

Nisi Shawl
New Action

01/12

received July 19 2025:

OxfordEgret463326Ninja16072025(EggPearl)
(Almond)

Loosing her hold on the knotted strands of the message, its recipient sighed and tilted back her head. Above, the cloudless heavens flickered with light: the sun's reflection off the thousand high-altitude balloons flying over her even here, at the continent's edge.

The message was trouble. A request for connection. She couldn't accept it. She couldn't turn it down, either. She couldn't afford to be known to have read or received it, so she certainly couldn't afford to keep it. But the message carriers' passage was logged on Balloonnet's individual balloons' platforms. Loss, destruction – built-in redundancy handled a certain amount of that, and she'd stayed within statistical bounds when dealing with other such requests. But too many missing drones and there'd be attention, follow-up ... She needed to try something different this time.

#

Excerpts from the *Wikipedia* article “The Five Petals of Thought,” accessed April 5, 2028:

The Five Petals of Thought, aka the New Bedford Rose, refers to a philosophical system dating back to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries widely adopted by activists in Anglophone countries, primarily the US and Great Britain,[1] ...

Elements and Structures: The Five Petals of the New Bedford Rose represent Thought, Action (also called “pre-action” and “pro-action”), Observation, Integration, and New Action (also called “re-action”). Thought is the first step in any course. The first petal is thus associated with visualizations, dreams, and all other methods of forming concepts. Action is next; its alternative names of pre-action and pro-action refer to the idea that any action taken will serve as a prequel or prologue to another action. Observation occurs both during and after Action, and provides material for Integration into the original concept. Integration then leads to New Action.[2]

Many followers of the New Bedford Rose stipulate its application as cyclical in nature, saying that New Action should be followed again by Observation, Integration, and further New Action[citation needed] ...

Rediscovery: The immensely successful[under review] popular psychology book *The Five Petals of Thought* by Melissa Skye is undoubtedly responsible[under review] for the resurgence of the activist philosophy for which it was named ... Translated into twenty languages and also offered in multiple audiobook formats, *The Five Petals of Thought* focuses on personal applications of the philosophy. A brief history

e-flux journal #93 — september 2018 Nisi Shawl
New Action



An artist rendition of a solar farm powered by balloons floating above the stratosphere. Photo: www.pixscience.fr/Emmanuel Jullien/Grégoire Cirade

section relies heavily on quotations from the works of Elvira Coker and other firsthand participants, and a short chapter speculates on the philosophy's ontological roots in the remnants of its first proponents' African belief systems.[9]

To date more than 100 million copies of *The Five Petals of Thought* have sold worldwide.[10]

#

received July 24 2025:

OxfordEgret463326Ninja16072025(EggPearl)(Almond)

(MumboSyrup)(forward)

"She found out about us somehow." Willis shook his crinkly chestnut curls back from his sweaty face. July was hot and humid, even here in the Appalachian mountain valleys, even in the shade of the old growth.

Madison nodded. "Yeah! Do I care how? Do you know who Melissa Skye even *is*?"

"She – "

"She wrote the book! *Five Petals of Thought*! She brought the Five Petals back – she's why we're *here*!" In her excitement Madison grabbed his arm and Willis had to pry her hand off. "That's the template we used to form our *dopkwe*" – Madison, though white, used the Dahomean word – "for collecting these wild herbs. *Hers*!"

"All I'm sayin is, if our security's compromised – "

"*Fuck* our security! Drug it and fuck it on the permafrost!"

"You don't really mean that," Junie's voice interrupted. It held half a question. Her small, plump hands held their lunch: tubes of peanut butter and plastic tubs of sliced peaches. Willis took his share and Madison took hers.

"I guess I don't." The white girl slumped down onto her sit-upon. "Just – I'm tired of the Antitrust butting in. They don't own the balloons. They have no right to tell us how many friends to make or seize harvests when someone won't cooperate. Didn't our parents fight for us being able to organize how we wanted?" She opened her tub and set the top aside, unscrewed the tube's cap and set it on its side on the sloping plastic.

Willis reached over and caught the peanut butter cylinder before it rolled off into the dirt. "Sure they fought. Same as their parents, and their parents' parents before them." He stood the cap on its bottom and it stayed on the tub top. Then he opened his own tub and tube. "Fighting ain't winning. Antitrust took last year's sang crop cause they wanted. Cause they could. How we gonna stop it?"

Junie hunkered down beside them. She waved off Willis's offer of a peach slice. "Thanks. I ate while we walked here. So you worried about that message?"

"I am." He tucked his chin to his chest. "The message itself is innocuous enough, but if we're charged with conspiracy to network across state lines we'll need lawyers. No, not if; *when*."

Madison frowned and unhooked her water bottle from her belt. "How would they get conspiracy from an unsolicited message about a care collective in Washington supporting the Rose?" She swallowed a judicious amount of cold water. Too much would cause cramps.

Junie laughed through her nose. "They'd get it by pulling it out their asses. Same as they get everything against us."

She unfolded from her hunker, smooth and graceful as a scissor lift. "And also they'd be talkin about how Skye had got our internal address."

"That's the big problem," Willis agreed.

"So besides freakin because we don't know – "

"The simplest solution, that we gave it to her? That, Madison, is what the Antitrust Authority will assume when we file our report with them tonight. That's what they'll use to accuse us of illegal, overextended organizing. Maybe resurrect the charge of harboring 'peripatetic' travelers who keep us in touch. Maybe add it to their list of excuses for shutting down the high-altitude balloon networks."

"Some of those balloon people rich."

"Get ready to make a recommendation back at camp tonight. Last time we all get to be with each other for a while; tomorrow we fan out in small groups till next Gathering Day." Junie moved off in the direction of the rest of the *dopkwe*, leaving Willis and Madison to eat in silence.

The Five Petals of the New Bedford Rose were Thought, Action, Observation, Integration, and New Action. Meals were a good time for Thought.

Presently Madison spoke. "If Melissa Skye messaged our coordinates by chance, there won't be any record of us sending them to her."

"Notoriously difficult to prove a negative such as us *not* sending them, though. In fact, it's impossible." Willis poured water in the peach tub and swirled it around to rinse it, then drank. "Besides. Why we have to bring that up? Let's shift the focus. She only forwarded what someone else wrote, right? Maybe by mistake? Maybe she got it by mistake, too – I say we recommend returning the message to the original sender and Observe."

#

Excerpts from the Wikipedia article "Balloonnet," accessed April 5, 2028:

Balloonnet refers to the redundant distributed communications system developed by hobbyists and activists primarily in the

03/12

e-flux journal #93 — september 2018 Nisi Shawl
New Action



A DIY RC FunJet ULTRA model plane launched by David Windestål was able to reach the stratosphere and capture its own weather balloon burst with a GoPro2 at an altitude of roughly 30,000 meters. The shadow of the model plane is captured in this shot. Photo: David Windestål.

05/12



High-altitude balloon during burst, viewed from up-facing camera. See <https://www.alicat.com/mass-flow-meters-for-high-altitude-ballooning-2/>

Northern Hemisphere. High-altitude balloons launch and dock drones carrying occasionally subversive[citation needed] messages recorded in a modern dialect of the Incan knot-based language known as *kipu* or *quipu*. New Bedford Rose adherents teach *kipu* encoding and deciphering free of charge ... Wealthy amateurs built Balloonnet by expanding on the schedules and experimental practices of pre-existing educational groups, extending balloon flights' durations with superior materials till they became indistinguishable from permanent installations.[citation needed] The first *kipu* payload was recovered on August 25, 2021 (presumably launched shortly before), but subsequently disappeared from the NOAA facility where it was stored.[citation needed]

#

received July 28 2025:

OxfordEgret463326Ninja16072025(EggPearl)(Almond)

(MumboSyrup)(forward)(HappyDust)(forward)

AND

received August 4 2025:

StellarRobin880581Cat25072025(EggPearl)(Alto)
"Glitch?"

Donna shook her head no. "The system's too redundant. And we got the pingback twice. There's another East Pomona Care Collective way over in Washington State, and they're who sent this in the first place. So –"

"But they don't have our same coordinates – or username!" Spots protested. He slammed the washer door shut and jammed in the start button.

"True!" Donna shouted above the water rushing into the industrial washing machine. "And Washington puts them just about as far away from here in Florida as they could be on the continent."

"Get up. I gotta clean the dryer's lint trap behind where you're sittin. Don't you think it's kinda coincidental they sent a message how they decided to join the Rose, and it's the very issue we've been talking about?"

"Coincidences happen. Us communications engineers know all about that."

"Sure." Spots balled up the maroon-and-grey lint wad he had scraped from the trap's screen. "But some people here are, I guess you could call em superstitious. That's why they scheduled a meeting for a vote on the topic this afternoon, a week ahead of time. Because we got that message last Monday. A week ahead, a week after. You goin?"

"Of course! A 'yes' decision could put us on the wrong side of the Authority for good. Maybe force them to try to shut us down and seize the building. Which could be a heavy straw placed exactly right on the back of their camel of a

regime. You're coming too, yeah?"

Spots shrugged. "I dunno."

"Why not? You use the Five Petals yourself, don't you? Scared that the monitors Antitrust is sending will see you?"

"Not really. And yeah, I use the Petals.

Mostly. Look, let's say I'm like Slattery and Prine and Greta and Schrodinger and all them, and I expect the universe to conform to certain laws. I expect if I shoot this lint ball off the ceiling vent and it bounces straight in the wastebasket –" he twirled and executed the bank as he described it "– that means I'm in tune with the music of the spheres. And *that* means my support of the New Bedford Rose is good and correct, and everything will wind up for the best."

"So?"

Spots opened the dryer door and shoved warm clothes onto the steel-topped counter opposite. "Help me fold these, please."

"It's my break," Donna complained. But she picked up a pale pink gown and shook its static-y front and back apart.

"Thanks. So I don't think like that. Don't think we're basically one-up on the Antitrust without tryin. I use the Rose, but I don't *believe* in it. If you get the difference."

"I do. Though I'm not sure an Antitrust officer would. They tend to set it off first, figure out what they're targeting later." She smoothed the tamed gown's fabric, squared its bottom fold with its shoulders, and picked a dozen brightly colored bandanas from the work pile to do next. Simple. But in the time those pieces took her, Spots demolished most of the rest of the pile.

Then her fitbit chimed. Donna sighed.

"Break's over. Incoming."

"Help me finish and I'll go up with you to collect."

One bedsheet left. They danced a minuet with it. Spots loaded their neat stacks of laundry into a basket, bra-and-panty sets on top. Scooping up the basket in his long, skinny arms, he walked it to the dumbwaiter by the steps to the ground floor and started the automatic pulleys that lifted it to the dressing room. "Now let's see what you got."

Their climb up the East Pomona Care Facility's open staircase turned into a race. Running off their nervousness. Breathless and giggling, they spilled out of the door on the roof.

The message drone waited on the far side of the drooping catchnet. Donna retrieved it and reset the notification trigger attached to the net's outermost strand. The practiced motions kept her calm. "This message's fletching's from Stellar Robin 880581 Cat's flock," Donna pronounced. "I like them. They've circumnavigated the globe sixteen times now."

"Why's that good? They learn from

experience?"

"Hah. Like they're Als. No, I guess not."

She read the message. "As I thought. It's about us and the Five Petals again. But I didn't expect ..." Long seconds passed.

"Didn't expect what?" Spots peered over Donna's shoulder as if he, too, could read the coded text. Shimmering knots ran up and down its grid, their shifting shapes matching sigils Donna had memorized in her sleep. Her specialty, but Spots could have taken the course too; anyone at the care facility could have, as part of preparing to join the New Bedford Rose. Rumor was Antitrust Authority officers were regular participants.

"It's from the other East Pomona."

"In Washington?!"

"Yeah. Them. The same ones who sent that first message we got 'returned' this morning." She backed up to lean against the wall at the roof's edge. "They – here, I'll read it."

"We promise Integration after you incorporate. Help us unfurl the Petals. We will assist you, too, in any way we can. Any way you want. A program to exchange personnel? Recipes? Persecution avoidance? Look for advantages in our mirror-bias geographics."

Spots slid from where he leaned beside Donna to sit on the mat of purslane growing beneath the catchnet and out to the wall. "What's all that mean?"

Their feet bruised the purslane's fat, rosy stems and freshened the hot afternoon air with their green smell. "Pretty much what it says. We'd have to axe an existing connection maybe, but no biggie. What's surprising is they decided they had to specifically say it, specifically to us."

"Well, if it's gonna affect our decision to join we got till the meeting at four to share it. If we rather the monitors the Authority sends don't get in on the discussion."

"Shouldn't affect anything," Donna scowled. "It's nothing new."

"Maybe they put a secret message inside?"

"Why? Reading messages is a skill taught by the Rose and nobody else."

"Taught to whoever wants to find out how. Plus if texts are cast from one flock to the next they can be intercepted."

"You're talking about what they do with radio waves?" Donna peered down at him, a peculiar but nice sensation. Usually he was looking down at her. "I suppose so. Which is why the idea of secrets is ridiculous. Messages go so many different places. Like they did on the internet before all those businesses took over, back before Neutrality ended."

"If there's anything hidden, anything to what they sent beside the words, it's in the words' context." Donna held out her hands. Spots

grabbed them in his and hauled himself upright. "Let's ask some of the residents. They have the best perspective, the most experience."

"Start without me? I should unload the dumbwaiter and check to make sure the washer's gonna stay balanced through the spin cycle. We need to act normal, finish our chores in case Antitrust sends officers early, right?"

"I'll meet you on the second floor. First won't take long."

Fifteen minutes later the two slipped aside her soundproofing curtain and stepped together into Bridie Raymond's room. The resident's thin white plaits hung limply on her substantial bosom. She smiled in their direction. "Miss Donna. With the latest message? And who's that accompanying you? Mr. Spottiswoode?"

"Good guess." Spots cleared his throat. This client was partially blind, which the other staff knew made him uneasy. "I brought you a new spray-on odor remover to try. An experiment." He took the spritzer out of his apron pocket.

Her mouth twitched; smiling or frowning? Both? "Set it on my table. No, the big one by the door."

"Why are you really here?" The black eyes had turned toward Donna. "It isn't class time. Meeting's not for another hour-and-a-half, couple hours."

"We're not actually sure," said Donna. "Could be something in this message?" She read it aloud.

The old woman rearranged herself on her pillows and tilted her head reflectively. "Seems normal. Which is weird, true. Why spend any effort sendin a message when it's not sayin anything you ain't already know?"

"What I was wonderin myself. Want to hear it again?"

"No, no. Nothin wrong with my memory. You mind me touchin it?"

Donna handed over the message. Examining it visually and with her fingers, Bridie clucked her tongue. "They tell me these descended from them knotted cords the Incans carried around?"

"Incas and a bunch of people. The way these ones' figures move keep em from making sense if you haven't had the latest training. But I have had it, and I still don't get more outta this than I read you."

"And you think it's there. Under the surface ..." The old woman's fingers combed apart the strands' twisted ends and stopped. "What's this?" Her voice cut sharp as a box knife.

"What's what?" Spots left the wall he'd been ostentatiously lounging against.

"These spozed to come in pieces like this?" In Bridie's palm lay the straw-like segment of a hollow thread.

A moment of stunned-sounding silence.

07/12

e-flux journal #93 — september 2018 Nisi Shawl
New Action

"No," said Donna. "No they're not."

They found five other easily removable segments, all on the message's address edge. East Pomona's proper coordinates marked the old openings. But the new openings were inscribed with different marks. No one who'd received any version of the New Bedford Rose's reading lessons – recent or obsolete – could decipher them. Clandestine coordinates.

None of the rest of the residents they visited saw anything wrong – practically, ethically, or even legally – with what the overt message proposed.

Antitrust sent four officers to monitor the meeting. They arrived a quarter of an hour early, lotioned up with their standard first-line protectant against the sedative gas they always carried. Oily-faced and impassive, they occupied the comfortable seats reserved for them near the common room's exhaust vent and didn't appear to notice Spots hovering by the kitchen's serving hatch. Despite performing their usual random credential checks for "peripatetics."

When they left two hours later East Pomona had officially voted to join the New Bedford Rose. When they'd been gone another two hours the meeting reconvened to consider another issue. Arguments took hardly any time. The conclusion reached had two elements: use the strange new inscriptions directing the drone instead of the original ones, and append to the drone's text lattice an affirmative response to the other East Pomona's offer.

#

Excerpt from the *Wikipedia* article

"Antitrust Authority," accessed April 5, 2028:

History: Following the suppression of so-called "freecycle"[3] and "Buy Nothing"[4] associations as competing against them unfairly, retail arms of many for-profit corporations sought further protection from social media-advantaged peer-to-peer distribution modes. Originating as an arm of the Federal Trade Commission's Bureau of Competition, establishment of the Antitrust Authority facilitated regulation of multiple kinds of "overconnectedness," ranging from commercial to cultural to aesthetic linkages.

#

sent August 4 2025:

OxfordEgret463326Ninja04082025
(EggPearl)(Amber-Zoo)

"Good. Because we don't know what Antitrust will try next."

Shyreesha shook her head "No" vigorously. "We never do. This way we're prepared when they shut our other addresses down. We can use these clandestine coordinates to communicate. That way we help the rich balloon hobbyists sow confusion."

"Pre-action," Melvin Wembley agreed, standing below the scaffolding where she knelt. "Pro-action. But what about the message to Melissa Skye?"

"Went wrong, I guess." The hopvines mostly curled in tight, clockwise spirals around the poles where they were planted. Then there were these rebels. "Nothing ever came back from her." They ought to just clip them off.

"You sure?"

From kneeling on the scaffold plank with her arms stretched overhead and hips straight, Shyreesha sank back on her heels. There was no reason for her to feel insulted. She reminded herself firmly that Melvin was woke. Softly, without force or rancor, she threw the ball of twine she'd used to tie back a wayward green bine down to where he waited on the ground. "Drones fail. Hawks and other predators –"

"I know, I know." Melvin caught the twine and rewound the loose end. "Anything ready to harvest yet?"

Shyreesha picked a promisingly dry cone and opened it. Golden powder filled the pale cups of its bracteoles. "Yes. Do you have a bag?"

"In a minute." The sound of Melvin brushing along the thickly planted row of hops receded toward the residence. Shyreesha continued to sit on her heels a moment, then began gathering ripe cones from the bines within the scaffold's reach.

Would it work? East Pomona had created four separate identities and joined the Rose under each, serially. Enough false leads? Too many? Each identity had reached its Antitrust Authority-mandated networking limit soon after its creation. The existence of a care facility with the same name clear across the continent was fortuitous – or was it? Distraction or clue? Especially now they'd contacted it directly and issued that invitation.

Melvin returned with a brown paper grocery bag and Shyreesha put the hop cones inside. Then she climbed down and they wheeled the scaffold further out the row.

"Careful of the spuds," Melvin warned her as she drifted too near the neighboring potato hills.

"All right." But Shyreesha's attention was on the road bordering their property. A skimmer stirred dust and light gravel as it approached. It crossed the old cattle guard, turning in. Yellow grass grown up between the road's ruts bent beneath the wind of its lift engines. It was headed for the residence. This was nap time. The kids. She dropped her hold on the scaffold's guide bar and moved to intercept the intruder. Fast.

In front of the ranch-exterior, the building's main elevation, the skimmer came to a stop and

08/12

e-flux journal #93 — september 2018 Nisi Shawl
New Action

lowered itself gently to the ground. Crimson gull-wing doors lifted and twin-clad bureaucrats stepped out. Male-presenting. Tan complexions glowing with protective lotion. “May we speak with the person in charge?” said the one on the left.

“No.”

“No such person,” Melvin explained, breathing hard from catching up with her. “We’re a collective, consensus-ruled.”

The officers nodded. Probably they’d known all along there was no use asking. “We’re from the Antitrust Authority.” That was the one on the left again. “I’m Officer Stitt, and this is my partner, Officer Chumley.”

An awkward silence. Neither Shyreesha nor Melvin offered their names.

“Shyreesha Dinan and Melvin Wembley, yes?” No hesitation. Antitrust had easy access to population registers. “We’re here to investigate a possible infraction of the citizen connection laws.” A shorter silence. “May we come in?”

“No.”

Melvin once more explained her answer. “Our kids are lying down right now; it’s quiet time. Questioning us might disturb them.” And the gas in the canisters Antitrust officers carried was worse for minors than adults.

“All right,” said Chumley. “Suit yourself. We can request a warrant.”

Shyreesha’s smile made no effort to look sincere. “And by when you get it back and

downloaded and printed you won’t need it; we only have them sack out an hour. Twenty minutes left. Whynchou come sit with us by the duck pond till then?”

“I’ll get us some lemonade,” Melvin volunteered, heading for the front door at top speed.

Exchanging a loaded look, Stitt and Chumley followed Shyreesha around the house’s far side to the fenced-in pond. Steps led up from the top of a stile to a gated balcony jutting from the roof of a low structure smelling of grain, mud, and duck shit. An awning provided shade to the balcony, and alders provided it to the water below. Plastic barrels and wooden crates topped with cushions were scattered around on the balcony’s bare boards; Shyreesha gestured to the officers to have seats on them.

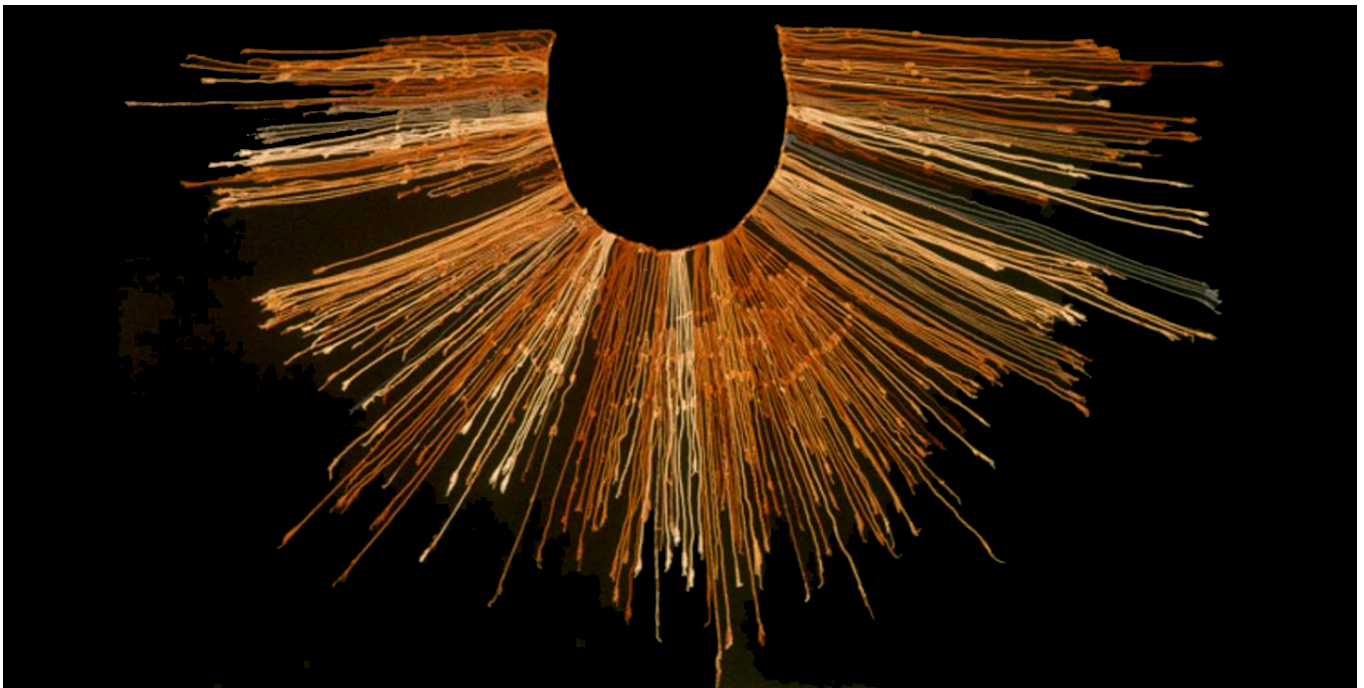
“So what can I tell you that you don’t already know?” she asked, lowering herself to balance lightly on an empty olive barrel.

Officer Stitt tilted his head and gazed downward, body language evocative of self-deprecation. “Start with the basics, I guess. What do you call this place?”

Shyreesha stared at him warily. “We got a few names. Cause we does a few things.”

“Let’s cut the crap.” Chumley pulled aside his tunic’s top lapel and grabbed a fist of hardcopy. “We have you listed in our files three times.” They’d missed an iteration. “Each listing admits to lateral connections with six suppliers,

09/12



An example of a *quipu* from the Inca Empire, currently in the Larco Museum Collection. Photo: Wikipedia Commons/CC BY-SA 3.0/Lyndsaruell

six outlets, six promotional associates, six financial affiliates, and one uncategorized organization. No replication. That's seventy-five total, making this location a real danger."

Shyreesha frowned and tucked her chin in like she was refusing a plate of spoiled food. "Danger to what?"

Stitt replied, "To the inherent hierarchy of government. You want to fight human nature."

He licked his thumbnail screen awake and read a quote from *The Five Petals of Thought*: "Widespread lateral networks are able to prove that equality is stronger, overall, than inequality. We're not giving you that chance."

Leaning forward, she said, "Could be just a misunderstanding. We call this here East Pomona Care Facility on most forms, but there's near as many names as we got members."

"But you're registered –"

"Hey! Anybody wanna help me?" Melvin's shouting interrupted the interrogation. "My hands are full and the gate swung shut." Shyreesha rose from her barrel, but Chumley beat her to the head of the steps. When he came back he bore a glass jar of sugar cookies lifted off the tray of mugs Melvin brought up behind him.

"Scuse me." Melvin set the tray on a crate and picked up two sweating, near-full mugs by their handles.

"Oh, no." Chumley pursed his lips and Stitt pressed his together tight. "We couldn't. Not while we're working."

"Why? It ain't alcohol." He thrust them in the officers' faces. They took them, but didn't drink.

Melvin and Shyreesha took up theirs.

"Cheers." Both swallowed big gulps and let out satisfied-sounding sighs. Melvin scooted a crate closer in from the rickety-looking railing and sat.

"Human nature." Shyreesha lifted her mug again, this time taking a mere sip. "It's complicated. You got lots of components. Some of em contradictory." She broke apart a sugar cookie and pointed at the pond below with its white crescent. "Society determines which parts of your nature get the most play."

"Ummm ..." Stitt and Chumley exchanged another glance. "Right. So are you saying you deliberately subverted the law?" Stitt asked.

"You're certainly at liberty to consider me a virgin if you like; I've been corn-holed."

Again Melvin translated. "That's a line from her favorite porno. Means she doesn't care for the question's root assumptions."

"Well she's not going to care for anything else we're asking either." Chumley inhaled the sweetly acid aroma of the lemonade but still held off from tasting it. He set it down on an empty barrel top, distancing the temptation. "'Root assumptions'? Got em. We assume the law's

right. We assume we get to enforce it. We assume you owe us some answers." His voice hardened with each statement. "We assume you're going to give them to us whether you –"

"Now Herman," Stitt interrupted. "You catch more flies with honey than vinegar, as my aunt always said."

"What's that supposed to –"

Loud quacks burst from the pond like farts, drowning the officer out. The ducks contended against one another for some invisible advantage. Wings beat, beaks stabbed, water spouted up and splashed back down. Then the waves and noise subsided, leaving the ducks swimming cordially together as if nothing had happened.

"Very hierarchical animals, ducks," Melvin observed. "Humans, not so much."

"You think so?" Officer Stitt set his untouched mug next to Chumley's. "Why?"

Shyreesha finished her mug and slammed it down on the balcony's floor. "Ever hear of a concept called '*mudita*'?"

"No, can't say we have."

"Google it. Sort of the opposite idea of *schadenfreude*, which you guys keep in wide circulation. It's like a particular kind of empathy – joy in another's pleasure." She grinned.

"According to the copy of your interning script I read, I am going to *mudita* the hell out of what happens next."

Scooping up the mug she'd just deposited, Shyreesha leapt to her feet. She crouched, knees bent, arms wide, and sprang over the intervening space at Officer Stitt. They crashed together against the balcony's rail – which held.

"Reesha!" cried Melvin. He rose too. Tried to.

"Sit! Hands up!" Chumley ordered him. He pushed him back down to make him obey. "And you – Ms. Dinan – stop! You're under arrest!"

Shyreesha looked up from her embrace of the other officer, eyes wide and angelic. She drew back the fist with the mug in it and smashed it against Stitt's head. Got in two more blows before Chumley ripped the top off of his gas canister.

Soundlessly, stainlessly, the nitrous oxide derivative it contained expanded outward. Quick-absorbing, this sedative's contact vector. Officer Chumley barely had time to pull on his mask. Stitt's only protection was the chemical in the lotion Antitrust made them rub on their skin before field assignments. The injured officer inhaled the gas helplessly; Chumley accepted that was probably for the best. The aerosol component worked more slowly, but its analgesic properties would combat any pain from Stitt's wounds. And there'd be no permanent harm; as the woman had alluded, part of Antitrust

Authority officers' training involved exposing themselves to this stuff. NewNight, which was what its manufacturers called the gas, wore off in a couple of hours.

Not this fast, though. Not so fast Shyreesha should be sitting up clear-eyed. Not so fast that Melvin remained erect on his crate rather than sliding off half-conscious.

"You oughta had some lemonade." The impervious man pointed at the officers' abandoned mugs. "If you hadn't suspected poison you'd be full of our antidote."

Officer Chumley protested the impossibility of an effective antidote to NewNight the best he could with his mask muffling his mouth. "Here, lemme help you." The woman snatched it off and tossed it to the ducks. Chumley scrambled to the balcony's edge but it was gone, a floating smudge in the pond's shining black-and-algae-green surface, dully translucent and drifting deeper deeper deeper deeper

"You hurt?" Melvin asked Shyreesha.

"Couple splinters. I barely feel em.

Messages sent?"

"I think the drones needed brushin up, raise their charges so they reach the right berths. Kids are still workin on em – they'll get em away before this wears off, though." He tapped Officer Chumley politely on one shoulder. "You want to stand up."

"Yes." NewNight made its recipients amazingly suggestible.

"You want to check how your buddy's doing." It helped if the suggestions matched the recipients' innate desires.

Chumley walked to Stitt's side and knelt. No blood. The prone officer rolled over at his colleague's prodding. His eyes stayed closed. Chumley slapped weakly at his cheeks. "I'd better bring him to a medic."

"You hit him that hard?" Melvin asked Shyreesha.

"Hell no! With *this*?" She showed him the mug she'd used. Half of it had crumbled apart. "Papier-mâché, remember? I did pound him with it, though, just like we practiced. Maybe the dose we coated it in was too high? But, you know, I'm feelin good on about the same amount."

Melvin returned his attention to the fallen officer. "You want to wake up." Stitt's eyes opened and he levered himself from the floor.

"You found what you were looking for. Now you want to leave."

#

Excerpts from the Wikipedia article "Message drones," accessed April 5, 2028:

Technical developments: The ability to store kinetic power and derive it from human manipulation ("stroking" and "petting") were added almost simultaneously. Most credit these

innovations to the same cohort of Five Petals followers that helped configure the original enthusiasts' haphazard high-altitude balloon flights into the current Balloonnet ... Early and middle period address protocols relied on idiosyncratic impressions on freshly exposed string-end-sockets made by hand-cast tools. These tools, created by scattered artists, never conformed to a set standard. However, their individuality helped protect information subject to unwelcome government scrutiny, particularly important during the period in which tracking programs were monitored. Along with the frequent revisions of knot codes and the institution of multiple clandestine addresses, these highly interpretable sigils helped disseminate the practical lessons of the New Bedford Rose more widely even than Skye's bestselling book.

#

received August 1 2025:

StellarRobin880581Cat25072025(EggPearl)
(Beaver)

AND

sent August 11 2025:

DancingPeacock907019Eel11082025(MumboSyrup)

(Antler-Zinc)

Melissa sighed. That worrisome message from East Pomona had gone back to them by way of her attempt at giving it an imaginary address. The recipients it reached had been real. They'd forwarded it to a different East Pomona, which may have been what triggered an even more problematic message to that second East Pomona from the first one. How did she know the new message was even more problematic? Because she had a copy on her lap. They'd sent it to her complete with secret coordinate sets, and she'd read it, and kept it for the last ten days –

She sank her forehead onto her clenched fists, then knuckled her tightly closed eyes. She had *tried*. Writing *The Five Petals of Thought* was just supposed to make her rich. Yes, the New Bedford Rose was revolutionary and yes, she cared about it. Yes, in the past it had changed lives, spread around the world, probably changed the course of history: hard to imagine women's suffrage succeeding, or the Civil Rights Movement, or the defeat of Belgium's Leopold, without it. Those, though, had all been before her time.

And yes, the Rose challenged the current government's fundamental precepts. But.

But she had her place in the scheme of things. She couldn't afford to lose it. She had her wins: this school, her home, her favorite charities. Health care providers who paid attention to her complaints.

Another sigh escaped her. Here on the

hillside where she always lunched and breakfasted, always examined the latest messages, Melissa's view of New Ramblin's precincts fell before her like a rumpled tapestry: the red horse barn, the white goathouse, the chicken coop, dronecote, bath, woodshed, and workshops connected by flagstone paths; the pool and boathouse; the commissary. The clinic being built down near the main entrance. All those neat and oddly assorted visions: the commissary like a Black Forest cottage, dripping with faux gingerbread and windowed with sugary panes; the circular dorm with its circus-tent roofline; and all the eccentric rest. Born of Thought, Action, Observation, and Integration. Persisting via pro- or pre-action, on her part or on the part of some other member of the Rose. Now for something New. She set aside the message that had meant another round of trouble.

Would the school go on without her? Could it?

One way to find out. One deliberately provocative way. Accept an illicitly high number of connections.

Shaking her head at what she was doing, Melissa turned and lifted the top drone off the fifty-plus crated beside her. Now where ... she found and opened the pen cushion compartment of the message kit on the wooden table beside her. Running her fingers over her pen's heads she selected the right one and thrust its point into a hollow thread's opening. Repeated the sequence for each of the other address threads. Then she stroked the wings on either side of the drone's body till she felt sure they were charged with enough kinetics to make it to the nearest balloon with a drone booster berth. And lifted it up and released it on the wind.

###

x

12/12

e-flux journal #93 — september 2018 Nisi Shawl
New Action

Nisi Shawl's stories have appeared in science fiction anthologies ranging from the groundbreaking *Dark Matter* series to *Salon's* online *Trump Project*. Ursula K. Le Guin described Shawl's 2008 Tiptree Award-winning collection *Filter House* as "superbly written." Though best known for her short fiction, Shawl also wrote the 2016 Nebula finalist novel *Everfair*, an alternate history in which the Congo overthrows Leopold II's genocidal regime. She has appeared as a lecturer at Stanford and Duke Universities, University of Hawaii Manoa, and other institutions. In 2005, Shawl co-wrote *Writing the Other: A Practical Approach*, a standard text on inclusive representation. She's a founder of the Carl Brandon Society and has served on the Clarion West Writers Workshop's board of directors for nineteen years. Shawl reviews for *The Seattle Times*, *Ms. Magazine*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Los Angeles Review of Books*, and contributes monthly columns to *The Seattle Review of Books* and *Tor.com*. She edits reviews for the feminist literary quarterly *The Cascadia Subduction Zone*. Additionally, she has edited and co-edited several anthologies, including *Stories for Chip: A Tribute to Samuel R. Delany*; and *Strange Matings: Science Fiction, Feminism, African American Voices, and Octavia E. Butler*.