

A GENTLEMAN'S C

***A Lusty & Amusing Tale of Intrigue & Romance Set in
Academia & Suitable only for the Sophisticated Reader***

By Robert R. Anderson

Published by **The Press of The Bob Frost Correspondence College of
Poetry**

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“Holden Caulfield with hair on his chest...A jolly and revolting romp for the sophomore in all of us...” *Northwest Logger*

“Every word a glittering jewel.....” *Delmarva Poultry Breeder*

Herewith the story begins in a first floor room in the dormitory of West Marquand on the campus of The Northfield School for Girls in the verdant valley of the Connecticut River in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The time was many decades past when television and rock ‘n roll were in their infancy:

“I’ve got to go!” I exclaimed.

“Good God!” she replied, horrified. “What are you still *doing* here?”

“We must have fallen asleep afterward, *obviously*.” The spring evening had been chilly and required blankets for warmth even for our nocturnal exertions. Morning had broken sending shafts of daylight filtering into her dormitory room through the screen of lacy white pines behind the building. We had awoken clasped in one another’s naked embrace. Her bed was intended for single occupancy only.

“You’ve got to get out of here immediately!” There was panic in her voice. The sound of a toilet being flushed and the rumble of water pipes could be heard away off. The dormitory was coming alive, ready to greet a fine May morning.

“But I’ve got to *go*!” I repeated. She had flung the covers off us and was groping for her bathrobe. My garments were strewn about the floor.

“Stop saying that! I’ve got to go to the bathroom now or I’ll burst.”

“That’s what I mean!” I pleaded.

“You mean *you’ve* got to go to the bathroom?”

“That’s what I’ve been saying,” I replied with a touch of exasperation.

“Well, you can’t go *here*.” Emily gestured toward her dormitory room door. Presumably, the common lavatory was located somewhere along the corridor upon which her door opened.

“Bring me some bung wad.” She looked baffled. “Toilet paper,” I explained.

She opened the door stealthily, peered out, and swiftly disappeared. I cautiously opened her window and peeked out. The window was on the back of the building. A narrow verge of lawn separated the dormitory from a screen of tall pines. Underneath the window was the bicycle I had used last night. Standing on the top bar, I had just been able to get enough purchase to scramble, with her help, through her window.

While she was answering nature’s call, I vested.

Perhaps this interlude will permit me a moment to explain matters—but a moment only for my bowels and bladder were verging upon the explosive.

We had met at the winter school mixer for the junior classes and fallen hopelessly for one another. Subsequently, smitten, we had dated every Saturday at the social events the schools planned. I had visited her at her home during the spring break and there she had allowed me some minor liberties beyond the mere five minutes of kissing which we were permitted by school authorities prior to embarking the buses that would return us to our campus. And she took some startling liberties of her own. Encouraged, and possessing a condom I had acquired from a dorm mate whose father owned several drug stores (what I did with the now spent condom a

sense of delicacy does not permit my relating), I contrived this nocturnal adventure I am relating to which she assented at first reluctantly but subsequently enthusiastically since her roommate recently had been expelled for behavior unbecoming a young lady. Thus, we would have a privacy that otherwise would have been impossible. In the dark of a moonless night, I had pedaled the three or so miles that separate the boys school from the girls school—separate schools but part of a whole known as the Northfield Schools. The bicycle I had purloined from a rack that stood at the back entry to my dormitory. A sophomore's parents had thought that their son might enjoy cycling the campus grounds, but, in fact, he never touched it and it stood lonely and forlorn, the only and ignominious occupant of the rusting rack.

I wish that I could explain in greater detail, and I will momentarily, but she had just given her door a sharp rap to alert me of her return. I stepped to a far corner of the room to be out of sight of passing dorm mates in the corridor when she opened her room's door. I glanced at the clock on her bureau. It showed five minutes past six o'clock.

"Here," she said. In her outstretched hand she held several sheets of flimsy toilet paper.

"*That's* not enough," I exclaimed, "go get some more. Plenty more!"

Reluctantly, she departed after having snorted in disgust at my profligacy. I looked at the sheets she had fetched. They were soft and pliable. My school, Mount Hermon School for Boys, supplied a cheap hard-finished sheet that when folded produced a sharp edge which could effect a paper cut on the bottoms of the unwary, the hasty or the uninitiated.

She returned and thrust into my waiting hand a bountiful wad.

"Now get out of here!" she hissed.

I mounted the radiator beneath her open window and squirmed into the casing. Clearly, I could not depart head first so I attempted to turn myself while hovering on the sill.

"Help me, I'm stuck." She grabbed my leg and with some pushing and thrusting aided my turning so that I could descend to the awaiting bicycle below the window. Cautiously, I probed for the bicycle with my foot.

I felt something odd and soft and it moved beneath me. Then I realized that I had located the bicycle seat. Gently, I slid my foot along and slightly relaxing my grip on the window managed to place both feet on the top bar. The bicycle trembled

beneath me and wanted to roll forward along the dormitory wall. Disaster clearly was lurking so I gave a violent heave and sprang away from the building. The bicycle clattered to the ground and I landed upon all fours in the dew-spangled grass.

There were but mere seconds to spare. I huddled ignominiously against the cold bricks of the dormitory wall and gratefully dropped my trousers. Tucking them well away from the line of fire, I bent over. Once, in times past, I had forgotten to adequately tuck my trousers and the resultant fiasco does not bear mentioning.

High overhead a third-floor window was thrust open and a lilting soprano voice began to sing ‘O, What a Beautiful Morning’ from the musical *Oklahoma*. The young lady must have peered out of the open window for when she arrived at the phrase “There’s a bright golden haze on the medder {meadow}” she stopped abruptly. There was a momentary pause as she apparently was grasping the spectacle below of me abjectly huddled against the dormitory wall with my pale cheeks smiling up at her. I saluted her gaze with the initial eruption from deep within my loins befouling the ‘bright golden haze’ of a beautiful May morning.

I heard the window slammed shut. No doubt she was alerting her schoolmates and possibly, worse yet, the teacher who was domiciled on her floor. I must hasten. But my body was not to be rushed. In the dining hall the previous evening baked beans and leathery ham had been the offering and I had partaken copiously. And, just when I thought that I had accomplished my task, a new surge of last night’s digestion greeted the bright day. At this point, windows were opening overhead in all directions and sleepy heads thrust out. Merry voices commenting on my progress could be heard as well as others, less jolly, directed to its unaesthetic aspect. Revulsion and hilarity seemed to be mixing in equal proportion.

I had the good sense to keep my head down so as to defy identification. But should an indignant member of the faculty housed therein come storming around the corner of the building momentarily, expulsion, and not the sort I was currently displaying to the on-looking multitude, would be the immediate result. How could I ever explain such mortification to my parents?

I must hasten for disaster loomed. I reached for the bung wad. But my body refused to be rushed and expelled a yet more fluid ejection accompanied by a resounding trumpet blast. There was renewed laughter and applause overhead as well as a dissenting voice or two. But, at last, my eruptive intestines subsided with a final splurt, much like a man spitting a stream of tobacco juice from between his

teeth.

Hastily, I swabbed my backsides. By now the amusement value had subsided overhead and only a few final cheers were to be heard. I assumed that my spectators were now rushing downstairs in hopes of capturing their entertainer. Cinching my trousers, I mounted the bicycle and wobbled forward. The wet grass caused the rear wheel to slip sideways, but I regained control and delicately surged toward the corner of the dormitory and freedom.

My fear of capture was not unwarranted. As I rounded the building, averting my face lest I be recognized, my audience, in varied states of undress, was spilling down the steps from the front door onto the pavement that fronted the dormitory. In the midst of them was an indignant floor mistress, wrapped in a quilted dressing gown with her grey tresses bound tightly in a hairnet. To confront such an apparition in the early morn would be a shock to any red-blooded male's sense of well-being. To confront it whilst in a state of panic and terror was quite another thing altogether. Furthermore, she was brandishing overhead a tightly rolled umbrella. Whether she intended to snag me or clout me I was in no mood to ascertain. I stomped hard on the pedals and swerved away from my pursuers onto the broad, vast, sweeping lawn that gently descended to the main road and safety. Or so I assumed.

"Young man, you come back here this very instant, do you hear!" Her voice though shrill and reedy was nevertheless daunting.

In the background I heard a chorus of mocking maiden voices. "Hi ho, Silver! Away!" some screamed. Other jocularities such as "Bottoms up!" and the like could be discerned amongst the skirling laughter.

As I descend the still damp breadth of close-cropped verdure, perhaps I should take the opportunity to inform my readers something of both the schools' history as well as something of the geologic history of the immediate environs across which I am at the moment gliding. And as I glide, no doubt the maidens are conducting the mistress around the corner of the dormitory to confront the evidence. Would she recognize the anointed wad of toilet paper alongside the steaming aromatic pile glistening in the sun's early rays as from their very own stock? If so, a sea of troubles mounted higher yet.

In the year 1879, the renowned evangelist Dwight L. Moody returned to his hometown of Northfield, Massachusetts to found a school for the area's farm girls. Two years later, he purchased land across the placid Connecticut River and some four miles distant to the south to found a boys school. Moody was a great salesman and he talked many wealthy donors into funding the new schools' buildings. The result was two handsome sprawling campuses of late-nineteenth century architectural taste. To this day, I have never seen a more pleasant and handsome campus than that which I was presently escaping with all haste.

The schools had flourished and now some seventy-odd years later were considered among the best of this country's private boarding schools. The religious aura of Moody still permeated school life. Religious studies were compulsory as was attendance at the thrice-weekly chapel services. Many faculty members held divinity degrees. And yet the student body accepted these rigors without complaint for this aspect of school life did not strike us as oppressive. For many decades, summer religious conferences were held here. The enormity of their popularity and the limited dormitory availability subsequently necessitated the construction of a huge three-storey inn able to comfortably accommodate hundreds under its vast roof. It was sited adjacent to the girls' school campus in a handsome neighborhood built in the latter part of the last century. The inn featured numerous outdoor activities including a nine-hole golf course upon which I had dawdled most spring afternoons oblivious to my studies. I would graduate shortly, though academically undistinguished (thus the gentleman's grade of C; only a bounder would perspire over his books and a true gentleman never perspired whether at sport or, worse yet, academics for a gentleman was the epitome of grace and elegance), so why should I care what my final grades might be. I was widely considered, as my faculty adviser admonished, a bit of a slacker. He, I concluded, was not a gentleman and, thus, could not comprehend the gentleman's code. As father says, like a country ham, a decent bourbon, or a sound gun dog, a gentleman is a long while in the making. Alas, these days father spent most of his time languishing alone on his croquet pitch, the family milling business being not what it used to be. Anyhow, I had my own plans which I will divulge shortly. Let the advisor fellow sneer at me as a slacker, if that pleased him, but my golf score had dropped significantly this spring.

As this was the day before co-education in private boarding schools, the Northfield Schools presented the prospective student with an alluring prospect—that of encountering members of the opposite sex on Saturday afternoons and

evenings in a social setting. But woe to the student transgressor who dared to set an unauthorized foot upon the campus of the opposite sex—particularly that of the female sex. The foolish offender, suitcase packed, would greet the early passenger train that trundled past the campus gates the following morning. My fate hung in my ability to speedily pedal the intervening three miles, arrive unseen, and scramble to the dining hall for the seven o'clock breakfast. Fortunately, my roommate was a heavy sleeper so my absence last evening and hasty arrival this morning might well pass unremarked, perhaps even unnoticed.

But before I unfold my journey that sun struck spring morning, the reader needs be apprised of the countryside I must cross as well as an explanation of how its configuration came into existence. Bear with me and I will compress geological time. The story begins in the Cambrian age, five hundred million years ago, with a long chain of low, mountainous islands rising from the sea to form the ancestors of the Berkshires and Green Mountains. Later, land toward the east rose to form another range of ancestral mountains. In this trough thus created a primordial valley came into existence. The glacier filled the trough pushing debris ahead of it. The debris formed a southern wall in the vicinity of Middletown in the state of Connecticut. As it melted, an enormous lake was created extending far northward well beyond Dartmouth College. Eventually, the debris dam burst, the resultant valley drained, and the Connecticut River began to flow. The broad silted terraces formed by the drainage, when tilled, produced some of the finest agricultural lands to be found anywhere. And it was on the hillsides overlooking the river and the rich fields that Mr. Moody sited his two schools.

The village of Northfield lies almost upon the New Hampshire border. Originally, it had been a frontier outpost twice attacked by raiding Indians. But now it was a serene and handsome rural town noted for its broad main street fronted by exceptionally handsome early nineteenth century homes of substantial proportion set well back from the occasional traffic passing by. I doubt that there could be found a more congenial vista than that its straight two mile length. At its northern extremity was sited the girls' school. At its southern extremity and across the broad slow-flowing river was located the boys' school. And from the former and to the latter I must now flee—and flee without detection. For therein lay disaster for both Emily and for me.

The chill grip of terror was cold upon my neck. Odd, I thought that once several hundred feet of ice had filled the gently sloping ancient lakeside I was descending. I

crossed the main road that led arrow-straight back to the village and plunged diagonally across a steeply dropping hayfield that led to the river, below and behind a dense screen of foliage. A freshman dormitory fronted the river side of the main road. It was a particularly egregious example of late-nineteenth century bad taste in brick laying. My course skirted behind it and I prayed that none of the adolescents was looking out a window. I was headed for a little lane that corkscrewed down to the one-lane bridge that crossed the river. After several near falls as the rear wheel of the bicycle slewed across the wet growth of grass, I emerged onto the lane. The winter sanding had by now collected along its verge and the front wheel sickeningly twisted in my grip as it slid sideways upon contacting the treacherous stuff. I nearly went over the handlebars. I must be careful. Trying to explain a road rash on my forehead as a consequence of a night's rest in my dormitory bed would be tricky at best.

I rumbled across the planking of the one-lane steel bridge. Long ago, a titan of finance had paid for its construction. Entranced with Mr. Moody's scholastic undertaking on behalf of Our Lord, he had had constructed a frenchified chateau opposite the school's inn. Being an impatient sort and unwilling to disembark with the common folk a mile from his glossy residence, he paid to have built the narrow span opposite the pile. The school had inherited the chateau upon the titan entering the great bank vault in the sky and annually the senior dance was held there. The dance had the reputation of being a somewhat libidinous affair but it certainly would be no match for what Emily and I had just perpetrated. I, in particular.

But what about Emily? The aromatic pile I had deposited was located mid-way between her room's window and that of her next door neighbors'. Suggestive but not conclusive—but that she was currently the only single occupant in the building was another matter entirely. How long before that harridan of a dorm mistress became suspicious? And that we were dating seriously was well-known on both campuses. Emily, I suspected, would be in for a tough morning of grilling. Her fate and mine hung on my undetected return to the now-sleepy campus of Mount Hermon School for Boys.

And then I realized two things that caused my now empty intestines to contract violently. Before my departure last night, once my roommate's snoring had reached its normal stentorian level, I had selected a sweater for, upon darkness, the mild May afternoon had turned cool. It was a crew-neck lambs' wool sweater that my

mother had purchased for me at Brooks Brothers on one of her recent shopping trips to Manhattan. It was an expensive purchase she often reminded me and I should take good care of it. And it was red—bright red.

I braked mid-bridge and pulled the sweater over my head. Balling it, I flung it through the lattice-work of steel girders. It caught a tendril of breeze, opened, and pirouetted on the zephyr to gently come to rest on the glistening river far below.

And then there was the other thing: I had no idea where I was. But south along the river lay my own campus—of that there was no question.

I took the first turning upon exiting the bridge. Any left-hand turn would take me in the correct direction and this one seemed propitious for it appeared to be a farm road and thus unfrequented. I stood to the pedals and accelerated. A freshly tilled corn field shortly appeared on my right with riverbank woods on my left. There were no houses in sight. As the corn field slid by, the road spiraled underneath a railroad trestle. There was a strong probability that if I were to be detected that I would be riding those same rails tomorrow. A short wooded climb took me to a broad, flat stretch of level ground, a terrace the melting glacier had left behind. In the far distance were farm buildings. In the near distance on both sides of the road were corn fields of considerable breadth awaiting the plow. A knee high layer of mist hovered over them. I hoped that the farmer was still in the barn milking for I was now completely exposed to view and would be for the next several minutes as I crossed the breadth of his land.

And yet another fright assailed me—time. I had no wrist watch so I could only guess at the hour. I had awakened at five minutes past six. Computing the events that had transpired, I arrived at ten minutes for the confusion in Emily's room, another five devoted to the merry display while huddled against her dormitory, and yet another ten astride the purloined bicycle. I am no mathematician, in fact my advisor had informed me that my SAT score in mathematics approximated what a reasonably bright sixth-grader might achieve, but I guessed that half past the hour had already slid by.

By now I was past the farmhouse and the barns, detected, to date, only by the farmer's coon hound chained in the yard who had remarked my passing with its hollow voice. Or so I thought. For the farm dog that I assumed to be in the barn lapping spilled milk had caught my scent and was giving tongue and making a hard run at me. Fortunately, I had a good head start and the dog, the morning's spillage slopping around in its belly, desisted in its charge some twenty yards from my madly

spinning legs and reluctantly turned for home, its blood lust frustrated by belly ache.

But my problems were mounting for the road, once past the farm, reared up and I had to dismount and push. A feeble attempt at running the machine up the steep twisting climb soon devolved into slogging and pushing accompanied by hoarse gasping for breath. The sands were running and I was stumbling uphill, lactic acid foaming in my veins.

“This, too, in time will pass,” my uncle likes to say with a sigh when confronted with something particularly nasty. And, at last, there appeared light ahead, a sure sign the climb was nearly over. I mounted and cranked the last few dozen yards. The farm lane terminated at a proper road. In the distance I could hear the rumble of an approaching vehicle. But the rumble diminished—the vehicle was retreating, not approaching. I swung out onto the road, uncertain of my whereabouts, though certain that school lay to the left. There was no choice but to pedal furiously and trust to luck.

And luck was with me. I rounded a wooded bend in the road and there was the beginning of the long, winding lane that led to the campus. I turned into it, said a quick prayer, and stomped on the pedals. Ahead lay the same railroad tracks under which a mile or so back I had passed beneath. The metals glistened with treacherous dew. Carefully, I bumped over them and surged forward again. I cast a glance over my shoulder. Would I be standing there tomorrow morning with my suitcase?

Beyond the stout brick pillars denoting the school entrance that lay just ahead, the sinuous road wound for half a mile toward the campus flanked by stands of white pine. Thankfully, I would be out of sight now. If only I could pedal the remaining distance without the disruption, and consequent dive into the pines, of an oncoming automobile, I might just skin under the seven o’clock breakfast call. But it was not confronting an oncoming car that sent me scurrying into the pines, rather one hard on my heels whose approach I had not detected until almost too late. The motorist did not turn his head in my direction, so I guessed I was still undetected. The pine boughs left small sticky wads of their resinous residue in my hair as I emerged. Could I pass off the astringent fragrance as after shave or a new hair dressing? I doubted that.

“Hey,” my roommate grunted. He raised his face from his pillow. In the corridor the rasping bell was sounding to awaken the sluggish, of which my roommate was a prime example. Apparently he assumed I had just returned from the lavatory down the hall. I had no interest in him thinking otherwise. He heaved himself into a sitting position, shook his head to clear it of nocturnal cobwebs, and slowly and unsteadily gained his feet. Noticing the brilliant spring morning glimpsed through our room’s window, he expelled a reverberating and poignantly aromatic salute to the glories of the month of May. “Be back,” he said and opened the door heading for the lavatory.

I dropped onto my bed and, reflecting upon my astonishing escape, panted pathetically. After my dive into the pines, the rest of the trip, some one hundred yards, was flawless. Our dormitory was the first building the approaching motorist would encounter. It was built of brick, three storeys in height, and housed close to half of the school’s five hundred scholars. I had stuffed the bicycle into the rack outside the entrance door. The building was long, tall, and narrow. There was a door at either end and one in the middle bay. The door I had entered was largely unused for the opposite door led directly to the dining hall and the campus buildings. This door to which I refer led to tennis courts that no one ever used. Thus, I had climbed the staircase to the second floor undetected and, waiting for the moment when the corridor was momentarily empty, heaved open the fire door and scurried the short distance to my room.

I pulled together the bed sheets into a semblance of propriety, for there was daily room inspection after breakfast by the young faculty members housed in apartments at the end of the corridors on each floor. Ours, young Mr. Higginson, we suspected, from the screaming fits of his wife and the sound of pots and pans being hurled about, was having marital difficulties. Our room, I should note, backed up to their apartment so we had a unique opportunity to assess the joys of marriage. There was a rumor that his affections lay across the river in the arms of a nubile gym instructor at the girls’ school. Mr. Higginson, his ears ringing from breakfasts with his outraged bride, was always solicitous about student orderliness, and rarely remonstrated with such matters as a less than tightly-made bed.

I was dragging a comb through my protesting hair, trying to remove the pine sap, when my roommate returned. He climbed into his clothes and belched twice.

“Ready?” he inquired, gesturing toward the door.

The dining hall, an enormous brick building with the largest interior clear span east of the Mississippi River, lay but a short climb from our dormitory. Streams of fellow students plodded toward it from several directions as there were a number of lesser dormitories spread across the campus. Inside the noise was nearly deafening between the clatter of cutlery and crockery and the voices of the assembled. To call the building a dining hall was a misnomer, for the word ‘dining’ in its proper sense did not remotely apply to the food served. The best that could be claimed for the food was that there was always plenty of it. No one ever lingered at table.

I had an eight o’clock economics class, the only class in my four academic years that I truly enthusiastically embraced. That would be followed by English History, like Eck (as we called economics) an elective open only to seniors. At ten o’clock, I would spend the next ninety minutes working in the library checking out books and re-filing returns in their proper shelves. I have always loved books so this was a task to which I daily looked forward. Furthermore, the crusty but kindly elderly librarian treated the staff, including me, to donuts and coffee in a basement room at ten thirty.

What set the Northfield Schools apart from its contemporaries was that every student was expected to work an hour and one-half every day. Some of us worked at the farm, some in the laundry or on the campus grounds, and yet others served in the dining hall in the kitchen or as white-jacketed waiters. And some, as seniors, were permitted a few more refined jobs—like the library.

I could not concentrate on what was being discussed in the economics class. My eyes glazed over as I tried to focus on the teacher. My thoughts were with Emily and the pile I had left behind below her dormitory window. Could she bluff ignorance? Circumstance was piled high against her: our amorous relationship was well known, she was the only single occupant in her dormitory, there was that stinking deposit of mine virtually beneath her window, and, lastly, that I was the owner of a well-noted bright red sweater. There were not many other possessors of such a garment on our campus. Upon recollection, I could not recall another.

Emily had a sober, serene quality despite her vigorous under-the-bed sheet earthiness. The latter she covered up admirably. But could she withstand hard grilling? I wondered. She had been admitted to a respected woman’s college in New York state and she could not risk expulsion and subsequent rejection by her college. I was pretty sure she would deny any involvement adamantly. She had too much at stake. But I had left behind on her bed sheet a damp, sticky patch—sure

evidence of our passion. If that sheet were seized, she would be overwhelmed by this circumstantial evidence. Realizing that, would she have had the wit to change the sheet for a fresh one?

I dismally stared out the third floor classroom window at the tops of the trees and the granite chapel tower in the distance. The classroom building was an elderly pile of brick built in dreary late nineteenth century architectural taste. It had a slightly musty aroma of age and the floors creaked.

The sudden report of a book accidentally knocked onto the floor brought my attention back to the discussion about public corporations and their offering of shares of common stock to the investor. The bell soon rang for dismissal and I descended one floor to the classroom in which English History was taught. We had progressed through the miasma of kings and were now considering the doughty, dumpy, and depressing Queen Victoria. I could not concentrate once again and I doodled in the margin of the fat little textbook. After an interminable hour, the bell rang and I was released of the tedium of late nineteenth century Britain. Hail Britannia, indeed.

“Try to at least look like you’re paying attention,” the grizzled instructor sneered as I filed out of the classroom. I nodded in forlorn acquiescence. Outside the air was fresh and a breeze was tickling the tops of the campus trees. I was headed to my job at the library where, hopefully, I could find a bit of solace among the stacks.

I thrust open the massive library door, deposited my books on the floor behind the circulation desk and sagged into the desk’s padded chair. Nothing was stirring in the dim interior, and no one was in sight that morning, neither staff nor scholars. To my left and right was a pair of reading rooms. Overhead was a catwalk containing several stacks devoted to history and literature. Bored, I heaved myself to my feet and wandered into the reading room that contained periodicals and magazines. A youngish English teacher had his head stuffed in *The Times* of London. He barely glanced at me. In the other reading room, a student was buried in a book and vigorously taking notes. I walked back to the circulation desk and plopped down into its chair.

I must have momentarily dozed off, for suddenly I was jolted awake by the scurrying arrival from various remote parts of the building of several staff members. The staff of the school library was comprised of genial elderly faculty wives all of whom called me ‘dear.’ I suppose they likely could not remember student names and found the term of endearment convenient.

Shortly thereafter, the librarian, a musty bald-pated bibliophile, announced the moment for coffee had arrived and beckoned me to follow. One of the wives slipped into my chair and I followed the group descending the narrow staircase to the cellar and the small, comfortable room reserved for staff. The steel coffee maker was bubbling and emitting a faint aroma. Due to Yankee frugality, an insufficient amount of ground coffee daily was set to perking. The resultant liquid, although devoid of any recognizable coffee taste while retaining a metallic overtone from the vessel in which it was brewed, was darkish brown and steaming. A cardboard box of donuts was passed around. When asked to have another, I had another. My breakfast appetite, despite my early morning exertions, had been scant due, I suppose, to the gnawing fear contracting my gut.

The librarian read a brief passage from an article in the *Atlantic Monthly* about library matters. We nodded our heads politely and sipped the liquid in our mugs. Then he announced that he and his wife had just purchased a home of their own in the village of Northfield and invited us tomorrow evening to a little *soiree* there to celebrate the great event. We again nodded our heads agreeably. I and the other few student librarians would be parceled out for transport among the library wives and their husbands.

Subsequently, when no one was noticing what I was doing at the circulation desk, I scribbled a note to Emily and purloined a stamp from a pigeon hole in the desk. I extracted an envelope which carried the library return address, addressed the envelope to Emily, and slid it among the missives in the out-going mail tray. The only communication between the scholars in the two schools was by post and, somehow, I had an uneasy sense that the U. S. mail might not be sacrosanct from prying eyes determined to discover the perpetrators of the morning mischief. The library mail I hoped would not be scrutinized—at least until it dawned that I was working this morning therein. And those prying eyes belonged to the dean of students, reputed to have spies among the student body as well as the faculty. If he could sink that low, could he not have the school post master in his pocket as well? He seemed to take a hideous delight in punishing malefactors. Fright clawed at my loins.

I knew that I dared not write anything alluding to our nocturnal exertions. Thus I noted that tomorrow afternoon, for she would not be able to receive my missal until the next morning, I would be on the golf course that surrounded the enormous three-storey inn belonging to the Northfield Schools. She was a bright young lady

and would understand that I was inviting her to meet and discuss matters. The inn was adjacent to Emily's campus. It had been built shortly after the turn of the century to house the attendees at the wildly popular summer religious conferences held at the girls' campus.

She knew well that most sunny afternoons I was practicing the game there as I was a nominal member of the golf team. Nominal in that my scores were never low enough for inclusion on the school team, but I diligently hacked a ball around the course. In fact, my scoring had improved lately and if I were not careful I might accidentally turn in a score that would sweep me onto the travelling team of six. I do not possess a competitive nature, rather a contemplative one—leading some of my instructors to conclude that I was merely lazy. Actually, I could understand their point.

And then I heard it—the cigarette-laced voice of the dean of students. He was standing just inside the library entrance door and he was talking to the elderly librarian. I had been re-filing books from a cart into the stacks behind the circulation desk since there was so little activity requiring my presence at the desk and, from where I was filing, I could keep watch on the desk should I be needed. The dean and the librarian shuffled toward the periodical and newspaper reading room while huddled in deep conversation.

Bending down, I scuttled stealthily toward the desk. I grabbed my textbooks and, peering over the desk, hoped that my exit might be unobserved. The clock over the entrance door stated that my departure moment had arrived. And yet I could not slip out that way for now the dean and the librarian had halted their progress and were turning back toward the circulation desk. Hoping that that sturdy object might obscure my flight, I pivoted, still squatting, and duck-waddled into the stacks behind me. From there the narrow staircase led to the cellar stacks and our coffee break chamber and other incidental offices. Quietly I crept down the steps. Overhead, I could hear the muffled voice of the librarian inquiring of an elderly staff wife if I had already departed. I did not wait to hear the reply and made my way hastily through the stacks to the emergency door on the rear cellar wall. I heaved against the panic bar (how appropriate I recall thinking) and the door protestingly opened. I stumbled from that treacherous dark cavern into a splendid, sunny spring mid-day.

What to do? Classes were letting out and students and faculty would be streaming toward the dining hall. Hastily tying the necktie that I carried in my back pocket,

for neckties were required at our mid-day meal, I slipped around the building and joined the hungry throng heading up the long hill to the dining hall. Fortunately, I was amidst that most nauseating of all human life—sophomores, so I was left unto myself as we walked.

Yet was I entering a trap? Seasonally, we were assigned tables at which we would eat in order to mix the students and prevent cliques forming at meal times. A table head, a senior, was assigned to supervise to be sure that even the most lowly freshman received a fair portion of the grub. And at lunch a member of the faculty sat at every table. Well, not every table for the administrators preferred their own company and sat together in a distant corner of the huge, noisy hall. The dean of students sat amongst them.

A trap? There was a seating chart and the dean could consult it and readily locate me. I was by now ravenous and could not consider passing up the meal. The terror of the hunted was upon me. Now I could understand that nervousness I detected in the squirrels and the songbirds—that fear of suddenly being seized and eaten by some unseen enemy. People who thought nature was serene were simply nuts.

But, I reflected as I cautiously hoisted fork to lip, the dean would likely feed himself before sweeping down upon me to seize me in his talons. Therein lay my hope of escape or, if not escape for that was clearly impossible, temporary avoidance. For, if Emily could bluff ignorance, the passing hours might lessen the dean's lust to swoop in for the kill. At least, that was my somewhat feeble theory.

As the roar and clatter of lunch subsided, my jitters increased. My tablemates looked to the mathematics teacher in hopes of a nod for dismissal. Fortunately, he was in no mood to linger and we pushed our heavy oak chairs away from the table. I scrambled toward the exit door farther away from the dean. When I tentatively glanced over my shoulder, he, too, had arisen from table and was scanning the departing students—no doubt to intercept me. But I had a huge head start upon him and, once out of the dining hall, trotted downhill to our dormitory. I had a one o'clock English class and I needed to dump my morning books and grab my notebook for the upcoming class. Rather than exit through the dormitory's generally used door leading to campus, for I feared the dean might be lurking there, I trundled out the rarely used door at the opposite end of the building that I had used this morning, crossed the lawn behind the library, and scanned the approaches to the classroom building next to the library where my class was to be taught.

What was I doing? I could not evade my pursuit forever. All the dean needed to do was consult the school's course chart to determine where I could be found for the next fifty minutes. And I dared not skip class for that would seem decidedly suspicious. So I scuttled into the building well ahead of any arriving students. But I was now trapped. The dean could seize me by the scruff of the neck (figuratively speaking, of course) and march me off to grill me about my whereabouts last night.

What little I had in defense was that I was sure Emily was sufficiently staunch to resist an inquisition for she had too much riding on maintaining adamant denial. Further, I was certain that my roommate was blissfully unaware of my nocturnal sojourn. He could have slept through a bomb blast and, further, he relied on me to awaken him lest he sleep through breakfast or an early class. But, on the other hand, there was that distinctive red sweater in which I had been seen, our well-known romance, and, worse yet, that accusatory turd. There would be no difficulty connecting the wearer of the sweater to that revolting pile, but, surely, there must be other owners of bright red sweaters among our five hundred male students. And I had kept my head down during my public excremental humiliation and had averted my face upon rounding the building on the purloined bicycle. So recognition would have been chancy, at best. But, circumstantially, the evidence was heaped upon us like a steaming pile of fresh manure.

The discussion in class was about Keats. Like Burns and Frost, he was a poet I could tolerate, and we had been studying a poem I knew well already: 'Ode on a Grecian Urn.' Last summer, I had accompanied my uncle and aunt to England and, while in London, had visited the British Museum. And there I, like Keats, had contemplated the Townley vase, the very vase that was the subject of his ode. For a schoolboy accustomed to the dull recital of tedious facts in dismal classrooms, to suddenly confront that vase and to realize that what I was contemplating over a hundred-odd years previous, standing rapt in the same place, had inspired Keats to write one of our language's most memorable poems. Thus, for a few blissful moments in the afternoon of that appalling day, I had drifted out of my fears and terrors and been swept away into a kind of literary reverie.

Time flies like an arrow (fruit flies like a banana). The corridor bell brought me back to matters practical, particularly how to avoid the dean of students. My fellow students surged toward the classroom door for the athletic hours had arrived. I dared not follow them along the corridor for, in the murky near distance of the dimly lit corridor, I was certain I could discern the profile of the tall, gaunt,

tobacco-stained dean lurking. I slipped back into the classroom. Other classes were letting out and the corridor was full of young scholars eager for the beckoning playing fields. There was no escape. I knew now the terror of the small animal snagged in a leg-hold trap.

What could I do? Where could I go? Certainly not the corridor's lavatory. The dean, when he realized that I had not passed, would certainly search the lavatory—and the stalls had no doors so I could not mount a toilet bowl. Apparently, fearful of what unseemly acts young males might perform in lavatories behind closed doors, such niceties had never been permitted. One emptied oneself open to public gaze.

Patriotism is the last refuge of the scoundrel so it is said. There was an incongruously large American flag hung from a floor pole in the far back corner of the classroom. I wrapped myself in it and held my breath. I could hear footsteps resounding in the corridor. I was certain to whom they belonged. I peered through the pale stripes of Old Glory and I saw a dim profile in the doorway momentarily poke its head into our classroom.

"Damn!" the profile said and emitted a smoker's hacking cough. The footsteps receded down the corridor.

If I were to catch a ride across the river to the golf course three miles distant for this afternoon's practice, I must vacate the building promptly. Two faculty cars, parked far off in the gymnasium parking lot, awaited to transport us for our numbers were scant. I counted to sixty thrice, dashed down the corridor, burst through the front door, and sped across the greensward toward the gym. I thought I noticed over my shoulder as I erupted from the classroom building a figure pausing at the door of the administration building next door. The dean had his office in the administration building. Heedless, I cast myself forward. The devil must take the hindmost.

The second car was just getting underway when I flung myself onto its hood. The golf coach braked the car and allowed me, gasping, to pile on top of my fellow teammates who were already squashed into the back seat. I kept my head well down until I was sure we had cleared the administration building. Then I rode uncomfortably to the course on the lap of our number four. He smelled of pickle medicine.

We stored our clubs in the small cabin nestled in the pines that was the pro shop. Today would be the team selection day, based upon our scores, for Saturday's

upcoming meet. The meet would be at a distant school and my lack of enthusiasm for spending long hours in travel with the likelihood that we would not return to campus in time for my Saturday date with Emily caused me to deliberately shank my drive off the first tee. My recovery shot, hit with needless vigor, bounded across the fairway and came to rest under a pine. Despite my best efforts, or worst would be more accurate, I carded a bogey when my impossibly long putt took a peculiar swerve and dived into the hole. We had been sent off in twos, shotgun fashion, and we kept one another's scorecard to lessen the possibility, or probability, of strokes intentionally overlooked in an effort to improve one's score.

Perhaps because I was not pressing to achieve a low score, I inadvertently began to play brilliantly—well, brilliantly for me. I suppose that my indifference caused a relaxation in my usually tense muscles and I could not seem to hit a bad shot. And my putts insisted on dropping though I spent no effort to properly line up the stroke. And so the afternoon proceeded.

The sixth hole was a particularly nasty and longish par three. It was flanked its length on the left by a well-laid stone wall that separated the course from the town road. The skating pond bordered its right side. It was a large pond with a small cabin where skaters rested from their exertions. From the elevated tee, I could see someone standing alongside it. I always hated an audience. I squinted toward the distant flag, drew back my driver and swung. The ball arced into the blue cloudless sky, held steady, and landed some fifteen yards in front of the green. My partner, rattled by my inadvertent brilliance, sliced his drive into the skating pond. Electing to take the one stroke penalty and play his third from the tee, his drive struck the aforementioned stonewall a glancing blow, bounded diagonally across the fairway and came to a soggy rest amidst the weeded growth along the pond's verge.

"Shit," he said. What a peculiarly apt comment on my day I thought—as well as on his errancy. We picked up our bags and trundled down the fairway. The person I had spotted by the skating cabin began to stroll toward the green to which we were headed. She looked vaguely familiar. As I drew nearer, having left my golf partner behind to hack his ball back into play, I realized that I knew her—she was Emily's best friend. She waved and veered away toward the path leading through a small patch of woods to the eighth tee. Presumably, she had a message from Emily for me.

My pitch from the fairway bounded onto the green, struck the flag stick squarely, and dropped dead at its foot. An unavoidable par—just what I did not need nor

want. While I waited for my partner to blunder his way toward the hole, I tallied my score in my mind and I realized that I was dangerously close to turning in a score that absolutely would guarantee my inclusion on the Saturday travelling team. In fact, if my calculation be correct, my score at this point would be one of the better ones to be turned in this season—by anyone. I needed a disaster.

I will skip over the par three seventh except to note that my drive, which intentionally was aimed into the flanking greenside trees, struck a branch and ricocheted onto the green. A bogey was the worst I could manage without appearing that I was deliberately trying to avoid the hole. That could only serve to raise other embarrassing questions. I lagged behind as we walked the wooded path to the eighth tee, claiming the need to re-tie my shoe laces. My partner strolled dejectedly onward.

“Psst!” Emily’s pal slipped onto the path from behind a tree.

“What?”

“She’s got a meeting this afternoon with the chaplain,” she replied.

“What’s that supposed to mean? With Friar Tuck?” The Reverend James Tucker, yclept Friar Tuck of Robin Hood lore, was chaplain to both schools. The good-natured vicar was my sacred studies teacher. I feared that his good humor currently was seriously stretched by my lack of involvement in class. But more of that later—much later.

“I don’t know. She just wanted me to tell you,” she replied.

“Nothing else? That’s all? What’s that supposed to mean? Is she okay?”

She shrugged her shoulders and stepped aside so I could pass. How much did this girl know? Did she know about the morning’s events? Surely *that* jolly news must have spread across campus in a flash.

I thanked her and hustled along the path to the eighth tee. With only two holes remaining, I had some seriously bad golf to play.

“Here,” my roommate said and handed me an envelope with the dean’s superscription. I had just returned from the golf course and was knotting my necktie while I shrugged into a tweed sport coat, both required dress for supper. “It was taped to our door. What’s he want you for?”

“Dunno,” I muttered. I knew damn well what he wanted me for. “Look, do me a favor. Forget about it—you never gave it to me, okay?”

“Huh?”

“Some merry maker must have swiped it off our door—how about *that?*” Clearly, sound sleeper that he was, he had never suspected my nocturnal adventure. I was not about to enlighten him. I stuffed the envelope in my pocket intending to rip it into pieces and flush them down a convenient toilet.

“Yeah, sure, I guess. Let’s go. I’m hungry.”

We were striding vigorously up the long slope to the dining hall when my roommate casually mentioned that Friar Tuck had posted the sermon schedule after class, for my roommate and I shared the same subject though at different hours and days. The good friar gave us scholars two options: take a final examination or deliver at weekday chapel in front of the entire school, faculty and students, a brief sermon which would be graded as our final exam. Intending to expend as little scholarly effort as possible in the final term of my senior year, I had opted for the sermon. I blissfully had put out of my mind that I would be expected at some point to actually deliver it.

“You’re next Wednesday,” he announced. Then he guffawed. My roommate shared as low an opinion of my scholarly enthusiasm and attainments as I did myself. “You’re screwed,” he added and doubled over in laughter.

“Holy shit!” I exclaimed in disbelief.

“There’s your topic!” he replied, almost gagging with glee. Nothing delights the adolescent male as much as the prospect of watching a close contemporary make a complete balls up ass of himself in public.

Dear God, what next! That question was promptly answered half an hour before lights out. Our floor master, Mr. Higginson (he of the outraged spouse) knocked on our door. The dean had been awaiting my arrival in his apartment for some time and, furious, had phoned our floor master to inquire of my whereabouts. His note, having swirled through the school lavatory pipes shortly after supper concluded, demanded my appearance this evening at eight. All innocence, my roommate and I feigned ignorance of any note, let alone the dean’s. I suspected Mr. Higginson was a tad suspicious, but reluctantly he departed to mollify the dean. Clearly, I must avoid the dean until I had an opportunity to talk to Emily. She would receive my note tomorrow morning. The post office was housed next to the student store, and, since the only communication with the outside world (radios were banned) was by post, students on both campuses assiduously checked their mailboxes. Yet another worry beset me: suppose tomorrow might be the one day Emily skipped picking up

her mail or, having read my note, declined my appeal to meet me on the golf course that afternoon. It was a troubled sleep that I slept that night.

I was awakened by birdsong. The little plastic electric clock on my desk informed me that the hour was a few minutes past five o'clock. Two hours before breakfast and already my stomach was protesting for I had eaten little the previous day. Terror tends to make one disinclined to linger at the groaning board. And now a new enormity hung itself from my neck, dragging me into a agonized stupor—in five days I must stand before the entire school and deliver total balderdash for I had no idea what possibly I could concoct that might laughably pass for a sermon. Good God.

I pondered the possibilities. First, I must surmount the hurdle that, despite four years of sacred studies, I possessed little or no familiarity with or knowledge of any topic suitable. I supposed I could talk about sin. I had recently become rather expert at that as well as at evasiveness. Inspired, I considered delivering the talk in Latin. That would be commendably scholarly and, better yet, no one would have any idea of the content for, being a dead language, it was never spoken in class. Topically, any gibberish might suffice. For my freshman and sophomore years, I had been tortured with its tangled tenses and impenetrable sentence structure. But given my ineptness, how could I possibly translate a sufficient quantity of text to approximate the requisite length even with the slowest conceivable delivery. This, despite its estimable shock quality, would not work—damn it. My roommate was correct—I was screwed.

We were well up the slope to the dining hall when I was afforded a hearty, congratulatory slap on the back.

“You’re Wednesday’s entertainment, I hear. Well done, old boy. Can’t wait to see you make an ass of yourself.” The speaker was George Warren, a sometime pal. I groaned, but then inspiration seized me.

“You’re Catholic, aren’t you?”

“My mother is, sort of,” he replied. “So what?”

“Don’t they have lots of saints?”

“I guess. What’d you have in mind?”

“I don’t know. Maybe some obscure saint nobody’s ever heard of.” I was pretty sure that there were lots of saints from which to pick. Then inspiration seized me. Never mind obscure saints, for many of the faculty had divinity degrees and might

actually be knowledgeable about the lives of the saints, I could manufacture some rubbish about a saint I invented. And I could have a jolly good time doing it. Much relieved, I continued to trudge to the dining hall.

“You’re screwed,” my pal chuckled as we separated in the chamber, heading for our respective assigned tables. He was now the second to express the direness of my situation in those very same words. But I was not so sure. There was a glimmer of light on the marshes.

And Wednesday was five days in the future. The present was my immediate conundrum. How was I to evade the furious dean until afternoon when, hopefully, Emily would meet me at the golf course for I had no idea what transpired yesterday on her campus. Had she cracked under hard grilling? But dear, kindly Friar Tuck would not resort to such tactics. He would appeal to her higher sensibilities. But that harridan who had threatened me with her umbrella likely would have taken quite another tack. I could envision her employing all her accusatory devices, honed over years dealing with errant maidens, to frighten an admission from Emily. The future seemed utterly bleak.

Once again, I had eight and nine o’clock classes: Spic Two and Bible Four. I had opted for Spanish since it was reputed to be the easiest of the modern language offerings and I was still reeling from two bouts with Latin. To my surprise, I actually had a small gift for the tongue although its usefulness seemed monumentally irrelevant. After all, why would any civilized fellow intentionally risk Montezuma’s Revenge or the nastiness of banana republics or the malarial Amazon jungle with its man-eating piranhas and cannibals. What little I knew—or cared to know—about the inhabitants of those lands led me to conclude that the whole lot was short, swarthy, sweaty, and smelled bad.

But a confrontation with Friar Tuck immediately thereafter was another matter altogether. Whatever had transpired yesterday afternoon between him and Emily? And suppose he were to ask in class about my subject or my preparation. What then? Dear God.

And then there was the matter of the dean. At the moment, he was no doubt at breakfast in his campus apartment, sipping his coffee and hacking his way through his first cigarette. He was married to a dismal, scrawny woman, by the name of Amanita, a fellow chain smoker. Presumably, he had office matters which required his attention this morning. Thus, I might escape his grasp while in class. But what about my library job for he had sallied forth yesterday to intercept me there. Only

luck had permitted me a back door escape then.

Distractedly, I strolled along the campus road with dozens of fellow scholars heading to eight o'clock classes. My mind was conjuring my imaginary saint. You do not acquire sainthood without sufficient reason—of that I was pretty sure. So what had my saint done that was so divine? And where? And he or she needed a name. Relax, I told myself, something will come to you. It had better and damn quick I realized. As I climbed the creaking staircase to my third floor Spanish classroom, I despaired. Usually, my day dreaming could be relied upon for inspired ideas, mostly absurd or pointless. Now, when I needed that useless ability, only stark reality intruded. And the sands were running from the hour glass. Think, I told myself, but thinking would get me nowhere. I needed a cosmic revelation.

Then as I sat slumped in Spic, my mind half on the subject, I found a name for my saint—Norton. Subsequently, I realized that Norton was the publisher's name stamped on the text book spine. Norton of Orkney. That sounded good—the repeating of the 'or' was kind of euphonic. Snortin' Norton of Orkney was my boy. Where was Orkney? As I mentioned previously, I had been a guest of my uncle's and aunt's this summer past on their trip to Britain, and I had a vague memory that I had heard the name mentioned there. I had better check this morning in the library's atlas.

Later, sitting in the far back corner to best avoid the good Friar's gaze, I realized that to most people the name Norton was associated with the wildly popular television program 'The Honeymooners.' Ed Norton was Ralph Kramden's dim bulb sidekick. Ah well, that must be risked for I had no time to start the process again. Snortin' Norton, dim bulb missionary to the Eskimos. Norton the first arctic saint, martyred by being eaten by a polar bear while baptizing little Eskimos. Total immersion would be a nice touch—as long as the little tyke did not slip from his near frozen fingers and slide under the ice cap. Oops, mom and dad—sorry about that. I had better check where Orkney was located and that it actually did have resident Eskimos. But no—that would require dreary research and I was not inclined toward *that*. Instead, Norton would hail *from* Orkney. Snortin' Norton of Orkney, the martyred saint of the Eskimos. Absolutely splendid. Well done, old boy—you are off and running. I turned my attention to the Friar. He was saying something about St. Paul and his martyrdom at the hands of the Romans in 64 *anno domini*.

"You *are* aware that you are scheduled to deliver your sermon Wednesday," Friar

Tuck warned. He had cut me off at the classroom door.

“My roommate told me,” I replied.

“And you’re really quite sure that you want to go ahead with it? Could I be of any help?” The man was a decent sort. A twinge of conscience flitted through my being.

“Well, I’m a little nervous about all those people. I haven’t any experience at public speaking.” Plus, those who knew me would find my presence in a pulpit preposterous if not downright hilarious.

“Just take it slowly. Watch the punctuation and pause there. Let your audience have time to digest what you’ve said. And speak to the back pew. Your voice should come up from your diaphragm, not from your chest. You’ll do fine—probably,” he added. “Incidentally, there’s another matter I’d like to discuss with you. Do you have a minute?”

“My job’s at the library. I’ve got to get going now or I’ll be late.” Before he could reply, I lurched into the corridor and descended the staircase two steps at a time.

How was I to avoid the furious dean? By now, he must be determined to capture me, and he knew well just where I could be found for the better part of the next two hours. A diversion—I needed a diversion. Cautiously I opened the great doors of the library and peeked inside. A student unconcernedly strolled past the check-out desk heading to a reading room. Otherwise all appeared still. I seated myself at the desk, a sitting duck.

A diversion—but what? I considered the possibilities and my only idea, if it fairly could be called that, was to somehow keep the dean away from the library for the balance of the morning. There was a telephone on the desk and beside it a directory of school telephone numbers. I desultorily leafed through the pages. And then, heaven sent, inspiration descended from above. I dialed the number of the nearby administration building.

“I want to report something suspicious,” I whispered into the receiver.

“Who is this speaking, please?” The female voice sounded concerned.

“I think I just saw a couple of people on top of the chapel tower. I don’t know what they’re up to.”

“Were they students?” she inquired.

“Maybe. No, I’m pretty sure. And they were carrying something heavy. Maybe you should tell the dean,” I suggested.

“He’s been in a meeting, but it should be breaking up shortly. He’ll go right up

there, I'm sure."

"Good," I said and replaced the receiver in its cradle. The librarian was approaching.

"You'll ride with the Bowers. Be at their house at seven, no later," he said. Tonight was the *soiree* at the librarian's new home in the little village of Northfield. Fred Bowers was my economics teacher and he and his family occupied a small campus house. He was a jolly, good-natured chap. Most of the teachers had acquired nicknames. His was 'Fat Freddie.'

"Actually, sir, I was thinking that since I'll already be at golf practice, I'd eat supper at the inn and then walk to your house afterward. That seems a lot simpler, don't you think. It'll be a nice evening for a stroll," I suggested, trying to polish the apple.

He shrugged and explained where to find his domicile. I sat back in the desk chair after he wandered off and emitted a long sigh of relief. Thus, if I could avoid the dean until I could escape to the golf course, I would be safe at least until nightfall. And, hopefully, Emily would meet me on the course and we could confer.

Later, and shortly before my departure for lunch, I hazarded another telephone call to the administration office. I reached the same woman to whom I had spoken previously.

"I called earlier about the chapel," I said quietly into the mouthpiece.

"Yes," she said, "the dean's investigating up there now."

"Well, I am pretty sure I saw the same guys going into the woods and they were carrying something with them." I gave her the name of the dormitory at the farthest distance from the chapel.

"Oh dear," she said in alarm. "He ought to be back here before lunch. He has some phone calls he has to make. I'll tell him as soon as he arrives."

"Good, these guys look really suspicious."

"And who did you say you were?"

"Bill, he knows me." I hung up. My name, of course, is not Bill.

For the time being, the dean would be preoccupied chasing ghosts. Perhaps at some point in the near future, he would suspect me being complicit in the morning's alarms, but at least now I might be able to eat a meal in the dining hall without the fear of being swooped upon and seized in his talons. And it was the first meal in two days that I ate without a sense of dread. Further, and in keeping with the theme of the last two days, the main course was that old standby of the

war years: creamed chipped beef on toast or, put less elegantly and more colloquially, shit on a shingle.

The discussion in the car taking us to the afternoon's practice at the golf course surrounding the schools' Northfield Inn centered upon the extraordinary events of yesterday morning at the West Marquand dormitory on the girl's school campus. The news had arrived from across the river by the morning post. For reasons which the reader surely must understand, I contributed nothing to the rampant speculation.

The golf coach, my roommate's English instructor, gathered us beside the pro shop and read his selections, based upon our scores from Thursday's nine hole qualifying round, for tomorrow's match at The Hotchkiss School in the wilds of western Connecticut, all of a two hour bus trip distant. Six golfers would represent our school and my score tied me for place number six. Remember, yesterday I knew that I needed a mighty effort on holes eight and nine to heftily pack strokes onto my score and, thus, disqualify myself as a competitor. The coach called my name.

"Really, sir, I think he should go," I suggested pointing to the eager underclassman with whom I was tied for the sixth position on the team. "My round was a fluke yesterday." For once, I was telling the truth. The underclassman brightened at the prospect.

"But this might be the only time you'll ever make the team," the coach replied encouragingly. He was not far wrong in that assertion.

"I know, but he needs the experience." The underclassman looked expectant.

"Okay, it's your call." My replacement gave me a look of gratitude. "So, guys, today go out and work on your weaknesses." I picked up my putter and headed to the distant practice green that fronted the inn's entrance driveway. From it, I could spot Emily's arrival.

The green had half a dozen holes dotted across its breadth with tiny removable flags inserted into the holes. After thirty minutes of rolling balls about, I was growing mightily bored with the activity—and practice was not making perfect. But the view was serene and attractive overlooking the sixth hole, which had given my playing partner of yesterday such torment, and the flanking skating pond reflected the cumulus clouds floating overhead. Across the street, a large, handsome turreted shingle-style residence lent dignity to the immediate scene and behind me

at the crest of the long slope the grand bulk of the maize-colored inn surveyed the scene with a benign content. Normally, I would have looked about me and reflected what a pleasant world it was in which I lived. But not today.

Where was Emily? I do not wear a wrist watch so I could only estimate the hour. I had written asking her to meet me here at three o'clock. We golfers arrived at the course typically just shy of half past the hour of two. I had been puttering around the practice green for the last half hour. If she were prompt, she should be coming into view momentarily. The street that paralleled the sixth hole ran directly to her campus. My view down it was obstructed by tall, flanking shade trees. I was beginning to despair when I detected, through the foliage, movement far off down the street. Please God, let it be Emily.

Whoever it might be appeared to be approaching and, shortly, came into view but partially screened by the waist-high laid-up stone wall that separated the sixth hole's fairway from the street. Emily? Well, at least now I could confirm that the walker was female.

And, in fact, the walker was indeed Emily. I waved my putter overhead to attract her attention. She noticed and waved in recognition. Shortly, she turned into the inn's driveway heading up the gradual slope to the practice green where I stood pathetically awaiting what I was certain to be nasty news.

My word, she looked enticing. Emily was a well-formed example of her sex and she was wearing a white blouse and gray skirt, which though entirely modest and proper, that did little to mask her attributes. And she was pretty with slightly pouting lips that made them seem eminently kissable.

"Well?" I said and reached out to embrace her.

"Don't," she said and stepped back.

"Why?" I was certain that doom portended now for Emily was not an abnormally shy person. In fact, as I have previously noted, in private she had a lusty nature. And then I realized her reluctance. A pair of my teammates was passing nearby, heading toward the sixth tee.

"Not here—let's find somewhere private," she whispered. They were looking toward us enviously and with a touch of the lascivious.

I looked about the immediate surroundings. Putter in hand, I led her toward the empty tennis courts that were located a short distance from the inn's long back verandah. On the two sides farthest removed from the inn, tall hedges grew against the high chicken wire netting that enclosed the courts. We could not be seen there

expect by a curious on-looker on the verandah and this time of year guests were scant.

“So?” I asked. She looked about cautiously to confirm to herself that we were unobserved.

“They suspect us,” she said. “Actually, you. Why did you have to wear that red sweater? Don’t you have any sense?”

“I wasn’t thinking. I didn’t expect that we’d fall asleep. Anyhow, I ditched it in the river,” I added

“Well, we did,” she replied, ignoring my explanation and demonstrating a firm grasp of the obvious.

“What about the sheet?” The damp, sticky patch mid-sheet would have been difficult to explain given all the other coincidences.

“Long gone,” she stated. I did not pursue that subject, but a feeling of deep relief surged through my being.

“So, do they think you’re involved?”

“I think they’re not quite sure. That’s why they sicced Reverend Tucker on me,” she explained. “Miss Grout doesn’t have any tact and besides she’s scary. He’s nice.” Miss Grout, I assumed, was the umbrella-wielding dorm mistress of yesterday morning. “Anyhow, why did you have to do it *there*? You could have done it in the trees.” ‘It’, I presumed, referred to the shimmering turd. ‘There’ referred to the dormitory wall and ‘the trees’ likely were the tall white pines a dozen paces distant from the back of the dormitory wall.

“I didn’t have any choice. I couldn’t hold it any longer,” I protested. She expelled a raucous Bronx cheer of disbelief, an oddly appropriate response all things considered.

“So, what did you tell him?” I inquired.

“Nothing. He’d been told what had happened, obviously, but he didn’t directly mention it. He talked about conscience and stuff like that.”

“So you didn’t confess?”

“Of course not. That would be suicidal. Besides, he didn’t directly ask about why you were there, but I think he had a pretty good idea. I said I hadn’t seen what was going on outside—that part was true—but I’d heard all about it. I just played dumb about you—but I’m sure he didn’t *really* believe me,” she said with a sigh.

“So, they’re certain it was me—I’ve been ducking the dean but he’s going to catch up with me sometime. Can’t avoid him forever.”

“You’re screwed,” she averred. Given the right occasion, Emily readily could lapse into raunchy schoolboy colloquialism. And again I was impressed by the similar assessment of my situation by my colleagues and their remarkably identical summation of my predicament.

“What about tomorrow?” She had turned away intending to depart. She hesitated and then turned back. A movie was being shown that evening for juniors and seniors in the auditorium on the boys’ campus. We had signed up earlier in the week to attend.

“What about it? You signed us up, right?”

“Of course. I just thought that maybe we could duck out and...”

“You haven’t gotten us in enough trouble and now you want to risk more?” she asked indignantly. I shrugged.

“You seemed to enjoy doing it,” I reflected. She shrugged, indicating agreement. “Suppose I could come up with a completely fool-proof plan?” A scheme was forming in my mind and, furthermore, I had in my dresser drawer another few condoms just waiting to burst into action.

“Let’s hear it. It better be good,” she said suspiciously.

“Give me a minute more,” I begged. I pondered for a moment. “Okay, I’ve got it.” I then proceeded to explain my plan to her.

Emily hailed from a sporting family which had resided for long generations in the Hudson River valley. Her father was joint-master of the local hunt and her mother shot over champion setters of her own breeding. Thus, Emily from childhood, when she ran with the local beagle pack before graduating to horseback and following foxhounds, was imbued with an intimate familiarity and knowledge of the technics of breeding which, no doubt, was in part responsible for her lusty willingness to engage in the process herself (as long as she was protected from its maternal consequences).

She had applied to her college, located some fifty miles down the valley from the family horse farm, in large part to continue to be near the sporting life that her parents led and of which she was enamored. Had we put its acceptance of her in jeopardy? But her stout denial to date sufficed.

I, by contrast and to the amusement of friends and satisfaction of the faculty, had been flatly turned down by the three colleges to which I had applied. My faculty advisor early on had warned that they would be a bit of a stretch considering that

my more than respectable score on the English SAT test did little to offset my appalling score in mathematics. And I had ignored on the three applications the requested essay and had substituted instead an essay on the research that I intended to pursue. It was a take it or leave it gamble—and they left it.

During the summer I had spent in England with my uncle and aunt, there had formed in my mind a quest to understand beauty. I had inquired of experts I met, for uncle was a trustee of the art museum in Salem on Massachusetts' north shore and, thus, had introductions to several British museum directors. All, when I had asked the question, had been startled by my question and had given me evasive answers which, taken as a whole, amounted to gibberish. But my uncle was intrigued. At best, we concluded, all that could be said was that people physically moved toward beauty and retreated from ugliness. But what *was* beauty?

I had tried reading Ruskin on the subject, as recommended by one museum director, but he provided no answer and, additionally, he was boring. I had asked in the British Library when we were in London but the librarians had been unable to fully comprehend what I was after, perhaps as there was nothing written specifically on the simple question of what defined beauty.

I had spent much of my spring vacation, when I was not fondling Emily, with my uncle and aunt at their expansive place on the north shore. When I explained my college applications to uncle one fine morning as we were trundling about the golf course he snorted that I would be wasting my time and that, furthermore, none of those colleges would admit me for, in my four academic years, I had achieved grades that generously were termed 'A Gentleman's C.' I never was interested in grade-grubbing, and I had developed several odd literary enthusiasms that had drawn me to themselves and away from my studies. By the time we had sunk our putts on the eighteenth green and were headed into the warmth of the clubhouse, he broached another alternative to college. He would arrange for me an internship at his museum where I could pursue my initial inquiries in congenial surroundings. But this June I had to graduate—that was the condition he imposed.

The reader may ponder what consequence such an investigation might conceivably produce. My answer to my uncle who proposed that same question was to consider its commercial implications. He is a bright fellow and immediately realized its vast potential. Our plan was that I intern for a year at the museum gleaned all I could from the association with its professionals and then he would take the initiative to place me at his college, he being a significant donor and

former trustee, where I would have access to a student body and would be able to create and run upon them whatever tests I might develop.

Already, I was beginning to drool about spending the vast wealth that my research, once marketed, would net me. For starters, I thought an Aston Martin sports car would do me nicely accompanied with a tweed cap from Lock's and a silk cravat from Hermes. Success was going to my head—and then I thought about that damn sermon I had to produce while simultaneously avoiding the dean of students. I hoped that with every passing hour (and the intervening problems inevitably confronting a man in his important position such as intruders in the chapel tower) his ardor for the chase would dim and I could go to ground safely while the hounds were still in full cry—and that the dean would not send the terrier down to bolt me.

And so the azure afternoon passed into a golden early evening and hunger was upon me. I had explained to the golf coach that I was a guest at the librarian's new home in the village at seven o'clock, and the hour now being past five, perhaps dining at the inn rather than returning to campus and promptly leaving again would be sensible. Assuring him that I had sufficient funds, he reluctantly agreed.

The inn, constructed to house the summer hordes attending the religious conference, spent the other three seasons vainly scrambling to attract visitors. It rivaled large urban hotels in its capacity and appeared to extend half the length of a football field. But, despite its rural amenities such as tobogganing and sleigh rides in the winter and golf, tennis, and swimming in the warm months, few were drawn to sample its modest charms. Parents often visited their children and, as a treat, took them to the inn for Sunday lunch. And the food was simply dreadful: plain Yankee cooking at its nadir. It must be admitted that the food surpassed the fare served in our own dining hall, but that hardly constituted a commendation.

I gnawed through a dry pork chop and manfully downed lumpy mashed potato and limp stringy asparagus. Clearly, the kitchen was blissfully unaware of the benefits deriving from the application of sauces or spices. The only dessert offering was that old New England delicacy Indian pudding, a form of thick corn meal mush anointed with molasses. A scoop of ice cream would have made it palatable but, though I asked, that was not forthcoming.

Thus, in a manner of speaking, satiated, I set off for the librarian's home one mile distant. The evening's at seven he had stated so I had ample time to leisurely stroll from the inn down to the broad main street off which lay his enchanted abode.

This, I reflected, was the same topographic declivity, though somewhat removed in distance, down which I had escaped yesterday at dawn. A queasy feeling came over me and perspiration suddenly beaded my brow.

The main street of Northfield in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts is, to my mind, as handsome as can be found in our Yankee environ. It runs dead straight due north and south. The houses are set far back from the travelled way thus producing a breadth and sense of ampleness. And many are of copious dimension and built with grace and imagination. Since this was an outpost in civilization's northward thrust, it had been attacked and savaged twice by the native inhabitants. Its recovery was belated and, thus, the architecture was of the turn of the nineteenth century. Mid-way was what constituted the village center: a church with a pointed spire and a few stores which catered to the basics. Farther along southward, for that was the direction I was ambling, was a garage and a filling station fulfilling the other basic need.

As I looked about the commodious scene, I thought that here was a place that I would like someday to call home. But that someday was a far way off and I still had to continue evading the dean of students and, furthermore, I had to compose my sermon. Two days now had slid by and I was no farther advanced than my original idea of the Eskimo saint. But with each passing hour, the fateful moment was drawing nearer. On the other hand, with each passing hour, hopefully the dean's ardor might be dissipating.

But now I was drawing nearer to the whereabouts of the librarian's little brick home. I consulted my directions, turning left onto a minor road that eventually would wind its way up and over the great wooded ridge that flanked my progress. But his home was only a few hundred yards distant and still on the flat fields behind the main street. A row of automobiles was parked in front of it and, as I drew nearer, I could hear a buzz of conversation emanating from within.

It was a cozy cottage of early nineteenth century vintage, but far too cozy for the assemblage contained therein. Moving about within its confines was difficult and one had to sidle rather than walk to avoid embarrassing collisions with portly faculty and their plump wives. A Victorian glass punch bowl dispensed a chilled semi-sweet non-alcoholic liquid designed to maintain proper Protestant sobriety. Conversation, thus, lacked the jollity consequent from the consumption of more civilized and enlightened recipes. All in all, it was a dreary event and I was glad to accept a ride back to campus.

Upon arrival, I was gratified that the dean had decided not to append to the door of our room another summons. Perhaps he was exhausted from pursuing the ghosts I had created this morning and for solace needed a stiff drink and to crack open another pack of cigarettes. Anyhow, I had miles to go before I slept. My sermon loomed nearer and I had to glance at my lesson in Spic for that class and my library job would fill my Saturday morning. And then there was the plan I had broached to Emily. A glimmer of an idea was developing in the back of my mind. Fortunately, my roommate would be occupied at choir practice for at least another hour so I had solitude with which to conjure.

I have an ability to sidetrack myself from responsibility—a liability would be a more accurate assessment. Though I should be searching through encyclopedias for information about Eskimos, I spent my idle moments Saturday morning behind the library desk concocting the evening's plans. To sit through the movie merely holding Emily's hand seemed preposterously absurd. The sands were running and in a few weeks Emily and I would part. Life would inevitably send us spinning off in unpredictable directions, and, further, were we meant by fate to spend the balance of our lives together? I doubt either of us was ready to make such a commitment or answer that question in the absolute affirmative. But there was an electric charge surging through my loins and, I suspected, that whatever constituted the feminine equivalent was similarly affecting her. We were, to lapse into the colloquial, ridiculously horny.

Lust obliterated any scholarly thoughts. My sermon research could wait. Anyhow, I was sure that I could invent whatever I needed should there occur any lapses in my knowledge. What was there to know about Eskimos—they lived in igloos, travelled by dog sled, paddled around in kayaks, and ate blubber. A pretty unattractive and uncomfortable life by any reckoning.

And then it occurred to me. I pushed myself out of the desk chair, turned, and descended the stairs to the stacks in the cellar. As you may recall, quite recently I had availed myself of the emergency exit at the rear of the cellar. If it could let me out, perhaps it could let me in. I depressed the panic bar on the door and studied the lock. If I were to insert an inconspicuous wedge between the frame and the door, I could open it from the outside despite it being locked. Outside, there was a handle to grasp but the right wedge could give me leverage to pry the door open and let the two of us enter come nightfall. All I had to do was locate the proper

instrument. But I could not leave the library desk unattended much longer so I dashed upstairs, settled into the desk chair, and cogitated.

Then, as I was checking out a reference book, I happened to shift inadvertently some papers stacked on the desk. Underneath was a flexible plastic ruler with the name of a stationer imprinted on its face. It was unusually broad, not quite an inch and one half. Its width would easily span the face plate of the lock and keep the bolt from seating itself in the door jamb. I slipped it inside my shirt.

A faculty wife replaced me at the desk shortly so that I could start to return books to the stacks. Quietly, I stole down the cellar stairs and made my way to the exit door. I opened the door and slid the ruler vertically between the door and the jamb and carefully pushed the door shut. An edge protruded slightly but that it might not be noticed must be chanced. Rarely did anyone frequent this dim cellar corner. I took the cellar stairs two at a time and moments later was industriously stacking returns like a dutiful student librarian.

No doubt my reader has already imagined the intent of my scheming. The coffee room had among its sparse furnishings a sagging sofa. It might occasion a bit of uncomfortable positioning, but it should suffice for our intentions. The stage was setting itself, at least the penultimate act. Somehow I had to concoct a way for us to be seen entering the auditorium where the movie was to be shown this evening, particularly by the faculty assigned to patrol us. Then I must find a way to exit unseen and make our way to the back of the library. Once we had consummated our passion, we needed to merge with the exiting crowd returning to the buses which would carry the young maidens across the river to their campus.

My library duty complete, I headed up the hill to the dining hall joining the throng from classrooms heading in the same direction. Overhead, ominous clouds were sweeping in on the strengthening west wind.

Once again I reflected on how close I had come to be motoring to the golf match at the remote Hotchkiss School in the wilderness far, far away. It was my approach shot from the par four ninth fairway (ours being a nine-hole course) that sealed my fate. The distance had called for a middle iron or, for the faint-hearted, a four wood. Instead, I had pulled a powerful brassie from my bag. I hit the ball squarely and it soared far over the green, took a forward leap, and, with a resounding report, smacked the wall of the pro shop. My partner looked at me in disbelief.

“Oops,” I said.

“Jesus,” the pro said upon emerging from the shop. “What the hell...”

“Sorry,” I yelled from out in the fairway. After two intentionally muffed chips to the green, I three-putted.

“Eight,” I announced upon extracting my ball. I feigned distress. I had similarly botched the previous hole and the likelihood of staying on campus Saturday afternoon (and evening) had decidedly improved.

As I ascended the steps to the dining hall, I felt a droplet of rain.

A soft, gentle mist enveloped the mild afternoon. I had decided to take a walk after lunch to get straight in my mind the content of my upcoming debut in the pulpit. Out on the athletic fields the track meet was being contested in slippery conditions. The pole vaulters understandably seemed to be unnerved by the moisture which coated their poles and I saw a damp discus shoot off at an unexpected angle causing the shouts of ‘fore!’ to warn the unwary. The shot putts landed with a plop in the wet turf and I reflected upon how close I had come to being dragged off to that soggy golf match far away that would be no fun at all.

What little I knew of Eskimos I was reluctant to supplement by the effort of grim research in the school library. I had neither the intellectual curiosity nor the desire to stultify my creativity with factual knowledge. Anyhow, what was there to know about these people who neither added to nor subtracted from the world’s store of goodness and light? They just existed. Somewhere and long ago, I had chanced across a translation of their language and it seemed to consist mainly of two sounds: uck and glug. Surely, I could compound names and places simply by combining those sounds and tossing in a few odd consonants for good luck. Muckuckglugatuckuckglug sounded like a plausible name for a pleasant seaside village. I transcribed it into a little notebook that I carried in the inside pocket of my tweed sport coat. I already was making progress.

The report of a shot caused me to jump. Far off across the playing field the starter for the half-mile race had let off his pistol to commence the running. Hopelessly distracted, my attention turned to this evening’s activity. An electric charge pulsed through my loins in anticipation. What I needed was a distraction, a sleight-of-hand manoeuver that would permit Emily and me to appear to attend the movie in the auditorium while, in fact, we were pursuing passion in the library cellar. Out on the playing field, the half-milers were commencing the second of their two laps. They looked grimly determined and bore on their contorted faces expressions of being acutely pained. Grime from the wet cinders of the track had turned their

white socks and pink shins gray and the rain had slicked the hair on their heads. Their uniforms clung soddenly to their gasping bodies. I pondered how it could come to pass that reasonable people could be persuaded to voluntarily undertake this activity as a form of recreation.

I had had enough of watching the track meet. Track and field meets on pretty spring days were boring. In the misting rain, now intensifying, they were intolerable. I headed along a path which would take me to the auditorium. Reconnaissance was called for. Halfway to the auditorium, inspiration again seized me. The name Oomgluck flashed into my consciousness. Oomgluck chief of the Muckuckglugatuckglugs—and his wife Odmudatuck. The sermon was already writing itself.

I climbed the granite steps to the auditorium door. I entered and stood in the foyer. A staircase ascended to the balcony. Underneath it was a door. I opened it. Inside was a closet containing various implements used for cleaning. Ahead were the double doors opening upon the auditorium. Already, the large movie screen above the stage had been pulled down. A note tacked to the door stated that the Hitchcock film *North by Northwest* was to be the offering for the evening's entertainment.

I was frustrated. Absolutely, we must be seen appearing to enter the chamber but there seemed to be no escape short of climbing out an auditorium window which would be difficult considering that the hall would then contain several hundred fellow students. Emitting a deep and tragic sigh, I descended the auditorium steps and headed toward the library. The moment had come to locate the Orkneys, birthplace of Snortin' Norton, Apostle to the Eskimos. The misting rain was intensifying.

My mind turned to the frustrated pole vaulters off in the far distance and to their wet, slippery poles. It might be jolly to watch them struggle. But no, I must discipline myself I told myself. But discipline has never been one of my strengths in the face of temptation and, halfway to the library, I made a hard right turn and headed for the pole vaulting venue. As I mentioned before, there is nothing that amuses the adolescent as much as watching one's contemporaries make complete asses of themselves.

Just before the library closed for the day, I slipped in and consulted an encyclopedia. The Orkneys, to my surprise, were a group of islands off the northern tip of Scotland and possessed of uncomfortable weather and terrain.

Worse yet, considering that they belonged to Scotland, there was not a single golf course. Long about the year one thousand, the Norwegians conquered the locals. Nine hundred and fifty years ago seemed like a safe distance and the Orkneys sufficiently remote. My on-going fear had been the knowledge possessed by our several faculty with divinity degrees. That any would have studied the time and the place I thought worth risking.

So I set my saint's birth in the reign of Thorfinn Skullsplitter (995 *a.d.* or thereabout). Born to a humble shepherd, young Norton early showed signs of mental instability or Christian devotion—the reader can make that distinction himself (or herself, as the author is aware of the need of inclusivity to avoid possible lawsuits accruing in these hyper-sensitive times). For our purpose, we will deem Christian devotion the preferred choice and get on with the fabrication. This irritating young divine so annoyed the locals that, on one of the Norwegian holiday cruises, he was deposited on an ice floe with the good wishes that he might continue his devotions and keep them to himself and the local seals. But the arctic current drifted him to land where he encountered local Eskimos who thought him to be Muchluckmuckuguck, one of their panoply of gods. I decided that he would be assumed to be the god of fertility as the thought of the sofa in the cellar below was causing an anticipatory buzzing in my groin.

I paused in my scholarly gleaning and looked out the reading room window. The view was dismal and sodden. Rain was continuing to fall and I was growing sleepy from my research exertions. I decided to forego the encyclopedia's entry on the Eskimo, heaved myself erect, and plodded out the building heading for my nearby dormitory and a pre-prandial nap.

The noisy arrival of my roommate from his lacrosse game downriver at Williston Academy brought me back to the world of the quick. Supper was imminent and I rummaged in our closet for a necktie, sport coat, and raincoat. As I shuffled about the various items of clothing hanging from the rail, my knuckles sharply rapped the bamboo handle of my umbrella. I winced. Then an idea emerged.

My mother is a cautious woman and had provided me both with galoshes for winter snows and an umbrella for rainy weather. To employ either item would have occasioned wondering frowns from fellow students so both remained closeted and gathered dust. I looked out the window of our room. The rain appeared to intensify. In little more than an hour, Emily and her throng would be pulling into our campus. The busses parked just short of the library, and the dates paired there

and commenced the longish walk to the auditorium.

At supper, my roommate regaled me with the account of victory. The lacrosse team was never particularly successful so a resounding win occasioned re-telling. I paid scant attention and bent myself to shoveling food into my mouth. A plan was forming in my mind. I congratulated myself on, once again and just in the nick of time, contriving a desperate escape from disaster.

“Let’s go,” my roommate said, pushing his heavy oak chair from the table and belching.

“You going to shower?” He, too, had a date for the movie. Personal hygiene was not one of his usual concerns or strengths.

“Naw, I’ll just slap some Old Spice on. That’ll do,” he explained.

“You might want to brush your teeth. You’ve got spinach caught in your front ones.”

“Crap,” he said and poked in his mouth with his index finger. Upon reflection, I should have said nothing and let him make a fool of himself. What was wrong with me?

Well over a hundred ardent swains huddled miserably in the gloom where the buses could be expected to arrive. But for mine, there was not another umbrella to be seen. The rain was now pelting. Overhead, my umbrella kept me delightfully dry and the condom nestled snugly in my inside jacket pocket. All about me were subdued curses from wet students getting wetter. Envious glances were directed at me. I smiled back benignly.

The busses were overdue. And then the rumble of grumbling ceased as the headlights of the first of several busses appeared rounding the curve by the administration building. Rather than stop in the usual place where the swains were assembled, the drivers stopped some fifty yards short. Clearly the drivers were sportsmen. We surged toward the buses with obscene shouts and imprecations directed at the drivers.

It is generally conceded that girls have more commonsense than boys. Feminine hairdos were protected from the rain with a variety of contrivances: yachting hats and caps, plastic sheeting decorated with feminine themes, and an occasional dinky lady’s umbrella. My sturdy masculine umbrella stood out from the assemblage dog-trotting up the sloping roadway to the auditorium. Emily grasped my arm and pecked me on the cheek for being so fore-sighted. We scurried along with the

crowd. A Hitchcock thriller was always eagerly anticipated. Behind us trudged a pair of young faculty whose depressing assignment was to be sure there were no malingerers ducking off for romantic gropings. Little did they suspect what I had in mind.

There was a jam at the auditorium door as dates attempted to squeeze into the bright, dry foyer and out of the downpour. A howl of pain could be heard above the din. The tip of a feminine umbrella inadvertently had poked someone in the ear. Moments went by as we shuffled slowly forward. At last, we surmounted the steps and entered into the foyer.

“Take that outside and shake it off. Don’t bring it in here like that,” Fat Freddie, my economics teacher, commanded. A couple of faculty was posted at the double doors that admitted us to the seats. Several umbrella-equipped Northfield maidens were similarly pushing back through the entering throng intending to rid theirs of surplus water.

“Come on,” I said to Emily.

“You don’t need me. I’ll wait here,” she replied.

“I’ve got a plan. Come on!” I grasped her hand and hauled her after me.

Outside the crowd had thinned and several umbrella shakers were turning to remount the steps to the doorway. The pair of faculty sweeps had just entered the building. We were alone.

“Let’s go,” I whispered.

“Where?” she asked suspiciously.

“The library,” I replied. “I unlocked the back door. Come on!”

“Wait a minute,” she said. She proceeded to remove her penny loafers. Our route was across broad lawns to the back of the library. “Are you sure this is safe?”

“We were seen inside by my teacher. He won’t notice that we didn’t come back. He’ll just assume we did. That was too big a crowd.” I shut the conspicuous umbrella. We took one final look about us. No one was in view. We ran.

The library door opened without protest. The plastic ruler slithered to the grass. The door shut behind us with a sigh. The darkness was total. I groped for a light switch and walked headlong into the steel frame of a floor to ceiling bookcase.

“Shit,” I hissed.

“Are you okay?” Emily commiserated. I grunted in the affirmative and continued palming the wall. Ultimately, after several subsequent collisions, I located a switch

box and lit the cellar.

Emily was holding her loafers in her hands. Her hair was shining with droplets of the rain through which we had just galloped. One ran down her forehead, along her nose, and fell to the floor. She smiled and stepped forward and kissed me hard.

"This way," I said and led her to the coffee room lounge. I lit the chamber with the switch by the door. There was a window in the wall that looked out upon the lawns behind the building. In the rest of the cellar there were no windows.

"On *that*?" Emily was pointing at the semi-decrepit sofa.

"This isn't a hotel," I replied. "It's the best I could do." She shrugged.

"Halloooo.....Is anyone here?" Our passion spent, we were lying buck-naked on the sofa, her head nestled in the crook of my arm. We were comfortable and drowsy.

"Hallooooo, I say....Anyone?" I knew the voice. It came from overhead, presumably the lobby. It belonged to one of the faculty wives who served as a library assistant. Then I heard a lower, guttural voice whose words were indistinguishable. Presumably that voice belonged to her husband. Someone, likely the owner of the inquiring voice, must have noticed the light emanating from the coffee room. On a Saturday evening the library was closed and its lights turned off. She and her husband lived in a cottage some distance behind the library. Presumably, she must have noticed this evening's anomaly and decided to investigate.

"Jesus B. Christ!" I whispered. Emily disentangled herself and leapt for the chair upon which she had neatly draped her clothes. My clothes were strewn about the floor. The umbrella I had prudently hung on the back of another chair. A small puddle of rain water had accumulated beneath it.

"Halloooooo.....?" We were nearly dressed. Our undergarments we stuffed into raincoat pockets. I kicked my feet into my desert boots. There was no time to tie the laces. We hesitated at the coffee room door. Above us could be heard muffled conversation.

We sidled along the cellar wall in the direction of the panic-barred door. Inadvertently or not, I had left the banks of cellar lights on. At least we could see where we were heading.

"I'll just go down and turn off the lights," the female voice declared. She must have been standing at the head of the stairs leading to the cellar stacks. A muffled masculine voice replied indistinctly. Her step rang on the steel stair. Cautiously, I

pushed the door open and we piled through, spilling onto the sopping grass. Fortunately, I had had the common sense to hang onto the outside door handle. As silently as possible, I eased it shut. Unless the puddle from the dripping umbrella was noticed, we were safe—sort of.

“What now, genius?” I had knelt to tie my laces. The rain had ceased.

“We’ve got to get away from here,” I whispered. “What time is it?” Emily wore a wrist watch.

“It’s dark, idiot. I can’t see. If you get us caught....” I grabbed her hand before she could finish the imprecation and pulled her along in the direction of the auditorium. We were on several acres of lawn and there was nowhere to hide. We were completely exposed. I glanced back at the library. In front of it, I heard an automobile engine turn over and headlights lit the pavement. Presumably, the car belonged to the inquiring librarian and her husband. Was she satisfied that all was well and the lights left on inadvertently? Or had she noticed the puddle on the floor of the coffee room. If so, the alarm would spread quickly resulting in a search by all available faculty who could be pressed into service.

The headlights were coming our way.

“Down!” I exclaimed and shoved Emily to the wet turf. The headlights swept past us.

“Now what are we going to do?” she hissed. “We can’t stay here!” She had a point. I pondered our situation. As I was thinking, I saw the lights lit in the auditorium windows. The movie was finished. Momentarily a crowd of students would begin to make its way along the road past the library to where the waiting busses were parked.

“Quick let’s get back to the library.” She, too, had noticed the lights. “We can slip into the crowd.”

The library porch contained large Doric pillars flanking the entry door. Behind these we could await the oncoming dates returning from the auditorium. We ran.

Breathless, we huddled behind a pillar.

“Damn,” Emily said.

“What’s the matter?” She was squirming into her panties which she had stuffed in her raincoat pocket in our hasty getaway.

“I’ve got the damn things on backwards,” she replied. “This is *all* your fault!” Already the crowd was halfway to us. She was bent over and struggling. I tried to prop her up lest she tumble. Trying to get one’s feet through the leg holes of

underpants I have always found mildly daunting. To do so in the dark was well to impossible.

“Shit, shit, shit!” she ejaculated. She continued to struggle as the crowd approached closer yet.

“Leave it,” I cautioned.

“Bloody hell. I’ve got one leg in and one out,” she complained. She kept struggling. The head of the crowd was upon us, but thankfully we were unseen behind the pillar. “Crap,” she said. She had pulled her foot out and was stuffing the uncooperative panties into her raincoat pocket.

“Let’s go,” I said and we stole off the library porch and filtered into the passing throng. Fortunately, thanks to the retreating rain obliterating the waning moon, the darkness was nearly total and we were unnoticed.

Dates were allowed a longish five minutes of necking before the bus engines erupted with a cough and the interior lights were lit. The faculty sweeps then began to herd the amorous toward the transports.

Emily and I embraced. But there was no passion in the embrace this time. I put my arms around her. She stiffened and put her hands in her raincoat pocket. She was not in a good mood.

“My bra’s gone,” she whispered. There was panic in her whisper. “It must have fallen out.”

A whistle blew indicating that the romantic interlude was concluded. The crowd began to shuffle toward the bus doors.

“Don’t worry,” I said, “I’ll find it.” We were now at the bus door. When I tried to kiss her, she turned her face away so that the kiss landed on her ear. But out on that broad expanse of lawn, there was little likelihood that I could find it in the dark and now we swains were being herded back to our dorms. A departure from the blue-balled scholars would have been instantly noticed. I trudged back to my dormitory. Somewhere out there lay a brassiere.

The school required attendance at three chapel services: one during the week after morning classes and prior to lunch; the second Wednesday evenings before supper (Wednesday afternoon being allotted for interscholastic athletic competition); and the third Sunday morning. We were required to wear our suits to Sunday chapel for this was a serious service. The choir processed and recessed behind the cross and sang during the service. Often visiting eminent theologians spoke from the pulpit.

My roommate and I were walking toward the gray granite edifice amidst a hoard of other compulsory faithful. A long, straight walk led past the five brick freshman dormitories. They were smallish structures of the appalling late nineteenth century taste and called The Cottages. Off to our right lay lawn and beyond the bulk of the brick dining hall. Behind us that sun struck mid-morn a gathering sound could be heard. It was coming toward us and the sound was of high hilarity. We halted and turned in order to determine the source of the merriment.

A pair of faculty dogs was dashing about the lawn that led to the dining hall. They ran in great loops, backward and forward, one in pursuit of the other. The pursued held in its mouth a brassiere. The pursuer avidly wished to grasp it. At this point, several hundred scholars had paused along the walkway to the chapel to watch the proceedings. Some cheered for the pursued, some for the pursuer. Around and around the dogs galloped, the brassiere, grasped by its strap, flapping madly.

Suddenly, the pursuer halted in its looping chase and decided to bisect the next loop thereby taking the pursued by surprise. The collision sent both dogs spilling pot over tea kettle. Now the situation reversed itself and the pursuer became the pursued. They headed at full gallop in the direction of the chapel with the mob of student spectators pounding along behind much like Emily in her childhood running with the beagle pack in pursuit of the rabbit. Only the pealing of the ten o'clock bells in the chapel tower brought the panting followers to a halt at the chapel doors. Their boisterous cheers rang in the welkin. A furious faculty member emerged from inside frantically gesturing for respectable quiet. Several scholars were bent double with glee.

It goes without saying, though I am loath not to say it, that a sense of suppressed merriment rather than adolescent reverence permeated the assembled students in the chapel nave that morning. Wondering frowns adorned the visages of the surpliced celebrants in the chancel. The visiting clergyman, the head of a distinguished divinity college, stopped more than once in the delivery of his sermon to attempt to comprehend the smiles and snickers and whispers running amuck throughout the congregants in the nave. The headmaster, one of the surpliced dignitaries in the chancel, half rose from his chair to remonstrate only to subside when the students noticed his intent and momentarily lapsed into behavior becoming the reverent.

Clearly, Emily's lost brassiere had been found and displayed to an appreciative

audience. Letters about this episode posted Monday by swains to their dates of Saturday past would arrive the next day. Word of mouth would by Wednesday have spread the reports across the breadth of the Northfield School for Girls. By Thursday, I could expect in the mail a response to the news from Emily—a response that did not bode well for the future of our romance. Worse yet, since we had to identify all our items of clothing that were to be washed in the schools' laundries by means of name tapes sewn in the garments, should her brassiere be found considerable embarrassment undoubtedly would result.

Since I was already in the dean's crosshairs, far worse than embarrassment likely would accrue to me. Had the assistant librarian who had routed us been of a suspicious nature and had she spotted the puddle on the coffee room floor and had she reported the foregoing to the dean? Dark menacing clouds appeared on my horizon and the brassiere with its name tape affixed would be my final undoing—that is if my upcoming sermon had not previously sunk my already listing boat. I was screwed.

Uggbu. That was the name I decided upon for the Eskimo god. Originally, I had planned for a large cast of gods if you recall. Rather than a panoply of gods such as the ancient Greeks tolerated (and whom I had studied in my freshman year and promptly forgotten), I considered one god more than sufficient. That large cast seemed an unneeded complication although being mistaken for the god of fertility, Muchluckmuckaguk, offered several amusing avenues for the plot. Enticing though that might be, I reluctantly decided for streamlined brevity and opted for just old Uggbu for my allotted fifteen minutes of sermonizing.

I had decided that troubling Sunday that I needed a post-prandial ramble. Fresh air and exercise might release the creative demons in my sub-conscious. Now would be the only available time to concoct my account of the trials and triumphs of the doomed Saint Norton for classes resumed Monday followed by afternoon golf practice. Sometimes panic is the best motivator for creativity, sometimes the greatest inhibitor .

My wandering took me past the front door of the chapel. The chapel stood on a rise of land. Far below stretched the playing fields. A path led to the freshman and sophomore dormitory at the far end of the playing fields. An English nobleman had been talked into donating the construction cost by that old persuader D. L. Moody. Thus, the dormitory bore the fellow's name. As I descended the path, far

out on the playing field I spotted the two dogs of the morning peacefully prone, gnawing the remnant of Emily's brassiere. I veered off the path in their direction. They arose and moved away from my approach. They were not about to allow their prize, which they were happily destroying, to be snatched from them. The brassiere had separated between the two conical cups. Each dog possessed one half of the garment. Presumably, the identifying name tape had been sewn upon one of the back straps.

I squatted hoping that my less intimidating appearance might entice them to me. I held out my hand as though I was offering a treat. The retreat stopped. They paused, wondering what delicacy I might hold in my out-stretched hand. Suspiciously they began to advance toward me. One dropped its brassiere prize and then the other dropped its half. Closer and closer they approached, their tails beginning to wag in friendliness and expectation.

They were almost upon me when I sprang to my feet and dashed toward the brassiere they had abandoned. But they divined my intent, and before I could halve the distance they had snatched their prizes and galloped away. I expressed my frustration with a well known hyphenated indecency.

I returned to the path and pondered. Torn I was by dread: for starters, in three days I would stand before the entire school and deliver a quasi-sermon about a phony saint; further, I was terrified about public speaking; continuing on, as of yet I had not a word of text; if that was not enough, the damning brassiere was now beyond retrieve and the question to whom it belonged hung in the air; if discovered to be Emily's, the dean of students, with his devious mind, might connect the brassiere, the puddle on the coffee room floor, and me.

I stiffened my spine and resolutely accepted my fate. Bring on the firing squad.

As I noted previously, panic can at times release the creative impulses. So it was that pleasant May afternoon that I meandered the lane that circled behind the campus proper. Along it at well-spaced intervals were smallish faculty homes. In all, its length was little more than one-half mile, but it provided a solace that the familiarity of the campus lacked.

And gradually the events in the life of Snortin' Norton began to assemble themselves. There were the childhood years when the irritating Norty asked many questions that annoyed his elders. As previously noted, they were unable to determine whether he was possessed of the Holy Spirit or simply crazy—it was a

toss-up. Then came the holiday cruise whereupon he was wished good luck and set adrift on an ice floe. Much refreshed by his long journey, he bumped into solid land and was cordially received by chief Oomgluck, his wife Odmudatuck, and the rest of the locals, the residents of the seaside villa of Muckuckglugatuckuckglug.

Having European features rather than the Mongoloid ones of his hosts, he was mistakenly assumed to be Uggbu, their god. Being a good Christian fellow, he set about bringing the heretofore happy, contented folk to an awareness of eternal damnation and the prospect of roasting in hell. Hell being a good deal warmer than home held no great terror, but they were not amused with the idea of Uggbu in the after-life kicking them out of what they had imagined to be something akin to Palm Beach. It all unraveled, when, as I alluded before, whilst baptizing an infant said infant slipped from his chilled fingers and disappeared under the ice cap. The child's parents were not amused. Apparently, it had not occurred to St. Norton to bring the water to the infant rather than the infant to the water. For a second time, St. Norton was set adrift on an ice floe. He disappeared into a golden sunset with a hungry polar bear paddling in his wake.

There is an expression used to describe incipient terror: the knocking of the knees. No one takes the effect seriously except perhaps soldiers pinned down in foxholes (non-atheists to the man) and me Wednesday evening in the chapel vestry. The rays of the descending sun slanted through the mullioned windows of the bare, dusty little chamber. The rotund Friar Tuck had buttoned me into a black cassock and departed to arrange affairs in the chancel for the service. He said he would return in a bit to conduct me to the gallows.

I leafed through the pages of my manuscript but the words were meaningless. The pain of my knocking knees was becoming unbearable and I slumped into a chair in hopes that sitting with my legs crossed rather than standing might improve my misery. Sweat dripped from my armpits and coursed down my flanks. My palms were damp and beads of perspiration fell upon the manuscript pages when I bent my head to read. Glancing out the window, I could discern students shuffling toward the chapel's side door.

Through the vestry door I could hear the rising grumble as the pews began to fill. From the deep recess of the balcony the organ prelude started to groan. Had there been in that little vestry a door to the warm, happy outside world, I would have burst through it and devil take the hindmost. Now I knew how the hunted fox must

feel as it tired in its flight before the ravening pack of hounds.

The dreaded chancel door opened and the cherubic face of the jolly friar appeared. With a crooked index finger he beckoned me to follow him. When I stood erect dizziness beset me and I staggered. The concerned clergyman grasped me tenderly and assured me that I had nothing to fear. Steadying myself, I shuffled along in his wake, deeply regretting the years of vanity and folly that had brought me to this moment, and ascended the several steps into the chancel. I averted my face lest I look upon the expectant multitude. Bile rose from my gut.

I took my seat in a chair beside The Reverend Tucker. We were seated against the chancel's side wall, he closer to the nave. Light from the overhead lamps glinted on the brightly polished brass cross on the altar. Suddenly, I was overcome with repentance for my sins of omission, commission, and any others along my miserable and wretched trek through this weary world. The good friar arose as the organ prelude wheezed to a conclusion. He moved to the front of the nave and in orotund vowels declaimed the introductory prayer. The organist resumed, noodling the introductory to the opening hymn. Hymnals were opened and the throng of five hundred students plus a smattering of faculty in the balcony noisily took its feet to sing. The hymn chosen for this early evening was the singularly most depressing one in the book: 'Turn back , O man, forswear thy foolish ways.' How exquisitely appropriate, I thought.

The good doctor Samuel Johnson famously stated that nothing concentrates the mind so wonderfully as the prospect of being hanged in a fortnight. Gently, the kindly friar placed his palm under my elbow to propel me toward the pulpit. Giddiness overtook me. Then I realized that I had left my sermon in my just vacated chair. I turned to retrieve it but the alert clergyman arose and handed it to me. Out in the assemblage a whispered remark brought forth a ripple of merriment.

I ascended the two steps to the pulpit, placed the text before me, and grasped the sides of the pulpit firmly lest my knees buckle. I surveyed the congregation. The seniors, my classmates, were arrayed before me in the front pews. Most knew me reasonably well from our four years together. The improbability of my standing before them in this place was not lost upon them. Behind the seniors were seated the juniors who knew me slightly, then the obnoxious sophomores, and lastly the inconsequential pimply freshmen.

I began to speak in a voice vaguely reminiscent of that of an eager used car

salesman. Out in the pews I spotted my roommate. He had his hand over his mouth in an attempt to stifle a derisive howl. Others who knew me well and were seated in close proximity looked restive. Was I the cause of their unease or was the release of what we termed an s.b.d. (silent but deadly) the culprit? Realizing that I was the more likely possibility, I began to clip my words rather like a crazed Nazi haranguing a mob of the ardent. Chuckles began to ripple through my classmates. I slowed my delivery, pausing at each comma and period and looking about consequentially as though I were waiting for my audience to grasp my profundity.

Slowly it began to dawn on the more sophisticated before me that what I was delivering was, colloquially speaking, a load of crap. Behind me, the good friar must have risen to hush the growing grumble of suppressed laughter for momentarily the grumble subsided. It rose again with the mention of the Eskimo god I had named Uggbu. Clearly now there was no one, even the lowliest freshman, who was not aware of the travesty occurring in the pulpit—and I was barely half way through my text.

Any moment I expected Friar Tuck to grasp me firmly and forcibly remove me from that sacred podium. I suspect that he must have been sorely tempted but overcame that desire realizing that the ass I was making of myself in front of the entire school assembled was a good and sufficient punishment. That and the delightful revenge of flunking me. I stumbled through to the conclusion of the saint floating into the sunset followed by the hungry polar bear. That image momentarily stunned the listeners to silence in the pews until its preposterousness sank into their adolescent consciousnesses.

Normally, the presiding clergyman at this point would conclude the service with a benediction. But Friar Tuck sat slumped in his chair, flummoxed into immovability by what he had just heard emanating from the pulpit. Clearly, it was a new low in the Christian faith that he had just experienced and he was too stunned to rise. The roar of appreciation from the pews was drowned by that of the organ erupting in a sonorous postlude. The organist, clearly a sacred opportunist, saved the moment from a greater yet disaster by launching into the dismissal hymn. Gradually hymnals were extracted from the racks on the pew backs and opened to “Jesus calls us; o’er the tumult/ Of our life’s wild restless sea....”

In the vestry as we divested, the usually ebullient friar, pale and shaken, croaked, “We’ll talk later.” Outside the chapel, my delighted classmates loudly chanted my name. When I appeared, I was greeted with a roar of applause and shouts of

delight. I was borne aloft on the shoulders of my adoring classmates all the way to the dining hall doorway. Cheers of ‘Uggbu, Uggbu, Uggbu’ accompanied the procession. Throughout supper that Wednesday evening, spontaneous cries of ‘Uggbu’ rang through the vast dining hall. Doubtless, repercussions would follow but the high spirits of the evening were not to be denied their venting.

I reflected, as I walked down the slope to our dormitory amidst a throng of back slapping dorm mates after supper, that graduation was ten days hence. I mentioned before that my ship was listing. Now it was taking on water. Could I bale furiously and keep it afloat? And a storm was about to brew that likely would swamp it. Was I screwed? More than likely.

The following morning, as students sallied forth to class, delighted cries of ‘Uggbu’ could be heard across campus. I cringed with each new iteration as I shuffled disconsolately toward my economics class. I had become a hero and, I feared, I was about to become a goat. Though I tried to concentrate, sly looks of approval from my fellow economists congratulated my daring of the evening past. Fat Freddie looked puzzled. Apparently the news of the chapel service had yet to penetrate the entire faculty corps. English History produced a similar result. The class was momentarily interrupted by the arrival of a student messenger. A note was passed to the grizzled, grumpy instructor. He studied it, lifted his head, looked at me, and smirked. I felt a tremor of foreboding run up my spine.

The bell rang for dismissal, chairs were shoved back, and scholars began to shuffle toward the classroom door. For a semi-decayed academic, our instructor was quick on his feet. He had my arm in his grasp before I could effect an escape. His fingers bored into the flesh of my bicep.

“You are wanted, sir, in the dean’s office post haste. That means *now*, incidentally.” There was an evil glint in his eye and a note of triumph in the way he spit out the words. We had never been on congenial terms.

The dean leaned back in his reclining desk chair and considered me across his desk. His eyes were narrowed in hostility and a tendril of cigarette smoke from his nostrils rose and disappeared above his head. He was a narrow man with a suspicious demeanor. Students feared him.

“What can you tell me about *this*?” He slid a remnant of Emily’s bra across his desk for my inspection. It was filthy and had been thoroughly gnawed. What

remained was the back strap and a vestige of the cup. “Go ahead, pick it up. It won’t bite you.” An evil grin flitted across his countenance.

Delicately, I did as instructed. I turned it over in my hands. Emily’s name tape was sewn on the back strap. Actually, some of the name tape was missing and presumably digested. It read: Bucha....

Emily’s surname was Buchan. To my disappointment, I had discovered that her family was not related to one of my favorite authors. Lord Tweedsmuir, otherwise known as John Buchan as any literate person well knows, was the progenitor of the spy novel. *The Thirty Nine Steps* since boyhood had been my favorite adventure story. My father collected his books. But Buchan, the son of a poor Scot cleric, was far more than a mere story teller for he was a publisher, barrister, member of parliament, historian, soldier, and finally Governor General of Canada. And he had put himself through Oxford by the sale of his writing. All in all, a most remarkable fellow. I had thought of Buchan as worthy of emulation, but I had to admit to myself that in that regard I was off to an astonishingly bad start. But I digress.

“The name of your date Saturday evening, please.”

“Emily Buchan,” I croaked.

“Do you suppose she accidentally dropped her brassiere Saturday?” he inquired sarcastically. He was like a cat torturing a mouse it had seized. Actually, little did he realize that, in fact, he was absolutely correct. I was sure now that the account of lights in the library and the puddle on the coffee room floor had been reported to him. His devious mind must have constructed events of the wet night and who likely was the culprit. He had missed snaring me once. Now, astonishingly, a second chance had presented itself. The venomous dean clearly was enjoying the moment. I needed time to think—desperately. Then inspiration dawned.

“It could belong to Margaret Buchanan.” She had the reputation of being astonishingly accommodating with her favors, thus a wildly popular date with fellow Hermonites. “She’s *very, very* popular, you know,” I added.

This possibility had not occurred to the dean. He thumbed through the student directory until he found her name. Under his breath, he whispered to himself what I believe was the word ‘damn.’ He looked crestfallen. The telephone on his desk rang and he answered it. Apparently, the call was of some import. He covered the mouthpiece with his hand.

“We haven’t finished with this matter by a long shot,” he hissed. Then he

motioned with his hand a gesture of dismissal and turned his full attention to what was being said on the other end of the line.

As I descended the staircase from his second floor office, I said a brief prayer of thanksgiving for deliverance to Our Lord—and, as an aside, to Uggbu. And then a cold chill overcame me. If he has not heard already, wait until the dean hears about my sermon. Oh, crap.

At lunch, the headmaster gave the blessing. An elevated podium contained the head table and beside it stood a microphone for announcements as well as daily graces. I cannot recall the exact wording of that particular grace but, without mentioning Uggbu or the travesty that had been perpetrated yesterday evening at chapel, its meaning was perfectly clear. A due reverence and a seriousness of purpose were expected of the student body. Since at noonday a member of the faculty sat at each table, a reverent and serious demeanor pervaded the student diners in that immense chamber—at least as long as they were under the cautionary gaze of faculty. Actually, the headmaster's mellifluous words had had an effect for after lunch merry cries of 'Uggbu' were heard infrequently and then only spasmodically.

I had an uneasy feeling that my fate had been under discussion. Obviously the headmaster was well aware of what had occurred and of the perpetrator. Disconsolately, at lunch's conclusion, I wandered to the tiny post office wedged into the auditorium building. When I opened my little box, there was one letter. It was from Emily. It contained but one sentence. She declined to attend the final senior dance Saturday as my date. Frankly, I was not really surprised. Our romance was finished. I suspected as much when at the bus door she had turned her face from my kiss. Likely, we would never see one another again.

Slowly but surely my student years were concluding not in triumphant celebration but in a damp and limp collapse. I slumped onto a nearby bench and dismally considered life. After a few minutes, I wearily heaved myself erect and, head down, plodded toward my dormitory.

"Hey," my roommate said, "Friar Tuck wants to see you at his house this evening. He told me to tell you. The evening's at seven, sport." He chuckled at what passed for him as sly cleverness. We had arrived at our dormitory door simultaneously. The Reverend White this term presided at my roommate's lunch table.

"Wonderful. That's just wonderful. Don't tell me I'm screwed. I already know

that,” I replied.

“You going to play golf?”

“I guess so,” I said despondently. I hesitated then turned and headed toward the gymnasium parking lot where our rides to the golf course soon would be waiting. What better antidote to misery than the old Scotch game the essence of which was tallying one’s mistakes on a scorecard.

Friday was the last day of classes. Monday final examinations would commence. Alone for once out on the golf course that Thursday afternoon, I desultorily swatted at the golf ball, caring little where it landed, and pondered the wreckage of my folly. And now I must face the good chaplain this evening. I dreaded the passing minutes that were bringing me ever closer to that mortifying confrontation.

As I stood over my putt, I pondered Saturday evening. The senior dance was the high-point of the social year. It was held in The Chateau across from the golf course. Although it was now falling into disrepair for want of funds for on-going maintenance, it still retained a semblance of run-down elegance. A wealthy banker had had it built so that he and his wife could be close to the schools and the religious conferences. He had left it to the schools upon his death. It was used rarely now. The Chat dance reportedly produced a licentiousness unheard of in other school social events and grass stains on white frocks were not unheard of. But now I would sit alone in my room Saturday evening. Four’s a party, three’s a crowd, two’s company, one is a wanderer.

The little white ball curled toward the hole, rimmed it, and spit itself out.

The Tucker household lay just beyond the chapel. The front porch that amethyst evening gave a superb view across the Connecticut River valley below and beyond to the far line of hills, a pale violet blue in the distance. With considerable trepidation, I knocked on the door. Shortly, Mrs. Tucker, plump and pleasant, opened it and cordially invited me in. She seated me in the comfortably furnished living room, excused herself, and began to clear the supper dishes from the table in the adjacent dining room.

“Ah, there you are,” The Reverend Tucker said somewhat unenthusiastically emerging from his repast and holding a cup of coffee. “I think we have quite a little bit to talk about, don’t you?”

Normally an affable and kindly sort, there was an edge in his voice. However, he

forgave me he said but I would have to take the final exam as he could not bring himself to grade my sermon. There was no letter grade in the entire alphabet, he added, that adequately reflected my presentation Wednesday evening. As I penitently departed, I offered him my hand. He declined to shake it. That seemed pretty mean-spirited for a holy man, but I suppose I had pushed him near his breaking point. Forgiveness extends only so far. Beyond that I suspect lies malice and revenge.

As I walked back to my dormitory, I assessed my chances of graduating. Now that I must take the religion exam, I needed to cram the better part of the term into my memory. I had mentally dozed through class and largely ignored the assigned readings knowing that my sermon would cover my final grade. As far as the others, I was fairly certain that I might limp through to a passing grade. I noted previously that I had a small aptitude for Spanish. Economics I enjoyed and was sorry that it was concluding. English I always considered a strength but English History was another matter with all those damned kings with the same names. How could anyone keep track of them? Furthermore, my instructor took a dim view of me so I could expect no charity in his grading. So what were my chances: fifty-fifty, forty-sixty, thirty-seventy? By exam week, I would be a pariah amongst the faculty given my escapades of recent vintage capping off a well-known propensity for cutting all available corners. There would be no mercy.

I was sad to shuffle out of Fat Freddie's ec class Friday morning. I had actually enjoyed the subject to my amazement. I had no regrets about departing the English History classroom and its surly instructor whose contempt for me was always palpable. The librarian at coffee hour was mildly complimentary about my semi-enthusiastic embrace of my work assignment this year. The faculty wives clucked a tepid agreement. I nervously glanced at the one who had interrupted Emily and me Saturday evening past. She seemed oblivious to my involvement. With some regret, I accepted a second doughnut when proffered—the final donut. These had been reasonably happy hours, I reflected, and in some forty minutes would be concluded and remain just a contented memory to carry to old age. Ah sadness, sadness.

After the post-prandial English class which dragged on unendurably, I gratefully breathed a lungful of bracing spring air and, for the last time and not without a touch of regret, strode across the lawns to the gymnasium parking lot to catch a

final ride to the golf course. I would miss those gently rolling green acres. Their maternal swelling contours had provided welcome relief from the hard-nosed school across the river where I had struggled the last four years. I had realized early that I was never destined to be a competent golfer but I enjoyed the aesthetic aspects of the game, happy to be spared its nerve-wracking competitive component.

“I have a surprise for you,” the golf coach said. “We’ll be having a jayvee match here tomorrow as well as the varsity!” A chorus of voices expressing genial appreciation rippled through the group of some dozen student golfers grouped around him. Mine was not one of them.

The athletic seasons always concluded with competitions against our rival Deerfield Academy some fifteen miles to our south. Generally, they beat us at everything. As our gathering broke up, the coach slung his arm heartily around my neck and informed me I would be playing in number five position on the junior varsity squad. Number six was a rather un-coordinated junior, nicknamed Spaz, who had taken up the game halfway through this season.

“I think we can expect a win from you at jayvee five,” the coach cheerfully proclaimed. “Let’s beat those fellows for once!” he concluded heartily.

I had been intending to devote Saturday afternoon to cramming for the religion final Monday morning. Since Emily dumped me and the Chat dance was Saturday evening, I had anticipated that that evening I would be in no mood to burrow into further studies. I would be too busy feeling sorry for myself.

There was a letter in my mail box Saturday morning. For nearly half an hour after breakfast I could be found in my room cramming for Monday’s religion final. Then exhaustion from the effort expended overtook me and I retreated to my bed for a much needed nap. Upon awakening late morning, I found myself on the horns of a dilemma. Should I continue my studies or should I take a bracing walk to clear the cobwebs in my mind, including in my ramble the post office which I had not visited in several days? To waste such a delightful May morn in the musty confines of my room bent over a dreary text book when the enchanting world outside cried aloud for my presence seemed against all decency. Thus, I closed my notebook, sighed, and wandered outside. I puckered my lips and whistled a cheerful air—until I opened the only letter in the mail box.

Dear God, Aunt Florence would be coming to graduation!

I have little discussed my family until now except to note that father was spending increasing amounts of time alone on our expansive and tightly-mowed croquet pitch rather than in his office in our family's mill. Mother would not admit that he was evading reality, but the demand for the axes, cant hooks, and sledge hammers, which had been the core of the business for over one hundred years, was drying up as power tools stole increasing shares of the market. Doom lay just ahead.

But to get back to Aunt Florence, ex-MFH of our local pack. Her voice, clear and ringing, was tuned to the demands of the hunting field and she had no reluctance to state her opinions without regard to the sensibilities of anyone within hearing distance. She had no patience with frailty, equine, canine, or human. Her standard solution for such malingerers was that the offender be taken out behind the barn and shot. I recall her assessment of her late husband who died years ago of pneumonia and assorted complications—he was, she asserted, a weak little man so what would one expect. From childhood she had terrified me.

She had little regard for me. At an early age, I had been bucked off a pony that was being led around a riding ring. I had firmly declined to remount and have so ever since. To Aunt Florence, a man who did not ride hard to hounds was no man at all. In her esteem I was barely negligible—another embarrassing family weakling for whom she could not be held responsible.

We were set off at ten minute intervals beginning at three o'clock. Our foursome, consisting of me at jayvee position five and Spaz at six as well as the two Deerfield opponents, teed off last as the hour neared four. Much of the time on the course that afternoon was spent by the four of us in searching for Spaz's mis-hit balls. His nervousness coupled with his incompetence meant that this would be a long round of nine holes as he zig-zagged across the greensward.

The rest of the match concluded long before Spaz finally had knocked his ball into the cup on the eighth hole. As we approached the ninth tee, a crowd of student golfers and their coaches impatiently awaited our arrival. An air of irritation ran through the assembled who were now eager to depart to their respective campuses and their suppers. Our lack of progress was the cause of their ire.

"Lester's going to lose, but if you can win we'll beat them for once," the coach whispered in my ear. Lester was Spaz's Christian name. "I'm counting on you," he added. He knew that I was currently even with my opponent and that everything

was riding on the outcome of this final hole. I cringed at the prospect.

I stood to the teed ball and peered down the long fairway. Already the two Deerfield players, clad in handsome dark green jerseys (our school was too parsimonious to provide team jerseys so we were clad in motley), had struck respectable drives. Discombobulated by the closely grouped audience around the tee box, Spaz's swing had come over the top producing the shank of all shanks. Spectators, in danger of their lives, leapt out of the way of the buzzing white pellet, struck at nearly a right angle to the intended direction of flight. There was a still lingering murmur of irritation at what had just occurred as I waggled my driver preparatory to commencing my backswing. Keep your right hand out of it I told myself. The over-strong right hand, as any true golfer well knows, ruins more shots than does any other factor.

I felt in my hands at the moment of contact that click (instead of a clank) that means a well and truly struck ball. Away it soared and from the audience there arose a modest hum of admiration. The ball landed in the middle of the fairway, bounced, and rolled forward. I will not belabor my readers with any more of the contest except to note that my opponent's drive had landed in a nasty divot forcing him to hack the ball forward with a wedge only to have it come to rest in yet another divot. His chance of winning the hole, even against the likes of me, was utterly ruined.

For the second time in a week, I was hailed a hero and borne aloft on the shoulders of my school mates.

My roommate had been avidly looking forward all week to his date with the aforementioned accommodating Miss Buchanan. He knotted his necktie in front of my mirror and splashed on an extra dose of Old Spice in addition to that in which he already had been marinating.

"Can I borrow one of your rubbers?" he inquired.

"Borrow?" I replied. "You're planning to return it after you've used it?"

"You know what I mean." I opened my bureau drawer, removed one of the two remaining condoms and scaled it to him. He caught it deftly.

"Good luck," I said as he opened the door to depart. After the dance concluded at the Chateau, the couples sauntered along the road past the golf course heading toward the girls' campus. Romance would be hovering in the air coupled with a final shot at romance's climax. Once on the campus, some headed for the grassy

bank of the pond, others to the barren hilltop where our founder lay buried. A full half hour was allotted by the authorities before the buses parked in front of the several dormitories blew their horns signaling imminent departure for the swains to their own cold beds. My roommate and his date would have little time to spare.

I slumped despondently onto my bed. On the other side of our shared wall I heard the shrill voice of Mrs. Higginson and what I guessed was a steel sauce pan ricocheting off it. The dormitory was virtually empty thanks to the movie in the auditorium and the senior dance across the river so I could hear more clearly than usual her caterwalling. Curious, I opened the door to our room intending to creep along the corridor in hope that I might hear better. At that moment, the Higginson apartment door opened and Mr. Higginson slipped through it toward the fire door and the staircase. He had barely begun his descent when the aggrieved Mrs. Higginson followed. She hurled a steel kitchen pot down the stairwell and emitted a few choice unladylike epithets. I was stunned.

“What are *you* looking at?” the furious woman snarled as she returned. I promptly withdrew my head and closed the door to our room. Once again, I dropped onto my bed. All alone on this the most congenial evening of our entire four years. One, indeed, was a wanderer.

I reflected upon our year with the Higginsons as neighbors. As I mentioned a while previous, there was a rumor that Mr. Higginson was enamored with the gym teacher at the girls’ school. If so, that was likely the cause of this evening’s uproar. Lord, I reflected, what troubles romance can cause. I stretched myself on the bed, folded my arms over my chest and considered the hairline cracks overhead in the plaster ceiling. I had never paid them much attention and now, with but a week left, I reflected on those insignificant cracks. What decades of life below had they overseen—what triumphs, what disasters, what imbecilities. I became philosophical, then morose, then sleepy.

A sharp rap on the door brought me out of my stupor. Hardly had I my feet on the floor when the door was pushed open and Emily slipped through into the room.

“What are *you* doing here?” I asked incredulously. “You dumped me.”

“What do you think, jackass? Anyway, I changed my mind,” she stage whispered. “Get something on quick and let’s go.” If she were to be caught in my room, expulsion would follow immediately for the both of us.

I reached in my bureau drawer for a sweat shirt. Providentially, I removed the last

of the condoms from its confines and slipped it into my trousers pocket. She grabbed me by the hand and drew me to the door.

“See if anyone’s out there,” she commanded. I poked my head through the doorway.

“All clear,” I whispered.

“Then come on!” She sprinted for the fire door with me in her wake. We paused at the landing above the first floor. Again, all clear. We descended the stairs and hustled through the rear dormitory door. Ahead lay the never-used tennis courts. Alongside them a station wagon was parked.

“Follow me!” She dashed toward the automobile and hurled herself through the already open driver-side door. I dived through the open window on the passenger side. We came to rest in a tangle on the bench seat.

“What the hell....?” I could not summon a coherent conclusion to the question. “Where’d you get this?”

“I swiped it. Shut up, let’s get the hell out of here!” She started the station wagon and slithered away along the winding road through the pines leading to the campus brick gateposts and the greater world beyond.

As we wended our way through the pines, she explained that the vehicle belonged to her dorm mistress and Emily long ago had discovered that the keys to it conveniently were kept behind the driver-side visor. These were simpler and safer times and the idea that someone might stoop to stealing an automobile must have seemed preposterous to the innocent, trusting woman.

“Won’t she miss it?”

“She’s chaperoning at the Chat dance. She drove over with Miss Horner. She hardly ever drives it anyhow and she leaves it behind the dorm. She’ll never know it’s missing,” Emily explained. She made a hard left onto the state road. In less time than it takes to write about it, she made another left turn onto a town road. At the corner was a motel, a seedy and run-down rural operation offering half a dozen rooms. Its illuminated neon sign was missing a couple of letters and it blinked spasmodically in the gathering darkness.

Perhaps motel was an overstatement. I had heard tell of the operation. It was not where one’s visiting parents properly would be lodged. Supposedly, it only opened for weekends and was jokingly reputed to rent rooms by the hour. There was already a couple of automobiles parked in front of it. Later in the evening there likely would be a full complement. We crunched across the rutted gravel parking lot

and drew to a stop alongside another vehicle.

“I already paid for the room. Here’s the key. Go open the door,” Emily said. “Number four,” she added. Number three was already occupied for a light shone dimly through the curtained window.

To say I was dumbfounded would be a gross understatement.

Two hours later, our passion once again spent, we began to dress. Now we had acquired neighbors on either side of us. The newer ones were having a party with friends and making quite a rumpus. A thumping Elvis Presley song could be heard through the insubstantial wall. I opened the door and peered outside. I counted five cars in the parking lot. One I recognized, the one that had been parked when we had arrived. I drew my head back and turned to watch Emily struggling into her brassiere.

“I know one of those cars,” I whispered. It was the one that had been parked in front of number three when we arrived.

“You’re kidding! Who?”

“It was here when we came,” I replied. “I just recognized the license plate. I didn’t notice it when we parked.” It was a vanity license plate. It read P28: Princeton’s graduating class in the year 1928. Then an idea popped into my mind—a last glimmer of hope. “Look, leave the light on here but let’s go back to my dorm for a minute. I want to get my camera.”

“Whatever for?”

“Never mind. Just hurry up!”

She quietly pulled out of the parking lot. By now all but one of the room lights was lit and a car was pulling into the lot as we exited. She stepped on the accelerator and in moments we were turning into the campus road. She sped through the bends and drew to a halt beside my dormitory. I leaped from the station wagon and galloped up the stairs. I wrenched open the bureau drawer and grabbed the Kodak camera, the flash attachment, and a sleeve of flash bulbs. In my haste, I nearly lost my balance and tripped descending the staircase.

“Go!” I hissed. She had reversed the wagon when I was upstairs. She stomped on the accelerator and we surged away. I flicked on the overhead light to be able to see while attaching the flash attachment to the side of the camera. I tore the paper sleeve holding the bulbs with my teeth, removed a bulb, and pressed it into the flash attachment.

Stealthily, upon my instruction, we rolled into the parking lot and drew alongside P28.

“Stay here and leave it idling,” I instructed.

“*Whatever* are you up to?” Emily inquired incredulously.

“You’ll see,” I replied and quietly opened the passenger side door and stepped out, camera in hand. Stealthily, I crept to the door to number three and took a deep breath. I listened at the door and I could hear muted voices and giggling inside.

“Vice squad!” I bellowed in my deepest baritone. “Open up!” I crouched behind my camera and waited.

Inside there was sudden silence. Lights promptly were extinguished in nearby rooms.

“Open up in there—now!” I yelled. “This is the vice squad!” I could hear movement within but no voices. Behind me I could hear Emily laughing.

The door to number three slowly and cautiously was opened. The dean of students tentatively peered out. In the background a young blond woman not his wife dived for cover.

“What...?” he meekly inquired, but he did not finish the sentence. I had pressed the button on top of the Kodak and suddenly he was bathed in a brilliant burst of light when the flash bulb popped. He staggered backwards, suddenly blinded. I spun and lurched toward the car. Emily had the forethought to leave my door open and I plunged in. In a spray of gravel, she spun the tires and bucketed across the parking lot and violently yanked the station wagon onto the asphalt state road.

“Slow down,” I counseled, “we’re safe now. Let’s go in the back way to the campus—just in case.” A rarely used lane led uphill past the dairy barns emerging behind the classroom buildings. She stopped in a small parking lot behind the science building and turned off the engine and extinguished the headlights. We were in complete darkness.

“That was the funniest thing I’ve ever seen. You’re crazy, you know. What’s it all about?”

“It was the dean of students. He’s been out to get me since he assumed we’d slept together two weeks ago. I knew his license plate. Everyone does. I can’t be sure but I think that was Mrs. Higginson in the room with him.”

“Higginson? Didn’t I hear that *he* was doing it with Miss Rueben. Maybe you told me,” she pondered.

“Yeah. His wife had a screaming fit tonight when he left. Threw a pot at him even. And she ends up shackled up with the dean. Out of spite, I bet.”

“Good God!” She paused and continued, “Incidentally, speaking about God, I heard about your sermon.”

“It’s just been one disaster after another. I’ll be lucky to graduate.” We kissed, agreed to meet at a pal’s house party directly after graduation, and she offered to stand us to another motel room—for the whole night this time. She pulled away heading back to her campus to return the purloined automobile. I trotted across the dark deserted lawns heading back to my dormitory.

I was curious about the blond woman I spied in the background of room number three. My impatience forced me to risk a knock on the Higginson door. There was no reply. I knocked again. Again no reply. I was about to enter my room when I heard the fire door behind me open. I turned.

A disheveled Mrs. Higginson stood at her apartment door and withdrew the key to the door from her purse. She noticed me with what appeared to be a carpet shock of recognition. She cast at me a look of blind hatred.

“You...*you*...!” she seethed, but she did not prolong her vituperation. Instead, she unlocked the door, entered, and slammed it shut. I gently closed my room door and, holding onto the Kodak for dear life, crumpled onto the bed in a fetal position.

Friar Tuck, bless his heart, awarded me a more than generous grade of D minus on my final exam. I breezed through Spic, Ec, and English History finals with grades on the low end of C. My strength has always been English and from that exam I waltzed away with a B. Averaged out, I had attained a final grade of a gentleman’s C. Further, the dean of students appeared to have abandoned his pursuit of me. Remarkably, I would graduate.

On the lawn in front of the new classroom building the graduation ceremony was conducted on a mild and pleasant Sunday morning. The lower classes had already departed and the school for one final day was ours, the graduating senior class—some sad, some resigned, some joyful. Thus, the pointless platitudes emanating from the several speakers slid past without remark—the usual response being an aforementioned s.b.d. to enliven the boredom. I was preoccupied with looking forward to a classmate’s party at his home two days hence and, especially, to be followed by a night in a nearby motel in Emily’s embrace.

At one point, there was a stirring among some outraged parents seated in the rows of chairs just behind us. My guess was that my irrepressible Aunt Florence had snorted in derision and appended rather loudly a rejoinder to what she considered a speaker's imbecilic remark. She frequently did this in public.

On the broad lawn in the center of campus, we, one hundred plus, seniors foregathered forming a circle. Our admiring parents spread themselves around the outer perimeter. Diplomas were passed around the circle. Diploma after diploma passed by me and I was beginning to become nervous that something horrible had transpired and that I would be left standing all alone diplomaless, an object of contempt (in the faculty's estimation) and ridicule (in my classmates'). But finally the torment resolved itself and, last but not one, a diploma with my name on it settled into my nervously perspiring hands.

"Let's go," Aunt Florence announced and strode off. My parents looked about indecisively. "Come along, Henry. And bring your get."

Henry was my father. She had no use for my mother and rarely spoke to her. The term 'get' referred to a male foxhound's progeny, thus she meant me. My parents and I trundled along in her wake. We had not gone far when she abruptly stopped and turned and fixed upon me a hard, cold stare. The three of us stopped in confusion. Then, pivoting and striding off vigorously, she loudly proclaimed with a shake of her head, "God save the nation!"

Amen