

Chapter 1: Remains to Be Seen

London 1965

The lone occupant of the mahogany case stared impassively from behind the glass at his two visitors. Hurrying students, on their way to class, were heedless of the enclosed figure. The box's resident returned the compliment. He had a good excuse. He was dead.

"He *does* look a lot like Benjamin Franklin," Henry Spearman commented to his wife as he stepped back from the brown wooden case to get a better perspective.

The corpse, which had the rapt attention of Pidge and Henry Spearman, was the mortal remains of the English jurist and philosopher, Jeremy Bentham. The resemblance to Benjamin Franklin was striking. England's great economist, David Ricardo, had noted it during Bentham's own lifetime. When Ricardo encountered a bust of Franklin in a sculptor's shop while vacationing in Italy, he wrote home, "It must be a bargain because it answers the object of two busts." Ricardo made the purchase.

The macabre display had deflected the Spearmans from going from Boston straight to their destination at Cambridge. Instead, they decided to take the time to visit University College, London, on that April morning. Bentham's remains were, after all, the closest thing economists had to an Epiphany. Bentham called it the Auto-Icon.

Jeremy Bentham's will had stipulated that his body was to be

given to his friend, Dr. Southwood Smith, for immortalization. The instructions were explicit: “The skeleton he will cause to be put together in such manner as that the whole figure may be seated in a chair usually occupied by me when I am engaged in thought. He will cause the skeleton to be clad in one of the suits of black occasionally worn by me.” The Spearmans read these words from the portion of the will attached to the door of the movable mausoleum.

More students scurried by. Henry Spearman was amused by their total indifference to the presence of the preserved body. A stuffed moose head on the wall might have elicited more interest from them.

A wry smile crossed Pidge Spearman’s lips. Her voice tinged with irony, she intoned; “I don’t think he’s having the effect he intended.”

“What did he expect? It was a bad idea to begin with.” The sarcastic remark at first surprised the Spearmans. Unbeknownst to Pidge and Henry, another couple behind them also had been studying the Auto-Icon. The young woman who had spoken was wearing a lavender shirtwaist dress and matching hat.

Spearman’s face lit up. He seized his opportunity. “It was not a bad idea to a utilitarian like Bentham,” he said with a smile. “You can see how someone who lived his life according to the principle of ‘the greatest happiness to the greatest number’ might have come up with it. After all, why not make better use of the dead than burying or cremating them? Bentham’s idea was to put the stuffed bodies of all the great people on permanent display. That would provide more inspiration for future generations than stone markers in cemeteries.” Henry Spearman turned to face the newcomers and smiled broadly.

“Wouldn’t a statue have done the trick? At least then his clothes wouldn’t look so seedy.” These remarks came from the gentleman standing next to the young woman. His disapproval of Bentham’s dishevelment was a reflection of his own grooming and attire. He was the kind of man who wears a navy blazer with a family crest and doesn’t look foppish doing so.

Bentham’s attire did show signs of wear after decades of encasement. His trousers were moth-eaten. His straw hat and gloves looked more like those of a gardener than a scholar. Only his

waistcoat and lace collar conveyed the impression of an English man of letters. His once fashionable walking stick lay diagonally across his lap.

Spearman replied with a wave of his hand toward the figure behind the glass door. “A statue would miss the mark. Bentham wanted people to see him as he really was. It was the sense of his presence that was to inspire his disciples. Notice how the inner case is on casters. When Benthamites have meetings to discuss his ideas, they simply wheel the Auto-Icon into the meeting room—just as Bentham stipulated in his will.”

Pidge looked embarrassed. “You’ll have to forgive my husband. He’s a professor and will give a lecture whenever he thinks he has a student. It’s an occupational hazard,” Pidge said to the twosome, with a look of feigned apology on her face. To her, Bentham’s remains were anything but inspirational. They reminded her that even the lives of great people end in death and decay.

“There’s nothing to forgive,” the older gentleman said to Pidge and her husband. “We’re delighted to have the information. I had heard about this display from a business associate of mine, but I never actually understood what it was all about. Now I do, thanks to . . .?”

“I’m Henry Spearman. And this is my wife, Pidge.”

“A pleasure, I’m sure. My name is Graham Carlton, and this is my friend, Ardis Home. We were in the neighborhood of the College, so we stopped off to see Bentham for ourselves. The old boy did have a point, didn’t he? And the wax museums seem to have got it.”

“What do you mean?” Henry asked.

“Well, look at the success of places like Madame Tussaud’s. People will pay to see resemblances of the dead. Maybe somebody should move this old boy over there. At least he’d get some attention.”

“I think Jeremy Bentham would have a hard time competing with Henry VIII and Elizabeth Taylor,” Ardis quipped. “He was the College’s greatest benefactor, but he doesn’t seem to be able to get the attention of any students. And there’s not even any ticket price to pay here.”

Graham Carlton glanced at his watch and then at his companion. “Well, I think we’ve seen what we came to see, Ardis.” He

turned to the Spearmans. “Thank you for the lecture, Professor. It’s been a pleasure meeting you both. Do enjoy your stay in England.” With that, the couple moved in the direction of the exit.

The South Cloisters of University College’s once-crowded hallways were almost empty. The next round of classes at the University College had begun. It was clear that the young scholars would be taught without any inspiration from Jeremy Bentham’s *Auto-Icon*.