true. Ditto for my dissertation director—and he is much closer to me than Fiedler. His nephew works with Wong Foo at Shitibank. This eminent scholar went so far as to warn his nephew about Woo Fung. The incredulous nephew reported that Woo Fung was a lovely person who could not possibly be a terrorist or a spy.

“Well she is not lovely to me,” I said to my former professor. “Does your nephew expect that Woo Fung would be obvious and
come to work with a bomb attached to her waist and screaming ‘Hail Allah?’

I decided to run the story by police before officially reporting it. One must not take accusing people of being terrorists or spies lightly. I approached a city pool cop who was watching Stuyvesant Town octogenarians repeatedly lift plastic noodles during Senior Swim exercise time. He advised me to file an official report. I went to my precinct and encountered an officer who resembled a Denzel Washington clone.

“Sergeant, I think that my upstairs neighbors are either terrorists or spies.”

“Just give me the facts ma’am.”

“They have a direct shot at the Empire State Building.”

“Uh huh.”

“They have surveillance cameras in their windows.”

“Uh huh.”

“Although they are never home, they keep their air conditioners running incessantly. What are they keeping cold?”

“Uh huh.”

“I am a Bella Abzugesque Jewish feminist theorist. The neighbors stood up to my most obnoxious onslaught. I mean we’re talking the full monty.”

“Oy gevalt. What! They survived an Abzugesque Jewish feminist theorist’s full monty? This is not possible. In all of my years on the force, I have never heard of anything so preposterous as surviving the New York Jewish feminist Force. I am taking your complaint very seriously. But, since no crime has been committed, I can’t do anything. Report it to your Super. Good day ma’am.” When I returned home, I noticed that a surveillance camera showed up on the tower of the building located directly across Park Avenue.

The Muldoon-Fats had rendered me impotent, turned me into a castrated castrating bitch. But, just when they thought it was safe to go back in the water (no reference to my hose foray

The Muldoon-Fats were finally in their apartment. Now was the time to strike. Feeling like the Navy Seals poised to storm Bin Laden’s hiding place compound, I knocked on their door.

“Hi,” said the door. What’s for lunch?”

“Who’s there?” asked Liam.

“Your neighbor.” Liam stood inside his apartment while holding his door open against her will.

“Your air conditioner is disturbing me. Why can’t you turn it off when you’re not home?” I asked.

“Because we have to keep our very expensive furniture cold.”

“I don’t see expensive furniture. I see nugahide. Are you telling me that the poor dead cute little nugas need to keep their pelts cold? Do the dead nugas need to avoid schvitzing? Miss Yetta wears cow skin pants. Do you wear nuga skin pants?” Do you want me to bring the nugas back from the dead to testify against you in a cruelty to animals case? I can do that you know.”

I heard a weird scratching noise and walked alone into the bedroom to investigate. The noise was coming from inside the closet. The closet door told me to open it and look inside. I saw two cute little skunk-like animals with orange bodies and a magenta stripe huddled together in a cage.

“Help,” they said in tandem. “We’re nugas. If you don’t save us, Liam will make nuga stew out of us and use our hides to repair his couch.”

“Do you function like skunks who need to defend themselves?”

“Yes, we have a skunkian defense mechanism.”

“When I need to make another big stink to live in peace, if I hold you up to the bathroom air vent, will you raise your cute tails and start spritzing?”
“You are breaking and entering,” he sneered.

“I am not breaking and I am not entering. As the door can see, I am standing in the vestibule talking to you civilly,” I said as I placed my big toe over Liam’s door plate and, hence, within his apartment.

“You are breaking and entering. And, furthermore, Android said that you reported us to the police for being terrorists or spies.”

“If the shoe fits, wear it,” I said stomping with my Muldoon-Fats apartment ensconced toe for emphasis. Wong Foo suddenly appeared and joined the verbal barrage.

“There is one of me and two of you. I am not screaming at you. Can one of you please talk to me one at a time and quietly.”

“Get your husband to come join you and yell too,” suggested Wong Foo. “I’m calling the police.”

“Go right ahead. I am not doing anything illegal. Your air conditioner is disturbing me,” I said while moving my toe back in the vestibule.

“We can put the compressor on the roof. It will cost ten thousand dollars,” offered Liam.

“In the face of your ridiculous song and dance, I curse you in the manner of the Fiddler on the Roof dream scene.” The elevator opened. Two police officers appeared.

“Officers, we have a problem. These people are making me want to live in Anatevka,” I explained.

“Anatevka?” they asked.

“Yes. Anatevka. Anatevka. I wish that Anatevka were my home. They don’t have air conditioners there.”

After listening to me and to the Muldoon-Fats, the police chastised us all for acting like children and left. Two days later, Cruella told the co-op’s lawyer to send a threatening letter to me. And then it was time for the annual shareholders’ meeting.

What do to? Pepe advised me to attend, keep my mouth shut, and act like a normal person. Following his advice would be very difficult. I have never shut my mouth and acted normal. But, knowing that Pepe was right, I decided to go to the meeting in a disguise. I stood in front of him while wearing the short black wig I wore when I ambushed Liam in the mail room.

“You look like an idiot,” said Pepe.

I went back to the drawing board. What could I wear that at once looked normal, over the top, and not at all like me? Then I remembered the perfect outfit: the six inch Zara heels and the skin tight short front zippered Eli Tahari dress I scored at a clothing swap. No person on Earth (or any planet in the universe)—and that includes the Muldoon-Fats’ door and air conditioners—had ever seen me wearing heels and a tight dress. I spent five minutes stuffing my body into the dress. Even though I never show my breasts in public, I pulled down the zipper to reveal cleavage. Body successfully encased with breast tops in full view, I put on the heels and stumbled into the living room.

“What do you think?” I asked the change averse Pepe.

“It’s not you. I don’t like it.”

“Good-bye. I’m going to the meeting.”

The shareholders, who had never seen me wearing anything other than normcore clothes, gasped.

“You look so hot,” said a female yuppie who obviously appreciated my slut outfit more than Pepe did. I did not reply. Keeping my mouth shut was on the evening’s agenda. I took my seat. Gaston Parapluieberg suddenly appeared with finger pointed. “Do not say anything. Liam and Wong Foo’s lawyer is here.”

I nodded in gratitude. Gomorrah began the meeting.

“Achtung. We will have no co-op board elections. There is no democracy in this
building."

“Heil Gomorrah,” said all the shareholders in unison with raised outstretched hands.

“I automatically reinstate all of the unelected Board members. Does anyone have any questions?”

The shareholders had never recovered from the fact that I had brought last year’s meeting to a halt. I outdid myself when I gave my I don’t want to live in North Korea speech, draped myself in the American flag which adorned the lobby, quoted the First Amendment, and shouted “freedom now.” Sensing that the meeting was about to end, everyone stared at me and held their breath. I said nothing.

“Meeting adjourned,” said Gomorrah.

I turned and saw Liam, Wong Foo, and their lawyer angrily stomping out. Victory was mine. I hoped that house call making lawyers are exceedingly expensive.

I had won a battle, but not the war. The whirring continued. On the morning which followed the meeting, I knocked on Gomorrah’s door to make a new complaint. Even the friendly door was getting sick of me.

“I do not agree with having shareholders’ cleaning women relegated to using the service elevator. In addition to not wanting to live in North Korea, I also do not want to live on a plantation. I can’t stand the building staff calling me Miss. “Doctor” is my correct appellation. I can’t stand the air conditioner noise. I can’t stand the surveillance cameras. I can’t stand the Muldoon-Fats’ lawyer coming to a private meeting to use my words to entrap me.”

“Frankly my dear, I don’t give a damn,” said Gomorrah as she slammed her door in my face. Her normal door was unsympathetic.

“Tomorrow is another day.” I said to the closed door which was unable to hear me.

Suddenly smoke filled the hall. An elderly woman walked through the closed elevator door. The elevator door was also normal.

“Mrs. Thwackwaddle? Excuse me. I don’t mean to be rude but I thought you were dead. I thought the same about Leslie Fiedler. But he was in the lobby recently.”

“News of my death has been greatly exaggerated. I am not sure that you ever knew my full name dear. It is Fruma Sarah Hilda Thwackwaddle. You can call me Fruma Sarah.”

Gomorrah peered out into the hall.

“I feel sorry for Sondra. You should help her to live in peace,” said Mrs. Thwackwaddle’s corpse to Gomorrah.

“No. I don’t feel like it,” answered Gomorrah while sticking out her tongue.

“If the Muldoon-Fats don’t turn off their air conditioners, I pity them both. I’ll come to them by night. I’ll take them by the throat. And this be the Muldoon-Fats if they don’t turn off their air conditioners,” sang the corpse.

The Muldoon-Fats agreed to pay to have their compressor placed on the roof. I subsequently chalked up the entire air conditioner noise incident to mere fiddle faddle.

Pepe came out and joined the chorus.

“Do you love me?” he asked.

“Do I what?”

“Do you love me?”

“Do I love you?”

This was too much. Pepe was distraught about the hosing and the screaming to the extent that he was turning into a real Anatevka denizen. This could not be. I loved him as a goy. I had to turn him back into a goy. I went out on the terrace, turned on the hose, and poured water into my hand. I threw the water on Pepe to re-baptize him as a goy. It worked. Pepe, returning to his shegetz self, muttered “tabernacle” and skulked back into the apartment.

The Muldoon-Fats were even more profoundly transformed. I was slightly wrong about Liam being a spy or a terrorist. My antipathy blinded me to the truth. Liam was on
our side. He was an American Special Forces agent. His former job: nuclear submarine combat specialist. He had controlled a nuclear bomb button. No wonder I could not win against him. Even Bella Abzug could not prevail against someone who could destroy the world. Now, twenty years after Liam’s submarine sojourn, he was assigned to protect the Empire State Building. It was necessary for him to keep all of his highly sensitive electronic surveillance equipment cold. The air conditioners always knew that Liam kept them on to protect the national interest. They decided to define me as collateral damage. Although I understood their reasoning and I was not quite as upset with them, they still did not sit well with me.

The Muldoon-Fats ultimately became my best friends in the building. They compromised by agreeing to turn off their air conditioners in the morning and during the dinner hour. After running a background check on me, Liam found out that I had devoted my life to research and teaching. He respected me. He belatedly realized that Gomorrah and Android were horrors. We were now on the same side. To nullify the combined force of Gomorrah and Android, I joined forces with a Special Forces agent.

When our air conditioner broke and she could not explain to me how she could be fixed, I turned to Liam for advice. “My air conditioner is no longer functioning. Its wall sleeve has the same configuration as yours. Please tell me how you repaired your air conditioner?”

“Glad to help. No sweat,” said Liam. Before Fruma Sarah returned to her grave and rested in peace, I asked her to tell Fiedler that I was grateful for his thoughtful intervention. I enjoyed relative peace too. Although I had few friends in the building, I could always count on the Muldoon-Fats’ door to be one of them. Even though the air conditioner war was over and I was on good terms with them, I sometimes gave the door a Subway sandwich just for old time’s sake. The door did not like Purina Nuga Chow.