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Excerpt from *Krall Krall* (Baltimore: Cars Are Real Press, 2013)

Fragment 1: Historical Note
(Rockville, Maryland, 2012)

sourced by Linda H., research consultant, History Partners Inc., Rockville, MD

[Note: due to payment processing errors, the History Partners dossier on Karl Krall commissioned by the present author and compiled by research consultant Linda H. is not currently available. Until these payment issues are resolved, the following fragments have been reconstructed from a trashbag of partially-shredded documents obtained with the assistance of History Partners' obliging Information Disposal staff.]

“...There are no fewer than two and no more than five Karl Kralls – most probably two. If your project is comparative, keep in mind the old maxim: never kick a gift horse in the mouth. Casual interest is not sufficient...it won't be as easy as you think to cash in on 'animal intelligence' whether hoax or genuine...Krall was a scientist, an unconventional one, he did not 'talk to animals' in any spiritual sense or communicate with his horses using a clever secret code. His perspective was anything but fanciful.

Of the other Karl Krall, a German- émigré entomologist in the employ of the Smithsonian Institution at the time of his death, I can say very little... an ill-starred marriage... the wife was a pulp novelist, renowned in social circles as a highly-entertaining eccentric. The vast majority of her books are no longer in print. Woven into their incoherent melodrama are pointed references to Krall's unfinished work on the evolution of the beetle subfamily Dynastinae. Unfortunately these are the only clues we have to the direction of his research, as his Palo Alto lab was destroyed in a fire originating at the nearby municipal dump that devastated much of the city's northeast quarter in 1953.

They appear to have met at a party in Lower Manhattan in 1945...Diana's first book fictionalizes the early years of their relationship...heavy-handed allegory...a female-dominated society in which men are forced to walk on all fours. This society enjoys peace and prosperity until the bold female protagonist witnesses the unthinkable: a man standing up... you see the drift of it.

...until past-due payments are received, I will be unable to translate material in German pertaining to the animal psychologist Karl Krall, including his short-lived scholarly journal, *Denkende Tiere* (Thinking Animals). An English source, Maurice Maeterlinck's *History of Men and Horses*, is diverting but unreliable.”

Fragment 2: The Passion of Karl Krall
(Baltimore, Maryland, 2005)

Krall has more than a passing interest in psychology. He has outfitted his country home with a modest but well-appointed laboratory where he conducts experiments to indulge intellectual curiosities not satisfied in the jewelry business, from whence his family fortune flowed and continues to flow, although it is doubtful that only son Karl will produce any eligible heir to the Krall estate. The elder Krall is dead and will never suffer this knowledge.

Krall makes friends easily. The trouble is explaining to them his scientific interests. The neighbors consider him an eccentric; his property is extensive enough that neither they nor their gardeners trimming ornamental border shrubs can hear the chirping, barking, and occasional howling from the recesses of the Krall mansion. He is regarded as very knowledgeable in the training of animals, and his social circle of late has become peculiarly restricted to elderly men who breed pigeons, horse trainers, retired cavalry officers, veterinarians, and a former zoologist of the Berlin Zoo. This sort of company is very stimulating to his investigations. Less enlightened residents of the town have never been friendly with Krall due to his line of business. Krall wishes, however, to move in more enlightened circles – we are provincial here. He wishes to start a scholarly journal about the thoughts of animals. It's a shame he was never sent to university.

I count myself a friend of Krall. In the project of procuring him an elephant for his experiments I have undergone many hardships.

“Your elephant is hopelessly stupid,” Krall remarks, shaking his cigarette ash into the imitation-ceramic planter outside of the train-station Starbucks, which is filled with parched impatiens. I know this to be true. The elephant is remarkably stupid.

“A negative result is still a result,” I remind him. My coffee is so bitter – Krall drinks his black and ordered me the same. On the street a fire truck sirens past, then another, so that I can't hear his reply. “Repeat yourself?” No one else can replicate what he's accomplished. We look to the column of smoke rising towards the sun in accusation. Various parts of the city have been on fire due to the unusual heat.

Krall says the elephant has no mental capacity whatsoever. The creature grabs with his grotesque nose at any object left unattended, and conveys it to his mouth whence to be turned over and slobbered upon. I can say with some certainty that the elephant comes from highly intelligent and capable stock, but is some kind of degenerate, which is how I came to purchase him at auction at the DuPage County Fair.

The young elephant makes its escape in the dark of night. Fleeing through the littered circus grounds, flickering sea of foil wrappers. Makes for the train tracks on the other side, makes to cross, but suddenly frozen on the ties by oncoming engine headlight and an incredible roar. The onslaught is deafening and the pulse of time slows. The engine creeps closer in silence now, an illusion of the vortex between an object with momentum and an object in its way.

Cue tinkling noise of a triangle being struck: one gigantic elephant trunk descends and wraps itself around the small elephant – then another from somewhere far above, beyond the tunnel of headlight, and another, warm, strapping under his front and rear legs, twining together and crossing familiarly. The great elephants tower over the train as it passes in the dark between their massive legs, and they lift up the small elephant from the rails. He wraps his trunk around theirs in terror while the train and its hot breath of smoke and endless rattling boxcars pass beneath his dangling feet.

I have great faith in Krall's methods, the most innovative and refreshing approach to animal psychology currently in use. The Starbucks beginning to burn (at least, its impatiens and styrofoam planters in a state of combustion), we walk down the sidewalk to get an ice cream sandwich from the 7-11. People glance at us as we walk. Krall looks uneasy, clutching his shovel in both hands. It's no trouble at all for Krall to pasture a small, baby elephant, but it will grow significantly and the people of the town, suspecting, have begun to fear for their property. They hear stories on the news of elephant rampages in which the creatures seek brutal vengeance for specific wrongs inflicted upon very distant ancestors, the memory of which has lived on in dimly-understood elephant lore. We take this as a demonstration of their remarkable intellectual powers; if only I could explain to the townspeople that the elephant we're dealing with is hardly competent to pick its own teeth. It's clear that I've created a public relations headache.

Instead of pressing on the elephant debacle, Krall politely asks after my wife. I don't have a wife, I explain. He nods, chewing the ice cream sandwich. Rivulets of ice cream run down the wrapper folds, but he handles the sandwich in such a way that his hands remain clean. We don't often talk of personal subjects. It happens that the last time we spoke of personal subjects, I did have a wife, but that is not the present situation. I was at the DuPage County Fair last August to support my then-wife in her efforts to carve an oversized rutabaga into a persuasive miniature of the Space Shuttle Challenger. Despite the patriotic spirit of this project, she lost to a rutabaga carving of the Eiffel Tower and in a foul state of mind, she drove off in our truck with our border collie, Inez. I returned to the fair this year in the hope that she would not be able to resist a chance to redeem herself, and I might be reunited with Inez and with my truck that was nearly-new at the time of my wife's absconding. Instead, I placed the winning and only bid on a young African elephant in the livestock auction, category “other,” which was sparsely attended because it occurred at the same time as the wool-carding championship. I hoped that Krall would be pleased and consider this an offering of friendship, but I soon realized that the elephant was damaged goods.

“It was my intention,” Krall says, “to come to terms with my failed legacy. How will my work continue without students – my estate and my animals whose highly-developed minds require constant enrichment? I considered appointing an heir. An energetic youth to take up the laboratory and, as a cover, direct the jewelery interests. This would raise a panic among the shareholders, who keep uneasy watch on my eccentricities. If they

depose me the laboratory budget goes up in smoke.”

“It's true you can have any number of seagulls,” I say, not to Krall, or to anyone in particular. Krall graciously acts as though I haven't said anything, testimony to his being a born gentleman whatever the prejudices of the townspeople. They have been mistaken in numerous things. I think of Krall's young men as seagulls, flocking around a precious shard inexplicably come to rest in this town.

“It's impracticable,” Krall is saying. “So everything ends with me.”

Sometimes the shadow of a great elephant stretches across the plains at dusk, and the small elephant feels the phantom warmth of an embracing trunk before knowing it as his own shadow. They left him to fend for himself. They lowered him to the plain where he followed them towards the smell of water, he dashed among the moving forest of their tremendous strides but really he sank in a tangle of brush grass, exhausted, though the shadows of marching legs still played across his eyes and his skin was tickled by strokes of his companions, who had saved him to be one of them and certainly not to wander utterly alone. Such a thing is death for an elephant. He continued to follow the smell of water on waking.

How much Krall knows it is hard to say. He may deceive others, as many accuse, and he may deceive himself. I believe him to be mentally acute and sound in his reason. We are walking now towards the gasoline pumping station and the grassy lot of a former laundromat.

“I began to be curious, however,” he continues. “An ant doesn't look at its anthill and say, 'everything ends with me.' Surely you too have pondered what becomes of your ideas and memories when you can no longer think or remember. Unfortunately, I come from money. For a man in my position there is a chaos of suggestions coming from the well-meaning and the charitable. To improve the material conditions of this world, etcetera. I began to think, who has suffered the most? What does that entail? Humans understand each others' suffering even when we inflict it upon each other. Comprehension gobbles it up. There are tears, empathy, ceremonies, forgiveness; it might as well never have happened. What we don't understand to be suffering must be the most terrible. When we say, *they do not suffer. They do not know the meaning of it, they lack the propensity to feel.* Indeed, but only on account of this: they were never taught to feel.”

I suspect we are entering into an esoteric area, and would almost prefer that Krall chastise me about the elephant. I don't have anything to say on the topic of suffering. Sometimes it's impossible to avoid.

“Look, Krall, can anything be done for the elephant?” I ask.

“My theory,” says Krall, “is that everything suffers and the role of education is to cultivate this innate sensibility. Communication is the key to suffering; basic mathematics is the key to suffering. You won't be young and beautiful forever!”

Presumably this is not addressed to me. I am no longer young and was never particularly beautiful. As a trainer of animals, I appreciate the distinction between training and education. In one of my finer turns, I trained a lion in the Yankee Robinson Circus to act like it had a broken heart.

In the lot of the former laundromat we stand in the unrelenting afternoon sun. Suddenly Krall swings the shovel that he's been carrying; I brace myself for a blow, either blunt, with the flat, or piercing, with the blade. The shovel strikes the ground, which is mostly concrete rubble, and rings out at a low frequency. The bellow echoes off the squat brick warehouses, out over the on-ramp of the Interstate. My ears ringing, I see Krall going red. He has been thrown to the ground by the unexpected resistance. His hands, clutching the shovel's shaft, have three glittering rings. Not bothering to rise, he throws the shovel at my feet.

“How big a hole can you dig? A hole big enough for an elephant? Or only big enough for me?”

My nerves slightly jangled, I walk off and let him lie in the lot of the former laundromat until he's through with his tantrum.

Fragment 3: An Experience of the American Karl Krall (Chicago, 1926)

Why is Karl Krall gentle? The insect world is neither gentle nor cruel. It really doesn't know the difference. And, due to this fact, Krall is gentle. A mosquito will not understand your malice; it will only be crushed and die.

Karl Krall was carried off by ants at a young age. It happened slowly. His surroundings became slightly unfamiliar. The bathroom mirror crept down the wall. More of himself became visible, in proportions not anticipated by standard human anatomy texts. A homuncular map would lead us to expect the expanding cerebral dominion of hands, eyes, lips, penis. What occurred was reduplication: he sat on the cool rocks by the side of the man-made lake with its many pavilions, and ants slowly carried him away to pavilion eight, which they had reserved, and presented an original play or pageant about the hilariously limited compass of human awareness. It began with a human stepping on an anthill and experiencing persistent but inchoate feelings of regret. It went on to portray a human with an inexplicable sensation of itching, a human with ants tattooed all over her body, and an ant hopelessly in love with a human who could not discern the frequency of the ant's voice. Krall clapped politely at the end of the production as the ants took a bow and then died, to be replaced by a new generation of ants equally well-endowed with the hard-wired behavioral repertoire to play their given roles with gusto. Seeing this, the young and impressionable Krall fell into a reverie, and his family had to resort to searching the park with a rented bloodhound, which led them to pavilion eight just in time to collect Krall as the park gates locked, and to stop at the omelet stand on the way home, where Krall ate a ham and cheese omelet unsurpassed by any he would encounter in the remaining decades of his life. At this point he became an entomologist.

***Fragment 4: Island Research Station
(Minor Outlying Islands, Pacific Ocean, 1950-51)***

Synopsis: Exile in the Pacific; something is definitely not right; increasingly erratic field notes; Diana tries to write her novel; Krall is consumed by resentment but comforted by the discovery of two new beetle species; he makes many observations thereof.

Karl Krall touched down in the Pacific islands with no particular anger in his heart. Rather, this emotion resided in the corners of his eyes, a diffuse black thing snooping in his peripheral vision. The propeller plane belched a miasma of overcooked root vegetables and rubber bands. Krall's pupils bounced rhythmically as the plane intersected with a lump of sand low over the ocean, and the lump of sand stretched out like a dry furry tongue. Rubber bands had been absent during the war. Real rubber was impossible to get, and the synthetic kind made of petrol crumbled in your hands. It was 1950; in addition to rubber factories and fertilizer factories other war machines were still whirring, finding new purposes. All over the South Pacific, planes that smelled of limp turnips were depositing researchers onto isolated atolls. Some of those researchers, like Krall, were there to count terns and measure albatrosses. Other scientists were there to destroy the terns and albatrosses with bombs, while the first group of scientists slept or played backgammon.

Krall was not suspicious of this arrangement because he only knew about the first part of the mission. His wife, the beautiful and fair-skinned Diana, inferred the second part but held her peace. She could not present any material evidence; her paranoid worldview dictated an eternal confluence of curiosity and destruction. Indeed, she glimpsed these hapless twin functionaries of the national interest nodding to each other as they passed in darkened hallways of the Honolulu field office where the Kralls received vaccinations for unspecified tropical diseases. Officially she looked forward to the peaceful counting of terns and playing of backgammon in an island paradise. "Where shall we build our hut?" asked Diana as she strolled down the beach, ribboning sand between her long, bulbously-jointed toes.

"A headquarters has been prepared for us." Krall gestured towards the island's upper elevation, a grassy twenty-foot rise above the surf.

"I intend to live in a thatched hut," said Diana. "I intend to fully integrate with the organic rhythms of native life."

A beetle scurried across her path, bound for the shallows of the receding surf. Krall's right eye followed it involuntarily. The beetle plunged into the water and paddled on the surface. Although Krall did not perceive any change in his own physical attitude, he had in fact dropped to his hands and knees and lowered his chin to the sand.

"I'll get a terrific tan. Do they pierce their noses here?" She walked alone down the beach.

"It swims," Krall muttered. "What does it eat?" He removed a glass vial from his vest pocket.

Krall's notes reveal little about what transpired on Island HA64 (Bunker Island) between January 17,

1950, and May 3, 1951, when Diana Krall was discovered afloat on a raft of pontoons and palm fibers at 16°45' N, 169°31' W (Johnston Atoll). The notes were compiled weekly, rolled into a wax-coated cardboard tube, along with jarred specimens, and collected by an O-52 Owl that also delivered provisions, mail, and laboratory supplies. The reports were filed in duplicate, one copy in the office of the Smithsonian Institution, the other in the headquarters of the Army Chemical Center, Fort Detrick, Maryland.

Sandy Kleptax, who flew the Owl, would have replaced Charles W. Sweeney's third backup pilot on August 9, 1945, had all four of these men been unable to execute orders as per the dropping of an atomic bomb on Nagasaki, Japan. Kleptax was proud of his legacy of not having inflicted massive suffering upon the people of Nagasaki, and was grateful to the United States Air Force all his life.

Krall's notes from January 17, 1950, read as follows:

Curious water beetle appears to skim plankton off the surface of tidal pools. Other possible food sources: deposits of minerals, remnants from shark feedings in deeper water. Landed at HA64 and established in lodgings. Islands uninhabited. Graduate assistants due in two weeks. Why here? My zone to include HA64, HA65, HA80, and HB16, with base camp on HA64, Bunker Island, so named because there is a cement bunker. Plotting most efficient water route for routine specimen collections. General survey to commence tomorrow. Supply pilot Kleptax an annoyance. Constant whistling of popular songs.

Diana Krall and Kleptax were playing a game with a bottle of baby oil. They lay the bottle on a hot, flat rock and watched as the clear plastic heated up. When the bottle began to droop in the middle and warp, they took turns squirting the hot oil at the swarm of beetles sunning themselves on the white sand. The beetles forming a solid mat then scattered with a great hiss, leaving behind their stricken companions to writhe as the liquid coated their exoskeletons and seeped in to the soft interior, blocking respiration. Exterminating insects with lipids was something Diana learned in the kitchen. Her mother gave her a paintbrush and a bowl of hot lard, because she couldn't stand to crush them with her shoe. The inside of the bug stayed inside – a viscous, invisible, perfect seal. Eventually it slowed and came to a stop, becoming a lustrous museum of itself. On the beach, a booby learned the game and waddled along in the wake of the oil jet, slowing as the victim slowed, casting its idiot shadow over the pebble black bodies. The booby learned to herald death, an extension of a more permanent shadow. This was of course a maladaptive trick to teach to a wild animal and it soon became nearly domesticated, its shadow seeming to breathe and stretch independently of the sun.

Diana and Karl Krall played a game with a white glove. She put on the glove, and he tried to remove the glove. She used her right hand, he used his left, and the unused hand was held behind the back. It began with her fingers arched, tips on the tabletop, as though poised over piano keys. He coaxed her firmly anchored index finger with his own. He caressed each joint, tugging gently at the knit fabric. He made a circle of index finger and thumb and jerked suddenly, uprooting her gloved fingertips; she made a fist and he pried up the smallest finger, writhing, and then the next. Sometimes in this game he would glance up at her face. Ripples from the distant motion of her hand stirred under the expressionless surface.

The Phoenix Islands were discovered by whalers in the nineteenth century. The absurdity of what they were doing there – just wandering over the surface of the ocean – was relieved by the presence, on these remote and barren Pacific atolls, of signs of human habitation. A blue bead, a sharpened piece of bark, a reinforced concrete bunker. The whalers walked out across Bunker Island but all around them was the ocean at war with the fringing reef, and the ripping east wind. Nothing grew above knee-level. It was not land, this was certainly not the earth. The ocean sometimes outdoes itself.

Karl Krall was not fond of seabirds. He wondered idly about the laborers who sailed from Brisbane fifty years ago with shovels, and shoveled bird shit onto their ships and then went home. Unlike the whalers, the birdshit shovelers were there for a reason. They had consulted a map and decided that great fortune lay in those piles of shit, which increased crop yields. How much birdshit had there been? Reports exist of forty foot mountains, and men hacking and dynamiting as in a limestone quarry. No one took pictures at the time. Although profitable, shit-mining was not a glorious undertaking.

When Humphrey called him up to join the Smithsonian expedition, Krall recognized his situation as a charity case. "Krall," Humphrey said, "I know you don't do birds, but you'd really just have to count. And tag them of course. And poke around on a government-issued skiff. It's all underwritten by Defense." Humphrey meant to say that it would be better for Krall very far away. Probably, Humphrey arranged it so that nobody appeared accountable for Krall's presence in the Minor Outlying Islands; by the time someone discovered him there, he'd be a blameless reformed citizen. His sin from the beginning was a distaste for replication.