



## THE CHRONICLES OF ANGLE STREAM

By

VINCENT COLIN BURKE

I

### TOEING THE LINE

“God,” Randolph Rand prayed silently as he closed the door of his home on Trent Park, “please have me win it.” The computer company scholarship for which he was to compete, if it was a competition, meant much: it could wholly pay his way through Memorial to a degree in science with his major in psychology, without his having to get a student loan; he had a horror of being in debt to any real extent, no doubt transmitted from his father’s honest thriftiness, which hadn’t obviously bedeviled his older brothers. (Besides, they’d been confident of degrees and subsequently work, in their study fields.)

“Go home, boy,” he said to the Pottles’ dog as it came up to him while he passed their house. It wasn’t sensible, he thought, to let the dog, which no doubt the Pottle kids loved now as he’d once loved Bounder, out on the street like that, though Trent Park was pretty quiet at evening. But at least The Menace, as Mr. Rand had grudgingly called her, was dead and gone.

“God, please keep me alert tonight,” he added to his prayer. “You didn’t grant the sleep I needed last night, so please keep me alert.”

Randolph turned left at the bottom of the hill instead of crossing Westvale Avenue to Elston, mainly because he thought Mrs. Reibling might be out, who still thought of him as a dog lover, and he didn’t want to talk to her about her dogs. Besides, he hadn’t time to talk; the test was set for seven-thirty and it was seven o’clock now. “Please let me win,” he said silently again to God.

“There’s an unusual opportunity open to you, Randy,” Dr. Pond had said to him about two weeks earlier, when Randolph had been called to the principal’s office. “A major computer company on the mainland is offering a scholarship this year to students at Coaker College who want to major in psychology and who meet certain requirements. The sponsor of the scholarship prohibits me from telling you what these requirements are, or how many of our students have met them, but I

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can assure you that you do meet them. It's a scholarship offered from the private fortune of the major shareholder of the company, who has ties with Newfoundland, with Angle Stream in particular, that cause him to be favourably disposed toward students from this area. He wishes the details of these connections to be kept confidential by the college, and if they were to become known through the fault of our administration here, this college's students would no longer qualify for examination for this scholarship. It would pay all tuition fees, the cost of accommodation at the St. John's residence or one of the Burton's Pond apartments, and normal holiday travel expenses, until you get your bachelor's degree in psychology. In return, you would have to keep me, or the next principal of Sir William's, informed of your progress through the years, which we would report to the sponsor of the scholarship in case he should decide to make you a job offer, which you would be under no obligation to accept, when you graduate. It is, as I said, a most unusual opportunity, and it comes from a most respectable source, which is all that I am permitted to tell you about the sponsor.

“Further scholarships for master's degree and doctorate are open to successful applicants for this scholarship.

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“If you want to try for this scholarship, let me know as soon as you decide, and I will arrange for you to take in our computer room the examination which has been provided to us by the sponsor.”

“It sounds too good to be true, sir,” Randolph had said. “Of course I’d like to try, unless there are special conditions I should know about.”

“There are none beyond what I have outlined to you,” Dr. Pond said. “There is a request that we let the sponsor know if you decline this opportunity, so that the company could refuse to hire you if you should apply to it for a job in the future, but that is only a request and not a condition of the scholarship’s availability, and I don’t think I care to comply with it.”

“That settles it for me,” Randolph had said.

“Then be at the computer room seven-thirty p.m. April twenty-fifth.”

He had plenty of time. He was now at the high point (at this end) of O’Connor Drive, opposite Somme Armoury, and heading down toward the park. As he turned off the road down the sloping bank into the left side of the bisected park, he wondered again whether Elizabeth had been offered the chance to qualify for the scholarship. She also wanted to major in psychology and she too had an eager interest in artificial intelligence. And her natural intelligence was considerable.

She had other natural qualities which interested him also, but he'd made a point of not making that kind of interest manifest just yet. He had felt that the affinity between them might be on her side platonic, as had been the case with two other girls for whom he'd formed a romantic attachment. They'd thought sexual interest a nuisance, an obstacle to friendship, and he'd decided, since Elizabeth reminded him of them in some ways, to let time and proximity work for him as far as possible with Elizabeth before showing the extent of his feelings for her. He hadn't asked her yet to go especially with him to the dance which the college students who were grads of Queen of Heaven and Coronation were planning for the Coronation gym May the second, because he knew he couldn't keep his voice and eyes from showing what asking her would mean to him.

At least, the confidentiality of the scholarship exam meant that that couldn't come between them, he thought.

Randolph crossed the culvert over the trickle that ran down to Angle Stream brook, and proceeded up the Excerptpark steps, still packed with hard-trodden snow, and slippery. But it was still a fine short-cut. He reached the college at seven-twenty, and went at once to the computer room, finding it locked. He went back to the security desk to talk with the guard awhile, and in about five minutes,

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Dr. Pond came out of his office, with an envelope and a book in his left hand.

“Good evening, Randy,” the principal said.

“Good evening, Dr. Pond.” They went to the computer room, which Dr. Pond unlocked.

“You’ll use this terminal,” the principal said, going to the fourth from the left. “It’s been connected for monitoring by a computer owned by the scholarship sponsor, to make sure you don’t plagiarize from other systems. I’ll be sitting outside the door, reading, and you may communicate with me only to ask the time. Have you a watch?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Then even that won’t be necessary. Your examination assignment is in this envelope, which you are to open after I have closed the door behind me. You have three hours to think of a solution to the problem presented, write a program implementing the solution, and make sure it’s working properly. It’s seven-thirty. Here you are. Good luck, Randy.”

As the door closed behind Dr. Pond, Randolph opened the envelope, sat in the chair in front of the terminal, and read the assignment. It dealt with obtaining information about the U.S. funds transfer system. He had to discover and record

the amount of money transferred, and the number of transfers, in that system in one day. The program dealing with this had to provide for checks of three computers, one each in Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York. Each computer would have to be checked three times a minute.

There were three elements in the problem, Randolph saw. He had to set up open telephone lines to the funds-system computers, display the information on the screen, and somehow overcome the limitation of computer memory to record the information for a whole day. He thought he saw the way to set up the telephone connections: he would put into the program a series of directions to the computer to receive the incoming telephoned information through opening-and-closing time-delay switches, which would receive calls from each of the funds-system computers alternately, at intervals of 6.66 seconds.

The information would then be displayed by a command to the computer to print it.

However, Randolph could not immediately see a way to overcome the memory limitation. It occurred to him that the final answer to the problem might be to demonstrate that the limitation could not be overcome, in proof of the fact that there were certain things a computer could not accomplish, but he felt

instinctively that that was not the answer in this case. However, a long time of puzzling over the solution yielded no result except growing frustration. He began to feel that the solution was in his subconscious and was something fairly obvious if only he could put his finger on it, and he felt sure that it would rise to the surface during the examination period. But that wasn't enough: he had to get to it in time to write a complicated program afterward, within the deadline he had been given, and he began to fear that he would not manage that in time. He looked at his watch – it was eight o'clock.

“My God, please help me see it,” Randolph prayed, nodding lightly over his keyboard. “Guardian angel, please enlighten my mind. And keep me awake and alert. Please.” He felt, dimly, his head droop down.

“They aren't going to help,” said Dr. Pond's voice behind and to the left.

“Are you sure of that, sir?” said Randolph.

“Pretty sure,” said the other. “Not certain, but pretty sure. By the way, you weren't praying aloud,” he added, referring to what Randolph had just thought he must have done; “I heard your thoughts.”

“Of course,” said Randolph. “All college principals have that talent.” He looked up, turning his head, smiling, and the smile stopped. Dr. Pond was wearing



a glossy black goatee that would have been a foot and a half long or more but for its having been tied in a knot in the middle.

“That’s hardly sufficient disguise for you to test my honesty properly, sir,” he said. “Besides, I already recognized your voice.”

“The beard is not a disguise; the rest of it is. I am not Dr. Pond; I am he who was called Lucifer and have since been given other, less complimentary, names. As I said, I heard your thoughts; they were not of that order to which my hearing is barred.”

“Well, I’m having a hell of a problem with this program, that’s a fact,” said Randolph. “And I don’t mind saying that you’re the devil of a distraction right now – sir. If what you’re doing now is part of the requirement for qualifying for this scholarship, I hope it won’t take too long. I need all the time I’ve got left.”

“I tell you, I am not Dr. Pond,” the other said, the knot in his beard moving up and down. “You can verify it by opening the door and asking him the time; your watch has stopped. I am indeed the prince of the ‘fallen’ celestials.”

Randolph slid his sleeve aside and looked at his watch. It was stopped, at eight-fifteen. Feeling suddenly faint, he went to the door, as the other moved close to the wall, and opened it. Dr. Pond was sitting outside, reading his book, his brown

face, when he turned, still smooth-shaven except for the black and white mustache.

“How much time do I have left, sir? My watch has stopped.”

“It’s eight-nineteen.”

“Thank you, sir.” He went, numbly, through the movements of setting and winding his watch, then closed the door and leaned against it. His heart seemed high in his chest.

“Don’t be alarmed,” the Devil said, moving away from the wall. “You’re in the state of grace, so far as I can judge, and you can lose it only by a decision of your own. I just want to make you a modest proposal.”

“Sure. My soul for the computer scholarship. No deal.”

“Not your soul,” the Devil said. “Just your right leg, below the knee.”

“What?”

“I won’t even ask for that, if you don’t agree that the trade is entirely reasonable, even logical,” said the Devil. “If you do agree, I will cause you to have a cancerous growth where it will necessitate removal of the leg at the knee. It won’t cause you much pain – just enough, just once, to enable you to give an accurate description of the necessary symptoms, and then the leg will be

amputated in hospital. We can have you in hospital by May the first. Subject entirely to your agreement, of course,” he added, raising his hand placatingly. “It doesn’t sound to me like a bad deal for a man who hates debts, one leg in exchange for several years of interesting and successful study, entirely free of financial constraint.”

“It’s a sin to mutilate oneself, which is what that really would be, since I’d be consenting to the cancer.”

“Indeed it would. I said I wouldn’t demand your soul, but you’d certainly be risking it. I’d gladly engage to keep you physically safe until you have time to repent, so far as the decision lies with me, but I can’t answer for the actions of the Almighty. All I’m asking you to do, so far, is to consider whether you may be seriously displeasing Him anyway, when all the implications of your actions are viewed objectively. I just want a chance to show you that if you are going to insist on gaining your education by operating a computer, you might just as well let me take your leg from you – painlessly, of course. Are you willing to listen to reason?”

“I like a good argument. Or are you just trying to delay me past the deadline so I’ll fail my test? Maybe my education can be an important weapon against you in

the future. That's it. Begone, Satan."

"Not so fast, my young friend. No matter how long we talk, it will only take up five minutes of this world's time. I guarantee it. See, the time we've spent so far is only two seconds." Randolph looked at his watch and found that only two seconds had passed since his setting it, though the watch was running. "That could be a trick," he said. "I warn you, if it is, I'll learn what I can on my own, to get even, if I can with the help of God."

"The education I'll give you in our forthcoming discussion will be weapon enough to use against me if we don't reach agreement," said the Devil. "Though the main points have already been discovered. If they hadn't, I wouldn't take the risk. But now... Will you talk?"

"I'm listening." The notion of gaining from the Devil ideas to be used in the service of God appealed to Randolph. Besides, he wanted that scholarship, and the Devil, not God or his guardian angel, had responded positively to the prayer he had made.

"One preliminary question," said the Devil. "Why did you walk over here instead of driving? Your father has a car. Do you enjoy walking?"

"No. I just like to depend on my own resources. And they don't yet include my

own car.”

“Very good. Now then: What, in the natural order, is the most significant element in the relationship of God and Man?”

“A human act,” said Randolph, remembering from high school religion classes.

“And what is a human act?”

“An action involving use of intellect and will.”

“Is that an adequate definition of human act? Don’t angels, and my humble self, perform acts of intellect and will? Haven’t you defined personal act rather than human act?”

“All right. A human act is an act involving use of intellect and will by a physical being, a composite of body and soul.”

“So the use of a body is an integral part of a human act?”

“Yes.”

“How much of your body are you using when you operate a computer?”

“My hands and my brain, and the nerves, muscles and bones connecting them. I don’t use my feet, except as an aid in sitting to operate.”

“That isn’t the point. The main part of your body used in operation of a computer is your brain. Are you then using as much of your brain as you would

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be using if you performed mentally and bodily – using written calculation – the work for which you use a computer?”

“No.”

“So a man’s operation of a computer is not as fully human an action as is the operation of a genuine intellectual process.”

“No. But the decision to use a computer for a purpose in accordance with the will of God is a fully human act of the kind we’re talking about. It’s a decision using the brain, which is physical.”

“It may be the kind of human action you’re talking about. I’m talking about the sort of human action preferred by the kind of materialistic Deity who’d choose to become incarnate. I am not myself incarnate, you understand. What you see before you now is the result of manipulation of molecules, of a high order, but it isn’t incarnation – which is beneath me. I’m a pure spirit. But I’m here to educate you, not to flaunt my superiority to your species. We’re talking about the kind of bodily action that God, in His Infinite Wisdom, values because it is performed as a part of the functioning of a human soul. You will hardly assert that the inner working of a computer is that kind of function?”

“No, of course not.”

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“So it is not as pleasing to God, indeed not as valuable intrinsically – which a Theist would say is the same thing – as the kind of thinking that occurs in the human brain, even when the latter performs less efficiently?”

“I guess.”

“We aren’t dealing with guesses here. Is or is not the inner working of a computer completely worthless in the eyes of God – who actually does have them, for some reason – compared to the most inane meandering of a human mind?”

“I suppose it is. But that line of thinking, if correct, would apply to all uses of machinery, wouldn’t it?”

“All use of fuel-powered machinery, at least. Why not?”

“Why, that’s mind-boggling. All the use man has made of machinery and animals since he started to make any progress at all, would be like...like...like...”

“Like cutting off a healthy leg to walk with a wooden one? Exactly. But it may not apply to the use of animals or of machinery not powered by fuel. You see, these can be joined to man, in the highest form of union open to them. Man’s use of a hand-wielded tool, whose movement depends on the movement of man’s body, is sanctified, in the eyes of God, by being made the object of direct bodily action and skill. Writing with a pen is a more animal, and therefore more human,

operation than using a manual typewriter, because it brings the implement more fully under the domination of the soul which informs the writer's body. And even writing with a manual typewriter is still a human action, because the body's action directly moves the type, while typing with an electric is not, because its type is moved – in response, it is true, to bodily action – directly by the power of electricity, from outside the body. In the same way, riding a bicycle is a human action, while driving a car is not, and walking is even more fully a human action than riding a bicycle. And riding a horse or a horse and carriage is a human action because there is a bond of shared knowledge and emotion between the man and the animal, on the highest level attainable to the brute, which raises the animal in the eyes of God. By using animals in this way, Man could be giving animals a place analogous to that of hair or beard, in relation to the Mystical Body of Christ. But of course, one can cut hair or shave beard. Animals aren't essential to man's life. But the operation of a computer has neither a direct physical contact with man nor a bond of knowledge with him. Nor does any fuel-powered machine.”

“If what you're saying is true, why hasn't the Church said it?”

“Mostly, I think, because I was careful not to have the question raised during the lifetime of Thomas Aquinas. That smartass caused me enough trouble on the



issues that did come to his attention. And this one mightn't be raised even now if a certain 'spoiled priest' hadn't been allowed to share his bread with a cat in his playpen. If he stops trying to make a name for himself in print and decides to contact a thoughtful bishop, the waste material may well come into sudden contact with the ventilating device, so far as the relation of the Church and industrial society is concerned. But he has his vanity, and I'm working on him. Even he is fairly sure that using a computer as a printing press, so to speak, which would be a mechanical process and not a 'mental' one, must be all right if the electricity employed were generated by direct action of human or animal."

"What did the cat have to do with it?"

"Animality treasured for its own sake is a counterweight to excessive spiritualism, I think God would say. Valuing animality only for the sake of rationality that happened to inhabit it, can easily lead to what orthodox Christians call the warped attitude of the Manichees and other Dualists, who hold that matter is evil and created by myself – as if I could be bothered."

"But animals are only meant to be of service to man, not valued for their own sake; I learned that the hard way."

"Right, so there's no chance of your becoming a veterinarian instead of a

psychologist? There've been rumors in certain circles that you might have a talent in that direction."

"Not for me. I had a dog named Bounder once, and a neighbour's cat named Mischief blinded him and he had to be put away. That hurt so much, I'll never become attached to another animal. I couldn't be committed to keeping them alive for people who'd have to lose them eventually anyway."

"That's a very human reaction. But you could become a veterinary researcher without having any personal involvement with pets."

"Sure," said Randolph, cheerfully; "find a cure for the leukaemia that finally got Mischief."

"You're going to lose your family one day," the Devil said.

"I'll get them back. They've got immortal souls. But once an animal is dead, it's gone forever. Animals are for studying, and maybe for work, not for loving. People are for loving."

"People are animals, too. And people can be lost forever; I'm not entirely unsuccessful."

"I know. You're tempting me strongly, now that I see your logic. It's only an animal part of me you're asking me to give up, in return for help in performing

another non-animal function that can mean a lot to me and to the people I want to help. But I don't want to be lost forever.”

“We've been over that. That part is up to God.”

“Well, I made the nine first Fridays three years ago, and I was sincere when I made them. I'm half inclined to take the chance.”

“I won't say you'll never regret it, but you'll get the worth of your leg. A degree in psychology will still be valuable even if the Church does declare computers to be obstructions to the art of human living. If it does that, of course, it must, to be consistent, do the same for all fuel-powered machinery, and you will then have it proved to you – if you remain a Catholic – that your sacrifice was gravely counter to the will of God and a crime against your own humanity. But people are using computers and other machinery all the time and the Church stays quiet. In the light of that complacency, it can hardly blame you if you sacrifice half a leg to assure your future well-being and a chance of helping other people, in a society it is allowing to depend on these things for prosperity.”

“One thing I need to know. Did you set up this scholarship deal to put me in this position?”

“No. The arrangement is entirely the brainchild of a wealthy, very Christian old

gentleman who cares about computers.”

“Well, if the Church of God can allow us all to stumble in such error for so long, I guess I can afford to make one mistake, and if it isn’t error, one leg more or less can’t make much difference. You’ve got a deal.”

“Stout fella. Now, go back to your work, right away.”

Randolph’s head jerked sharply. He was alone in the room.

He felt fear, then glad relief. He calmed. He thought carefully, in stern composure. He was no nearer the solution he needed; so far as that went, his thoughts were nil. Then he decided that if the deal offered in that quick dream – his watch, still running properly of course, showed that it was eight:twenty-one – were really available, he was ready to accept. “I do accept your offer, Satan,” he said then silently.

At once, he realized that the way to overcome the computer’s memory limitation was to put into the program a system command that would, after a certain number of transfers and money amounts had been read in, add up the total amount of money transferred and erase the readings previous to the total, then record that number of readings again, add it to the previous total, erase the prior total, and continue that process ad infinitum. The same would be done with the

number of transfers.

Relieved, Randolph began to write the program, his thought processes flowing at what was, even for him, indeed a rapid pace. He finished it by nine-forty, and, anxiously, began to test it out. By ten o'clock he was confident that his program was working. He tested it a bit more, and by ten-twenty was ready to tell Dr. Pond that, as far as he was concerned, the scholarship test was finished. And he was confident he had put in a good performance.

As he walked home, he reflected that after a hospital stay which might start May first or earlier, walking might be even more of a chore than it was now, but he also reflected that one gets used to chores. Anyway, he would one day, not too far off, have, if it turned out to be necessary, a car adapted to the requirements of a one-legged man. But as he walked on, the thought occurred to him that he should have seen much sooner than he did the solution to the problem he had been set. And he realized then that if the Devil had been in the details he had dreamed, he had not got special help of a positive kind. Rather, the Devil had only removed an inhibition of his thinking which the Devil himself had caused, so that he would require help. He resented that, then shrugged. A deal was a deal. He hoped. If the offer had not been real, he'd sinned mortally (which was in solid spiritual sense

far worse than losing a leg) without the gain for which he'd dared. But his benefiting by the scholarship would make it difficult to repent; he might eventually have to forgo his gain to save his soul; mere remorse wasn't repentance.

When he got home, his mother said, "Elizabeth called. She wants you to call back." He dialled his friend's number, and she answered on the third ring. "Oh hi, Randy. Listen, I figure you're old-fashioned about things like this, but I can't keep myself from asking any longer. Will you take me to the dance at Coronation on the second?"

There was a sharp pain in his right knee.

II

THE MAGIC REVOLVER

CHAPTER 1

Quick-draw scenes of the two Clint Eastwood “spaghetis” crowded his imagination as Edmund Peddle walked, in the autumn night air, along Chapel Street from the front steps of the Regal Theatre in Angle Stream, absentmindedly through the small crowd leaving from the side door toward Eastvale and the cars parked along it. He crossed Middle Street and began to walk up Read, mind glowing in the aftermath of depicted violent action which had hurt no real person.

Edmund was still in that blurring warm mental haze when, about ten minutes later, on O’Connor Drive, he heard a girl’s sharp scream, cut short, from the far side of the canteen-and-dressing-room building off to his left, just being passed, in Marjorie Bowring Park. Not jolted from reverie but drawn more deeply into it, he

immediately conceived himself heroic rescuer, wishing, as he ran down the short slope of the road's side, that he had a gun with him, to make the situation proper and complete. He turned the corner of the canteen and stopped. Dark shadows close together at the end of the wheelchair ramp were backgrounded by the white wall lighted by the moon, in gloom cast by building's being on hither side of two bright lights. "Damn zipper's stuck," said the voice of the second crouching shadow. The third was under the two.

"Let her alone!" It sounded shrill to Edmund, but faces showed dim, turning up. "F— off, man," said the nearest, in a young voice, mean.

"Let her alone, I said. Get up. Now." Good; not shrill. Part of shadow blurred, and there was a sound of striking. "She'll keep till Turkey learns his lesson. Now, F---er, what you buttin' in fer? You know the c---?"

"That doesn't matter. Get out of here now. Maybe she didn't recognize you; you might get clear before the police get here."

"The police aren't in this, man. Not till after. Too late." Arms of standing shadows moved; moonlight flickered as metal flicked. *Knifers in Angle Stream!* Time to bluff. Edmund assumed gunman's crouch, hand dropping beneath right hip, with light enough behind him, he knew, to give them the gesture's meaning.



Then he thought, *Damn Clint Eastwood!* as fear broke into glory-hogging dream in moonlight: any gun he might have'd be under windbreaker, on the left. Should've faked cross-draw prep. Time to run, hope police get here to save the girl. He was a good runner, ran for fitness, running for life not difficult, probably quite safe. Then his hand swept up instinctively to solid weight at hip. He shot each would-be assailant in the right foot, and then he did run as they fell screaming, but he was running not toward the police. He scrambled up the slope to the Drive and ran back to the top of the hill near the Somme Armoury, no cars passing either way. He turned left at Elston, dropping into an easy lope to become a late-night jogger till he reached the *Western Observer* property. Then he walked down the paved lane across the lawn to East Street, and settled into his customary quick stride. Then it hit him. Where was the gun. He groped at his hip. Nothing there. He let his hand fall relaxed beyond the hip, willing comforting weight to hang there again, and brought the hand back up, as he had so explosively before. Three fingers touched metal and wood, and his thumb closed on the hammer-ear. A man coming out of the Yu Garden was looking at him curiously, and he shoved his hand into his pocket. Exploration would have to wait.

When he reached home, near the upper end of Mount Benedict Avenue, the

house was dark except for the light in the kitchen. His father had the eight o'clock shift at the mill next morning, and his mother always went to bed when Sam did. Edmund let himself in, got a glass of milk and six Fig Newtons, wolfed them down, and went upstairs to his bedroom. Inside, he dropped his hand beneath the weight now solid on his hip and brought it up as he'd done on East Street. A gun slid up and was visible. It was a Navy Colt cap-and-ball somewhere about halfway between .22 and .45. There was a cap on each of the six nipples and each chamber was loaded. Shifting the revolver to his left hand, he reached down with his right and felt a holster, though he couldn't see one. He felt from the holster along an unseen belt around his waist. He willed them to vanish from touch, and they didn't. He took the gun into his right hand and dropped it into holster and willed them to vanish from touch and they did. He willed return and the weight came back. He drew the gun again and it was visible in his hand. He holstered it, it vanished, and he unbuckled his own belt and dropped his jeans, and willed return, and the weight returned. He dropped his shorts and repeated testing. The magic still worked. Magic! Going crazy? Could be. How settle? Ah! What will paper say tomorrow about shooting in park? Can wait till then, anyway. That decided, he went to bed and hardly slept all night, though in the morning he was

neither tired nor sleepy. He didn't listen to the news on the radio, fearing he'd betray himself to his mother watching him eat breakfast, but after eating went on to his job at the Angle Stream Video Mart, where he found himself functioning normally, or so it seemed to him, though a weight at his hip was coming and going all morning, at his volition. Customers returning movies mentioned hearing of two youths, wounded by gunshot, being arrested in the park, for sexual assault, but he felt he gave no indication of personal interest in the matter, though his heart quickened every time it was brought up. At noon he bought a copy of *The Western Observer* in the Buyer's Drug Store in the same building. The story he was looking for said:

Two young Angle Stream men found wounded by gunshot – each in the right foot – have been arrested on charges of sexual assault, as a result of an incident alleged to have occurred Wednesday night at Marjorie Bowring Park. The two were treated at hospital after an RNC constable leaving the police headquarters on nearby College Drive heard shots from the park. Details are being withheld pending further investigation. The accused were to appear in court 2 p.m. today.

“Not much about the shooting,” he said, putting down the paper as a customer approached with a tape. He turned the paper toward her, a tall blonde with long

hair and attractively irregular features.

“Interested in shootings, are you?” she said with a smile but took the paper and looked at the item, missing the blush that came to his chagrin. “They don’t say much, do they? In the States, they’d have at least the names of the accused, and probably a detailed account from the D.A. nailing the poor suckers to the wall before trial. We Canadians are better that way, I think.”

“Have you been in the States much, ma’am?”

“Just a year, taking a journalism course in New York. But I thought I liked teaching better, so I’m at Queen of Heaven now. Seems okay; I’ll probably stay awhile. Well, good day to you.” He watched as she walked out. She had a nice walk. Her name was Anna MacGillivray.

He phoned Father Walker right away and made an appointment for eight-thirty that night.

Edmund didn’t talk much at supper and responded abstractedly when his mother asked about the number of movies rented so far that day and whether there’d been any demand for dirty ones. She was concerned about the possibility of her son, a prospective seminarian after his postponed university education, being defiled by purveying dirty movies. They had a continuing argument over

whether incidental sex in the kind of films the Video Mart rented, constituted defilement. He was more affected by her position than he let on, as he himself was fairly readily aroused by scenes relatively innocuous by today's standards. Tonight he hadn't much heart for the argument, and that bothered his mother a bit.

"You haven't gone and got attached to some girl, have you?"

"Well, what if I did? I wouldn't be any worse off than Dad."

"You shouldn't endanger your vocation."

"The Bishop isn't as sure as you are yet that I've got one, Mom. And Father Michael thought I was emotionally too immature for university, much less the seminary. I've got to grow up somehow during the next few years."

"Well, dear, you just bear in mind you certainly don't have to get a girl in trouble to grow up."

"You don't even have to go through the motions, son, without gettin' 'er in trouble," mentioned his father.

"Sam!"

"Well, that's what you meant, isn't it, dear. Goin' through the motions'd wreck a vocation same as gettin' a girl pregnant."

"You don't have to be so vulgar, Sam. Motions! The idea!"

Edmund was grateful to be left out of the rest of it.

When he sat in Father Michael Walker’s office he stammered a bit, then stood, saying, “Look at this, Father,” and drawing the gun.

“Nice trick, Ed. I hope it isn’t loaded.”

“It’s not a trick, Father; it’s magic.”

“I know it’s magic. Magic’s a trick.”

“Not in Chesterton’s ‘Magic’. I thought you’d understand, you of all people.”

“Magic’s like—”

“‘Ghosts: the principle is valid but examples are rare’; I know. But if this isn’t magic, it’s a miracle, and I’m not worth a miracle.

“Watch.”

He put the gun back in the holster and it disappeared. “Here, Father, come feel if there’s a gun on my hip.”

“You setting me up for sexual assault, Ed?” It was a joke, but almost obligatory in the light of sensational news about priests in Newfoundland in recent years. Ed laughed. “Okay, just move the edge of your hand up and down here, while I hold my hand out like this.” (He was ready to draw.)

Father Michael did as suggested, then touched Ed’s palm on request. Ed

brought his hand up slowly to the gunbutt and closed three fingers around it (as Sam had taught after reading *Shane* when Ed was nine years old). “Now, Father, reach your finger around inside my hand.” The priest did so and tapped a gunbutt. Ed turned so Father Walker could see the inside of his hand, and the priest’s eyes widened. “I can’t see it.”

“Touch it again, Father.” That was done. Ed drew the gun; it became visible as it cleared the holster. Father Walker’s face was pale under the tan. “Magic,” he said. “The preternatural dealing of angels or devils with the things of this world. You’re marked for greatness, Ed, in good or evil, and the nature of the weapon suggests it’s likely to be evil.”

“Why, Father?”

“Instead of explaining that myself, I think I’ll just suggest you join Malcolm Kenwood’s fencing club at Coaker College and get to know Dr. Kenwood and his methods. You may not be ready for direct, blunt teaching by one who tends to be too abstract about such things. But I’d advise you never to draw that gun unless you’re attacked, and that with a weapon, in danger of death with no other means of escape. Buy a pellet gun for practicing drawing and aiming. For God’s sake, Edmund, put that away!” Ed holstered the gun. “Edmund, this thing is a bit like

the One Ring; it has a certain amount of corrupting influence just by being a thing of power. And its nature – but you’ll come to know that. It’s from a time when use of guns was relatively innocent, I think – as much as it could be. And the experts say the devils are under obedience to the angels of God, so although there’s danger to your soul, there’s potential for great good in your having this. Ed, does it have anything to do with the shooting of those two in the park last night?”

Ed told him the whole story, then asked whether he should tell the police about it all.

“Interesting question. Ordinarily, a person thus connected with a crime, or attempt at crime, should tell the police everything, if only to prevent their wasting time on investigation otherwise needless. But I doubt that ownership of a weapon given through magic is meant to be publicized as it would be if you did that. I’d say you are meant to be a secret influence on the fate of many people, especially in Newfoundland. If the police come to you about it – and it’s my guess they won’t – talk to them freely, but I’d say, don’t go to them. The girl will probably be witness enough against her attackers.”

Ed felt relieved, in a way he was glad he didn’t have to talk about. He resolved



to approach Malcolm Kenwood.

When Edmund called the philosophy professor and fencing coach, the latter replied, “Well, the season is well underway, and we’re not actually soliciting new students, but how are you at learning physical things generally – were you, for instance, fairly fast and accurate as a kid with bat or hockey stick? Or do you perchance play badminton?”

“I guess it’s yes to both, Dr. Kenwood. I’m supposed to be fairly good at badminton, also table tennis.”

“There’ll be a place for you in the group, then, even if you should prove somehow a duffer with a foil. But you probably won’t. Some people pick it up fast. We’ll see. The Dunedain Fencing Club meets six-thirty to eight-thirty Wednesday evenings and ten to noon Saturday in the multi-purpose room, over the pool. You can meet me at the cage Saturday at nine-fifty.”

“Thank you, Dr. Kenwood.”

Saturday morning he walked the short distance up to Sir William Coaker College and asked the security guard where the “cage” was. Being told, he went there.

“Dr. Kenwood? I’m Edmund Peddle.”

“Glad to meet you, Edmund,” said the slender man of medium height with brown hair, “but I’m not Kenwood. I’m Oliver Kendall, just out from St. John’s to start reporting for the Observer. Malc and I have always looked a lot alike, except for the beard. We were mistaken for each other quite a bit at St. Bon’s, when he didn’t have it.”

“I thought you’d shaved it since I saw him last. I only know him to see him, till we talked on the phone Thursday. Do you know Father Michael Walker? He said he was at St. Bon’s with Dr. Kenwood.”

“Yeah, I know Mike. We all finished Grade Twelve last year they had high school. Mike and Malc were boarders and I was a day boy. We’ve all kept in touch during the years. Lots of good arguments, by mail and in person, mostly by mail for me till now.”

The hall door opened and the real Kenwood came through. “Hi, Cowboy,” said Kenwood, to which Kendall replied with a slight sneer that managed somehow to be wholly good-natured, “Good morrow, Sir Swordsman. Got a new student here, Malc?”

“Hello, Dr. Kenwood. I’m Edmund Peddle. I was talking to you on the phone the other day.”

“Right. Glad to see you.”

The security guard from out front had followed Kenwood in, and he unlocked the cage door. They went in, and Kenwood invited Ed to pick a fencing jacket to fit, from among those rolled up on the shelves, and also a mask. “You’re righthanded, or left?”

“Right.”

“Okay, there’s a fairly good right-hand glove, and here’s a foil you can use.” To the guard he said, “You can leave the door unlocked, if you like, till the others come.” Kenwood and Kendall picked up long, seemingly identical, bags with both shoulder straps and hand straps, which looked as if they might hold musical instruments but which Ed took, from the context, to be special cases for fencing equipment. They went down the corridor and up the stairs to what turned out to be the “multi-purpose room”, where Ed helped the others roll back a blue wrestling mat which took up three-quarters of the floor. Kendall put on a fencing jacket – all three were wearing jeans – and donned a mask, then took a small flat case from his equipment bag while Kenwood put on plastic hockey mask and a worn white shirt.

Kenwood smiled and said, “Here’s something we like to practice.” He took up

a fencing weapon with a swept-back handguard, and walked to the far end of the room. Kendall took a CO2 pistol, which Kenwood later said had cost a lot, custom made, from the small case.

Kenwood gave a salute with his sword and launched himself. It looked to Ed like a peculiar, specially fast, combination of gymnastics and ballet as Kenwood came slantingly, irregularly, to left and right, back up the room, always on the approach oblique, ducking and dodging, as spots of paint appeared here and there on the wall behind, correspondingly with spurts of sound from the gun in Kendall's hand. There were six spots on the wall when Kenwood tapped Kendall on the top of the mask with his sword. Kendall said – Ed felt the man had sensed his eagerness – “Like to try it, Ed?”

“Yes, sir!”

“Malc?” Kendall was reloading the paint-ball gun.

“Okay,” said Kenwood. “Let's see if you can hit a moving target. Use a gun much?”

“Rifle mostly. I used to be fast on the draw playing cowboys years ago, but no way of knowing if that was accurate. I always thought I was.” He grinned.

Kenwood went back to the far end, saluted, and came at him. Ed saw there was

no pattern in his side-to-side, after the first few shots missed, then got rid of thought-induced inhibition and his reflex-firing in trust of instinct scored twice on the leaping man.

“Bravo, bravo, bravo!” called Kendall. “Amateur gunny brings down Knight of Swords!”

“You’re good, Peddle,” said Kenwood. “I’ll have to practice with you more often.”

“Why do you do it?”

“Other things being equal, the wielder of a sword is morally superior to the wielder of fuel-powered weaponry. So it behooves the morally superior to acquire skill against the degraded.”

“What makes you think a gunman is degraded – sir?”

“It’s obvious when you think seriously about it, Peddle. Look–”

“Very obvious,” said Kendall.

“It is, to the right-minded. Look, Peddle, man is a tool-using animal. The rational animal is the highest form of being in this world, and the other beings in it reach their fulfilment through him. Other animals are fulfilled by being companions in his well-being or sacrifices to it, and inanimate objects are fulfilled

by being employed by him, for whose employment they are designed. The more direct the usage, the more perfect the fulfilment. A tool moved directly by man's own action is, in its nature, a better tool than one moved indirectly as a result of man's mere contriving. It enjoys a closer union with its final cause, the reason for its existence. A sword is moved directly by a man – or woman, should that be necessary. A gun is a most imperfect weapon, for a gun without bullets is useless even though a bullet is not an integral part of a gun but is only contained by it and propelled not by but merely from it. A gun is only the place where a chemical reaction occurs, to send out the thing that really does the damage. But the edge or point of a sword is really part of the sword, so the sword really causes directly the harm it is used for. And the sword's movement is directly caused by the action of man, whereas the bullet's movement is caused by a chemical reaction in something not even alive, much less rational, which is therefore decidedly an inferior kind of chemical reaction compared to the kind taking place in a living body, especially a living body that thinks. Does all this make sense?"

"Nope," said Kendall, and Edmund said, "It sounds as if it should, but I think it's over my head."

"Under your arse," said Kendall.

“It shouldn’t be, not if you really think about it,” said Kenwood, ignoring Kendall’s remark. “But most people don’t think about it. Our masters give us other things to do.”

“What masters?”

“He means Satan and all the other infernal, loathsome, ugly, perilous, deadly fiends and devils and demons,” said Kendall. “He still believes in all that outmoded mythology of the true religion’s early days.”

Ed was about to say he also did, but Kenwood said first, “He’s in for a surprise. I keep praying it’ll be a pleasant one. Poor old Kendall is a convinced and committed Modernist, which is Catholicism perverted for this particular degraded age.”

“Didn’t Chesterton say a man who marries his age will soon be widowed?” said Edmund.

“Something like that. At least you’re on the right road, if you’re reading him. Have you read ‘The Sword of Wood’?”

“Never heard of it.”

“I’ll lend you a copy if your book-return record is good.”

“I always return Father Michael’s books in good order. He lent me ‘Magic’.”

“If he trusted you with ‘Magic’, I can trust you with the ‘Sword’, I guess.”

“What’s the difference between G.K.C. and ABC?” asked Kendall.

“I don’t know,” Ed replied.

“The alphabet is useful,” said Kendall.

“Knowledge for its own sake is more valuable than knowledge for use,” said Kenwood.

Other students began arriving while they washed the paint from the walls, and the fencing lessons began. One of the older fencers had an artificial leg, below the right knee. He was, Edmund found, an M.A. lecturing in psychology at the college. He had adapted well to his handicap and was only a little slow and awkward on his recovery from the lunge. His name was Randolph Rand.

When Ed was on his way out, he noticed Kenwood, Kendall, Darlene Duncan (one of seven women in the club), and Rand, going into the faculty common room. For no particular reason, he suddenly felt left out.

After the following Wednesday night’s session, Kendall said to Edmund, “Your father’s Samuel Peddle of the electricians’ union?”

“Yes.”

“I’d like to talk to him about the wrongful dismissal case from the mill that



started before Judge Edwards today. I'm covering it and I'd like to talk to someone who knows the background. Would your father do that or suggest someone who could? I could give you a ride down the hill now, if that's convenient?"

"Okay. It can't hurt to ask him."

"Do you mind if Kenwood drops in with us? I usually give him a ride home and we usually drop in at the Benmill for a drink after fencing."

"Oh, okay."

When they arrived, the Peddles were watching television. "Edmund tells me you two play Progress Versus Guts," Sam said after introductions, which included being told Kendall was on business.

"We've never actually called it that," said Kenwood.

"Neither has Edmund. But that's the way it sounds. Too much like Guts Without Brains, sounds like."

"Do you play table tennis, Mr. Peddle?" Edmund had mentioned it.

"I like it, got good reflexes, but I can't outthink the other fella, way some can."

"I'm real good at table tennis. I use essentially the same mental skill to fake out Kendall. And try to fake out Edmund. But he's sharp. But I think I nearly got him

figured out.”

“You hope. He’s my son and I haven’t done that. What have you got against progress, anyway?”

“I just happen to think the quality of life is bettered or worsened according as life itself centres around greater or lesser beings, and fuel-powered machines are really lesser beings, compared to live ones. But you got to compare them as beings, not just helps to comfort and power, though.”

Sam Peddle thought for a while, thumb and middle finger plucking at the right mustache tip while he chewed his tongue with his lips closed. “That’s the only good argument against progress I ever heard,” he finally pronounced.

“There are others. C.S. Lewis said man’s increasing control over nature means some men’s control over other men, with nature as the tool.”

Sam thought about that, too. “So there’s two arguments against progress. I guess that’s why we need strong unions, to keep the money men in their place.”

“That’s just what the unions are doing, too: keeping the money men in their places of power, when they should be throwing them out and making sure all men are equal in economic opportunity, so we could have a genuine free-enterprise system. Instead, Big Labour supports Big Business by keeping it tolerable to

people who value security over freedom. If it weren't for the unions insisting only on high pay and cosy work conditions, Capitalism would be dead."

"And you'd have communism instead, where the workers can't fight back at all. What choice is that?"

"The choice between the devil and the deep sea. But instead of serving the devil or drowning, we could insist on going back to the land and being our own bosses. Besides Capitalism and Communism there's Distributism."

"What's that?"

"Giving everyone enough land, or enough share of resources, to live independently."

"This distributism and anti-progressivism is great for farmers and hunters, all right, but what about people like me whose abilities are tied up with machinery?"

"Where machinery is really needed is in medicine – X-rays, CT scanners, that kind of thing. But the electricity they use should be produced by direct actions of men or animals. Technology with a living body, not just masked with a human face."

"Well, I'm too old to learn new tricks, I guess. Maybe you can teach Edmund to change the world. As long as the money men leave enough of Newfoundland

free to hunt over, I'll have to fight 'em over the rest even if it means really supportin' 'em. I got to make a livin' with my own abilities, and there's not much call yet for monkey-powered generators." Then he turned to Kendall. Told that the reporter suspected there was more to the dismissal case of the electrical worker than had yet met the eye of the court, and that Kendall wanted background, off the record, to help decide whether seemingly trivial points of evidence should be highlighted in his report, Sam asked, "And how far off is off the record?"

Kendall said, "What I take off the record, I don't tell anyone, not even the editor, though technically I'm supposed to tell him most of the time. But I've heard too many editors say, 'Don't repeat this; I was told it in confidence.'"

Sam looked at Kenwood.

Kenwood said, "There are three people besides myself and my confessor I'd trust to keep a secret. One I'm married to, one I avoid like the plague, and the other is Kendall."

Sam looked back at Kendall, and, starting to get up, beckoned to him. "I gotta little den in the basement."

The two went downstairs. Edmund's mother said, "What a lovely beard you

have, Dr. Kenwood. When we were courting, I used to ask Sam to let his grow, but he wouldn't, and now it's fashionable again, he's too set in his ways."

"I got set in my ways in the sixties. My mother and father weren't happy at all about my beard, especially my father. I just don't like the idea of suppressing growing things for no good reason, though I have grown a little vain of it. So thank you for the compliment, Mrs. Peddle."

"That sounds nice and practical. Edmund would look nice in a beard, wouldn't he?"

"Mom!"

"You're like your father. An old man already, set in your ways."

"I am not."

"Well, if you stop shaving tomorrow, we'll have baked alaska for supper."

"That'd almost be enough to make me shave," said Kenwood.

"You really like men with beards, Mom?"

"Any live woman likes for a man to look like a man. Isn't there a French saying about that?" She was looking at Kenwood.

"Vive la difference."

"I thought so. Something like that."

“Okay, Mom, I’ll start tomorrow.”

Kenwood said, “Start shaping the edge from the beginning, Edmund. Looks much tidier than hair sprouting wherever it wants.”

“Thanks.”

When Sam and Kendall had returned and the two visitors prepared to go, Sam said, “Thanks for teaching the boy to use a hand weapon, you two. I’m a fairly good shot with a rifle, but I’d be hopeless on the street with a walking stick, which he’s likely to need when he’s my age, if life in Newfoundland keeps gettin’ Canadianized. Used to be a nice quiet place, Angle Stream.”

“It’s still quieter than St. John’s,” said Kendall.

“Well, that stands to reason.”

When they’d gone, his mother said, “They seem like real nice men, Edmund.”

“Yeah, they’re pretty good.”

“That Kenwood got a head on his shoulders,” said Sam. “And Kendall got eyes in his head, too.”

When he noticed Edmund’s jaws contrasting with the shaved skin below, a few days later, Sam said only, after a quick stare, “Well, there’s no hippies nor beatniks around now, anyway.” Edmund felt some relief.

Saturday morning, after fencing, Kenwood passed him *The Sword of Wood* and invited him to the faculty room for coffee with the others. One of the topics of conversation was the wearing of armour, which Kenwood opposed, saying defence should be not a matter of passive concealment but of active wielding, so that a shield, carried as much as worn, was legitimate, but mail or plate garments not. Kendall's reaction was: "Where *do* you get those ideas?"

## CHAPTER 2

“I hear you’re pretty good with a gun,” said a half-familiar voice behind Edmund; he nearly dropped the tape he was putting back on a rack, and turned. Anna MacGillivray was smiling at him, her right eyebrow a little more than usually higher than the other. “It’s time someone put Dr. Kenwood in his place,” she continued, to his quick relief as eyebrow went back down. “Darlene Duncan told me you’ve shot down the great swordsman four weeks running. Greatly to his chagrin, I hope. We used to be fairly close till he got too tiresome about the moral superiority of swords to guns, and the awesome onus on the soul of man to use the morally correct weapon. Good Lord.”

“He didn’t seem too chagrined. He seems to like the challenge of trying to get me.”

“That’ll last until he sees he can’t. Face it, the man’s middle-aged, and you’ve young reflexes. Youth will be served.”



“Have you read ‘A Piece of Steak’? I think that’s where I came across that phrase.”

“No, I saw it somewhere else. Forget where. Who wrote about a piece of steak?”

“Jack London. Short story. I think it was called ‘A Piece of Steak’. About two fighters, one young and lively, the other older and underfed.”

“Not swordfighters, I hope.”

“No, boxers. Early in the boxing days. I think maybe bareknuckles.”

“If Kenwood were consistent, that’s what he’d rely on.”

“I don’t think so. It’s consistent with man’s nature as a tool-using animal, for him to wield a weapon of some kind.”

“Straight from the mouth of the master. You’ll soon be ashamed you can gun him down.”

“I don’t think so. I might learn to be ashamed of using a gun, but I’d never be ashamed of an ability. Especially if he convinces me swords are really the best weapon; I can transfer my co-ordination. I’m pretty good with them, too. He says I’ve got the makings of a really good fencer; I come by the moves naturally, he said.”

“What you need is a good dose of movie cavalry with Winchesters surrounded by hordes of bloodthirsty savages using bows and arrows.”

“I sometimes think I’m a little too addicted to that.”

“Me, too. But not the movies so much as the books. Louis L’Amour and Clair Huffaker are my favourites. Huffaker’s much better, but Louis wrote le more.”

Edmund laughed. “What about el more?”

“Leonard?”

“Yeah. I’ve read some of his. Liked them pretty good.”

“Not bad. But as a plain action writer he’s less than L’Amour and for a novelist I prefer Huffaker.”

“I’ve never read Huffaker. Never heard of him before. He’s really good, eh?”

“Really good. I haven’t seen anything by him in the local bookstores lately, though. But I’m always ready to hook another believer. I’ve an extra copy of ‘The Cowboy and the Cossack’ – I bought a copy on just the day a friend bought one for me, and I’ve kept my own copy as a test specimen for new borrowers. Bring it back in good condition and I might lend you another book.”

“Gee, that’d be marvellous. Thank you very much.”

“Good books naturally deserve to be spread around. I’m not generous, just have

a disinterested desire to propagate the good.” She was smiling, and Edmund smiled back, delighted with a sudden realization he was falling into friendship with a really attractive woman much older than he was.

Aware of smiling too long and too frankly, he stopped. “Where can I pick up ‘The Cowboy and the Cossack?’”

“I’ll drop it by here next time in.”

“Okay. I’ll be glad to get it. Thanks. Oh, can I keep it long enough for Dad to read, too? He likes a good western.”

“Be my guest.”

“Thanks.”

“You’re welcome.” She smiled again, and left.

That remark from behind about his being good with a gun had been particularly startling by reason of its being made on the day Robert Granger and William Wareham were to have a sentence hearing on the charge of sexual assault. They had originally elected trial by judge and jury when arraigned before a provincial court judge who visited their hospital room in the company of their lawyer and a Crown attorney, and had been remanded in custody, so that the RNC guard upon them had continued while they were in hospital but they had re-elected provincial

court and pleaded guilty, and the sentence hearing had been set for three weeks in advance of the day set for the preliminary hearing, when a convenient opening had appeared in the court's schedule. Edmund was a little anxious all day, therefore, till he was reassured by radio and television reports that the evidence at the hearing offered no clue to his identity.

The *Western Observer* account next day said that Granger and Wareham, in their early twenties, had met their putative victim, whose name was withheld by court order, at the Arts and Culture Centre swimming pool and asked her to accompany them to the Benmill Inn, where Granger's girlfriend would be awaiting them. The complainant was to be Wareham's date for the evening. As the three walked down O'Connor Drive the men had made a lot of sexual innuendo, not particularly unpleasant in tone and not, apparently, particularly unwelcome to the girl. But as they were passing the park, Granger suggested that open air sex, in reasonably cold air, was best of all. The girl said she hadn't tried it – yet, and Wareham said there was no time like the present. The girl laughed and suggested that she and Wareham step off in the park while Granger went on to the Benmill. Granger said, "What am I, black?" Wareham said, "He's not black, is he?" The girl suggested then that they all go on to the Benmill, but the

two men seized her and dragged her behind the canteen, where they were trying to have sexual intercourse with her when a stranger confronted them in the semi-dark and, faced by their flashing knives, shot each in the right foot. The bullets recovered by the police showed that their assailant had used a make of gun now unusual and the police were still looking for him and the gun. After hearing the arguments of counsel, the judge had set sentencing for a week later. Since no one but he and Father Walker knew about the gun, Edmund felt confident nothing would lead the police to him. He therefore set the paper aside, after reading the comics and solving the Jumble, and picked up the Louis L'Amour he was on that week. He had finished it by the time Miss McGillivray dropped off her book at the Video Mart, so that he was ready to start on that right away. He finished it in a couple of nights and was ready to return it on her next visit. She usually dropped in at noon every three days or so. She seemed pleased he was returning it so promptly. "How was it?"

"Splendid. I'd like to read more of his stuff. Are you sure it's out of print?"

"I've got all his books that I know about. Why don't you drop by my apartment sometime next week and have a look at my library. I've other things you might like, besides his."

Edmund suddenly was buoyant. “I’d like that.”

“Phone me before you come. I’m in the book. Sixteen-E Albert Street.”

“That’s close to where I live. Eighty-five Mount Benedict.”

She was home when he phoned at seven-thirty the next Tuesday night and she told him she’d be free at eight.

She came to the door of the basement apartment a few seconds after he rang the bell, and she smiled, saying, “‘Come into my parlour,’ said the spider to the fly. Though my parlour is also my dining room, I’m afraid.” He went down the steps ahead of her and into the main room, off which two doors opened in the wall opposite the one by which he entered. There was a table against the near wall, and a chesterfield set, with a low table bearing a record player, occupied the far end.

“Have a seat, my friend.” She gestured toward the furniture. Edmund went to the armchair and sat. The doorbell rang. Miss McGillivray went to answer it and came back with a man about her age. “Bob, this is Edmund Peddle. Edmund, this is Bob O’Gorman, just dropped in to grab a book or two from the library. Help yourself, Bob.”

O’Gorman went into the nearer of the rooms, leaving the door open. The room, meant as a second bedroom, contained a couch but was lined with shelves of

books, mostly paperback.

Miss MacGillivray sat on the chesterfield and put her right hand down on it, saying, “Why don’t you sit beside me?”

O’Gorman stuck his head around the doorjamb. “Yes, Edmund,” he said in a soft voice, “sit over here and get cozy.” He grinned an evil grin.

“Knock it off, Bob,” said Miss McGillivray. “Edmund and I are just literary companions.

“Besides, Bob, this ... boy ... *is* just a boy.” Fortunately, Edmund thought, he had sense enough to realize the truth of that, or it would have been really outrageous. He grinned widely.

“What a terrible thing to say to a young man,” said Miss MacGillivray. “But if C.S. Lewis is right about friendship we should be sitting side by side instead of looking at each other.” Edmund blushed, and went to sit at her right.

“Terrible is right,” said O’Gorman. “Terrible, terrible.” He went back to the books.

“May I get you tea or coffee? We won’t give Bob any.”

“Oh no, starve old Bob,” came the voice from the other room.

“Bob, you’re *de trop* at the moment,” said she. “Will you just get your books

and go, please?”

“Okay, okay. Got ‘em. Going.” He emerged. “‘Nostromo’ and ‘The Rescue’, okay?”

“Okay.”

“Thanks, Anna.”

“Welcome.”

“Nice to meet you, Edmund. Enjoy your talk about books. That’s all she ever does.” He ran for the door and slammed it behind him as Miss McGillivray straightened up with a book in hand and ceased poising to throw.

“He doesn’t have to be snide about it, does he?”

“No,” said Edmund, grinning again. She resumed her seat.

“So you liked ‘The Cowboy and the Cossack’?”

“Really great. Dad loved it, too; he was working from four to midnight, so we read it in shifts. It sounded just like the doings of a group of men without women; it has real masculine-group atmosphere.”

“So you caught that. I found it slightly foreign.”

“Yeah. It would be kinda rough.”

“You think I couldn’t ever be rough.”



“Not exactly that way. Not in your whole manner and outlook. I think you could be tough if you had to be. After all, you’re a teacher.”

“True. True.

“Tell me, did you see the point of the book as it affects the philosophy of weapons that Dr. Kenwood teaches?”

“Well, I thought Huffaker showed a lot of sympathy for the sword-wielding Cossacks among the good guys, and the remark about the sword having a thousand deaths in it and a rifle only a few, and then the other one about a rifle butt going on for ever, seem to indicate a certain belief in the sword’s being better.”

“Oh, there’s no question about the sword’s being morally a better weapon. The real question is whether you’re always limited to the sword or an equivalent weapon when your enemy’s using guns or bows or bombs or when he has you hopelessly outnumbered.”

“Well, the way the cowboys and the Cossacks worked against the Tartars...”

“Exactly. When your enemy’s morally bankrupt, you’re allowed to use almost any weapon against him. Isn’t that what Huffaker is saying?”

“I guess you’re right. They never even thought of treating the Imperial troops

that way.”

“That’s what I was thinking of. Do you think he’s right?”

“I don’t know. I’ve been trying to decide about that. Dr. Kenwood says a man is obliged always to use a man’s weapon, and that means a weapon depending on man’s own strength for the killing force behind it. It’s hard to refute that argument, especially when he says that superior weapons are always used in order to gain unfair advantage.”

“The killing force behind a bullet is a product of man’s ingenuity and of co-operation among men. Doesn’t that make a gun a manly weapon in that sense?” Her right eyebrow was quirked upward again, in that delightful way she had. “As for that other sense, doesn’t the manliness depend on whether the gun is used against men who have equal weapons? Have you read ‘A Lost Tale’, by Dale Estey?”

“No.”

“Anyway, there’s a scene in it where an old woman tells an intelligence officer, ‘If you’re shooting with a gun at someone who’s trying to shoot you, that’s well and good. But when you use an atomic bomb, you don’t know who you’re killing.’ Or words to that effect. That’s the whole point, I think. What we have to

do is teach men to be more manly in that higher sense and apply the rules of chivalry to the higher weapons: no shooting of enemies who aren't in equal position to shoot back. War should be a duel of nations, not a matter of one side throwing anything at all at the other. There should be agreement on the weapons to be used, and if there were, Kenwood's probably right they'd agree on the sword quicker than anything else. But most people, like me, have right now some belief in superior ingenuity, co-operation, and human progress, and I'd rather see armies, decked out in equally brilliant colours, try to out-manoeuve each other in hunting through woods, or rocks or hills, than have them square off with swords on a level field like dancers in a ballroom. Only in a case where a fully democratic nation has decided to wage all-out war against you could you even consider using nuclear weapons."

"But if one side, a country with a tyrant government, was using nuclear weapons, and the other side was too moral to use them, wouldn't that be the same as standing with a sword against a gun?"

"Pretty much, I suppose. That's why it's so important that men be educated to be manly in the higher sense and not use nuclear weaponry at all. They've got to learn to consider that their enemies may be fighting in good faith, just like

themselves, so that both sides can agree on the weapons to use. As I said: Duel between nations. Arms races usually end up in both sides being about equally and excessively armed, anyway. And a nation that breaks the agreement on weapons limitation should be nuked out right away.” She was smiling a wholly provocative smile – intellectually provocative.

“No. C.S. Lewis suggests in ‘That Hideous Strength’ that it’s always the good which suffers and dies beneath the power of the merely physically strong. And if that’s the case, it’s just as well to stand straight with a sword and let the gunman be a murderer if his will is bent enough.”

“Or stick to the gun and be bombed. I think I incline to Lewis’s view, and yours. But I think confining oneself to the sword is really a counsel of perfection where facing guns is concerned. That’s why I found Kenwood so tiresome. Imagine trying to enact a law requiring people always to turn the other cheek.”

“I’ve often thought that turning the other cheek might be enjoined by Our Lord as a tactic: when the other guy swings at the second cheek, you duck and punch back. If he doesn’t hit at it, you forgive him for the first blow.”

“I like the way you think, my friend. Don’t ever get tiresome like Kenwood.”

“I don’t find him tiresome. I think he’s truly chivalrous.”

“Anyone who tries to enforce the laws of chivalry on us shrewd and cunning peasant types is truly tiresome. So he’s got you nearly converted to holy knighthood, has he?”

Edmund grinned. “Almost. There’s just—”

“What? Well, of course, if you’d rather—”

“Can you keep a secret?”

“I never tell secrets. I’m totally trustworthy about them.” She was smiling gently.

“Will you keep this one?”

“Yes.”

“Look at this.” Edmund moved his left foot back a bit, pushed his right a bit forward, and turned a little on his left hip, drawing his gun.

“Neat trick. Is that registered? Have you a permit to carry?”

“Not just a trick. It’s real magic. Feel here.” Holding the gun in his left he ran his right forefinger along the top of the holster. She did the same, and her eyes widened.

“Another one,” she said softly.

“What?”

“I’ve known another young man with a weapon exactly like this, provided by angels.”

“*What?*”

“Put it away, please – loaded guns make me nervous when others are holding them – and I’ll tell you about him.”

Edmund reholstered the gun and then ran his hand along his hip, showing gun and holster had vanished from touch.

“I was working on a journalism assignment in New York that required me to travel on the subway for a long time, and one day a gang came through and started to insinuate that one old man might have a lot of money on him and that he might be generous enough to make a major loan. Two of them were bouncing knives on their palms, and the old man started to get scared and take out his wallet. Then a man about your age walked up to the group – I was behind him – and told the old man they were only joking. The gang started to get ugly, and the young man reached at his hip and then pointed his hand toward the roof, and I could see the gun-barrel pointing up ahead of his shoulder. The gang started to leave, and he told them to sit until the next stop and then get off, and they did exactly as they were told. And when they sat, he put the gun into something on his

hip, and it disappeared. Then he backed past me and sat again. I could hardly believe my eyes, and thought I must be hallucinating, so I waited till his stop and followed him off, and accosted him, telling him what I'd seen.

“He took me for a walk in a quiet street and showed me the gun close up. It disappeared when he put it back. He told me he'd felt the gun on his hip one night when he was stopped by muggers, and he'd used it to scare them away, sending a shot past the head of one of them. Someone he'd asked for advice, who had some dealings with the occult, told him that there are special weapons reserved for guardians of the right, which angels provide to them, to be kept with caution and vigilance and sometimes to be passed on from one guardian to the next, at the current guardian's discretion. If a guardian found no worthy replacement by the time his prowess began to fail, he was to deposit his weapon on a church altar with no one else around, and the angels would take it back and find the replacement themselves. But the devils know the guardians and their guns and can send someone subtle and cunning to get them. Their emissary can get the guns only by asking for them in a way that tricks the guardians into surrendering them willingly. So beware of anyone who asks to see your gun or hold it, posing as representative of angels, especially if it's someone you yourself haven't told about

the gun. Anyone else who just happens to see the gun when it's out won't be able afterward to remember the face of the guardian who held it, unless the guardian decides he can really trust that person. I became a good friend of the guardian in New York, and we still keep in touch. You might be able to learn more from him – I didn't happen to – but I promised never to tell anyone his name, and I sort of got the impression, just from his conversation, that guardians aren't supposed to have much to do with each other. I could be wrong about that.”

“Wow! Imagine me running into someone who really knows what's going on! Whatta coincidence!”

“Providence isn't just coincidence, Edmund. The angels could have drawn us together.”

“You think so?”

“Don't you?”

“Yeah, I guess. What else can you tell me?”

“That's about all I was told, really. Someday, when you really need it, you may meet someone else who can tell more. But I certainly wouldn't trust anyone who knows about the gun from any source but yourself.”

“Thanks a lot. I'm glad I know that. I'd easily believe, otherwise, the angels



were sending me a messenger.”

“Right. You’re at an age when many young men tend to be a little naive.”

After that, Miss MacGillivray asked what kind of music he liked, and, when he said he wasn’t very musical, suggested he listen to Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony, which was handy and which, it turned out, really impressed him with the feeling of a gathering and breaking thunderstorm. Then she served more tea and some apple pie she’d made, and then it was time to go, he felt.

When he got up, she asked, “Have you read Lewis’s Narnia stories?”

“Father Walker offered them to me last year, after I read the Perelandra trilogy, but they’re just for kids, aren’t they?”

“So are Grimms’ fairy tales, right?”

“Right.”

“I take it you haven’t read what Tolkien and Lewis said about that.”

“Oh, did they?”

“I’ll lend you ‘Tree and Leaf’ and my copy of ‘An Essay in Criticism’, as well as Narnia. I suppose you haven’t read ‘The Hobbit’, either.”

“No...”

“My, my, aren’t we grown-up.”

Edmund felt himself blushing. She was smiling.

“Any book really worth reading by kids is worth reading by adults. Try Narnia? I think you’ll like them.”

“Father Mike said the same thing, but I didn’t listen. But if both of you think so...”

“Right. I’ll get them.” She went into the library and came out holding a boxed set of seven paperbacks, and two other books, one hardcover. “Here you are. Call me when you’re finished, and we’ll talk again. I enjoy talking with you.” He smiled broadly, rather pleased he wasn’t blushing, and left.

When he arrived home, his mother said, “I hope you haven’t spent too much on those books, Edmund, you got to keep remembering to save for your education.”

“Oh, these are borrowed, Mom. From Miss MacGillivray.”

“Who’s Miss MacGillivray?”

“A teacher at Queen of Heaven. She’s a friend of one of the fencers and we got to talking at the video shop one day. She’s really nice, you’d like her.”

“I hope so. She’s decent, Edmund?”

“Mom, she’s so decent her boyfriend teases her about it.” Though he was by no means certain Bob O’Gorman was Miss McGillivray’s boyfriend. “She just likes

anyone who can talk about the books she likes.”

“Well, be careful, won’t you? I met your father in a library, and he’s no priest.”

“Mom, I may never be a priest. You know that.”

“I know that, yes. But I’d rather it was just the right choice and not just a matter of nature overcoming you the way it does most men. I’ve raised you to be chaste, thanks to your Uncle Gerard, God rest his soul, and I don’t want that wasted.”

“Yes, I know, Mom, and don’t think I’m not grateful.”

“It’s not a thing to be carelessly sarcastic about, Edmund.”

“My good heavens, Mom, can’t you take a joke?”

She laughed at his sudden earnestness. That also could be carried too far. She’d used a wary, concealed detachment and a turn of technical phrase left over from her nursing career to train her only son, whose father fought shy of intimate discussion with him on sexual matters, in the psychology of male continence, absorbed in long conversations with a hot-blooded, farsighted younger brother who died of cancer before he could be ordained, and had thereby given him a better than merely fighting chance against temptation to solitary vice, though she didn’t know that his skill in changing the topic of his thought and indulging visualization of page after page of books like the Father Brown stories, so as to

steep his mind in verbal atmosphere, had got him a reputation in high school as “the absent-minded professor.”

Two weeks later, Edmund was waiting eagerly at Miss McGillivray’s door, the nine books in a plastic bag under his left arm. The door opened and her smile welcomed him. They went down the stairs. “I’m glad you enjoyed them,” she said, harking back to his phone call preliminary to visiting, in which she’d suggested deferring discussion of Narnia until they could be comfortable together.

“Yes, I really did,” he said as they sat again on the sofa. “I used to think children’s books wouldn’t deal with anything very important to – anyone but children.”

“Good books for children deal always with moral choices or moral atmosphere at least, I’ve always thought. Which did you find more important in Narnia?”

“The atmosphere in ‘The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe’ was kind of light – I didn’t think the sacrifice scene quite fitted into it.”

“Do you know that Lin Carter, at least, agrees with you?”

“No.”

“I’ll have to lend you ‘Imaginary Worlds’, then. But that’s not the question.”

“I’d say Lewis has more to do about making moral choices than with providing

merely moral atmosphere.”

“Didn’t you feel sad almost all the way through ‘The Last Battle’? I did.”

He hesitated. “Yes. Yes, I did. I’d felt a kind of foreboding – I didn’t realize until I went back to it, when I’d finished, that Lewis actually states in the opening that these are the last days of Narnia, so I was kind of hoping against it, but the general tone is sad.”

“I don’t think the tone itself is sad. I think the atmosphere evokes sadness, rather.”

“I guess.”

“You felt Narnia was real, then?”

“I’d begun to hope there might be a world something like that. There’s no reason why there couldn’t be, Father Mike says. I like the idea of talking animals. I’d like to have a cat, but Dad’s allergic to litter and Mom’s afraid a tomcat could spray or a female have too many kittens. Mom would have the cat cut if we had one, but Dad wouldn’t stand for that. He says it’s the proper life of a tomcat to fight and fornicate.”

“So it is. Writers who wouldn’t allow tomcats those rights tend to compensate by making their human heroes excessively like tomcats. John D. MacDonald, for

instance. I can't stand the man."

"Haven't read him."

"Good for you. Why do you suppose Lewis made his traitor a cat?"

"Well, cats are individuals. Making one of them a traitor doesn't seem like stereotyping or racism, as it might be with a dog traitor."

"One thing that bothers me a little is the absence of Puddleglum at the ending. I'd hate to think he was lost. But maybe the only reason is that he just couldn't fit and be in character. Anyway, I've read he was one of Lewis's favourite characters."

"I never thought of that. But it sounds right. I liked Puddleglum, too. So did Dr. Kenwood. He was glad I was reading Narnia. He offered to lend me a trilogy by someone called Eddison."

"Zimiamvia?"

"That's it."

"I've got that, too. Trust Malcolm to have what he can get by haters of the twentieth century."

"Did he hate the twentieth century?"

"As much as Lewis and Tolkien or more. They had him to dinner once or

twice. Tolkien thought him a great writer but hated his personal philosophy – said it led to arrogance and cruelty. I’ve never read much about it. His books I have read are really good. I don’t recall anything of a nasty personal philosophy in them.”

“Lewis certainly shows his philosophy in his books,” Edmund said.

“That’s what they’re written for. No, not really. They’re written because he had certain mental pictures and the urge to write about them. But he was the sort who wouldn’t write a book that didn’t support his philosophy. He once confessed to hating people who disagreed with him, and he once fenced broadsword against rapier with someone who argued with him.”

“You must have read a lot about him.”

“I’ve got his ‘Letters to Arthur Greeves’, ‘The Inklings’ by Humphrey Carpenter, the letters edited by his brother, ‘Letters to an American Lady’. I’m waiting for A.N. Wilson’s biography to come out in paperback before I get that.”

Her eyebrows lifted. “Would you like to have seen guns in Narnia?”

“It would have made the people too much superior to the animals, I think.”

“Your idea, or Kenwood’s.”

“Mine. I haven’t discussed Narnia much with him.”

“Didn’t the bows make the people too superior?”

“Well. I guess, but it doesn’t seem the same. At least, it wouldn’t have struck me, till you mentioned it.”

“Essentially, though, Narnia is an animal culture, and guns are greatly artificial; I think I agree with you. Where Malcolm goes wrong, I think, is in mistaking this world for Narnia. In a world where animals can’t talk or wage war against evil, a greater artificiality in weaponry is allowable, I would say.”

“I guess.”

“Anyway, I’m inclined to agree that women are too fierce for hand-to-hand combat. I’ve taken up archery since you were here last. The instructor says I have a knack for it. I’ve got what he calls good grouping, anyway. Getting all the arrows in the same place is next best to getting them all in the right place, apparently.”

“Wouldn’t you rather be learning to use a gun well?”

“I can use a gun well. One of my uncles was a marksman in the army, and we saw a lot of each other after he retired. But I’d like to be able to use a weapon the law will let me keep in my bedroom without poking its nose over my shoulder all the time. You don’t yet need a permit to keep a bow and arrow. Or a sword.



Kenwood keeps a sword in his bedroom, did you know?”

“That’s the one he brings to fencing class sometimes, is it?”

“I suppose – the Prince of Wales sword? Battle Sword?”

“That’s the one. You know a lot about Dr. Kenwood for someone I never see him with.”

“You could have seen us together a lot once, till he tried to get my co-operation in cheating on his wife – oh Jesus! Sorry, Edmund, can you forget I let that slip? It was long ago, and I’d almost forgotten, though I’m sure he hasn’t; he seems to have the kind of conscience now that would keep gnawing him for that offence against his holy soul.”

“I won’t tell anyone you mentioned it, nor will I mention it to anyone. I’m disappointed in him, though.”

“So was I.” She was silent for a time. Then she said, “Anyway, I’ve got a dandy bow and some sharp arrows in my bedroom to give a splendid scare to anyone who might break in here in the dead of night. Everyone should be prepared for that eventuality, especially women living alone.”

“Yeah.”

“The trouble is, most weapons used against us these days are insidious and

government-approved. If you took your dandy little revolver down to Jim Handy at the mill and told him to stop poisoning the air or you'd shoot his little toe off, you'd be locked up about ten years."

"Yeah."

"The bloody government keeps extending their deadline for cleaning up. A licence to poison."

"Well, I suppose it's better than having the city's economy go down for want of paper being made."

"Is it? Don't you think Kenwood's kind of economy, based on animal energy rather than fuel-powered machines, would be better?"

"That would be the ideal way to live, yes. But till it can be brought about, we've all got to make a living in the real world."

"That's what I keep saying when I hear about Kenwood advocating a return to swordfighting, isn't it?" She smiled, and he felt comfortable with her again. They didn't talk about the mill again, but she turned the conversation back to use of firearms in Narnia. She pointed out that it's Narnia's destiny to insist on being itself despite "progressive" oppression. "China and Japan should have done the same; they could have been the Narnias of this world, going their own way

against the greedy materialists. Their example might have converted the world, and we might all be swordsmen and archers and craftsmen, and Kenwood would be just another philosopher among many instead of Don Quixote on Crusade. That would have been the ideal. But nothing is done ideally. Japan and China had to have guns. But they shouldn't have adopted all the other mass-produced baggage of Western economy. You make and use guns in an emergency. Emergency action shouldn't become every-day social function. Too bad for the Japs and Chinks." She smiled again, and said, "Well, that's their problem. It's not my job to save the world. Christ did that already, and if he's content to let it go to hell afterward when it insists on going, it can jolly well go."

She smiled once more, and the gathering bitterness was eased.

"Guns are about the only industrial artifact that should be allowed," she said. "Most tools using electricity are wrong in their nature because the electricity isn't produced by actions of animal life, which generates its own electricity from within to move itself. Therefore it's entitled to generate that power by life's own actions on machines to move them for its own purposes. That makes it a force of too noble a nature to be generated by the inanimate to move the inanimate. And steam engines are wrong because they depend on fuels derived from the organic

to move the inorganic, subordinating the higher to the lower, which is a perversion of values.”

“That’s exactly what Dr. Kenwood says! You’ve agreed with him all along.”

“On almost everything but the guns. There I’ve got to live in the real world. There’s nothing wrong with using inanimate process to render something else inanimate, but he thinks only living process should make things dead. I think that’s a perversion of value. And, as I say, he’s very tiresome about it. Very much the holier-than-thou. But, darn it, I’m tired of talking about him. But don’t tell him I do, will you? It might encourage him to recall old times, and in some ways he can attempt to be attractive. Lead us not into temptation...”

“Right.”

Then it was time for tea and music and some Elkes biscuits. When he was about to leave, she said, “Have you read Jacobs’s ‘English Fairy Tales’? No, of course not.” And she lent him a Dover edition of the book, which he promised to return in a week.

“Till next Thursday,” she said as she let him out.

It was a good book. He read first the story of Childe Roland, then several others at random, then the rest, several on a single day for several days. But after he

came back from fencing Wednesday night, she phoned and said she had to be out of town Thursday night and she'd promised 'English Fairy Tales' to Bob O'Gorman when it came back. "If I'm not to have the pleasure of your company tomorrow night, would you do something else for me at that time and bring the book up to him? He's at Five Midlyob Terrace."

"Okay," he said gladly. She'd be home for him to visit Friday night.

As he trudged up through the light snow cover on Minister Drive Thursday night, Edmund saw that the underpass below the arterial route (snaking down across this side of Trent Topsides, from the Trans-Canada Highway on the city's high east, and continuing down left forward – northwest – to cut off from the main body that mass of rock lying north of East Street and east of Main) was lighted again. Hope springs eternal, he thought. How long would the lighting last this time? City Hall must think the vandals were all in jail for the winter. He went through the underpass noticing that even the litter was cleaned up, and on up the steps and trodden hillside path left of Minister, up Minister itself, and on, turning right at the brow, to Midlyob Terrace.

O'Gorman opened the door almost on the ring. "Quite the prompt young messenger, aren't you?"

“I endeavour to give satisfaction, sir,” Edmund said with a kind of aloof austerity.

“Do you now? Have you ever endeavoured to give satisfaction, Edmund?”

“Nope. I’m thinking of being a priest.”

“Just as well. Anna should be a nun. Why don’t you both get religion the same time and get out of my life together?”

“I’m hardly in your life at all. I met you once before and now I brought you a book. If I never see you again, it won’t kill me.”

“You’ll see Anna again, won’t you?”

“I hope so. She’s real nice to me.”

“She’s nice to me, too. That’s all she ever is. Nice. You like her a lot, do you? Is that all?”

“Yes.” But a blush was almost incipient.

“She likes you a lot, too. She told me so. She tells me everything. She has a lot of confidence in me.”

“I hope ‘tis never misplaced,” said Edmund, and he left, closing the door behind him. But later, going down the hill, he felt sorry for O’Gorman, whose being in love with Miss MacGillivray must have deepened into the roots of his

sexuality. It was time to marry or move on when that happened, for most. Would he himself ever be content to marry in the kind of unfree society he was coming more and more, through talking with Dr. Kenwood and Oliver Kendall, to realize he lived in, even if he fell in love that way? A man had to make a living in the real world, but was it something he could cheerfully beget a son to do? If the real world was getting worse instead of better? This line of thought might lead to the first bad argument between Sam and Edmund. Turning the question over, he looked up sharply on entering the underpass, as he became aware of someone at the other end.

“Hello, Dr. Kenwood.”

“Hello, Edmund. Your mother told me you’d gone Topside, and I thought this would be a good place to meet you.”

“What for? Is something wrong?” Kenwood was wearing his fencing shoes, gaiters standing waiting a little way from his feet. He also wore a loose-looking white jacket, almost to the knee.

“I hope not. But it’s time to give up the gun.”

“What gun?”

“I’d say it’s a cap-and-ball Navy Colt thirty-six. That’s the usual. You’ve had it

since September at least, at least that you know about.

“You’ve had ample opportunity to see that it’s a test of whether you want to exercise the wrong kind of power, and I’ve done my best to show you why the use of guns is wrong; like the One Ring, it’s the kind of power that has to be given up. Its purpose is that it be given up. You realize that, I think.”

“I know exactly why you want me to give it up.”

“There’re only three other persons who could have told you that, and they don’t betray secrets. You couldn’t know.”

“Yes, I do. I know the kind of test this is.”

“That raises the stakes, but it doesn’t alter the nature of the choice. If you’re going to give up the gun, untie the leg-thong and unbuckle the belt, so it becomes visible, then put the holstered gun on the ground and leave the way you came, crossing the arterial by its upper surface.”

“I’m not going to give it up.”

“Then you know I’ve got to try to take it.”

“Try, is right. Are you as fast with your gun as I am with mine? Or have you got real black magic?”

“What? Wait, listen—”



“Shut up and draw!” Edmund’s hand swept in the familiar move, and the gun thundered in the tunnel. Kenwood recovered from the sidewise lunge, a sword in his right hand. Sucker! Something really wrong, but no time to change mind now. He fired again as Kenwood went into the Elusive Swordsman act, using tunnel’s narrow breadth as Edmund wouldn’t have thought possible and taking – Goddamnit, he must be taking! – several balls in torso without going down, his unblinking gaze fixed on Edmund’s eyes. Then Edmund was jamming gun into holster for usual magic reload and it was coming up again and Kenwood was right in front and sword swept down on forearm nerve centre. Gun fell from loose fingers before hand could turn upward.

“If you’d given it up, you’d been promoted as I was when I did,” said Kenwood. “You can never hide it again. But there’s a chance for you to avoid trouble. You can keep it with you, always visible from now on, and sometime face the police with it, or you can take off the holster and let me take the whole thing. Whichever you do, I’m going to empty the gun, and it won’t ever magically reload for you again.” He held the sword at Edmund’s chin, just below, and Edmund stepped back and he picked up the gun and shucked off the caps. “Which do you want?” He sheathed the sword. It disappeared.

“You can take the gun. You don’t need it anyway, with magic like you’ve got. You should be dead if you were normal.”

“My only magic is provision of the sword, as yours was of the gun. I’m wearing a custom-made bullet-proof shirt. Armour is permissible to swordsmen against gunfighters. I knew better than to tell you that, with your quick and deadly aim. I’m sorry, Edmund. I thought you were the right sort. The angels must have thought so, too. Okay, I’ll take the gunbelt now.”

Unthinking, Edmund undid thong and belt with right hand. Amazed, he looked at it. His sleeve wasn’t cut; there was no blood.

“Unlike my more mundane personal weapon, the guardian’s sword has a single sharp edge. I used the back against your arm.” Kenwood turned and walked down the tunnel and, shoving on his gaiters, out the lower end. For a moment, Edmund was lost. He was trying to think hard, and couldn’t seem to think at all. Next moment everything was clear, and he ran from the underpass to the O’Connor Geriatric Centre, and pressed the “after-hours” buzzer near the locked door.

Shown to a phone, he dialled 911 and asked for the police. A deep voice said, “Royal Newfoundland Constabulary.”

Edmund found it easy to speak calmly. “This is Edmund Peddle of Eighty-five

Mount Benedict. I'm at the O'Connor Centre. Anna MacGillivray, a teacher from Queen of Heaven High School, is in serious danger at Five Midlyob Terrace, the residence of Robert O'Gorman, the man she wants to marry. I tried to help but the man who's after her tricked me and he's got a sword. Have you got that?"

"Yes, sir. Will you just hang on a moment, please?"

"I've given you the essentials, the rest is too complicated. I'm going home now."

Edmund hung up the phone and strode out, thanking the security guard with old-world courtesy. His head was high. He was Shane and Bob O'Gorman was Joe Starrett. Every man is Shane and every man is Starrett. The Shanes, the light slender men like Edmund, were the selfless knightly sort who achieved pure love and were willing to give the Starretts the chance they needed because the big husky men couldn't be continent. Starrett needed Shane, as the handsome lover needed Cyrano. He'd make Anna see reason and accept her true love. He was a wizard, born to be celibate and wield true magic for others, as well as Shane the warrior. He was Aragorn and Gandalf together. He needed a walking stick, both wizard's staff and Sword of Wood. He stopped at the Angle Pharmacy, on the left at lower East Street, and bought one, beaming at the cashier. What Shane couldn't

have done with a walking stick if he'd been a fencer! Maybe he'd better get back to Bob's. No, the police were in control. He strode on home, saluting with his stick every woman he met, whom he'd gladly die to defend if necessary, and singing softly that verse from *The Saint Closes the Case*: "The song and the sword and the pipes of Pan are birthrights sold to a usurer. And I am the last lone highwayman, and I am the last adventurer."

When he'd got so far as home, he decided to go on up to College Drive and drop in on the police, see how things were going. When he got to the station, he said to the constable on duty, "Could I see whoever's in charge of investigating the kidnapping of Anna MacGillivray? I'm Edmund Peddle; I reported it." Another constable took him in to see a plainclothes cop who introduced himself as Investigator Jim Dunfield.

Edmund said: "Did you get the Renegade Knight? Is he in jail?"

"Who?"

"The Renegade Knight. The guy I called about, who was after Miss MacGillivray? Is Miss MacGillivray all right?"

"I'm sure she's fine, Edmund. Now, about this call of yours..."

"Right. I couldn't say too much right then; Jim Handy had the phone tapped.

But Miss MacGillivray was at Bob O’Gorman’s apartment, secretly, to plot the downfall of the Dark Elf King, who’s really Jim Handy of Cooper. She was planning to lead an army of women archers against the mill, which is this world’s version of the Dark Tower, because most of the men are under his power! But he’s got the apartment bugged, and he sent the Renegade Knight up to take her to the tower so he can seduce her by magic and make her want to work at the mill. Bob isn’t afraid of the Elf King, so he was going to draw up the strategy for her. I was going to stop the Renegade Knight with my magic gun but he disarmed me by magic and took my gun away. If he hadn’t had magic armour, I’d have killed him. But now the Dark Elf knows everything and he’ll stay in power till the end of the world unless the angels get my gun back for me. If they don’t, he’ll crucify me – I’m Jesus Christ. Or he might behead me. I might be John the Baptist instead. Anyway, the world was going to change, but now it won’t. Jim Handy’ll be the big boss forever.”

“Edmund,” said Dunfield, “what’s the Renegade Knight’s identity in this world?”

“I can’t remember. He’s supposed to be somebody I know, but I can’t remember who. It might be Oliver Kendall – he’s dedicated to the service of the

Dark Elf, but I don't know if he's really active yet. I know him really well, but I can't remember."

"Are you telling the truth, Edmund?"

"Yes, sir. I'm going to fight the Dark Elf with a walking stick, with him using a sword, and he's going to cut my head off, and my sacrifice will change the world, and Bob O'Gorman and Anna MacGillivray will be King and Queen of Newfoundland, and I'll guide their destiny from heaven. That's the way it's going to be."

Dunfield didn't seem as happy as the good news warranted. Could he be a minion of the Dark Elf? No, he was a Shane! No, so was the Renegade Knight! Some Shanes perverted their destiny, with regard to both love and duty.

"Edmund, do you think maybe you should go to the hospital?"

"Is Miss MacGillivray there?"

"There's someone there you ought to see right away."

"Did the Renegade Knight get to Bob O'Gorman? Is he serious?"

"No, Bob's fine."

"Did he wound the Renegade Knight? Is he shot?"

"I don't think we should go into details right now, Edmund. The important

thing is to get to the hospital. Here, I'll keep your stick till it's time for your fight with the Dark Elf.”

Edmund went out raving happily between two constables, who brought him to the hospital's emergency department and, after talking to a nurse, up to a room on the fourth floor where they sat and waited while he contained his lively curiosity until the door opened and a man Edmund knew from *Observer* photos came in, nodding to the constables and smiling at Edmund with white even teeth above the telltale short, neat-edged beard.

“He's Satan!” Edmund yelled. “He's been after me a long time!” But the constables held him down despite his struggles, and the devil took down his trousers and stabbed him in the butt with a needle, causing him to start losing consciousness and, he feared, his soul.

### CHAPTER 3

Edmund doggedly paced the ward floor, keeping watch for someone's having the door unlocked for a few seconds when he reached that end of the corridor, so that he could escape. It didn't happen, though he paced until nightfall. Then a woman who seemed to be a nurse though she wasn't in nurse's uniform offered him a pill said to be intended to help him sleep, but he knew that if he took that pill he'd be thereby consenting to what the perverted Starrett who posed as an orderly would do to him while he slept. Pseudo-Shanes tried to corrupt by persuasion, but a pseudo-Starrett would resort to deceit if he thought he could get away with it. He kept pacing the lighted ward till nearly midnight, when he realized the other patients on the ward would go to Hell if they were still disobeying when the world ended at midnight the Master's injunction to keep awake till His return, so he began to stride, shouting from the depth of his bass throat, "Wake, men! Wake!" Urging from a woman (who might have been a



nurse) that these men needed their sleep did not deter him, and soon two RNC constables arrived, asking whether he would be quiet or go with them to jail. Knowing what it would mean, as movies and television had shown him what to expect of pseudo-Starretts in prison, he nevertheless said he could not stop trying to wake the others, but mindful of the Dominical instruction to go two miles with him who would force you to go one, he went with the constables quietly enough. At the lock-up, his bathrobe belt was taken from him, so he tore off toilet paper in his cell and ran it, rolled lengthwise, through the loops of his robe to keep his loins girded as the Master required for His return. A match tossed to him, after much pleading, by a prisoner in the opposite cell would serve as portion of staff with which to stand ready and as light to have burning at end. He tried to stay awake, but he fell asleep and woke with his throat somewhat clogged, so he knew what had been done by one or more pseudo-Starretts among those police who served the Shadow. Doubtless they'd fooled the real Shanes and Starretts.

Next morning he was back at the hospital ward, and his mother and father came to visit in the afternoon. Both looked grave, and Edmund knew that that was because Mrs. Peddle could not yet bear to destroy the One Ring, her wedding ring, which gave the Shadow power over men. They talked awhile, Edmund

giving her advice in shrouded language, which he hoped she would understand, about seeking help from Dr. Kenwood, who he thought would be his successor now that he was imprisoned. He couldn't be clearer, because servants of shadow were nearby, among those who ran the ward. That night was a close repetition of the first, and on nights to come he wanted his door locked lest a foul-mouthed female patient with a broken arm come to tempt him. But the pseudo-Starrett said that if the door had to be unlocked for some reason in the night, the noise might disturb him, and he knew well enough what that hinted at. All the time, he was refusing to eat, not knowing what among the food offered was produced in Canada or what imported from Shadow to corrupt one's desires into serving the pseudos. He refused medication, knowing it was designed for that specific purpose, and he refused the psychiatrist's repeated, insistent suggestions that he agree to take electro-shock therapy. He knew he'd be tortured to death by this modernist abomination if he agreed. He refused water, knowing it was offered to make his body a better conductor for electro-shock. He wondered whether he should abandon his Christly mission – it might have been mere pride to accept it – but when he asked a woman who seemed to have official status whether he should shave his beard, she said, "Change your image? You'd be sorry for that in a few

days,” and he was reassured he had to go through with it, even to crucifixion. (After that, when he looked in that woman’s direction, he’d look no higher than her neck; that was what the Childe Roland story advised when it said Roland was to cut off the heads of those who gave him advice.) One day he had his parents leave early because he didn’t want them crucified too. But not electro-shock. He steadily refused to take that, and the doctor said that if he didn’t consent, he’d be sent to the Waterford, where they could force him to take it. He might be sent to St. John’s, but he’d not formally consent to his own torture, he thought. And so he went.

It took some persuasion by the constables to make him change from Christly garb to modern clothing, but they appealed to his sense of what people on the plane would think when they saw him board in pyjamas and bathrobe with toilet-paper belt, and he consented. He remembered little of the plane trip, but while he was waiting for a doctor at the Waterford the first night, he kept pacing round and round a pattern of dirty-water stains on the floor, because the making of Narnia, predicted by Lewis, depended on his circling: when one particular spot was rubbed away by it, Narnia would be complete. Shortly after it was done, Dr. Tyrier called him to an office, and he asked, “Are you in authority here, sir?” (St.

Paul said to obey lawful authority), and Tyrier said, “I am,” and he went. He told the doctor that his trouble was that things weren’t the way they were supposed to be, and the doctor said, “We call that the Is-Ought Gap,” and Edmund felt that it was nice for Doctor Tyrier to have a handy name for everything but it didn’t do much toward really altering the situation, and they made little progress. But, since he feared to sleep, Tyrier stayed sitting by his bed to protect him, until he was actually asleep, a kindness he always remembered gratefully after being told about it later.

The next day, he distracted a nurse (they wore uniforms here, which clarified matters somewhat) long enough to grab from the desk a pencil in lieu of staff; she didn’t try to get it back. That night, the inner pain he’d felt from time to time in the Angle Stream hospital returned and he feared he was in Hell: when he knelt on the foot of his bed and looked out the window he could see in a hideous yellow light what he took to be smoke rising from a pipe attached low down to another part of the building. He almost despaired, but prayed. The day after that, he decided he was in Purgatory and paced the hallway grimly, silently repeating the Our Father, Hail Mary, and Gloria. He endured the day. He still wouldn’t eat. When an aide offered to crack a boiled egg for him, he refused with sharp fright;

consenting to have an egg cracked for you meant in symbolic language of this place that you agreed to have a testicle crushed. Also served that morning was cream of wheat, but consuming that sticky mass of grainy particles would signify consent to oral-sexual abuse. There was nothing that could be eaten safely. When he told the male nurse Hector Simon he feared sexual abuse, however, Simon replied, “That’s the least of your worries, Edmund.”

He often annoyed Simon by turning off the television set in the recreation room which was corrupting the simpleminded among the other patients, but he endured the annoyance of repeated reprimand.

Then, one morning a cloud seemed to clear partially as he sat at the breakfast table and he said, “Could I have” (what was the word) “an eggstand?”

“Eggstand!” A woman patient snickered.

“I’m sorry, Edmund, we don’t have any eggcups,” said a nursing aide. He ate the boiled egg and enjoyed it. From then on, he refused no food. And he took his medication. He returned the pencil lest he be tempted to harm someone with it.

A day or so later, the youth from Harbour Breton who was always feigning to pitch like a softball a couple of rolled-up socks and letting the ball fall behind him instead, remarked to Edmund, “I’ve never seen a quicker recovery than yours.”

Hector Simon came into the four-bed room, attaching to each bed a piece of lettered sticking tape bearing the name of the patient in that bed. Edmund took this to mean that each one would remain until they all went out together, and he decided he was going to help the others get well also. He demonstrated fencing parries as well as possible without a foil, to the softball pitcher and anyone else who would pay attention. He was doing well, he fancied, drawing out each about their favourite sports, when the woman who had snickered at him came in, eating an apple. Eve. She said not everyone had to be interested in a sport, and she took a bite out of her apple. Edmund did his best to counter her influence for the Devil.

They were sitting in the TV room next day when the hands of the clock began to turn round real fast. “Time sure flies,” said Simon. Panicked, Edmund started asking to see a priest.

Two days later, he felt free of all delusion, remembering a lot of what he’d thought was happening. Dr. Reade took him to his office that day and asked him whether he remembered what led up to his breakdown. Edmund spoke carefully and confidently.

“I found a gun in Angle Stream somewhere, a revolver, and it was loaded. I kept it hidden and it gave me a sense of power. A friend advised me to turn it in,

and I refused. I was falling in love with an older woman who wanted to be just good friends with me, and I wanted to keep the gun to protect her. The need to have it went deeper. When my friend took the gun from me, one day, I lost my sense of competence about protecting those I cared about, and I had what I suppose you would call an identity crisis.

“I started believing in magic ruling the world through industrial exploitation. That’s about it, I guess.” And true, every word – so far as it went.

“You can see through all that now?”

“Yes.”

Reade asked why he’d refused electro-shock in Angle Stream, and Edmund told him. Reade said electro-shock was still a valid therapy in certain cases, but movies like *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* had made some people scared of it. He said it hadn’t been necessary, however, for Edmund, who’d responded well to a heavy injection of anti-psychotic tranquilizer.

Edmund was scheduled for an electro-encephalograph the next day. As he shut his eyes tighter and tighter against the ever-brighter flashes of light, he reflected calmly that if he were still paranoid, he’d really be frightened now. When the test was over, the woman who’d conducted it said, “You shouldn’t be in here much

longer with those results.”

A week after, Edmund was home, his father and mother coming to Moose Pond to meet his plane. His mother was shocked at his appearance. “Well, if you don’t eat ...” he said. Not all the weight he’d lost had come back yet. He was to see Dr. Mahmoud about having his prescription continued in Angle Stream. His mother said Dr. Kenwood had asked to be kept informed of his progress and was glad he’d recovered so promptly. That reminded him of what he’d been putting together about things during the past week, and he phoned Kenwood that night, asking to visit him.

Seated in Kenwood’s den at 18 Trent Park, Edmund asked, “Dr. Kenwood, what do you know about guardians?”

“Guardians of what?”

“If you don’t know, I guess I shouldn’t tell you.”

“Edmund, I know enough about your situation to be aware that guardians, as you call them, are chosen partly on the basis of their discretion concerning secrets, but I can’t help but be doubtful about you now, in light of what I’ve heard of recent events.”

“I can trust you to keep a secret, can’t I?”



“Yes, I’m trustworthy, I believe, in that regard. No merit in it for me, I’m afraid. Comes naturally to some people. I don’t know what we’d do under real coercion, though.”

Edmund then showed him something which, in the circumstances, Edmund thought would be calculated to inspire trust, and Kenwood laughed loud and long.

“Okay, Edmund. I was the guardian who disarmed you. The one you tried to kill.” And with that confidence imparted, Edmund remembered clearly that it was so.

“I thought you might have been.” And Edmund told him all the story he hadn’t yet known, and he was silent awhile. Then he said, “She didn’t tell my secret, but she contrived to betray me. The vicious bitch. The vicious, lying bitch.

“Anna and I were very close at Memorial in the sixties after I left St. Augustine’s Seminary and decided to pursue a university career. I told her about the sword and how I’d got it, knowing she’d never tell anyone else. We intended for a while to marry, but she wanted us both to get education degrees and teach school in Labrador City, saving money to buy land we could farm on, ignoring industrial society as much as possible after marriage. She wouldn’t marry me otherwise, but I felt I had a vocation in teaching philosophy, which doesn’t fit

well into high school, and I wouldn't give it up, so we broke up. By the time she changed her mind, some three years later, I was in love with Carol and on the point of getting engaged. Anna tried to persuade me to break that up. I never thought her bitter enough to set me up for killing.”

Edmund felt awkward about that. “And I tried to murder you. Can you forgive me? I am sorry.”

Kenwood smiled. “I think it can be managed. Partly you were misguided, though I'd say there was some guilt for you. But Anna is really guilty of murder, by all rational reckoning, like all who attempt or counsel it. And there's not much we can really do to have her convicted, given the situation we're in.

“Well, apart from that, things worked out fairly well, didn't they?”

“Yeah. Yes, I guess they did.”

“Randolph Rand was to have been my successor in 1985, but he ran afoul of cancer that spring. I ended up leaving the sword on the altar at the cathedral last Tuesday. You got my bulletproof three times, and I knew it was time to quit. We guardians aren't always called on to do much with our swords or guns; it's mostly a matter of carrying on tradition and being ready.

“I'm glad you've had so full and quick a recovery. I guess we can look to see

you back at fencing class?”

“Right on.”

“Good.”

The next day, Edmund went to confession to Father Michael, telling him briefly the whole story, but circumspectly and leaving out name and gender of other guilty person. They were sitting in Father Mike’s study. When the priest had given him absolution, and imposed the penance of saying the Rosary before the Blessed Sacrament, Edmund stood and said, “Look at this, Father,” and drew the sword of which he’d become conscious, invisible at his left side, while in the bathroom at the Waterford last Tuesday, the gleaming sword with the single sharp edge that showed itself to the eye when fully drawn from unseen scabbard. It was Father Walker’s turn to laugh loud and long.

“God bless you, Edmund. Go in peace.”

Edmund walked the short distance from rectory to the empty cathedral, and when he had finished his Rosary in front of the tabernacle altar, he stood and drew his sword, holding it out with arm and sword in one upward-slanting line, then brought hilt to chin and swept sword down, in full formal salute. A movement at the other end of the transept turned his attention. The janitor stood staring, eyes

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wide. Edmund winked at him and walked to and down the centre aisle, confident that, though the man likely wouldn't ever forget the incident unless he purposely put it from his mind, he'd not remember the person. Edmund smiled, and went out the door into the cold air of pre-Christmas winter.

III

KENDALL AND KENWOOD

CHAPTER 1

“Why don’t you have your cats mate with each other?” asked Darlene Duncan.

“Cats don’t mate,” said Malcolm Kenwood.

“Sure they do. How else would they get pregnant?”

“They, ah, copulate, since the really accurate four-letter word is inappropriate in mixed company. ‘Mating’ connotes association to look after the young. Cats don’t mate.”

“Well, why don’t you have your two pets f–, ah, copulate?”

“We’re going to.”

“Oh. But why is a certain four-letter word inappropriate in mixed company?”

“Too physically specific. ‘Copulate’ could mean any joining at all, except it doesn’t really, not now. After a long-enough while, it’ll be a dirty word, too, as

‘intercourse’ is becoming. You can hardly use ‘intercourse’ in its original sense at all now, can you? Because of the specific connotation of genital sex. Euphemism is a futile art, in the long run. Of course our sexuality deserves respect, as the means of the highest personal communion naturally available to humans. But as long as original sin tends to drag our attention down exclusively to fulfilment of genital instinct, it will always be an insult to call a man an ‘effeminate’. For it accuses him of concentrating entirely on the very lowest aspect of what ought to be high indeed. He is strongly tempted, of course. So the genital always tends to overshadow the personal in all terminology of sexual congress, and euphemizing is largely a waste of time. But it does help avoid certain graphic images, which is important when dealing with adolescents or mixed company.”

“I can see sparing adolescents, but why necessarily mixed company, if we’re all consenting adults? You haven’t answered that.”

“It depends on the specific ingredients of the mix,” said Oliver Kendall. “To some people, graphic physical terminology in mixed company can be inflammatory. Other people are less sensitive. I’d have no hesitation telling the dirtiest of dirty jokes to the lifestyles editor at the Observer, but I wouldn’t try it with the district editor, and I wouldn’t tell one now. I don’t know everyone here

well enough.”

“Which is just as well, or you’d copulate the lot,” said Darlene.

Kendall blushed, as did Carol Kenwood. Martin Newcombe, Carol noticed, did not, nor did his wife, Yvonne. Like Kendall, they were Modernists, and Malcolm had invited them to dinner to meet his old friend who’d just taken up residence in Angle Stream. The six of them now were sitting about her living-room after the meal.

“It’s a matter of the artificial side of propriety,” said Malcolm. “The rules of chastity never change, but the rules of propriety vary widely from age to age and place to place. C.S. Lewis’s example was that a thoroughly chaste woman in Elizabethan days could use language that only a completely abandoned one would employ in the time of Queen Victoria. And the modern age has both Victorians and Elizabethans, who often may be found in the same small group.”

“I, for example,” said Carol, “am definitely Victorian.”

Kendall glanced at her. One of his more intense loves had been most Victorian. But Carol was, of course, married, and that naturally ruled out that.

“And would therefore appreciate yer mindin’ yer Elizabethan mout’, me dear,” Malcolm added, to Darlene, for Carol, and smiled.

“Okay,” said Darlene. She and Malcolm and Oliver were old friends from student days, and neither of them had before summoned the courage to correct her frankness. Some people wouldn’t believe it on the basis of her conversation, but Darlene had confided, last year, to Carol that she’d taken a vow of virginity, to live the single life in the world, as the church usually put it. She taught medieval and Renaissance English at the Coaker College. Malcolm, in whom neither Darlene nor Carol had confided about the vow, was hoping, Carol rather suspected, that Darlene would make an honest man, and in the process an orthodox Catholic, of Oliver. Fat chance.

The conversation was likely to get round to cats when Malcolm and Oliver were part of it. Carol had often enjoyed Oliver’s anecdote of Lasciva and the black Labrador who’d thought he was death on cats, and the Newcombes had enjoyed it also, a few minutes ago. So far as dogs were concerned, Lasciva should have been named Perniciosa, Oliver was sometimes heard to remark in company that included anyone as familiar with Latin as he and Malcolm were. The names, respectively meaning playful or saucy, and dangerous, were both synonyms for the English “Mischievous”, and Mischief had been the name of a cat owned by Malcolm, which had given birth to Lasciva two years before dying, some years



ago, of leukaemia. Lasciva, of course, had the relatively new vaccine, as had the current Kenwood cat, Rhadamanthus Furlong, offspring of a black Maine coon cat and a black-and-white domestic longhair. He too was ferocious when occasion demanded, though he would not – unlike Lasciva, or her mother, of fond memory – actually cross the street solely to attack a dog.

“I remember one time I was coming up from Reade,” Malcolm was saying. “A kid was trying to sic a spaniel on Mischief. Another kid was saying, ‘Don’t do that; she’ll beat him up.’”

“I think all of us have heard that one before,” Carol murmured.

“Anything to keep Mischief’s memory alive,” said Oliver. “She was one dandy cat. The Rands called her a menace, but it was Bounder’s own fault he ran afoul of her, wasn’t it?”

“On our own property, plain as a pikestaff,” said Malcolm.

“Speaking of pikestaffs, Charlie Dundee is coming out to take over from Edgerton in psychology for a year,” said Darlene. “He’s big stuff in the Society for Creative Anachronism on the main campus, and he’s almost certain to start a shire here. Anyone interested in joining?”

“Not I, not especially,” said Malcolm. “I’m interested in the essentials of the

Middle Ages, which are going to be difficult enough to bring back now, not the frills. It doesn't really matter whether you wear a tunic and hose or a suit and tie, if things like craftsmanship and a co-operative economic system are being ignored, and I'm afraid the kids in the SCA are merely entertained by the frills, like archery which a true knight would scorn, and medieval dancing, which admittedly is an improvement over rock and roll."

"I think I'll probably join," said Oliver. "The frills, like swordfighting, are attractive enough if you're not quixotically hog-wild over the 'essentials'. What we need now is not a return to a craft-and-guild economy but a real advance, to a co-operative industrial society, a truly democratic socialism using the highest technology possible."

"We seem to be forgetting," drawled Malcolm, "that high means living or life-centred, powered by forces of life."

"Please," said Martin Newcombe. "I think that point has been made often enough with sufficient strength to convince anyone here who was likely to be taken in by it. Wait for a new audience, okay, Malc?"

"You're admitting, then, you've no new arguments against the eternal verities?"

“I don’t,” said Oliver. “No new arguments from this side. I just thought you’d like to rehash the old one in different words, Malkie.”

“Ah, copulate yourself,” said Malcolm, “the two a’ ye. Any argument is supposed to be thoroughly hashed out till both sides are agreed.”

“Maybe it’s one of those divergent problems Schumacher says are the stuff of life,” said Darlene. “A conflict between two valid positions irreconcilable by logic, meant to expand the soul in coping with it.”

“Nope, it’s plainly observable that animals are on a higher level of being than machines,” said Malcolm. “Schumacher makes that clear from the start, if you need to read him to think of it. It’s a matter of logic, really, not a divergent problem. Divergent difficulty, I mean. A problem is by its nature a difficulty resolvable by thinking. If I could only get those two to think, I’d convince them in no time. And if they weren’t Modernists, they might conceivably be brought to think.”

“Possibly we might,” said Newcombe. “Oliver, you’re stepping into roomy shoes at the Observer. How do they fit, so far?”

“Not a clue,” said Oliver. He was sitting in the maroon vinyl chair, moveable on wooden stand, with wooden arms, which had its back toward the large window

fronting west on Trent Park. Kenwood was in the small armchair of wood and faded red plush which had belonged to his maternal grandfather and was now set in the corner, ahead of Oliver and to his left, lined by the cedar bookshelf-set Kenwood had built to fit it when he'd moved in. Carol sat, backing the large colour television set (given them by an aunt of Kenwood, mainly for her own use, when she'd stayed with them one summer), on a straight-backed chair upholstered with plush of faded gold and faded red, also passed down from Kenwood's grandfather. Martin and Yvonne Newcombe occupied the fold-down sofa matching Oliver's chair, along the wall to the right, and Darlene sat on his left, in a metal collapsible chair from the Kenwoods' card-table set, her back to the divided tapestry in the place of a folding-door to the hallway. Behind Carol, to her left, was a door leading to the dining-room where they'd have a light lunch later on. Oliver took a sip of his Bristol Cream.

“Samuel Tompkins was probably the most feared man in Angle Stream, if you go by the number of fearers,” said Newcombe, who was Tompkins's neighbour on upper Middle Street. “The hard-boiled criminal element didn't mind him too much, since they knew he and the paper were fair, but the impaired drivers and the women who'd had a scattered lapse into shoplifting dreaded the sight of his

withered old mug, I can tell you. No one who wants his neighbours to regard him as decently respectable wants his petty crime to be read about all over town.”

“Sam told me two teenagers who didn’t like his using their names in connection with underage-drinking convictions jumped him on the way home one night in sixty-nine,” said Oliver. “Sam took a punch in the face on getting up after they dragged him down, went on home, and phoned the police. Next week he was publicizing the boys’ convictions and fines for assault. The paper let him cover the trial himself, too, though it sent another reporter along to watch. He’s more cold-blooded about it than I think I would be. I think I’d have had to fight back.”

“Tompkins hadn’t your experience in boxing,” said Kenwood. “And he probably had more faith in the law and the courts. Due process was almost his first ideal. Yours is action. You may get yourself in trouble through that.”

“Did you ever hear the one Sam tells about the young fellow who was up before Magistrate Andrews in the sixties for causing a public disturbance by swearing?” asked Oliver. The Newcombes had, many times, but not the Kenwoods or Darlene. “It was at a drugstore, and the manager gave pretty damning evidence of how the young man had put up resistance on being asked to leave because the store didn’t allow loitering and how he’d sworn at the manager

when finally forced out. Magistrate Andrews asked the accused whether he had anything to say in his defence, and the accused, from where he stood, without taking oath, gave a yarn which if believed would have let him entirely off the hook. Then Andrews asked whether the young fellow wanted to go in the witness box and swear to his story. ‘No, your honour,’ said he, ‘I never did that before in my life and I’m not going to start now.’

“‘What do you mean you never did before?’ said Andrews. ‘You mean you didn’t swear?’

“‘Yes, your honour.’ Andrews gave a quick grin and fined him.”

Kenwood said, “I heard the one about the magistrate with whom an old familiar customer, who got in trouble on a trip back from the mainland, pleaded for another chance after being convicted. The magistrate told him that sentencing would be postponed until the next day, and if he were out of the province by then, no one would go looking for him.” Darlene laughed at that one. The Newcombes and Carol, having heard it before, merely chuckled politely.

“What some of these old magistrates didn’t get away with,” said Oliver. “Have I told you the one Mr. Justice James Higgins used to swear to, about the magistrate who heard only the prosecution side of his cases?”

“You’ve been holding out on us,” said Kenwood.

“Not really. I only heard it myself this year. It was in Higgins’s career as a lawyer, when he used to go out around the bay. Anyway, he asked the old guy about the practice, and the magistrate said, ‘Oh yes, I used to hear both sides, but it used to get me confused.’”

There was the usual light hilarity, except from Carol, for whom, thought Oliver, the silly old “jurist” must have had particular appeal, for her head was back (fine, dark-brown hair hanging free), her chin thrust up, and she was giving out a dull, low-throated guffaw: *Huhgh!huhgh!huhgh!huhgh!* Somewhat masculine. The image remained with Kendall for the rest of the party. On his way home down the north side of Trent Park, he met Rhadamanthus Furlong, for whose naming he’d been responsible, told him he had an unusual mistress, petted him a few times, and went on, remembering Carol’s laughter as he opened his apartment door at the back of the Phoebus Optical Building on East Street. Lasciva met him there with a glad *miau* hinting of impatience, and he picked her up, scratching under her chin as she sat on his left arm, against his chest. “Nothing masculine about you, is there, little one? As Rhaddy Furlong will soon find out, we hope and trust. Are you used enough to this place to be let out a bit? Maybe in a day or so, eh? When we get the

furniture in. More like home then.”

It was like a barn loft now, except that it had brown carpet, orange-flecked, on the floor, that living-room, which had a hallway leading back, from what would otherwise have been the corner at the rear of the apartment, to his left and ahead of him, round the curving end-wall of the sleeping quarters, to another apartment’s door, bolted on this side and locked on the other. The two bedrooms, side by side, were reached through a hallway serving as an open vestibule that gave access also to the bathroom (round to the right) housed in a corner section which somewhat recessed the kitchen from the living-room. The larger room was walled with pine boards and the kitchen with bright wallpaper in which orange predominated, as in the linoleum on the floor. Kitchen and living-room were further separated by a bar counter with padded green edge, growing from the outer corner of the bathroom to within a comfortable distance of the outer wall. The fridge was in the corner formed by the bar and the bathroom wall, and the electric stove was in the corner diagonally opposite the fridge. The walls meeting in the other corner held light-green cupboards above a counter of darker green, with more cupboards under the counter. There was a ceiling light in the kitchen but none in the living-room. That space was gloomy now, lighted only by a streetlight shining through the large



window in the outer wall. He was looking forward to Saturday. Meantime, he had a cat to feed and her litter in the rear hallway to change, before going to sleep on the floor of the bedroom which was to the right as he faced the hallway from which it opened. He put Lasciva on the floor and went to the fridge for the beef kidney.

The next day, Oliver, after a busy afternoon in court and a hectic hour and twenty minutes at his computer terminal – some Angle Stream lawyers weren't yet aware of *The Observer's* knowing they thought a client could escape publicity by pleading guilty while the reporter was busy helping out with other news for the Saturday edition (the only one printed the day before it came out) – paid a visit to Father Michael Walker after supper.

“Sorry I couldn't make it to Malcolm's last night,” the priest said as they sat in his study, which was lined with books, including many which Kendall and Kenwood also had. “Have a good party?”

“We finally summoned up the courage to suggest to Darlene that her conversational style might be offensive to some pious ears. She took it much better than I would have thought. Of course, it was done very diplomatically. But her temper may be improving.”

“I think it is. Settling in all right?”

“Pretty good at The Observer. Furniture coming tomorrow. Busy afternoon today. Two spousal assaults and an impaired driver, all pleading guilty but arguing a lot and at length about sentence. All in tomorrow’s paper. Power to the press. Great good fun.” He paused. “Could I go to Confession, Father?”

“Recent convert to orthodoxy, are you?”

“Not really, but confession is good for the soul.”

“Oliver, how can you expect me to give you absolution when there’s a very wide area of morality in which you won’t admit you’ve sinned, where we both know that objectively the matter of sin is really considerable?”

“Is a confessor really supposed to take advantage of friendship like that?”

“Would you be asking to confess if I weren’t your friend?”

“It wouldn’t be honest, not without a full explanation which another priest would find hard to accept.”

“As I do.”

“Right. But I don’t see why you can’t forgive the sins I admit to be sins, while recognizing my conscience is really clear about my love life.”

“Is it so clear?”

“Of course it is. My love life is conducted strictly along the lines laid down by *Humanae Vitae*, except I believe humans have evolved beyond the need to marry, where conception is really avoided. Sex is a legitimate expression of genuine love, provided the primary function isn’t artificially frustrated, and a man can truly love more than one woman, successively, without necessarily wanting a child by any of them. Love of a woman is not the same thing as love of her child; unless you want a child, or can’t avoid having one, there’s no need to marry.”

“Why don’t you leave the Church entirely, then? You and the Church can’t both be right, and if the Church is wrong on one thing, its universal authority is gone.”

“I don’t agree. The Church is evolving toward infallibility. I think the Church will adopt my view, and I don’t want to leave it prematurely, just because old fogies in the Vatican won’t realize that. An increasing number of people do hold it.”

“Very few hold your precise opinion. Most do believe in marriage and monogamy.”

“They think they do. More of them are coming to believe in divorce. Their feelings at the bottom are the same as mine, and their thinking will come into line

as it evolves.”

“It’s what I feared, then: thought following feeling, instead of feeling being directed by thought.”

“No, I’ve really thought it out – though, of course, in a sense feeling is the basis of thought, since it is prior on the evolutionary scale. I’m convinced that sexual love changes and evolves, with each person who becomes its object, and a lover must be free to grow up to a higher level of beloved the next time.”

“So you keep saying. It’s been four beloveds so far, hasn’t it?”

“Five. I broke off with the last one after only a short relationship. That was highly unusual; she wasn’t nearly as intelligent as I’d thought.”

“Five unrepented premarital relationships, and you want to confess losing your temper a few times, I suppose, while ignoring these entirely.”

“I’m convinced that four of these were highly spiritual relationships approved by God, and the last one was honestly mistaken for the same, and I broke it off right away when I knew it wasn’t, and I know well enough that indulging anger and resentment is sinful.”

“If you’re so convinced that God agrees with your private convictions, why don’t you confess to Him alone, spiritually, and be on your merry way?”

“Confession to a priest makes such good sense psychologically, that it’s got to have His approval and be required. As Father Alfred Wilson said, you don’t know yourself that you’re sorry enough until you find yourself willing to confess.”

“Your trouble is that you’re really scared by the big bogey of a bad confession.”

“I want to be honest about it.”

“If you were really honest about it in your heart, you wouldn’t mind going to a priest who didn’t know you and confessing your other sins while not mentioning the fornications.”

“They’re not fornications. I didn’t do it for the pleasure but for love. My own pleasure was irrelevant.”

“When you agree it was fornication, I’ll be glad to hear your confession. Not before.”

“Okay, Mike. At least when you agree to forgive me, I’ll know I’m really forgiven. But what do I do in the meantime?”

“Stay away from Communion. Pray for wisdom. Remember Padre Pio’s message to Graham Greene: God doesn’t ask of anyone what he can’t give. Though, now that I think of it, I don’t know whether that means God doesn’t ask

of men what they can't give, or whether it means God doesn't ask of a man anything God can't give him, so that he could give it back. Anyway, pray, if your evolving God can answer prayer."

"Prayer to him is one of the factors in his evolution, Mike."

"Sure, b'y. Sure. You're still relatively free of serious sexual temptation, I take it, except when you're in love?"

"Pretty well. I've no trouble controlling and banishing impure thoughts; my father's training still holds. Not many like him."

"Not many. Not nearly enough. You've got the makings of a good priest or monk if only you'd see sense."

"Little boys aren't my taste at all. No, seriously, Mike, I'm not cut out to be a monk."

"Most of our drive to love others is really an expression of our need to be loved. If you could realize Christ's love, you might not need women's so badly."

"Yeah, yeah. I don't think my vocation's in the priesthood. It wouldn't be fair to the old men in the Vatican if I took their ordination and preached my own ideas."

"You're absolutely sure your own ideas are correct?"

“If I weren’t sure that love between man and woman is God’s highest ideal at this point in evolution, I think I’d have no problem with the priesthood. Sexual passion is resistible when you’re in love. It’s strong enough then, and specific enough, to be fought hard, when love itself offers a reason for fighting it.”

“Which seldom happens, of course.”

“Right on. Except for avoiding pregnancy during the fertile period.”

“You’re the greatest abuser of divine generosity I’ve known for a long time.”

“If I’m wrong.”

“You’re wrong, all right. You accept all the orthodox arguments about the primary purpose of sexual congress, except you give them a perverse little twist that justifies having multiple lovers.”

“Progressive loves, rather. I’ve never had more than one lover at a time. Being in love doesn’t work that way.”

“Having another lover while one lover still lives, is having multiple lovers.”

“You’re just a hidebound cleric, Mike, when it comes to the implications of the theory of evolution.”

“Accepting evolution as a principle all-pervasive requires an even greater leap of faith than believing in the Divinity of Christ.”

“Well, then, that’s my faith. And I gather you’ve no new arguments against it.”

“No new ones. Nothing since my last letter. It’ll probably take experience to show you your error. I’ll pray that it won’t take too much of a disaster to wake you up.”

“Thanks. But if you want your prayer to be effective, pray to the Deity in a general sense, rather than to Christ.”

“You bloody idiot. But you’re consistent. But so am I. I’ll pray to Christ for you, and we’ll see. In this life or the next.”

“Yeah.”

“Are you going to join the Dunedain Fencing Club when Malcolm gets it going again for the year? He’ll be doing it pretty soon. I understand the college begins classes again a week from today.”

“Oh, yeah. We’re looking forward to regular fighting, both swordsman-swordsman and swordsman-gunman.”

“Good.”

The movers arrived Saturday, and Lasciva slipped out on the landing while they brought the furniture in. They put the two single beds in the bedrooms, and Oliver told them to leave the rest in the middle of the living-room. When they’d



left, he put the oblong dining table and its chairs alongside the bar, the green vinyl armchair in front of the window in the living-room, the matching sofa facing it with back cutting off the rear hallway but leaving a walk-space between sofa and wall. The end-table went between the sofa and the side wall, and he stood the sides of the bookshelf-stand, made by Kenwood in replica of his own, together in the corner of side wall and front wall, for fastening with the screws which had been removed for disassembly. The bookshelf-stand firmly in the corner, he plugged in the lamp he'd bought on moving in, in the outlet near the window, and dropped the cord behind the bookstand, put the lamp on the end-table. Then he moved his La-Z-Boy chair into position between bookstand and end-table, and felt himself at home; all now needed were the books: he got to work at the boxes and put the books on their proper shelves, in order as they had been in his living-room in St. John's. Yes, he was home again. Home, except for having a bed, which he set up next in the bedroom he'd chosen: neither had a window, which bothered him not. He stacked the boxes in the spare bedroom, to wait till garbage day. Lasciva curled up in the corner of the bookstand, her favourite place since kitten days, and went to sleep, while Oliver rested in the La-Z-Boy a while. He planned his housewarming for the night of Labour Day. He'd invited the

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Kenwoods, the Newcombes, Darlene, Father Mike, and Will Richards, his new managing editor.

## CHAPTER 2

“Nice party last night, Oll,” said Richards, as Oliver went to his desk in the newsroom.

“Thanks.”

“That Carol Kenwood looks a bit like a witch, don’t she? Real severe-lookin’, I mean.”

Oliver laughed. “I’d forgotten. She gives that impression at first, till you get used to it and realize how good-looking she is.”

“Good-lookin’?”

“Extremely.”

“Sure, she’s got a real nice complexion.”

“It’s more than that. Some women look plain at first, till you get used to them. Their real attractiveness grows on you.”

“Well, hers better not grow on you too strong. That Kenwood’d shove a sword

into you quick as he'd look at you, if it did.”

“He'd let me have a sword first, to defend myself. And I'm not exactly a slouch with one. Anyway, I don't fall in love with married women.”

“You want to do a story when the fencing club starts, for Sports? You'd do it better than the other guys.”

“Okay, sure. I usually did the opening story for the MUN club every season.”

“Good. All set for the Supremes' opening this morning?”

“Yup. Judge Goodridge is presiding. The advance is on my file. I hear there's a wrongful dismissal from the mill coming up. That should be interesting.”

“Yeah, these are usually good. Rare, that's the only thing.”

“Part of what makes 'em news.”

“I guess.”

Will settled down to his machine. Oliver rewrote a couple of minor press releases while waiting to call the police about the long weekend's incidents and charges. He usually called for the 911 report also.

The court was busy setting cases all morning, and Oliver got back to the newsroom after lunch, as little but a small-claims trial was doing in provincial court; a break-and-entry in Courtroom 2 had been postponed. “The wrongful

dismissal is George Grimford, an electrician at the mill,” he said to Richards. “It’s set for the twenty-fifth. Three sexual assaults in the meantime.”

“Sexual assault. Could be anything.”

“I checked. Two allege actual rape. The other’s just a thigh stroke from down the coast. I wish they hadn’t smudged the classification of rape and indecent assault.”

“Old way was better all round. What’s really rape seems less serious, till the public knows the details, and pattin’ a bum can get you the same reputation as rape.”

“Bum rap. Like me to do an editorial on it?”

“Sure. If you got the time.”

“Good enough. When I get this done. Lots of contested divorces this time. Lot of civils we mostly wouldn’t bother with covering.”

Oliver keyed in his starting code, started his story: “Three sexual assault charges, two of them alleging forcible sexual intercourse, were among the criminal charges set for trial by jury when the fall sitting of the Newfoundland Supreme Court at Angle Stream opened Tuesday...” He went on to name the accused and give dates and places set out in all the charges set for trial. Next

named was the wrongful-dismissal case, and a short sentence mentioned the number of civil trials set and civil cases postponed. Then the number of divorce matters set for hearing.

“Carol Kenwood’s got a master’s degree in philosophy?” said Richards, as Oliver sat back. “Why don’t she teach, I wonder? Should come in handy for teaching religion in high school, if she didn’t wanna be on the same staff as her husband. If that didn’t bother her, she could lecture there without a doctorate, couldn’t she?”

“She doesn’t care for teaching at all. Tried it once and had discipline problems. She’d rather write. Doesn’t talk about it much. But she writes really good fantasy yarns about an imaginary Newfoundland following the Amish philosophy in opposition to an industrialised mainland much like modern Canada. She can’t seem to get them published, though. Maybe in part because her Newfoundland’s a separate country and doing well. But she’s got the guts to keep trying. Like Malc. He keeps writing essay-length versions of his letters to us, as if they’re from semi-literate, or at least wholly unsophisticated, outport types, discussing the Amish philosophy as opposed to industrialism, and things like abortion and contraception. I don’t agree with the Amish point of view, but they’re funny as

hell. But the publishers don't seem to want them. If he'd put their content in dry scholarly form, he might get a textbook company to print it, but he says he's having too much fun his own way. You need a certain amount of intelligence and literary craftiness to appreciate the humour in them.”

“Like you need a fine-arts degree to appreciate Carol bein' good-lookin'?”

“You just have to be used to her.”

“And you're used to her.”

“We've been friends for a long time. Ever since she and Malcolm started dating. Every now and then she looks to me the way she did at first impression. If I could draw, I'd show you how she looks to me mostly. An artist could do that. Photography can't.”

“Like hell it can't. I've seen some dogs who looked pretty good in some photos.”

“Me, too. But that's creating a false impression. An artist can show the truth so you see it yourself when you look at the same subject.”

“I'd like to see Mrs. Kenwood your way, just once. Maybe she's worth his energy after all, aside from sharin' his philosophy – which ought to mean a lot to someone like him. But how come they got no children?”

“They don’t quite know for sure. Malc’s against trying to find out so far as himself’s concerned, and she’s against that, too, though they’re pretty sure it got to be him. I agree with them on that.”

“Me, too.”

“Anyway, it’s not for want of trying; I’m pretty sure of that.”

“Yeah, they seem pretty close.”

“Yeah.”

Richards went back to his typing on the computer, and Oliver felt a stirring of gratitude for the closeness of his two friends at least, while he himself was lacking a beloved. The feeling recurred, somewhat stronger, when he went to bed that night. It was followed by a twinge of jealousy – on Malcolm’s behalf? – when he mused briefly on Richards’s interest in Carol. He thought that was probably purely carnal and not at all practical but rather speculative, but he didn’t really know Richards well enough to say.

Oliver’s sense of his friends’ closeness was heightened somewhat September eleventh while, after the introductory meeting for the fencing season, well attended partly as a result of Oliver’s story in *The Observer* the previous Saturday – “first intelligent sports story I’ve seen,” Publisher Hal Calloway had remarked –



he was chatting with Malcolm, Darlene, and Randolph Rand in the Stuart Lounge of the Benmill Inn (named like East Street for Sir Benjamin East, an officer of the original paper company of Angle Stream). Rand had brought up the topic of open-mouth kissing in a movie he'd seen on the weekend: "Why do so many movie characters want to behave like suicidal duelling toothless lampreys?"

"Because kissing as properly practised to be fully erotic doesn't look dignified, me son," said Malcolm. "Puckering your lips well forward in a properly outward seeking for the mouth of one's beloved makes the human face look thoroughly ridiculous. Two people seeking each other thus are twice as ridiculous. It wouldn't do at all for the movies where visual effect is everything. We can't have moviegoers laughing at serious sex, the supreme spectator sport. Naturally not."

"Is that how you and Carol kiss?" asked Darlene.

"Nunna yer bluddy bizniz, me dear. My love life isn't meant to be the basis of erotic fantasy for frustrated single women." Darlene, missing his shin and kicking the table leg, grimaced. "I'm just talking about general principles in a very general way."

"You mean you've kissed other women besides Carol that way? You'd have to, to make it 'general'. A lot of them." It was, Oliver thought, a medium-quick

recovery, considering the pain in her foot.

“That too is nunna yer bloody bizniz. I’ll not give you more fuel for your frustrated fantasies than I can help.”

“Oh, copulate yourself, Malcolm.”

Oliver was glad the conversation’s focus wasn’t on him at the moment; he feared his face might have betrayed how his emotions were stirred by a sudden image of Carol and Malcolm kissing in the manner just spoken of. It seemed an intensifying of eroticism not at all ridiculous to him.

The image disturbed him again when he had just settled down in bed that night: it turned up in his mind, of Carol seeking intensely with forward-pushing lips tight-puckered. For just a moment, he pursed his own as if to meet her mouth coming down on his, and a thrill shot through him. He was horrified, at more than the back of his mind, at his being tempted thus, at so late a date, to fantasy of adultery, and he tried to turn his thought toward a blessing of the union of Carol and Malcolm, and he succeeded. He hoped they were doing it at this moment, that Carol now was being enjoyed by her lawful love, and in that hope he relaxed and slept.

The image recurred during the next few nights, and increased a nascent

curiosity about his friends' lovemaking. And on Wednesday, when he was typing into his file the story from the police about the double shooting in the park, it occurred to him he might be able to help control his curiosity about Carol's most attractive mouth (which really set off her perfect complexion) by presiding more actually as a kind of benign spirit over Carol and Malcolm in their bed, with the aid of the mike and receiver he'd had for two years. A *Radio Shack* manager had advised him, when approached on the topic, to pick up an electronics magazine and look in the ads for listening devices and send for a catalogue, and the mike and receiver had arrived in time to help him get one of his most important stories. How he'd got it, had always remained his secret. The mike and receiver, mostly out of mind now, were on a shelf in the closet of his apartment, with the *Knights of Camelot* and *Magic Realm* games he hoped to play with Malcolm and Carol and Darlene and Rand. He wanted to enjoy as a friend his two friends' enjoying each other, so that he wouldn't be tempted to imagine himself illicitly enjoying a minor, but still sexual, aspect of one of them. Reality was always a good cure for an unhealthy imagination, Father Mike often said – a remark hitherto irrelevant to Oliver's private life. Appearing thus, the notion became strongly insinuating, especially when he reflected on it in bed at night, alone except for Lasciva. Before

he knew it, a resolution had been taken. Two days later, the mike in his jacket pocket with a loop of thread tied onto it, he turned up right from Westvale on his way back from court in the afternoon, let himself into the yellow house at 18 Trent Park, and asked Carol, who was working in her den (off the kitchen; past the dining-room) whether he could pick up a book or two from the bedroom stand. He was particularly interested in *Almayer's Folly*. He said he didn't want to interrupt her work, and he could find it for himself. She agreed, smiling with full smooth lips.

Oliver went up the stairs that began at the left as one came in from the porch, and crossed the narrow hallway to the bedroom above the living-room, in the southwest corner of the second floor. Malcolm's den adjoined it, in the northwest corner. He hung the microphone by the loop of thread from a protruding screw on the back of the corner bookshelf-stand – identical in design with the one downstairs, it had been Malcolm's first effort in carpentry and was a little rougher in execution – and picked out *Almayer* and two more books, *Almayer* for rereading and the others as new material. Then he went to the den and thanked Carol, chatted a bit about the work in progress, before letting himself out. He thought she never looked so attractive as when enthusiastically intent on her

fantasy world. Malcolm was a lucky man.

That night he went to bed early, having adjusted his receiver to the rarely used frequency the mike had been set for. He started to reread *Almayer*, refusing to indulge in speculative fantasy with reality so close. Late at night, Malcolm and Carol were apparently continuing a discussion started downstairs, of Martin Newcombe's latest column in *The Observer*, before settling down after murmured "Good night" to fall asleep and snore, Carol (Oliver thought) rather jarringly. Malcolm was lucky he was asleep first.

The next day, Oliver started covering the Grimford dismissal trial. The matter had been dealt with by an arbitration board, and Grimford was appealing the board's finding of fact, contrary to his evidence, that visibility had not been so affected as to prevent his seeing the origin of smoke in the room at the Cooper mill where he'd refused a foreman's order to enter and change a blown fuse which had caused a paper machine to shut down.

Grimford was the first witness. He told the court that about eleven a.m. January fourteenth, 1990, Foreman Charley Organ called him to change the fuse in a switch just after the machine stopped. There was smoke in the room, too thick for him to see whether it was coming from the switch in question, the feeder switch

that supplied it, or a PCB transformer, all of which were fairly close together. He was certain the smoke was too thick, but Organ kept insisting that Organ could see it was coming from the lesser switch, and kept ordering him to go in and change the fuse. He had refused – “No pun intended, I’m sure, my lord,” said Grimford’s counsel – and the machine had been shut down for forty-five minutes, until the smoke cleared. Then, he went in and found a fuse blown in the feeder switch and changed it. There had been no danger from the PCB transformer at all, but he’d had no way of knowing that unless he’d accepted Organ’s evaluation at the time, which had contradicted the evidence of his own eyes and indeed was proven to him to be mistaken when the smoke cleared. He had been fired for trusting that evidence of his own eyes.

Cross-examined, Grimford said he had no good reason for thinking Organ would lie to put him in danger, but on redirect, his lawyer asked whether he had any reason at all for distrusting Organ, and he said, reluctantly, that he had once suspected Organ of “sniffing around my wife” and had later been insulting to Organ at a party at the Legion club. Yes, that was well before the incident in question. No, he hadn’t asked his wife whether Organ had been bothering her; he’d felt he’d made his point to Organ without going so far as to find out whether

he should poke him in the nose, which he'd have felt obliged to do if his wife had confirmed what he'd thought.

There were two more witnesses, both brief, for the appellant, and in the afternoon, after argument by counsel, the respondent opened its case. After the hearing of evidence about loss of production, and scientific evidence about lack of danger from feeder switch as opposed to PCB transformer, Organ gave much the same evidence as Grimford had given, except for saying he distinctly told Grimford several times he could clearly see the smoke was coming from the feeder switch. He'd never said the smoke was coming from the lesser switch. He had no doubt about that. Asked whether he knew any reason for Grimford to impugn his word, he said the only thing he could think of was that Grimford seemed to be a very jealous husband. No, he had never done anything to provoke that jealousy himself.

Cross-examination of Organ was set for three days later; the trial was taking longer than expected, and the court schedule was intervening.

That night, on being admitted to Samuel Peddle's den, Oliver told the union head that Organ looked like a "lady's-man type" to him, and said he rather thought that there had been more ground for Grimford's jealousy than had yet

been uncovered at the trial. Peddle replied with workplace gossip which he said workmates never repeated when Grimford was present.

“A question about what kind of fire lies behind a certain kind of smoke, not wholly unrelated to suspicions of marital misbehaviour, dominated Wednesday’s session of a Supreme Court hearing that is to decide whether electrician George Grimford was wrongfully dismissed nearly two years ago by Cooper Incorporated, owner of the Angle Stream newsprint mill,” was the lead Oliver put on the story he wrote that night about the day’s proceedings.

“That’s awful sensationalist for us, isn’t it?” said Richards next morning.

“I’ve got some off-the-record stuff that justifies it, in my judgement; should help smoke out rebuttal evidence, I think.”

“You better be right. You won’t get away with anything again if this is not justified. We’re practically saying Mrs. Grimford’s playing around.”

“Organ is married. He’s the one misbehaving.”

“Could argue that, I spose. Okay, I’ll give it a try, if you’re sure. You don’t usually go for that stuff, I’ll give you that. But I’ll cross my fingers.”

There were a few phone calls about the lead the day after it appeared, but none from the Grimfords or Charley Organ, though Mrs. Organ had a lot to say to



Kendall and Richards both. “I hope it’s worth it,” said Richards.

When the trial resumed, Organ, under cross-examination, again denied ever justifying Grimford’s “dirty-mindedness”. Counsel for the appellant asked permission to call rebuttal evidence, bearing on credibility of the respondent’s chief witness. It was granted. Mrs. Grimford took the witness box and told the court that Organ had told her once that he could go out of his way to make things nice for Grimford at work if she’d be nice to Organ well away from work. She’d never told that to her husband, though she’d mentioned it to a close friend, since she feared Grimford’s temper would land him in court for harm to Organ, who wasn’t worth disgrace. (However, she had told Organ that “if he ever got close enough even by accident, I was going to give him a knee in the b—, groin, my lord.”) But when she’d read in the paper that Organ’s lying about that could lose George’s case, especially when the paper “hinted so barefaced about marital misbehaviour,” she could hold it in no longer and gone to her husband’s lawyer with it.

Mrs. Grimford’s evidence apparently influenced the court’s decision, which, most unusually, was rendered immediately after arguments, in Grimford’s favour, with Judge Edwards remarking that “even irresponsibility on the part of the press

is an ill wind indeed when it blows nobody any good at all.” Oliver looked properly chastened.

“*Nailed the bastard!*” he exulted to Richards when he got back to write the story, in which the judge’s remark about the press received due prominence. “The judge suggested Organ be charged with perjury.” He rubbed his hands.

“Good,” said Richards. “I’m really glad it worked out right.

“Makes us look like shit, that’s the only thing.”

“Yeah, that’s a bit unfortunate.”

“What I can’t figure out is why you’re so dead set against adultery, if you’re so sure we’re evolving away from marriage.”

“Free will is a self-evident fact of human nature, and people have a right to decide whether a given level of evolution is appropriate for them, if they want to commit themselves for life to other people. I think individuals in a relationship can progress beyond their partners, and some of us progress faster than others, and I think the race will eventually progress beyond needing marriage, when society as a whole evolves to the level of certain individuals, but I think marriage is important now so far as children are concerned. I don’t want a child myself, because I don’t think society right now is conducive to my raising it successfully

according to my own ideals of really progressive economic co-operation instead of competition, but if I did decide to have one, I'd commit myself to staying with his mother – whom I'd choose pretty carefully – because it's been truly said – for this stage of evolution – that a child needs to know his parents will stay together. And if I promised to stay with a woman so we could have children, I'd stay with her even if it turned out we couldn't have them, as long as she still wanted me to stay. I don't mind divorce if procreation is impossible or if no children have been started yet. But if a childless couple want to stay together, if they both think it's appropriate to their present level of personal development, no one else should try to interfere. No one else has a right to try to break them up, or to persuade one to deceive the other.”

He'd listened to Malcolm and Carol making love twice in the past few nights, and their delight in each other lent force to his opinion now. That love was a thing no outsider should be allowed to sully.

As often happened, Oliver took the initiative in argument that weekend, during supper Sunday, October sixth, at the Kenwoods'. A new idea had occurred to him Thursday, after he'd got the invitation.

“I've been reading,” he remarked, “in a book by C.S.L., who of course is

second only to the great G.K.,” – he bowed toward Carol with his eyebrows raised – “something which might well suggest even to a convinced Christian that inanimate matter has its own Divine standing, independent of man, in God’s scheme of things. Lewis says that by his death your divine Christ descended to the level of inanimate matter, to raise up all things when he rose from the dead. And Father Hardon’s catechism says the Divine Personality was united with Christ’s body even in death. So maybe Christ has thereby raised unliving matter to divinity by His own action, so that it can be allowed to move by its own quasi-animation without having to depend on the animate as narrowly conceived by some.” Oliver prided himself on keeping up to date in orthodox teaching, so as to counter it better when arguing for Modernism.

“You remind me of the priest who told me once that men don’t have much to do with angels since Christ came down to man from above them,” answered Kenwood. “But St. Thomas says the lower is always raised by the level next above it, so far as the next level is capable. My view is that Our Lord would want other men to imitate and share in His raising of the inanimate, since men are made to make, like the Maker. Putting the matter to be formed, into the place of the one who is to form it, is like Satan’s trying to put himself into the place of God, I

think. Have you reflected, by the way, that that attempt pretty well makes Satan the patron of Evolution?”

“You orthodox types are always putting yourselves in God’s place, aren’t you? Why isn’t that Satanic?”

“Christ brought us into His own place, as he would have brought Satan for admitting unworthiness, by putting His divine Life into our souls. Matter doesn’t have a soul for Him to enter; it’s sheer stuff-for-making with.”

“So are you. Or don’t you believe your God said, ‘I am the potter; you are the clay.’?”

“God is pure Maker; matter is pure ‘makendum’” – “Ugh!” said Oliver, Latin purist – “and man is between them and shares their modes of being. When Christ sanctified the unliving by becoming inanimate, he made it worthy of being modified by men raised to Divinity.”

Oliver was a little disgruntled, but wasn’t showing it. This facile countering of a good argument was most unfair. “You’ve said what seems most likely to you. You haven’t really refuted my suggestion – given anything really convincing.”

“That God might deal directly with matter without sharing His making with man, is not repugnant to reason,” Kenwood conceded magnanimously. “He made

matter a long time before he made man – and He dealt with it directly then – unless He had the angels’ unneeded help, simply to share with them His doing. Which most orthodox theologians seem to think He did.”

“Thomas Aquinas, you mean.”

“Another thing. If Christ meant the inanimate to stand by itself, I think He’d have chosen to disguise Himself in consecrated pieces of metal or stone instead of bread, for His maintaining His own Physical Presence throughout our world. His way of giving us the Eucharist seems to mark a strong line between organic and inorganic.”

That seemed to be a clincher, from the point of view of a strict Catholic – and Oliver and Malcolm always tried each to argue from the other’s point of view, when attacking; the self-consistency of Modernist attitudes probably explained why Kenwood was so seldom the aggressor; it was as a Catholic that Kenwood had to be convinced of anything, so far, till he could be shown Catholicism was unreasonable. Unfair. It had seemed such a good argument when he’d thought of it. He looked down at his plate, forking into apple and lamb of Kenwood’s favourite meat pie – cooked by Kenwood, not Carol, for a change – and barely caught the puckering well forward of Carol’s mouth at Malcolm. Startled, he

looked directly at her as she shrank, hunched, with shy-guilty grin. Then all three laughed heartily.

“I hope you’ll let me finish this pie before I have to leave,” said Oliver.

“Stay as long as you like,” said Malcolm. “The horny little bitch can use the discipline.”

“You just changed my mind, buddy,” quoth Carol, but blushing. Highly Elizabethan, for her, but she’d needed to pass it off: her congratulation on Kenwood’s winning the argument. Unfair. Then she said, “How are things going with the SCA, Oliver?”

“Not badly at all. Charlie appreciates my helping out with the rapier instruction, which is pretty much foil with an edge, the edge being handy on the return if you miss with the point, like your own smallsword. I offered to teach sabre, but Charlie says ‘heavy-weapon’ play is much different, the battle sword being carried on the shoulder and swung from it to go round the head and shoulders if it misses, to rest on the shoulder again. I showed him how easily my battle sword could be used like a sabre, but he says that’s not ‘authentic’. I think efficiency in weapon play is more important than authenticity in imitation of the old-fashioned, but he doesn’t agree, and he’s head of the shire. No sabre work for us, therefore.

But I get enough with Malc, and edged rapier is good fun. We don't yet have the rattan equipment and the shields for 'authentic' heavy-weapon practice. Of course, we fight 'in garb'; I've got a striking scarlet tunic of velveteen, trimmed with black, made by Mamselle Stitch-It. It's all right to wear jeans with it; no one wants to be slashed or scraped on the bare leg.

"We're having our first feast at Hallowe'en: authentic courses (served in the Regular Ripples Community Hall) heated by microwave in the kitchen, after a fencing tournament, and followed by medieval dancing, which is rather fun. I'm looking forward to the food and the tournament. Darlene's agreed to be my partner for the dancing, in the absence of anything specific in the way of love-life or close-enough acquaintance, so Malkie needn't worry I might try to borrow you for the occasion. Come to think of it, why don't ye attend as my guests?"

"We're going to the Drama Club party; Jake Bottom invited us last week. But a real medieval feast might be fun for Malc – I'm not fussy about it myself – eh, Malkie? Any idea when the next one'll be?"

"Probably at Valentine's, on the Saturday. (For medievals, we're really forward-looking.) I'll let you know as soon as 'tis settled. Keep reminding me."

"Since Valentine's is Friday, you wouldn't be separating us on the day. We



usually eat out together then, in the evening.”

“By the way, Malc, you’d be proud of the second-year Dunedain; most of them are in the shire, and Charlie can’t beat any of them on anything like a regular basis.”

“You’re the club champion, Darlene tells me,” said Carol.

“I win most of my matches. Could make it to official shire champion at the feast, even at my age.”

“Age and cunning conquers youth and brawn,” said Malcolm.

“Get someone to take a video of your fights there, then,” said Carol. “I haven’t seen a fencing match for ages.”

“You and Malcolm still practise, don’t you? Malc?”

“Oh, yeah, that and good old jiu-jitsu both,” said Carol, “but I haven’t had anything to watch. And edged foil sounds sort of exotic.”

“Yeah.”

After the usual length of time for one of his visits – which this time included two games of Scrabble – while all three were thoroughly relaxed, Oliver hurried home. Sure enough, Carol and Malcolm were in bed together. Unfair. He’d no one now. And love had to come unsought, or at least was better that way: looking

for someone to love was begging to be loved; Lewis was right about that. Carol had a delicious-looking mouth, in repose; puckered, it looked muscularly delightful. What did it really feel like? Malcolm knew. Unfair. For once unable to sleep, he went out into the living-room, took his battle sword – like Malcolm’s, a Wilkinson replica of a thirteenth century knight’s weapon, bought from British Ceremonial Imports Limited of Weston, Ontario – from the top of the bookshelf-stand, and went through several series of sword exercises. Then he got Conrad’s *Chance* from the bookshelf and went back to bed to reread. After a few pages, he lost interest and set the book aside, turned off the lamp on the dresser next his bed, and, hands behind head on pillow, wondered whether he would ever get Carol Kenwood to kiss him on the mouth. It seemed unlikely; he’d had his chance once and turned aside from it, having not the faintest notion that the missed opportunity would ever give rise to such chagrin.

It had been at Carol’s and Malcolm’s wedding, with bride and groom greeting well-wishers in the porch at the Basilica. Many of the males had tried to kiss that mouth then, but she’d kept turning the other cheek so assiduously her Jesus must be proud of her, Oliver thought at the time, grinning to himself. But when his turn came, she sort of mentally gritted teeth and presented mouth, puckered as he’d

seen it tonight. He smiled, kissed her cheek, smiled again into the dark brown eyes of greenish tint, and winked. She smiled back, intuitive, grateful. So she owed him now that kiss on the mouth, and he was entitled to collect. But it would, he felt, take guile. And he had guile; all he had to do was lie here like this and let a plan form up, then use a bit of effort to refine details and smooth wrinkles.

The plan formed up as expected, taking a bit of time; technically, what he intended was legally sexual assault, but if it should actually get into court and public knowledge, the consequence would more likely be laughter, at all involved, than a fine or jail; and he went to sleep deciding to shave his neck in the morning for the shaping of a beard.

“Going to look even more like Kenwood, are you, Oll?” said Richards a day later, when the dark began to show.

“Not really. My beard’s dark brown when it grows out. Contrast more than anything.” Kenwood’s was light auburn. “But I’ve adopted his view that growing things should be allowed to grow, at least to that extent.”

When Kenwood noticed it, he murmured his approval. By Christmas, their beards were almost the same length, Kenwood’s, recently trimmed a bit closer than usual, the longer by a little. The three friends were to spend Christmas Day

together, or most of the afternoon, Kendall, who (having no family in Angle Stream or within convenient travelling distance) had offered to handle such work as came up at *The Observer* that day, which meant the Christmas baby at the hospital and a photo of a quiet business street, had accepted the Kenwood's invitation to turkey dinner at noon; they had no relative in the city but were staying home this year.

Taking his coat in the hallway, Malcolm asked, "Did you hear about Sam Tompkins? Two young fellows seeking revenge for publicity about court about this time last year, broke into his house during Midnight Mass, cut the branches off their Christmas tree, and tore up the gifts they were giving each other. The two are in custody; a neighbour saw them going in."

"Poor old Sam. What a rotten thing to do."

"Yeah. The father of one of them offered to pay for the damage if Sam wouldn't press charges, and I gather the police were rather noncommittal about that, but Sam is going ahead; he believes in due process. He plans to take civil action for recovery, too. Newcombe phoned about it a few minutes ago."

"Proper thing. I hope they get the book thrown. I'll make sure they get proper publicity this time, too."

“Proper thing.”

“Merry Christmas, Mr. Kendall,” said Carol, when he went into the living-room. She was sitting in the chair in the bookshelf corner, diagonally opposite the Christmas tree, her knees together under the grey skirt and her feet apart in green slippers – which perfectly matched her blouse – on the gold-flecked light-brown carpet. She was smiling lazily.

“Merry Christmas, me dears. Brought ye a little gift.” He held out the book sized present, gift-wrapped and tied with green ribbon. Carol opened it eagerly. “Volume Three of the Collected Works of the great G.K., from Ignatius Press,” she said to Malcolm. “Got it through Angelus Books of Barrie, in Ontario,” said Oliver. “Oliver, you’re a pal,” said Malcolm.

“I know.”

“I’m not too bad in that department myself. Look what we got for you.” Malcolm picked up a smaller book sized package from under the tree, and Oliver opened it: *How to Think about God*, subtitled *A Guide for the 20th Century Pagan*, by Mortimer J. Adler.

“If the subtitle is accurate enough, this should fit my needs just right,” said Oliver. “Is Adler himself a pagan, though?”

“Oh, yes.”

“Good.”

“At least you’re admitting a Modernist is practically a pagan.”

“To the extent that an orthodox Catholic is practically a superstitious gull.”

After the plum pudding, they were eating grapes and nuts when Carol cracked an almond with a double kernel.

“Philippina?” she said to Malcolm.

“Okay. The usual?”

“Ya’h.”

“Fillawhat?” said Oliver. “What’s this about?”

“Townies,” said Malcolm. “Don’t know nuthin’.

“The philippina – spelled usually like lady Philippino – is an old custom back home, probably brought from England, since it’s in the Oxford English Dictionary. The finder of a double-kernel nut gives one kernel to another person and they both eat, after agreeing on a forfeit to be paid by the first of them the other catches saying a certain word, usually ‘What’, ‘Yes’, or ‘No’. That’s how it’s played back home, though the OED says only that a gift is given by one of the sharers at their next meeting. No mention of a contest. OED says the word might

come from the German vielliebchen, very dear, but since it's also spelled p-h-i-l-o-p-o-e-n-a, it could come from Latin for 'lover's penalty'." He chuckled. "One of my older cousins, back home, once suggested it might be a corruption, though she didn't use that word, of course, of 'fellow peanut'. When your partner says the designated word, you have to say, 'Philippina!' right away, or she isn't caught."

"Hey, I've got one," said Oliver. Lightly, he asked, "Want to go for a kiss, Carol?"

"On the cheek?"

"Of course."

"What word will we have?"

"How about 'what'?"

"Okay."

"Good. That's the usual one I have with Malkie, for a thirty-point handicap at Scrabble. By the way, the forfeit word has to be said in conversation directly with the partner."

About half an hour later, while the three were lounging companionably in the living-room, Oliver leaned over to Malcolm and muttered a question in which the words "Chesterton" and "Orwell" were audible to Carol. In Malcolm's muttered

reply, she heard “Lewis” and “Tolkien” and “Carol”, and was for once completely caught off guard. “*What* are ye two puttin’ through ye?” she demanded. Each man looked up with an evil grin and whispered, “Philippina!”

“Oh, for heaven’s sake.” And she kissed Oliver on the beard, which naturally transmitted no sensation whatever of that mouth. Unfair. He could have been content, perhaps. Looking for something to change his train of thought and keep it from becoming apparent, he glanced at the top of the bookshelf-stand, and said, “What’s the smallsword doing there? Isn’t that the broadsword’s usual place?”

“We’ve decided to take turns, week by week, manning the defence of the property in general and the bedroom in particular, respectively,” said Malcolm. “Anyone who sneaks in here at night and takes the bookshelf sword had better not press his luck by coming upstairs.”

“No,” said Oliver.

Then they played *Scrabble*, Malcolm beating Carol just barely despite her handicap, also beating Oliver, to whom the handicap did not apply. After that, Oliver went up to the hospital by way of Spruce Avenue (leading east off the top of Trent) to photograph the Christmas baby and her parents, then over for a shot of deserted Wideroad. After leaving the camera at *The Observer* and typing in his



cutlines, he stopped briefly at his apartment to see how Lasciva was doing. She and Rhadamanthus Furlong had been bred there the night of October twenty-second, after Oliver had written his story about Robert Granger's getting two years, and William Wareham's getting two and a half (as a result of previous record for common assault), for their attempted sexual assault prevented by an unknown gunman. Carol, with a marked primness of manner, had declined to watch these proceedings with Oliver and Malcolm but asked to attend the births if they came at convenient time.

"Maybe tonight, maybe tomorrow," Oliver said to the Kenwoods when back at their house for supper of cold turkey and potato salad. "She's always pretty calm about the whole thing once we've got the box made up and she's clawed up the newspaper. As usual, I've got a big cardboard box with a smaller one end-up inside."

"I've never seen a kitten born," said Carol, which was not new information. "Mischief was so darn private, and we never had another female. It must be wonderful to watch."

"Always is," said Oliver. "Lasciva is a marvellous midwife for herself. Most queens are. If it happens late at night, she'll wake me and I'll call you. Since that

time she gave up trying to wake me and had the kitten in bed with me, I've been fairly easy to wake when she's near her time."

Lasciva woke him about one-thirty a.m. Boxing Day, and he called Carol, getting fully dressed afterward in deference to her strict sense of propriety. The first kitten was there when she arrived, but she saw the birth of the second.

"Yuck, Lasciva, how can you?" was Carol's response to an aspect of the process. "Oh, so that's what Barbara asked whether she'd have to eat, in 'Farnham's Freehold'. I'd forgotten that till now."

"Eating the afterbirth seems to stimulate lactation, or so I've read," said Oliver. "Human standards don't apply to cats. And maybe not to rational beings on other planets."

"Oliver, I'm not going to argue with you now. I just want to enjoy this – oh, oh look, she's getting ready for the next one. She really does do for herself splendidly, doesn't she?"

"What'd I tell you? No hospitals for them."

In that closeness, he was tempted to explain to Carol, then, as she sat with shining eyes regarding his cat in his living-room, his obsession about her mouth, and to request as a special favour that he be allowed to humour it. But he

suspected that talking about it might cause the obsession to dissipate, and he didn't quite want that. He was obstinate, therefore, about his stratagem.

And so, on a Wednesday night in January, after fencing, on the way to the Benmill with only Malcolm in his car – Rand and Darlene were seeing a movie together – Oliver said, “If Carol still doesn't want to go to the feast and you do, we could have a bit of fun with Darlene, if you didn't mind risking her temper.”

“How?”

“We wear the same costume, get your beard dyed like mine, and alternate as her partner, you posing as me when I'm not there; see how long it takes her to twig. You could imitate my voice pretty well, I think.”

“Gad, you've got a nasty mind. It's a great idea. Will it work?”

“I've been giving it some thought. I can drive you to Regular Ripples early and come back for her, arrange with Dan Victor to keep you out of sight in the kitchen, and one of us there all the time after Darlene and I arrive. Her attention would be on the fencing; maybe we could switch about in that, too; give ourselves away and disqualify me before the scrolls are awarded after the feast, if I win.

Okay?”

“As long as she doesn't notice this scar” – Malcolm touched the top of his head

– “that day, I’d say we’ve got a fighting chance of pulling it off. I’ll just have to avoid giving her a chance to look down at me.”

“Right.”

When they were settled in at the Stuart Lounge, Oliver said, “Malkie, my son, I thought you should be first to know: Adler’s made an orthodox of me.”

“What?”

“Yup. Fact. ‘How to Think about God’ makes it thoroughly clear that God isn’t evolving and that any evolution there is, is produced by Him and isn’t part of Him. He couldn’t possibly be anything but Pure Total Existingness.”

“That argument really works for you?”

“Like a house afire. A thing that can change can be other than existent, and a thing able not to exist needs something else to make it exist. Obvious – when you think of it. Which I never did, not being trained in philosophy. And you never told me. Why not?”

“That particular insight has always been opaque to me, though I’ve almost totally accepted the argument from causality: there can’t be an infinite number of causes, so there must be a final Cause Who is Himself not caused. The only question there is whether everything that we can think of as needing a cause,

really needs a cause. That's the question of whether reason is valid, a premise we must accept or else reject all thought."

"Right."

"It just isn't that obvious to me, as a proposition. I accept Thomistic philosophy, therefore, because it's endorsed by the Church I've found to be the only guardian of Truth worth living by. I've no trouble accepting the idea of God as Pure Actuality; I just don't know for sure whether He's really necessary in order for us to have a universe. We can see the universe exists. *Contra factum nullum est argumentum*. We can't see God."

"Is that why you've never tried to convert me with argument philosophical? You really don't see it clear for yourself?"

"Partly. And it's not an argument related to anything you've raised yourself. God knows why you haven't studied philosophy, and the Devil probably has a good notion about it, too, but you haven't, and there it is. People have got to be geared themselves to accept argument; it's no use trying to force it on them out of the blue. It's different if they just pick up a book in their own good time."

"Even if the book's given by you who want to argue?"

"Yeah."

“Adler probably wouldn’t make me orthodox if I hadn’t read Lewis’s argument about morality needing God as an origin. But if God isn’t evolving morality along with Himself, then morality must spring directly from Him and never change. It’s us who got to evolve till we reach up to it, till we achieve reconciliation of opposites like justice and mercy, by loving – as Schumacher says. When you’re orthodox, everything fits, doesn’t it.”

“Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s. And He avoided spelling out which are which. He might have meant that Caesar’s coin of the tribute should be cast back in his face for good and all by the Chosen People and never used by them for buying food or for paying taxes. But He left it up to them to decide. I sometimes think that if His own people had accepted Him as Son of God, and thereby brought Roman wrath against themselves, He’d have accepted crucifixion of Himself alone by the Romans exclusively, in their defence, to save His own people’s natural lives as well as supernatural life for all men. But He didn’t spell that out. People have to make their own choices on the basis of their own perceptions, with the immutable moral law as guide. We’ve got to combine justice and mercy, freedom and discipline, contempt for mere lust with respect for humans wholly sexual, due honour for art

and truth with our need to make a living. He never laid down a rule that would make mechanical the living of our lives.”

“I still think there’s a proper connection between fuel-powered machinery and human living; that’s one of the balances to be achieved. Charity will achieve it.”

“Dream on, buddy. But it is true that His yoke is easy and His burden light. The key is meditation: trying to think your way into His mind as expressed in the Gospels, trying to see the gospel events as He remembers them now. As Lewis said, it’s not enough just to empty yourself; you’ve got to know whom you want to fill that emptiness; or someone might whom you wouldn’t like to. But the Mind we’re trying to reach is human, though it’s the Apex of Personality unreachable by mere nature. We have to ape the Apex, as it were. And not an ex-ape. That’s what St. Paul means by putting on Christ. Our own personalities have to come to contain and reflect Pure Existence. We have to live the Life of One Whose Existing is something He really Is. It might not be too much, though I haven’t checked out the theological soundness of it with an expert, to say that His Existence is also what He does, as you or I would do an ordinary deed, like walking or holding a foil.”

“Ah. And either Christ mediates to us this Infinite Doingness, the source of

saintly action, or Christ really didn't do anything worthwhile for us.”

“I think so. And you can't evolve to that; it's given; we only develop ourselves so as to tend in its direction. And if we're lucky we express it, in utter unawareness of our own expression. The first step is avoidance of sin.”

“Yeah. I've got to go to Confession soon.”

“Why not immediately? You could die tonight or tomorrow.”

“Yeah.” But the reason for his putting it off was one he couldn't discuss with Malcolm. In seeking to kiss Carol's mouth, he was committing himself to an act formally adulterous on his part, though there would be no infidelity of a spouse, and though the focus of his desire was oral rather than genital, and he didn't want to Confess while still intending to sin, even if only venially (which would not invalidate the Sacrament), in that way. He'd just have to hope God would spare him, or grant him grace of perfect contrition at the point of death, until his goal was achieved. After that, he'd go to Confession, and try thereafter to live a life strictly devout. But that kiss had to be got or definitively withheld. So, before they parted that night, he asked Malcolm to bring one of his special mutton pies to the SCA's Valentine's Day Feast at the Regular Ripples Community Hall on February fifteenth.



When Oliver stopped his car at 18 Trent Park on the afternoon of that day appointed, about twelve-thirty p.m., he tooted his horn, expecting Malcolm only. Her appetite whetted by the video from the Hallowe'en feast, Carol had reluctantly refrained from seeking approval for her attending the fencing only – after which she'd have taken a taxi home – because her presence would make the practical joke more difficult. And indeed, Malcolm came out alone and settled in the bucket seat beside Oliver, cradling in his lap a wide and deep glass baking dish, covered, containing a mutton pie. Malcolm's beard was barely a half-shade lighter brown than Oliver's had been before they both dyed their beards that morning with Clairol "natural medium brown" hair colouring from Buyer's Drug Store at \$6.49 a bottle, and he was wearing a duplicate, commissioned weeks ago by from Mamselle Stitch-It, of Oliver's own tunic. Both wore jeans, Oliver's hardly a trifle more worn than Malcolm's. They'd put on fencing jackets under their tunics, when they arrived.

When Malcolm was firmly settled with the pie, which they would leave at Oliver's apartment until he picked up Darlene, Oliver turned on the ignition, then caught himself. His heart was beating fast. "I forgot," he said casually, "I'd promised Darlene I'd borrow 'The Eyes of the Dragon' for her; we've a bet on

that I can find a Stephen King she'll like, and this is my last hope. No, that's okay. I know exactly where it is." Malcolm, stirring politely, was, of course, cumbered with the pie. Oliver got out and went up the porch steps, changing his walk and posture after the door was closed. Carol was sitting in the living-room bookshelf corner; the tapestry usually serving as hanging door was drawn back. "Back again, dear," he said, with a glad glance, in Malcolm's voice, which he'd much practised, comparing sound and tone from eavesdropping equipment with his own taped imitations. "Kendall wants a book for Darlene." He'd infused an undertone of frustrated passion in those words which she knew well, Oliver was aware, to interpret. He bounded up the stairs in Malcolm's manner, grabbed the hardcover mass-market edition from the bedroom corner bookshelf-stand, and went back down. "Another kiss for luck? – at the joke and later?" Kenwood had recently had a trifling difficulty of impotence, nothing much. Carol stood and looked into his eyes. He projected Malcolm's loving gaze as well as he could, and it was well enough. His arms went round her, book in left hand against her back. Her left hand came up over the top right side of his head, holding him, and her right thumb pushed gently against the right side of his chin, fingers lying along other side of jaw, tilting his head thus to the right and stretching up on her toes,

mouth puckered and aimed. The floor slammed his back. “*F—er!*” He was looking up the blade of the smallsword she’d snatched, in wholly graceful grab, from the bookshelf top almost before he stopped feeling impact of floor resulting from adroit combination of pushing elbows and tripping heel. Jiu-jitsu practice paid off, damn.

“You *f—er!*” she hissed, venomous. “Try to *f—* me, will you! Off with that tunic! Don’t get up! Get it off!”

“Not *f—*. Not *f—*.” Good God, the courts were looming now. “Just kiss. Lovely mouth. Obsessed. Darling mouth. Had to kiss. I swear. Just kiss. Marvellous mouth. Had to.” Her eyes widened. He babbled on, looking down at the carpet, ashamed, blurting out the whole story.

“*Huhgh!huhgh!huhgh!huhgh!*” The low-throated masculine-sounding guffaw made him look up. Her head was back and her eyes were closed, her arms hanging and the sword trailing. She stopped. The sword came up again. Her eyes narrowed and her lips thinned in an evil grin. “Here’s what we do, maniac. You come here some afternoon next week and either we wrestle so you have a chance to rob me of a kiss – I’ll respond a moment if you get your mouth on mine, which I doubt – and I have a chance to throw you around and maybe break some small

bones, and we tell Malc all about the whole thing afterward, or you let me cut my initials on your chest with this sword, and afterward you rub them with salt or vinegar from time to time to keep them scarred, and we both keep our mouths shut. And don't take the whole day to decide."

"I'm sorry, Carol. I'll take the cuts. I deserve them."

"Good. You do. And Malkie values your friendship. I'll destroy the mike."

"What gave me away?"

"Your not having Malc's little dent in the place of that scar. I always touch it when we're about to kiss and I want it to go further than that. I'd forgot for a moment that 'you' were waiting outside." She was blushing. "Get out."

He picked up the book and left.

"Bit more trouble finding it than I expected," he said calmly as he got back in the car, putting *The Eyes of the Dragon* on top of the dash.

Except for what went wrong at 18 Trent Park, the practical joke on Darlene Duncan was a complete success.

IV

THE WALKER RUNS

Father Michael Walker was crossing the floor of the gymnasium of Queen of Heaven High School when his soul revolted. “Not like that!” he called, voice deep. He strode swiftly to the front of the stage, put his hands on its edge, jumped a little and bounced with his feet while pressing quickly and strongly with palms and shoulders. Feet came up between hands and he stood straight upon the stage.

“You’re in really splendid shape, Father, for a man our age,” quoth Anna MacGillivray, English teacher directing early rehearsal for the school play to be held in November or early December. “But to what sacrilege do we owe this visitation?”

“Great heavens, woman, where’d you get your notion of fencing?”

“I just thought it was done like this while staging a play. Not good enough?”

“Far from it, my good woman. For one thing, Hamlet and Laertes would

probably be fencing rapier-and-dagger – thrusting with long, parry with short. But if you're going to use single-weapon style, it certainly isn't just knocking blades together. One fencer thrusts; the other parries and thrusts back, maybe going around a parry. Probably no lunging; that takes more practice than you boys would manage without hurting knee ligaments; anyway, I think 'twould be highly anachronistic. Here, let me show you a few plausible moves. Joey, you extend your arm like this, and then, Hayward, you do that. And then..." He choreographed a fencing sequence for the two young actors. "I'll draw the sequence in stick figures for you later on tonight. Right now I've got your very brief Latin essays to correct." He jumped down from the stage. "You're welcome, Miss MacGillivray. Or is it 'Ms.' these days?"

"'Miss'. I'm still missing out on a lot," she said with her delightful smile. At least, it had always delighted him. He laughed, as did the teenagers on stage. "Sorry," he said then.

Father Walker was taking up the fourth-from-last essay, in the classroom where all of Queen of Heaven's Latin classes were taught – the other teachers went to the rooms of the grades they taught, but this classroom included a small Latin library and a number of theology volumes; some religion classes were taught

here, too, and by himself quite frequently – when someone outside knocked on the door. “Come in,” he said.

It was Miss Anna MacGillivray. “Sorry I didn’t thank you for your help when you gave it, Father Mike. For a long time I’ve hated anything that looked like fencing and I was taking a savage glee in that parody the boys were putting on. Mean and narrow-minded, I suppose. These kids deserve to put on as good a show as possible, and you’ve helped a lot. Should I have them take the college course, to really get the hang of it?”

“I’m told Jim Francis would disapprove of that – he says, apparently, that practice in the actual sport, for an actor, might lead to an instinctive response, during pretence, that could do real harm.”

“You don’t know Dr. Francis yourself, do you?”

“An old fencing student of his from Memorial mentioned it one time.”

“Oh.

“Jesus, Father, I still hate the bastard. I don’t even pray to stop hating. It keeps me from Communion. Kept me from it for years now. And I hate him more for that. And it seems to be working. I’ve prayed they won’t have children. And they don’t. I don’t hate her, she only got what I thought was really worth any woman’s

having, but I still hate him.”

“Until you can pray not to hate, it won’t start to go away. I’ll pray for you.”

“No, I want to hate.”

“I’ll pray, anyway. You know I can’t help that, now.”

“I suppose. Maybe, deep down, I want someone to pray for me. I know I’m scared of Hell as anyone is, and I don’t want to die this way. But I’d like a long life of hating before I repent.

“You know – I’ve never told this to anyone before now – I’ve got land enough to farm on, in Sanapeda, if I ever needed to, to be properly independent of fuel-powered society. I bought it with what I made in Lab City, and I’ve kept enough over the years to build a small house on it. I thought that if she died, maybe of cancer or early Alzheimer’s, and he later regretted the past, I’d tell him I had the farm we’d always wanted, and laugh in his face. I don’t want to farm all by myself, though, so I guess I’ll stay a teacher all my life. At least I don’t hate literature because he loves it. That came before him.

“Father, I didn’t mean to get into all this at all. I came to invite you out to dinner.” She laughed at the look he gave her, though he didn’t think it would have been all that funny. “Oliver and Darlene and I, and a friend of Darlene’s named



Randolph Rand – I believe you know him fairly well – are planning a regular dinner every Thursday at noon at the Benmill Inn dining room. We'd like you to be there when you can. It's the only time we've all got free so far. Can you make it? We've got the table reserved, and we'll phone in our orders in the morning, to avoid a longer wait than we'd like."

"Marvellous. Great idea, Anna. I can make it this week, so far. Thank you very much."

At noon that Thursday, he arrived at the Benmill the same time as Darlene Duncan and her younger companion of the wooden leg, who'd long been his penitent for spiritual direction and who'd mentioned once or twice the evil aftermath of a dream which they both thought could hardly have been thoroughly illusory.

"Too bad the Kenwoods can't be here," said Darlene.

"Not in the sphere of practical politics at all," said Rand, of whom Wodehouse was a big favourite. "Too bad, though. Oh." For Anna and Oliver were approaching. They all went into the Coach House Chamber, where a local artist had painted three walls – the east was a curve of windows – with a series of nineteenth-century outdoor scenes with a strongly authentic flavour of Dickens.

“God knows what horrors O’Malley and M’Bakra will be ingesting today,” said Father Mike as he sat. “Monday and Thursday at the presbytery, the meals are my choice; Tuesday and Friday it’s M’Bakra’s, and Wednesday and Saturday it’s O’Malley’s. Sunday the housekeeper puts up a surprise. She’s taken all too well to Father M’Bakra’s suggestions. But it’s very good to have two young and enthusiastic assistant priests. Allows me time for hobbies like teaching, not to mention occasions like this.”

“Good to see the heathens giving something back,” said Darlene. “With all the modern tendencies among bishops in Canada, I’m glad ours is importing properly conservative priests who get orthodox formation.”

“I read somewhere that the trendy types in the Church are reacting with the comment, ‘When in Africa, do as the Romans used to do,’” said Rand.

“We tell O’Malley that when Africa has re-evangelized Canada, Ireland will be modern enough to take back the favour she’s done of sending priests here,” said Father Mike.

“If you have to convert all the Canadians before you start,” Oliver Kendall said, “you’d better pray there’s lots and lots of African priests. Most modern Canadians are at least as intelligent about religion as I am,” – “At least,” murmured Rand –

“and we don’t go in for crucifying people to get us to heaven. We’re content to evolve into friends of God’s evolving self, or to be reduced to being food for the body of Earth if we don’t make it.”

“Pleasant choice indeed,” said Darlene. “Nice to be sure that that’s all there is.”

“I wish he could be sure,” said Anna. “I’ve got a holy dread of Hell – sounds too much like insanity to me: loss of all but reason, as someone said.”

“Why so scared?” This from Oliver.

“Wild sex life,” said Anna. Everyone laughed heartily, Michael joining in by pretence, not to seem odd.

“Fencing season’s off to a good start,” Rand remarked to Oliver and Mike.

“How lovely,” Anna said icily. Conversation languished for a while. All were eating, anyway.

Darlene gave Father Mike a ride back to Mount Benedict on her way to the college; Rand, with a free period just ahead, had chosen to walk back, by the park route. “Wish Anna hadn’t that phobia about the Kenwoods in general conversation,” she said as they left the Benmill parking lot. “One on one, she hardly leaves the topic for more than fifteen minutes. Sorry; it’s mean of me to grumble about her. But she does rather use me to sound off her sense of

grievance. It's almost an obsession with her. I told her the other night she should get me to give her fencing lessons and challenge either Malkie or Carol to a duel, to get the whole thing out of her system and maybe stop hating. She nearly bit my head off. I think she likes to hate."

"Some people do. I think maybe Anna resents Malcolm's having allowed her to get so deeply involved with him that she decided she'd never want anyone else. She values too highly her making of a decision, once it's made; at least she's been like that as long as I've known her."

"Same here. Always."

"I think she resented his having any ability of his own to make any choices, after his commitment to her. She wanted all choices jointly made or left unresolved, he told me once. I think he was very lucky."

"He was. I'm sure of it. But she's my best friend, and it hurts me that she can't seem to recover. It's been so long, after all."

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"You all laughed at the notion of my having any love life," Anna said at dinner

the last day of October. “You’d no idea I’d have a boyfriend so soon, did you?”

“Boyfriend?” said Oliver.

“He has the makings of a dear, dear friend, I think, and he’s certainly a boy. What’s more, he’s open-minded about being called one, which is refreshing. We got talking about books at the Angle Stream Video Gallery, where he works, and we like the same Westerns. Name of Edmund Peddle.” Darlene looked at her curiously, Mike noticed. “Lives not far from me, which is convenient. I’m finally getting him to read Narnia, Mike.”

“That’s more than I’ve been able to do. Good girl.” They smiled at each other.

“Oh, by all means, keep him from outgrowing Narnia,” said Oliver. “Crown him Emperor of Fantastika, why don’t you, and live in Never-Never-Land forever.” She gave him a long, hard stare, and he said, softly, “Sorry.” People said that a lot to Anna, Mike thought.

“No harm done,” she said. “His beard’s almost as pretty as yours, Oliver. And a little thicker, for all his youth. Too bad you haven’t joined the fashion, Mike. I think you’d be quite attractive with a beard. But what a waste that would be, eh? I don’t suppose yours is going to waste, Oliver?”

Kendall blushed, Father Mike noticed, and, having noticed, he sighed softly to

himself. Who was it this time, at all, at all.

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Father Mike phoned Anna – he’d tried several times that evening, before she arrived – shortly after she got back on the night of November twenty-fourth from the English teachers’ conference in Gander. “Anna, have you noticed anything strange in young Edmund’s talk or behaviour lately? He’s on the fourth floor now and he didn’t make much sense to me this morning when they let him out of jail. But he mentioned you and Oliver as playing a large part in what’s going on in his head, and Oliver hasn’t a clue to it.”

“He’s been in *jail*?”

“He was acting up a bit on the ward last night – and the night before. Trying to wake the spiritually dead, or something. He’s not charged with anything.”

“Oh, thank God!”

“Why? Might he have been charged, do you think? He was raving about a gun and a sword and you trying to save him from the Dark Elf and the Renegade Knight. You seem to be the only person he can count on, in his current state. He railed at me for a traitor to Narnia and Right Reason, in the course of pouring out a lot of highly organized delusion. The police – he went to them himself,

apparently – don't seem to know anything about a gun or a sword, though someone reported smelling gunpowder in the arterial route underpass shortly after Edmund is believed to have gone through it Thursday night, when he was committed. I gather they're more curious about the gun than they let on."

"Oh! Oh, my God! Mike, can I come over right away?"

"Of course."

She arrived five minutes later. "Mike, I couldn't ask you on the phone – has anything happened to Malcolm Kenwood?"

"He was at Mass this morning. Seemed fine, I thought."

"I tried to have him killed, Mike. And I put my best male friend right in Hell trying." He said nothing, but looked at her and waited. "Mike, I've got to go to Confession." She smiled, weakly. "Got time to hear a 'general'? It's been a while."

It took a while. She dwelled particularly on her having used Darlene's friendship for keeping track of Malcolm and any prospect he might meet for his successor as guardian of the sword, and for feeding her hatred on intimacy Carol shared with her confidante. She mentioned some misgiving about supernatural motive for repentance, feeling the latter could be due chiefly to her purely natural

horror of insanity – Kenwood had told her long ago that sudden madness often attacked prospective successor-guardians who resisted their mentors and failed, but she'd been sure that Edmund could not fail. “Malcolm must have cheated somehow,” she muttered with a hint of humour.

Father Mike, for his part, refrained from mentioning the wholly natural component of his joy at her repentance. He asked a few questions which reassured her of her sincerity of supernatural motive, but before making her Act of Contrition, she said again: “Mike? Do you think that my actually doing something – even though vicarious, it was potentially lethal – might have triggered temporary natural emotional release? Will I regret repenting?”

“Repenting often has to be repeated or at least confirmed. But I think making ill-will effective is somehow essential to its being forgivable. Mortal sins, which are always in essence a willing of the death of God through grave rejection of the moral good, were not forgiven until their actually killing God, in the human nature of Our Lord, was made possible, were they?”

“God, that’s a sobering thought, Father. Just knocking your will against the impassible nature of God is thoroughly unforgivable, eh?”

“So it might seem.” She made the Act of Contrition and he gave her absolution.



“Poor kid betrayed,” she said, standing. “I suppose he’ll recover eventually? Malcolm seemed to think they did.”

“The prognosis is pretty good, really. It seems to be mostly a matter of getting the medication into him.”

“Oh, good.”

“I’ll reassure his mother. She’s been worried you might have caused him torment about his chastity, enough to cause his breakdown.”

She laughed long at that. “I might now become a threat to someone’s chastity before too long,” she said, straightening up. “But he won’t be that young. Thanks, Mike. You’re a pal. Thank you for the absolution. God, it’s grand to be free again. I’m free, I tell you!” She threw her hands up in a gesture humorously dramatic that turned his heart over. “Free! Oh, thanks be to Christ. Though I still have to ask forgiveness from Malcolm. And young Edmund, when he recovers. I’ll wait to ask him first. Only right, I think.”

Next Thursday, at the noon dinner, Oliver Kendall asked, “Does anyone know yet what young Peddle went mad for? The cops were asking me if I knew anything about a gun he might have had. I didn’t, except the CO2 revolver he’s borrowed from me at the college, and they seemed to think that might serve to

answer. Naturally, I told them I knew nothing at all about anything he might have been raving about, apart from my opposing an ideology he was attracted to, as any rational modern would oppose it. They seemed satisfied. Seems he told them I might be in league with the Dark Elf, whoever that was, to play on your libido by magic, Anna. Not that that's – um, sorry."

"It's all right, Oliver. The kid had a crush on me, and you and a certain person were causing him some confusion. An argument he had with me didn't help matters."

"The cop I talked to wondered if Edmund's psychotic episode might be related to that double foot-shooting in the park in September. I was totally ignorant of any possible connection."

"That's a novel idea," said Anna. "Not your ignorance; the idea of Edmund shooting anyone."

"Well, it would have been self-defence. He seems capable of self-defence."

"Shooting to hurt isn't the same thing as playing Guts Versus Progress, or whatever you call it," said Darlene.

"Of course not," said Anna.

"Anyway, somehow I don't think the police are going to get far with that

shooting investigation,” said Oliver. “Though you’d think it shouldn’t be too hard to get a hint on the whereabouts of an old Navy Colt thirty-six, wouldn’t you?”

“Is that what it was?” asked Rand. “I thought they were keeping quiet about that.”

“They were until now. But they’ve asked me to do a story for tomorrow’s paper seeking public assistance. The story isn’t to say what the weapon’s connected with, just that anyone who knows of one in Angle Stream or nearby would be helping the police if he came forward with the information. But a talkative cop let the connection slip.”

“Well,” said Rand, “it’s one case I rather hope they don’t solve. The poor fellow would be in trouble with the law for doing what should be done, and not really all of that. Far as I’m concerned, he’s got proper judgement to carry a gun. More power to him. If it were your young friend and the police made any connection, I’d advise him to rely on the Canada citizen’s absolute right to decline to help a police investigation, on the very plausible grounds that the circumstances of his psychotic episode were too painfully personal, wouldn’t you, Oliver?”

“Right on. Couldn’t put it better myself.”

On the Sunday before Christmas, Anna met Father Mike outside the Cathedral after eleven o'clock Mass. "Edmund's forgiven me," she said, smiling her delighted and delightful smile. "He said that if God had forgiven me, he couldn't refuse. He said he'd been praying he'd be able to; it'd be hard to forgive in his heart if I weren't sorry, but he was praying I'd be sorry so 'twould be easy. Isn't he marvelous?"

"Quite a boy."

"Malcolm said almost exactly the same thing. Those two are a lot alike, you know?"

"I know."

"Do you know exactly how much they're alike, Father Mike?"

He laughed and said nothing.

"Malcolm and Carol both complimented me on the fencing in the play. They invited me to Christmas dinner. Oliver's to be there. But I'd already accepted invitation from Randy to go with him and Darlene to his parents' place. So I've invited the Kenwoods to the Thursday dinner on Boxing Day. I've reserved the small dining room in the new wing, near the conservatory, just this once. Don't tell Darlene or Oliver we're reconciled, will you?"

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“I don’t know why we need a room all to ourselves just because it’s Boxing Day,” said Darlene. “None of us ever gets drunk and noisy.” She was at the south end of the table, the entrance being in the long wall to her left. “Hey,” – she’d just noticed the extra places set – “who’s bringing in outsiders, today of all days?”

“I hoped no one would mind,” said Anna.

“Well, I mind. I like to be told these things and I–”

Anna put a finger sweetly to her lips as someone knocked on the door outside, and Darlene, tactful for once, broke off. When she saw whom Anna showed into the room, host and guests wearing great big smiles all three, she put her hands to the sides of her mouth and yelled: “*UHuhUHuhUHuhUHAHHH!*” Everyone laughed.

After dinner, they all repaired to Kendall’s apartment to view the new kittens. Lasciva didn’t object too much to the crowd.

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“I suppose you’ve all heard what those two look-alike bastards did to me last

Saturday?” said Darlene as the group gathered for its fourth Thursday dinner since the one where it was made whole.

“I think they’ve been crowing about it to everyone they know who knows you, and a few besides,” said Father Mike.

“Well, we needn’t go into it again, then,” said Darlene. “I’ll just have to be content with hoping they aren’t allowed to get any after the resurrection, I suppose,” she muttered.

“What?” said Carol and Anna together. The others stared.

Darlene actually coloured a little. “Just a private notion of mine,” she said slowly. “You know, Our Lord said that after the resurrection, people will neither marry nor be given in marriage, but live as the angels of God in Heaven, but who really knows what the angels get up to, without marriage? Maybe Milton was right. Somebody did say that ‘the gods flow in and out of one another,’ I forget who. Everyone takes it for granted there’s no sexual intercourse in heaven, or on earth after the resurrection, but maybe then it will only be changed to a function proper to us as brothers and sisters of Christ, from its being now a function proper to us as potential parents of more brothers and sisters for Him. I think maybe men and women might instead of procreating produce by ‘reproduction’ special foods

which ‘embody’ and combine their own particular spiritual gifts to be shared thus by them together and with others. Our Lord might make love physically as well as spiritually with the really holy virgins who’ve been purified on earth, not to procreate but to share Divine perception by physical expression or through their eating the food produced, or maybe doing both sort of separately and distinctly, and His special beloveds might pass it on to lesser men by nursing, perhaps even with the men assuming reversion to baby bodies for the purpose, and those men might pass it on to less holy women by Our Lord’s method. He did speak of Heaven as a marriage banquet. Maybe He was being more literal than most realize.”

“My God, the bitch is horny,” said Oliver Kendall.

“Not at all,” said Malcolm. “She just has that child’s view of sex without which none of us will enter the kingdom of heaven, and which some of us will acquire only through long torment in Purgatory – not mentioning any names, Kendall. Some priest or other said once that chastity is the virtue by which we love others sexually without preying on them, and nobody preys on anyone in Heaven. The love will be the same, however it’s expressed, and the expression will be marvelously sufficient, whatever it is. It could be expressed partly as Darlene

suggests, I think. I don't see why not. But if that is so, far too many people would be looking forward to heaven, or earth after resurrection, in a way guaranteed to keep them out, if the truth were actually revealed. They'd be seeking sexual experience for its own sake, which even now people are encouraged to think God wants them to, so as to ensure He has more children. The specific pleasure of sex is meant instead to be a sort of 'incarnation' of the special spiritual joy of our trying to have God's children, in the highest human imitation of God's own 'favourite activity' which is the generation of His Son Who is His Truth."

"Nice sermon, Malkie," said Oliver.

"I've often found chastity made easier by looking forward to a properly loving relationship, in all purity, in Heaven, with the object of desire," said Father Michael. "It is a kind of attention I sometimes recommend in Confession and spiritual direction. But you're right, Malc. For that to work one needs a proper notion of love and that doesn't come easily to fallen humans. One mustn't look forward to a particular mode of expressing love, rather than to the love itself. But eye hath not seen, nor hath ear heard, nor has it entered into the mind of man.... But maybe a little of it has got into the mind of a particular woman."

"You mean you agree with the horny bitch?" asked Anna. Carol was still



blushing, off and on.

“I can’t reject her speculation out of hand, can you?” replied Mike. “The important thing is the love of God. For some on earth now, that means relinquishing the right to a given mode of expressing it, in regard to others. That relinquishment might well continue, and be extended to all, but glorified beyond our thought, for all Eternity. We just don’t know. And, as Malc suggests, we shouldn’t care much; that’s the whole point. Lewis may be right about sexuality’s being ‘engulfed’ in something much, much greater, after the resurrection. His metaphor’s the taking away of swords from the conquered who’ve misused them, and the sheathing of swords, never to be used again but still to be kept in the scabbards, by the conquerors who’ve used them properly. But if Darlene is right, I think it likely also that human ‘excretory processes’ would be transmuted to make natural bread and wine, let’s say, so that saints who’ve been physically virgin in this life might remain so while enjoying bodily expressions of divine love.”

“What I object to is just being a scabbard for someone else’s sword,” said Anna, and Darlene agreed. Carol just blushed again.

“Rather a demotion for poor old Sex, though,” said Oliver. “From procreative to merely associative.”

“Look who’s reread ‘*Humanae Vitae*’,” crowed Darlene. “Though I must say, I see little sense in being a half-assed Catholic, as Harry Boyle said his father put it. If you’re going to convert to orthodox, you might as well convert all the way. Hunting for a mother for the sons you should have had long ago?”

“I’m not certain I would’ve had them, Darlene, if I’d been orthodox since puberty. It’s not a healthy world for children. If it were, we wouldn’t have widespread abortion. That itself means at least half our society hates children.”

“That’s because it loves instead the moving things that are merely dead,” said Malcolm.

“I don’t agree. The real trouble with our society is that its outer shell has expanded faster than the body’s really important cells and organs could catch up. When the machinery it’s developed has been overtaken by the family unit – as it will unless the shell collapses first – then the world – or our country – will be safe again for a man and woman to have kids and raise them right. I may not live to see that day, and I don’t think I want to marry until I do see it.”

“In the meantime, I think couples who really want to be families may have to carve out their own territories with the sword,” said Malcolm. “Or do something equally energetic with similar initiative.”

“Like yourself, of course,” said Darlene.

“*Touché*,” said Carol.

After the dinner, Anna asked Father Mike to walk back with her to Mount Benedict and Queen of Heaven. “Mike,” she said as they walked across the snow-covered lawn by the *Western Observer* building, down the icy path, “do you really think there’s to be no escape from sex, after all? My mother, for one, would hate to think so, and I’m very much her daughter in many ways. I rather like, I must say, that hymn line about ‘Mannn or womannn...no morrrre.’” She sang the quotation in a low voice. “I want to be as spiritual as it can get, when I live forever. Part of me was very much attracted by Maria Valtorta’s notion that we humans would have propagated more like plants than animals if Adam and Eve hadn’t fallen, though I didn’t read beyond that point, feeling rather gypped at having bought five bloody big hardcovers. I decided then that His Lordship couldn’t really have been her sole source of inspiration; dear old Animality’s closer to Him any day than mere vegetation; sheer philosophy makes that clear, and theology and philosophy don’t contradict. No wonder Pope Pius wouldn’t give her book his official approval. But I’ve had enough for now of love’s sometimes very real slavery, especially when it’s coloured by sexuality. I think

what I'd really like just now, if teaching ceased to be so satisfying, would be retiring on my land in Sanapeda with a friend like Darlene who minds her own business and living my own life without interference from God or man, especially man, so long as I didn't actually sin. I suppose I'm really a feminist at heart, and now a confirmed old maid."

"I'm glad we agree about 'The Poem of the Man-God'. I've even heard recently that it used to be on the Index of Forbidden books, but I'm not sure. But did you know theologians have a technical term for the kind of independence you're talking about?"

"No, I didn't. What do they call it?"

"They call it 'Hell'."

"Oh." She chuckled. "Oh. I see. Yes, I suppose. There's no real hope of freedom, is there?"

"There's no freedom from being human, not for humans. I sometimes think the old hermits found human society not an irksome distraction from the mind of God but rather a far too pleasing one. "There's freedom to love or hate. Our lives are so bound up together on this earth that it's very difficult to avoid doing one or the other. Chesterton said that flows from the very Triune Nature of our Creator."

“Then if I’m to love, I suppose I must marry. But I don’t want to marry someone who’d marry me without our having a common perception of God’s will for us. I don’t suppose you’d leave the priesthood for me?”

“Anna, our common ideals almost kept me from the priesthood, to work for them in the world, by myself. But Malcolm was in the world anyway, and I encouraged him to teach and write as I would have liked to teach and write, and he’s had about as much success at it as I would have had. But it’s the supernatural life that really makes our natural lives to matter. Almost every Mass I offer, unless I’m committed to a requested intention, I offer in particular for you to be as holy as you can get. That’s how I dedicate my priesthood to you, not by leaving it. It helps with chastity in a more general way, too, sometimes.”

“A priest forever according to the order of Melchisedech.”

“Right.”

She sighed. “What a shame. Oh well, maybe I can make it a sacrifice, being an old maid. But I’ll have to work at it.”

However, two years later, Anna and Oliver Kendall named their twins Malcolm Michael and Carol Darlene, with the Kenwoods as godparents to the boy and Rand and Miss Duncan godparents to the girl.

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