

Every Dog's Bark Plays a Melody

- a tale from the switch generations -

Dr. Grice Boyles flicked on his Natural Bliss Switch¹ and within seconds it kicked in.

Urban decay never seemed so beautiful.

His tongue hung out of his mouth as he gazed dreamily at the shimmering black fields rising up to the heavens. Big doughy chunks of warm wind clambered up his body. He felt precisely like a great oak, oh yes, a great oak tree welcoming the delicious dawn light with open arms, a simple tree dug into the firm pavement. Autumn's harvest covered his roots: plump used contraceptives, auburn-stained toilet paper, and sparkling silver cans. This rich load had been shed by the local beasts and now provided food for foraging maggots and flies. Those glorious, little burrowing maggots. He was one with it all.

But soon the effect wore off.

And before him all was deformed skyscrapers, harsh gusts of smog, and grime-laminated litter. Dr. Grice Boyles' stomach turned at the sight of maggots crawling over some sort of rotting SynthMeat. His whole body squirmed, wobbled, wibbled and squibbled with disgust. Then his hand hesitated over the Natural Bliss Switch. But (grumble grumble) he had to wake up, so he withdrew his hand from his armpit.

All switches, you see, were conveniently concealed in this otherwise dank and useless anatomical structure. Who would have thought that the humble armpit would form the stage of humanity's latest revolution? Most people had both armpits full of these little unobtrusive black switches. It was a fashion statement to wear a switch on your wrist, a fashion *faux pas* (so 2042) to wear one on your neck.

Dr. Grice Boyles staggered onwards, yawning and slapping his cheeks lightly to wake himself up. It was 06:30 and he had set off intent on completing his business. It was a very important day for him for there was a very important thing to see to. Important *indeed*. He had decided that it was absolutely imperative for him to trek to the other side of the city, to the headquarters of Absolute Switch Incorporated (or maybe CORP - whatever the horrendously successful monolithic switch merchant was called). He had to go there to complain about his Unconsciousness Switch². It was faulty.

Dr. Grice tried the switch again, but its failure caused him to emit something between a growl and a whine. Consciousness was still coursing through his veins; he

¹ **The Natural Bliss Switch:** Version 1.0 released in 2032 by Pleasure Switch Inc. Original advertising slogan: "See the Beauty in Everything!" Promotional material included: "This gift *might as well* have been from God!! It makes everything seem serenely natural, transforming the bleak and the bland into the beautiful and blissful!!" Review: "92%, I'd almost forgotten what real flowers looked like, but this opened my eyes and showed me flowers where there were none. Perhaps it's a bit inefficient and day-dreamy though." - *Which Switch Magazine*

² **The Unconsciousness Switch:** V1.0 released in 2036 by Absolute Switch Inc. Original advertising slogan: "No Need to Feel!" Promotional material included: "Ever wanted to live your life without the hassle of conscious interference?" Review: "9.8/10, Few switches have changed the face of everyday life so much... in fact this switch eradicates *any* part of everyday life that gets on your wick - it lived up to the hype." - *Switch Boutique*

had to plumb that leak. He needed the ability to turn off consciousness. Or at least get a refund.

Dr. Grice's father, Grandpappa Boyles, bounced down the stairs in his Professor Wheatos-themed pyjamas. He proudly combed his full head of playfully wavy silver hair and sat down at the breakfast table.

"Good Yolk!" he said to his golden Labrador puppy, Yolk, who brought him the daily newspaper.

He couldn't stop fidgeting – pulsating, even – as he deliberated over what specifically to spread on his toast this splendid morning. Grandpappa Boyles had always had a perpetual motion metabolism, *sans* switch. His natural energy abounded, from the second his Sleep Switch³ ticked off to the second he tucked in and switched on (the Sleep Switch worked, as with The Unconsciousness Switch, like a programmable alarm – the so-called 'egg-timer feature').

Jam.

He said good morning to his granddaughter, Delilah, and asked her to pass the jam.

Delilah was hurriedly stuffing breakfast beans into her mouth; she was late for school but knew she needed to keep her levels of beta proteins up. She clumsily passed her grandfather the jam, knocking a tub of butter over in the process. Impatiently trying to pick up the tub of butter, she slipped and got butter all over her hand.

"Butter fingers!" Grandpappa Boyles blurted out, chuckling all over. After calming down he said, on a more serious note, "Oh, you did remember to download that update for your Positivity⁴, didn't you, dear Delilah?"

"Of course, Grandpappy," Delilah answered.

"More on the way," he said.

Grandpappa was working long past retirement. He'd made his money in switch design; The Positivity Switch was his baby and his cash cow. Negative vibes had indirectly put him through University and bought this house.

Delilah ran for her schoolbag but Grandpappa stopped her.

"Won't you give your new Positivity a spin then?"

"I haven't got time," she said, looking at her watch, "oh, go on then." She knew what it meant to her Grandpappy.

Delilah flicked on The Positivity Switch as casually as she might stroke her hair, and picked up the daily newspaper. She quickly found a page covering the latest devastating famine in Zaire.

³ **The Sleep Switch:** V1.0 released in 2032 by ASI. Original advertising slogan: "Insomnia no more! A Snore's Never More Than a Second Away." Promotional material included: "Why cut out on stressful efficiency when you can just sleep it off after a hard day's work? Guaranteed REM." Review: "*Best of Breed*, it beat all other 'Rest and Relax' category switches in double-blind tests." – *New Scientist*

⁴ **The Positivity Switch:** V1.0 released in 2033 by Global Switch Industries. Original advertising slogan: "Negate that Negativity!" Promotional material included: "Life is full of things that anger you, depress you, cause you physical pain or just plain bug you... but it doesn't have to be that way!" Review: "“♥♥♥♥♥ (from a possible five hearts), The ultimate rose-tinted glasses. Just be careful, you won't even feel cuts or burns." – Dame Keira Knightly, *Celebrities' Favourite Switches*.

“Nothing,” she told Grandpappa Boyles, and Grandpappa Boyles smiled. “It doesn’t make me feel sad at all.”

As the next test, Grandpappa suddenly jumped up and jabbed at the back of Delilah’s hand with a knife. A little blood crept out.

“Nothing,” Delilah said. With no word of fuss she mopped up the blood. “But won’t that bruise?”

“Nope, not with this update,” Grandpappy said.

“That’s so gwool,” she said (for ‘gwool’ had long been the new ‘cool’ and ‘cool’ had been relegated to ‘anything *but* gwool’). “That’s fucking gwool,” she added (for swear words were now appreciated even by the elderly).

“Exactly. Stick your head in the freezer,” Grandpappa Boyles instructed. And Delilah did.

“Nothing. It just feels quite... weirdly nice.”

“That’s the stuff. You’ll appreciate the beauty of the cold, the infinite variations on- ”

“Yeah yeah, Grandpa, I get it,” Delilah said, having heard his enthusiastic spiel a hundred times before, “G to G.”

“Later,” Grandpa said as he waved her goodbye. When Delilah was gone a little personal smile curled around his face, he turned on his own Positivity Switch and considered for a moment the prospect of dying, probably by some horribly debilitating disease.

“Positively beautiful,” he whispered.

Dr. Grice Boyles had set off too early for breakfast and was now licking his lips. He considered eating the sleep that had crusted around his eyes, agreed with himself that it was probably for the best, and thumbed around his own eye-sockets for the mucky mucus.

He tried not to look to his left. Everyday he passed them; they littered the left-side of the whole street: the drop-out degenerates of the switch generation. This season’s league of switch junkies.

Switch industries had inherited – hijacked – all resources from both the legal and illegal drug industries, as well as those from countless others, including self-help and entertainment. Traditional drug use was now seen as nothing but mystical. Drugs were neither cool nor economical. They were unsavoury. Switches were neat. The prevailing philosophy of the time was, ‘If it doesn’t go straight to the neurons, don’t bother.’

So what did switch junkies indulge in? Mainly underground, ultrariched amalgams of Natural Bliss, Positivity and Meaning Switches⁵, and the whole class of Head Fuckers⁶. Dr. Grice wouldn’t let his head turn as he heard them lethargically

⁵ **The Meaning Switch:** V1.0 released in 2045 by ASI. Original advertising slogan: “Feel the Ineffable!” Promotional material included: “Religion may have failed and science may tell you that you’re nothing but a composition of atoms that evolved by random evolutionary processes, but you’ll never forget that there really *is* a meaning to your existence with The Meaning Switch.” Review: “79%, Poorly executed, lacking in depth, but dependable and longevitous.” – *Switch.Net*

⁶ **The Head Fucker Switches:** released without legal registration at the start of the ‘30s. They were imitations of various insanities – mostly successful, some not successful enough, but others too successful. Selling points: more discrete than

crying out to him, “Be gwool man, everything’s gwool man,”... “You’ve got to see what’s in my head, bro,”... “Why don’t you look at us?”

Grice was a qualified medical doctor. As a general practitioner he had seen scores of switch junkies.

And he’d told his daughter, time and time again, not to get the new switch. The new switch... *everyone else in the class has it! Grandpappa says it’s fine!* It wasn’t *fine*. Man was an animal, not a machine.

He physically tried to shake the thought from his head but it wouldn’t go. He had believed he’d prepared himself for parenting. He would allow his children to listen to ravage-rock, he would turn a blind eye to them puffing on the odd bifta, he’d... but he never imagined having to allow his children to mutilate their own minds on a daily basis. Young and naïve, he himself had got his Natural Bliss Switch, but he wouldn’t let his sweet Delilah inflict any more switches on herself. The first switch he forbade was The Satiety Switch⁷ and she’d gotten it behind his back. All children rebel, right?

He shook his head wildly again, trying to fling the thoughts off. This time it worked. Now he was focused once again on his goal: filling up with unconsciousness, switching these thoughts off for good.

Delilah switched off her Satiety. Sometimes she just wanted to enjoy a snack the natural way before school. She was in the newsagents and had whittled her choices down to a final two: a pale, limp banana or a bright, bulky Banana™. There was no contest. With her friends she walked out of the newsagents and credit was automatically deducted from her account by the shop scanner. Outside, she tore the wrapper off her Banana™ and took a big, juicy bite rich in artificial goodness. Real bananas were rarely eaten now – a good thing, considering they were all but extinct.

“When I eat a Banana, all I want to say is Bananananananana,” Delilah said casually to her friends, “and keep going on, Bananananananana.” She was imitating the ubiquitous Banana™ advert. Her friends laughed and nibbled on their own assorted chemicals.

“So Delilah,” her best friend Calalacy said to her, “you still coming this afternoon to get Orgasm Switches⁸?”

Although Delilah knew full well she had already agreed to go to the Switch Parlour, she was still shocked by Calalacy’s question and an uncomfortable feeling crept into her throat.

“Yeah. Of course,” she said.

injecting heroine; cheaper than caffeine; theoretically it was always possible to switch them off.

⁷ **The Satiety Switch:** Version 1.0 released in 2037 by Switch Dieting. Original advertising slogan: “Fuck off, Atkins!” Promotional material included: “Effortless slimming; combine with nutrition regime and be your ideal shape within one month.” Review: “987 *permil*, everybody’s life-saver, a true classic that we were screaming out for. How on earth did we cope without these, girls?” – *Just Seventeen*

⁸ **The Orgasm Switch:** Version 1.0 released in 2041 by Ann Summers. Original advertising slogan: “Orgasms on the hour every hour!” Publicity material included: “... you don’t even have to touch those unsightly genitalia, just switch on and lie back.” Review: “Although it replaces the outdated, ritualistic ‘love-making’ of the 20th century, it is wanting of improvements in verisimilitude.” – *The Times*.

Her dad would never, ever allow it. He would hate it. But he'd never give permission. He never understood her.

Delilah was a vivacious, wilful 14 years-old girl with a 3-year-old streak of silver in her hair. *Every* girl and *every* boy had an Orgasm Switch. There was something wrong with you if you didn't have an Orgasm Switch. But Delilah didn't want one because of peer pressure or the tide of fashion; she wanted one because she really did want orgasms on tap. That was her choice. It was her life.

Still, she threw the rest of her Banana™ in the bin. She didn't feel like it anymore.

Grandpappa Boyles sat on an antiquated cast-iron bench in the hippest 'pay-per park' this side of Mega-Waterloo. Everything seemed glorious; the sun had his heat-proof hat on and was sending forth rays of joy. It was just Grandpappa Boyles' nature that he always had a nose in the air, sniffing for the scent of human imperfection and room for scientific progress. But all was serene and idyllic. Even the strange dog who was barking furiously at Yolk was a source of rare beauty, its bark reaching Grandpappa Boyles' awareness as a switch-warped melody. No matter how aggressively the dog could bark – and how pathetically Yolk could yelp back – not a soul in the park suffered the slightest perturbation. And this sent old Grandpappa Boyles a' musing.

It had all started with a dog's bark. As a 9-year-old Grandpappa Boyles had been an ardent opponent of what he saw afflicting everyone: *sadness*. Of sadness he had never been too keen. As he voyaged through his teens this not-altogether odd dislike cemented into a bona fide obsession. He just could not believe in the necessity of negativity, and made it his life mission to ease the grip that pain and suffering held on humanity, to eradicate the scourge of sadness from the world. Fortunately he was growing up in a prosperous time and the solution could be easily plucked from the new and blooming switch sciences.

All you needed to get into switch design was a 1-year diploma and a basic grasp of the human condition. With his nose in the air, it didn't take Grandpappa Boyles long to suss out an untapped human failing. He had Yolk's grandmother to thank for that: a dog who barked throughout the day (at her own imagination, it seemed). A bark so piercing it embarrassed his owners and terrified guests. No matter how much mental effort Grandpappa Boyles made to remain calm and unaffected by the bark, he just could not stop it from triggering a sticky, visceral reaction in him. So what did he do? He switched it off.

The brain really hadn't been as hard to conquer as previous generations had expected. 20th century psychologists had dramatised the whole affair. 21st century neuroscientists had gradually tamed the brain; they knew how to manipulate – and market - its every instinct and appetite. Grandpappa Boyles was lucky enough to ride the switch wave at its most controversial and profitable, making his contribution with the Anti-Canine-Bark-Aversion Switch. It worked perfectly (although now there were versions that worked *more* perfectly). It became a tiny component (a one thousand and ninth) of the more succinctly named Positivity Switch. His own design was somewhere behind his armpit and his consciousness, at this very moment switching a dog's bark into a tune worthy of hum-along.

He was filled with such nostalgia and contentment that he didn't notice his son, Dr. Grice, pass by the park in an awkward, agitated stride.

And Dr. Grice, plunged so deep into his own tumultuous thoughts, didn't see his father either. He was having a hard time keeping his head straight – and an even harder time keeping his legs straight. He considered turning Natural Bliss on again – the glorious park did nothing for him – but decided against it.

Dr. Grice Boyles did not follow in his father's footsteps; he never shared his passion for switches. In fact he went further than that, he *detested* these unnatural vulgarities with the sort of loathing and negativity that his father had endeavoured to obliterate.

But if you *must* switch off some thoughts you may as well go the whole hog and switch them all off, Dr. Grice thought. Keeping this overriding goal in mind he headed for the tallest, ugliest and darkest building dominating the horizon. It was a long way off, but there would be his cure.

“Just turn on your Immersion⁹ and read, Humphrey!”

Miss. Zolid was angry. She'd ordered the children to read a hundred pages of Gordon's 'Switching on Dad' screenplay – a perfectly simple demand – but one strikingly fat child was making trouble. Humphrey was the large pile of biomass sitting next to Delilah.

“I can't concentrate, Miss, not on such a lovely summer's day.”

“I don't *care* if it's a lovely summer's day, Gordon's a hard writer to study and we've only read 14 of his works so far. Exams are looming and –”

“I haven't got an Immersion Switch anyway, Miss, you know that.”

A general murmur filled the room. The children nudged each other out of Immersion and looked to Miss. Zolid for a response, like a mob anticipating a street fight.

“I *know* you haven't got Immersion and *you* know what I think of that.”

Silence. “And that's why you drift off into your inefficient day dreams, looking yonder at the clouds as they puff up and vanish... achieving *nothing*. Which is exactly what you'll do if you don't buckle up, switch on, and-”

“But I don't want to switch on.” It was a slap back at the teacher. The children didn't need any switches to be engaged by this sort of incident. “It's my right, it is, I don't have to-”

“Oh come *on!* Grow up to the real world, Humphrey. If you want to do well in this school, if you want to find a job, if you want to attract a *pretty* lady, then you've got to catch up and *succeed*, be *efficient*. Don't you even have Motivation¹⁰ yet?”

“No, because-”

“It's available free of charge from the department of education, you-”

⁹ **The Immersion Switch:** Version 1.0 released in 2024 by E-Book Tech. Original advertising slogan: “Lose yourself.” Promotional material included: “Restricts your attentional limits to a 2m locus. Switch off distracting posters, the sirens in the street, or a crying baby. Immerse yourself in your book, movie, videogame or orgasm generation.” Review: “*Positive:* A multitude of successful applications. *Negative:* Sometimes the rest of the world won't go away.” – *Education Guardian*

¹⁰ **The Motivation Switch:** Version 1.0 released in 2027 by Natural Fuels Inc. Original advertising slogan: “Effortless Effort All Day Long.” Promotional material included: “You'll achieve more than you ever dreamed possible. Don't let yourself fall behind. Protect your mental health.” Review: “*Editor's Choice* - Essential tool for the 21st century workplace. Hard work becomes child's play and all-important efficiency is maximised.” – *The Edge: How to Earn and Excel*.

“I know,” Humphrey interrupted. Miss. Zolid wasn’t used to being interrupted. But Humphrey hadn’t finished. “But I’m getting As without them.”

“Oh, Mr. A-Triple-Star Humphrey Woods, too *good* for switches, too *good* for this class? Is that it?”

Humphrey didn’t quite know what to say. He’d never been ridiculed for getting A-Triple-Stars before – at least not from the teachers.

“Oh and before I forget,” continued Miss. Zolid, tacitly egged on by the rest of the class, “you’re obviously too good even for The Satiety Switch! You don’t need that to tackle your *inexcusable weight problem*.” Sniggers abounded. “Look around the class, Humphrey. In Mr. Rogers’ class he teaches them that obesity is almost *an anachronism* in the developed world!” A few children in the class triggered their Orgasm Switches, just to capitalise on the crescendo. “So yes, you do have the right to be poorly behaved and to be a fatty, to fail to succeed in life and be a vile sight to all females, but-”

“Stop!”

Miss. Zolid stopped obediently, straight away. It was the second time she’d been interrupted today, only this time it wasn’t Humphrey.

“Delilah Boyles? Don’t talk like-”

“You’re bullying.” Third interruption. Delilah spoke in Humphrey’s defence while he sat with his head covered by his flabby arms, sniffing and bobbing up and down rapidly. “Teachers shouldn’t bully. If Humph doesn’t want switches, *you* can’t make him, so just leave it.”

The children should’ve been ecstatic – two fights for the price of one! - yet they were all silent or gulping nervously. It was one of those moments when nobody wants to be there; luckily some of them had Positivity or Unconsciousness.

They were quiet because they knew about Delilah’s father.

Miss. Zolid cleared her throat and hastily constructed an apology for Humphrey.

Everybody had forgotten about Delilah’s father.

Dr. Grice Boyles took step after painstaking step through the oppressive heat and shin-high garbage. He was on a shortcut through a dingy side road called ‘Utopia Alley.’ Like all good utopias, Utopia Alley had tried, bless it, and failed. It was an alley that stunk of urine, like the rest of them.

Grice’s problem with switches had become a problem with his job. Refusing to ‘update himself’ with switches like Motivation had led to increasing pressures at the medical practice where he worked. He just couldn’t keep up. Although they softened (or concealed) the blow with business jargon, apologies and words of appreciation, effectively they couldn’t let Dr. Grice Boyles continue to practice as he was. Without switches he was without a job. As stubborn and obsessive as his father, he continued to refuse switch augmentation and joined the Global Anti-Augmentation League. ‘Global’ was quite misleading; it was a cobbled-together scattering of dissenters and it barely spread past the London suburbs. Such anti-augmentation communities had sprung up wherever there was a whiff of switch-malaise, but they were so weak and in such minority that they were simply ignored by the normals. They were seen as spiritual or religious – cults that were trying to cling onto some absurd and outdated view of humanity or God.

Dr. Grice Boyles had fallen out of rhythm with the world.

If you’re looking for a cause, perhaps it was because, when Delilah was but a toddler, Mrs. Boyles died of cancer.

There was no Cancer-Cure Switch. It was in development. Everything was in development.

Grandpappa Boyles paced the laboratory in his customary fashion, his cuddly explosion of silver hair amassing inspiration. What else did humans *need*? What else could be *created*? The 1, 456 patented switches surely didn't cover *everything*! The word 'retirement' was not in Grandpappa Boyles' vocabulary (his favourite word was 'burgundy', not that it matters).

Behind him, on his blackboard, was the little joke-to-self that he could never bring himself to erase:

"Next project: The Immortality Switch."

The indisputably mortal Dr. Grice Boyles stood facing a receptionist in the delightfully sterile lobby of the Absolute Switch Inc. He had been pestering the receptionist for some time but her stoic, salary-earning smile was persevering.

"I'm sorry but can you be more specific in the complaint you have with your Unconsciousness Switch, sir?" she asked soothingly.

"I will explain again," Dr. Grice Boyles said, sighing and taking a pause to formulate his next sentence. He couldn't take it; he'd come so far and this had all been against his better judgement. His whole body dripped with sweat and stress.

"I can still feel it," he said.

"What's that, sir?"

"Life."

"Well how does that feel? Be more specific."

"Niggling. It feels niggling."

"A-huh."

"I want it gone."

"A-huh."

That was all she could say?! *A-huh*? He was talking about thieving the mind of its prized jewel, blinding the soul's very eye, aborting the most mysterious product of nature, and all she could say was *a-huh*? No defence of consciousness, no admonishment of his ingratitude, just *a-huh*. She continued,

"So it doesn't work at all? OK, well this problem is resolved for a number of clients in newer versions like 2.1. I can't offer you this free of charge, although I can offer you-

But Dr. Grice was disgusted.

"I've changed my mind," he snapped. He was disgusted with switches, with the receptionist, but most of all with himself. He was not a happy chappy, that was for sure, and his anxious thoughts wandered.

He'd had such trouble supporting Delilah after his wife had died. Grandpappa helped out but Grice had always felt inadequate. She was such a wonderful creature. Delilah. She deserved so much, she-

"Sir? Are you OK?" The receptionist shook him from his reverie.

"Yes. And I've changed my mind. I want you to take them out." His tone was so full of conviction and authority it seemed it could burst at any moment.

"Take them all out."

"Sir, we don't do that. That service is available at a number of switch boutiques or parlours if you've got the requisite funds, but we don't provide-

Dr. Boyles was already out of the door. He'd had a swift change of heart. Unconsciousness was no solution; he had *never* had any faith in these switches. He needed to rid his body from both of these switches, to free his system from these demons.

Life hadn't always niggled so.

Delilah squeezed Calalacy's clammy hand as they stood in the queue at Prestige Switch Parlour. They were both a little nervous about the Orgasm Switch insertion, but there was little reason to be; the procedure was as easy as piercing an ear or (if something went wrong) getting a small tattoo.

A few of their friends were there just for the atmosphere: the edgy music, the Nu Age artwork, the trendy clientele, and of course one particularly lad who worked there "plugging" customers. In fact most people there were just there to be part of the scene, half of them totally peaced-out on Positivity and Meaning.

"Hey, you're going to Dave's party later, right?" Calalacy asked. "He's got a NightSky projector and-"

"Yeah, look, this isn't dangerous, is it?" Delilah interrupted, agitated.

"What, this Orgasm Switch? No way. Once we've got them, we can show those boys at Dave's party that we don't *need* them!"

"A-huh," Delilah said, "I guess we can." She would've turned on her own Positivity and rinsed the anxiety out of her system if it wasn't for the fact you have to have a stable psychological baseline for the insertion.

In these rare, brief moments where she had no switches on at all she always found herself looking around and not being able to keep up with anything. She was swept up in some sort of current, unable to resist its flow, but a part of her was screaming to get out.

The rather dashing lad came out from behind a scrawny piece of black fabric.

"You two next?"

"Yeah, my name's Calalacy!"

Delilah followed her friend, frustrated that she wasn't in control of her own life, and paranoid that she must have appeared meek when she felt so strong.

Because never mind the orgasms, never mind her slim figure, the positive vibes or Dave's party with the SkyNight projector. Delilah only wanted one thing; all Delilah wanted was a man.

When she walked out of that parlour she looked so happy. What a gigglesome pair she and Calalacy made, tripping over the curb with laughter and orgasmic pleasure as they ambled towards the setting sun. Glee filled her sparkling eyes.

And Dr. Grice could see it. His jittery mind had to keep confirming that this was his daughter, his dear Delilah, and she looked happier than he'd ever seen her before, happier than he'd ever *made* her. Perhaps it was just because she'd just been branded with one of those godforsaken switches, but still. She was happy.

So he staggered to his feet and decided to leave without giving a 'good day!' to his own daughter. Yet he rose so clumsily that it caught Delilah's eye and she looked up, squinting through the sunlight.

"What is it?" Calalacy asked.

"Nothing... I thought I saw someone, was all."

And her father slipped back into the shadows.

Dr. Grice Boyles wouldn't be visiting the parlour today; the switches would stay, for now.

Grandpappa Boyles had nearly finished his egg-covered pesto pasta *par excellence* and a stonking good bit of Bach was reaching to a level of ecstasy. He turned the heat down on the food and the volume down on the music, and hollered for Delilah.

"The dinner dong chimes!"

"Coming!"

Yolk the dog assumed, as always, that Grandpappa was talking to him, so he licked his lips and sat patiently by the table. Delilah came running down from her room and sat up at the table, licking her own lips. It didn't take Grandpappa long to serve up and prepare for digestion, tucking his oversized serviette into his collar, as was his custom.

But before he could even start, Delilah quite put him off his food.

"Today... it was weird," she began, "I thought I saw dad today."

Grandpappa Boyles lay his knife and fork down by the side of his plate.

"Oh." The joviality of the room took a nosedive.

"But I know I can't have done because it was probably just... a tramp, or something, and it was sunny and-"

"Delilah, your father has been missing for three years now."

Delilah took a big gulp and tried to focus on the room as it started to spin around hectically.

This is how it felt – when everything was wrong.

"I know," she said. "It's just is there any chance I-"

"You see him in your dreams almost every night, and he's always in your thoughts, so –"

"But he seemed so real!"

"So it makes sense that his image intrudes into your life. But that isn't actually him. We have no idea where he is."

"But I-"

"Don't let it upset you," Grandpappa Boyles ordered. "You're crying – why are you crying? – turn your Positivity Switch on, for god's sake!"

"No! I have to feel it from time to time! I can't just ignore it!" she cried defiantly.

"You *can*!" he said.

After composing herself and wiping the tears from her eyes Delilah said,

"I should never have..."

"It wasn't your fault, Delilah."

Yolk began to bark at all the commotion and this reminded Grandpappa that he didn't have his own Positivity Switched on. He frantically switched it on. Bach returned to comfort him.

And just before turning her own Positivity on Delilah said,

"I should never have gotten a single one of these *things*."

"It's OK, my love."

Yolk kept barking and barking, his mouth becoming hoarse, because nobody was paying him any attention. In fact, his paw was caught under Grandpappa's chair-leg and was slowly being crushed.

In Grandpappa Boyles' calmed mind the bark was harmonising melodiously with the Bach. When Delilah's Positivity kicked in nobody noticed Yolk's agitation so he kept on barking his lonely, lonely cry.

Delilah tucked into her pesto pasta.

“Next year, Grandpappa, do you think I could have an Unconsciousness Switch?”

“We’ll see,” Grandpappa Boyles replied eagerly, “we’ll see.”

Dr. Grice Boyles looked up at the advert that hung over the skyscraper in front of him like an XL-shirt on a Small frame. It advertised some switch or other – he couldn’t see, his vision was too hazy – and it simply read, “We’re Gods of our own bodies!”

Gods? he asked himself. Yes, Gods. Gods of our own corpses.

He settled down against the wall and shook his head in a panic, trying to get the sadness, the confusion, and the sensation of bitter cold out of his mind. An emasculated figure crept over to him.

It was a switch junkie – the kind he’d tried to ignore this morning. He was surrounded by them; he was back exactly where he’d started.

“I knew you’d be back, Doctor, I knew it! You-you-you like it here, don’t you?” It was just another switch junkie, on just another night.

Actually, it was the best friend Dr. Grice Boyles now had, and he couldn’t even remember his name.

“I don’t feel ideal,” Grice said.

A response came quickly from his scrawny companion.

“Just go and take a break. Take a break in the fields. You love it out there. It feels so warm and happy.... The-the-the wind on your cheeks and-and-and-and the feeling of being-being content that lifts you up. Go to the fields, Doctor. That’s my prescription! That’s my-my-my-”

“*What* fields?” Dr. Grice Boyles snapped. He didn’t have a clue what his junkie friend was talking about.

“You know what fields,” the dark little imp replied. And he was right; Dr. Grice knew exactly what fields he meant.

Dr. Grice Boyles turned on his Natural Bliss. Within moments the lifeless black skyscrapers in front of him spread their wings and fluttered with an iridescent magic that eluded Grice’s focus. They formed grand vertical fields ascending to a misty, captivating unknown. And the wind! The wind brushed so sweetly over his cheeks!

So beautiful! There was the face of his daughter, drifting through his hair, so beautiful! He looked down at his fingers and they were sprouting flowers – blossoming with the tiniest little buds of happiness! They were growing and covering him in their silky, softly-scented happiness.

He sat in wonder, pinioned to the wall lined by switch junkies.

And here Dr. Grice Boyles finally fell asleep, relaxed and at peace, dreamy and gleeful and wonderfully free.