

FIVE

Harvey Manning

THE FELLOW WHO JUMPED OVER CANDLESTICKS AND CLIMBED BEANSTALKS  
AND WENT UP THE HILL

THE FELLOW WHO SOLD HIS MODEL A PREMATURELY

THE FELLOW WHOSE SCREEN WENT BLANK

THE FELLOW WHO DRANK WATER IN PUBLIC

THE FELLOW WHO WASN'T SUPPOSED TO BE THERE AT ALL

THE FELLOW WHO JUMPED OVER  
CANDLESTICKS AND CLIMBED  
BEANSTALKS AND WENT UP  
THE HILL

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## ONE

Jack was so nimble and quick that he scarcely had mastered walking before he was jumping over every candlestick in the hovel, in the neighbors' hovels, and at hovels up and down the High Road. Living nasty, brutish, and short lives, devoid of entertainment except for being burned at the stake in auto de fes provided by the Inquisition, the peasantry greeted him everywhere with cheers, though mixed with some few grumbles when the candlestick was on the supper table and he kicked over the gruel kettle. Four times he led the High Road High team to the playoffs, each time setting a new record, the last an astounding 101 without stumble or singe. He'd have made 102 had not Coach Lewd of Low Road High surreptitiously substituted a blowtorch which scorched through Jack's pants and burned off a bealluc, as it was called in those Dark Ages.

Fairy admonished him, "It's nothing to me, personally, that your manly or boyly productivity has been reduced by an eighth, but a word to the wise: look before you leap."

The Fairy had been hanging around the hovel since the morning Jack awoke from the first occurrence of a sensationally enjoyable dream. On that occasion she'd given him a bean, told him to plant it and harvest the crop and then, whenever seized by the mood for adventure, to plant a bean at breakfast and upon arriving home from school in afternoon, to climb the beanstalk up, up, up into the cloud.

The mood seized him every day. Each afternoon as he clambered back down from the cloud he'd be hailed by Daddy. "Have a good adventure, son?" Daddy would jovially ask. "I sure envy your climbing style, so nimble and quick. It would do credit to Joe Brown or Gaston Rebuffat. I'd love to join you but this gimp in my left hind leg is murder in chimneys."

Mommy always pecked him on the cheek as he entered the hovel and said, "Now honey boy, you just sit yourself right down and eat your nice hot gruel and then brush your teeth."

As Jack adventured daily through the years to the age where he was shaving twice a week, Daddy's humor progressively soured. One afternoon, sweaty and disheveled, spade in horny hand, he confronted the descending Jack.

"Enough of the games, kiddo, where do you hide it?"

"Hide what?" wondered Jack.

"The Ogre's gold! You must have thousands of Troy ounces squirreled away and that's okay, you never spend any, and it's all in the family. But I'm the Daddy and I've got expenses and I've dug this farm as full of holes as a Swiss cheese."

"Ogres?" cried Jack quailing. "Have we got Ogres?"

"If there's a beanstalk there has to be an Ogre. If there were no Ogre and no gold, why would you run up to the cloud every afternoon?"

"It's no secret, Daddy, you just never asked. Up in the cloud there's a Lady-Girl with bosoms bigger than basketballs and such a sitdown that she's almost taller sitting down than

standing up. Up in the cloud a person needs every bealluc he's got and one of these days I'm going to splatter that Coach Lewd all over this Kingdom."

Daddy gnashed his teeth and wept copiously. "The kid's not old enough to vote and he's confronting bosoms bigger than I've ever seen except in girlie mags and I'm a taxpayer!"

Daddy stalked off in a grump that ended only next day when he called Jack out behind the hovel to tell him the facts of life.

"My boy, a peasant's life is nasty, brutish, and short, and that's a fact. Other pertinent facts are that every year the soil gets leaner and the harvests skimpier and every year you grow taller and your stomach bigger. There's barely gruel in this hovel for three. Without Old Pooper the witches would be yowling all night on the back fence. That puts it between you and Mommy. Granted, her gruel is so cruel I've thought of turning her in to the Inquisition, and admittedly her bosoms are no basketballs, yet she handily outranks you in that department and in the sitdown as well. The moment has come, son, for you to experience the second stage of peasant degradation in this ancien regime of ours. In short, hit the road."

"So my childhood is at an end!" sighed Jack. "To be candid, I can't say I'll miss hauling logs from the forest and sawing and splitting them to keep the hovel fires burning, nor plowing the south 40 and the north 40 and the east and the west 40's, Donkey never offering to help, sitting all the while under the persimmon

tree picking his teeth. Further, after gagging down approximately 17,000 bowls of Mommy's gruel, a change in diet will not be unwelcome and may cure my acid stomach. However, we're a family, and I vow that when you and Mommy die, doubtless soon, I'll write the County Commissioners and ask them to throw dirt on you, that your naked bones shouldn't be gnawed by Old Pooper and his cronies."

"What greater filial devotion could a Daddy and Mommy ask? To show where my heart lies, as a parting gift I want you to take along Donkey. No beans, though. Hear me? Leave the beans be! I've a notion to take Old Pooper and the .12 gauge up to the cloud and do me a little Ogre hunting."

"No Ogres there, Daddy."

"Well, whatever."

## TWO

Down the High Road a piece, Jack bethought himself to ditch Donkey. However, Fairy took him aside for a private talk.

"You've recently had breakfast and your digestion is still awry. Nevertheless, you must give thought to supper."

"Supper," mused Jack. "With no Mommy?"

"No problem for Donkey," said Fairy, pointing to the snout immersed in roadside weeds. "But a growing boy can't make it on vegetables."

She whispered in his ear. Remembering the years of plowing while Donkey lazed under the persimmon tree, picking his teeth, Jack had to stifle a laugh. That night as Donkey stood sound asleep, Jack conked him on the head with a rock, carved off a rump roast, stuck bandaids on the wound, and built a fire. Donkey awoke at dawn with a headache and a sore rump but he'd always been a morning grouch anyway.

The pair progressed along the High Road, Jack jumping over every candlestick, to the acclaim of the masses. However, whenever a performance was concluded and the peasants turned to their gruel and Jack hinted how yummy it smelled, the constable would recite the ordinance against loitering. Had it not been for Donkey, he'd have been a mighty hungry Jack.

Now and then, the shaded grass beneath a persimmon tree appealing to hot brows and sore feet and hooves, they'd lay over

a day. Jack would grow a beanstalk; he had, after all, filched a handful of beans. The prospect of a beanless future constantly nagged at him. What if some afternoon he decided not to climb down from the cloud but to remain there for good? Should he stay even to nightfall it would have to be for good because at sunset the magical beanstalks withered. Were parlor entertainment the whole of life, "forever" might pass very quickly in the cloud. However, Jack never had sniffed any gruel up there, nor seen a kitchen nor restroom facilities. He made a mental note to ask Lady-Girl about that, if he could remember. He'd never heard her speak. But neither had he ever had anything to say.

The High Road came to the City wall. Jack and Donkey made to pass through the gate.

"Here now!" bellowed the Gatekeeper. "You can't enter the City like that. The bealluc ordinances are very strict. You are absolutely illegal. Gracious! A person would think you'd run up against a blowtorch."

"Over a blowtorch, actually," said Jack. "Ultimately I'm going to distribute that Coach Lewd very widely across this Kingdom."

"Be that as it may, meanwhile you'd best have your Mommy sew up your crotch."

"Mommy is no better at sewing than at cooking gruel. See my shirt? Looks like a designer original, right? Band-aids covering moth holes! It any event, she's many a rump roast distant on the High Road."



Donkey jerked his snout out of the weeds and gave Jack a hard look.

Gatekeeper continued, "If you got no Mommy you'll have to hire a crone to stitch you up. That'll take a couple of coppers."

"Coppers!", exclaimed Jack. "And Daddy wants gold. I almost wish there were an Ogre at the top of the beanstalk."

"What are you saying?" spluttered Gatekeeper. "The books are unanimous about an Ogre with a zillion Troy ounces of gold. A peasant slays him and lives happily ever after. Are you some kind of atheist?"

"All I know is what I know, and that's a Lady-Girl with bosoms bigger than basketballs and such a sitdown that she's almost taller sitting down than standing up. I never thought to ask about gold."

"What a lad!" laughed Gatekeeper. "Scarcely shaving twice a week, I'll wager, and regularly confronting bosoms bigger than many a taxpayer has ever seen except in girlie mags. You have a future, that's my prediction, and not necessarily so nasty, brutish, and short, either. If I were in your shoes I'd hie me to the U and get a Ph.D. and become a Consultant."

"Where is this U?"

"On the Ave, in the City."

"Oh, aye, but I can't enter the City with my beallucs hanging out. Hiring a crone to stitch up my crotch would cost coppers I don't have. How do I earn coppers?"

Gatekeeper looked Jack up and down. "You have the broad shoulders and foolish grin of a logger--no call for that around here--no forests. You have the low forehead and snotty nose of a plowboy--no south or north or east or west 40's in these parts. You might get a copper for the Donkey."

Donkey flipped his ears fore and aft.

"Who'd pay a copper for a Donkey who sits all day under a persimmon tree picking his teeth?"

"A person could conk him on the head with a rock and carve off rump roasts."

Donkey's eyes flicked back and forth between Gatekeeper and Jack; his tail switched back and forth over his wounds.

Gatekeeper cocked his head. "You know, sonny, you have a nimble and quick look about you. Have you ever jumped over a candlestick?"

Jack couldn't restrain his chortling. "Merely 101 at the playoffs! Would have done 102 had I looked before I leaped."

"You," cried Gatekeeper, "Are the Jack? We always supposed the nursery rhyme was pure fiction! Well, your timing is perfect. On the far side of that knoll the County Fair is in its last day. Tonight is the big finish, the candlestick jumping, and first prize is a sack of coppers and a scholarship to the U."

"It's a sound plan," nodded Fairy. "Go for the coppers, and the crone, and the U. However, need I say it again?"

"A word to the wise," dutifully recited Jack.

### THREE

Carousels and ferris wheels were spinning round and round, rollercoaster sleds were rocketing up and plummeting down, bumper cars were crashing into walls and each other, steam calliopes were striving to out-poop rivals, vendors were hawking roast chestnuts, fried ants, honeycombs, pickled salamanders, cotton candy, and gruel-on-a-stick.

A barker beckoned to Jack. "Come here, boy! Don't hang back like your feet were stuck in a bucket! See this villein?" He gestured to a peasant locked in stocks, mouth wide open. "For one thin copper I give you three horse apples. Fill the villein's mouth with dung and you get to cut off one of his ears. Wear it around your neck, put it in a frame and hang it on your hovel wall."

Jack shrugged. "I'd sure love to own a villein's ear, but if I had coppers my beallucs wouldn't be hanging out."

"No Ogre's gold either, one imagines," said the barker. "Tell you what I'm gonna do. Back your Donkey up to me and conk him on the head with a rock so I can carve off a rump roast and I'll give you three horse apples and two coppers change."

Donkey backed up, but not toward the barker, upon whom he turned a baleful eye. The glower swung to Jack. Donkey's tail reflectively explored the bandaids.

A crowd surged past, capering and howling, following a dog that was yelping and biting at the rooster tied to his neck, the

rooster meanwhile trying to peck out the dog's eyes. A peasant nudged Jack and yelled above the din, "A copper on the dog!" Jack turned up empty palms.

"Hurry, hurry, hurry!" shouted a priest beside a cage of yowling, spitting, clawing cats. "For one thin copper you get a pole and a lucifer and a cup of coal oil and a witch fresh from dungeons of the Inquisition!"

Children jittered up and down as the nun took their coppers, tied witches to poles, doused them with coal oil, and set them afire. The children ran off skipping and laughing, witches flaming atop the poles, screeching like so many hot cats.

Donkey's ears pricked up and eyes glowed. He'd always been a big fan of witch-burning. "Sorry," said Jack. "Without coppers there are no villein's ears, no betting on dog-and-rooster fights, no burning witches to a crisp. Also there are no pickled salamanders, no cotton candy, no gruel-on-a-stick.

The aroma of world-class gruel drew Jack to the big top where steaming kettlefuls were being savored by the judges. The sight of smacking lips set Jack's stomach to churning. He couldn't stay to see the blue ribbon awarded, had to run to the open air to be borne along willy nilly by the mob, dogs and roosters in a moral combat, witches burning atop poles, steam calliopes pooping. Passing a gap between tents he thought he saw a distant beanstalk reaching up to a cloud. Before he could break free for a clear view the horizon was empty.

Loudspeakers were blaring, "Take your seats in the big top

for the County Candlestick Jumping Championship! See Coach Lewd and his Low Road All-Stars defy challengers!"

As Jack stood waiting his turn, Fairy nudged him. "Remember what I said?"

"You bet. Look before I leap."

Jumpers managed anywhere from 5 to 50 before knocking over the stick or snuffing out the candle -- or balking, as some did after one youth tripped and came down with the candle up his bung and another, wearing acetate pants, went up like a torch, sounding so much like a witch on a pole the audience guffawed itself hoarse. Coach Lewd trotted out his All-Stars and they did 77, 85, 92 -- and the anchorman 102, breaking Jack's County record.

Jack's entry into the ring caused a scandal among the gruel ladies. They complained to the County Commissioners, who weren't going to let Jack compete, until the Gatekeeper got their ear. Their jaws dropped open and their cigars fell in their lemonades.

Flushed with excitement, the ring announcer bellowed, "Lay-deez an jennamen! I have just been informed that the nursery rhyme is not, as we all have supposed, pure fiction. Our next contestant is none other than the original, the renowned, the nonpareil, the actual Jack the Nimble, Jack the Quick!"

During the standing ovation Jack looked over the crowd. He spotted Coach Lewd scowling -- and suddenly smirking -- and vanishing. Jack gave him no further thought because he saw Daddy! Daddy beating the air with upraised forefinger, Daddy

giving a high five to the fellow on his left, a low five to the fellow on his right, Daddy bringing the hammer down. The beanstalk apparently had been real.

Snooting his nose at the sneering All-Stars, Jack jumped the candlestick 101 times almost faster than the referee could count. An official's timeout was called to insert a fresh candle. As Jack resumed he thought he heard a sizzling. The roar of the crowd submerged all other sounds as he completed 103 and 104. However, at 105 the candle - subsequently determined by the Fire Department to have been a cannoncracker -- exploded, blowing off one of Jack's beallucs.

As he accepted the sack of coppers and the scholarship to the U, Jack muttered to Donkey, "That's two. Now I'm only three quarters the man or boy I used to be on the farm beside the High Road. Someday I will see Coach Lewd in simultaneous transit to every corner of this Kingdom."

Donkey, switching his tail as if counting band-aids, appeared less sympathetic than he might have been.

"Myself, I could care less," said Fairy. "Four-quarters or three-quarters or no quarters, it's all the same to me, personally. Yet as your mentor I am compelled to tell you that nimble and quick will take a peasant only so far. You must look, Jack, you must look."

## FOUR

Jack spent a copper for a gruel-on-a-stick, two more to treat Donkey to a tossed salad and a witch-on-a-pole, and a fourth to have the blowtorch-and-cannoncracker breach in his britches st<sup>+</sup>itched up.

"Typical crone work," frowned Gatekeeper. "Should hold together as far as the Ave, though. A lot of beallucs hang out there, and never mind the ordinances." He grew animated. "Bless you for the championship jump, Jack! Before the bookies wised up I got down a bag of coppers at fifty to one! I had to rent a wheelbarrow. No more nasty, brutish, and short for me. I'm now the proud owner of a fast-gruel franchise at the new High Road Shopping Mall."

"Should I ever return to the High Road," said Jack, "I'll look you up."

"Do it," urged Gatekeeper. "My gruel ever will be your gruel. A final bit of advice, if I may. Your crotch is fine but donkey, there -- his rump -- well -- it's not specifically illegal but it's the sort of thing that makes the Inquisition suspicious."

Donkey's ears flipped up. Jack wouldn't meet his eye. However, when they'd walked through the City to the U, Jack took Donkey in a shop on the Ave and had him fitted for a blanket of llama wool knitted by the lamas who lived on the Hill. They next repaired to the Registrar to cash in the scholarship, which read,

"Admit Candlestick Jumping Champion and Guest." Jack then paid for Donkey's parking permit. When he did, the sack of coppers was empty.

Donkey was hugely content <sup>stroll</sup> ~~standing~~ over the campus, the lawns so broad and lush, the flower beds a cornucopia of roses and pansies and dahlias, far more sumptuous fare than the weeds of the High Road. As for Jack, memories of the gruel-on-a-stick watered his mouth. He was sure he'd never again have an opportunity to conk Donkey on the head with a rock and carve off a rump roast.

"Here is the spot where you get your three wishes," announced Fairy. "Technically you're supposed to pull a thorn from a dragon's nose or do something disgusting for an ugly old lady but let's not and say you did. So, what'll you have?"

"Hmm ...Daddy would say gold."

"It's your wish, but I advise against gold. Gold always sounds good, and is good at the end of a tale. However, give it to a peasant in the middle and wherever he goes people are trying to stuff him in a sack of witches and roll him down a hill in a barrel with spikes driven in from the outside. That's no way to live."

Jack lusted for beans, but held his tongue. He didn't understand his relationship with Fairy. The only females he'd known at all well were Mommy and the Lady-Girl. Fairy didn't belong in either of those categories. Her legs were shapely, so far as one could see, which wasn't much above the ankle. Her



hands and arms were delicate and creamy and her shoulders, which emerged from her gown with no suggestion of adjacent décolletage, were as gleaming white as her neck was long and slender. Actually, a rigorous male-eye inventory was impossible because her gown was of the same material as moonbeams on a frosted meadow and her hair was as dazzling as new-mown hay backlit by the low autumn sun. Her face--was it motherly? Auntly? Teacherly? More sisterly -- and that made Jack ashamed to speculate if she had bosoms or a sitdown.

He twitched guiltily when Fairy prodded, "Witch got your tongue?"

"Gee, my stomach is growling for gruel, but that seems too cheap a thing for a wish."

"I'd agree. On the other hand, tale after tale warns against the greed which over and over again has delivered a peasant -- and even more often, a prince or merchant or star athlete -- into the clutches of the Devil."

"Is the Devil in this?" quailed Jack.

"The Devil is in everywhere<sup>thing</sup> in these Dark Ages and He's a strong argument against too much gold, too soon. Now -- copper -- He doesn't much care for it and neither does the Church. My suggestion is the request that cannot be refused and is instantly forgotten - "lend me a copper." Why wear out your pants pockets carrying heavy metal? As soon as done, the deal is wiped off the records, out of memory. The accountant just thinks some coppers fell through cracks in the floor. Internal Revenue hasn't a

clue."

"Wow!" cried Jack. "All the gruel I can eat -- and not Mommy's. Witches-on-a-pole for Donkey. The sweet life! I can't imagine what other wishes a person could use," he lied.

"Believe me, a peasant needs all the help he can get. If I were you I'd go for the perennial favorite, the fiddle that makes everybody dance. Or a flute - more portable. Better, a pennywhistle -- no months and years of music lessons, just stick it in your lips and blow."

"Goody goody!" crowed Jack, dancing in anticipation.

"Another time-tested wish is the finger you waggle to make people fart. Indelicate, yes. But crude is what peasants are - most of their humor derives from the plumbing department. As for applications in the City, at the U -- well, you're a peasant."

"I love it, I love it!" chortled Jack. "Coppers, crazy dancing, farting! Throw in the candlesticks and the only thing missing would be . . . "

He swallowed the beans and Fairy pretended not to notice. "Jack, stick with me, and I'll make you King of the Varsity Ball and get you the President's Medal."

## FIVE

"A peasant!" hissed the Dean of Students, studying Jack's folder.

"That's right, your honor," said Jack, touching his forelock. "Just in from the High Road. Wasn't eager to leave the hovel but Daddy advised me to do so."

"Ever since the Big War the City is running over with peasants," hissed the Dean. "Why don't they stay where they belong?"

"Well, your honor," Jack earnestly began, "Largely it's the gruel situation. In our case, with only enough for three, Daddy had to choose between me and Mommy and Old Pooper . . ."

"It was a rhetorical question, ninny!" The Dean waddled about the office and flapped at the desk, then calmed himself. "Mind you, we have no prejudice here, nary a jot nor a tittle. We run an equal opportunity institution. Peasants get every bit as much respect as noblemen, merchant's sons, and frat boys. However, may I respectfully ask what the hell you are doing here?"

"The Gatekeeper told me to come, learn to be a Consultant. Fairy said it was a good plan, I could be King of the Varsity Ball. Then they gave Donkey and me the scholarship and a crone stitched up my crotch and here I am."

"For the U gruel, presumably."

It is on the scholarship, your honor, though if you're running scant I can handle it myself. Lend me a copper."

Handing over a copper without noticing, Dean stared reflectively into space. "Was a time I could send students to bed without any gruel. Had a big paddle, too, could swat you on the sitdown until it was so swollen you were almost taller sitting down than standing up."

"Like the Lady-Girl!" broke in Jack excitedly. He stared reflectively into space. "Bosoms bigger than basketballs."

Not hearing, the Dean reminisced on. "The President would watch me whack and afterward we'd go to his mansion on the Hill for a hot spiced gruel and laugh at how the kids had blubbered for pity. He'd pat me on the head, he'd pat me on the sitdown. Those were the fun days at the old U! Then they took away our in loco parentis and now the students treat me like a goose."

"But you are a Goose," Jack pointed out.

"A Gander, you nincompoop!" hissed the Dean, flapping his wings and arching his neck. "Ah god, I went to USC and got my Ph.D. in Educational Administration and they taught me how to swing the big paddle and then they took away my in loco and here I am inundated with peasants and Donkeys . . ."

"Well, your honor," began Jack stiffly, "If this is an equal opportunity institution, like you say, maybe there's some other Goose I can talk to around here, since you seem to have this prejudice . . ."

"No no!" gabbled the Dean. "No prejudice! No discrimination! Just let me fill in these last two places on the form and we'll fix you up with a nice cup of iced gruel and plenty of professors. Now, the question on the form is, 'Where do you expect to be ten years from now?'"

"Ten years," pondered Jack. "If I stayed on the High Road, ten years from now -- what with the life there being nasty, brutish and short -- I'd most likely be in the same shape as the average peasant, my naked bones scattered in the dust being chewed on by Old Pooper and his cronies."

"Old Pooper," repeated the Dean, writing. "Now, the final question and you can be out of my feathers and on your way: 'what is your life goal?'"

"Same as every peasant lad," said Jack. "A princess."

Flapping halfway up the wall to the ceiling before he fell back to the floor, the Dean honked, "A princess! This is what comes of fairy tales! A princess! Next thing the peasants will want to be professors, department chairmen, deans! Princess! You haven't even pledged!"

Two Assistant Deans waddled into the office and helped the Dean to his couch, but not before Jack borrowed their pockets empty.

## SIX

Religion 101 taught Jack that in 4004 B.C. God created the heavens and Earth, and man and woman, who took anatomy lessons from the Devil and set about laying with and begetting so enthusiastically that Jack wondered who had time to write it all down. Having second thoughts, God drowned the Earth, sparing only those creatures (good swimmers aside) who boarded the Ark, two by two.

The Geology 101 prof informed Jack, in answer to his question, that laboratory replications had determined an Ark of the given specifications could not possibly hold together during forty days and forty nights of the two-by-twoing one had to assume was performed by the mice and cats and dogs and horses and giraffes and bears and catamounts and hippopotamuses and elephants, not to mention Noah and family.

In History 101 Jack read about Cleopatra in her barge, Renaissance Popes with their castrati, King Henry VIII and his Catherines and Annes, Rousseau with anybody he could get his hands on, and ditto for President Kennedy and the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., and marveled that anybody had time for wars.

He took Lit 101, proceeding from the graffiti on Grecian urns to the stories of Boccaccio and Chaucer, the English poetry which stirred the Puritans to Civil War, the French poetry the

English refused to translate, and climaxing - repeatedly - in the paperback books with plain yellow covers and no indication where they were printed or by whom, notoriously The Story of O.

He took Drama 101 and observed demonstrations of the PG, R, and X techniques of foreplay.

He took Art 101 and was so stimulated by the temple art of India and China that he hastened to the Herbarium, largest medicinal herb garden in the Kingdom, and amid the belladonna, digitalis, ephreda, rosemary, thyme, dill, cumin, caraway, camomile, peppermint, woodruff, and giant fennel planted a bean and climbed the beanstalk.

As he clambered down, a head poked from foliage of the giant fennel.

"Man", said Pharmacy Prof, browsing in his garden. "That looks like a trip! Give the Aggies one of these beans and they'd revolutionize peasantry."

Jack shook his head. "The beanstalks shrivel at sunset. There's no figuring a Fairy -- only the first bean yielded a crop -- a barnful. But Daddy has those and I've scarcely a pocketful. None to waste on Aggies."

"I could do a paper that would get me invited to all the prestige conferences -- Marseilles, Mexico, Sicily, Turkey, Thailand, Afghanistan."

"I hate to be greedy, old scout, but I am."

"Ah well, I've always got my giant fennel," said Prof, munching.

Each course further clarified to Jack what the U was all about. "Higher" seemed the wrong adjective, but it certainly was an education. Even in Chemistry 101, the O and the 2H flung passionately together as H<sub>2</sub>O, and in Physics 101 the electrons buzzed so fiercely around the nucleus an orgasm seemed inevitable.

In Zoology 101 Jack dissected a frog. Alive when Jack raised his scalpel, through every slice its eyes fixed his eyes. Jack amputated the head and the eyes followed him still. He removed the eyes and their gaze never strayed. They reminded him of someone. He cut off the legs and slit open the sitdown and it came to him. He shuddered and shook and dropped the course.



## SEVEN

"Sure you want to try, peasant?" asked a solicitous Coach Beaver. "A stumble could give you a bad singe and it appears you've already had a certain amount of misfortune in that area."

Disdaining answer, Jack jumped 43 times before an errant heel skimmed the flame and snuffed it.

Coach Beaver hopped up and down and slapped his tail on the floor. "My golly gosh! You have to be the Jack! Before every meet I have my boys kneel and say a paternoster and your nursery rhyme!"

"Don't know how I missed on a mere 44," snorted Jack. "Out of practice. Haven't jumped since the County Fair."

"Being a peasant, naturally you wouldn't know the NCAA candlestick is higher than on the High Road. My heart breaks thinking of the lads I've watched go out on a stretcher, irremediably reamed. Really, you were lucky to snuff - the candle burns hotter, here. Show me a letter sweater with three stripes and I'll show you an athlete with, at most, one bealluc. But, as the priests say, the game's loss is the Church's gain."

"Got to adjust my trajectory a bit, that's all. Did 104 at the County fair and there'd have been no stopping me had it not been for the cannoncracker. Someday that Coach Lewd is going to travel very widely, piece by separate piece."

"Hey, let's be good sports! Lewd is a very bad man but a super coach. Forget him, Jack. You're Hall of Fame material. All you need is a little work on your looking before you leap."

"See?" said Fairy.

"You fret for doing merely 43!" enthused Beaver. "The NCAA record is only 77."

"Even with a taller stick and hotter candle, that's not many."

"For you, Jackie boy, de nada, de nada. You and me, we're going to make this Kingdom sit up and flap its flippers. The playoffs! The Final Two! Interviews! Endorsements! Parties! Bosoms!"

Coach Beaver dashed off to brag about the recruiting coup he'd pulled off under the nose of the infamous Lewd, newly hired by the Aggies in an attempt to get a little respect. The Faculty Senate promoted Beaver to full professor. The Board of Regents funded a huge new Candlestick Jumping Arena and gave Beaver a budget for more assistant coaches and new satin panties for the pompom girls. There was grumbling in the back benches of the Senate about firing the Latin and Greek faculty to hire the new coaches, but the President quipped, "Ashes to ashes, dust to dust, dead languages last, candlestick jumping fust." The Associated Students protested that the new arena meant dropping plans for a dorm, meaning barbarians would have to continue living in tents; the Dean of Students admitted the canvas was rotten but pledged to lay in a stock of bandaids; the Greeks

scoffed that barbs couldn't sleep without rain in their faces.

The City press was delirious. For the print people, Jack meant their pieces might be picked up by the AP for the national wire; for the broadcast people, that their segments might go on the net from coast to coast. A lot of folks stood to ride his coattails to the bright lights. Wherever Jack went he was ringed by cameras and mikes.

(Donkey, also hounded, kept aloof and silent. Resentment died hard yet it was not for him to reveal the dark secret concealed by the lamas' llama blanket. He knew which side his bread was buttered on -- whose scholarship was putting him through the U, whose coppers were paying for his parking permit.)

Coach Lewd opened the season by bragging that the national championship was already his. The Kingdom's sportswriters agreed, voting the Aggies the top spot in every weekly poll, despite knowing the school would be put on probation as soon as the NCAA confessed knowing that Lewd had his team on steroids and speed and morphine and coke, and that his stars earned more from the Alum Slush Fund than the average jumper in the NCL. Traveling to the Final Two in Louisville, Coach Beaver was dispirited, psyched out.

"Rest easy, Coach," said chesty Jack. "Think NCL. The Great White Way, bosoms, Madison Square Garden, champagne breakfasts, Jimmy the Greek, bimbos, Billy Graham revivals, sitdowns, Howard Cosell, classy dames, the King coming to the locker room to shake your hand."

The arena was a single massed roar. Pompon girls did cartwheels to show off their satin panties. Flashbulbs popped -- and Jack flinched. Coach Beaver asked the men-at-arms to surround the ring and keep close watch for possible fake photographers.

The U's first three performed creditably, having benefited from Jack's tutoring, and lost by very few jumps to Lewd's drugged hirelings, who topped out at 56, 66, and 76. But the Aggie anchorman, so high they had him tethered like a hot-air balloon, broke the old record and sent to 89 before he fractured his skull on the arena roof. The fans went wild and two pompon girls bounced their sweaters off and a play-by-play guy swallowed his mike and strangled on national TV -- live, in instant replay, reverse angle, and on the wrapup.

As Jack climbed through the ropes into the ring, not only the individual but the team championship was at stake. Pompon girls led the U rooting section:

"Jack be NIMBLE!

"Jack be QUICK!

"Jack jump over the CANDLESTICK!"

The stat man kept numbers running across the bottom of the TV screen: how many candlesticks Jack jumped at the high school playoffs, at the County Fair, during the current season, how many he needed for victory, how many beallucs he was born with and how many were hanging out tonight.

Jack did 88 and took a timeout -- not for toweling off but

for dramatic effect. He'd not so much as broken a sweat. Indeed, he'd done some jumps backwards and others with one hand or the other behind his back.

The arena was pandemonium on pandemonium when the referee signaled the timeout end. Jack brushed back the pompom girls who were stuffing slips of paper in his shorts giving their telephone numbers and stats. He swaggered to the candlestick, gave the arena a lordly once-around, and jumped right on by 89 to 101. Ringsiders later testified he could have continued indefinitely had not some crazed pompom girls broken the police lines and wrestled him to the mat and stuffed bosoms in his mouth. He didn't much mind, not until after the police had retrieved him and the ring announcer was holding up his hand and proclaiming him the new champion and he realized the twinge he'd mistaken for ecstasy had been what it feels like to have a pompom girl bite off a bealluc.

He spotted Lewd in the crowd, smirking, and moving his lips. Jack had no difficulty reading them: "That's three. You're only five-eighths the man or boy you used to be."

"Someday, Lewd ..." said Jack's lips. "Meanwhile ... "

Jack's finger waggled, the fans held their noses and erupted in a mass "P-U!" and the police horsewhipped Lewd out of the arena into the night, pursued by national TV.

## EIGHT

Not an evening passed that Jack wasn't invited to a Regent's glass palace on the Hill where the lamas grazed their llamas, shown the views of City lights and horizons to the High Road, and served imported gruel in crystal goblets with twists of lemon on the frosted rim.

The profs gave him A's whether or not he attended class, which he didn't very often, because the U curriculum got him too excited and his stock of beans was running low. Donkey also got straight A's but earned them, won his own scholarship, and was appointed to the subfaculty. He and Jack crossed paths rarely -- and got along the better.

After Jack led the U to the Final Two at Omaha and a second national championship in a row, Coach Beaver called him in his office, embraced him, and, weeping, began: "You know the game, Jack. Sure we're on top now, but who knows what can happen? Thanks to our loyal alums gunning down those fake pompom girls, you made it out of Omaha with beallucs intact. But I can't trust my future to your crotch. I'm a Daddy, and Daddies have expenses, and there's this Duke who just bought the expansion franchise 30 minutes from Broadway. We don't figure to place high the first couple seasons. We'll have high pick in the draft. My dream is to grab you and be a Daddy to you all over

again."

"Actually," said Jack, "I can take Daddys or leave 'em alone. Coaches, too, though it's nothing personal."

The two exchanged sitdown pats and pledged to get together for a gruel at the next nationals. Jack gave no thought to Beaver's successor until it was too late. He then stormed into the President's office.

"The man got the Aggies on probation and quit them, went to Arizona and got them on probation and quit there. He farted himself out of Louisville and Omaha!"

"But, but," gobbled the President. "Two straight years in the Final Two. And your pal -- so he told me -- way back to high school."

"Pal!" howled Jack. "Three beallucs worth! Look at me!"

The President eyed Jack. "Excuse me, but you seem more than adequately equipped."

"By your standards," sniffed Jack. "Except on Lower Campus very few profs go around with open crotches, and hardly any students except athletes and Greeks, but I've never seen anybody hereabouts with more than a pair. The rumor among students is that a prerequisite for promotion to Chairman, Director, or Dean is to have none at all. Golly knows what secret your tightly-closed trousers conceal."

The President dropped his head on the desk and blubbered. Lifting tear-streaked face and shaking his wattles he begged, "Can't we work this out? Lewd is big time. His being here makes

me big time. Don't be cruel, Jack. I've got a shot at the Big Ten. All credit to you, Jack, all credit to you! But athletes come and go. It's coaches who make schools notorious. If I don't make my career move now I'll be stuck in this jerkwater City until they ship me out to Sun Villa on the High Road. Low cholesterol, lots of roughage, golf, shuffleboard -- egad, Jack!"

"After what I've given up for you and the U, you'd risk my remaining beallucs to get you to the Big Ten?"

The President dabbed handkerchief at eyes and resumed as much dignity as he could. "Jack, I'm no jock, but the blame isn't all in one corner. You were a couple down before you enrolled here, and I've read in the papers that the critics fault you for not looking before you leap."

"You have to give him that," interjected Fairy.

"My gosh!" Jack erupted at her. "The blowtorch and the cannoncracker, okay, but the wrestling match -- I certainly was doing no leaping down there and sure as heck couldn't do any looking."

"You managed to keep busy," said Fairy, clipping her words primly. "Doing what, not for me to say, it was a spectacle no decent Fairy would stay and watch."

The President broke into their mutual glower. "Look here, Jack, how about a heart-to-heart with Lewd? Maybe he hasn't heard the full story on our Alum Special Force, the bunch who gunned down the pompom girls. This is the hard core of loyalists



-- and I mean hard. They clawed their way up from the bottom -- used cars, land-developing, discount retailing, banking. Get my drift? They love you Jack, and will for two more years. Do anything for you. Know those naked bones on the High Road being gnawed on by Old Pooper? Not all belong to peasants who starved to death!"

"Not that your precious beallucs mean anything to me, personally," said Fairy prissily, "But if you ran away from Lewd, people would say they made you a coward."

Jack stayed. He and Lewd took afternoon gruel together at the President's Mansion and evening gruel at Regents' castles and faced the cameras side by side. However, whenever Lewd presumed to throw an arm around Jack's shoulders or pat him on the sitdown, Jack meaningfully unlimbered his finger and Lewd jumped to attention.

## NINE

Jack knelt to plant a bean and the pocket was empty. He turned it out, he turned out all his pockets, he took off his pants and shook them upside down.

"No more beans!" he wailed.

Pharmacy Prof, sprawled beneath the giant fennel, awoke with a start. "No beans!" "That it should come to this!"

Fairy shrugged. "Coppers will buy anything gold does. You never had any luck with Ogres anyhow."

"Ogre!" moaned Jack. "What have beans to do with Ogres?"

"Beans, beanstalks, Ogres. What do you think I sent you up to the cloud for?"

"You're putting me on!" said astonished Jack. "I wake up from my first occurrence of that terrific dream and there you were -- presumably to get me fixed up."

"What's this 'fixed up'?" stormed Fairy. "How do you get 'fixed up' with an Ogre?"

"Don't talk about Ogres!" Jack protested. "Ogres make me nervous! I don't believe in Ogres. I believe in a Lady-Girl with bosoms bigger than basketballs and such a sitdown that she's almost taller sitting down than standing up."

"Nasty, nasty Jack!" spluttered Fairy, hopping away as hastily as if a cow had flopped on her slippers.

"Dumb Fairy!" grunted Jack. "Thinks there are Ogres!"

"You don't believe in Ogres? How about Fairies!" Turning on her heel she flounced off in a huff.

"Your sis has got a temper", sympathized Pharmacy Prof. "Nice ankles, though. Couldn't make out much else about her. Sort of hazy. Like the way everything was when I baked up a batch of gruel cookies, put in some good stuff from Guatemala and tossed in a smidgeon of the Syrian."

Jack's afternoon was long, the night longer, and following days interminable. The dreams grew so poignant they flung him out of bed and bounced him off the walls. He reeled across campus eyes ravening, foam flecking the corners of his mouth. He found the perfect spot by the library steps to watch the bounce of sweaters and the flirt of skirts. He became a regular at the games of the girls' volleyball team.

Never having had anything to do with girls except the Lady-Girl, who was easy, and the Fairy, who didn't count, he was afraid. He'd heard talk out on the High Road. If a peasant boy confronted a peasant girl's bosoms, brothers and cousins jumped out from the bushes with their .12 gauges, her Mommy and Daddy trotted out the priest, the neighbors started throwing gruel, and that was another peasant boy who'd never marry a princess. Jack had eye contact enough to believe many a campus bosom was eager for confrontation, yet every time his hands uncontrollably reached out for a reflexive grope, he'd imagine a rustling in the bushes and somebody mumbling Latin.

Still, conversations overhead in the locker room and at the Union suggested confrontations were occurring all the time, everywhere, without .12 gauges being pointed and pots and pans tied to wagons. How could a peasant penetrate the secrets of a City U?

Jack began listening to the recruiters. They extolled the closeness of the brotherhood and the sweetness of Housemommy and the flavor of the gruel and the pool tables in the game room and the contacts that would be so useful later on, in business. Jack never had had or wanted a brother, had had one Mommy and that was plenty, was sure nobody could beat the gruel served at the castles on the Hill, never had cared for games until his recent interest in volleyball, and would as soon clearcut the entire forest and plow every 40 in the County as go into business. However, the snickering and winking and leering and nudging spoke to his needs. He pledged.

## TEN

Jack was flabbergasted by his first exchange, an afternoon gruel dance, the girls wearing sweaters and skirts. He'd never dreamt that full-length body contact was permitted in City society with the lights on. He watched warily from the sidelines, an eye out for .12 gauges and priests, and none appearing, decided to take a chance. But when he confronted the girl's bosoms, she clouted him on the side of the head and kneed him as he slumped to the carpet.

"No, no, Jack!" cautioned his brothers as they dragged him off the floor. "Never go straight for the bosoms. That's not smooth. First you kiss."

"Kiss was what I was aiming to do," complained Jack.

"The lips, Jack. And not on the dance floor. Be suave. Whisper in the ear -- doesn't matter what -- 'great weather for the gruel harvest' will do. Then you steer into the shadows and kiss the lips. Later on you can go for it."

"Kiss the lips," marveled Jack. He couldn't remember if Lady-Girl had any. Above the bosoms she was just a blur. Had he ever seen her face? Why did the thought make him shudder?

The evening of the first formal he was stunned and staggered, upon entering the sorority house, to see half a hundred girls with hair something like Fairy's, though lacking

the dazzle, and gowns of a similar cut, except with no sparkle and measurable décolletage. Scarcely aware what he was doing he skipped about the house jumping over every candlestick and lighted cigarette. Giddily he joined the band with his pennywhistle, setting the pace for so mad a dance the Fire Department parked two aid cars and a pumper truck in the street. Up and down Greek Row frat boys and sorority girls abandoned their own dances to stand in the night pressing envious noses against the windows. Jack wagged his finger at the outside and his friends inside had hysterics watching the competition fleeing in agony and humiliation.

Jack whirled a girl around the floor and whispered in her ear, "Who needs beans?"

"Beats me, Jack," she whispered back.

He whirled her into the pantry, closed his eyes (as instructed by his brothers), and pressed his lips on hers. He opened his eyes -- and with a shriek flung her away.

He selected another outstanding pair on the dance floor, smuggled her up to the sleeping porch -- and came running white-faced down the stairs.

A third girl he took in the broom closet, and a fourth out on the lawn under the persimmon tree, and returned quaking.

He took no more girls into the shadows but ran hysterically about the parlor kissing -- and flinching -- kissing -- and spitting -- kissing -- and retching.

Always she was a lovely girl when he closed his eyes and pressed lips to lips. But when he opened his eyes he was gazing into the eyes on the dissecting tray in Zoology 101, kissing a frog.

## ELEVEN

Jack turned off the Ave into a pub. "Lemon gruel," he told the barkeep. "Extra ice. Make it a double. And lend me a copper."

The Coyote on the next stool chuckled. "That's some wish you got there. More portable than the golden eggs, less messy than the golden urine. Safer, too -- nobody lurking in the bushes to stuff you in a sack of witches and roll you down a hill in a barrel with spikes driven in from the outside."

"It gets the job done," sighed Jack.

"Would you think me impolite if I asked about the other two?"

Jack briefly set the bar patrons to jigging and farting.

The Coyote howled, "That's a heck of a Fairy you got there!"

"Thank you," said Fairy. "It's nice to know some folks appreciate good work."

As Jack drained the glass of gruel, dumped the extra ice on his beallucs, ordered another double, and borrowed another copper, Coyote observed, "For all that you have the look of a Jack with troubles."

"Nothing remarkable," said Jack wryly. "Daddy kicked me out of the hovel and stole my beans, I made away with a few but now my pocket is empty, Coach Lewd has reduced my productivity by three-eighths and golly knows where that will end, my Fairy is in



a snit, my Donkey is in Law School and says his first case is going to be a class action against peasants who carve off the occasional innocent rump roast, and my frat expelled me for turning a whole sorority into frogs."

"Good grief!" laughed Coyote. "Frat men are famous pranksters, but what a thing to do!"

"I didn't plan it. I didn't know. I'd never kissed a girl before."

"Oh sure," snorted Fairy.

"On the lips, on the lips! What's it to you anyhow?"

"Nothing, personally. However, no compassionate person can fail to be touched by the plight of the poor girls -- poor frogs, that is. Charter revoked, thrown out of their house by the national, forced to move into a dorm. All those cashmere sweaters going to waste. Many never will get a proper husband, now."

"They'd have been married long since," said Jack, "If they'd had .12 gauges and priests in the bushes, as all nice girls do."

"Like the nice girl in the clouds?" mocked Fairy.

Jack exploded. "She's not here to defend herself, so please leave Lady-Girl out of this! It's no fault of hers she has such a sitdown that she's almost taller sitting down than standing up."

"You seem to be a man of the world," interjected Coyote. "Clouds, Lady-Girls, not to omit a most excellent Fairy." He bowed, she nodded. "Have you ever taken a moment to get to know

a frog?"

"I dissected one."

"That's not quite what I mean. I, myself, have eaten many a frog. I love them sauteed so lightly they kick and squirm all the way down until they drown in the vinegar and garlic butter and gastric juices. Still, I don't claim to number any frogs among my close friends, and very likely I'm the loser for it."

"Loser of what?"

"You remind me of Wolf! Rigid. Doctrinaire. Rejects new ideas. Wants everything exactly the way it's always been. Change one little detail and he goes extinct."

"We Coyotes, on the other hand, we're pragmatists, opportunists, go with the flow. When the Kingdom was wildwoods, we were wildwooders. Came the High Road and farms, we struck up acquaintance with the sheep and the chickens. Then the City was built, every house with a so-called 'garbage' can in the alley that to a person with a flair for sauces, with a little Frenchness in his soul, is a veritable cafeteria of haute cuisine. Flexibility! Adaptability! Most people don't even realize we're in the City."

"How could they miss you, bellying up to the bar?"

"You're a country boy. City folks see me sitting here and don't bat an eye because they take me for a Dog."

"Nobody mistakes what I am," said morose Jack. "Perhaps I'd best return to the High Road and beg Daddy for a few beans, though chances are he'd sic Old Pooper on me and wouldn't even

know it was his son whose bones were being gnawed in front of the hovel."

"Wouldn't Fairy help?"

"Fat chance!" humphed Fairy. "All those years I supposed he was doing battle with the Ogre!"

Jack jerked his thumb derisively at Fairy. "She has this thing about Ogres."

"Miss Fairy," whispered Coyote, "You'd best be careful of such talk. The Inquisition is very down on Ogres and Ogre Associates and to be honest, is highly dubious about Fairies. The thing is, not that I'd ever say a word against the Inquisition, but I have reason to believe at least a few of those witches that are set afire at children's parties are plain and simple pussycats."

"Inquisition!" snorted Fairy. "See how many wishes they get." But she kept her voice low.

Coyote turned to Jack. "Couldn't you dodge the lips, immediately and directly confront the bosoms?"

"Try that in the City," grumbled Jack, "And you get clouted on the side of the head and kneed as you go down."

"There must be girls on the High Road who follow the old ways."

"Oh swell -- the old ways mean the bushes are full of priests and big mean brothers. Anyhow, after being in the City a while you see that peasant girls really are nasty, brutish, and short."

Coyote reflected. "Reviewing the alternatives, I wonder if you ought not to try a frog."

Jack banged his head on the bar. "How do you try a frog? I cut one to pieces and never saw any clue to a bosom. As for the sitdown, well at that point I dropped the course."

"Come, come," reproved Coyote. "If you'll pardon me, there is a residue of nastiness in you." When I say 'try' I mean kiss, of course."

"On the lips?"

"You kissed girls and they turned into frogs. Perhaps if you kissed frogs they would turn into princesses."

"Princesses -- or something. Princes, maybe? What would that make me?"

## TWELVE

In carrying the U to a fourth straight national championship, Jack raised his record during the Final Two to 1001, quitting only when the candles ran out. Coach Lewd was content to bide his time until Jack's graduation, certain then to ride stolen glory to a top spot in the NCL. On such occasions as he day-dreamed wickedness, the smirk gave him away and Jack had only to unlimber his finger to stir vivid memories of being horsewhipped out of Louisville and Omaha. Jack further amused himself by borrowing so many coppers that Lewd couldn't understand why he wasn't getting rich from his fat salary, the endorsements, and the limited partnerships in developments on the High Road.

Jack wanted for naught -- save the one thing. In a frenzy of desperation he turned the girls' volleyball team into frogs, half the barmaids at the gruel joints on the Ave, and all the Regents' wives -- a scandal hushed up by stuffing them in a shoe box and mailing them to a rehab spa. He went so far as to risk Old Pooper and the .12 gauge, but the hovel was gone and the farm was a shopping mall. Jack sighed to see, in a waste field not yet blacktopped, hundreds of sere beanstalk stumps, each representing an ecstatic afternoon in the good old days. He stopped at a fast-gruel stand to drown his sorrows. The proprietor, the Gatekeeper, greeted him with open arms and sprang

for a double gruel with a side of fries.

"We see your Coach and Regents all the time," said Gatekeeper. "Since they got the High Road rezoned they're really moving and shaking this end of the Kingdom. Can't keep a peasant down on the farm once he's seen a shopping mall."

Jack was elected King of the Varsity Ball. ("I told you so," said Fairy.) He nigh onto blinded the assemblage in a cloak of peacock feathers trimmed with chipmunk heads and scarlet silk breeches open to display his endowment, which despite misadventures still was spectacularly beyond the ordinary even for an All-American.

However, after so many years the taste of acclaim was bitter. Out of sheer ennui he augmented the orchestra with his pennywhistle. Nobody could recall such lively stepping to "Mood Indigo" and "The Man I Love": as for "Louis, Louis," before Coyote appealed to Jack's better judgment the ambulances were pulling up to the door like limousines at a Hollywood opening. But Coyote couldn't prevent him from going berserk and turning the Queen of the Varsity Ball and her princesses into frogs, and the School of Nursing and half the School of Librarianship.

He was awarded the President's Medal simultaneously with his B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. in Athletic Communication. ("Whatever that is," sniffed Donkey, who also had a 4-point, earned honestly with his B.A. in Human Husbandry and the L.L.B. and J.D.)

The Convocation was the summation and zenith of Jack's academic career. The media flocked from throughout the Kingdom.

The faculty spent months having new gowns tailored to make a good display on the TV, which was going around the edge of the world by satellite.

The solemn procession began with lower levels of the hierarchy, the Departments of Arithmetic, Geometry, Astronomy, Music, Grammar, Logic, and Rhetoric, the professors modestly attired in sackcloth. Next in order of march, as of prestige, came the Civil Engineers, the Alchemical Engineers, the Wheel and Lever Engineers, and the Swill Engineers, in black robes spattered with silver symbols for pi, infinity, and the square root of -1. They were followed by the departments which brought the U the heaviest outside funding -- Medicine, Forestry, Physics -- in purple damask adorned with ermine dollar signs and embroidered phrases appropriate to the wearer: "God bless the NIH," or "Weyerhaeuser uber alles," or "Don't mess with U.S."

The summit of the hierarchy was marked by a magnificent double cross wrought in gold and silver and studded with precious stones. With it came the President in a day-Glo pink taffeta robe trailing a long train carried by the Vice Presidents, Provosts, Deans, Directors, and Chairmen, in plain brown robes, and known collectively as the President's Brownies.

Behind the Presidential cluster came the faculties ranking equally high with those to his immediate front: Athletics, Bus. Ad., Law, and Communications, the professors in silk robes of red and blue stripes trimmed with the finest witch fur. Bringing up the rear in bib overalls and stocking caps were Linguistics,

Religion, Anthropology, and other departments that had no students worth mentioning, the faculties barely managing to keep body and soul together at Salvation Army gruel kitchens.

As Jack stood beside the President on this grandest day of his life, resplendent in peacock feathers and chipmunk heads and scarlet breeches and exceptional endowment, a Brownie came at Jack from behind. It was the Dean of Students! Flapping his powerful wings and arching his long neck he nipped off a bealluc and waddled away honking triumphantly. In a paroxysm of rage Jack fingered the Convocation to a chaotic conclusion. Professors trampled each other at the exits -- the entire History faculty went under the boots of Forestry. Others didn't get that far -- trapped behind Bus. Ad., Music was asphyxiated to the last flautist. As for Lewd, even in the agony of his baritone aria he smirked, and smirked, and smirked.

Fleeing the hall he had made deadly, Jack moaned, "That's four! I'm only half the man or boy I was when first I met Fairy!"

"Is that a crack?" snapped Fairy. "Trying to put the blame on me? Not that your beallucs mean anything to me, personally, but I tried to teach you to look before you leap. However, I surely didn't think a peasant had to be told never to turn his back on a Goose, much less a Gander."



## THIRTEEN

The Faculty Senate heard Jack out politely, then called on the President to explain the behavior of the Dean of Students.

"A sad case," the President began, wiping the dampness from his glasses. "One of our own -- one of us -- a casualty in the never-ending struggle against students. Let me remind you he has pleased four Presidents as Brownie and before that, in the Big War, served with distinction as a General's Brownie. When demobilization swamped the campus with peasants -- nasty, brutish, and short -- he kept them in order with his paddle and by sending them to bed with no gruel. But when the King took away his in loco parentis, he couldn't cope, was half the day lighting a cigarette, which as often as not he stuck in his ear. Surely, we regret the mad fit, yet I believe we can sympathize with 'one damn peasant too many!' -- the Dean's cry as he took his pension and left campus, retiring to his beach cottage. Incidentally, he extends an invitation to his old friends to come visit. He would enjoy the company. Little enough to do there except waddle up and down the beach, hissing at the waves which splash over the driftwood line and topple the porcelain gnomes on his lawn."

The Faculty Senate extended condolences and best wishes to everyone - except Coach Lewd, the Dean's close friend and co-conspirator. They failed to see how he could claim battle

presently on the High Road in a rapid coach, destination Broadway. He is taking over the spot formerly held by Coach Beaver, whose record was so dismal the Duke had him made into a hat."

The Faculty Senate squirmed in its seats, keeping fearful watch on Jack's finger. A Forestry prof, bucking for Brownie and braver than most academics, coming as he did from a department where farting was the dominant means of communication, leapt to his feet. "Why are we wasting our distinguished <sup>AC</sup> ~~pres~~ences on Jack? His eligibility has run out. There's nothing more he can do for us. Too bad about his beallucs, but he still has two or three times more than the average Weyerhaeuser, and I'm not sure the Inquisition oughtn't to look into that. I say we've given him a good deal -- four years of public gruel, four expense-paid trips to far corners of the Kingdom. What have we got? Frogs!"

Jack wagged his finger and played the Alma Mater on the Faculty Senate. He took out his pennywhistle to have them dance to the tune but Coyote warned that a spark of static electricity could blow up the campus and never touch Lewd. He had to be dealt with in another forum.

Fairy (having her personal axe to grind) assembled birth certificate, school records, and discharge papers that proved Lewd was an Ogre. Donkey, offered an acceptable quid pro quo, presented the situation to the Board of Regents.

"That Lewd is an Ogre," began Donkey, "Will be no hindrance -- rather, the reverse -- in the NCL. However, for many years this City has been legally off-limits to Ogres. Ironically, the same rezoning that opened the High Road to shopping centers and light industrial parks also zoned Ogres from that area."

"What is all this to us?" blustered the Chairman of the Board.

"What, indeed?" mocked Donkey. "Who brought Ogres into the City? And who are Ogre's fellow limited partners in the High Roller Group now engaged in developing the High Road? And who is the High Roller general partner?"

"I advise you to keep His name out of this!" snapped the Chairman. "he's got more lawyers than Jack could shake a finger at."

"Matters in the domain of the civil courts are not my concern here."

"The Inquisition has nothing on us!"

Donkey flapped his ears and "hee-hawed" as he tossed on the table photographs secretly taken by Coyote behind the walls of the rehab spa. The Regents recognized their frogs and the jig was up.

The potent Friend of the Regents got the President appointed head of a foundation in LA, not the Big Ten but not Sun Villa either. The students weren't fooled by the face-saving; their newspaper headlined, "THE TURKEY IS ROASTED." Donkey was installed in his place, and so it was that he and Jack made up

their differences and restored their old friendship -- or better say, considering the persimmon tree, established a true friendship. President Donkey took his revenge on the human species through the Brownies. Understandably sensitive about his rump, he ordered them to march to his front, and when feeling pucky would nip their sitdowns, a trick that made him a great favorite with the students and the lower faculty.

## FOURTEEN

Having announced the Olympics would be his final competition, Jack leapt back and forth over the eternal flame as the runners carried it from the Kingdom border to the LA Coliseum. The feat was hailed as his supreme achievement -- until in the Games themselves he did 10,001 jumps -- forward, backward, eyes closed, both hands behind the back, somersaulting, backflipping, spinning.

Ironically, his popularity plummeted. The cameras couldn't cut away, risking that candlestick fans would view only in replay such never-again-to-be-witnessed jumps as the one where Jack carried a watermelon under each arm and balanced a bowl of gruel on his head. Thus, the forty-slave galleys with coxswains didn't get on TV until two days after their event, the women's midget chicken-pluckers were bumped altogether, and there weren't even any cameras on hand for the mudball hurling. Sensing the way the fickle wind was blowing, the media went along, castigating Jack as a showboat, blaming him for the Olympic Committee's decision to drop candlestick jumping from future Olympiads, and forecasting that his performance would shame the NCL to death, throwing hundreds of athletes on the welfare rolls.

Jack was stricken. "Should I have pulled my jumps?" he wondered.

"You gotta do what you gotta do," said Coyote. "Somebody, sooner or later, had to be the Eternal Number One. If it hadn't been you it would have been -- God? Think what a ruckus that would have started, everybody claiming it was their God, not the other guy's. What if the Devil had pulled a fast one? There'd have been Hell to pay! As it is, there's already the nursery rhyme, known to every peasant lad around the edge of the world. You're the proper champion. Nobody else rates."

Mounting the platform to receive his medal, Jack felt detached, remote, apotheosized. Within the faceless crowd whose roar he had heard so often and never would again, he searched for Daddy bringing the hammer down. He scanned the sky for a cloud wherein waited a Lady-Girl with bosoms bigger than basketballs and such a sitdown that she was almost taller sitting down than standing up.

Fairy noted the distance in his eyes and was concerned. "Pretty nice show," she said, trying to snap him out of it. "Makes Louisville look sick."

"Who could ask for anything more?" Jack half-whispered.

"An Ogre, maybe," Fairy cackled. Nobody else joined her laughter.

Coyote suggested they make a night of it, doing after-hour gruel joints; Jack was grueled out. President Donkey reminded he was expected at the diplomatic reception; Jack ruefully observed that he'd be liable to turn the ambassadors' wives into frogs and start the Final War.

"Please leave me alone," he asked. "All I want is to be alone."

Reluctantly his friends let him go off in the night unaccompanied. They were not on hand to see persons unknown leap out of the chaparral and stuff him in a sack of yowling witches. By sheer luck a beat cop chanced to arrive at the top of a hill as he was being stuffed in a barrel with spikes driven in from the outside.

The Fire Department medic confirmed Jack's fear that he had been badly damaged. "Look at it this way, Champ. If my count is accurate, you're still fifty percent better off than the man on the street."

"We've got an APB out on Ogres," the Police Lieutenant assured Jack. "We don't need their sort in LA anymore. As for the witches, we've called in the Inquisition and they've scheduled an auto de fe that will make the Olympics look like a warmup for the main event."

"Someday," gritted Jack, "That Coach Lewd is going to rain down on this Kingdom in chunks too small to stab with cocktail

picks."

"That will be as it may," said Fairy. "Meanwhile, nobody likes to be an I-told-you-so, but with the story so far from over, did you have to go for the gold?"



## FIFTEEN

Jack had no remaining ties with the U, yet with the High Road solidly commercial (reeking of brimstone), he had nowhere else to go. He hung out on the Ave, visited the Herbarium to chew medicinal plants with Pharmacy Prof, roamed aimlessly seeking he knew not what -- or rather, did know, but had no notion where to find it.

For a time every eye followed him. Then just most eyes, then only some, and fewer by the day. The sport having been dropped by the NCAA and thus the high schools, and the NCL out of business, and kids no longer jumping over candlesticks in alleys and schoolyards, folks forgot anybody ever had. As for his erstwhile fans, they stared at his crotch, sewed up tight nowadays, and whispered behind his back about how many beallucs the witches actually got.

President Donkey offered a spot on the U payroll as Consultant; a job wasn't what copper-wealthy Jack needed. Coyote, who had gone into politics and kept a finger on the public pulse, urged him to drop out of sight.

"Your logical career move here is to become a legend. Folks don't worship what they see every day. You want them to focus on what they used to see -- or think they saw. You want them to start making up stories about what they wished they'd see."

"If anybody around here is interested in my opinion," said Fairy, "I say this story is dragging. It's high time for the peasant kid to go after his princess."

"You bet," sneered Jack. "Settle down in a cozy castle and raise frogs."

"Princess Jillian is no frog," said Fairy. "Indeed, I've overheard comments that she has a passing resemblance to -- well -- me."

"You?" gaped Jack. He blushed to recall his rude speculations. He wasn't aware he was saying it: "You and me?".

Fairy, reading his mind, flushed. Defensively adjusting her gown she primly responded, "I said nothing about you and me. You and Princess Jillian. However, I take personal exception to your implying she's a frog."

"Not a frog now. After the lip-kiss."

Coyote ruminated. "Are you certain that princesses are sticklers for the ear-whispering and lip-kissing before the confrontation?"

"I know from nothing about princesses. All I know is sorority frogs. And the Lady-Girl, but I never noticed if she had lips. Peasant boys in my neighborhood who were terrified of priests said sheep aren't bad. A trapper claimed he was caved up a whole winter with a hibernating bear."

"Beasts!", spluttered Fairy. "I'm not going to stand here and listen to this! If you're serious about a Princess, now is the moment, while the King is investigating what the Devil and

the Ogres are up to on the High Road."

President Donkey had an inspiration. "We could set you up! Award the Alumnus Summa Laude Dignatus! The King would have to put that on his itinerary!"

"Do as you wish!" grumped Fairy. "Sheep! Hibernating bears! Don't call me, I'll call you."

She flounced off down the Ave. Jack's eyes followed as she vanished in moonbeams on a frosted meadow and autumn sunlight through new-mown hay. "I've never noticed that before," he murmured. "How does she do it?"

"No idea," said Coyote. "Mighty pretty to watch, though."

## SIXTEEN

As the King and Queen and Court completed a leisurely progress over the realm, along the High Road, merchants and gentry and the lesser nobility flowed into the City to secure balconies on the Ave for viewing the royal procession. At the command of Mayor Coyote (winner in a landslide served by Jack as honorary chairman), men-at-arms ringed the City walls to watch for Ogre Lewd, lest he slip secretly out of Wales, where he had been granted political asylum. President Donkey had arranged for the School of Dentistry to wire shut the jaws of pompom girls and had ordered the campus police to shoot Ganders on sight, and, to be on the safe side, Turkeys too. The Inquisition had discovered that frogs were witches and on the eve~~ning~~ of the King's arrival staged a magnificent auto de fe which significantly decreased the campus population.

One afternoon Jack was sitting in a bistro sipping a vanilla-cherry gruel, gazing pensively out to the gathering stir and bustle on the Ave, where not so many years ago he had arrived fresh from the High Road, straw in his hair and beallucs mostly intact, accompanied by a Donkey whose rump was a scandal.

He jumped to his feet, spilling his gruel. Down the Ave pranced four matched pairs of high-stepping geldings, drawing a coach gilt with Happy Faces! Within, who should be reclining at

ease, glittering in polyester that reflected every color of the rainbow, but Daddy and Mommy! Between them, wearing a collar studded with pearls and gnawing on what appeared to be a femur, sat Old Pooper!

Jack burst out on the street. "Daddy!" he cried. "Mommy! Old Pooper!"

"Jacky boy!" Daddy and Mommy joyously exclaimed, Old Pooper adding his gruff greeting.

After the hugging and kissing, the laughing and crying, and the unclamping of Old Pooper's jaws from Jack's arm, Mommy brought out a thermos, poured a bowl full, and, patting Jack on the head, said "Now, honeybuns, eat your nice hot gruel and then brush your teeth."

Daddy gave Jack a high five and a low five and brought the hammer down.

"I went to visit the hovel," said Jack, "Not there. The farm was a shopping mall. I didn't recognize a thing except the stumps of hundreds of beanstalks."

"Yes", nodded Mommy, "Daddy kept after that Ogre, just like you, but he never got any gold, either."

"I caught your act at the County Fair," Daddy broke in. "Did you see me bring the hammer down? Wanted to get together for a chat but had a session with the lawyers and accountants."

"We took the around-the-world cruise," said Mommy, "The great circle next to the edge, so close we could hear the Ogres roaring and see their flaming breath."

"We followed you in the Olympics," said Daddy. "On the satellite, better than being there. But when we heard you were getting the Dignatus -- well -- that's different. The captain claimed he couldn't go any faster but we slipped him a bag of precious stones and he doubled the lashes and when a slave collapsed on his oar would load him in a slingshot and fling him over the brink. The other slaves heard the Ogres ripping off slabs of raw meat and crunching bones -- well, that galley shot ahead like it was jet-propelled!"

Jack was as nonplussed by their journey as by their finery. Daddy explained, "After the High Rollers got the High Road rezoned, growing gruel was out of sight. Property taxes were murder. A peasant couldn't afford to stick around and be nasty, brutish, and short. Had to take the money and run. The High Rollers made me an offer I couldn't refuse."

"Everything was legal," protested Mommy. "The man from the Inquisition came around but couldn't prove anything. The farm was ours and what with you being a minor, so were the beans."

"Beans?" queried Jack.

"The best part!" chortled Daddy.

From a pocket of his rainbow vest he withdrew a silver box. The cover read, "JACK'S BEANS -- For the Clamber that Quickens Your Nimble." Beneath were smaller letters, "Another fine product of Daddy & Mommy Corp. Inc."

"Corp?" wondered Jack. "Inc? BEANS? JACK'S?"

"You don't suppose we'd fail to give you credit, do you?"

asked Daddy "What sort of Daddy and Mommy do you think we are?"

"The sort of Mommy who fed me 17,000 bowls of gruel so atrocious I'm still burping. The sort of Daddy who kicked me out of the hovel and stole my barnful of beans."

"Why, Jack, that is harsh", said Daddy, hurt. "Especially since I have brought you this lovely gift." He held forth the box. Inside, on a velvet cushion, rested a bean.

"All yours, me bucko," said Daddy as Mommy brushed back tears. "For auld lang syne. All those great old times sitting around the hovel strangling on the smoke and your Mommy's gruel. Hey, Mommy, just a little joke there!"

"One lousy bean?" shouted Jack. "From a barnful!"

"You are dead right, boy, the barn was very full, and my sorties against the Ogre did little to deplete the stock, though in all modesty I must confess to carrying on the lonely battle indefatigably. Clambering down one afternoon, I did a bit of mental arithmetic to estimate how many more beanstalks the barnful could grow and I was humbled. I just didn't see that I had that many beanstalks left in me. Though still in my prime, I sensed a decline in my elan vital. Mommy is a witness to that."

"He's telling it the way it was, Jacky. He'd fall in bed at night and go straight to sleep."

"You might have thought about cutting me in," grumbled Jack.

"There's another way to look at this, Jack -- from Mommy's viewpoint. It was all very well for me to have my afternoon fun chasing the Ogre up and down the cloud, but what about her? You

remember the travel brochures she kept around the hovel and was always asking the priest to read to her."

"So you're Corp and Inc and filthy rich."

"I leave most of that stuff to the lawyers and accountants. Capital gains. Tax shelters. Spinoffs. Takeovers. Raids. Levering. Dummy subsidiaries. Mainly I take care of the numbered accounts in offshore banks."

"I've never heard of your Corp Inc. You must have a lousy ad agency."

"No ads! That's the gimmick. Keep the beans hush, hush, hush, as if they were illegal. Our advertising reps do their work purely word of mouth, in whispers, in dark corners. We sell strictly person to person through our sales engineers, ex-vice cops who've been fired for being on the take. If the sucker hasn't got bags of gold and precious stones we don't even talk. Sonny, when the beans run out your Mommy and I will be fixed for life."

"What about me?" whined Jack. "How about fixing me up?"

"I just have!"

"One sticking bean!"

Daddy signaled the coachman to drive on. His parting words out the window trailed off in the distance: "Jack boy, time marches on. One bean will do it!"



## SEVENTEEN

At the gate the City Council, Police Department, Fire Department, Water Department, Garbage Department, Chamber of Commerce, Kiwanis, Rotary, Elks, Moose, Eagles, and Shriners prostrated themselves as Mayor Coyote presented the King the key to the city. The Faculty Senate groveled as President Donkey awarded honorary doctorates to everyone in the Court above the rank of baronet.

Coaches bearing the Royal Family and the high nobles rumbled down the Ave. Merchants and gentry and low nobles flung flowers from the balconies. Peasants, jammed hip to hip and cheek to jowl on sidewalks, flung gruel.

King and Queen rode in a closed coach, only their gloved hands to be seen as they tossed coppers to the peasants.

The following coach was open, and in it, alone, rode Princess Jillian. Her hands, waved in greeting, were delicate and creamy. Her shoulders, emerging from her gown with no hint of décolletage, were as gleaming white as her neck was long and slender. Jack was unable to do a detailed male-eye inventory because her gown was of the same material as moonbeams on a frosted meadow. However, beneath a crown of hair as dazzling as new-mown hay backlighted by a low October sun, he could see that her face was not motherly or auntly, was more sisterly -- or better, cousinsly -- second-cousinly, perhaps cousinsly-once-

removed -- far enough removed it was no sin to speculate.

## EIGHTEEN

As guest of honor at the King's masked ball, Jack led out the opening dance, a minuet, partnering Mommy. (Daddy hung about the gruel bowl, attended by low and high nobles and merchant notables on business that appeared urgent and confidential.) Mayor Coyote squired the Governor's daughter, a real Fox. President Donkey was escorting his fiancée, a stunning Filly -- brainy, too, a full professor of Human Psychology.

The exchanges permitted Jack to occasionally, briefly touch the creamy hands, brush silk breeches against flounces of the moonbeam gown, breathe the scent of the dazzling hair, and peer through the domino to the second-cousinly-well-enough-removed eyes. However, in a kingdom with only the solitary Princess, the competition was fierce from a regiment of gallants, most of them higher or lower nobles or more or less wealthy, but some identified by Jack's discerning eye as peasants who had taken dancing lessons and rented costumes. Observing the athletic agility of the Princess, Jack yielded to impulse, popped the pennywhistle in his mouth, and led the orchestra into a quadrille, saraband, bolero, fandango, allemande, Virginia reel, gavotte, stathspey, tarantella, rigadoon, and fling. The older nobles gasped to the sidelines. The gallants huffed and puffed and sweated like pigs.

Neither Jack nor the Princess so much as glowed or drew deep breaths and their turns together grew more frequent in the tango, polka, schottische, mazurka, galop, hornpipe, and jig. She accepted his partnering without comment, seeming solely absorbed in performing every step precisely.

Scarcely any of the nobles, and even fewer of the peasants in disguise, kept up with Jack and the Princess through the one-step, two-step, fox-trot, turkey-trot, Lindy hop, Charleston, buck-and-wing, heel-and-toe, double-shuffle, shimmy, cancan, cakewalk, bunny-hug, jitterbug, moonwalk, Lambeth walk, and twist.

The Princess, eyes sparkling through the domino, broke her silence, "You are fully as nimble as repute hath it, sir. And quick."

Jack bowed. "Your highness shakes a pretty mean leg, too. And I do mean pretty, at least as far as one can tell."

"Naughty peasant!" remonstrated the Princess, tapping his shoulder with her fan.

A few hardy peasants kept trying to cut in. When Jack repelled them they whined, "Ar, come off it, mate! Can't yer gi' yer ol' pals a look-in? So 'igh an mighty 'e 'is, wi' is candlesticks and beallucs!"

"Your highness," Jack addressed the Princess, "Does it not strike you that the ballroom floor is congested?"

"Verily, sir, and the situation is the more objectionable with sweat flying through the air like a typhoon cloudburst from

the brows of these peasants, so nasty, brutish, and short -- present company always excepted."

Jack needed no further encouragement to unlimber his finger and empty the ballroom, saving only those he'd also exempted from the dancing - his parents and friends and, of course, the King and Queen.

The King had been sleeping on his throne behind his mask. The farting woke him. "Bad dream!" he shouted. "Ho, bad smell! Where did everybody go? Is it an assassination? Which are the terrorists? What ho, the guard!"

"Calm yourself, Papa," the Princess called to him across the room. "Everybody's off to their palaces. It's beddy-bye time."

"Listen," whispered Jack as "Good Night, Sweetheart" was gratefully played by the exhausted orchestra. "Why don't we grab a rapid coach and dodge across the state line and wake up a priest?"

"You are a bold peasant!" laughed the Princess. "Didn't anybody ever tell you to look before you leap?"

Jack's eyes suspiciously narrowed, trying to see more clearly through the domino. "I'm looking," he said. "Okay, I've looked. Now I'm leaping. How about a date?"

"That might be nice. A walk in the country, perhaps. The peasants out there are so cute - they believe in Fairies! Do you believe in Fairies?"

Jack paused for another close look. "I try to keep an open mind."

"We could go up the Hill, maybe fetch a pail of water."

"Or something," chuckled Jack.

"Whatever," giggled the Princess.

## NINETEEN

Jack awoke thinking he was in the hovel and with a thrill of anticipation jumped from bed to run out and plant a bean. Then he saw he was in his pad on the Ave, remembered the masked ball and the Princess, and was thrilled again, differently.

On the way to keep the date he pondered the difference. Not minding where he was going, he found himself in the Herbarium. "Man," murmured Pharmacy Prof, flat on his back beneath the giant fennel, "I kept up with you through the fandango and fling but in the mazurka I hurt myself." Absently, Jack planted the bean.

Before starting up the Hill, Jack and Princess Jillian held the usual party separation, going behind separate bushes.

Fairy whispered in Jack's ear. "Take it easy, now. A lad could fall down and break his crown. The first pitches are simple enough -- Class 3 and 4, plenty of good holds. Then you can free-climb the 5.2 crack, the 5.4 layback, and the 5.8 chimney. You should have protection on the 5.10 dihedral. On the roof, you'll need aid."

"You know," grumbled Jack, "When a fellow is out on a date it's sort of humiliating to have a Fairy whispering in his ear. I can take care of myself."

"Sure you can! Who kept telling you to look before you leaped? And who's lost five beallucs to the Ogre? Not that it matters to me, personally, but you always were so proud of being

a freak and now you're just fifty percent away from being normal."

"Please!" protested Jack. "I think she's coming. She might hear."

Fairy flounced off. Jack watched her disappearing act, then turned to the reappearing act of the Princess, and would have mused a bit had not the Hill awaited.

Jack led out nimbly and quickly. To his chagrin, Princess Jillian passed him and moved ahead. "Mama and I summer in the Alps," she explained. "Yosemite in spring, Snowdon and Skye in winter, the Gunks in fall. But you do very well for a peasant."

Jack was ashamed to admit he kept a bolt kit in his rucksack and never had done a pitch better than 5.9 without a top rope. Sure enough, driven by pride to follow her, he peeled off the roof, burned rubber down the Hill, and bounced through a Hellberry bush which ripped off his trousers and a bealluc.

Princess Jillian didn't get off scotfree because though she'd done the roof as if it were a ladder, she was carrying the pail and in grabbing at it to save himself Jack pulled her off. She came tumbling after, but well-trained as she was in taking a fall, her wounds were no worse than bruises and scrapes. She ran to Jack, lying in the brimstone-reeking meadow raving that someday he was going to reduce the Ogre Lewd to pieces no larger than molecules.

"Poor boy!" murmured the Princess. "He's broken his crown. Believes in Ogres, which long since have been zoned out of the

Kingdom. He has suffered a grievous loss, I see, yet even so he is as well off as any man has a need to be."

She bent down and kissed him tenderly on the lips.

A convulsion jerked Jack upright. He opened his eyes wide -- and wider -- staring in horror - which softened to amazement - yielded to joy.

"You are not a frog!" he exulted.

"That's the nicest compliment I've had all day," she smiled, gently plucking thorns from his two surviving beallucs.



## TWENTY

By chance or destiny, Jack's path homeward from the royal lodgings passed the Herbarium.

Pharmacy Prof was hunched over a Primus stove, deeply inhaling the fumes as he boiled up a pot of a giant fennel tea. "None of my business, Champ, but your beanstalk is starting to turn rancid. If you're going to climb it's now or never, that's my professional opinion."

His will not his own, Jack clambered up the beanstalk as in a dream. He wondered to see a great many other beanstalks, rooted near and far and all around the compass, converging at the cloud.

"Watch it, Jack!" warned an Earl as Jack stepped into the cloud -- into a jam of High Rollers waiting their turns. A Banker lowered his shoulder and blocked Jack into the wall. A General shook a baton in his face. A Mafia Don pulled a knife.

Jack stuck a Channel Five ticket in his bonnet, raised his video camera, and bellowed, "OK, everybody! Big smile!" The High Rollers gave way, beating the air with forefingers and sticking faces in the lens crying, "Hi Mom! Hi Uncle Benny!"

The line led to the Lady-Girl with bosoms bigger than basketballs and such a sitdown that she was almost taller sitting down than standing up. It also led to -- Ogre Lewd!

Jack recoiled in jealousy -- hatred -- disgust -- and

laughter. He raised his gaze above the bosoms. The Lady-Girl had no lips! No wonder the cloud lacked facilities for cooking gruel. She did have eyes. Jack recognized them from Zoology 101.

He took his scalpel from his vest pocket and cut off her big toe. With a long, mournful "Hiss-ss-ss!" the Lady-Girl flattened from rotundity to a pancake.

Lewd, startled, lifted his face from the erstwhile bosoms. The horrified High Rollers who had paid fortunes for beans fell on him, kicked out his teeth, gouged out his eyes, pulled off his nose and ears and fingers and other loose parts. Several sobbing High Rollers peeled the Lady-Girl from the floor and ran off to find a patch kit and a tire pump.

Jack clambered down to the Herbarium, borrowed the Prof's Primus, and torched off the stalk, dry as tinder. The flame leapt to the sky. In a flash of lightning and a clap of thunder, the cloud exploded. Fragments of High Rollers rained upon the City and the High Road and every corner of the Kingdom. Among the pieces Jack recognized the wrung neck of ex-Dean Gander, the roast chestnuts ex-President Turkey used to keep stuffed up his sitdown as treats for his Brownies, the stock portfolios of Regents and other Limited Partners in the High Roller Group, an odor of brimstone which may have been the General Partner Himself, the County Commissioners who had rezoned the High Road Corridor -- and the smirk, naught else, of Ogre Lewd.

Daddy had been right. One bean had done it.



TWENTY-ONE

Mayor Coyote delivered the encomium, reciting Jack's beginnings as a nimble and quick peasant lad famous in a nursery rhyme but generally supposed to be purely fictional, to his triumph at the County Fair and four victories in the Final Two, his conquest of the Olympic gold, his eternal championship of the world, and his degree as Doctor of Athletic Communication.

President Donkey, gorgeous in a scarlet-and-ebony cashmere blanket (beneath, just a corner poking out for the benefit of Jack's eyes, lay the blanket of wool from llamas grazed by lamas on the Hill), awarded Jack the U's highest honor, the Alumnus Summa Laude Dignatus.

Jack knelt before the throne. The King lifted his sword, tapped Jack on both shoulders, and said, "Arise, Sir Jack, Knight of the Ave. Having completed your candlestick-jumping career, what further glory do you intend to bring my Kingdom?"

"Sire, I crave to round up the High Rollers of the High Road -- those, that is, whose flesh and blood and bones did not rain upon your Kingdom yesterday -- and stuff them in sacks full of witches and roll them down the Hill in barrels with spikes driven in from the outside."

"It shall be the King's justice! That you may not be forestalled, I dub thee Marquis of the High Road, empowered to stuff in the sacks and barrels as many knavish <sup>urea</sup>~~beaus~~ bureaucrats and

and County Commissioners as you deem fit. Now, sir, for this you merit a reward. What boon do you crave?"

"Only one, your majesty -- that you grant me the hand of the Princess Jillian in marriage."

"My Jillian!" exclaimed the King. He turned to the Queen. "Do you know aught of this?" She shook her head, "Naught."

"What says the Princess?" asked the King. "Where is the Princess?"

Jack was desolated to find she had not come to witness his triumph and support his suit.

"Well!" expostulated the King, "In her absence I scarcely can dispose of the Princess. Boon denied."

"Don't sweat it, " whispered Fairy in Jack's ear. "Remember your three wishes."

Jack's face brightened. He waggled his finger to tune up the King and then had him render "Hail to the Chief," which brought the Court and Faculty Senate to attention, hands over hearts. But abruptly the farting ceased. Jack shook his finger. Nothing. It was pooped out.

He turned to Fairy. She screwed up her face. "I never said anything about a lifetime guarantee. You've still got two wishes left."

Jack blew on the pennywhistle. The King and Court and Faculty Senate did a single cakewalk around the hall and resumed their seats. The pennywhistle was blown out.

"One left," shrugged Fairy.

"A copper!" whispered angry Jack. "What good to me is a copper? Especially as the evidence suggests it will be my last copper, and the last of your three crummy wishes."

"Crummy wishes! They've brought you a long way, young man! You expect me to carry you indefinitely? Think I've got nothing better to do than follow a peasant around wiping his nose? I've made you what you are today, ungrateful wretch!"

"Oh yeah? Who provided me with my famous beallucs? Not you."

"Beallucs, beallucs! You were a freak! Every girl you kissed on the lips turned into a frog!"

"Okay, let's leave the beallucs aside for now. You've got to admit I was nimble and quick long before you started hanging around the hovel, sister!"

"Nimble and quick! Nimble and quick! You sound like every old jock. Listen up, Jack -- oh, excuse me, it's Sir Jack -- or perhaps Your Marquisate? Nimble and quick are well and good for a peasant when he's young. If you're going to make it as an old peasant -- or as an old marquis -- you've got to be crafty. Exercise your brains, if any, and ponder what you could do with a copper. I'll give you one last hint and then I'm outa here."

As Fairy whispered in Jack's ear, a crafty light dawned in his eye.

"Your Majesty," he spoke up, "Lend me a copper, willya?"

The King absently reached in his royal purse. In the Queen's royal purse. Turned out all the noble purses of his

Court. "Gold," he said. "Silver, platinum, bronze, tin, nickel, lead, Swedish steel. No copper!"

"I beg to differ, Sire," said crafty Jack. "A synonym for 'copper' is 'penny', am I correct?"

"Yes, but I find here no coin smaller than a dime."

"Did I specify 'coin', Sire? The full name of the Princess is Jillian Penelope. It is this Penny I beg of you."

"Oh well, done and done. Take her with our blessing."

"Thank you, Papa", said Princess Jillian Penelope, appearing at Jack's side from a shimmer of moonlight on frosted meadows and autumn sun through new-mown hay.

"How did she do that?" Mayor Coyote whispered to President Donkey.

"No idea. But it was mighty pretty to watch."

"Seems to me," said Coyote, "Jack is better off being only a quarter the man or boy he was down on the farm."

"Almost one would think," said Donkey, "The Ogre and the Fairy were in cahoots."

"I wonder what all this means?" mused Coyote.

"It doesn't do to push too far," said Donkey.

"I've got profs in Lit and Anthropology who fill thick journals and fat books with unreadable silliness about Little Red Riding Hood. It's the latest fad from France."

"To clinch the deal," said the King, "We must divide the Kingdom. Which half do you prefer? North or south? East or west?"

"Sire, your choice rules. What is it in your Kingdom you chiefly cherish?"

"Hmmm . . . perhaps the Army. Yes, the Army! Or the Navy? The Marines -- I love their dress blues. National Guard. Coast Guard. Green berets."

"You keep those and I'll take -- oh, let's say the iron and copper and silver and gold and coal mines and gravel pits and quarries, the forests and pigs and sheep and fields of amber gruel."

"Doesn't seem fair. Messy ores, untamed wilderness, dirty animals, and just plain dirt. But, if you're satisfied. I enjoy the Court very much -- and our Embassies and Consulates -- they give me excuses for triumphal tours around the edge of the world, throwing galley slaves to the Ogres."

"Good choice. To go with, you should keep the CIA. I'll make do with the cities and the schools and the media and the FBI."

"I'm very fond of sunshine. I'd like to keep the deserts."

"For me, then -- younger and hardier as I am - the mountains and glaciers and rivers and lakes and beach property."

"I am so content, while the Queen is in her parlor, eating bread and honey, to be in my counting house, counting up my money."

"The Treasury is yours, Sire, and with it you'll also want the National Debt, of course. I'll make do with the tiresome old Tariff and Internal Revenue."



Mayor Coyote presided and President Donkey stood up for Sir Jack, Knight of the Ave and Marquis of the High Road, as he became Prince Jack, consort of Princess Jillian Penelope, heiress to the entire Kingdom -- though Jack privately vowed that when the time came he'd cajole some vainglorious and stupid Duke or Earl into taking over the King's share of the deal.

Their carriage rolled up the Ave and out the gate onto the High Road, by the Hill, where barrels were bouncing down the slopes into the Hellberries, the witches screeching and the High Rollers and County Commissioners screaming. They passed the site of Jack's boyhood hovel, where peasants were plowing up blacktop of the abandoned shopping mall, which by joint proclamation of King and Church had been declared an anachronism. Only spared -- by Jack's special dispensation -- was Gatekeeper's fast-gruel stand. Seeing the beanstalk stumps going under the plow, Jack was pensive.

"A copper for your thoughts," murmured Princess Jillian, cuddling. "An old girl friend?"

"No no, not her!" protested Jack. "I was just wondering -- where did Fairy go? She whispered your middle name and I never saw her again."

"Fairy!" merrily laughed Princess Jillian. "The Kingdom has been zoned against Fairies as long as Ogres. That medieval stuff doesn't go anymore. Your imagination has been playing tricks,

sweetly."

Moonbeams sparkled on frosted meadows and the low autumn sun shone through new-mown hay and Jack and Jill lived happily ever after.

- end -

**THE FELLOW WHO SOLD  
HIS MODEL A PREMATURELY**

**Harvey Manning**

## ONE

The morning after his fortieth birthday Abner and Emily slept in, less to recuperate from the party, which had been temperate, than to exploit the girls' absence -- at a pajama party -- with the sort of Sunday morning once habitual, when they were only two.

Turning forty hadn't given Abner so much as a quiver. At the party Charlie had clapped him on the back and cried, "Welcome to middle age, buddy!" Abner responded, "Review your math, buddy! What's the expectancy in our suburb, after deductions for cigarettes and whiskey and wild wild women and the freeway -- seventy-five? Trisect that into beginning, middle, and end and I've been middle fifteen years already!"

Thirty had hit him hard. Partly because it brought forty as near ahead as twenty behind. Mostly because The Bomb was hanging heavy heavy overhead, Ike was dozing in the White House as the last New Dealers were going dourly silent, and the girls were babies and the family home was rented and cramped and he was junior and insecure at the Company.

At forty he'd lived so long with The Bomb (and forty) the dread had dulled. President Johnson was behaving like a New Dealer, seeking permanent prosperity and a livable environment and social justice. Vietnam was a mess and traffic was heavier and the smog worse, but such public concern was being expressed

that these too would surely pass. Meanwhile he had health, a lovely and loving wife and delightful twin daughters, a comfortable splitlevel with an easy mortgage, a substantial savings account and some stocks and bonds and a good pension plan and a middle-management position in a Company that plainly had him ticketed for the top echelon.

Stimulated by his last drink (he quit early, the Sunday morning in mind), Abner had mounted a chair to deliver his birthday oration: "Forty was a breeze, fifty will be a joy, I can hardly wait for sixty. In the words of Rabbi Ben Ezra, 'Grow old along with me, the best is yet to be, the last of life for which the first was made!'"

In the course of the morning Emily commented that Rabbi Ben was a smart ol' feller. From time to time, though, she saw a distance in Abner's eyes.

At last she tweaked his nose and asked, "Where are you?"

He bit her ear and said, "In a dream."

"Good?"

"Oh yes. Well, sort of. Not sure..."

"One of those recurring dreams nobody ought to talk about and when they do everybody wishes they hadn't?"

"Never had it before -- and it wasn't as weird as you, lady. But it was so vivid. Felt real."

"Not about me, obviously, because I am, in case you haven't noticed."

"I have. And you were there. With me. But it wasn't about us. We were the audience."

"Voyeurs! Watching your college sweeties perform? Let me take you away from all that, back to the real."

"Sounds like a good deal to me."

Later, Emily again spotted the distance in his eyes and whispered in his ear, "Wasn't no damn sweeties, was it?"

"No. It was the Model A."

TWO

The other thing they always used to do Sunday mornings before they were Parents was waffles with blueberry syrup and little pig sausages and coffee with real cream. Now, as the last half-waffle came from the iron and they divided it, Emily asked, "How long sice we sold the A?"

"Seventeen years."

"1948. The year after we were married."

"Took us on our honeymoon."

"And another trip or two."

"Don't talk dirty just because the girls aren't here. I hate a woman who talks dirty."

"You say that, but you giggle. Though you trully were a shy one. When did you take me for my first ride in the country -- 1946?"

"January. It was raining and I hadn't tarred the roof and you had to sit close to me to stay out of the waterfall on your side."

"My side was the waterfall! You never did tar the roof -- the whole roof -- until we were engaged. Every time you shifted gears your right hand hit my left knee. Sure was a lot of shifting with a Model A."

"How I lusted after that left knee. My knuckles touching your skirt, even through my gloves, drove me half out of my mind."

Often I was tempted to try my luck."

"I wondered why you didn't. After a while I also wondered if you ever took a girl on any kind of date besides a drive in the country, in the rain."

"Well, I never learned to dance."

"I also wondered how many left knees there'd been in your life, all your high school and college sweeties."

"You know how it was with Model As, us Andy Hardys. We were cleancut and blue-eyed, not like the greaseheads in the V-8s. Most girls were afraid they'd scare me so they chose the waterfall. That's why they're not the mothers of my twins."

"Most chose the waterfall? My guess was I was the first left knee you ever grabbed."

"Let me simply say, you were the best."

"I do know it was the second winter before you grabbed. Nearly a year of waterfalls. At that rate there can't have been too many left knees. When did you buy the A?"

"1941. It was eleven. I was sixteen."

"Very sweet, I'm sure, and never been kissed."

"Not at seventeen either, or eighteen, but finally a girl came out of the waterfall and I grabbed her left knee and then made an honest woman of her."

"I thought you'd never ask."

"I didn't -- you did."

"We've had this conversation before."

"Not recently. What America needs is more pajama parties."

"I'll vote for that. I ate too many little pigs. Feel



sleepy."

"I could stand a nap before the girls get home."

As they were returning to the bedroom Emily's eyes drifted to the same distance where Abner's had been. "You were a slow son-of-a-gun. But you got there, after a while. And it was a great while, wouldn't have wanted to miss a single waterfall."

"That was the thing about the A. The while."

### THREE

Next morning, beginning his turn at driving the car pool, Abner picked up Fred and George and Charlie, residents of the same suburb and fellow executives at the Company, merged on the freeway, and sank into his customary trance, hypnotized by cars ahead, cars left and right, cars in the rear-view mirror, four lanes of cars the entire twenty miles to the Company.

"Hey Ab," broke in George, "What's wrong with the Chevy?"

"Yeah," added Fred, "Is the bus running out of gas, or you?"

"Is this the rabbi's best?" jeered Charlie. "What you trying to do, drive your age?"

Abner looked at the speedometer -- 45. That must be why the Cadillac was riding his rear bumper flicking lights on and off. He accelerated to 75 and moved to the slow lane to let the Cadillac pass.

"A person could get killed, Ab, driving 45 at eight o'clock," reproved George.

"Murdered," amended Fred. "I thought the Caddy was going to bulldoze us off the road like scrap metal. This is mean country. You don't want to rile these folks."

"Lay off the poor guy," mocked Charlie. "It's the delayed reaction. Saturday he stood up like a good soldier and took the bullet in the brain but now he's starting to bleed."

"In my day," responded Abner mildly, "When you clipped along

at 45 you felt like you were in the Indianapolis 500 or driving your Camel through Richthofen's circus."

"Your day!" yelled Charlie. "I'm a few steps older than you and I don't ever remember driving 45!"

"On most highways that was the legal limit when I got my A."

"A what?"

"The Model A, Henry Ford's supreme achievement, which General Motors assassinated with its Chevy, while also and meanwhile buying up all the interurban trains in America to close them down and force everybody onto the highways."

"Oh lord!" whined Charlie. "We read this in the funny papers all the time -- what's good for General Bullmoose is good for the country. I don't understand how I ever gave a Commie like you a key to the executive latrine. I also don't understand why the hell you're still driving a Chevy. Why don't you put in for a Pontiac?"

"Don't know one from another," said Abner. "I switch cars when the fleet manager tells me. The girls are always thrilled by the different color and shiny wax and they love the new-car smell. Me, I just switch my gloves from one glove compartment to the other and get in and drive."

"Gloves!" groaned Charlie. "He still has driving gloves!"

"The thing is," said George seriously, "When you're at Pontiac rank and aren't driving one, people wonder."

"Speaking of new," said Fred, "They say this is a hot little number -- what'll she do?"

"Darned if I know. A lot more than me. The last one, when

I was out on the High Plains and doped off a minute, before I realized it would wind up to 90 or 100, twice as fast as God ever meant us to go."

"Aha!" cried Charlie, "Now we get the theology! The Model A was God's car and 45 was -- or is -- His speed?"

"If God wants to travel at the speed of light He can feel free, for all of me, and in any vehicle He wants. I only say He once put a good thought in Henry's mind. As far as speed goes, they used to tell me a new, tuned-up A could hit 65. Best I ever did in mine was 55, and that was on a long downhill."

"So what was the 45 pace?"

"That was college-boy speed, hippetty-hopping down the avenue, both hands on the wheel and foot on the gas and the rest of you airborne, all over the car, you and your pals or your sweeties bouncing off the doors and roof. To round a corner everybody leaned hard, like coming about in a sailboat. If you saw a cop you saluted and smiled and he smiled back, he knew you were okay in an A, not like the criminals in their V-8s."

"I can think of plenty of streets where 45 is what the criminals do now, wearing black leather jackets and motorcycle boots."

"Oh, I'm exaggerating, of course. The A was so light and nimble it seemed a lot faster than it was. At a stoplight you revved the engine and let out the clutch -- and it grabbed -- and you jumped across the intersection like a jackrabbit before the Buicks had their fat rear ends in gear."

"It is difficult for me to believe," said Charlie, "That the

freeway blockader of 1965 ever could have been a jackrabbit."

"That was only in town, loping around the University District, on a Friday night after the Blue Moon closed, driving to the Robin Hood Grill for hamburgers. You couldn't hold 45 too long -- too athletic."

"You had a speed slower than 45?"

"For long-distance cruising. Taking a girl for a Sunday afternoon ride in the country, you'd do 35 or 38. But if you were going to be on the road all day you wedged into the corner between backrest and door, stretched out your left leg past the clutch pedal, and arranged your right leg in the best angle to avoid cramps and let your foot and the gas pedal and the A get comfortable. On upgrades you shifted from high to second and went slower and on downgrades you slipped into neutral and free-wheeled like the wind, but on the flat the needle would stick hour after hour just about exactly on 28."

Charlie wailed and held his head. "How could anybody get anywhere doing 28? You'd be a week just getting to the High Plains, it would take you a month to tour the branches."

Abner was drifting back down into the trance. Charlie snapped his fingers to return the Chevy to 75.

"You've forgotten, Charlie," murmured Abner. "Most people have. The world was a whole lot bigger, then. More interesting, too. And we got everyplace we wanted to go. That was worth going."

## FOUR

The Retreat chanced to be scheduled to start on Abner's birthday, so the family had the cake the evening before, at a simple supper, the four of them. The clam chowder and shrimp salad and baked oysters were Emily's little joke. The girls made the cake, four large candles around the rim and five small ones in the center. They sang Happy Birthday as he blew out the candles and then gave him birthday kisses. In his birthday speech he expressed the wish he was Retreating with them instead of the Combine, and they chided him for telling his wish because now he wouldn't get it.

In the morning he was downstairs before Emily awoke. Entering the kitchen she caught the distance in his eye, familiar these five years. There was a new quality, she thought.

"Happy birthday, sweetie," she whispered in his ear, and bit it. She poured a cup of coffee and joined him at the table.

"Where did you go last night?" she asked, gently.

"All around the University District. Out in the country. To the beach."

"The grand tour. Sounds terrific."

Silence.

"Not terrific."

Abner sighed. "Remember how I used to fix the A? Last car I could fix. About the only tools you needed were the three

double-ended socket wrenches that fit every nut on the car. With those and pliers and a screwdriver you could practically dismantle the whole A. Heard stories about kids doing that on Halloween. Took only a few minutes to check the points and plugs and generator brushes, clean the carburetor, adjust the timing and idling, change the oil, borrow a grease gun and give a couple squirts. If the ammeter showed a discharge you could go over the whole wiring system in nothing flat, looking for shorts, wrapping friction tape on bare spots. Once in a while you replaced the radiator hoses and the bulbs in the headlights and tail light. You could take the engine apart in an afternoon -- not that anyone did except for the fun of it. Never spent a nickel on a mechanic. Feed it a little gas -- not much, always got twenty miles a gallon. Pat it on the fender and the A just kept running and running."

"Not always," said Emily. "Sometimes you stepped on the starter and it didn't growl, it clicked."

"Sure, so I jumped up and down on the running board to unstick the Bendix spring."

"There was that trip to the mountains when it sputtered and stopped and we sat an hour and for no reason it started, and after a while it sputtered again, and started again, and so on and on."

"When we got home a friend showed me the waterpump was leaking and throwing water back on the condenser and shorting it out. A piece of innertube solved the problem. Most old As had innertube wrapped around the condenser. Easier than repacking

the waterpump."

"How about the night you took me to see the moonlight on the waves?"

"That was your knee's fault, pressing against the gear shift. It wasn't raining, either, let me remind you! The headlights had been on so long they were getting dim and I knew I'd have to start by compression so I parked on a hill, but the knee had me flustered and I didn't check out the street. We came back from the waves and I rolled down the hill -- to a deadend. And the battery was too low to give enough spark by cranking."

"You knocked on a door and a man got out of bed to give us a tow. Nice man."

"All the world loves a lover."

"We weren't, yet."

"No, not until after I crashed into the house."

"Those brakes! When I dream about the A I wake up screaming!"

"That's why tailgating was practically a capital crime -- hardly anybody had decent brakes. But Henry's were worse than most, and GM used it against him, going hydraulic while he stayed mechanical. An A driver didn't expect to stop by stomping the foot brake -- or yanking the emergency brake, which was a joke. You had to use the terrain, know your routes like the back of your hand, and when you were in foreign country watch out for traps. You plotted your stopping strategy hundreds of feet ahead, deciding when to double-clutch from high to second, second to low, and then maybe turn up an alley or nudge a curb."



"You'd yell, 'Throw out the anchor! Drag your feet!'"

"What would beat you was a dumbhead stopping in front of you for no reason, with no hand signal, just when a car was coming the other way so you couldn't swing out to go around."

"You were so cool! As if you'd meant all along to jump the curb, knock down the fence and bust through the shrubbery. I thought, this shy sweet lad of mine has gone stark raving mad!"

"Is that why when the people came out to see who'd smashed into their front porch you had your arms around my neck?"

"Didn't see any other necks."

"Well, it worked out. When those folks saw the look on my face, they took my word I'd come back next day and fix their fence and garden and porch. All the world loves a lover."

"Pretty soon, we were. So the brakes weren't all bad."

"No..." The joy in the remembering faded from Abner's eyes. "They were the beginning of the end, though. You tightened up the brake rods every few months, but after you'd taken all the turns you had to reline the brakes, which meant rounding the drums, except they were so far out of round that wouldn't work and you'd have to buy a new axle, and that cost a fortune, so you sawed off the rods to get a little more purchase, a few more months..."

After a long pause Emily asked, quietly, "Last night -- it was the brakes?"

"No brakes. Every corner I turned, a cliff, a red light at the bottom."

"I hated running red lights -- the swerving and honking,

people shaking their fists and shouting."

"You had to do it. And sometimes you had to hit a car. That's what bumpers were for. But one bump finally knocked off my front bumper. Threw it in the trunk, never did put it back on, too rusted to take a weld. then the muffler went clatter-bang on the street. Threw that in the trunk, all rusted out. The A never sounded right, afterward. Louder, of course, but also -- it didn't laugh, it squawled. Then somebody stole my fog light and there was no driving in the fog without it. And they took my hubcaps and the wheels looked naked."

Emily's eyes were misting. "I'd forgotten," she whispered. "No -- I'd put those last months out of my mind. It was like my uncle who died of creeping gangrene..."

"Last night pieces kept falling off until the A was completely gone and I was doing 75 on the freeway in my suit and tie, Chevies and Caddies roaring past left and right, and I was driving the Keene Coaster I had when I was five years old..."

## FIVE

The Retreat Center had once been, in fact, a seminary and the students' paths through the forest and along the lake remained, and their tennis and handball and volleyball courts, refurbished now, and augmented by a kidney-shaped pool and three bars. Abner's room, however, was not a stone cell but brilliant plastic, businesslike yet scented, ready to go either way, the sort of office-bedroom that had made his nights so lonesome on the High Plains. He slid open the glass door to step out on the balconette, overlooking the forest. The morning air was chill and he soon turned to go in.

"Nice forest," commented a voice a couple feet from his ear. "It's not the lake, of course, but it's not the parking lot, either. Maybe next Retreat we'll get the lake. Maybe someday a penthouse suite with both forest and lake. On the other hand, next time we might get the parking lot and afterward be nevermore seen. This is my third time with the forest. Holding my own. With a little bit of help from my friend." He brandished his glass. "Can I fix you up?"

"Does seem there might be snakes around," said Abner. A glass was passed from balconette to balconette. "I've never Retreated before -- not with the Company. Retreated from it -- we called that vacation."

"Those were the good old Company days," said the voice,

identified as Elmer. "The Company was founded by Mr. Company, who had a better idea about widgets and hired Mr. Worker and Mr. Foreman and Mr. Engineer and Mr. Salesman and Mrs. Bookkeeper and Miss Secretary and they went along for years making widgets, they knew widget technology to perfection, and the widget market and the widget competition, and they took enormous pride in being among the foremost widgeters in the world. But then Mr. Company grew old and he knew that when he died the tax laws would bust up the Company so he made a deal with the Combine, which knows nothing about widgets or gidgets or whatsits or thatsits but does know the Congressmen who write the tax laws."

"If the Combine is so smart, what is it Retreating from?"

"It wakes up at night feeling unreal. All it knows is dollars -- not real dollars -- the imaginary dollars that come and go with the pipedreams and panics of Wall Street. It's afraid of being like the Emperor's New Clothes -- some little kid will blurt out that there isn't any Combine at all -- so it brings in us widget and gidget and whatsit and thatsit people to try to suck some reality out of us."

"My Company was mergerized last month. We were assigned to a Division. The Division Vice President flew in and we took him on a tour of the factory and he asked what a widget is. My boss, Charlie, says not to worry, us old boys are still running the Company and now we'll have better access to capital, be able to consolidate expenses, gain marketing allies -- and as individuals we'll have a whole new level of career opportunity."

"Well, God bless poor old Charlie. And may Mr. Company

enjoy Palm Beach. They built America as we know it. My Company was mergerized three years ago and this is my third Retreat and I've seen Charlies go to the penthouse -- and to the parking lot -- and outer space. With a little bit of help from my friend, I've still got the forest."

"What's the secret -- sit on your balconette the whole weekend?"

"The strategy is, don't be visibly not there but don't be prominently there, either. Be heard laughing -- not too loud -- but never talking, except to order drinks and ask the cocktail waitress what time she gets off. But don't be there when she does. Be seen, but not too often and not too long. Use the natural cover -- the shrubbery on the lawns, the potted palms in the lobby, the shadows in the bars. Never get trapped out in the open."

"How do you hide at the Seminars? The brochure says everybody at a Seminar is expected to contribute."

"Don't go! Seminars aren't where the Retreat is. The professors at the Graduate Schools of Business are very big on Seminars, it's what they do instead of learning about widgets and it makes them nice side-income, and the Combine worries about the professors because some of them eat dinner at the White House and could end up in the Cabinet, but actually it thinks they're wimps. You can Seminar your way straight to the parking lot."

"Where do I skulk, then? Out in the woods? By the lake?"

"God no, that's weird! Somebody might think you're a holdover from the seminary. The bars, head for the bars. In

fact, you being a new mergerization, they'll be looking for you there right now. The Combine wants to figure out who you are. They know who I am already. Or think they do. I can hang around the balconette and get blasted before I go out on the dodge. You, though, my advice is to take a double hit for the road and go drink lunch."

## SIX

Abner searched all three bars, scanned hundreds of executives from dozens of Companies, without finding Fred or George or Charlie. At the last he took a table by a window overlooking automobiles made in America, Germany, Japan, Sweden, England, France, and even Italy.

Instantly a young fellow, late twenties-early thirties, approached deferentially, said hesitantly, "Hope I'm not intruding, sir, but aren't you the one they call, in the Company, the A Man?"

An eye steely from balconette snakebite remedy fixed upon the youth, who was wearing an Italianate suit and cowboy boots.

"You see, sir, my grandfather was a T Man and I'll never forget his farm and his Model T. He hadn't driven it in years, kept it up on blocks in the barn."

"In the barn? Wish I'd had a barn," said Abner. "The A grew directly out of the T -- carried over a lot of the same parts. It was a giant leap forward but there was continuity, too. Not like some of these --" He gestured at the parking lot. "--that have no momma or poppa." He noticed the kid was still standing, invited him to sit, which he did with alacrity, and when Abner's large Scotch arrived ordered one for himself and insisted on signing the tab for both. Howard, his name was.

"The T was the quintessential horseless wagon," said Abner.

"No speed, but went faster than a horse could trot, and longer, pulling a bigger load, and that was speed enough. Geared so low it could creep up any hill, an inch a minute. High wheels for slogging through the fall floods and the winter snows and the spring thaws and the summer cowflop. So simple anybody could make it go who could make a horse go."

"I'd spend hours," said Howard, flushed with excitement and Scotch, "All by myself in the driver's seat, hands on the steering wheel, pretending. Then one day grandfather took it off the blocks and pumped up the tires and cranked up the engine and I drove the T! Only around the barn, but there I was, nine years old, sitting pretty on top of the world!"

Howard waved in another round and signed the tab and Abner decided he was a decent enough lad, never mind the boots.

"Didn't ever drive an A," Howard mourned. "But my first car was a VW and people say it was a lot like the A."

"It was," pronounced Abner, feeling the professorial value of his years. "Ferdinand Porsche's inspiration was the A -- which truly was the People's Car -- better for farmers than the T but also terrific for city people. When the first deliveries of As were made to the agencies at the end of 1927 they say business came to a standstill, everybody dashing to the sidewalk to watch the A go by, then mobbing the agency for a test ride. It was a fun car, but steady as the T, and cheap. This was the car President Hoover was going to put in every garage, along with the chicken in every pot."

"Almost wonder why we're not still driving the A," suggested



Howard.

"It was the Chevy done the dirty deed!" cried Abner, taking a swallow from a glass that had refilled itself. "Henry knew a good thing when he had it and kept the A the same from 1927 to 1931. GM made a copycat Chevy, very decent car, but people wanted the real thing. So GM took a lesson from women's clothes -- change for the sake of change. Make Americans as dissatisfied with last year's car as last year's Easter bonnet with all the frills upon it. Suddenly the Chevy was outselling the Ford, first time ever. Henry knew what was good for America and tried to tough it out until the country came to its senses. In 1932 he allowed some good little revisions to get some of the T out of the A, called it the Model B, the only car ever made that was better than the A, sold hardly any, because by that time the Chevy was streamlined, for golly sake, and so was the Plymouth, and Ford slipped to Number Three. So Henry caved in, shut down the plant, redesigned and retooled from scratch, and in 1933 leapfrogged over the opposition with the V-8."

"Was that a good car?"

Abner turned a scornful eye on the parking lot. "Better than these jumped-up gewgaws," he gestured with his empty glass. "Very steady, like the T and the A, just went and went, and could cruise easy at 45, and 60 was no stunt."

"They restore the V-8s now, take them on classic car rallies."

"If Hitler was still around," snorted Abner, "We'd call him a classic. Hitler and the V-8 -- and the Chevy -- were the start

of -- of this." The sweep of his arm embraced parking lot, bar, Center, Retreat...

"What was wrong with it?"

"I didn't mind buying oil in five-gallon cans at Sears and stopping every hour or two to pour in a quart. Oil was the cheapest thing you put in a car and smog hadn't been invented so the blue cloud you left behind was no more sinful than bad breath. What I hated was getting a crick in my neck trying to see over the hood. You always felt things were happening you didn't know about. You were sitting in a deep hole. In the A you perched on a throne, monarch of all you surveyed, envy of every eye."

"What do you see here you like?" asked Howard, waving at the parking lot. "How about the VW?"

"When it first came to America it was very homey. My 1954 had only 28 horsepower but was so light it was as nimble as the A. Cornered like a sports car -- and that's why so many of us spun out or even rolled, showing off. You cruised neatly at 55 and 60, but that also was just about the top speed -- the speedometer quit at 70, none of this 120 nonsense like on the Chevy and Pontiac. On any long hill you had to shift from fourth to third, maybe even to second, and chug up at A speed, but the low was so low you could climb a wall. It went places that scared a Jeep, hardly needed a road, and was so good in mud you'd swear it was paddling on little duck feet. They said you could wrap it in a tarp and swim it across the river. Porsche was like Ford -- knew what people needed. But the people don't know, so

the Germans started boosting the horsepower to keep up with the Chevy. For years the VW had a crank hole and came with a crank. Had a manual choke. Such a bad heater you had to keep driving gloves in the glove compartment. You even had to double-clutch into first! This above all, to thine own self be true. The VW isn't, anymore."

"What do you drive?"

"Whatever the Company gives me. --No, that's wrong. They give me a Pontiac, and I ride in that. Last year Emily and me bought bicycles. That's what we drive."

## SEVEN

Abner asked Howard to pass the ketchup and he did but said, "Sir, I'm Ronald." Bloodying his steak sandwich and french fries, Abner squinted at the fellow, late twenties-early thirties, Italianate suit and cowboy boots.

"I still don't quite get double-clutching," said the kid, chewing steak and swigging beer. "Actually, I'm not all that clear what a clutch is."

Abner looked out the window to the forest to gather his thoughts, took a swig of beer, and said through a mouthful of red potatoes, "There was this frontier, the transmission, where power was either transmitted peacefully from engine to wheels, or else war broke out. If you weren't diplomatic you could strip your gears or even tear out your rear end. Shifting up was pretty easy. You accelerated to the proper speed in low or second, as the case was, threw out the clutch -- that is, stepped the pedal down to the floor, and this disengaged the engine gear from the wheels gear -- and shifted to second or high and let in the clutch -- that is, took your foot off the pedal, and this reengaged the gears. You had to let it in ever so gently because the clutch always grabbed. At intersections you used that grab, of course, the way a Camel pilot used his torque -- which automatically threw the plane into a spin if you relaxed your grip on the stick, and that's how you shook a Tripe off your

tail."

"Camel?" asked the kid, puzzled. "Tripe? On my tail?"

"That's another story, Roland. Before we get into it let's talk about shifting down."

Abner chewed a piece of steak and emptied his beer glass. The kid waved in another round. "Let's say you've turned up a hill and the engine is starting to lug. If you're a beginner you have to come to a dead stop and start over in low. Not artistic. So you learn to double-clutch. You'd jolly well better learn because you don't have any choice if you turn down a hill and are picking up speed and have no brakes, which you never do, and have to use the engine as a brake."

Abner closed his eyes. "Give me a second. I have to feel this. You didn't think about it, you just did it, the way Fred Astaire did the Continental. If you did it wrong you gave Ginger Rogers a broken leg."

"Fred Astaire?" wondered the kid. "Ginger Rogers?"

"They did the Continental and the Beguine, Rupert. I didn't. I double-clutched. Now, don't interrupt, I have to say it fast or I'll get it wrong. Throw-out-the-clutch-and-shift-to-neutral-and-tromp-the-gas-and-let-in-the-clutch-and-throw-it - right-out-again-and-shift-into-second. Or into low. There! But if you don't tromp the gas hard enough or are slow with the clutch you just grind gears."

"Guess you had to be there," sighed Ronald. "I still don't see how a clutch works. I don't see how anybody got anywhere. Grandfather used to tell awful stories about winter mornings."

"Winter! That separated the crows from the canaries. Draining the radiator at night. Putting cardboard on the front of the radiator so the water wouldn't freeze from the wind you made when driving. If the radiator did freeze and boiled over, stopping to wrap it in a blanket, so you could thaw it out without turning off the engine, which would stop all circulation and maybe crack your block."

"Grandfather said getting the car started was the real pain."

"It wasn't hard if you parked on a good hill. Or somebody else got their car started and would give you a push. If you were on your own you tried the starter, not with much hope, but you never could tell. The battery might have only enough poop for a single growl but if you had a nice touch on the choke, that might do it."

"Choke?" asked Ronald, grabbing his throat.

"At the bottom of the dashboard on the right side, over where your sweetie sits, you have a double-duty gadget, a little wheel, that's the carburetor control. To start, you turn left for a rich mixture. To run, you turn right to lean it out. The wheel also is the handle for the choke wire. When you pull it straight out, you squirt a stream of raw gas in the engine, no air mixed in at all. That is choking, the key to success in starting any time, hot or cold. Too much raw gas and you flood. Not enough and the vapors in the cylinder are sub-explosive."

"Good God, sir!" yelled Ronald. "It's an explosion you're plotting?"

"Rodney, you've been driving a car all these years and don't know what an internal-combustion engine is? It is the bomb that is our American way of transportation, just as the nuclear bomb is our American way of foreign policy."

"In the silent movies they stick a rod in a hole under the radiator, give it a yank, and something funny happens."

"In real life it wasn't funny. There's nothing to laugh at when it's raining, the middle of the night, and you're lost, and there's not a house in miles, and you turn the crank a hundred times and nothing happens except you rupture yourself and get grease all over your new sports jacket and you know this is your last date ever with this sweetie."

"Pardon me, sir," said Ronald, "I know plenty about sweeties, it's cranking you keep on not explaining."

"Follow me step by step. Every step is crucial. Who drank my beer?" Ronald snapped his fingers and the glasses were full.

"You retard the spark -- that's the lever on the left side of the horn button, which is in the exact center of the steering wheel -- you push it clear to the top. You advance the hand throttle, which you have in addition to the foot throttle, it's the lever on the right side of the horn, like a hand on a clock -- you push it all the way down to three o'clock. You switch on the ignition. Now you get out in front of the car and stick the crank -- that's a rod that would make a half a swastika, the other end is the lug wrench for changing tires -- in the crank hole at the bottom of the radiator and take a swing to turn the engine over once to clear its throat and make sure you've put the

gearshift in neutral or you'll hurt yourself. From here on the situation is intricate. No two As were the same, no two days or nights in the life of an A. Nothing was certain and rigid, everything was questionable and changeable. Maybe you should give a jerk or two on the chokewire -- that was a little loop that stuck out from the bottom of the radiator. Or maybe you shouldn't. Maybe you should give two jerks."

"When are you going to crank, sir?"

"You suck in your gut, you fill your lungs, you flex your biceps, and you give that crank a heck of a yank and the engine maybe goes HUFF -- and if you don't have a powerful follow-through sometimes it throws the crank back around and breaks your arm. Maybe the second or third -- or twentieth or fiftieth -- yank you get a CHUGGA and instantly you pull the chokewire -- not too much, not too late. If you get a CHUGGA CHUGGA you run to the cab and advance the spark -- pull the lever down to nine o'clock. That gives a throatier CHUGGA CHUGGA and from then on it's up to your touch with the throttle and the choke whether you make it, or start over."

"Like I say," said Ronald. "How did anybody get anywhere?"

"Howard, where we were was where we wanted to be. Be honest now -- would you rather be cranking? Or Retreating?"



## EIGHT

"Mine was a coupe," Abner was explaining to Chester, on his right, and Arthur, on his left. "No rumbleseat, sad to say, they were sporty. Of course, I was always in the driver's seat anyhow, and the trunk my A had was more practical than a rumble-seat for carrying luggage and groceries and whatever. Actually, two people could ride in the trunk, and with three in the cab that was about as many bodies as a two-door sedan could handle, or a four-door, or as far as that goes, a truck. They all had the same chassis and engine and transmission, just different bodies."

"Could you haul that load up a hill, though?" the kid asked.

"Not with any speed. But the low was low, would grind up any road America built. On long grades the radiator boiled, you had to pull over and let things quiet down. In the mountains you stopped every mile or so, and now and then had to find a creek. In hot country you drove only at night. Incidentally, Ronald, never add water to the radiator with the engine off, keep it running or you may crack the block."

"Winston," corrected the kid, late twenties-early thirties, Italianate suit, cowboy boots.

"Winston," repeated Abner, and took a slug of wine that brought in focus the lamb chops with panties and creamed potatoes with sprigs of parsley and the four other strangers around the

table and the scores of other tables ringed with strangers and covered with lamb chops and potatoes and glasses of wine. He gazed out the window to the lake and said, "Winston, you must always keep an eye on the ammeter. The electrical system is exceedingly simple, you can fix practically anything with a screwdriver and pliers and a roll of friction tape, but the balance between the generator and the battery is very delicate. You want the ammeter needle well over on the charge side of the dial to take care of ignition and headlights, and to keep the battery charged for the big wallops of juice the starter takes. On the other hand, if you overcharge the battery you burn it out, so on long daylight trips you turn on the headlights, or maybe change the setting on the generator brushes. Naturally, if the needle swings left, to the discharge side, except when you're using the starter, you know you've got a bad short or maybe you've broken a brush."

"I'll watch the ammeter, sir," said Winston. "That will be easy because except for the speedometer the only other instrument I have to watch is the gas gauge, which is a cork cylinder floating in a little compartment of the actual damn gas tank, which is practically sitting in your lap, just in front of the dashboard, on top of the engine compartment, the gas cap is right in front of the windshield, and it's incredible everybody wasn't blown skyhigh. There's a little window cut out in the dashboard so you can see the cork in its little compartment. As the gas level lowers the cork revolves from F to E, and you can go many miles on E but when the cork stops bouncing you'd better find a

gas station because you're driving on fumes."

Abner was still applauding his student's recital as the President of the Combine was ushered to the dais by a cluster of Italianate suits and cowboy boots like the President's, his progress applauded by other suits-boots, one set per table.

"I thought he was tall," whispered Chester.

Whispered Arthur, "They're all short once you kick the shit out of 'em."

This obviously had not been adequately done, added Arthur in too loud a whisper, as the President anecdoted about White House dinners with a row of Presidents, including Nixon, last week, and thought-provoked on the international situation, and left to catch a plane -- or perhaps, as Arthur speculated, an Italian horse.

"It's like a nightmare," said Arthur gloomily, far too loud. "Congressman by virtue of slandering Voorhees, Senator by virtue of slandering Douglas, Vice President by virtue of pioneering the way for Joe McCarthy, Vice President a second term by virtue of the Checkers Speech, and by that time fourteen years of American history are contaminated beyond cleansing. But then he gets his ass whipped for President, and re-whipped for Governor, and our faith is renewed -- and you wake up and he's in the White House and you are trembling and sweating and screaming..."

"Well, now," said Chester, calmly but also too loud, "Admittedly the Old Nixon was gutter scum, on the make, kick you in the nuts if he had to. But now he's made it, he can afford to be the New Nixon, nobody to kick in the nuts but the Russians and

the Chinese, and they respect that, Communists are his kind of scum. Who else can get us out of this Vietnam gutter?"

Abner, after long devotion to wine, broke his silence in stentorian tones, "Never would have been a Vietnam War if we'd stayed with the A."

"But sir," reproved Winston, "They had World War I even before the A. And if my reading of history is correct, a couple others as well."

"I mean, we wouldn't never have been in no more wars."

"World War II?"

"How did world' get in the name? It was a couple of wars. An Asian war. A European war. Not America's wars. We don't need any wars. Got a Pacific Ocean here, Atlantic Ocean there, full of floating fortresses. If any enemy somehow sneaks past our battlewagons, our coast artillery will blow 'em out of the water. Don't even need an Army, except some cavalry to chase Pancho Villa back across the border. The Marines can take care of Nicaragua."

"I fail to see how we could have stayed out of World War II."

"Could've stayed out of half of it. Japan only wanted what they've now got, we had no business in the Phillipines anyhow, and the Panai needed sinking by someone, insult to the Chinese nation. Okay, I'll grant you Germany was so crazy that in another ten years they'd have been dropping heavy water on us with V-2s. But Hitler never could've gotten that strong -- that crazy -- if the A had been the end of the line. We could've sat

on our Mesabi Range and Iowa corn and Butte copper and Texas oil and Pennsylvania coal and Northwest timber, and if we wanted to tour the museums of Europe or cruise the South Seas, wait and go between their wars."

"It is very late indeed to be preaching isolationism."

"Not preaching. Can't stop progress, not trying, don't have to like it, though. Free country. Used to be. Don't know about the Combine. Do know the Army wasn't free when I was in it. Army doesn't believe in freedom, except for generals. When we went to the Chevy and V-8 and B-17 and B-29 and Atlas and Titan and Minuteman and nuclear bombs, we sold our soul to the Army."

"It is interesting to some of us," said Winston, icily, not as drunk as he'd seemed, and loud enough to be heard by nearby suits-boots, "That seventy-three percent of the Combine's gross volume is directly military-related."

"Big business!" laughed Abner, who was as drunk as he seemed, loud enough for the whole banquet hall to hear. "When I was a kid a soldier or sailor going on leave took off his uniform, put on civvies, because the country hated the military so bad a uniform was practically a prison offense, except on Memorial Day and Fourth of July and Armistice Day, in parades. It was a free country then. Now the military owns the Combine and the White House and the country, and it's because we have cars with speedometers that go up to 120. In the Model A we never could've got to a war in time."

## NINE

On Abner's fiftieth birthday Charlie took him to lunch. He ordered doubles, which was not unusual, but almost immediately called for refills, which was.

"Can't fly on one wing," he said.

"Are we flying this afternoon?" asked Abner.

"Why not? What was it you said at your forty-year bash? The rabbi's song?"

"Grow old along with me."

"The best is yet to be. Well, Ab, you now are halfway to a hundred. My grandfather lived to a hundred. We thought he was good for two. Then he just decided enough was enough. I wonder how much is enough, nowadays? Grandfather lived half his life in the nineteenth century. Hardly seems a person could do a hundred in the twentieth -- or the twenty-first, Heaven forbid. Look how much has happened the last five years. Fred transferred East to make gadgets, doesn't know a damn thing about 'em. George transferred South to make whatsits, whatever the hell they are."

"Kids from South and East transferring in, wearing cowboy boots."

"Out and in. In and out. At the Retreat last week, many old faces missing, many new faces up front, late twenties-early thirties. They got a million of 'em, waiting for us old crocks to stumble."

"I was at a Retreat once, with a view of the forest. Then I was at a Retreat with a view of the parking lot. Then I didn't have to Retreat anymore."

"Dammit, Ab, you're not only a good old friend, you're a damn good man. I always expected you'd step into my shoes."

"Cowboy boots?"

"Ah, lay off, willya? That was a long time ago. Dammit, I really thought I had a crack at Division VP, the penthouse. Instead, all those damn Toyotas and Datsuns and Hondas and Mitsubishis."

"That was a bomber, I think. Wasn't that what they called the Betty?"

"Who made the Zero?"

"Same outfit that makes the Yamaha, I'd guess."

"Geez," sighed Charlie. "That wasn't such a bad war. Seemed almost kinder than this. I know it moved slower."

"No Retreats in those days. If you had something to say to a person, you wrote a letter. If it was an emergency you had Western Union or Postal Telegraph deliver a telegram, a kid on a bicycle, or even got on the long-distance phone and shouted through the line-crackle."

"Now you have conference calls. Up at Division they have TV conference calls."

"The TV looking at you? Bad enough for you to have to look at the TV. Remember the radio on Tuesday night? Fibber McGee and Molly, then Bob Hope, then Red Skelton, all in a row, next day we'd still be laughing."

"Sunday night, Jack Benny and Fred Allen."

"One Man's Family in the afternoon. Other nights, I Love a Mystery, Jack, Doc, and Reggie in the bat cave. Ellery Queen. Inner Sanctum."

"Grand Central Station, Mr. First Nighter, The Green Hornet, The Whistler."

"Easy Aces."

"Vic and Sade."

"Li'l Orphan Annie."

"Who's that little chatterbox?"

"Arf says Sandy!"

"Jack Armstrong, the All-American Boy!"

"Buck Rogers in the Twenty-fifth Century!"

"Renfrew of the Mounted!"

"Hi-ho Silver, away!"

"Gittum up, Scout!"

"Ever long for a life of adventure? We offer you --  
escape!:"

"Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men? The Shadow knows!"

"Yeah," said Charlie, quieting, starting a new double, Abner nursing his old. "So do we, now. Ab, they made me an offer."

Abner withheld congratulations.

"Gave me a choice."

Abner waited.

"Walk the plank or be thrown overboard."

"Just like that?"



"It's no surprise. You know that. Three years I had the lake, but never made the penthouse. Then came the forest. This year, the parking lot."

"Doesn't have to be the end. Wasn't for me."

"You mean losing your Company car, being transferred from bossing the High Plains to running the paper-clip warehouse, the raises Division approved for you didn't even keep up with inflation, Emily going to work to help put the girls through college -- that wasn't the end?"

"I'm still smiling."

"That's because you stopped caring. When you don't care anymore, they can't get at you. I still do care. I even thought I could make a comeback from the forest to the lake. But if I took a demotion now, the cowboy boots would keep on rubbing my nose in it. This way there's some dignity. A part of a pension."

"Enough to make it?"

"Oh hell. We didn't save anything, you know. Figured I'd have to live like a Division VP to get to be one." Charlie brightened, took a gulp. "Maybe what I need is a new challenge to keep me young. I lined up a spot with the distributor of these Taiwan widgets, covering your old territory."

"Mighty cold out there, Charlie, those northers blowing the ground blizzards."

"Sure, but living's cheap, no country club dues or powerboat squadron, no bigshots to put on the dog for, a thousand dollars worth of whiskey lined up on your wet bar. We'll put the house

on the block, too big for just Helen and me. Got quite a bit of equity. Probably live in a travel trailer a while. Be like camping out. Helen is a good sport. If I can hold out on the High Plains a few years we can afford to put a mobile home on our Arizona lot and warm up our tootsies."

"Too fast..." murmured Abner.

## TEN

Charlie was so enchanted by the novel irresponsibility of getting blind drunk in broad daylight he did so, and Abner drove him home to Helen. Pulling out of the driveway in his Toyota he glanced in the rear-view mirror and saw the two of them still standing on the patio, clasped in silent embrace.

Returned to his desk at the Company he found a note from Charlie's replacement suggesting he drop by at his convenience. He was surprised to see a friendly face.

"You expected maybe Gene Autry?" chuckled Elmer.

"Tom Mix. Hoot Gibson. Rex the Wonder Horse. Wouldn't have been surprised by Death Valley Reagan himself -- I've missed three Retreats, barely know the cattlemen from the squatters."

Elmer smiled wryly. "Remember what I told you on the balconette. Never let them get you out in the open." He shook his head. "That banquet..."

"The Sand Creek Massacre!" cackled Abner. "The fellow on my left -- Chester, or Arthur? -- and the guy on my right -- Arthur, or Chester? -- quoth the raven, nevermore. The computer at our table -- Rollo or Wimpy or Hotspur -- was fascinated by my Model A."

"As were we all," laughed Elmer ruefully. "As were we all, in the bar, after the banquet. You were the star of that year's show. Upstaged the midget President. Ever since, at Retreat,

I've never seen a bunch sit at a table to start drinking without somebody saying, 'Hey, remember the A Man?' You wouldn't believe how many folks can recite practically everything you said. It was beautiful. Hardly a dry eye in the house. Not ashamed to say I was feeling misty, over in my corner -- my shadowed corner."

"My mouth made me what I am today," shrugged Abner. "I feel bad about Charlie, though. He even bought the boots."

"Seminars," groaned Elmer. "He didn't believe me. Thought they'd get him the penthouse. He Seminared so faithfully he even invited professors to his house. It was the boots that sent him to the parking lot, though. He didn't know you had to have permission."

"What are your plans for interior decoration here?" asked Abner. "Potted palms around your desk? Blackout curtains on the windows, twenty-watt bulbs? This desk is pretty exposed and this has gotten to be pretty dangerous territory for Indians."

"Well, I appreciate your worrying about me. Pretty unusual thing, in the Combine. But I've been in three Companies since the balconette. Not moving up, moving around. John Wayne wants a sure kill, never pulls the trigger until he's got you square in his crosshairs, a sitting duck. So I don't sit. The strategy is to stay on the dodge until I spot a safe refuge on the outside -- in some old-fashioned Company run by a not-too-old and not-too-greedy and not-too-stupid Mr. Company. Dodge in and faithfully serve out my life as a good ol' honorable Charlie. However, got to be careful not to jump into a Company just before it's

swallowed up by the Combine."

"The secret is to be fast on your feet, I guess."

"Nimble," corrected Elmer. "I hate fast as much as you do. Like nimble. Your Model A. Bless its heart."

## ELEVEN

It was a neat plot, perfectly timed. Abner was finishing off the baked oysters when the phone rang. Emily asked him to get it because she had to check the kitchen. The girls were on the line, with an extension that let both talk at once, giving hugs and kisses, telling what they were doing at school and where they'd hid his presents, and then -- on prearranged countdown -- bursting into Happy Birthday precisely as Emily came from the kitchen with the cake, five big candles blazing.

Afterward they sat close on the couch, staring at flames in the fireplace, discussing this day in the lives of their friends of more than twenty years, Charlie and Helen.

"Too fast," said Abner. "The freeway is faster at 55 than it was at 70. So many more cars, such bombs under the hoods, such strung-out nerves. Everybody tailgates, darts in and out, speeds up to cut off a car trying to merge from an onramp or block a car angling toward an offramp."

"Is there any chance it's partly that you're a step slower?"

"More deliberate is the way I'd put it. Thoughtful. Considerate."

"I'm not complaining. You're much suaver than the crazed boy who groped for my knee."

"Scared kid defending his gearshift."

Abner fell into a long silence. "We had trains and ocean

liners that combined comfort with a decent speed. For adventure there were airplanes and those German dirigibles. To get out of town we had our personal tickets to freedom -- take the family to a national park, your sweetie for a Sunday drive in the country."

"Or a honeymoon at the ocean. Funny, I remember hearing the ocean, not seeing it."

"To see the ocean you had to leave the cabin -- like I did, several times."

"You hurried back."

"Don't assume you can talk dirty around me just because the girls are away at college."

"Our girls are very good girls, like me, and I'd not be surprised if this very minute they were thinking dirty about some very nice boys, like you."

"It's too soon!" protested Abner. "Too fast..." After another silence he resumed. "Remember how highways were two lanes and twisty and some farmer always was plugging along at 28, leading a parade? You couldn't pass so you relaxed. Looked a horse in the eye, watched a duck swim in a pond, the farmers plowing, the flowers blossoming. Illich says it's a firm law that diminishing returns are bound to set in when people try to travel at more than 15 miles an hour. Maybe so. I do know, myself, that at 28 you could still tell the yellow flowers from the blue. Everybody accepted their place in line -- except the crazies who kept yelling and steaming until they got the freeways built, and now they sit on your rear bumper and yell and steam, the only satisfaction they get. At 28 you saw faces, knew

people. If you did something impolite you'd get frowned at so you minded your manners as carefully on the highway as on a sidewalk -- in your neighborhood -- in your home. It was a civilized nation. We were a civilized people. On a freeway, though, those aren't people, they're machines. They don't care if they make people unhappy, if they hurt people, if they kill people. That's why people are buying machines to fight machines -- pickups, power wagons, Land Rovers, Jeeps. Whether you're a bully or trying to defend yourself against bullies the idea is to intimidate. Terrorize."

"You couldn't terrorize anybody with the A," laughed Emily. "I remember Sunday afternoons, you getting so upset you almost said 'darn,' honking your silly little horn -- Ooga, Ooga -- and the cows standing in the middle of the road blinking their eyes."

"Cows didn't take you seriously in an A. Nobody did. Can you imagine Hitler, or General McArthur, rolling down the avenues in a rumbleseat? You couldn't have a war with Model As. Everybody would be laughing too hard, the way they laughed at us, knowing we were having fun."

"Roads are too crowded to have fun anymore."

"Country's too crowded to have fun anymore."

"Ah love, let us be true to one another, for all the world is as a darkling plain --"

"--Where ignorant armies clash by night."

"I recall a time or two," chuckled Emily, "When you did a little clashing by night. There we'd be, alone in the A on a dark country road. A car comes toward us and won't dim, so you



turn off your lights completely and drift into his lane and flick your lights on -- then off -- and the poor old farmer swerves all over the road wondering where you are."

"Next time he was going to pay attention when an A dimmed for him, even though the A's lights were so dim the high beam wouldn't make an owl blink."

"They were as bad as the brakes -- or the heater, which only kept you warm in summer."

"Nobody claimed the A was supposed to be your home, it was your vehicle. In winter I wore wool socks and long underwear and a heavy sweater and a muffler and a stocking cap. Driving gloves, naturally, though the A didn't have a glove compartment. In case you've forgotten, I had a lap robe for my sweeties -- it also kept frisky knees away from my gearshift."

"The windshield wiper," added Emily. "Didn't wipe the windshield."

"Going downhill it did. On uphill grades the engine needed all the air that supplied the suction for the wiper so you had to take your foot off the gas a second to let the blade get in a quick swipe. You only needed a swipe every minute or two to keep track of where you were."

"When it was snowing --"

"--You drove with your head out the window."

Memories of a certain winter night caused a mutual convulsion that subsided to giggling, silence. "Last night," whispered Emily, "You were tossing and turning, mumbling. I hardly slept. When I did, and woke up, you were staring at the

ceiling and looking so -- so..."

Abner's arm, around her waist, squeezed hard. "Whenever I drove downtown there was a certain block I used to park in, out on the edge of the business district. Once in a while my block was full so I'd park in the next block, or the next, or even one or two streets over. Coming back I'd always forget, walk automatically to my spot, and have a terrible fright, and then I'd remember the A was in the next block, or the next street over..."

He was breathing so deep Emily was alarmed.

"But it wasn't always there. Sometimes when I parked I had things on my mind and later, returning, I went to my spot and the A wasn't there, so I'd walk to the next block, the next street, faster and faster, other blocks, other streets, sweating, heart pounding..."

Emily had both arms tight around him. "Our first city date you took me to a show -- and you lost the A. It was so cute. So -- so like you..." A sob escaped. "It took us an hour, but we found it!"

"Last night -- I didn't..."

## TWELVE

Not since Charlie left had Abner been invited to lunch with the boss, not even by Elmer, who for all his genuine friendliness didn't dare be caught in the open with the A Man. He reported to the Company cafeteria's private dining room, where he was joined, after a while, by his host.

"It's been a while!" cried Winston, pumping his hand. "Ten years! Seems only last night we were talking about the good ol' A. Sorry I've not had a chance to pop in and say hello but coming from whatsits and thatsits and gidgets I've been going a mile a minute to get up to speed on widgets. Let's see, where are you now?"

"Bulletin boards, coordinator. I stamp 'approved' on notices."

"Thought you were in paper clips."

"You brought in the kid from Division."

"Well, anyway, here we are. Ten years! Can't keep track of all the slots I've filled. How many have been in the driver's seat here?"

"Charlie, Elmer, Howard, Ronald, and now you."

"Almost like the White House! Lot of traffic there the last ten years -- Johnson, Nixon, Ford, Carter, now Reagan. They sure come and go. Guess you've seen 'em all since Roosevelt."

"Hoover."

"You're kidding! I sort of remember Truman. Eisenhower was my man, though. Good ol' Ike. Lot to be said for those days. Last President to serve eight years! Things sure moved slower."

"Had to. No freeways to speak of except in California. That's Ike's legacy -- the Interstates. Wider, straighter roads for faster cars, more cars, to speed us onward to the age of Nixon and Reagan."

"Be fair. There'd been a half-century of automobiles before he was elected. Before that, the railroads. Before that -- did you ever read up on the flying coaches that practically overnight put Scotland next door to London? Every decade since the 1820s the average travel speed has gone up. What could Ike have done?"

"He could have done what he did best -- nothing. Not promoted the Interstates, encouraged the buildup of the great American traffic jam that would have forced the country to stop and think things over. If he felt the itch to do something he could have gone the other way -- take the subsidy away from highway departments and truckers and airlines and airplane manufacturers and give it to railroads and ships and interurban trains and trolleys and buses."

"You're hell on Republicans, Ab, but your Kennedy and Johnson didn't do the job for you, either."

"Don't pin those donkeys on my tail. Kennedy's slick answer was to give up Earth as a bad job and fly to the Moon. Johnson got his guns stuck in his butter. It's all been downhill since Hoover, the world going faster and faster, getting smaller and smaller, noisier and dirtier and poorer, nastier and meaner and

more brutish."

Winston frowned. "Ab, this is not the sort of talk America needs -- or the Combine wants."

"What's a person to do when he falls in a swamp? Hiss like the snakes?"

Winston appeared to take the remark personally. "Well, Ab, the reason I wanted to chat with you, aside from renewing our friendship. Happened to glance at your printout and it says today is the big double-five. Congratulations! Nice age! Still got your old pep, and a lot more smarts than some of us whippersnappers. Lots of good years left, lots of time to move into something new."

The waitress brought the menus. "What's your pleasure?" asked Winston. "After all, it's your day. The chicken pot pie is an old dependable. I can recommend the steamed halibut. You like spinach salad?"

### THIRTEEN

When Emily staggered in under a load of groceries for the three-family supper, Abner was staring at the fireplace, and there wasn't a fire. She didn't have to ask why he was home at this hour, obviously on his second or fourth beer. She was startled to see the heavy-padded, black-leather driving gloves in his lap. She thought about the winter night when he alternated between shoveling at the snowbank and reassuring her. She could feel the soft leather on her hair, the snow melting on her forehead.

She put the roast in the oven and opened a beer and flung herself on the couch and said, "We'll make ourselves rich by making our wants small."

"Waste not, want not."

"Eat it up, wear it out, make it do, do without."

"Eat a peck of dirt before you die."

"Do I have to? Let's move to the ocean and eat clams."

"I love to hear you talk dirty."

"Took me all these years to corrupt you."

"Just try to control yourself when the kids are here. They get hysterical when they see grandmother attacking grandfather."

She gently withdrew the gloves from his lap to hers. "Aside from that, Lord Cornwallis, how did you spend your time in Yorktown?"

"Where I -- we -- used to park. Walked around. One-way streets. Deadend streets. Parking garages. That whole area was wiped out by the freeway, of course, and then the Convention Center. Couldn't find the block at all. I think the street's gone." He laughed. "How can a person find his A when he can't find his city?"

"How long has it been?"

"Couple years. Used to see it gallop by and take off after it but my Keene Coaster was too slow. Sometimes, now, can't find that. After today, don't need it, I guess."

Emily returned from checking the roast. "Darn it, let's buy an A! Can't cost too much, they're all over, even on TV ads."

"Fakes. You see them blasting along the freeway, going 60, jumping in and out of lanes. Those aren't As, those are VWs in costume."

"Does the antique car society allow that?"

"The ones you see on rallies are authentic. You can tell by the sound. What they are, though, is authentic toys. My A was a working car. It did the work of America. It did my work."

"Don't knock a good toy. Most cars are toys. Wish our twins had grown up knowing the A instead of just hearing us talk about it. Wish their kids could know it -- know the alternative."

"Sure, sure. Where would we have kept it? In our third-floor garret we hardly could pay the rent on? Out there on the street, it was rusting to death before our eyes."

"If we'd been farmers we could've put it in the barn."

"That's an argument for being a farmer. Think of it -- a big, dry barn out in the country where you can drive 28 and not get blown away by thundertrucks."

"Wish we'd known in 1948 what we know now."

"Even later, when you and me were beginning to rub two nickels together. For what we spent on diapers and strained carrots in a year we could've filled that barn with dead As and robbed the bodies to keep ours alive."

"Should've done it!"

"Far as that goes, until I don't remember what year you could put together a complete brandnew A from the Sears catalog. After Ford turned traitor he sold the tools and dies and Sears kept the A going. Did a good business for a long while, all the trucks in the U. S. Postoffice were Model As until the war. Was it before or after that they switched to the darn V-8s?"

"You're asking me?"

"Darn V-8. Double-darn Chevy. My fault. I could've gone to the wrecking yard and found a bumper that would take a weld. New brake rods. New axle and hubcaps. Foglight. Muffler. Repack the waterpump. Even tar the roof -- on both sides."

"After all these years, this is your first confession."

"What was I supposed to do? I never learned to dance."

"Well, the waterfalls were nice. I liked the snow even better. A white Sunday in the country, me bundled up in the lap robe, you wearing your driving gloves." She drew them on her hands, lost within.

"We shouldn't have settled for the country roads. Enough of



us bouncing down the freeway at 28 and the crazies could yell and scream all they wanted, nobody would hear them, everybody would be laughing so loud."

"Nobody would get to work."

"They'd find other work. More worth doing."

Abner took the gloves from Emily, drew them on his hands, stroked her hair. "The A was slow, but not too slow. And not too fast."

"Neither were we," said Emily.

"No," said Abner, "we -- and the A -- were just right."

THE FELLOW

WHOSE

SCREEN

WENT BLANK

Harvey Manning

## ONE

The morning after the class reunion Henry awoke and, as usual, lay abed, eyes closed, to put the night in day's focus.

There wasn't anything there.

The screen was blank.

Not so much as a test pattern or carrier wave.

Just snow and an electrical hiss.

## TWO

For years Henry had gone about awakening in precisely the same manner each morning. Lying quiet, eyes shut tight, passively receiving rather than aggressively recollecting, he expertly slowed the rate of surfacing, stretched out the interlude above the below and below the above, suspended himself in the bridging space between night and day. Retaining the logic of the before even as he accepted the logic of the after, he felt the linkage of blood and brain.

By carefully recalling episodes of the night before they could evaporate he fixed them firmly in the day. While showering and shaving, knotting tie and crunching corn flakes, driving the freeway to the city and riding the elevator up the tower, initialing memos and dictating memos, riding the elevator down the tower, and driving the freeway to the suburb, eating a TV dinner of meatloaf and mushroom gravy and creamed peas and apple cobbler, watching TV, undressing for bed, he retold over and over the journeys of the night, savoring and interpreting and explicating, and then lay him down to sleep and thus connected one night to the next and so managed to live.

Many journeys (more as the years passed, and that was sad) adhered to an almost daylike logic. There were reconstructions of the past as it might have been with a different fall of the dice at this turning point or that; variant presents being lived by variant Henrys on parallel time tracks; chillingly plausible

futures.

His best trips were totally foreign to his days, peopled by magicians (he among them) who loped and leapt and flew and galumphed about emerald valleys meandered by silver rivers and toured by ebony tornadoes, deserts gashed by Technicolor canyons and punctuated by stereo volcanoes, big snow mountains with cherries on the top -- scenarios devoid of psychiatric subtlety or philosophic pretension, art for art's sake.

He especially rejoiced in homecoming returns to landscapes explored and characters met on thrilling nights of yesteryear when the most bizarre geologies and psychologies seemed possible, or nearly. The older the dream the sweeter.

Intrusions by house and family he let fade without fixing. He'd also have erased the office except those sequences more often than not starred Miss Funstermass in the virtually palpable flesh.

### THREE

He strained closed eyes to adjust the contrast, the definition, the color. No use. Nothing but snow and the electrical hiss.

This, he concluded, was death. However, upon opening eyes he beheld familiar bedroom walls and furnishings, no choirs or fires, only the windows transparent.

He reclosed eyes to inspect for internal damage of the sort that might have resulted from combat with an old enemy, rebuff by an old friend, coldness of an old love. He found no wounds. In fact, except for the snow his insides seemed better than (almost) ever.

His class never before had held a reunion and was moved to do so this thirty-third year after graduation by the death of the school, sold off to be remodeled into a condo, the proceeds to go for a new computer center. Due to college, war, careers, marriage, riches, poverty, madness, and death Henry had seen few classmates since graduation. Memories, though, had been kept vividly alive by the school annuals, the pages turned until greasy with fingerprints.

On the appointed Friday evening Henry arrived at the doorway aquiver -- and stopped short. The hall was a milling mob of aged strangers. He was turning away in confusion when a group converged on him with cries and squeals and hearty claps on the back and kisses on the cheek. Glancing from name tags on chests

and breasts up to faces he recognized a nose here and a pair of ears there, eyebrows and cheekbones and lips and chins. And eyes -- he knew all the eyes that for thirty-three years had gazed out at him from pages of the annuals.

As the evening frolicked onward from the drinking to the eating to the dancing the wrinkles and bulges and sags were edited out and he reconnected to dozens, to scores, to hundreds of eighteen-year-olds known in classrooms and corridors, lunchroom and grandstand. He nodded circumspectly to old enemies, gratified to find ancient hostilities valid, pumped hands with old friends, happy the attachments remained firm, and hugged old loves, thrilled that they still were.

By evening's end he knew -- and knew he'd always known:

These were the people.

Those were the years.

On that stage all the melodramas and idylls and comedies and tragedies had been premiered, all the sound effects and background music and stage directions arranged, all the roles definitively interpreted. Thirty-three years had brought inferior sequels and second-rate stand-ins, different costumes (polyester) and plot twists (gimmicks), bigger screens and louder music (the sound of popcorn), but nothing new (that wasn't worse, with that single exception).

Driving home, laughing at the funny speech given by Gasbag, the class president, chest warm from dancing with Bertha with the big brain and crazy giggle and Florence with the round bottom and

vile mouth, his two old loves smarter and rounder, crazier and  
viler at fifty-one than eighteen, Henry anticipated a Golden Age.

Instead -- snow and the electrical hiss.



#### FOUR

When Henry came down to breakfast Saturday morning Molly already was containerized and plasticized for the Model Home. He'd never seen her so starkly, his eyes no longer shielded from the glare of day by the filter of night. He'd never heard her so loud.

"Hoo hah!" she screeched at sight of his burnt-out eyes. "One made an ass of oneself, one wagers. Did you wrestle the mike away from the emcee and sing the One Ball Reilly?"

"On two Manhattans and a glass of white wine? I never did anything of the sort in my life, or at least not in the last twenty-five years."

"Day life, OK, but night life, wow, you wild Irish tenor you, hoo hoo hoo!"

"How the hell do you know about that?"

"Goddy god! A nose like a dying goat wakes me up and I turn on the lights and there you are, smirking and whining. Took years to get the whole thing taped and transcribed. Had to ask you to repeat parts, or even spell out words, and you would, hee hee! I finally put it all together -- the blood and slaughter, O'Reilly's daughter, pail of water, two horse pistols, rig-a-jig-jig and rub-a-dub-dub, whoopee!"

"Of all the mornings in creation, why tell me now?"

"Your damn reunion, sucker."

"You could have gone. You didn't want to go. You don't

know anybody."

"Know anybody, ho! I know them all, they're all on my tapes and in my notebook - Gasbag the Great, cock of the walk, Bertha with the round mouth and Florence with the vile bottom -- I've got those two upside down or something, hee haw! I don't know my brothers and sisters like I do your damn high school class."

"The school's gone," Henry informed the coffee pot.

"Had to happen, we've been nagging the school board to get on with it for years. City schools aren't where it's at, families on the move don't give a fat fig about double digits and fifty-years payouts. They're betting on the come and aren't spooked by balloons later on, if there is a later on, and the Vegas line is ten to one against. They want the town houses on the mall and the split-levels on the cul-de-sac and the horse acres high on the windy hill and their kids want the paved parking lots and Olympic pools and racquetball courts and no minorities unless they're clean and well-dressed. On the other side of the coin -- and I mean gold -- city condos are the ticket for swinging singles who take herpes in stride as no worse than a hangover and young couples of any sex who hate rose gardens and Welcome Wagons and retirees buying turtleneck sweaters and bikinis and looking for action at the spa. The market is operating, daddy, and thank golly, it's what makes the Model Home go-go-go."

"They're gone, too," Henry murmured to his cup of coffee.

"Who's gone?"

"The whole class. Everybody."

"Molly's cup clattered in the saucer. "You mean -- the screen went blank?"

"Snow. An electrical hiss. Not even a carrier wave. They signed off."

"Even Miss Funstermass?"

Henry's cup clattered. "What's Miss Funstermass got to do with this?"

"Hoo haw hoo-ee! My tapes say Miss Funstermass has got to do with everything! Puberty and ecstasy and male menopause and entropy -- whatever the hell that is -- and Scarlett O'Hara and the burning of Atlanta and King Edward's abdication for the woman he loved and Fay Wray and the ape and Helen and the fall of Troy and Bigbrain Bertha and Roundbottom Florence and the girl in Sunday school with the golden curls and your sorority sisters and Betty Grable's legs and Lana Turner's sweaters and Brigitte Bardot's wet shirts and Marilyn Monroe's hula hoop and your whores in Italy and thousands of girls in your damn annuals and the whole female staff at the office the whole twenty-five years -- even including me when I manned the Reception Desk and grabbed you off the free list, right out of college, hee hee! Your Miss Funstermass is all your fantasies rolled up in one bundle, you dirty old man!"

"I don't have fantasies," sniffed Henry. "Not the kind you mean."

"Wanta hear my tapes, sport? Har dee har har! It's like you're the world's first A bomb and she's ground zero at Alamogordo. The question the world is asking is, what happens when you push the button. Ha! Between us buddies, I'd be surprised if you could snap her girdle."

Gazing to a far place, Henry may or may not have said aloud, "I'd be surprised if Miss Funstermass knows the meaning of girdle."

## FIVE

Saturday was an excellent day because Molly always left early and stayed late at the Model Home and the kids' Friday nights lasted to Sunday evening. Henry took his bowl of puffed rice to the set and watched Roadrunner, Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, Sylvester and Tweety Bird.

After a hundred bloodless deaths the cheap new computer-drawn cartoons commenced and he switched to American Bandstand, where high school and Dick Clark are forever, but only for an hour, leaving no recourse except NCAA football, not without redeeming virtue. Henry lunched on a baloney-and-lettuce sandwich and glass of chocolate milk and before the end of the first quarter had feet on couch and lids over eyes.

Drifting like an autumn leaf from the above to the below, lulled by the rattle of stats and the southern drawl of the color man, he ran through his current catalog (periodically revised, within categories originally established in high school) of bridges, entertaining in themselves and frequently inspiring a particularly satisfying journey:

### Money

He controlled the wheel at Lake Tahoe by telekinesis or knew the cards by precognition and drove the Mafia crazy. He put a bank to sleep with his Mandrake gesture and emptied the cash drawers. He donned his cloak of invisibility and kidnapped the president of the world's largest timber company and held him for

and land-developers. He significantly improved the nation's weather and radically lowered the price of steak. When the student body refused to continue the assembly otherwise, and the principal and Gasbag implored him, he came out of the audience, up on stage, and played the clarinet like Benny Goodman and danced like Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers and told jokes like Red Skelton and Jack Benny and Fred Allen and did coin tricks and backflips and finished with the One Ball Reilly.

### Love

Never mind Molly's tapes, he couldn't be held responsible for what went on below; his bridges, above, were as chaste as Nelson Eddy and Jeanette McDonald in the spruce forests of Canada, or Charles Boyer and Joan Fontaine in cow pastures of the Alps, he a worldly-weary genius composer and she a constant nymph running around in mountain flowers without a girdle.

ransom deep in the timber. He was given a map by a dying prospector and followed it to a cave whose walls and floor and ceiling were glittering crystal quartz veined with eighteen-karat wire gold.

### Power.

He guaranteed peace in our time by harnessing the planet's magnetic force and plucking the Soviet and American and French and Argentine navies out of the seas and depositing them atop the Greenland Icecap and South Pole and Mont Blanc and Aconcagua, and by guiding monster electrical storm and tornadoes to melt down and/or bend out of shape every nation's missiles and airplanes and tanks and central intelligence agencies, and by flicking his wrist to put the Middle and Near and Far East and Africa and central and South America in a deep trance. He flew his magnetism-powered couch over stripmine-fired steam plants and canyon-drowning hydro dams and sky-poisoning nukes and melted their insulators with a zap of the fingers and brought America to its knees, where it had to listen to reason.

### Popularity

He shot down a hundred and fifty-five Messerschmidts and raced his PT boat through the Japanese Imperial Fleet, torpedoing three carriers and the largest battleship ever launched. He recovered from serious wounds to complete forty passes in the Rose Bowl and dropkick three fieldgoals. He conquered several serious diseases and invented new ones designed to afflict only corporation presidents, stockbrokers, senators, rapists, muggers,

## SIX

Despite baloney, NCAA, and bridges, Saturday afternoon was pure snow. Henry heated a TV dinner of Salisbury steak and hash browns and broccoli with cheese sauce and blueberry surprise and lay on the couch to watch Lawrence Welk and Love Boat and Fantasy Island -- that is, these were on the set though he, of course, fell asleep at first quaver of the accordion. He awoke in the night to an electrical hiss in the set and turned it off and went to bed, where Molly was snoring. He awoke Sunday morning to an electrical hiss in his head, Molly already off to the Model Home.

The kids had come and gone. Henry knew this because the freezer door was ajar and the kitchen was end-to-end empty cartons of ice cream and tater tots and fish sticks, ketchuped and chocolate-syruped dishes, and half-full cans of Dr. Pepper.

He carried his Shredded Wheat and banana slices to the set and watched Herbert W. Armstrong, father of the defrocked Garner Ted Armstrong, and his World Tomorrow, from the Worldwide Church of God, Pasadena, California; Dr. Jerry Falwell and his Liberty Baptist College and Seminary, Lynchburg, Virginia; Jimmy Swaggart, cousin of Jerry Lee Lewis, the rock singer who scandalized even the South in 1957 by marrying thirteen-year-old Myra Brown, and his Christian son and country-rock hymns, Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Spencer Kincaid and his Spoken Word and Jerald Ottley and his choir from the Mormon Tabernacle, the Crossroads of the West, Salt Lake City, Utah; Kenneth Copeland, a graduate



The boy dropped his fish sticks on the floor and yelled, "I'm just come to collect for the paper, Mr. O'Malley, but I'll catch you next month," and was out the door and down the alley like a shot dog.

Henry felt foolish. Though the youths in the kitchen were very alike in dress and hair and clothes, he should have known he had no black sons. He'd have tried again but they began slipping through the walls, a trick invented since his time, when children under attack by elders stood at attention and took the bullet in the brain.

Alone with the ketchup and chocolate syrup and Dr. Pepper, Henry realized he'd never looked at his kids through eyes not filtered by the night, and that except in emergencies, such as fires or attacks of appendicitis or Christmas, he'd never talked to them -- not since they learned to talk back -- and wasn't sure how many there were, or their sexes or names, or who they had become, if anyone. It was much too late to ask about their dreams, if any.

and trustee of Oral Roberts University, and his Believer's Voice of Victory, Fort Worth, Texas; It is Written, with Pastor George Vandeman, Thousand Oakes, California; Oral Roberts and his wife and son and their University and City of Faith, Tulsa, Oklahoma; the Kroeze brothers and wives and daughters and their World Outreach, Everett, Washington; Rex Humbard and his wife and kids and great-grandchildren and their World Ministry, Columbus, Ohio; Dr. Robert Schuler and son and their Hour of Power in the Crystal Cathedral, Garden Grove, California; and Day of Discovery from Florida's Cypress Gardens, presented by the Radio Bible Class, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Religious needs satisfied (though he was curious what sort of show the Jews might sponsor and wished Monsignor Fulton J. Sheen were still around), Henry turned to the NFL as the half ended. He lunched on a tuna fish and dill pickle sandwich and glass of buttermilk while watching the girls wiggle their pompoms and at the second-half kickoff fell asleep.

He awoke shivering in snow and after two nights and two days of it was desperate for the human warmth he was accustomed to receiving from dreams. Voices drew him to the kitchen, where ketchup was being splashed on tater tots and chocolate sauce on walls.

In the grip of a sudden odd compulsion such as he'd never felt, Henry threw a fatherly arm on the shoulders of a boy who looked familiar and said, "How y'doin', son? Had any good dreams lately?"

## SEVEN

He went back where he came from, his home during high school. The house was vacant, had been for years, since Mother went away. Dad, though, was at the TV in the RV watching the NFL.

Eyes riveted to the screen, he called over his shoulder, "Pull a couple Specials from the freezer. Game's about over, stinks like an English lady, every time the Seagulls miss a block they fall down and grab their crotches like a rassler, the Magic Christian has been on his knees all day, praying for God to complete a pass, he sure can't."

"I don't know how you can stand that crap. I even have trouble getting to the end of the Rose Bowl. Except for the pompoms it puts me to sleep."

"What more could you ask? Perchance to dream, in the great and famous tradition of the O'Malleys, said in the old country to be of leprechaun stock?"

"Hah!" snorted Henry, sliding two NFL Specials in the microwave.

"That snort said there was more to the matter."

"Or less."

"You are not dreaming well?"

"Not at all."

"Saints! Since how long?"

"Friday night."

"Bless us, the reunion. Well, let us dine before NFL Today, while the Seasnails are creeping through the two-minute drill to make room for the leftover commercials."

They sat in the kitchenette to pork chop-grits-blackeyed peas-corn bread-sweet potatoe-pie dinners, with red gravy.

"I worried about the reunion" said Dad, mopping the tray with the bread. "I've known it to happen early as the tenth and my bones told me your thirty-third was as sure as a woman's faithlessness. It was on my mind to speak to you -- but hell -- it would happen or it wouldn't, nothing to be done about it."

Henry spilled grits in his lap. "You know about this? It happened to you?"

"Happens to us all, I would guess, sooner or later."

"This is a damn scandal! It's like the Black Death with nobody saying a word! There should be newspaper columns, TV psychologists, bestselling books, national foundations with telethons, Presidential commissions, the United Nations."

"Ah well, it's like a dose when there was no cure and what you did to get it was so sinful the father would keep you at the Hail Marys and Pater Nosters 'til the cow lept over the Irish Channel."

"It's not fair -- that you have to die before you die."

"Oh, if it's death you're bringing in, they do say it is not an absolute but a matter of degree and medical science itself debates the definition, not to omit the hierarchy."

"When did you -- when did your screen go blank?"

"The night Belly Johnson and me went up before the City Council. You remember, that was twenty years ago, and they asked how long we'd been in the Department and if we were married or whatever and our opinion of foam and fog and firebug insurance and Negroes sleeping in the same firehouse as Swedes. Belly and me kept winking back and forth and afterward went out and tied one on and voted unanimously that neither of us wanted it, it was our dream since we were tiny children to lead the chase in the Chief's Car, siren wailing worse than a banshee, and now it didn't matter."

"How come?"

"What was it with you, seeing your bully boys and darling sweeties all in a bunch after thirty-three years?"

Henry sighed, and again. "The war was supposed to be one of those things we have to do once in awhile, but when it's over we go right back to where we were before. College wasn't the same, though, even after an extra year, hoping. Then the Company took me and Molly grabbed me and there were twenty-five years and then the reunion and it was so good . . . "

"Good indeed, indeed . . . Thirty-three years in the Department and I had a hand on the doorhandle of the Chief's Car and next morning . . . "

"Snow?"

"A blizzard."

"I'd have helped, or tried, if I'd known."

"Sure you would've, I knew. In Ireland the entire clan

would have crowded in, the village, too, and the county, saving the English with their money and their guns. Sadly, this is new country, a hard one, and you were dreaming and it is a commandment upon us Irish, here: never meddle with a dreamer. Couldn't be helped anyhow. On this side of the ocean nobody can help anybody. Everybody dreams alone -- and not dreams alone."

"Not dreams! Twenty years . . . What keeps a person going, in the after?"

"It is well you ask . . . What about Grandpa after establishment of the Free State? With Pa, when they promoted him from the beat and put him in a radio car, it was digging up the garden, winter and summer, all stones, never grew a potato as big as a marble, for him it was the digging."

NFL Today was running scores down the screen and recapping the day's most violent blitzes and sacks and Dad was riveted. From the side of his mouth he said, "You don't know how I can stand this crap. Just wait. The NFL will get you, too."

"It turns the brain to jelly, like the kids' music."

"Now you're onto it! Relax like the kids, like me. You've got it made."

"What?"

"No more sweat. Shift into free-wheeling and coast home."

"Coast?"

"Once the dreaming stops you never have to step on the gas ever again."

## EIGHT

After a weekend of showing bathroom fixtures and closet space and electric-eye garage doors and yard lights that turned on at sunset and sprinklers that turned off when it began to rain Molly always got blasted at the Model Home and slept over.

That was the best thing about Monday morning. A good thing about any weekday was the kids had perfected a means of instantaneous transport from bed to school or wherever it was they went, leaving no trace of their passage through the kitchen except crusts of toast mingled with the fish sticks, Sugar Pops with the tater tots, glasses of Astronaut Juice with the cans of Dr. Pepper, and an overall dusting of cinnamon.

Three cups of coffee enabled Henry to get in suit and tie and compact and from freeway to parking garage to elevator to Executive Suite. Passing the Reception Desk was trickier than ever after three nights of snow and electrical hiss. On reflexes alone he dodged by Miss Lindemann, niece of the commander of the Bismarck, sustaining only minor damage to his superstructure and none to his hull.

Safely in his cubicle he lay back in his swivel chair and closed eyes -- to snow. "Damn, damn," he whined, and kicked the desk. The snow swiveled, the most interesting show on his screen since Thursday, so he kept kicking, swiveling, and with the Doppler Effect even the hiss wasn't so bad.

A snake of a voice insinuated, "Can any old body jump on

your merry-go-round, Mr. O'Malley?"

Feet slapped floor, chair stopped, still-swiveling eyes opened on Miss Funstermass. He'd never gazed upon her without filters. In fact, he'd never gazed at all, only cast sidelong glances, mainly when she was in vivid retreat.

"Miss Funstermass," he began, but had nothing to say.

"I wasn't sure I should bother you."

"No bother -- that is, please do."

"Well, I was wondering, just now with your eyes closed -- was that REM under there?"

Henry blushed and closed his eyes, and instantly opened them. "No, I'm sorry." Why was he apologizing? "No more REM, just snow."

"Under the lids! Poor baby!"

"An electrical hiss, too."

"Oh I just hate it! Do your ears hurt?"

"Everything -- hurts."

"That's why I came, they said it was bad."

Henry's eyes slitted. "Who said?"

"Everybody."

Henry jumped up but was so dizzy he sat back down. "Everybody? How does anybody know these things? Is everybody hanging around my bed with a tape-recorder?"

"Gee, Mr. O'Malley, I don't know about your bed," she said, giggling, which set her jiggling. "However, as we all know, except for the top brass and their bankers and lawyers there's



grabbed you off the free list, right out of college?"

"Molly says I couldn't snap your girdle."

"Girdle? What's that?"

only one entry, under the eagle eye of Miss Lindemann."

"Pity she didn't go down with the Bismarck, too."

"Can't blame Miss Lindemann, Mr. O'Malley, or her uncle, or his boss, Mr. Hitler. They only do what they get paid for."

"Who should I blame?"

"Gosh, not me, I'm on your side."

"That makes two of us. We need eleven to make a team -- no, that was the old days, now its forty-five plus a taxi squad."

"I didn't think you were a fan."

"Dad says I better learn."

"Dad! See, you've got three."

Henry's cubicle, the air-conditioning designed for one body only, how grown torrid as a hot tub.

"Miss Funstermass, Friday night I went to the thirty-third anniversary reunion of my high school class and afterward my screen went blank and I'm having crazy thoughts and you tell me everybody knows and Dad tells me nobody can help."

"Mr. O'Malley," she breathed, and in the confined space the steam flowed directly into his nostrils, "Some folks can help some folks."

"How old are you, Miss Funstermass? Eighteen, twenty-eight, thirty-eight?"

"Not fair, Mr. O'", she jiggled. "Let us just say I've been around a while."

"Wish you'd been around when I was."

"You mean when Mrs. O'Malley manned the Reception Desk and

## NINE

Weekday noons in the cubicle were very different from nights in bed or weekend days on the TV couch yet equally crucial to survival, coming as they did in the middle of such long wastes. Henry would bring a quick and simple lunch in his attache case, typically a thermos of tomato-rice soup, certain to make him drowsy, and lean back in the swivel chair.

Background noise of the Executive Suite was muffled enough by foamboard and carpeting to prevent abrupt jolts to the surface, yet was sufficiently persistent to prevent plunges to dreamless depths. His fifty-odd minutes of lunchtime REM were continuous and pure -- and all recallable, more than could be expected from an entire average night in bed.

The unique pleasure of noon-nights was the contest between the below and the above. Henry would snuggle into his swivel chair full of hot soup, determined to follow a favorite bridge to a climax or pick up and continue a good story broken off by the alarm clock. Upper-logic, while it retained control of bridges and continuations, insisted on a basically linear narrative. Under-logic, when it got hold of the oars, went off wildly rowing in circles and swirls. Under ordinary circumstances the upper-logic would surrender at a certain point and lay back to be entertained by the gyrations of its loony partner. However, when it had something important on its mind, such as after a bad freeway morning or any staff meeting, it would refuse to yield.

TEN

The phone jangled him out of the snow.

"You're on, O'Malley," barked Miss Guderian. "At precisely 1:04. Synchronize -- it is now precisely 1:02."

Henry groaned. He'd forgotten the ceremony. Fortunately VP for Personnel was brisk, he'd soon be back in his cubicle, initialing memos.

At precisely 1:04 the portal slid open with an electrical hiss. He advanced to the desk of VP, at whose side Miss Guderian, lips so tight she scarcely had any, was perched on the edge of her chair.

"What have we here, Guderian?" asked VP.

"A scheduled twenty-five year pin, sir."

Why, wondered Henry, the emphasis?

"Name?"

"O'Malley, sir," said Miss Guderian before Henry could open his mouth.

"Numbers?"

"Age, fifty-one. Years in college, five, M.A. Years in army, three, PFC. Years in company, twenty-five, XIII. Cubicle size, six by seven."

"Six by seven!" exclaimed VP. "But six by seven by twenty-five by XIII is only . . ."

"Thirteen thousand, six hundred and fifty, sir."

"But at fifty-one your score has to be . . ."

Under-logic would then pretend to obey, would cleverly simulate rigorous cause-effect, and not until the surfacing would upper-logic realize it had been swindled. Often it became angry, having thought the dreaming had been to a useful end.

Playing no favorites, Henry could smile through the afternoon and evening, recalling the two logics locked in dubious combat and the stars of night and noon-night mingling and merging on the screen.

Night was high school, of course, the round bottom and crazy giggle and big brain and vile mouth, singing in the Canadian spruce and running around in Alpine flowers.

Noon-night was Executive Suite, inescapably, except he was still eighteen and so was Miss Funstermass.

"Twenty thousand, sir."

"Well, but MA, PFC, XIII! Married is he, family man?"

"Yes, sir, just under twenty-five years. Miss von Stuka grabbed him when she manned the Reception Desk."

"Stuka! Great eyes, and loyal to the bunker. Have to give weight to Stuka's judgment."

"I agree, sir," said Miss Guderian, tight lips briefly relaxed by a nasty snicker.

"Can't very well double-jump to XV. Don't we have an open eight by eight?"

"We do, sir but you see, sir . . ."

Miss Guderian handed over a thick folder. VP flipped through, pausing to scan certain pages. He whistled. "Miss Lindemann says that?"

"Yes, sir."

"And the reunion was Friday night?"

"Yes, sir, and as you see, sir, we have two independent verifications."

"So I see. Any potential for the after --- NFL, booze, pot, flowers?"

"None, sir."

"Tennis, skiing, church, United Way, stamp collecting?"

"Nothing, sir."

"Fanny-pinching?"

"No, sir!" hissed Miss Guderian, taking it personally.

"So," mused VP, "What's to hold him together?" He stroked

his mustache. "Are our hands tied, Guderian?"

"Yes, sir, they are, sir."

"Well, fellow," said VP, looking at Henry for the first time, "You've got to clear out. No hurry, take the rest of the afternoon to clean out your desk."

Miss Guderian cleared her throat emphatically. "May I remind you, sir -- twenty-five?"

"Oh oh! Has he vested?"

"Not until 1:15, sir."

"Close call! A XIII gets a bundle!"

"It is precisely 1:08, sir," said Miss Guderian urgently. "Osberg Nelson Cox & Roe recommend he be off the premises by 1:14, to be safe."

"Well, what's your name, you'd best be hopping or we'll have you shot for trespassing!"

"Sir," protested Miss Guderian, "Osberg Nelson Cox & Roe recommend against that on the grounds . . ."

"Just a bit of humor there, Guderian! What's his name and I have been coworkers twenty five years, almost, friends surely can share a joke in parting."

Henry vaguely recalled there was some other reason for his being here and stood rooted to the carpet until Miss Guderian began making shooshing gestures with her hands. He turned to leave.

"Hold on there, fellow!" cried VP. "You'll actually be a minute shy but what the heck -- here -- take a twenty-five year

pin, for luck!"



Henry returned past half-wall doorless enclosures of Xs and VIIIs who had carefully studied and dutifully answered his memos, and desks of IIs and Is who had shorthanded and typed and circulated and filed, and not a glance strayed his way from typewriter or telephone or cabinet. Over the years, eyes veiled, Henry had supposed there was something between him and them beyond occupying space in the same tower. Now he had six minutes to get off the premises and nobody tried to delay him.

-- Save one, who lept to her spike heels in the back row of the bullpen and cost him a near-fatal half a minute with a face-screwing wink and a yoo-hoo of the fingers.

A paper sack of personal belongings waited on the floor outside the cubicle door, which displayed the name of an XI newly promoted from a half-wall doorless enclosure and who doubtless was now spinning around and around in the swivel chair.

Miss Lindemann's eagle eye looked through Henry as if he didn't exist -- as he didn't. Old Walt, the door guard, was so intent on the official company door clock he failed to deliver his customary salute and "Goo nigh, Misser Mallory." As the door closed the minute hand jumped to 1:15 and Old Walt's pistol jumped from the holster, a tick too late.

Henry's compact was missing from the Executive Garage, the XI's name now stenciled on the concrete. The attendant handed Henry a memo telling him where his car had been towed at the recommendation of Osberg Nelson Cox & Roe.

recommendation of Osberg Nelson Cox & Roe.

He stood on the sidewalk pondering which way to go, and why.

"Anywhere but up," he shrugged, and turned eyes skyward, counting floors toward the Executive Suite, losing track in a cloud.

A snowflake floated from the cloud, grew larger, became a paper airplane spiraling to his feet. He unfolded and read:

"Played any post office lately? How long since you got an air mail special delivery???? WELL THEN, meet me in Waterfront Park tomorrow after I get off. Or BETTER, before, giggle giggle!! Do I have a girdle? Where? If you can find it you can snap it! Tee hee!! Wink wink!!"

He was minded to remain for the last show and then scout around for an all-night movie house. Walls never snowy or hissy perhaps could provide an endurable after, an alternative to the NFL.

However, the darkness began to come alive with squirmings and whisperings, heavy little feet thumping up and down the aisles between seats and candy machines, and he remembered why he hadn't been to a theater in years. Overpowered by the reek of popcorn, he fled.

Henry was in no rush to ransom the compact. Molly would just now be crawling out of bed, a bear if the earnest money had been slow at the Model Home, a pig if it had, and in either animal manifestation snarling and stomping and snorting and taking out her hangover on whoever was handy.

He couldn't recall the last time he'd been afoot downtown. He walked the streets looking in windows: of department stores, to clothing and furniture presumably featured in people's dreams, though never his; jewelry shops, to arrays of precious gems inferior to those of his Monday bridges; travel agencies, to posters and brochures from Love Boat and Fantasy Island, poor stuff beside his galumphing landscapes; candy shops, to childhood's dreams, sweet indeed, but gone.

On impulse of a memory abruptly surfacing he entered a theater, a relict Oriental palace from before The Crash. So dark and still and so nearly empty was the gigantic vault of the auditorium he had the sensation of experiencing a supernatural REM. Not in years had he known an exterior screen larger than twenty-one inches. The huge wall seemed as vast as his own interior screen and was so vibrant with brilliant motion as to overwhelm and enthrall him, despite its being somebody else's night, not his.

He stayed through the intermission, eyes shut to prevent obliteration of the movie below by the auditorium above, and only opened them when the film returned.

In the olden era when Henry attended fifty movies a year he invariably emerged from the theater into darkness and was soon abed, dreaming, delayed perhaps an hour or two by a hamburger and malt with the crazy giggle or the vile mouth. Now, sunlight flowed beneath western clouds along city canyons and his above and below were awry. Night invited from a doorway.

A second time this public day he had the sensation of total solitude in a private space, the glows of jukebox and cigarette machine and bottles backlit by the bar mirror virtually as vivid as REM, the aromas of liquor and tobacco and perfume seeming the very air of sleep.

Henry last had drunk extensively in public places during college, the beverage then being beer and the state law mandating lights brilliant enough to discourage lewd behavior in the back booths. This new-model free-wheeling public night was stunningly dreamlike. He was solicited by a semi-nude waitress who brought a Manhattan so oceanic he exclaimed and was told with a flutter and a bump this was the Special, this was the Happy Hour. Thought Henry, the hell with the NFL.

Chewing a third maraschino, stomach warming and muscles loosening and mind expanding/simplifying, Henry chuckled to think how amazed the enchanting women of this night would be to learn he was Henry XIII King of England (on his Mother's side, she being a Tudor), newly returned from sledding to the Pole, readying his armies to conquer France again. These sumptuous

readying his armies to conquer France again. These sumptuous female silhouettes in haloes of mystic smoke, auras of forbidden incense -- when he threw back his cloak to reveal his medals they'd claw and slobber to embrace his knees and kiss his feet. Their bloodless escorts -- Swiss bankers, senators and governors, embassy officials and OPEC sheiks, First Family wastrels, generals in mufti, CIA agents, SS officers become Harvard professors, princes of the Church -- were no competition. The waggle of a finger would summon every Funstermass in the place.

However, justice first must be done the splendid lady (gradually dividing, amoeba-like, the miracle of the fishes and the loaves) who languorously hipped between crowding tables, black net stockings up to here and bare shoulders down to there, sumptuous bottom justling his elbow, chasmal cleavage engulfing his nose.

Four Special Manhattans established an understanding. As her ear passed close by his lips he whispered, "With all this, who needs REM?"

Stashing a fourth Special Tip in her garter, she huskily breathed, "Only a hog, sir."

Miss Funstermass wouldn't mind if he practiced up.

Glass dry, cherry chewed, he ordered another and signaled with a gentle pat he was ready to make his move, and she said crisply, "Sorry, Charlie, Happy Hour is over and the Special is off and so am I."

It was too early to go home. He remembered from his drinking era, in college, it's always too early. Fortunately night had fallen and he could weave from the privacy of one shadow to the next, humming the One Ball Reilly. He discovered the city had been platted not in right-angles but circles. Following sidewalks to see where they went, he ended where he'd started, beneath the tower, now empty, gleaming electrically high in the sky, hissing.

He re-read the air mail special delivery and wondered. Not about the meaning, that was clear enough, rig-a-jig-jig. The why. The why now. Nothing of the sort had happened since Miss von Stuka put the grab on him, twenty-five years ago. The memory chilled his cockles. A warmer night invited him in.

As he stood swaying, waiting for walls and furniture to firmly materialize, two female shadows arose from a booth and exited. The flare of a cigarette lighter illumined tight lips relaxed to a sneer and eagle eyes squinting as if in want of monocles. Henry recollected this bar was virtually an annex of the Executive Suite. He fumbled in his pocket for the service pin and stuck it in his lapel and lurched onward.

Passing the booth from which Miss Lindemann and Miss Guderian had come he noted a residual drinker and stopped short, uncertain. He thrust his face forward and down, hunching like an ape, and squinted.

"Gasbag!" he cried.

The residual drinker's hands flung straight up in surrender. Contents of the glass that had been at his lips lofted like a mortar round and rained fruit on his head and whiskey on his shirt front.

"One Ball!" he quavered.

Henry's King Kong-like plummet to the booth sent Gasbag in a hip-scoot around the circular table to the far side, his face that of a man who expects blood and slaughter.

"Thirty-three years we don't see each other," marveled Henry, "And now twice in three days."

"Look O'Malley," gasped Gasbag, combing fruit from his hair, "We do what we got to, right? Earn your pay or it's anarchy, right? Rioting in the streets, municipal bonds defaulting, the water going bad, a freeze on land-development, nuns being raped . . ."

Black net stockings interrupted to take the order for a Manhattan and an old-fashioned, doubles. Gasbag noticed he wasn't bleeding, and relaxed. "Never could get the hang of a martini," he muttered morosely. "Might've made the home office." Chewing on a grape and slice of orange squared his shoulders. "So, One Ball, what you been up to since Friday?"

"Bugs Bunny, Dick Clark, football, . . ."

"NFL, I hope?" cried Gasbag.

"A little, the halftime pompoms. Mostly a half a quarter of NCAA. Oral Roberts and the Kroeze Brothers and Dr. Robert Schuler from the Crystal Cathedral. Sure wish they'd bring back Monsignor Fulton J. Sheen."



"He's dead."

"Well, reruns."

"He was black and white. They don't rerun black and white much."

"Then they gave me this twenty-five year pin, though I was a minute short when Miss Guderian shooshed me."

Gasbag had recoiled at "pin" and "Guderian" as if they were horse pistols being jammed up his nose. He whined, "Do you know my score? Nineteen thousand, seven hundred and twelve!"

"I didn't even know you were on the board, you never mentioned it Friday."

"Would you want old friends to know you were in the Dallas office? Nevertheless, I had a XIV and an eight by eight, air-conditioning for two."

"I was XIII and six by seven."

"I know. You also had twenty-five years, or would've had in a minute. Where I screwed up as staying in after VJ Day to buddy up to the Germans. What have they done for me? I hit fifty-one with only twenty-two Company years and that makes me two hundred and eighty-eight points short!"

"Shoosh shoosh and bottoms up, for tomorrow we die."

Gasbag crammed his mouth full of fruit. "No. I'm OK."

"Me too, with a snootful of maraschino cherries."

Gasbag stifled a sob. "Don't break my heart, Henry! You've been on the nod in your six by seven for years while the rest of us have been out in the jungle. You never saw the gangs of Xs and VIIIs in their half-walls waiting for us to stumble, the

been on the nod in your six by seven for years while the rest of us have been out in the jungle. You never saw the gangs of Xs and VIIIs in their half-walls waiting for us to stumble, the hordes of VIs and IVs in the bullpen sharpening their teeth to tear us apart. We had too many kids, Henry -- how many did you turn loose on us?

Henry pondered.

Gasbag drained the old-fashioned and scooped the spilled fruit off the table and stuffed it in his face and wig-wagged the net stockings. "Know what the kids are going to do, One Ball? First they'll cut off our Social Security, then they'll lock their doors when we come begging, and then when we've got no place to go and are obstructing traffic they'll bus us out to a National Park and expose us on a rock."

"Who'll fill their freezers with tater tots?"

"Look, Henry, it's too late to laugh. They've got the military sewed up, the tanks and flamethrowers, and if they run out of rocks they'll have special showers with no water. God, I should've stayed in, I'd have a couple stars and be set. Who could've guessed it would come to this? Blame the kids, Henry, they're why I did it."

"Did what?"

"Gasbag went nearly pale. "My big mouth," he whimpered.

Henry stared. "You were one of the independent verifications!"

"Don't hurt me, O'Malley, I can't stand pain."

"You organized the reunion!"

Gasbag waved in another round, tears running down his cheeks, and emptied his glass in a swallow, fruit dribbling from his chin to shirt and lap. "It's no worse than joining the Communist Party for the FBI, like we used to in Dallas to get our Secret Clearances, and turning in Communists to get them fired."

Henry tried to undo the miracle and make a single weeping Gasbag of the two. "I'm not Communist, I'm Irish."

"That's what I forgot, I didn't think the reunion would matter, I thought your screen had been blank for years."

"Yours?"

"Since I was elected."

"Thirty-three years in the snow!"

"It's cold, One Ball. Even in Dallas I couldn't handle football, and that's where they invented pompoms. Tried agitating to get the US out of the UN and being born again and pinching fannies and this is the best I've been able to do."

"Old-fashioned?"

"This, damn you, this! But don't put it all on me, Henry. If you'd dodged and sideslipped instead of nodding, you could be in an eight by eight, a XV, safe until the next cut at fifty-four. The numbers can be beat, I'm beating them. So what if I am a fink? You wouldn't have been shooshed just on my word. They had Miss Lindemann and the other verification from Miss von Stuka."

"Miss von whom?"

## FIFTEEN

Gasbag wanted more fruit but Henry needed air and set out alone to see where the sidewalks went. This time gravity took him straight down the hill from the towers to Waterfront Park. He was a day early but thought there'd be no harm in rehearsing his moves where he'd be making them, if she left him any to make, rub-a-dub-dub. He sat on a bench and breathed the salt and looked beyond the docks to lights of moored ships and shuttling ferries. How many dreams had ended here on the road from Mandalay and the Yukon? Did seamen and fishermen dream? The Indians? If so, did they stop, and why? And what was their after?

A body plunked emphatically down at the far end of the bench. The chap's suit was much ruffled but was so heavy a tweed as to be thereby all the more dapper. He thrust his feet out, fastidiously drawing up trouser legs, showing silk socks but not the garters, leaned regally back against the bench and dramatically cleared his throat.

"The sea is calm tonight. The tide is full, the moon lies fair upon the straits. On the French coast the light gleams and is gone. The cliffs of England stand, glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay."

"There's no Moon," commented Henry, since it was his bench. "That's Magnolia Bluff and from the stink I'd say the tide is out."

"Have you no poetry, sir? You've the Irish look, do you never dream? I dreamt that I dwelt in marble halls, with vassals and serfs at my side."

He snapped open his attache case, withdrew a paper sack, unscrewed, and tilted. "Ah-ah-ah!" He replaced sack, snapped case shut, and hummed the tune of "When I grow too old to dream."

"You'll have what to remember?" asked Henry, resenting the intrusion on his thoughts of Miss Funstermass. "The muscatel, the ruby port, the dessert sherry?"

Mr. Tweedy warbled, "Drink to me only with thine eyes and I shall pledge with mine sack -- or mine fortified loganberry wine or mine single-malt Scotch or whatever else is readily to hand for purposes of paralyzing mine nerve-endings. What else, sir? Who else, sir? Would you have me remember the soprano in the polka-dot dress behind the hedge at the graduation picnic in Canton, Ohio, home of the Bulldogs? The maiden in the tea shop in Baltimore, Maryland? The pleasingly plump matron in the movie house in San Diego, California? No, sir! A woman is only a woman but a jug of wine is a snort."

"Does it help you dream?" asked Henry, a hope stirring.

"Sir, it enables me to not dream."

"Your screen . . ."

"Blank as a female philosophy book, sir, since my youth."

"Something too good happened?"

"My word, sir, you are an Irishman! Well, in reality you are correct, sir, though at the time it seemed a cruel blow indeed."

"Bad dream?"

"Sir, there is no such thing as a bad dream, every dream is a glory if you believe. My tragedy was to doubt."

"Doubt what, sir?"

"The utility, sir."

"Public or private utility, sir?"

"Sir, you're tangling the thread. Let me tell you a little story, sir. But first . . . "

Case was unsnapped, paper sack tilted, replaced.

"Ah-ah-ah! Well sir, there was a couple in Canton, Ohio, Willie and Emma Erlenmeyer, very devoted couple. One night they got stuck fast together and medical science pronounced itself incapable of prying them apart without unacceptatble damage. Well sir, they had to buy clothes especially made and learn to walk sideways, and those were some of the lesser complications, as you, sir, a man of the world, may well imagine. Made the best of it, they did, took up horseback riding and parachute jumping and became regulars at the amusement park on the rollercoaster and bump-em cars. At parties they achieved great fame, if that's the word, dancing cheek to cheek, to say the least, sir.

"Movie theaters required them to sit in the balcony and restaurants were out of the question, except drive-ins. Emma quit teaching, naturally, and Willie had to give up beating the big bass drum in the American Legion parades. Nevertheless, sir, community acceptance was high. On a summer eve when old folks were setting on porches along Elm Street, rocking chairs and slapping mosquitoes and watching the young folks promenade,

they'd comment, 'The Moriartys are a handsome pair, he's doing very well at the bank,' and 'Those are the Engelhardts, new in town but said to be kind to animals,' and 'We must have the Lewises over for lemonade, she sings sweetly in the choir,' and then Willie and Emma would pass by and everybody along Elm Street would nod and say, 'There go the fucking Erlenmeyers.'

"As you can understand, sir, the spectacle was an inspiration to us lads in Canton, Ohio, home of the Bulldogs, and I dreamt of following in Willie's sidesteps -- and Emma's too, unavoidably. However, one day when I was sixteen I was waiting for an open chair at the barber shop, occupying my time watching Lippy snipping on Willie and Emma. Lippy was the quintessential barber, mouth never stopped, and as he was working around their ears, where he could address them confidentially, he asked if there was anything about their life they regretted, and Emma said she had no complaints but Willie looked wistful and said, 'I sort of miss the occasional night out with the boys.'

"Well, sir, it was a weighty message for a lad of sixteen."

"You quit dreaming?"

"Lost the enthusiasm, sir, though it didn't go blank until the picnic."

"Polka-dot dress?"

"Bull's eye, sir."

"And then the snow . . . "

"Candidly, sir, a goodly portion of the summer passed before I noticed, and when I did there were entertainments readily to hand. However, as the trees of Canton, Ohio, began to fall into

the sere and yellow way I was walking in the park with the polka dots and we chanced upon Willie and Emma sidestepping through the leaves and the very next day I joined the Navy and saw the world, and much else, too, sir."



Molly, fully recovered from her three-day weekend, was forking in scrambled eggs and bacon, chomping buttered-jammed toast, swilling creamed-sugared coffee.

"Balls of fire!" she crowed as Henry wavered into the kitchen and pulled up a chair. "You didn't get such gaudy eyeballs from whatever went on under the lids, har-dee-har-har!"

Sipping orange juice, very carefully, averting his face from the slabs of dead swine and ejecta of female chickens vanishing in Molly's maw, Henry icily observed, "Miss von Stuka certainly knows where and when and why I painted my eyes red. Loyal to the bunker! I never guessed."

"Who did you think runs the Model Home, booby? What was I supposed to do when it became plain as the One Ball Reilly you weren't panning out?"

"Why me in the first place?" demanded Henry. "You had hundreds of IVs and VIs passing in review under your eagle eye every day."

Molly gurgled coffee pensively. "Us Germans are suckers for dreamers."

"Yeah, suckers," he said bitterly. "Parasites. Waking up at night to tape my dreams. Why couldn't you be satisfied with your own?"

"Dear boy, American women don't dream, not after adolescence."

Henry's eyes opened so wide they indeed seemed to burst in

flame.

"Nothing but snow," confirmed Molly, crunching toast.  
"Since the Junior Prom."

Almost he reached out to pat her shoulder.

"Don't go weepy, buster. You're new on this block. It can be handled. Women have always been here, rarely in history has there been a society that permitted female REM after puberty. But the race is still in business, right? And look at today's kids, they all go blank at ten, and just stick things in their ears to drown out the hiss and go to rock concerts so damaging to the brain they lower the IQ seventy points -- and that's before the dope."

"Gasbag says they're going to bus us to National Parks and expose us on rocks."

"They don't scare me, I know some tricks, I've been dashing through the snow in a one-hoss open sleigh a long while now."

"Since the Junior Prom, God . . ."

"During the war there was the USO, rub-a-dub-dub, and then came the Reception Desk, and then I got you in my cross-hairs, har-har. Be honest in your remembering, daddy. It wasn't always Miss Funstermass under your eyelids. For a lot of years you even forgot the round bottom and the crazy giggle. I put in my REM time, lover, and you're a liar if you say we didn't make beautiful music."

Henry reflected. She was right. That made it worse.

"I'd have thought there was a Company rule."

"Against beautiful music? That's why the eight by eights

"I'd have thought there was a Company rule."

"Against beautiful music? That's why the eight by eights are air-conditioned for two. Dreaming? The Company doesn't care. In fact, dreaming is considered a plus when you're a IV and V and believe hard work will earn a piece of the action. The two-hundred-percenters keep the VIIIs and Xs running scared. The problem is when you turn thirty and wise up that the top brass is permanent, there's no room except for members of the family, and quit."

"Quit dreaming? But that's missing the whole point of dreaming!"

"Ho ho! I hear my dear mother spinning in her grave, moaning, 'I warned you about the Irish, Brunnhilde!!'"

"Brunnhilde?"

"I changed my first name in order to go for a change in the last, back when the cockles and mussels, alive alive-oh, seemed a fair gamble, your mother being a Tudor and you a Henry, with an outside shot at being king once you woke up."

"Wake up? What's to wake up to?"

"Memos, sweetheart. That's what it's all about. A person with no hope of a piece of the action has to have something to keep his mind off what he's doing. Dreaming is OK by the Company, and so is not dreaming, so long as you have an after -- NFL, fanny-pinching, getting blasted at the Model Home, being king, finking on your high school class."

"My out-basket was always full and my in-basket clean."

"So far, sure, but the Company has to go with the percentages, the actuaries have it all worked out in their tables. If your screen goes blank at thirty, even forty, you'll likely develop an after, but when your numbers are XIII, six by seven, fifty-one, thirteen thousand, six hundred and fifty -- and then you go to your thirty-third reunion -- and then in one minute you're going to vest . . . "

"And then Guderian and Lindemann and von Stuka attack by land, sea, and air and Gasbag stabs you in the back."

"If it's any satisfaction, Gasbag lost his bonus points, arrested for soliciting on the Skid Road at two in the AM, staggering down the middle of the street screaming that the uptown bars had run out of fruits. As for me . . . "

Molly O'Malley, nee Brunnhilde von Stuka, arose from her pillage of chicken embryos and pig carcass, hitched containers top and bottom, and said, not unkindly, "Relax, ol' pal, I'll take care of you. You'll make a nice deduction, especially now I'm a XV."

## SEVENTEEN

Orange juice and coffee added acid stomach and the jitters to Henry's symptoms, which to him, not having been smashed since college, seemed those of impending dissolution. He called the clinic for an appointment, was offered a date the following week, protested he was near death, and was given the address of an emergency receiving hospital.

"What's the trouble?" asked the intern.

"An electrical hiss."

"Have you tried sticking something in your ear?"

"Also snow."

"You talking about a controlled substance?"

"Out of control. Do you have anything for dreaming?"

"A narc! You guys think we got nothing to do but be patsies for your games of sting? Take two aspirins and plenty of liquids and go to hell."

Down the street from the hospital a storefront advertised SIX PSYCHIATRISTS SIX NO WAITING.

A bell jingled. A box said TAKE A NUMBER AND BE SEATED. However, before he could do so the wall said, "Psychiatrist Three will see you now. Deposit twenty dollars in the slot for the first fifteen minutes."

The money activated Door Three, which slid open with an electrical hiss, revealing a gorgeous psychiatrist in a bikini who had him lie on his back on the couch. She sat beside him,

"That's just it. Nothing to tell."

"I can't analyze you if you don't dream. But if you'll take off your pants and deposit another fifty dollars we can try a massage."

Farther down the street a church invited Henry to a dim religious gloom. He pushed a button and a priest appeared and asked, "Who might you be, my son?"

"O'Malley, father."

"Ah, one of ours."

"Well, Dad is lapsed and Mother was Church of England."

"Oh, an atheist."

"No, I watch Jimmy Swaggart and Jerry Falwell every Sunday, but . . . "

"Yes, my son?"

"I really miss Monsignor Fulton J. Sheen."

"Bless his memory! So the Monsignor has brought you back?"

"To be honest, father, I've a terrible hangover, my first in twenty-five years, enough to convince me Manhattans aren't my answer, no matter what Mr. Tweedy says. Dad says the NFL will fix me up if I give it a chance. Medical science wants me to take two aspirins and a massage, and my wife gets off on real estate and my class president is a fink."

"You're shopping around. Nothing sinful in that. The Church is glad to compete in the marketplace. What is it you seek?"

"Well, you see, Friday night my screen went blank."

"Oh dear, the worst that can befall an Irishman!"

"I can't go back to high school, I understand that, now. We couldn't even hold another reunion, not with the class president arrested for soliciting. It doesn't have to be high school, I guess, it could be the volcanoes and tornadoes and the big snow mountains with cherries on top, or anything, so long as it was a dream, and I wondered about God."

"My son, God is no dream."

Henry stared, the hiss swelling to a roar, snow flecking his eyeballs.

"God is real?"

"Oh yes, my son, indeed He is."

"But in that case -- why bother?"

EIGHTEEN

The PGA ws on the TV so Dad was free to talk. "What you been up to in the snow, sonny? Hanging tough? Loose? In there?"

"So far as my head goes, any sort of hanging would help."

"The eyes are surely gorgeous. I have to say, I'm sorry your choice is that."

"Its not that, though the notion crossed my mind last night, celebrating my retirement."

"Oh oh! I was afraid of it. I doubt you vested."

"A minute short."

"The luck of the Irish! What are your prospects for Rice Krispies and TV dinners?"

"Miss von Stuka promises to take care of me."

"I'm sure! Look, son, as a double-dipper of frugal habits I have a full freezer and the O'Malley Manse has rattling-around room. I just happen to be in the mood for a trip and the engine needs the exercise. We can be on the Interstate in an hour, pointed any direction but up or down. Of course, you understand about the NFL."

"I always did have a weakness for pompoms."

"You're halfway home! Pompoms are simply the female equivalent of blitzes, they both lead to sacks. That takes care of Sundays and Monday nights and not a few Thursday nights. Saturdays there's NCAA and NAIA, and what with bowls and all-star



NBC and CBS. The new USFL may take up the spring slack but until then we make do with basketball, NCAA and NBA, spiced with NHL and soccer. That leaves only a few weeks to suffer through the AL and NL. Throw in the occasional tennis match and horse race and boxing match and the Indianapolis 500, some ski-jumping and figure-skating and gymnastics and rodeo and bowling and the Superstars."

"Where do they find time for hurricanes and murders and wars?"

"The cable has channels for those, and for the time of day and the weather and the tides, and to spare. There's not a minute of the years you can't find polo or water polo, rassling or arm-rassling, diving or sky-diving, volleyball, bicycling, fencing, archery, skeet, roller derby, kayaking, mountain-climbing, turkey shoots, polar-bear hunting, jai alai, handball, kite-flying, flagpole sitting, Boston Marathon -- and every four years there's the Olympics, summer and winter."

"When do you sleep?"

"It truly is hard to get more than a few winks, what with the satellites bringing ping pong from Red China, balloon-racing from Argentina, dog-sledding from Alaska, America's Cup in the Atlantic, bullfights from Barcelona, surfing from Hawaii, ostrich races from Australia, Little League from Taiwan, bocci ball from Italy, cockfighting from Tennessee, llama steeplechases in the Andes, water-skiing from Florida, bullfrog-jumping from Calaveras county, ice-fishing derbies from Ontario, Gold Cup on the Detroit River, log-rolling from Idaho, grouse-shooting in Scotland,

county, ice-fishing derbies from Ontario, Gold Cup on the Detroit River, log-rolling from Idaho, grouse-shooting in Scotland, eight-oared shells at Henley, throwing darts in London pubs, the all-Iceland croquet tournament, not to omit tossing the caber."

"That must get the blood up."

"For blood and slaughter and thunder we have snowmobiles, motocross, dragging, and NASCAR and SCCA and CART and USAC and IMSH and Formula One, plus the demolition derby."

"Is it permitted to turn off the sound?"

"For peace we have chess, duplicate bridge, Monopoly, marbles, Willie Mosconi giving pool lessons to Minnesota Fats, and Amarillo Slim teaching Burt Reynolds how to lose at poker."

"I'd no notion you'd kept so busy the last twenty years."

"The pickings haven't always been so rich. The cable is the difference."

"You can't take your cable on a trip."

"Ah, but you're wrong! To be sure, they don't yet have a dish practical for the RV when it's rolling along at fifty-five per, but I've an atlas that shows every RV park in North America with a hookup. You're correct, until the dish we only have the local signals when on the road, and in hilly country, not even them. At such times we must make do with the scenery."

"Is it in color?"

"After a fashion, to the best of the Lord's ability, Him lacking the benefits of Japanese chips."

Henry gazed down the freeways of the future, to the cables

terms, even as we before you in our own ways, digging a stony garden or soliciting funds for the IRA or illuminating manuscripts at Kells. Even if you can't dream about it, you did have your reunion."

"I expected to have it over and over again."

"Things that good happen only once, and then you're ruined, as I was when the Council appointed me Chief."

"They picked Belly Johnson."

"After I turned it down. Poor Belly, he got the job and the blank screen -- and then your Mother."

"Mother! She died!"

"I, too, prefer to think of it that way but the fact is she's queen of a retirement villa in Arizona, holding court at her tea parties on Belly's insurance. Ah, Belly, Belly! They say he was attempting some heroic action when he ran up the ladder and fell off, but often enough at a fire I thought of the English lady and looked fondly into the flames."

Henry held his head in both hands. "Mother!"

"Don't fret about her, son. She's kissed all the Irish and Swedes goodbye and is coasting comfortably home with the tea and the cactus, just as I'm coasting on the NFL and the cable."

Henry rolled his red eyes. "With Molly it's the Model Home and Gasbag is on fruit and in the Executive Suite there's even a IX who writes poetry."

"There you are."

"Molly says the kids go blank nowadays at ten and stick something in their ear."

"What would the poor things dream about? They see their future in the video games, that's what they do instead of dreaming."

"There's always a gang around the house -- shifty eyes, tater tots, chocolate syrup -- nobody I know. When I was a kid everybody dreamed -- the English and Germans too, even a few Swedes, I think."

"In my neighborhood dreaming was very nearly the number one entertainment, surpassed only by the Church on holy days and firecrackers on the Fourth. I only knew the single non-dreamer, Alexander, and it was said to be in the blood, he was connected to Rockefeller and Morgan and Weyerhaeuser."

"How did you know he didn't dream?"

"Well, when we were eleven, twelve, thirteen, thereabouts, the gang would gather at the special spot in the woods and build a fire and sit around cussing and spitting, and sooner or later telling our dreams -- cavalry charges against the Apache and flying a spad in circles about von Richthofen and cleaning the bases in the World Series -- baseball was the game then you know, before they made the AA leagues into so-called majors and put on fancy pants. Mainly they were made-up dreams, yet they were in the style and had the spirit, dreaming was honorable and honored and we'd no more try to pull an outright fake than pass a wooden nickel.

"One night we were up to the usual, and this being in the fall we were smoking dry bracken fern when there came a yip, 'Alex is smoking a cigarette!' He was, too, as we each

independently verified, and as we went along telling dreams the show was for him, laying back against a log like the King of Spain, sucking his tailor-mades. At length the question is asked if he would favor us with what we supposed were surely the champion dreams of the neighborhood and he puffs out a string of smoke rings and says,

'You cannot have failed to note that in recent weeks when you have come on Sunday dawns to scavenge the parking lot behind Rich Barker's Dance Pavilion, Saturday-night social center of this entire continent and a scene where in the past you might pick up pennies and nickels and dimes spilled by men and women stimulated by dancehall exercise to visit parked cars or secluded shrubbery, your reward has been loud noises from the Pavilion and birdshot in the seat of your britches. Well, chums, the explanation is that for a percentage Mr. Barker has awarded me the franchise. The pickings once shared among entrepreneurs for miles about the countryside are now exclusively mine. Did I say nickels and dimes? There are quarters and halves, silver dollars, loose paper, and as for the double-eagle, I didn't even bother Mr. Barker with news of that. There are wristwatches and pocket watches and ear rings and charm bracelets and fraternity pins shaken loose in the night, and you would be astonished how much a person will pay for return of a wallet or handbag if the transaction is kept private.

'The upshot is that I smoke Old Golds and have a new bike and genuine professional hockey skates and a .12 gauge shotgun and stop for a chocolate soda every afternoon on my way home from

Henry was on the same bench at Waterfront Park when a familiar tweedy voice came over his shoulder, "Even from this side of your head, sir, I sense a terrible affliction of your eyes. May I offer a touch, strictly for medicinal purposes, the traditional hair of the proverbial dog?"

Before Henry could do more than nod the attache case was snapped open and a paper sack, tilted, was releasing from a thermos a flow of chilled Manhattan. His stomach steadied and vision softened. A second slug halted the hissing. One more and he'd have set sail with Mr. Tweedy.

"You're a St. Bernard, sir, you've melted the blizzard, and I thank you. You see, though, a lady . . . "

"Enough said, sir! I, myself, have dallied with the damsels of Delhi, wooed the witches of Worcester, lolligagged with the lasses of Liverpool, handled the hulas of Honolulu, and ever have averred, sir, that man cannot live by Manhattans alone. I thus take my leave, sir, until the next time." Mr. Tweedy snapped shut the attache case and saluted. "Sir, in parting, my final word -- remember the Erlenmeyers."

The buzzing in Henry's ears truly was friendlier than the hissing. He was half-minded to leap up from the bench and flee. Then female warmth wafted to his nose, a round bottom assaulted his shoulder, and a low voice crazily giggled, "Hey, sailor, snap my girdle?"

"Girdle? What's a girdle?"

school and buy all the Tootsie Rolls and licorice whips and jawbreakers I can eat and Titty Tessie down the alley lets me play with 'em in the garage and I've run out of things to dream about.'

"He quit? On purpose?"

"So he said, and he said Thomas Edison and Henry Ford had, too, and last I read in the papers he owned half the city."

"What, indeed, Mr. O?" jiggled Miss Funstermass, hiping up to Henry on the bench.

"How do you do it?" asked Henry. "That's no mere ninety-eight point six."

"Am I bothering you, wink wink? Let me wipe the sweat from your poor little red eyes."

"There's a lot going on I don't understand," said Henry. He reflected. "I guess I don't want to. One thing -- why me, Miss Funstermass?"

"The dreams, Mr. O. Those wild Irish dreams."

"You never even came to my side of the desk. I thought I was just another XIII to you, and before that a XII, XI . . ."

"IX, VII, V. Silly! You don't imagine I spent all those years walking away from everybody that way?"

Years of sidelong glances passed in review before Henry's corner-of-the-eye. "Why now, when the dreams have stopped?"

"Because the dreams have stopped."

"That's not real logic, that's dream logic."

"I wouldn't know, Mr. O. You see, I never had any REM."

"Not even before the Junior Prom?"

"I didn't go."

"Who can live a whole life of after?"

"Ballet dancers, novelists, the Queen of England, Cleopatra? Children are the usual and I'm told there's a profession even older. And there's REM."

"You never had any."

"Not mine -- yours."



"We've got years of remembering to do, Mr. O," she breathed in his ear. "Years of lunch hours, you in your six by seven with your eyes shut and me in the bullpen, sipping my diet Pepsi through a straw and giggling inside."

"Nothing ever happened," protested Henry, bidding farewell to Jeanette McDonald in the spruce forests of Canada and Joan Fontaine in flower gardens of the Alps.

"Well listen, Mr. O., the future lies ahead."

Henry reflected. "Well, then, rig-a-jig-jig, Miss Funstermass."

"Call me Tessie, Mr. O'Reilly, rub-a-dub-dub."

Their material pasts condensed to two suitcases, Wednesday afternoon they arrived by bus at the RV.

"Tessie!" cried Dad. "Gorgeous as ever, bless my soul, surely there's a law!"

"That was her aunt, Dad," explained Henry.

"Thank you, Dad," said Tessie. "I've heard so much about you."

"You know, darling," continued Dad. "My fancy was that had my luck turned up a pot of Tootsie Rolls hidden by the leprechauns I'd have beat out Alex."

"That was Aunt Tessie," insisted Henry.

"A niece?" marveled Dad. "Carbon copy of the aunt? You are positive, boy?"

"Can't you see she's nowhere near as old as you?"

"Sonny, I can't see how old I am -- nor feel it when a Tessie is to hand! No offense meant, me love."

"None taken, sir," giggled Tessie.

"Glory, glory! She's making up to me again, as in the old days in the alley! Before we hit the Interstate we'll absolutely pause at a candy shop for licorice whips and jawbreakers and --needless to say -- numerous boxes of Tootsie Rolls."

"Whee!" giggled Tessie. "You sure know how to throw a party, Dad!"

"Who's driving?" interjected Henry, moving toward the RV's

you've seen 'em all."

"My dear," answered Dad ever so sweetly, "Words to much the same effect have been uttered about Tessies."

"Dear old Dad," responded Tessie even more sweetly, "I'm confident we can arrive at some happy arrangement."

The RV wheeled away from Henry's high school home, where the English lady had promised he'd be king. Dad drove, half-watching deep-sea fishing from Florida. Tessie sat in Henry's lap and whispered in his ear. The shadow of Emma and wistful Willie crossed his mind. Mr. Tweedy surely mixed a lovely Manhattan.

Dad eyed them in the rear-view mirror. "When the fun's over, my boy, we can dump her at a truck stop."

"Alternatively," said Henry, "We can dump you -- hey Miss Funstermass, rig-a-jig-jig?"

"Or you, One Ball," said Titty Tessie. "Dad's an O'Malley too, rub-a-dub-dub."

THE FELLOW WHO DRANK  
WATER IN PUBLIC

Harvey Manning

## ONE

When at a certain age for certain reasons he wondered where he came from and searched as far back as he could, he found his earliest (almost) memory:

THIRST.

A very great thirst.

A thirst in his mouth and throat, in his stomach and small intestine and large, in his brain and blood, a thirst all over his body, inside and outside the skin.

He gulped water from a glass but refilling it was too slow. He took the faucet in his mouth but the pipe was too small. He buried his face in a lake but the level dropped and he sucked air. So he thrust his head in up to the neck and opened his mouth wide and smelled creeks flooding his sinuses, felt rivers bathing his adenoids and tonsils, heard oceans trickling around his semicircular canals. He opened his eyes and saw water seeping through his eyeballs and knew it in both hemispheres of his cerebrum and cerebellum. He blew the last bubble of air from his lungs...

That was how he knew his earliest (almost) memory was only a dream.

He'd had The Dream just that once but frequently dreamt about it and awoke remembering. Lying in bed, remembering, he'd

feel his blood getting dusty and would go to the bathroom for a drink of water. It was very good. Much less good than The Dream, but it recalled The Dream.

His passion was not drinking, it was water. At parties where other kids were having Coke or Pepsi or root beer or black cherry pop he would ask for a glass of water. The hostess mother would say, "We've got creme soda! Green River? Orange Crush? A nice cup of strawberry Kool Aid?" In the end she'd give him what he asked but then went whispering to other mothers, "That child drinks water." At dinner he'd leave his milk and his mother would say, "Drink your milk," and he'd say, "May I have water, please?" and her eyes would narrow.

The bathroom brought the crisis. One night the dream about The Dream was so vivid he got up three times. The last time his mother was standing in the doorway. Next day she took him to the doctor.

"He won't drink his milk," she said. "He doesn't drink Coke or Pepsi or root beer or black cherry pop. Just water. He gets up at night and drinks water."

"Then wets the bed?"

"Certainly not! His bed is as dry as a desert. He just drinks water."

The doctor did the usual weighing and measuring and temperature-taking and pulse-counting and heart-listening and rib-thumping. He squinted in eyes and ears and nose and throat and rapped the knee to see the leg kick.

After watching the leg kick several times he stroked his

chin. "The eyes do seem a bit watery." He tented fingers and frowned. "Doesn't wet the bed?"

"Never!"

The doctor gazed out the window at a passing pigeon. "Well, we'd better take a specimen."

The boy hated that. He hated it as much as he loved drinking water.

Thereafter he drank his milk, trying not to gag. At parties he accepted a Coke or Pepsi or root beer or black cherry pop, just like the other kids, and just like them, spilled it on the rug.

## TWO

He stopped getting up at night, even to go to the toilet, because his mother became so light a sleeper she was always hovering in the hall. He stopped going to the kitchen tap, even on hot days when he'd been playing hard and everybody in the neighborhood was drinking Kool Aid by the pitcher, because she was always watching, arms folded.

He used an outside faucet until he spotted a face in the shrubbery and realized she could hear the water running in the pipes. He was well along toward serious dehydration when it occurred to him that a deaf old man and deaf old woman lived down the alley. He filled bottles and jars at their faucet and hid them in the bushes -- and in his bedroom, so he could drink at night unsuspected.

Milk, soft drinks, cocoa, and Postum were an agony, as was any but a very thin soup. However, he loved every sort of unadorned water. When his mother was hard-boiling eggs and left the kitchen for a minute, he'd sneak a cup of hot water to feel liquid fire scald his throat and stomach. He stole ice cubes from the refrigerator and held them in his mouth until a cold star in his forehead spun him to the brink of unconsciousness.

On visits to other houses he took every safe chance to sample the tapwater. Most was standard-issue City Water, chlorinated and fluoridated and acidized and neutralized. Some



houses, and some entire neighborhoods, had an extra ingredient -- rust, quite tangy. Outside the city he encountered spring water and well water with one or another interesting enrichment, mineral or organic. Some had an odd flavor he eventually recognized as the absence of flavor, the water containing nothing but dissolved air. (The flatness of airless water he knew from "night water" cached in his bedroom.)

He adventured beyond the tame and domesticated. He crept about the garden on hands and knees licking dewdrops and raindrops from flowers, thrilling to the little jewels on his tongue. He savored the grittiness of mudpuddles and the oily richness of roadside ditches, rather rudely enjoying the after-hours of belching. The neighborhood swamp awoke whole new sensory organs but his digestive tract erupted at both ends and he had to go piss in the doctor's bottle and so gave it up.

Unbeknownst to his mother, who had neglected to read the fine print, the preschool she sent him to provided a swimming class, a normal precaution in a world full of dangerous water. When first he saw the pool he thought it was The Dream and he was the first kid to obey the teacher and duck.

He opened his eyes and saw water from the inside. He opened his mouth but instantly closed it -- the uric acid and free chlorine were not Dreamlike.

The class went to a lake to learn about swimming in the natural world. Opening eyes underwater, he saw myriad dancing motes incandescing in the sunrays and wondered if they, too, were learning to swim. Briefly opening his mouth, he found the taste

similar to a dilute swamp, warning that in sufficient quantity it might send a person to the doctor.

The children were taken miles and miles from where the boy lives, all the way across the entire city to its western edge, a place he'd never been, except...

The teacher led them out in gentle waves until the water came above their knees. He ducked. He opened his eyes. He opened his mouth. The teacher dragged him up on the sand and drove him straight home and his mother had a screaming fit and drove him straight to the doctor, who made him piss in the bottle, and his mother took him out of the preschool and never again let him within miles of the beach and never again let him go swimming, anywhere.

### THREE

Though swimming was forbidden and drinking had to be done on the sly, bathing was condoned, even encouraged, until he went too far.

He started taking baths without being told.

That was disturbing enough but when the frequency increased from twice-weekly to daily to thrice-daily, his mother's eyes narrowed. One evening, on the pretext of bringing a towel, she invaded his privacy and caught him in the tub face down, head submerged. He came up instantly at the sound of her shrieking.

He tried locking the door but she was always rapping, asking if he had enough towels. He bathed when she was out shopping but on returning she'd check the hamper for damp towels. He hid them in the basement and mopped the tub dry and ran the exhaust fan but she would take one sniff and know. In the end she took him to the doctor to piss in the bottle and afterward he bathed (twice a week, no more) with the door ajar, coughing and humming and whistling to hold her off. It kept him clean but gave no satisfaction.

So he borrowed a bucket from somebody's garage and filled it at the deaf folks' faucet and hid it behind the furnace and when his mother was out would go down in the basement and stick his head in and open his eyes...

She never again caught him drinking or ducking, but knew he was doing it, and was ever on the watch. Playing with toys, reading a book, listening to the radio, he'd feel her eyes. He often observed other mothers gazing at offspring. This was not that. It was no gaze, it was a stare, as of worry or fear or envy or sorrow.

He'd look up and she'd look away.

She took to stalking. By the creak of a board, the sough of a draft, he'd sense her, peering around a corner. He'd turn and she'd retreat.

She took to ambushing. He'd be walking through the yard and spot a nose in the tulips, fingers on a window curtain. He'd be coming home from school and see the family car parked on a sidestreet, only eyes showing above the steering wheel.

In later years he felt pangs when turning pages of the family album, which poignantly portrayed the change, during the few years of his childhood, from a rounded young woman whose distant smile and misted eyes were hauntingly beautiful, to an angular crone who glowered dry-eyed at the camera.

He was saved from a crippling guilt by his socks. They didn't match. Never had. While being taught how to button his pants and tie shoelaces he'd patiently been shown how to mismatch his socks. This was before the water problem, so she probably wasn't his fault, or not entirely.

The socks made trouble in school, but nothing important; when other boys were being ridiculed as short or tall, fat or skinny, smart or dumb, having big ears or bow legs, wearing knee

pants or glasses, it wasn't too bad to be laughed at for socks. Everybody got laughed at for something. The laughter was what told you who you were.

--And who your mother was...

In adult contemplation, head in bucket, he realized the socks were the key to his mother. He understood, at last, the curious incident at the birthday party, during the time before he remebered The Dream, when he still was drinking Coke and Pepsi and root beer and black cherry pop.

At party's end, the mothers gathering up children, he ran in the house from playing on the swing and saw his mother trying to take the wrong boy home.

The wrong boy was docile but the correct mother was making a terrible fuss. The two mothers were pushing each other and pulling on the kid, who couldn't figure where he'd gone wrong except what his mother already had yelled at him for -- coming to the party wearing one brown sock and one green.

"Let go of my boy!" howled the correct mother.

"He's got to go home!" screeched the wrong mother. "The party is over, they have to go home! I have to take my boy home!"

"This boy is not your boy! This boy has red hair and buck teeth and is grossly fat, he is my boy!"

"HIS SOCKS DON'T MATCH!"

-- Those distant, misted eyes couldn't tell one boy from another. Nor could the dry-eyed glower. That was the reason for the socks.

As an adult, head in bucket, he wondered if she was the wrong mother. At the time of the party, though, he wondered if he was the wrong boy, and started searching back, and remembered The Dream.

#### FOUR

In later years he considered the possibility that both he and his mother were his father's fault. The question was, how? His father wore a changeless expression that might almost be a smile or almost a frown or neither. He never reacted in any way to events in the home or the neighborhood or the world and only spoke to say "please pass the salt." He played a smaller role in family life than the furniture.

When the boy began wondering where he, himself, came from he wondered about his father, too. In morning he watched him walk out the door in suit and tie and drive off down the street in a late-model sedan. (Where to? When school forms required the father's occupation, his mother told him to write, "business.") In evening he watched him drive up the street, walk in the door, eat dinner, and go upstairs to his attic study.

Other fathers along the street appeared identical in suit, tie, car, and schedule. They all wore matching socks. Presumably other clues to identity were known to family members. Why wasn't he let in on his father's? He recognized his father not by who he was but only by where.

His mother either didn't know where her husband came from or didn't want to talk about it.

Pouring over the family album, the boy observed that unlike his mother, his father hadn't changed the least since the

marriage. Then, as now, his eyes seemed focused on a far horizon and were half-closed in a squint, as if against a bright light.

Searching for earlier albums and finding none, the boy pondered that perhaps his father hadn't existed before. Possibly boys and fathers were two distinct species, at a certain moment in life switched in a one-for-one exchange. Where, then, did fathers come from? Where did boys go?

The boy speculated about the attic study, fantasized, even dreamt. When his father was at "business" and his mother shopping, he'd tiptoe up the steps and try the knob. The door always was locked, but from the feel, not securely.

One day he was home sick from school -- not very sick, just enough to have to go piss in the doctor's bottle. Afterward when his mother went out he ran down in the basement and stuck his head in the bucket -- and had a grand thought.

He ran up to the attic, turned the knob and kicked the door, which swung open to reveal...

The boy's face fell.

There was no bucket.

Not so much as a glass.

There also were no library and no desk.

On the sill of the west-facing window rested a kerosene lantern; the boy had noted the glimmer at night and supposed it an ordinary electric lamp with a dim bulb. There also was a telescope, aimed at nothing special, so far as the boy could tell, just the sky over rooftops, west...

The only other furnishings were an easy chair, a floor lamp,



and an end-table, upon which rested a solitary, dog-eared volume, the College Edition of Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language.

In its pages the boy found the only evidence he'd ever come upon that his father ever had given him a thought.

## FIVE

It had been an exceedingly momentary recognition, and quite impersonal -- after all, how much could a father know about a son while filling out the birth certificate?

What was the motive?

A joke, played on the boy and the world together?

Punishment, for the crime of being born?

A kind of love, an effort to help a brandnew human break free from old chains?

The boy didn't suffer. His nickname, "Ex," was as smoothly accepted as "Bob" or "Bill" or "Jim"; his classmates Oswald and Elmer and Ethelred were the ones derided.

There were major and permanent advantages. Never in his life would he be confused in the telephone directory with any other Smith. The effort of learning to pronounce his name made him a very early, very distinct talker, the marvel of the neighborhood. Learning to write his name in order to fill out school forms made him an exceptional speller, easy victor in every bee.

His reputation as a prodigy was enhanced by his knowledge of history:

He knew that Xenocrates was a Greek philosopher (396-314 BC).

That Xenophanes was a Greek Eleatic philosopher of the 6th

century B.C.

That Xenophon was a Greek historian and general (434-355? BC) who marched with Cyrus against Artaxerxes of Persia and rose to leadership of the Greek army.

That Xerxes was the son of Darius the Great (519?-465 BC), was himself called the Great, strove to complete his father's punishment of the Greeks, defeated the Spartans at Thermopylae, but was vanquished at Salamis.

A rumor among the teachers said Ex came of a long line of classical scholars; it was known his father had a study. He was awarded top honors at grade school graduation ceremonies, to which he wore one black sock and one white.

When in a hurry he filled out forms as "X.X.X.X. (Ex) Smith," but ordinarily he luxuriated in spelling them out -- all the male names in the "X" section of the New World Dictionary, underlined in that dog-eared volume on the end-table.

That day in the study Ex also had seen these names underlined: Zebedas, Zeno, Zephanich, Zephyrus, von Zeppelin, Zeus, Zeuxis, Ziegfeld, Zimbalist, Ziska, Zola, Zoroaster, Zorilla, Zuluoaga, Zurbaran, Zweig, and Zwingli.

Ex was just as glad not to be "Zee." His father obviously had considered it and relented. That told something about him.

Given time to study the whole dictionary, Ex might have learned much more, but his mother was due home any minute. Flipping quickly through the pages he saw other names underlined, too many for him to note more than a few -- Nereus, Oceanus, Poseidon, Ptah, Ymir. Ex didn't know what all this meant but it

made his eyes water.

## SIX

Ex's upbringing was otherwise unexceptional. He was fed a wholesome, balanced diet, marred solely by daily doses of milk and occasional harassments by Coke, Pepsi, root beer, and black cherry pop. He was dressed like other boys, saving that single idiosyncrasy. His hair was cut and teeth cleaned and body regularly serviced, his only complaint that even for vaccinations and eye examinations (they were fine, though a bit watery) he had to piss in the bottle. The Smith home had a sufficiency of books and magazines and a twelve-tube radio. There was no swimming pool but he did have a tricycle, and later a bicycle with balloon tires. If what his parents felt for him wasn't recognizable as love, the mismatched socks and the X.X.X.X. evidenced some sort of caring.

As a loving (or whatever) son, he tried to live up to his parents' expectations. Lacking any notion what these might be, he tried to live up to other parents' expectations.

Fathers seemed to hold football in high esteem, so he turned out for the grade school team and was issued a uniform. He'd not bargained for that. A very ordinary boy in build and features, only when suited up did he realize how essential the socks were. Rendered interchangeable, he began blurring into a generalization.

He endured the practices and might have survived the first

game had he gotten in it; he didn't. Sitting on the bench listening to thudding and grunting on the field, clapping and yelling in the stands, Ex slowly slipped out of focus. In the fourth quarter he felt the entire world dichotomizing into "boyness" on the field and "fatherness" in the stands and suddenly he leapt off the bench and stuck his head in the water bucket. The officials tweeted and cheerleaders waved pompons and the crowd roared. The coach told the principal he didn't care if Ex was the smartest kid in school, he wasn't going to have him making a mockery of football.

Mr. Smith didn't learn about the incident, of course. Belatedly Ex recalled his father never read the front page of the newspaper, much less the sports section. Ex despaired of doing what his father expected.

Surveying mothers, Ex saw that the way to gain the approval of most was to be clean -- plainly not a feasible tactic for him. Others admired brains; Mrs. Smith's attitude there was suggested by her never calling him "Ex" but, instead, "boy" or "you" or -- as the years passed and she grew more angular and distracted -- "Bob" or "Bill" or "Jim" or "Ethelred."

Music lessons seemed worth a try. Ex mentioned he wouldn't mind the piano or clarinet; Mrs. Smith stared. He allowed that if worse came to worst he might be able to handle the accordion; her jaw dropped.

The last resort was Sunday school. Since the Smiths never went to church, the morning Ex emerged from his bedroom all dressed up and slicked up his mother let out the same shriek she

had on finding him face-down in the bathtub.

Eventually she quieted, and even gave him a dime for the collection plate, and he followed some neighborhood kids to their Sunday school. The adults there were very nice, truly interested in who he was and where he lived. Wednesday evening there came a knocking and Mrs. Smith opened the door to find the minister and wife on the porch. It was simply terrible, Mrs. Smith's jaw hanging open and eyes bulging, the poor minister and wife nearly falling down the steps to escape, and Ex keeping a tight grip not to make a dash for the basement.

With a father who didn't care if he made the team and a mother who didn't care if he went to Hell, Ex decided there was nothing for him but the bucket.

## SEVEN

Parents receded in the background when Ex entered high school, ten times bigger than his grade school, with no little children but many adult-size males. And females.

It was an interlude society between "boyness" and "fatherness" where individualism briefly flourished; mismatched socks went unnoticed. It was a brilliant society where straight-A students formed a group that was elite yet not particularly small. It was a diverse society where the uncommon was common; Ex met and became good friends with a genuine Z -- Zachariah (named for the father of John the Baptist) -- and a Y -- Yorimoto (for the first shogun).

All this so excited Ex he yearned to rise to the top of the society, to be a star. However, his former distinctions no longer were; he felt blurred and cast about for a new self-definition. He couldn't wear athletic uniforms or play a musical instrument. He had no taste for cigarettes and didn't know what to do with girls. So he turned out for debate.

Nobody noticed. His research was thorough, his arguments solid, and he wrote them legibly on 3 x 5 cards and read them aloud distinctly -- in a monotone, eyes and hands fixed on the cards. Two years he participated in intra-Squad practice debates. Not until the third year did the Coach -- reluctantly -- promote him to the Team and send him forth to do public



combat.

Ex found himself in a row with the other debaters at the speakers' table, on a stage high above a sea of faces. Before him sat a pitcher of water. Inside, ice cubes floated. Outside, beads of condensation slid by fits and starts down the frost.

The moment neared when Ex must stand up and walk to the podium and become the focus of the seaful of eyes. His throat began to glue, breath rattle, blood turn dusty.

Ex never had seen a speaker pour a glass of water from a pitcher, much less drink. The pitcher and glasses and water and ice cubes were for decoration, like flowers. --But maybe also for emergencies, such as the podium catching on fire, or somebody dying of thirst?

He poured a glass of water and closed his eyes and lifted the glass and drank -- and drank.

There was a great, a univereal silence. Ex, licking his lips, supposed it was that personal, internal peace that follows supreme pleasure. But he then became aware that the entire auditorium had gone still. In flashback, now, he heard table companions gasp, audience murmur, enemy debater at the podium halt in midflight. He gazed, now, over the silent sea and saw every eye fixed upon him.

Ex realized that neither he nor anyone else ever had seen (except in the movies, which weren't real life) a person drink a glass of water in public. Milk, yes, and Coke and Pepsi and root beer and black cherry pop, but not water.

When Ex poured a second glass the audience heaved a deep

sigh, and when he drained it in a loving, exultant swallow the enemy dropped his 3 x 5 cards on the floor and retreated from the podium.

Ex read his 3 x 5 cards in the accustomed monotone. However, he'd carried a glass of water to the podium and paused often to sip. The audience held its breath, only exhaling when he set the glass down.

During rebuttals the enemy launched an hysterical counterattack, to no avail. Ex had but to reach for his glass and the audience leaned forward, lips parted, eyes shining, and the enemy faltered, fumbled with his fly, and turned to watch.

Ex became the Team Star, won the American Legion Oratory Contest, and the newspapers ran his picture shaking hands with the Governor.

## EIGHT

Never in the history of the school -- the city -- the state -- had debate been so popular. The crowds were larger than for basketball and would have rivaled football had there been a big enough hall. Better than half the audiences were girls. His looks and build (middling) weren't the draw, nor his socks (merely cute), nor name (sort of funny). It was the water. Boys were captivated, too, but with girls it was love. The school paper compared him to Frank Sinatra and though the girls didn't swoon or try to tear off his clothes they chose lunchroom seats that gave a view of his table and hung around drinking fountains on the chance he'd come by.

He was very pleased because he'd been in love for several years but hadn't known any girls, nor what to do if he had. They taught him. He never had to work up courage to ask for a date because they asked him. In the theater he never had to worry about when to make a move because as soon as the lights dimmed there'd be a head on his shoulder. At the doorstep he never had to screw up nerve for a goodnight kiss because she'd handle it. He was the envy of every boy in school, including the star halfback, and was widely reputed to be a veritable Errol Flynn.

The reality was less. A girl would date Ex two or three times and no more, not even if he asked. A former date never again was seen at debates or hanging around drinking fountains.

Since Ex fell truly and deeply in love with every girl who asked him out, being thrown over two or three times a month, month after month, would have been permanently damaging had there not been an inexhaustible supply of new true loves.

Once, after being dusted off by a girl so gorgeous that just walking down the hall she left in her wake a staggering throng of crippled boys, he despondently mentioned his problem to Y and Z. Seeing the sudden freezing of their faces, he knew something was seriously wrong.

He commenced a careful self-scrutiny. During debates everything was fine, standing room only, a thousand intent students, half a thousand adoring girls. To be sure, there was an uneasy shuffling at the speakers' table, exactly as on the occasion of his first public drink; he'd always put it down to envy, if not admiration.

The lunchroom was the crux. He observed that though his lifting of a glass set off a general sighing at other tables, at his own the eyes were averted and the mouths set hard.

He confronted Y and Z. They hemmed and hawed and coughed and scuffed but finally came out with it.

Said Y, "Watching you drink -- close up -- is -- well -- it's too much."

Murmured Z, "Too deep."

"It's terrific at a distance," said Y. "But sitting right next to you..."

Blurted Z, "I feel like I'm drowning!"

...So, his mother was his fault? His father, too?

They were beyond help. He had to think of himself. Unrequited love (he'd never got past a goodnight kiss and having no need to fret about Hell, hoped to) stimulated heroic reforms.

With a girl at the Dairy Dell after school, he ordered a lemon Coke! At the Mountain Malt Shop after a movie, a pineapple malt! His gorge rose, stomach turned over and blood shrilled through arteries, but will triumphed over flesh for the sake of the uncompleted handiwork of man.

It was no use.

He was an abject failure with lemon Coke -- and cherry Coke, vanilla Coke, strawberry Coke, 7 Up, Green River, and Orange Crush. He was a total disgrace with pineapple malt -- and raspberry malt, butterscotch malt, grape malt, caramel malt, chocolate soda, and root beer float. With anything but plain water he was an actual laughing stock.

## NINE

When war broke out Ex was barely 16 and expected not to be involved. However, one night while shortcutting home across a golf course, a path he knew well enough to walk with eyes shut or, as in this case, during a blackout, he heard thuds and saw dark lumps approaching and was grabbed by the neck and arms. A flashlight blinded him briefly and blinked off.

A harsh voice rasped, "He's sure as hell one of 'em."

Captors frog-marched him through the blackness to a tent. The lifting of the flap let a beam escape to illuminate a cannon pointed skyward. Two armed soldiers stood on either side of him while a third, the flashlighter, addressed an officer seated at a folding desk, studying papers by the glare of a Coleman lantern.

"We got us one, captain sir!"

"One what, corporal?" drawled the captain. "A ba-lloon? The dang ba-lloons showed up?"

"No sir, a spy. A Jap spy!"

"The hell you say. Where?"

"Here, sir."

"That?"

"Yes sir."

"How y'figure him for a Jap?"

"The eyes, sir, look at the eyes."

The captain held up the lantern. "Funny eyes, sure's hell,

but not how I expected." He rummaged through a filing cabinet in the drawer labelled "JAPS" and pulled out a copy of Astounding War Comics and flipped the pages, then squinted at Ex. "Skin ain't yellow enough. Teeth don't stick out."

"But the eyes..."

"Bad eyes, sure's hell. But they look more like fish eyes than Jap eyes. You a Jap, boy?"

"No," said Ex.

"You run around with Japs?"

"Well, I have a friend whose grandparents came from Japan."

"See, sir?" cried the corporal.

"What Jap you know, boy?" coldly drawled the captain.

"Y -- that is, Yoritomo."

"Yoe-ree-toe-moe? What kind o' name is that for a Christian boy?"

"Well, we never talk religion, I can't say if he is a Christian. He was named for the first shogun, 1147-1199. A Minamoto. Overthrew the Taira in 1185 and established his capital at Kamakura. You can read about it in The Tale of Genji."

The soldiers gripped rifles. The corporal rose on tiptoe.

"Not Christian?" hissed the captain. "Y'all got any other good buddies, boy?"

"Z -- Zachariah."

"Zack-ah-rie-ah?"

"The father of John the Baptist. It's in the Bible."

"Our Bible -- King James?"

"That, too."

"Northern Baptist or Southern?"

Ex paused. "Well, the Holy Land is about the same latitude as Atlanta, or Little Rock."

"This is no Jap, corporal," said the captain. "Who are you, son?"

Ex told him.

Geniality vanished. "Don't smart me, boy!"

Ex offered his school identification card.

"That is one bangtwister of a handle for a Smith." The captain reflected. "Southern Baptist...? Well, you got the benefit comin', that's the American way. Mind you, though, don't be smart, son. You're gonna be in this war and this man's army don't swallow smart boys except to spit 'em out, all chawed up."

"Shall I handcuff him, sir?" asked the corporal.

"No -- don't feel easy about his front names and there's sure 'nuff something wrong with those eyes..."

"Sir, his socks don't match!"

"Don't make him a Jap. Eye-talian, maybe, but we don't arrest them."

The anti-aircraft gun and tent had been installed that day, while Ex was at school. Next morning the barbed-wire fence was rigged and the barrage balloons went up, constant reminders that on its first meeting with him the United States Government found something wrong with Ex.

As for Ex, he wondered about the United States Government, because soon after the blackout it shipped Y and his family to a



concentration camp.

## TEN

After a year in the University Ex met the Government a second time, when he registered for the draft and was ordered to report for induction. On the assigned morning he entered a warehouse guarded at the door by a sergeant.

The first thing they did was make him take off all his clothes. Immediately he began blurring into a generalization. That presumably was the reason for it -- to strip off personalities along with the socks and thus manufacture interchangeable non-individuals, as they'd be (in uniform, with matching socks) on the battlefield, sent there by "generals."

He was directed into a large room full of plumbing fixtures. The second thing they did was make him piss in a bottle. That was the end of the war for Ex.

Exiting from the pissing room in the single file, he saw hundreds of naked boys slowly serpentining through the warehouse from one half-wall cubicle to the next.

The serpentine's first turn was to the right. Ex turned left, through the back door of a cubicle, a flagrant violation of the maze rules. The doctor whirled on his stool and giggled, "Naked boys at the front door, and now naked boys at the back door! And here am I wearing vest and tie and jockey shorts and socks! Why should boys have all the fun?"

The doctor took off his clothes and went out the back door

and Ex put them on and as naked boys came in the front door held the stethoscope to their chests. After a while the doctor came in the front door and Ex listened to his heart, and then the doctor took his clothes back and listened to Ex's heart and chortled, "Sherman was a blithering idiot!"

In other cubicles Ex had his toes counted, crooked his trigger finger, raised both arms high in the air, and unwrapped a Hershey bar and held it forth, smiling. His orifices were peered into and poked at and appendages manipulated. Later, going into a cubicle, he recognized the boy coming out as the doctor who'd played with his balls. The boy whispered, "See you later! Your war or mine?"

At the eye machine he read every line to the bottom, but the doctor blinded him with a flashlight and said, "There's something wrong with your eyes."

Replied Ex, "I seem to recall there's something wrong with your heart."

The doctor's flashlight clattered to the floor and he sagged on his stool and whimpered, "How much time I got, doctor?"

Said Ex, "I'm not the doctor, I don't have any clothes on, not even socks. You're the doctor."

"Of course I'm the doctor," cried the doctor, jumping up. "I used to be a corporal but now I'm a doctor and no smart boy with no clothes on can tell me anything."

"Well, nevertheless, if I were you I'd wear a hat in the hot sun."

The doctor shoved Ex out of the cubicle, muttering in his

ear, "You smart boys want to ruin our war but you just watch out -- there'll be another war, and another, until there damn well ain't no more smart boys!"

Ex serpentined onward, naked and generalized, half-dead already. As morning wore into afternoon he made half-friends. Serpentinaing boys commented on his toes and trigger finger and orifices and appendages, and his technique with the Hershey bar. Doctors took him aside in their cubicles to ask his frank opinion of their hearts.

The doctor in the last cubicle had him cross his legs, whacked his knee with a rubber hammer, and smiled to see the leg kick. He did that a dozen times, chuckling, eventually grew pensive, and asked, "Did you have any trouble pissing in the bottle?"

"No," said Ex, "But I hated it."

"Hated it! Excellent! Magnificent! You were a bedwetter, then?"

"Of course not -- Mother wouldn't permit it. But she kept taking me to a doctor to piss in his bottle."

"You don't like doctors, then."

"Not necessarily. Myself, I was rather a nice doctor."

The doctor drummed fingers of one hand on the desk and thrust the other hand behind his back. "You were a doctor, then? Which doctor?"

"No, heart doctor. Say, you don't happen to have a bucket of water handy?"

"Buck-et? Wa-ter?"

"Pitcher? Glass? Army canteen?"

The doctor pulled a toy bear from behind his back and pushed it in Ex's face and cried, "Teddy hates your eyes! They're watery!"

"How does Teddy feel about your arrythmia? In my professional opinion -- when I was naked, that is -- it's beyond belief you can sit on your stool."

"Teddy can't stand naked boys talking about my stool!" screamed the doctor. He leapt to his feet, brandished his rubber hammer, clutched his chest, throat, bear, and bum, and fell over dead. A naked boy entered the cubicle and put on his clothes and gave the bear a hug and started rapping knees.

The serpentine led to the warehouse door, where the boys were permitted to dress and given a choice of swearing allegiance to the U.S. Army, U.S. Navy, or U.S. Marine Corps. The sergeant who in morning had made Ex take off his clothes let him out the door without swearing allegiance to anything.

## ELEVEN

Omitted from the war, Ex continued what he'd been doing since kindergarten. So few males of mating age were on campus he might well have become, at last, a veritable Errol Flynn, except no occasions arose for drinking water in public.

The lack was all the better for his studies. He majored in ancient history and languages, of which he learned, in class, Latin, Greek, Early Hebrew, and Sanskrit, and on his own, when he otherwise might have been sitting in theaters with his arm around girls, Aramaic, Babylonian, Old Iranian, Minoan, Egyptian, and Mesopotamian cuneiform. He was so good a student, and there were so few students of any kind other than girls marking time until peace gave them a chance to mate, that departments vied for his favor by bestowing upon him all their sub-faculty sinecures, those reserved in peacetime for members of faculty families.

The income enabled him to rent an apartment near campus. He not only could keep a bucket by his desk, nobody the wiser, but had a private bathtub in which he could immerse his entire body with no danger of a shriek.

His eyes got worse and worse. The world of sharp edges and glaring lights grew rounded and shimmery, soft and ripply, very nice. However, professors began taking him aside and suggesting he see a doctor. That was out of the question. Fortunately, there was a ready alternative.

The campus was thronged by scions of the ruling juntas of America's Good Neighbors. The youths had come north because their choices were: (1) accept commissions in their national armies and risk being sent into battle; (2) stay home, out of uniform, and be publicly revealed as deficient in macho, or (3) spend the war at United States universities studying American girls, who throughout Latin America were reputed to be lusting to be ravished by Caesar Romero. To hide what was in their eyes, which in English-speaking communities was a prison offense, they wore very dark glasses. Ex found the glasses served his purposes as well, and by refraining from sideburns, hair grease, pointed shoes, and silk suits never was arrested.

His mother wasn't fooled. He went home Sundays for dinner and she appeared as pleased by his visits as ever she'd been by his residence, so the relationship seemed to be holding its own. He knew that she knew about the glasses. All the Sunday afternoons she was staring at him around this corner or from that ambush. Oddly, it no longer bothered him. The darkness of the glasses dissolved her glower and the wateriness of his eyes eroded her sharp edges; she assumed a shimmery roundness and ripply softness that was appealing, not threatening, and to which the peering-around-corners was shyly appropriate and natural.

After a couple years he noticed his father hadn't been down to Sunday dinner in a long while, maybe a couple years, though his mother continued to lay three settings. Ex came home one weekday and watched from the alley until she went shopping, then snuck up the attic steps. The door was wide-open, cobwebbed.

Chair, lamp, and endtable were as before but kerosene lantern, telescope, and dictionary were gone.

The Sunday after graduation Ex brought home all his embossed certificates for the family album. It was missing, and so was his mother, though the table was set for three and dinner was on the stove. Ex waited until evening, ate the dinner, washed the dishes, and left.

For a few Sundays he forgot to go home and when he did there was a used-car lot where the house had been. The salesman never had heard of his mother and father. The only things Ex had to remember them by were his name and his socks.



## TWELVE

In later years he wondered how his life might have turned out had he followed in his father's footsteps. It was idle speculation, of course, since he'd no idea where they were. Lacking an elder to guide him into "business" he pursued the only vocation he knew, in this graduate school and that, until he had so many degrees there was nothing left to do but teach. Every university in the land, deluged by returning GIs intent on becoming wealthy, healthy, and beautiful through higher education, was recruiting faculty. Ex accepted his alma mater's offer and -- so to speak -- came home from the wars.

Y never did. He was freed from the concentration camp to join the Army, which sent him to Italy, where he was reported missing in action. Z tried to register as a conscientious objector, but on moral rather than religious grounds; the Supreme Court having ruled America is a religious nation but not a moral one, the Government put him in the penitentiary, where his card was misfiled and he was lost in the system.

With no parents and no friends, face pallid and body flaccid from years in library stacks, slave of a secret vice, Ex seemed doomed to a solitary life. --Until the very first day he mounted the professorial podium.

All was as it had been.

By the end of the term not a seat in his classes was empty.

Students stood shoulder to shoulder at the back of the room and squatted crosslegged at his feet. The next term he was given bigger rooms, yet still they overflowed. The next year, noting an astonishing number of transfers from other schools in the region, the University assigned him its largest auditorium. The third year, finding students flocking from around the nation and Free World, the University took him to address a joint session of the Legislature, which by acclamation not only raised the faculty salaries and bought a new football team but appropriated funds to build a lecture hall larger than the basketball pavilion, the podium equipped with running water and icemaker.

The subject of his courses didn't matter. Initially he offered History of Western Civ and the like, part of the curriculum required to become wealthy, healthy, and beautiful. Installed in his own building, however, he packed the house with any subject at all: the cultural similarities of Incas, Mayans, Polynesians, Egyptians, and Icelanders; the voyages of Saint Brendan; the explorations of the Grand Eunuch Cheng Ho.

At the podium he removed the dark glasses and girls fell in love by the hundreds. Many sent him notes, often in verse, telling how his distant, unworldly eyes seemed to pierce the veil of illusion, the harsh angles and glaring lights, and focus on the naked softness, roundness, shimmeriness of the essence of reality. Some of the notes included telephone numbers and snapshots taken in the privacy of automated penny-arcade booths.

Leaving the podium he was careful to don the dark glasses and wear them during office conferences and while drinking water

in a restaurant, in the company of those girls whose verse and snapshots were most promising.

He felt on the verge of completing the handiwork of man and did, indeed, explore considerable fresh territory. However, inevitably the moment arrived when the crazed girl demanded to gaze deep into his eyes and the glasses had to come off and that was that.

## THIRTEEN

Of the three professorial roles, Ex performed that of teaching more than abundantly via classroom and television, and that of community service to rich University gratification by lobbying politicians and the press for higher salaries and more buildings. As for the third responsibility, research, he presented papers at scholarly meetings, which is how professors get grants and sabbaticals so they don't have to teach, and tenure so it doesn't matter whether they can.

Ex's initial audiences were small, composed solely of professors who couldn't be in bars, angling for better jobs at richer universities, or in publishers' hospitality suites, bartering the possibility of adopting textbooks for the possibility of signing a contract to write some, because they, too, were scheduled to give papers and attended sessions on a quid pro quo basis so nobody would have to speak to a completely empty room.

The word quickly spread. Though his research was pushing ever deeper into the past, enormously beyond the interest of sociology-oriented historians, eerily near the arcane domain of particle physicists, and typically he addressed such problems as life in Atlantis after the sinking and whatever happened to the people who didn't catch Noah's ark, the hall invariably was jammed, the bars deserted, and even the hospitality suites

closed, the publishers' reps themselves sitting in.

The inevitable happened.

On the fateful day Ex strode to the podium, removed his dark glasses, shuffled his 3 x 5 cards, and poured a glass of water, but -- a trick he'd put in his act for effect -- didn't drink, not immediately. Later, thinking back, he recalled a more than ordinary expectancy in one section of the audience, a general leaning forward of professors and reps, a gleaming mass display of teeth.

He took a swallow -- and his eyes overflowed.

He set the glass down and pondered the extraordinarily severe attack of watering, set off by a water unlike any he'd ever known from tap, sky, or swamp. He tried a second swallow, savoring its vigor in nose and eyes and back of throat, down to the stomach and into the blood and thence to the toes and brain. It gave him something to think about.

He continued reading his paper but the more he swallowed the more he thought. At last he threw the 3 x 5 cards out over the audience, cried "Whee!" and tried to stick his head in the pitcher. From far, far away he heard a shriek of pain, or a bellow of triumph, or an infinite giggle, or all three.

The audience carried him to a hospitality suite and brought glass after glass, pitcher after pitcher. Publishers' reps and professors and graduate students and girls from the hotel corridors gathered in solemn hush, lips parted, eyes bright (not with the innocence of old) to watch Dr. Xenocrates Xenophanes Xenophon Xerxes Smith drink gin.

## FOURTEEN

Ex set out to inventory the liquor store, bottle by bottle. He drank things with fizz that reminded him of Coke and 7 Up; with color, of black cherry pop and creme soda; with sugar, of malts and floats. That left the dry white wines and aqua vita (vodka, tequila, light rum, plain grain alcohol) but mere weeks sufficed to prove his first love was his true and lasting passion.

Any gin would do -- cheap gin, good gin, great gin, Tanqueray. He drank them all beautifully, whether neat, shaken with cracked ice, or on the rocks. He often accepted a twist and occasionally an olive or onion. Under no circumstances, of course, would he permit a bottle of vermouth to be opened in the same room.

Headliner of the scholarly meetings, he became, as well, superstar on the lecture circuit and grew as rich as a professor can without teaching medicine.

He held joint appointments from every department that could devise a claim on his attention and was the youngest full professor (the youngest six) in University history. Arrangements were made with the Downtown Movers & Shakers to endow a seat for him the moment his hair showed a touch of gray.

Sought by foundations, Washington, D.C., Hollywood, and the networks, he resisted every attempt to lure him from teaching.

The waiting list for his graduate seminars was years long, applicants flocking from throughout the Free World, the Third World, and behind the Iron Curtain. (Two exchange professors in double-breasted blue serge suits offered him asylum if he'd defect to vodka but he simply waved a hand at the Hogarth prints on his office wall.)

Possessed of fame, wealth, tenure, and proven loyalty (the exchange professors were double agents), Ex wouldn't have been blamed had he abandoned the undergraduates. He did not, and overwhelmingly won every popularity poll run by student groups seeking revenge on the faculty. When he cried "Whee!" and threw his 3 x 5 cards out over the audience as the standard conclusion of his Friday lecture, the hundreds followed him from the hall, to be joined by thousands of waiting others, including professors and staff and out-of-state visitors on Gray Line tours, who serpentined through the Quad, in and out of the Library and Hospital, where cripples threw away their crutches, crying "see! I can see!", and along the freeway, convoyed by jovial police, to City Hall, where they were met by the Mayor and City Council.

Department chairmen, deans, vice-provosts, and vice-presidents were always after him for luncheons and teas (with no tea, that was a condition) and parties. He was such a regular at the President's Mansion there were plans to add a room for him.

Publishers' reps hounded him for lunch, for dinner, for coffee (no coffee). They hoped to sign him to write a textbook. Failing that, they hoped to get his name on other professors'

textbooks as consultant. Failing that, they hoped to advance their careers by turning in expense accounts that included, "Entertaining Professor XXX: steaks, \$50; hotel suite, \$100; Tanqueray, \$500; ice, furniture and window breakage, and police bribes, \$1,000." At the least they hoped for an anecdote -- the squeezing of a twist, the crunching of an onion -- to carry around their territories, entrancing professors on other campuses so they'd adopt the reps' textbooks.

Due to reps and deanery and Alumni Association and Downtown Movers & Shakers, he drank gin all day at lectures and seminars and luncheons and coffee breaks and teas, all night at dinners and parties. He put aside the dark glasses because his eyes weren't watery anymore, they were magnificently, glamorously, famously, historically bloodshot.

Presumably due to that, every morning he awoke in bed with a woman he'd never before seen in his life. These women gazed so deeply into his eyes -- without flinching -- as to suggest he probably had experienced, at last, the sweet mystery of life. He was glad, even though he couldn't remember what it was.

He supposed he would remember, sooner or later. Meanwhile it was a relief to avoid the usual academic catastrophe, awaking in bed with an underage student, female or male; his were mostly faculty wives, so no harm done.

--Until the fatal morning.

The scene was the President's Mansion, the bedroom of the President's wife. Had that wife been in the bed the matter would have been hushed up for the good of the University. But when in



the dawn she returned from wherever she'd been and saw in her bed a woman who was not herself, she set up such a shrieking as Ex hadn't heard since his mother caught him in the bathtub. The University Police swarmed from the shrubbery and in minutes the City Tactical Squad was cordoning off the mansion and forming up ranks for the assault, helmets snapped tight and batons and gas canisters at the ready. Before the shrieking ceased the mansion was crawling with cameras and tape-recorders. The Tac Squad dragged Ex and the woman from under the bed and held them up for display on national television.

He was recognized by millions across America and the Free World and Third World, and a considerable number behind the Iron Curtain. Only a handful knew her, but among them was a chief of the Downtown Movers & Shakers, head of the biggest "business" in town, chairman of the Board of Regents, her husband. The President had no choice but to invoke the moral turpitude clause, previously used only against Communists.

## FIFTEEN

The University Senate donned Commencement regalia and led a protest serpentine of students, faculty, staff, and fellow travelers from campus to City Hall. This time the Tac Squad patrolled the line of march on armored motorcycles and arrested scores of bartenders and barmaids for pelting them with cocktail onions and stuffed olives; the Mayor and City Council did not come out to extend greetings.

The American Association of University Professors adopted a resolution that what was good enough for a professor's wife was good enough for a regent's wife and censured the University for infringing academic freedom. The American Association of University Regents adopted a resolution that professors are not the same as regents and damn well better not forget it.

For all the furor, Ex cruised comfortably onward, merely changing lanes. Though the professors of the nation knuckled under to the regents of the nation, they salved consciences by inviting Ex to drink gin on (or near) their campuses. Textbook publishers bid for his services and the winning firm sent him on a triumphal tour of the Free and Third Worlds and behind the Iron Curtain, where, as a goodwill gesture to his old friends in double-breasted blue-serge suits, he drank vodka while they drank gin.

He earned huge sums for his company. When its editors were

besieging a big-name professor to write a textbook that was wired in to the old-boy network and sure to have very heavy adoptions, Ex would be trotted out and the contract would be wrapped up over the first pitcher of Tanqueray. When its reps were lobbying an adoption committee for one of the high-profit courses, such as History of Western Civ, a cocktail party with Ex would be the clincher.

It was an exacting life. Ex spent so much time in the air that when he awoke he'd have to ask the woman not only who she was but where, and when.

Before boarding an airplane he drank to insensibility -- not for fear the airplane would fall down but from a dread it never would come down at all but fly on forever through the enormous, empty, loathsome sky.

Airlines outdid themselves for so good a customer. His seat was specially screened to block any view out a window. A pitcher was ever at his elbow lest he regain consciousness. Upon landing, the crew woke him or, if they couldn't, carried him off on a stretcher and put him in a cab or, if need be, an ambulance.

--One day he was picked up at the airport by a woman who drove him to a house and took him to bed. The same thing happened on the next return, and the next, and Ex began to have the feeling it was the same house, the same bed, the same woman.

--One day he was picked up by a man who drove him to a hospital. The man turned out to be Ex's brother-in-law and the woman Ex's wife, who just had given birth.

The nurse showed Ex a roomful of babies. He wondered how

anybody could tell which was whose -- none had mismatched booties.

## SIXTEEN

Reflections on fatherhood stirred memories of boyhood. Once again Ex marveled that two such diverse species could occupy the same physical shell in such close succession. At precisely what point did he leave off being the one and start being the other? Was it the night he experienced (or so he supposed, he still couldn't remember) the sweet mystery of life? More likely it was the moment of comprehending that he had, after all, followed his father's footsteps, that he was "in business."

Business had been booming ever since the GIs returned with their twin faiths that civilization had been saved and that it was, through education, ultimately perfectable. The nation buckled down to build new schools, fill them with new children, produce new teachers, and manufacture new textbooks. Not since the Catholic Church in its boom years of the Dark Ages had the world witnessed an industry so evidently destined for permanent growth.

However, in the quarter-century after the big war there were two littler wars that also did not save civilization, which eventually was widely suspected of declining, even falling. Moreover, it became apparent there wasn't enough money, medicine, education, and cosmetics for everybody in America, much less Mexico and Puerto Rico, to become wealthy, healthy, and beautiful, not while staging a continuing string of little wars

and preparing for the Last War. Recognizing that butter wouldn't fend off the barbarians, some of who were 90 miles off Florida and others of whom flew through the American stars at night with complete impunity, the people accepted the necessity to impoverish half the nation, and were prepared to do so, so long as it wasn't their half.

Abandoning the sinking ship of education, the oil-fired conglomerates that had bought up the textbook business in its boom years leapt nimbly aboard the new growth industry, missiles. Ex went with the flow and never missed a payday. His paychecks, though, lost zeroes off the end because his eyes were focused on the watery, blurry, mystical past; in the airy, precise, mathematical, future-fixated present the best job he could manage was as a technical editor, processing the scrawls of semi-literate engineers into manuals intended to be read by uniformed soldiers during the opening (closing) seconds of the Last War.

It was not possible to both work on missiles and think about them. If not born in a stupor, a person had to achieve one. Bowling, motorcycling, right-wing politics, born-again Christianity, and TV were favorite devices, but the old dependable was booze. At the start Ex expected his high style with expensive gin would earn general respect; he quickly learned his fellow workers were too far gone to notice who was drinking what, or how. They all wore Latin glasses to hide the bloodiness of eyeballs.

Manuals produced under such conditions were worthless, of course. It didn't matter; by the time a manual was published its

missile was obsolete, replaced by a new model, its manual in preparation, also never to be used.

Had the manuals been accurate and timely they still wouldn't have been used because they were designed for soldiers, and soldiers never were allowed near the missiles, which were far too complex and costly and treacherous to be put in charge of youths with 12th-grade educations and 6th-grade reading levels. Operations were conducted strictly by civilian engineers and scientists trained and commanded by captured Germans.

Even so, the manuals were not a waste, and indeed were the quintessence of the nation's defense. Aside from closing the manuals gap they bolstered the GNP and thus helped America maintain leadership of the Free World.

## SEVENTEEN

Each morning Ex drove across the desert from his motel to the Air Force base, reeled into the B-52 hangar which had been recycled for missiles, staggered to the portable, plywood-wall office, so wedged himself between chair and desk as not to fall on the floor, and so arranged typewriter, blueprints, elbows, and dark glasses as to permit undetected sleep.

He would see missiles lifting from the blueprints and flaming through the enormous, loathsome sky and plunging into a pitcher of vodka, and missiles erupting from the vodka and plunging into his bucket of gin, and he would awake, having fallen off his chair.

Each evening, trembling on the brink of sobriety, he would reel from under the low ceiling of the portable office -- to the Romanesque vault of the hangar -- to the dreadful desert sky that arched to the ends of the earth -- to the end of the world. He couldn't totter into his motel room fast enough.

Weekends he somehow drove hundreds of miles home to the woman who was somehow his wife and the boy who was somehow his son and carried a pitcher out in the garden to the concealing green where he could drink unseen, without Latin glasses.

One summer afternoon he awoke in the raspberry patch where he'd toppled the night before. Blinking open blood-blurred eyes, he saw a youngster in the roses staring as intently at the sky as



he, himself, once stared into water.

It was the youngster said to be his son but suddenly Ex knew it was the wrong boy and felt his blood turn dusty.

## EIGHTEEN

At the end of that week he reeled out under the desert sky, got in his car, and set off in a different direction. He came to a broad river, slammed on the brakes, lept from the car, sprawled on his belly, and drank. It was warm and murky and, due to the bomb factory upstream, so radioactive his teeth tingled, but it was water. He threw away his glasses.

Through the night he lay drinking. In morning he drove onward -- to another river -- lake -- marsh -- mudpuddle. He sampled the waters of gas stations and cafes, farms and villages, towns and cities. They were all very good, but ...

His eyes grew so watery he couldn't read road signs or maps. After a while the automobile license plates were a different color. They changed color again, and again. After a few days the people in gas stations and cafes spoke with an accent. A few days more and they had a different accent, then another. Then they were speaking Spanish, then French.

He drank:

Water nearly thick enough for a plow.

Water that was a rich stew of algae, waterweed, and polliwogs.

Water flavored by iron, calcium, aluminum, or gold; chlorides, bromides, sulfides, or oxides; carbonates, borates, silicates, or nitrates.

Irrigation water so loaded with fertilizer and pesticide and herbicide he could feel his marrow dissolving.

Rain water so clear and clean it seemed not to exist except as a Platonic form.

Swamp water he had to gulp quick lest the alligators bite off his nose.

Hot water from geysers.

Cold water from icicles and snowfields.

Forest water tea-colored by bark tannins.

Glacier water milky with ground-up rocks.

Volcano water gray with ash.

Water so still that clouds sailed through it.

Water so turbulent it was more air than liquid.

Water that fell directly from the sky into his open mouth.

Water that was blown by winds through his parted lips.

Water in mists that enwrapped him in a soft silence and gently bathed his cheek and forehead, ears and nose, mouth and eyes, and seeped through his skin to cool his blood.

It all was splendid, except...

After a while the people were speaking German, then Polish, then Russian, then Hungarian, then Serbian, then Italian, then Turkish, then Arabic, then Hindustani, then what sounded like Japanese except their skins weren't yellow enough and their teeth didn't stick out.

He was drinking water in private, for its sake, for his sake, searching.

However, one day he lifted his mouth from a spring and the bushes flurried and he could have sworn it was the University Senate.

Another time, lying under a waterfall on his back, mouth open, he rolled aside to catch a breath and the fellow who ducked behind a tree almost certainly was the doctor whose bottle he used to piss in.

He emerged from a river and the banks were lined by fishermen, except the gas canisters on their belts gave them away as the Tac Squad.

Motorboats putt-putted along lakeshores and in them he saw the captain from the golf course, the doctors from the induction center, a deaf old man and deaf old woman, and the Debate Team.

Canoes floated down the streams paddled by teachers, girls he'd dated in high school and college, women he'd met in bed, and the poor minister and wife.

Airliners skimmed the ground, windows framing faces of stewardesses and the mothers of boys whose socks matched.

He was once again drinking water in public, for their sake.

They stopped hiding and openly gathered in hushed groups, lips parted, eyes shining -- again, innocently. He recognized

publishers' reps, German rocketeers, Russian double agents, the deanery, the President, the Board of Regents, and the Governor. --At least he thought that's who they were but it was hard to be sure, his eyes were getting so watery, everybody looked so rounded, so shimmery, so nice.

One day he surfaced from a face-down soak in a hot springs and spotted in the crowd the blurred face of a woman who was either his wife or the Regents Chairman's wife, or both.

He wandered to countries where the people spoke Bantu, Salishan, Latin, Classical Greek, Aramaic, Early Hebrew, Babylonian, Old Iranian, Sanskrit, Minoan, Egyptian, and Mesopotamian cuneiform, and where they grunted and squealed and hopped up and down, scratching their armpits. Everywhere the people watched, their eyes shining. Everywhere the water was superb, only...

He came to a very far place where the waters were very still, very dark. As he drank he saw, deep within, Y's face, and he cried out, "They said you were missing!" And Y said, as he eddied into nothing, "No, not me -- they are missing."

He drank again and saw Z and cried out, "They said they lost you in the system!" And Z said, as he faded, "They'll never get me out of their system."

He bent to drink a third time and saw the reflections of the wrong boy and looked up and saw him flying overhead and distinctly remembered never having experienced the sweet mystery of life, not yet.

He remembered where he was going.

He walked beside a thousand lakes and marshes and swamps and bogs, a thousand rivers and creeks and springs, over a thousand valley glaciers, piedmont glaciers, and icecaps. Wherever and whenever he lay down to drink the peoples of a thousand nations, following, watched.

He came to where he was going. He'd passed the place earlier but hurried on, hearing in memory the terrible shriek...

Now...

Water rolled in from the eternal horizon -- powerful, attacking, conquering water, yet gentle, welcoming, loving water. It hissed up the sand to kiss his feet, embrace his ankles, enfold his hips, fling him high on the beach, draw him far down to its depths.

He tasted, and recalled the day in swimming class -- and The Dream -- and his earliest (almost) memory.

The surf cast him up in a white turmoil and sucked him deep into green peace. He opened his eyes and they weren't watery anymore, or rather, everything was so watery that he clearly saw seals, fish, kelp, algae, and plankton.

This was his earliest memory, from before The Dream, before the THIRST.

A final time he surfaced.

He saw the enormous loathsome sky. From horizon to horizon

the mindless missiles were linked in the grand serpentine of the Last War. On the Moon an oil tycoon was playing golf -- it was his fake son, the wrong boy.

He saw the peoples of a thousand nations issuing from the forest at land's end, trudging through sand dunes, crawling over driftwood, wading into surf. There were sadly few youngsters among them because since the war the handiwork of man had thronged the continents mostly with the wrong children -- from the wrong future.

He saw the lighthouse, long abandoned yet now with a kerosene lantern glimmering in the window and a telescope poking out, trained on him. At the base, on surf-swept rocks, a voluptuous woman with misty eyes languorously flicked her tail and smiled at him as she never had when she was wearing a dress and legs. Ex knew what his childhood had been about, and knew that he was the right boy.

He made an obscene gesture at the wrong boy and held arms close by side and legs tight together and sank like an arrow straight down. The water pushed up his nose and trickled in his ears and permeated his pores. He blew the last residue of dreadful sky from his lungs and rejoiced to hear the great whales singing.

THE FELLOW WHO WASN'T  
SUPPOSED TO BE THERE  
AT ALL

Harvey Manning



## ONE

Otto was a mistake.

His father blamed his mother for taking neither precautions nor remedy. She blamed him for abruptly resuming a relationship so long defunct, and in such minimal fashion, that she didn't realize until much later that it wasn't a dream.

His father's nerves were stretched so tight by years of bubblegum rock, peppermint rock, hot rock, punk rock, and junk rock that the reintroduction of infantile noises gave him a tremor.

His mother resented another invasion of her body just when she was significantly reducing her golf handicap and rising rapidly in the League of Women Voters.

His siblings were embittered by the disruption of long-established room assignments and the intrusion of babytending duties on their life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness.

His father, whenever the child approached, fled to another room or outside to prune the rose bushes; he found more and more business trips unavoidable. His mother attended more and more committee meetings that lasted longer and longer. His siblings, condemned to babysit, shut him in a dark room and turned up the stereo.

In the beginning Otto spent a normal proportion of time crying, initially with a normal if grudging maternal response. However, as the months passed his crying sent his mother away and

summoned siblings to yell and spank, the louder and harder if he persisted. At last he cried only rarely, when in near-mortal distress, and then in a complaint so wispy it was easily submerged in the TV laugh track.

Otto emerged from infancy soft of step, in perpetual retreat around corners and behind furniture and shrubs, and never speaking unless spoken to, and he never was.

He ate little at home, due to the difficulty of obtaining food at a table where nobody offered him anything and he never asked for anything, or from cupboards and refrigerator under constant depredation by siblings. When scarcely able to toddle he started nibbling grass, leaves, flowers, and berries, sometimes becoming ill, but never fatally, so nobody noticed. In time he was able to obtain a sufficient meal simply walking to and from school. At one point he experimented with ants, worms, grubs, slugs, and caterpillars, but when living creatures squirmed in his mouth he imagined wispy death cries and spit them out.

Perhaps partly from what he didn't eat, and partly from the workings of the survival instinct, he grew slowly, not tall, and exceedingly slender.

The first outsider ever to look intently enough at Otto to see him was the new minister called to the congregation as the boy was nearing school age. During his initial pastoral visit the minister was introduced individually to each family member present in the parlor. One name on his readout remained unexplained. Siblings were dispatched in search.

That evening the minister's wife came upon him in the study, lost in thought. She asked how the day had gone.

"Strange, very strange," said the minister, brow furrowing. "There was this little boy... When they brought him in from the yard -- well, I almost felt they were dragging him -- and he came in the door -- not so much walking as -- as materializing -- the sun was low in the sky, behind him, giving him a sort of all-around halo. But also I had the funny impression I could see the sun -- shining -- through him..."

## TWO

The second outsider to look at Otto on purpose -- or often as not to look for him -- was the teacher of the special-education class to which he was assigned after kindergarten, where he had caused no problem except at year's end when the teacher, writing pupil-progress reports, came upon his name and couldn't remember ever having seen him.

At home, slipping silently around corners, Otto overheard conversations he wasn't supposed to. That was how he found he was a mistake. It also was how he learned some people speculated he was a Mongolian idiot.

He had no notion of the meaning. Alone in fields or forest, eating breakfast or supper, he would softly repeat the phrase, over and over, an incantation, a mystery perhaps someday to be understood, and with it, himself. So it was that one day in school the teacher was revolving a globe, naming countries as they passed, and she said "Mongolia" and Otto became acutely visible. The teacher leapt at the opportunity and went to considerable trouble mining the school system for picture books and maps and film strips of the grassland steppes and pony herds and desert barrens and the empire of Ghengis Khan.

Subsequently she pounced on his burst of excitement when an argument between two classmates culminated in one calling the other an "idiot." Having calmed the combatants, the teacher

exploited the episode by explaining to the class the unequal paces and degrees of mental development. Otto fastened so intently on the lecture that she arranged a play period with a class of children classified as slow and watched as the ever-retiring, near-invisible child made close, warm contact with the strangers, not by words.

Pleased though she was by these two coups, there were so many claims on her attention that Otto gradually eluded not only her eye but almost her memory. She was the more shaken, then, reviewing pictures on the assigned theme, "What I want to be when I grow up," to find a drawing of a horde of children, labeled "IDIOTS," one in the middle of the horde identified as "OTTO," riding ponies out of "GOBI DESERT" down the streets of "ULAN BATOR."

The teacher was the first and last person to weep for Otto.

### THREE

The special-ed teacher, the only educator in twenty years of schooling ever to see Otto, accidentally provided his life direction the day she took the class to the zoo.

Some children were captivated by the elephant and the rhinoceros and the buffalo, others by the lions and tigers and bears, the monkeys and apes. Otto shrank from the big animals -- too big -- and the carnivores -- too ferocious -- and the anthropoids -- too noisy. The teacher was disappointed that he found no friend, seemed as wary in the animal kingdom as the human.

Later, picnicking atop a grassy knoll, the teacher was able to follow Otto's movements unusually well, though even here he maneuvered to use other students as screens. Eventually she realized he had brought no lunch and she was trying to devise a discreet way to offer him a sandwich, when a cluster of children discovered a bumblebee and flew apart, revealing him in the act of stuffing grass in his mouth. As she was gasping at this she was further startled to see the evanescent child suddenly flush to full reality. Following his eyes, she saw over the crest of the knoll several diaphonous white creatures strangely and beautifully swooping and swirling against the blue sky.

For the only time ever, she was able to take Otto by the hand, lead him over the knoll, where several people were holding

long poles and sweeping the air with nets. Now and then a net was lowered for the catch to be examined, ever so lovingly, then released, ever so kindly, to flutter away in the sun with a darting motion that took it a great distance at incredible speed in absolute silence -- or perhaps to settle in the grass amid the flowers and vanish as if by magic.

The teacher again mined school resources for every book and film strip on lepidoptera, happy that Otto had, after all, found a friend on zoo day, and was only sorry she could not satisfy his request for information about the moths and butterflies of Mongolia.

She didn't know, of course, that he prayed to both God and Santa Claus for a butterfly net, and didn't get it.

#### FOUR

What Otto especially admired about lepidoptera was the ability to be there, then not there -- to go in a flick (or non-flick) of the wing from something to nothing. It was the very talent he had cultivated since becoming sufficiently ambulatory to escape siblings, and never more assiduously than in school.

When the boys were herded out on the playground for a compulsory game of mob soccer, he moved with the ball up and down the field, in the crowd but not of it, yet not conspicuously on the fringe or sidelines with the odd ones. When roles were assigned for the class pageant the teacher's checklist found him, but so belatedly there was no part left but a tree in the back of the forest. When the class photograph was taken he managed to move precisely at the click of the shutter, so that not even the camera saw him except as a blur.

Otto had no friends, there being no other idiots in the class. But also he had no enemies, as he did at home, where the siblings were. In school he was merely there -- and not there.

Never after the time in special-ed did he allow a teacher to get him in focus. By adroit head movements he evaded the eye scanning the room for a pupil to recite. He carefully kept his assignments and tests in the upper-C, lower-B range. Independently, however, he avidly pursued studies that promised to help define him as a person -- and preserve him from whatever



threatened, siblings or other.

In mathematics his attention was caught by the number that is not there, and he searched the library for information.

He read, "A zero must have been introduced in India sometime before 825 A.D. because the Persian, al-Kowarizmi, included it in his book of that date."

And, "The zero is found in tenth-century Spanish manuscripts, and may have been brought to Spain by the Arabs, who dominated much of the peninsula for hundreds of years after 711 A.D."

And, "The zero is found in a twelfth-century Latin translation of the al-Kowarizmi treatise."

And, "By 1500 the algorists, advocates of the zero, had triumphed over the abacists, its opponents."

The word, "zero," he read, apparently is derived from zephyrum, a Latinization of the Arab sifr, a translation of the Hindu sunya, meaning void, or empty.

He mused over the statement, "About 4000 years ago wandering bands crossed the Himalaya passes into India from the great plains of central Asia."

One year as his birthday approached Otto prayed not to the All, the Everything, but to Nothing, the Zero -- and got the butterfly net. He took this as a sign, unaware that his parents, who didn't really hate him, as did the siblings, had now and then glimpsed him chasing moths and butterflies with a piece of fly screen.

## FIVE

The problem of Everything versus Nothing troubled Otto the more as his body began changing, adding to childhood fear an adolescent guilt. In a recurring Nightmare he was pursued by a Punisher even larger and more violent than siblings. Netting butterflies reminded him that for all their subtle devices they, too, could be caught.

He became vividly aware of catastrophes suffered by the site of his home city. During the Ice Age it had been buried under a glacier thousands of feet thick, and before that under enormous lava flows. Intermittently it had sunk beneath the sea. Periodically volcanoes had extinguished all life in eruptions of hot gas and suffocating ash.

Though these geologic events were generally considered as normal and ordinary as weather and war, to Otto they seemed what a cannoneer calls "ranging shots," by which a target ultimately is bracketed.

In his own time and place the shots were coming uncomfortably near. A stray typhoon swerved out of the South Pacific and felled forests and killed scores of people. Residents of river valleys said in the public press that the hundred-year flood was now occurring every five years. A meteor scarred a mountainside east of the city. A tornado passed within a mile of his house, knocking over garbage cans and deroofing

carports. An earthquake shook the cornices loose in the older section of downtown and crushed a number of winos. Fire ants were reported on the way from Alabama, and killer bees from South America, and the spruce budworm from Montana.

Driving to his high school graduation ceremonies Otto's parents were caught in a collision between a gasoline truck and a beer truck and drowned in hot foam. Had he not decided to stay after school to chase butterflies he would have been with them. It was a very close call.

The Nightmare persisted in college years, and often he awoke screaming -- wispily, not bothering anyone. He would lie in bed and reflect, was it The Abacist who caught him? Or The Algorist? Did he scream in terror? Or in an ecstasy so great it was the same thing?

## SIX

His small inheritance enabled Otto to enroll at the University, whose campus was so wooded and shrubberied and had so many buildings juxtaposed at artful angles he found it easy to flit about unseen, despite always carrying the butterfly net lest he miss an important encounter amid the flowers of a spring day or the streetlights of a winter night. He slipped into classrooms after everyone else was seated and just as the professor was opening his mouth and slipped out just after the professor closed his mouth and while everyone else was gathering up books. The precautions were excessive; the University harbored so many tens of thousands of students and professors and administrators and visitors and tourists and loiterers that idiosyncrasies were so numerous and varied it was the ordinary that drew comment.

His academic program was evasive, based in General Studies, haven for hiding.

He took courses in history, up through the Mongolian People's Republic, and psychology, and these cleared up his misunderstandings without dispelling his affinity for central Asia and the mentally disadvantaged, and for anthropology, where he speculated on his possible relationship to Peking Man.

In philosophy he was introduced to Platonic forms by a professor who discussed the nature of Whiteness and Chairness and Horseness and the Form of forms, God, but did not go into whether

there was a form of Nothingness; Otto wondered if this might be a self-contradiction.

In logic he was enthralled by the concept of a class with no members.

He skirted mathematics circumspectly, close enough to hear about zero sum, which he understood to mean a situation where everything adds up to nothing.

In European literature he read the works of the nihilists, who denied the existence of any basis for knowledge or truth, but searched in vain for nihilists who denied existence.

He developed a fondness for certain Romantic and Victorian poets and committed a number of verses to memory:

From Wordsworth's "To a Butterfly":

Much converse do I find in thee,  
Historian of my infancy!

What joy awaits you, when the breeze  
Hath found you out among the trees.

Swinburne:

So pert and so painted, so proud and so pretty,  
To brush the bright down from your wings was a pity --  
Fly away, butterfly, fly away!

Shelley:

The desire of the moth for the star,  
Of the night for the morrow,  
The devotion to something afar  
From the sphere of our sorrow.

From the classics he learned that to the ancient Greeks the butterfly was the symbol of immortality. He pondered what might be the symbol of the opposite, and settled on the moth. But could there be (not be) an opposite? Would it not be the same thing?

## SEVEN

Otto eventually took the step, not so bold as it seemed, of transferring to the Department of Lepidopterology. This department was an embarrassment to the University, its existence due solely to a pioneer family which habitually made large gifts for athletic facilities, parking garages, and fountains, and in return expected not only that their names be placed on the athletic facilities, parking garages, and fountains but that the family sport (in the biological sense) be maintained in his academic position, bizarre yet not an outright social disgrace.

Chairman of the department as well as composing its entire faculty, he rarely had a student, but so much enjoyed being a professor he delivered -- that is, read -- his lectures on schedule, whether or not anyone was there to hear. Eyes fixed on lecture text or blackboard, he never saw Otto. Having no standard of comparison to determine whether Otto was a good or poor student, he graded his papers and exams C plus or B minus, perfectly satisfactory to Otto.

The arrival of the bull market in higher education brought the University ample funds to meet every faculty demand and some left over. To dispose of the surplus the Dean randomly scattered unrequested assistantships around campus. One fell to the "butterfly department." The Chairman had no notion who to choose. The Dean pointed out to him that his department had but

a solitary major, its first ever. Otto was so shaken by the appointment he suffered violent attacks of The Nightmare. However, given no duties nor any further notice he warily explored his office -- a corner of the museum basement blocked off by stacked-up packing cases containing bones of a dinosaur donated by an alumnus, awaiting an Alumni Association drive to finance erection in the Quad.

After a time the Chairman wasn't around anymore, no one knew why. By then Otto was close to a doctorate but couldn't finish up, lacking a professor and a department. Nevertheless, he had been so long in the museum basement it had become his home and since nobody remembered he was there, they let him stay.

## EIGHT

With continued growth of enrollment and wealth the hordes of administrators so crowded the campus the President didn't know who they all were or what they did and hired an efficiency expert to reorganize everything and put them on a chart.

The expert came from the Outside and never had done a university before and quickly was disoriented. Unlike an ordinary business, the University did not have a relatively few hierarchical strata but a multitude, and hardly any two administrators were (or at least, considered themselves to be) on precisely the same level. Moreover, lines of reporting were not always simply upward but often sideways or even downward; frequently the arrows pointed both ways; many lines deadended; and some positions were not connected to anything but the payroll department.

Alert administrators recognized a golden opportunity to build empires not in the traditional manner, by patient conquest over the years, but by sudden strokes of the efficiency expert's chart-drawing pen. It only was necessary to make a good impression on the expert.

The Dean performed brilliantly and fondly thought (he having been an historian until he was able to give that up) his new situation vis a vis the President might be compared to the Mayor of the Palace and the last of the Merovings, or the Shogun and



the Emperor of Japan, or the Pentagon and the White House.

--Then the expert brought the Dean a list of minor matters to be settled before the final draft of the chart. He asked about the Assistant in the Department of Lepidopterology, and pointed out there was no such department. The Dean paled. He dared not admit Otto was a mistake and not supposed to be there in the basement at all.

The new organization chart designated Otto as University Lepidopterologist, with the rank of associate professor, and tenure, and a secretary, who set up shop outside the wall of dinosaur bones.

## NINE

Otto's promotion to associate professor was buried in the routine announcement list but his appointment as University Lepidopterologist caught the fancy of education reporters, science editors, and humor columnists. Accustomed as he was to eluding everyone, he never was seen by the reporters and cameramen and didn't know they were after him. The Dean had to take the brunt, devoting such energy to mustering enthusiasm for this little-known academic treasure (who he had never seen) that his ulcer kicked up. It was worth it, though, because the President's nose got so far out of joint he went on sabbatical to Madrid.

Otto, who neither read newspapers nor watched TV, was unaware he was on so many minds. However, he knew something was going on and began feeling as insecure as during the recent "meteor shower of the century" when the night sky blazed with hundreds of missiles, many seeming barely to miss him.

After his parents' death he had more or less surreptitiously occupied a garret furnished with a bed and a primitive kitchen, including a hotplate on which he cooked -- during seasons of poor browsing -- pots of oatmeal mush and lentil soup. Abruptly his landlady, previously content with a small monthly sum of cash slipped under her door, invaded his garret and demanded he move to a ground-floor apartment, which he did, purely to escape her

-- with the serendipity that she shooshed away the realtors who wanted to sell him a condo.

He received so many letters offering opportunities to become wealthy his mailbox got plugged up, he having never in his life looked into it; after a while the mailman returned all letters, writing on them, "Not there." His secretary pushed so many "While You Were Out" messages under his office door (newly installed, a privilege of rank, and always locked to keep her out, Otto having a private route through the bones and out the window) he spent hours at night pushing them back under the door. For all his skill he was caught several times on campus and as the price of release bought a car he didn't know how to drive, vacation homesites on Lake Havasu and an island in the Mississippi River, and a life insurance policy with himself as beneficiary.

The worst was the siblings, who in order to ask about his will and try to borrow money gave a party on the anniversary of the marriage of his parents, an invitation he couldn't refuse, since they, after all, had given him the butterfly net.

Otto was horrified at how huge the siblings had grown, nearly doubling their former mass, and how much additional bulk they had accumulated and generated in spouses and children. The house was a Nightmare of flesh -- crowding, suffocating, pressing him against the wall, leaving no room for fluttering.

When the siblings learned he had walked the eighteen miles to the party (there being no place to hide on buses) they recoiled in horror the equal of his, recognizing there was no

business to be done with a pedestrian. He took the chance to flit out the door, pick up his net, and run the eighteen miles through the night, never again to see the siblings, who agreed he was, in fact, a veritable Mongolian idiot.

## TEN

Otto was caught solid and sure. During the instant of capture he felt the rapture of enwrapment in the diaphonous white net, and also he felt the Nightmare.

Her name was Cynthia, for the goddess of the Moon, she explained. She caught him by ambush outside the window outlet of his escapeway through the dinosaur bones, claiming she had a mysterious specimen. It proved to be a female Actias luna, which she should have known, and later he realized she undoubtedly did. In the diaphonous moment, though, he only knew she reminded him of a Danaus plesippus, except much larger.

However, it was her net, not Otto's, and the wedding night synthesized his childhood fear and adolescent guilt, Everything and Nothing, terror and ecstasy, and he understood what it was all about, and didn't like it.

Cynthia took the car and the apartment and the Lake Havasu lot and the Mississippi island and garnisheed his salary, soon after the day he came home early and opened the bedroom door and the mailman yelped, "You're not supposed to be here!"

## ELEVEN

Released from the minds of Cynthia, mailman, landlady, siblings, reporters, and salesmen, and not for years on the mind of his secretary, who never had seen him, Otto lapsed gladly into obscurity, the more peaceful, now, in the cave behind the dinosaur bones. Lacking a hotplate he no longer supplemented his browsing with oatmeal mush and lentil soup and grew the more wraithlike, the easier to slip through the bones and out the window.

He took long walking journeys to distant forests and mountains and deserts, gently catching and tenderly releasing so many butterflies and moths unknown to science that he would have been the most famous of lepidopterologists had fame been his aim, and had he ever been able to pin a specimen, as Cynthia had the Actia luna, and him.

He brooded on that dangerous period and considered the possibility of a permanent escape.

He visited his childhood comrades at their institution, sliding unseen through steel bars to discuss the matter, without words. They appeared willing.

He approached a herd of ponies in a country pasture. They, too, seemed agreeable.

He set out to scout the route for the horde. He came to the shore of the ocean. The way to Mongolia was blocked.

## TWELVE

Women weren't being attacked on campus more often but were accepting it less gracefully. They went so far as to demand something be done.

The President appointed a Committee. Walking to attend its first meeting he encountered a butterfly and saw the opportunity he'd been awaiting since the reorganization. After a preliminary shuffling and hemming and hawing by the Committee he casually asked the Dean about "his butterfly man", the fellow in the basement.

The Dean snorted. The President tapped a pencil on the table. The Committee nodded, shrugged, frowned, hummed. The hint of a smile at the corner of the President's mouth turned the Dean pale.

Not for ages had Otto's secretary pushed any "While You Were Out" slips under the door and so had seen none pushed back out, and had no notion if he were in there, or where.

At the apartment, from Cynthia, the Dean learned about the escapeway through the bones.

## THIRTEEN

Otto spotted the ambush in the nick of time and retreated through the bones.

Who was it out there? Whose mind was he on now? As the ambush relentlessly continued day and night he concluded there was more than one mind. The world seemed thronged by siblings.

Cut off from food he dwindled to a featheriness very lepidopteralike.

The Nightmare cut him off from sleep.

He filled lightheaded hours picturing the Cheshire Cat, watching it slowly vanish, beginning with the tip of the tail and ending with the grin, which remained after the rest of it had gone.

He wisply recited a favorite poem:

Last night I saw  
Upon the stair  
A little man  
Who wasn't there.

He wasn't there  
Again today.  
I wish -- I wish --  
He'd go away.

Otto wished he could go away, but didn't know how or where.



## FOURTEEN

Otto determined that the heavy breathing and low muttering emanated from bushes outside the escape window. The Dean's ambushers had forgotten the office door. Never having used it, so had Otto. One evening after his secretary went home he fluttered out and away.

The campus night was a delicatessen of delicious aromas; the fasting, though, had killed his appetite. He curled up in a copse and chewed the ancient question: Is there an exterior hard world that minds think about and, through the thinking, bring themselves into existence? Or are there interior hard minds that think about the world and, in thinking about it, create it?

He fainted into the Nightmare and awoke asking: The Abacist or The Algorist?

A herd of feet thumped the path past his hideaway. A streetlamp identified them as the Committee. The President was badgering the Dean about the ambush, whether he was certain the butterfly man was still in there, and whether he was sure the fellow existed, or ever had. In a whining voice the Dean was explaining his proposal to settle all these questions with an emergency appropriation to erect the dinosaur in the Quad.

Otto knew whose minds he was on. But -- the other part of the ancient question -- were there minds? Or a mind? The President? The Dean? Whatever became of the Chairman of the

WHO? Anyone he knew. Would being God be

this? Would he enjoy being God? Did he?

The sound of Committee feet faded. Students streamed by, to and fro. Otto supposed he must be a figment of one of these passing imaginations. At any moment it might be distracted by a pretty girl (or boy), later try to recapture the thought, and muse, "I had something on my mind. What was it, I wonder?"

And that would be the last of Otto.

## FIFTEEN

Otto was wrong.

He watched moths batter the streetlamp and fall, fatally scorched, into darkness, a favorite modern symbol of mortality, as, anciently, butterflies fluttering upward into light were of immortality.

He recalled geometry:

A solid lacks the dimension of time.

A plane lacks the dimensions of time and depth.

A line lacks the dimensions of time and depth and width.

A point lacks the dimensions of time and depth and width and length.

He pondered: What, in this progression, succeeds a point?

He felt a boiling-down of the world from a hard chunk to a thick stew, to a soup, to a broth, to a mist. He looked up through the Milky Way to a Black Hole. He looked down through the Earth to the Sun.

It was so bright he blinked and everything and everybody were nothing.

The whole thing had been a mistake.