

ANY FOOL CAN

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PREFACE

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Any fool can start a war, and once he's
done so, even the wisest of men are helpless
to stop it--especially if it's a nuclear war.
--Nikita Khrushchev

Any Fool Can is a work of fiction, a novella, in which I attempt to satirize our passivity in the face of the nuclear threat. The title tries to communicate two themes, first, an obvious one, a warning that any fool might actually start a nuclear war, whether on purpose or by accident being irrelevant. I also want to suggest a second caveat: None of us should have to live in an environment where the threat exists. We are "fools" to live in such danger. By their mere existence, nuclear weapons are a risk and an insult to human life.

I consider both warnings to be less than original and essentially self-evident. However, my story does not stoop to the detonation of a nuclear device but, instead, raises a false Civil Defense alarm. It is enough, for me, to explore our fear in the imagination of a nuclear attack. I do not wish to legitimize any history which includes an actual explosion. I do want to examine why we remain uninvolved. Nuclear proliferation and the arms race are symbols, it seems, of Homo sapiens' helplessness. In the face of potential annihilation, it is hard to know how to proceed. If we are fools, I want to give us a fighting chance and not allow our incineration, even in fiction.

Indeed, any fool can start a fictional war too.

My approach is comic because my fear of nuclear war does not stem from any sense of physical danger. I am not particularly afraid of being killed by a Soviet SS-19 ICBM because I am not sure I understand the risk. I simply cannot grasp the destructiveness of the weapons. It is like trying to count to a billion dollars. There is a discrepancy between awareness and understanding. Although I am concerned about nuclear proliferation, I drift in a netherworld, half believing the horror and half unable to believe.

In 1963, Stanley Kubrick directed Dr. Strangelove, or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb. The film is a comic classic but it was not originally conceived as a comedy. Kubrick started to make a serious film about accidental nuclear war and could not do it.¹ One reason, in my opinion, is the same reason I cannot quite comprehend the nuclear threat. The reality is simply overwhelming, even for the artist. In other words, the truth is stranger than any fiction, and, besides, nobody would believe the truth. Kubrick said, "the only way to tell the story was a black comedy, or, better, a nightmare comedy, where the things that make you laugh are really the heart of the paradoxical postures that make nuclear war possible."² It may be that comedy is the only logical approach to understanding nuclear war.

Kubrick, most assuredly, was affected by the events of his day including Sputnik, the Missile Gap,³ and early negotiations toward the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty.⁴ My experience was different. In the summer of 1972, preparing for my freshman year in college, practicing on a new Olivetti typewriter I had been given for graduation,

I wrote a sophomoric story predicting a utopian existence in a world free from nuclear war. In my fictional society, offensive and defensive warheads literally consumed each other when launched. No radiation, no blast, no shock wave nor flash fire, no negative result of any kind occurred in the aftermath. In short, the scientists had miscalculated. Doomsday weapons had been rendered ineffective by my artistic license.

In retrospect, it is impossible for me to say how much the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty or the Interim SALT I agreement signed that year in May affected me. I suspect, however, that the optimism felt over the treaties could explain the euphoria inherent in my creative inclinations.⁵ The preamble to the ABM Treaty expressed the hope of the two superpowers'

declaring their intention to achieve at the earliest possible date the cessation of the nuclear arms race and to take effective measures toward reductions in strategic arms, nuclear disarmament, and general and complete disarmament.⁶

It seems that I too had been caught up in the celebration. Technology and negotiation combined to offer a little security.

Ten years later, I would return to the issue of the danger of nuclear war in writing Any Fool Can. Though feeling much less optimistic about our ability to control the arms race, I suspect that the events of the last decade have influenced me as circumstances did in the early seventies. Where the Safeguard and Sentinel ABM systems and the deployment of Multiple, Independently Targeted Re-entry Vehicles (MIRV) affected my work in the glowing spirits of SALT I, the failure of arms control in general, SALT II in particular,⁷ and

the apparent reawakening of the arms race must surely have had their impact on Any Fool Can. Certainly, a vantage point ten years in the future will provide an interesting perspective from which to analyze the effect of events on my novella. Nevertheless, the optimism of 1972 has given way to a pessimism in the present.

It is an extremely humiliating experience to research the language of nuclear war strategy if only for the presence of one term, Mutual Assured Destruction, or MAD for short. Unfortunately, the concept should sound familiar. MAD describes an ironic form of deterrence: As long as one adversary cannot attack the other without risking an unacceptable retaliation, neither side will ponder a first strike. Fred Kaplan, a gifted analyst of our nuclear age, said,

The whiz kids even calculated how much it would take to deter: they figured that the task required marshalling sufficient blast power to kill about twenty-five percent of the Soviet population. . . and to destroy fifty to sixty percent of its industry.⁸

These figures do not include deaths from radiation, fallout, and other long term effects. Although the concept of MAD has changed slightly and new concepts of deterrence such as Counterforce and Flexible Response have come into vogue, Kaplan summarizes our universal plight:

Nuclear war planning is getting out of hand, this much is clear to all but those mind-numbingly engrossed in its other worldly chessgame aspects. Few in the business have managed to hang on to first principles--namely, that the primary purpose of nuclear weapons is not to use them, and that their mere possession poses such an overwhelming threat that it deters all enemies from using them against us or threatening to do so.⁹

Somehow, it is not very reassuring to know that nuclear war planning

is viewed as a chess game.

Yet one need not look too far to find that the "otherworldly" game has been played since the first atomic bomb exploded at Alamogordo, New Mexico, July 16, 1945. Since the beginning of the atomic age and continuing into the present, world leaders and their experts have participated in horrifying mathematical mutations, calculating and recalculating death tolls for hypothetical nuclear wars. Although Any Fool Can attempts to scale down a disaster, show a generalized panic through the use of a false alarm, and concentrate on the reactions of a limited number of participants, it was necessary to provide a context cognizant of history. I decided to introduce each section of the story with quotations revealing first, just how callous nuclear strategy has made us to the concept of apocalypse, but, also, how the individual has been reduced to a numerical factor, a raw statistic. It was a chilling research project. Atomic technology forces leaders to think in abstractly inhuman terms.

In Dwight Eisenhower's farewell speech, he warned that "public policy could itself become the captive of a scientific-technological elite."¹⁰ According to Herbert York, a former director of the Lawrence Livermore Laboratory, Eisenhower was concerned that as issues become more complex, decision making can be removed from public control in the name of that complexity.¹¹ For that reason, I feel the introductory quotations lend a realistic sense of such helplessness to my novella. It is as if our world leaders plan, orate, and decide the fate of the world without concern for the individual. In our world, as in that of my characters, such surreal statements hardly

connect. Important decisions are made outside our sphere of influence.

Certainly, it is not as if war strategies are irrefutable. The concept of MAD, while frightening enough, has faded away and left behind a new idea, Counterforce. Counterforce is a nuclear plan which targets important military installations (including missile silos) and industrial centers--not necessarily large cities. As compared to MAD, which implied striking population targets, one might feel relieved. In truth, Counterforce introduces a new danger. If both sides in an arms race were able to destroy individual missile silos,

such knee-jerk mirror-imaging would only create a hair-trigger situation in which, during a particularly serious crisis, both sides--fearing the other might strike first--would be tempted to launch a pre-emptive strike. This is the paramount danger of a counterforce/counter-silo posture.¹²

New is not necessarily better.

If the goal of nuclear strategy is to prevent the use of nuclear weapons, the present has brought even new fears. Any Fool Can evolved because of the irony of the nuclear threat, that is, there is only the present, our present skills, desires, and attitudes in which to guarantee our safety. There is no chance to practice. One mistake might be the last one. Any Fool Can looks at the way we are in the hope of making us laugh at ourselves. Also, we should recognize, as Kubrick did in 1963, "things that make you laugh are really the heart of the paradoxical postures that make nuclear war possible."

Any Fool Can introduces the Austin Civil Defense Program run by George Roberts and his assistant, Marcia Yablonsky. Roberts accommodates a volunteer, Mrs. Bunny Pickens, a well-intended, ignorant, overzealous woman who feels it is her civic duty to help.

Roberts is a pork barrel politician and accedes to Bunny because she is the wife of a prominent man in town, not because he needs assistance. He already has his hands full with Marcia. The three interact directly in the story and are participants in the plot leading to the false alarm. As public figures, they affect other innocent citizens in the community: Roger Walker, a collegiate golfer; James Rigley, an airline president; and John Sennet, an old man.

Bunny, Marcia, and George are what I call my "bureaucratic" characters. They are responsible for the lives of others but do not operate out of a sense of duty. Actually, they are selfish and self-serving. All three are intended to be flat, ludicrous characters, Marcia being the least and Bunny the most ridiculous. In a sense, these three are Eisenhower's scientific-technological elite, making decisions out of public view.

The three innocent bystanders are supposed to be ordinary people, us, caught in the middle. They are designed to be more complex than the flat characters. The bureaucrats should be easier to interpret than the bystanders since it is through the latter three victims we must see ourselves. Their lives and concerns should be richer and more complicated.

Roger Walker is a young man who, of course, knows everything, everything about golf that is. He never feels any better than his golf swing. When he swings well, he feels well. His life is a constant, narcissistic attention to how he feels, what might be bothering him, and, if something is, what he will do about it. His life, career, and future are golf and I hoped to draw on the comic

tradition of the "golfer who never quits" in creating Roger. His vanity is comprehensive. The only mention of a woman in his life is one "he undresses in his mind," as a way to fall asleep, a way to take his mind off golf. Walker has not had much practice fighting adversity. He is a collegiate champion, spoiled in his success, and used to winning. His worst enemy is wind and he despises playing in it. While in Austin, under pressure, he learns to conquer it. He revels in his discovery and loves himself for achieving another victory.

Nevertheless, anything which perturbs Roger encourages him to quit. When the Civil Defense siren rings in the middle of his backswing, he thinks the world has come to an end. He may have been correct, but to Roger, the world comes to an end because he shanked a golf ball. His concern goes only as far as a problem in his own circumscribed world. Although he shows potential in crisis situations, he fails when the siren rings.

Who is Roger? I hope he is those of us who do not see problems clearly, who put too much importance on career, money, or self. He embodies our reluctance to think beyond our personal problems. Roger Walker never contemplated that "it" could happen to him.

James Rigley is the President of Australia Air. I call him Jimmy because he lives in his more memorable and successful past. "James" has reverted to being a high schooler, "Jimmy." I tried to create him as the epitome of the superstitious man. As president of his firm, he needs a slogan, cannot write it, and is unable to find the man who can--at least to his satisfaction. Jimmy's adversity

brings on paranoia. He suspects a conspiracy against him but finds none, managing only to ruin the meaningful relationships in his life. Consequently, he does not see the past for what it is, but for what it might be again. Jimmy wants a second childhood, a respite from the grind. He wishes his once youthful, boyish smile and charm would return and serve him in the adult world.

Eventually, a high school infatuation becomes a compulsion which intensifies his daydreaming and childish behavior. He is a frustrated actor in search of drama in his life and makes the assumption that his high school sweetheart is thinking about him. His instinct has no basis in fact nor does his intuition that people are escaping a premonition of disaster by flying to Australia. Oblivious to the odds, he plans to fly overseas and find romance.

As he is waiting to depart for Sydney, the panic occurs, forcing Jimmy to escalate his plans. In the midst of take-off, he feels a momentary flash of genius, discovering the perfect slogan. Thoroughly confused, he falls asleep but his dreams reveal to him that he will not find bliss by reliving the past. It will not hold any answers for him. He returns home.

Who is Jimmy? Jimmy is those of us who hope for a magical solution to our problems, especially those who seek it in the past. Jimmy may not know how to find the right answer in the present either, but he is meant to be the character who fails by living in the past.

John Sennet is seventy-five-years-old and he wants to die. He has outlived all of his friends and relatives, and his wife.

His health is not good, and the urinary catheter he requires angers and humiliates him. He is not mentally ill in his desire to die but is quite normal in his wish to end the mystery. He probably could not commit suicide.

He does suffer from advancing senility, and his fascination with death, with the deaths of his friends and family, leads him to an absurd, mathematical formula which (to him) accurately predicts the date of his death. He plans around the calendar, including which suit he will be buried in, cancels the newspaper, and leaves money for payment of his utilities. He also prepares his menus so that he will not waste any food.

This character should be the blackest and the humor should be most sardonic. He should be funny, but not too funny, and a little remorse should be felt for him. John comes closest to dying in the crisis--he is involved in a traffic accident, the result of people panicking to get out of town. The crash scene should be slap-stick and pathetic. He cannot see, he cannot hear, his car is dying, and the rest of the world has suddenly gone mad. When he does crash, nobody stops to help him.

Who is John? He is the victim of my story. He is old, he wants to die, but when he comes close to succeeding, it is sad. John's accident is Bunny's fault, the ordinary man caught between the bureaucrat and the volunteer. John should remind us of the nature of second chances. Sometimes they do not come.

Structurally, the sequences in the story begin with either Marcia, Bunny, or George, in any combination, and proceed through

Roger, Jimmy, and John, in that order. Each sequence gets shorter until the alarm sounds. This structure hopes to dramatize the climactic event and demonstrate that when actions are taken, results are known only after the fact.

I chose to narrate Any Fool Can in the third person in order to apply a consistent, evaluating consciousness to the characters and events of the story. The narrator is privileged, although to a limited degree. The bureaucratic characters, especially Bunny, are to be seen as foolish and the narrator can be extremely sarcastic. Roger, Jimmy, and John require even less intervention by the narrator since their characters are to be fuller. They should be appreciated, even in view of their own particular peccadilloes. The distancing between character and narrator is closer in the case of the bystanders.

The narrator tells the reader that "Bunny became impregnable, what with her clemency from T.R.'s jokes and the vest she always wore out of admiration for T.R.'s work." Bunny is actually sterile. The distance between narrator and Bunny is greater than that between the narrator and any other character.

Marcia is a bureaucratic character as well and her plan to steal George's job prevents her from acting for the common good. Her actions on the job affect innocent people and her goals are selfish. However, since she fights with George, it should be evident that "hating Texans" is a bit less ridiculous than "hating Russians." After all, Marcia knows T.R., Bunny, and George, as does the reader, all too well. The distancing between Marcia and the narrator is a middle ground, closer than Bunny and further than either Roger,

Jimmy, or John from the narrator. I intend the narration to be reliable, even though it is capable of exaggeration, since the tone corresponds with the norms of the implied author.¹³

Roger requires the narrative persona to slip into some necessary sports cliches as a tool to reveal the rather simple state of mind of the performing athlete. Most important, Roger chants to himself incessantly. Short, exhaled words, as if he were mumbling to himself on the golf course, color much of the narration describing him and his actions. Two verbal themes are extremely important, one symbolizing his need for comfort by using the words "feel," "touch," "rhythm," "pace," "tempo," "click," and "slow." All describe Roger's fetish with feeling right. The second theme is that of being safe. Roger plays a conservative game with a lot less power than others. He hits a three wood off the tee. He plays the par fives, traditional gambling holes, so safely that his coach encourages risk--an intended counterpoint to Roger's need to be in control.

The challenge in narrating Jimmy's scenes was that of describing the conflict between his happy past and his youthful popularity, and his unhappy and miserable demeanor in the present. His dreams needed to seem attractive as if he were to escape to them, but, also, they had to be shown as exactly that--dreams. His recollections should be seen as personal historification of his early life.

Similarly, John should be observed in two contexts. He is tired, angry, scared, and failing. Although he desires death, he is afraid of a heart attack. John likes the idea of schedules, plans, predictions, and guarantees. He wants to know. He is both afraid and accepting,

and his ambivalence extends to love and hate. He loves the nurse because she is "dependable," but he is so extremely lonely that she can fail in a moment by making the smallest error. The irony of his auto accident is that he never succumbs to death. He wants death, but only on his own terms. The choice is not one he, or any of us, can make. John tries to calculate it, so must fail.

To conclude, Any Fool Can has its similarities to other works of fiction which explore nuclear proliferation. Seven Days in May and Failsafe rely on conventional plot devices, dramatic dialogue, and a realistic setting. I hope that Any Fool Can shares these elements. It should not rely on them. The most important difference is the structure of the novella where a historical context is provided by short quotations intended to operate on the reader as a news bulletin does to a television viewer. Just as the home audience must interpret the news, so it is left for the reader to interpret and enjoy the many faceted ironies supplied by the brief introductions.

Finally, the effect of a false alarm would be frightening in and of itself. Later, the relief from the fear would hardly balance the initial panic. Certainly, it would be an intimidating learning experience, maybe even effective. Then again, we might not learn anything and proceed as usual. Any fool can.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ William Bayer, The Great Movies (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, Inc., 1973), p. 80.
- ² Bayer, p. 80.
- ³ Edward Teller and Allen Brown, The Legacy of Hiroshima (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1962), pp. 69, 124-125.
- ⁴ Glenn T. Seaborg, Kennedy, Khrushchev, and the Test Ban (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), p. 9.
- ⁵ Thomas W. Wolfe, The Salt Experience (Cambridge: Ballinger Publishing Co., 1979), pp. 1-18.
- ⁶ Roger P. Labrie, ed., SALT Handbook, Key Documents and Issues, 1972-1979 (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1979), p. 15.
- ⁷ The SALT II negotiations were riddled with blunders and bad luck. See Strobe Talbott, Endgame: The Inside Story of Salt II (New York: Harper & Row, 1979).
- ⁸ Fred M. Kaplan, Dubious Specter: A Skeptical Look at the Soviet Nuclear Threat (Washington, D.C.: Institute for Policy Studies, 1980), p. 3.
- ⁹ Kaplan, p. 68.
- ¹⁰ Herbert York, Race to Oblivion: A Participant's View of the Arms Race (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970), p. 9.
- ¹¹ York, pp. 11-14.
- ¹² Kaplan, p. 67.
- ¹³ Wayne C. Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), pp. 158-159.

CHAPTER II

ANY FOOL CAN

Question: Should we discourage children from playing war games?

Answer: We might wish to discourage them, but it would be utterly useless at the present time, so we might as well give in gracefully and try to see that when war games are played they teach the lessons which we wish our children to learn--fair play, magnanimity in victory, courage in defeat, and no hatred of peoples.

--Eleanor Roosevelt

Marcia Yablonsky hated Texans. She hated Texans mostly because they hated Yankees, but not only for that. She hated them for their smug self-assurance; hated their maddening superiority complexes. Marcia came to Austin from Philadelphia, the brotherly love city she liked to say, but between her name and Philly accent she was "another god-damned Yankee." If she only had a nickel for every time she heard that.

Marcia couldn't do anything about being a Yankee and she'd given up trying to set an example. She'd given up on women's rights, except hers, in Texas. She'd given up on politics in Texas. She'd just plain given up on Texas. Marcia Yablonsky was an outsider. As long as she could do what she had to do, she'd be satisfied with herself. She'd decided that as long as they didn't tell poe-lack jokes in front of her, she'd ignore them. She'd let them go on

thinking that women were to be pampered, were to be called "gals," "ladies," "little women," and "sweet young things," were to stand by their men, come Hell or high water--in skirts or dresses only--and let men go on whistling, grabbing, and otherwise possessing them.

Yes, she could learn to live with that because she had met some people she could call friends. Not many, but a few. Marcia Yablonsky did draw a bottom line though, and, below it, she knew her limit. She'd be damned if her boss would give her a little squeeze out of previously formed habits, and she'd be double-damned if she wasn't going to get his job, lazy son of a bitch. She wasn't going to let anyone stand in the way of her Civil Defense Awareness Campaign. She'd been hired to organize the civil defense plan for the Austin, Texas, area. No word-drawlin', frustrated Alamo gunslinger cowboy, nor petticoated cowgirl was going to stand in her way. That was the very bottom line.

"Miss Yablonsky, can you come in here a minute?"

"Oh shit," Marcia cursed, "I know what's hit the fan now."

George Roberts had been appointed by Austin's mayor to administer the city's civil defense. George, a councilman for years, was an old crony of the mayor's, and loyal, a loyalty bought and paid for. George wasn't much of a Texan as Texans like to go. He was short, stood five foot eight exactly, pushed five-nine in shoes. Marcia knew her height bothered George; he took it personally. She stood up as straight as she could.

"Do you have to hurt Mrs. Pickens all the time, Marcia?"

George asked. "She come into my office yesterday, cryin'. Cryin',

Marcia. She told me you yelled at her."

Marcia predicted as much. "Do you know what she did, George?" She waited for his answer; there was no use in offering any information that George didn't want to hear. George shifted in his chair, whining in complaint.

"Marcia, lookee see. She's the wife of a prom-nent man here in town. She's tryin' to he'p. She thinks the President, of the United States of America, spoke person-ly to her to go out and volunteer for somethin'. And she showed up on our doorstep. We can't very well tell her thanks but no thanks, now, can we?"

"Jesus Christ, George. Cut the crap. She's loony tunes!" Marcia leaned down on George's desk, pushed her arms against her breasts, thrusting them into George's view. "She's a nut, crazy, stupid, probably retarded. She wears a bullet proof vest for Chris-sakes."

"I won't take to no swearin' now Miss Yablonsky."

"I'm sorry, George, but we shouldn't have to mince words about her. She's a basket case, catatonic. She really thinks we're going to be nuked at any second. She's a frickin' Chicken Little!"

"Now stop your swearin'. I'm a Christian man and I won't have that kind of language in my office."

"O.K., George, fine. What are we going to do about her, tell her the vest won't deflect a tactical nuke?"

"This is what we're goin' to do. Nothin'. Hear me, nothin'. Ze-ro. You're gonna be nice to Mrs. T. R. Pickens or her husband is goin' to go to our mayor, and the mayor is goin' to come to me, and you're goin' to be out on your Yankee der-ri-err."

Marcia stood up, staring at George so intensely that he turned away, swivelling in his chair to avoid her gaze, reached for a cup of coffee. Marcia smiled.

"Is that all. No input from your senior staff?"

"No input."

"Great, George, but I'm telling you, no, in fact I'm warning you right now. That lady is going to cry wolf some day. She's going to get both of us into so much hot water you'd wish your ass was Yankee cold and white too."

She waited for George to crumble, vacillate, swivel some more in his chair. He didn't. She strode out of the office, leaving George with his coffee. She didn't tell him that he'd spilled some on his boots and it would probably stain.

We may be likened to two scorpions in a bottle, each capable of killing the other, but only at the risk of his own life.

--J. Robert Oppenheimer

Bunny Pickens was forty-seven-years-old. She was the wife of Theodore Remington Pickens, who was the owner, founder, and president of Execu-Vests, a company specializing in fashionable, lightweight, discreet, bullet-proof vests for high visibility executives. Bunny had no formal education. T.R.'s firm sold most of its vests to big business and the Foreign Service. Bunny knew how to keep T.R. guilty. T.R. knew how to hire a hybrid employee-half engineer, half haberdasher. It was a perfect marriage; T.R. joked at parties that the weave was a tight one.

It wasn't nice for someone to call someone else a human

diaphragm--but that's how it all started, as ugly as it sounds.

T.R. met Bunny as a senior at The University of Texas, at a Sigma Nu mixer, and he'd fallen in love. T.R. loved Bunny because she was so good. She never thought an impure thought, couldn't imagine that anybody else did either, but, in actuality, T.R. discovered this a little later.

At first, he had teased her unmercifully, and Bunny liked him, but hadn't fallen in love with him, not right away. He and his buddies told jokes in front of her, in competition, to see if she would laugh. When she didn't understand one, they'd all laugh at her. She hated it, but wouldn't say anything. T.R. finally figured out that she really didn't understand and apologized to Bunny. That's when she fell in love with him. He had said he was sorry. Bunny and T.R. married that summer.

After that, T.R. never told jokes in front of her again, in all those years. Bunny became impregnable, what with her clemency from T.R.'s jokes and the vest she always wore out of admiration for T.R.'s work. She had a full pardon, the worst in life never reached her. Her body was protected by Teflon, and T.R. never teased her, which was good, since a vest couldn't be expected to protect her from all assaults, especially above the neck. Even at that, nothing much penetrated Bunny's head, except twice. After a couple years of their marriage, it was discovered that Bunny was barren, sterile, could never have a baby. She figured out that the diagnosis was the clincher that effectively removed T.R.'s last excuse for bugging her and threw him into his work. She claimed to be the reason for his success, and she was right. The second fertilization of Bunny's

mind occurred when the President asked good Americans to help him control big government. Bunny was good. Bunny believed in the President. Big government was bad and volunteers would see the way out. Bunny would make volunteering her baby.

And so she shopped, which was her way, shopped around for the right issue. She compared, and, in Austin, there weren't that many activist groups, at least not many that fit Bunny like her vest. There were religious organizations which popped up everywhere, but Bunny couldn't compete with those folks. They were too, well, forceful for her. She never got a word in edgewise.

She tried a pro-nuclear power rally, but the participants were so scientific, always talking percentages. She tried the anti-nuclear power group and liked them, liked them a lot. They were worried about babies, their children especially, but they told nasty stories, like T.R. used to, stories of destruction, annihilation, apocalypse. It was too painful a memory for Bunny to hear nasty stories again. She kept shopping.

She decided against the Equal Rights Amendment because, somehow, she didn't like either side in that fight. The anti-amendment women were scared of losing everything, she never knew exactly what. They talked about losing femininity, but Bunny thought that was ridiculous--women were women and a law couldn't change the way people acted. The pro-ERA people bothered her worse. They talked as if women, once educated, would be independent, stop being women really, and men and women alike would simply be people. Bunny knew better. She did go to UT to get her M.R.S. degree and got it,

graduated with honors, with T.R. He told her not to get discouraged and was glad she didn't get in with that bunch. He said they were dykes. Bunny held her hands up and covered her ears.

She tried everything, environmental issues (T.R. didn't want her involved with anti-business bleeding hearts), and CARE (she didn't like the compelling pictures she saw, they were nasty too). Bunny wrote to the U.S.O., out of desperation, considering she didn't have show business in her blood. If the U.S.O. asked her about her act, she'd have told them she didn't have an act, as such. Bunny, out of the goodness of her heart, thought maybe she could have Bob Hope kid her up on stage or something. (T.R. would have been angry, she knew, but she was desperate!) The U.S.O. never answered. Bunny almost gave up on volunteering until she heard about Marcia Yablonsky's civil defense plan.

Bunny hated Russians. She hated Russians mostly because the President hated Russians, and Bunny agreed that the Russians were out to conquer the world. She could remember sitting in the balcony with her older sister, watching the newsreels tell how the Axis Powers would take babies away from their rightful mothers if they won World War II. From that time on, Bunny saw the world differently. Bunny didn't want anybody's baby taken away.

So Bunny listened to the President, hung on every word as he asked those Americans who were well off to do what people had always done in this country, help, volunteer, make good government. That's how Bunny and Marcia met. Bunny wanted everyone to be safe from the Russians when they dropped bombs. Bunny was sure they would, it

was only a matter of time. And, worse yet, the attack would come when no one expected it, in the night, or on a holiday, or on a Sunday, like Pearl Harbor. She wouldn't even be wearing her vest!

She wanted babies to live. Bunny thought Civil Defense was the answer. She volunteered in George Robert's office. She told him that she had her husband's permission and that this was what she wanted to do. Bunny was put in charge of volunteers, being the first. Bunny was ecstatic. Bunny hated Russians, after all, and now there was something she could do about it.

I do not believe that civilization will be wiped out in a war fought with the atomic bomb. Perhaps two-thirds of the people of the earth might be killed.

--Albert Einstein

Roger Walker trudged into the early summer breeze and dropped his shag bag and golf clubs behind an evergreen tree. The wind whipped puffs of dirt off the practice field like little bunker explosions. Roger stood so that the tree blocked the wind, pulled his visor down. He hated for his hair to blow around. It made him feel dirty, made him feel beaten down, made him feel nervous, like the whole world was shouting in his ears. Wind ruined his swing, made him feel awkward, juvenile.

It was true, Roger Walker hated to play in the wind, but he hated to practice in it most of all. This time he had no choice, Coach meant it. Wheeler was all over him, "Walker, what in the hell do you have against great? You're good. But you don't have a sniff of what great is all about." Coach had put his hands on his hips.

"You afraid of great, Walker? Oh, I know, you only want to be a golf course manager somewhere."

Roger Walker knew how to ignore all-time great Ohio State golfer Coach Rock Wheeler. Everyone on the Buckeye golf team knew how to ignore Wheeler, but they weren't preparing for the NCAA Golf Championship. It was important for Walker to let Coach's remarks slip by. He had to play seventy-two grueling holes.

Roger laid his two and three irons down on the ground, pointing out to his target, two parallel shafts intended to line up his shots. Roger didn't like this technique because he sure couldn't lay two clubs down before every shot in a match. Wheeler watched from the clubhouse, mumbling, "You're gonna hit 150 golf balls into a fifteen yard circle or you're gonna hit 'em again." Roger checked his grip on the five iron and lifted a high, arching shot, 165 yards into the stiffening wind. It made him feel good. Roger Walker only felt as good as his swing.

Roger wished that Rock Wheeler knew something about biomechanics or something about medicine, especially adrenalin. Wheeler taught golf with worn golfing maxims, and after a freshman accomplished a facsimile of a swing, Wheeler wanted only to work on his mind, as he did with Roger. Everything was mental with Coach Rock Wheeler.

Roger wanted to know why some of the other schools were teaching their players such a flat, baseball swing, and why Coach stuck with the classic, Bobby Jones swing. Down deep, he did know why. Rock Wheeler never actually had a golf lesson in his life. Everything he knew was accomplished through an amazing dedication to long, dull

practice sessions. Rock Wheeler, class of '54, Big Ten champion, two times. Roger realized he had taught himself in much the same way, in spite of Coach, in flagrant competition with him. Roger Walker, Big Ten champion, three times.

Roger Walker wasn't dumb, about golf. He read everything he could on the golf swing, even the scientific articles concerning fulcrum and force, torque, action and reaction. More than anything, he wanted to know about adrenalin, why he could never sleep for two nights before a match. He suffered from stomach aches at night, felt his heart vibrating in the mattress springs and coils. He'd worry about his pulse, worry it was shortening his life, worry it would ruin his putting, snap his steely nerves, the best part of his game. Even Wheeler had to give him that. Rock Wheeler never saw anybody putt under pressure the way Walker did.

Roger held his hands up toward the window shade at night sometimes, looked at them, backlighted by the glow from the streetlamps, barely able to see them, watching for the telltale shake, the stutter that would spell the end. When he was really shook, he'd find something, think his hand unsteady, dispossessed, his no longer, fate and adrenalin bent on ruining his career. Then he'd have to think about something else, about undressing a girl he'd seen on the course, undress her in detail, any girl, peel her like a grape. That trick usually worked when he couldn't sleep, made him relax, but at times failed him as well. Sleep wouldn't come until he played the golf course in his head, especially the par fours.

Roger put away his driver on the par fours, burying it deep in

his bag, deeper in his mind. He'd hit a three wood, 240 yards, straight, or maybe a little draw, into the fairway, hardly ever into the rough. Then he'd have a six or seven iron where some of the big drivers were hitting eights or nines, but often catching fliers out of the rough and missing the green long, or yanking one into a sandtrap, or punching out in desperation from behind a tree. There Roger would be, not always closest to the pin, but on the green--safe. Nobody putted like Roger, not even in the big name players from Wake Forest, or this kid of Bing Crosby's. When he wasn't closest to the cup, he liked it best. He liked going first. When he made putts as often as he did, there was a sort of exasperation that he could detect on his opponents' faces and hear in their breathing. This relaxed him; their panic was his calm. One long, snaking putt by him psyched the others; sometimes they missed dead cinch birdies. Nobody putted like Ohio State's Roger Walker. He had touch, he had feel, and he played safe.

The puddle of golf balls 160 yards into the fairway, no more than fifteen yards wide, grew bigger. Roger hated the wind. It made him press his body into it, lean forward, making his hands lag a tad behind. Nothing worked right in the wind, no tempo, no rhythm, no click. Roger Walker liked to feel a well struck shot ring through the steel shaft of his Wilson Staffs, liked the ballistics of a golf ball when struck solidly, when clicked. Not feeling a shot meant he'd rather not play, rather not practice, meant death. He hated wind. Yet he knew his swing would be ready, if the adrenalin didn't kill him in the night.

The puddle shone in the sun. A dust devil swept across the course, the wind knocking him to his heels; Roger hit a slight fade, slight enough to keep the ball in the puddle in practice, enough to satisfy Coach, but a fade which would carry a shot off the green in a match. He couldn't concentrate, everything was rushed. He felt terrible. His eyes wouldn't focus clearly, couldn't separate the ball from the grass. Roger Walker played on comfort and he was uncomfortable, lived on smoothness and felt awkward, fed on confidence and sensed fear. "Coach, don't make me practice in the wind today," he had pleaded. "It goofs me up, we don't even play in the wind that much."

"I'll tell you about wind," Wheeler had said. "You think those Okies play indoors? You think they don't know how to play a knockdown wedge? We ain't playin' in Ohio son. We playin' in Austin. That's in Texas, 'n case you don't know. You ain't seen wind, fella. You ain't ever seen the hurricane you're gonna have to play in. Maybe 20-25 miles an hour. Then you'll see. Go hit those balls."

Roger ignored Rock Wheeler. He couldn't afford to have his own coach plant the seed of failure in his head. He'd hit the 150 balls, but he would do it without thinking, and maybe it wouldn't mess up his swing. God, he hoped there wouldn't be wind. Rain, fine. Snow, even, fine. Now that'd be better than wind. Please.

Roger walked back to the clubhouse through the fading light. Coach waited for him behind the register as a couple of duffers were paying green fees. "Hey, Walker," he goaded.

Roger tried to ignore the obvious challenge. "Yeah, Coach,"

he answered casually.

"You're pretty good on those par fours, but damn it to hell, birdie a god damn par five would you? Why do you have to play so safe? You can hit a three wood into the fairway every time off the tee. Why not hit a green with one from the fairway?"

Roger wanted to tell him that a fairway's wider than a green, and ask Coach what was wrong with a seventy average.

"God damn, Walker. We're payin' your way out there. Wake Forest and Oklahoma State are gonna tear you a new ass if you don't hit low into wind! And let's try to win. No guts, no glory."

This country is singularly fitted, by reason of the ingenuity of its people, the knowledge and skill of its scientists, the flexibility of its industrial structure, to excel in the arts of peace, and to excel in the arts of war if that be necessary.

--Franklin Delano Roosevelt

James Rigley took the first sheet off of a stack of stationery and held it up toward the fluorescents. James Rigley, President, Australia Airways. He examined the letterhead, wondered if Australia Airways should have been dropped below his name. He couldn't decide. Jimmy buzzed his secretary and asked her. "Rosemary, what do you think? Does it run too far across the page?" Rosemary looked at a sheet and pretended to study it closely.

"No sir, Mr. Rigley, it looks fine to me. It looks like airline stationery should."

Jimmy frowned at Mrs. Rosemary Hempfler. He didn't trust her word unless he saw it in her eyes. This time he wasn't sure, it

bothered him, grated on his nerves that his eyes betrayed him, that he couldn't interpret his own secretary. Jimmy turned back to his desk, dismissing her.

"It looks like airline stationery should," he mocked. "What the hell is airline stationery supposed to look like?" Jimmy snatched the phone. "Listen Rosemary, get the printers on the line and tell them I want a second version. Australia Airways on top of my name. I want to sell the company, not my name."

"Yessir."

"Just can't trust any of these fools," Jimmy complained. Jimmy K. Rigley couldn't trust anybody. If he didn't supervise jobs himself, they didn't get done right. Like his Koala Club campaign. The advertisers had come in with stand up displays of eucalyptus trees with little Koala bears hanging on the branches, speaking to airport customers by means of a cartoon bubble: Free, as a courtesy to all Australia Airways passengers, we introduce courtesy clubs at all major U.S. cities, and in Sydney and Melbourne. Jimmy came unglued. "Koala bears don't talk that much! Come up with four or five words, not twenty-five." He stormed out of the room, thinking his agency was bilking him with another bum idea.

Jimmy tried for several hours, later in the evening, to write the bear's words himself, but couldn't come up with anything either. He did know he wanted to call the airport lounges Koala Clubs, and children would be called Koala Cubs. He'd serve Koala cola, spell it K-O-L-A and issue preferred customer charge cards called Koala Kards.

His airsickness bags were illustrated and scented with eucalyptus.

He called these Koala Kits. "Whoever named them airsickness bags never got sick on an airplane," Jimmy claimed. "Who wants to fly when the airlines are constantly reminding their passengers they might lose their lunch?"

Of all Jimmy's ideas, the Koala Kits were the most appreciated. His stewardesses didn't mind carrying the cheerfully colored and scented baggies back to the toilets as much, and the bags didn't make other passengers sick just thinking about them. But nobody could come up with the display copy that would satisfy Jimmy R.

Early the next morning, Jimmy called another agency, telling them he'd lost faith in his present firm. The president of GraphicSale asked who Jimmy's present advertiser was; Jimmy told him it was none of his business, but that Ed McPherson's outfit did his work, his father-in-law's long time friend. The president said he'd get back to Jimmy.

Later, McPherson called to inform Jimmy that he no longer wanted the Australia Air account and told Jimmy to go shopping. Jimmy said fine, called GraphicSale back to find the president didn't want another client, he was too busy, at least for six months. Jimmy screamed. "What? Did you talk to McPherson? What is this, a conspiracy between you two?" The president told him no, that he simply couldn't give Jimmy quality work for the present, he'd have to wait, and hung up.

Rosemary entered with a phone message from Dad. Jimmy slapped his hand at the pile of his new stationery and slid it off his desk. "God damn it. Nothing's easy anymore. It's like everybody's out to

get me." He watched the A-A paper float and settle on the floor, kicked through the pages, sat back in his chair and tried to remember.

At one time, Jimmy Rigley thought his life was going to be easy. In fifth grade, his teacher thought he was the cutest little boy she'd ever seen. Miss Blackmund was the first teacher who treated him extra special and Jimmy liked the advantage, especially when Miss Blackmund fixed his blonde hair after recess. She would use her fingers to straighten it out and smooth it, combing his hair with her hands. All the smart boys in the fifth grade didn't like her so much. She gave gym grades without checking with the gym teacher. She gave Harold Ouelette a B, and all the boys knew that Harold was the best player in every sport. Jimmy got an A, never thinking twice about it. The girls thought Miss Blackmund was beautiful, absolutely gorgeous. It didn't do them any good. She liked little boys better than little girls.

Life stayed pretty much the same for Jimmy all the way through high school. He never worked very hard because all his teachers thought he was such a nice kid. Jimmy never asked insubordinate questions, or tricky ones either, plus he smiled all the time. If there was one thing Jimmy had, it was a beautiful smile. Jimmy turned the back of his Seiko watch over and grinned into the distorting lens of the gold plating.

One day the drama teacher stopped Jimmy in the hall and asked him if he wanted to play the lead in the school's production of The Spirit of St. Louis. Jimmy could play Charles Lindbergh if he wanted to. Jimmy smiled. The drama teacher told Jimmy she saw

something in that smile, something "intangible" she called it. She cast him in the lead of four plays his last two years in school. She convinced him to enroll in drama classes and pushed him toward good acting schools. Jimmy really liked her, even though Jimmy didn't know if he wanted to act or not, so he didn't follow up on any of the suggestions. Everyone thought that was O.K. Jimmy was sure to make the right decision, sooner or later.

Jimmy pictured his pretty girlfriends. He recited the big scenes in the plays, the scenes where he got to kiss all the girls whose mothers hoped their daughters would be the next Elizabeth Taylor. Mothers knew that kissing was important to acting, and so all of them, Renee, Gwen, Susan, Pam, and Elly, all of them kissed real good. Jimmy's buddies never gave him a hard time about his acting. They wanted to know if Renee, Gwen, Susan, Pam, or Elly were stacked, or loose, or good kissers. Jimmy smiled at their questions, but didn't answer. It made his friends jealous, but they thought Jimmy was a good Joe anyhow, a lucky guy, and that Jimmy had it easy. Jimmy wasn't convinced, wasn't necessarily positive, but life was pretty good.

The night of the graduation party, Renee, Gwen, Susan, Pam, and Elly cried and kissed their friends, just like in a play, all night long. High school was over; they felt big feelings. The group came to Jimmy and wanted him to tell them that everything was going to be all right. Jimmy smiled. It made his girls more confident in the future, more secure. Jimmy Rigley's smile was an elixir for a secure and safe life.

"Jimmy, why don't you come to college with me?" Gwen asked.

"You're such a good actor, and if you don't mind me saying so, Jimmy, you're real handsome."

"Thanks," Jimmy answered. He liked Gwen best, always did.

Her mother had pushed her since she was a baby and he could recall her tap dancing at elementary school talent shows. I'm a little white duck, sitting in the water, . . .

"Mother thinks you're good too. She says, with a little training, you could be another Marlon Brando, maybe, or a James Dean even." Gwen looked down at her corsage, pinned to her graduation gown, blushed, looked back at Jimmy. "Mom thinks you're handsome too."

"Thanks, " Jimmy said. He watched Gwen redden. He remembered The King and I when he shaved his head, and how Gwen, in dress rehearsal, ran her hands all over his bony skull, almost kissed him to death. He wished she'd do it again.

"Oh, don't pay attention to me," Gwen apologized. "I know you. You've got your plans made and I'm depressing you on a night that's supposed to be a party. I'm sorry Jimmy. I do love you, you know."

Jimmy stood up and smiled, held his hand out for Gwen. She looked at him queerly, as if she didn't understand his dramatic gesture, and then, thinking she did, leapt eagerly into his arms. She kissed Jimmy, for real, led him off down the darkened hallway. They passed the mock casinos, bistros, and French cafes, courtesy of the student council for graduation night entertainment. Gwen unlocked the door to the drama classroom. "I've had this key for two years, as Drama Club president," she whispered, pulling Jimmy

through the entry.

Jimmy lay in the costume closet with Gwen asleep in his arms. Her eye make-up was still perfect and he looked at her in appreciation for both her and her mother. Between them they had created a really talented, beautiful girl. Jimmy felt like life was going to be easy, wondered if Gwen thought it was as easy as he did. He whispered in her ear, "Have a good life, have a good one, Gwen."

Jimmy woke up in his plush, leather chair, stood, closed the blinds, buzzed for Rosemary, asking for a cold washcloth. "Thank you Rosemary," he said as she returned with it. Rosemary looked worried. "That's all Rose, please leave."

"Mr. Rigley, can I help? Is there anything I can do?"

"No. Everyone's out to get me. Australia Airways is big business and we're booking flights like never before. They're out to get us, Rose."

"Who's out to get you, Mr. R.?"

"Everybody. My father-in-law, my ad people, even you, Mrs. Hempfler. You won't leave when I ask you to."

"Me?" Mrs. Hempfler's eyes filled with tears. "I'll have you know that I've never even borrowed from the coffee fund, Mr. James Rigley." She looked at him with the washcloth covering his face, slamming the door as she left.

"God," Jimmy sighed. "If it was only as easy as it used to be." He sunk back deeper into his chair, thought about Dad, about how he'd accuse Jimmy of messing around with a good business. And changing. Everybody, anymore, accused Jimmy R. of changing. He

wasn't the same good guy that everyone knew and loved. "Screw them," Jimmy thought, "life isn't as simple either."

Safety will be the sturdy child of terror,
and survival the twin brother of annihilation.

--Winston Churchill

John Sennet was tired and he wanted to die. He hated to cry, couldn't rationalize it when he did, felt like a child, felt like crying was another sign that he was dying. The sobs came in waves now, convulsing him, exhausting him. When he stopped he felt no better, no relief. It was another false signal. He wasn't dead.

John ripped a Kleenex out of the cardboard dispenser and padded across the floor of his home to the bathroom. He looked into the mirror, silver backing coming off in all the corners, plastic knob dirty and stained. He dabbed at his eyes, thinking to himself how deathly ill he looked, yellow, wrinkled, and pale. Looking away, the fear rose in him again, and he sank in it.

He'd often sit and watch television, with the audio turned up as loud as it would go, still not hearing anything very well, and right in the middle of a show, his heart would give him a little jolt, start racing, and the thought that some day he would be gone, utterly dead and gone, paralyzed him. Ever since confirmation class in middle school, his heart, more than anything or anybody else, reminded him of his mortality. John Sennet had always known the painful fact that he was as temporary on this earth as his wife. He had always known that he was going to die and that death was the only fact of life. There were some other good percentages, but death was the only plain fact.

In his youth, he recovered from his heart attacks, could move on to another task, forget his heart, forget what an attack signalled down the road; but now, looking into the mirror, now, stepping onto the bathroom scales, now, seeing his weight drop down to 125 pounds, now, he could taste death, close by, taste it like the Polident unrinsed from his dentures. It scared him, like always, like before, but now, he couldn't shake it.

Life was not kind. He couldn't forget the disappointments of his seventy-five years. He felt like he was going to wet his pants, that's what he felt like doing, but he didn't have to worry about that, not with a catheter sticking in him. John Sennet felt worthless and couldn't imagine how seventy-five years could come and go so fast, with so little result.

John emptied and changed the urine bag, wishing he knew how it was all going to end. If he knew, he could prepare. He figured it'd be soon enough, but didn't know how to live his life in the meantime. And his no-good son (no-good since Thanksgiving) wouldn't even call him on the phone. It wasn't so bad that he'd been forgotten on one of the big holidays. It wasn't so bad either that John had gone out in his 1972 Plymouth Valiant and bought a Swanson's TV dinner for his Thanksgiving feast. But late that night, on Thanksgiving, his catheter slipped out, fell right out, and he had to call the nurse in Austin. When she saw the TV dinner wrapper in the wastebasket, the look of pity in her eyes was enough to kill him there on the spot where he stood. She opened the lid to throw away the wrappings for his catheter, and she stopped, just for a split second, staring at

the aluminum foil and the peas that he never ate, giving him a glance and a smile that stabbed John as surely as she had stuck the catheter into him. That was bad. The smile came late. It hid the sadness. John loved that nurse. She was, what he always said, dependable. It hurt him and humiliated him to know that she worried about him.

She took John out for his seventy-fifth birthday to the little diner, the only diner in town, little Elgin, Texas. A few truck drivers looked around when she shouted, "Happy Birthday, Mr. Sennet." They smirked, reckoned she wasn't hitting on all cylinders, but John never heard her, eating his roast beef sandwich, smacking his lips, gurgling to himself all the while.

"I sure do like your automobile," John said, climbing gingerly into the nurse's car.

"Thanks, Mr. Sennet. Let's go for a ride."

John and the nurse went for a ride into Austin, visited the Texas campus, rested under the Tower. John watched the students come out of the Union, all of them so young and carefree. He watched the girls mostly, every single one of them reminding him of his wife, dead now these twelve years. John thought of nothing else and couldn't remember the drive home. He wanted to show his nurse the little baby picture his wife had stitched with yarn. The baby's face was an ordinary snapshot, but she had outlined his little head and sewed pink yarn around all the other details in the photo. It was a sort of primitive three-dimensional picture that John kept enshrined above his bed.

"Mr. Sennet, you know I've seen that picture many times, don't you," she asked.

John glanced down at the picture, thought of Sarah, knitting away at her project, sewing the miniscule picture.

"Mr. Sennet, do you know what day it is today," she asked, worried.

"It's my birthday," he answered, "May 17th. It's Thursday. You always visit me on Thursdays."

The nurse packed up her black bag and told John she'd see him next Friday, not Thursday, Friday. "Do you want me to write it down?"

"No, no, I'll remember. Next Friday." John watched her go. He really liked her automobile, wondered when the nurse's husband would get out of the army.

I do not believe the atomic bomb to be so serious a force as certain politicians are inclined to consider it. The atomic bombs are intended to frighten the weak-nerved, but they cannot determine the outcome of war since atomic bombs are by no means sufficient for this purpose.

--Joseph Stalin

Marcia's phone began ringing off the hook at nine a.m. Monday morning. Every caller told the same story. A middle aged lady came around over the weekend warning them that there would be a Civil Defense test on the next weekend, Saturday, May 26th, probably. Marcia asked each caller if the lady had given her name. Everywhere the same: "My name's Bunny, and I want to let you know that we're going to protect you." Marcia gathered a list of seventeen names before heading for George's office.

"Have you heard about Bunny's overtime this weekend?" she

asked him.

"No, did she work extra?"

"She sure did, George. She told practically every businessman in Austin that there's going to be a siren test next weekend. She said it would be part of the C.D. teach-in we're doing on campus." Marcia waited, looked at George, saw him redden, blush like he'd been boiled under his sun lamp, microwaved in embarrassment.

"She what?"

"She thinks that we can ring our sirens for a community test. George, you know we can't, not without forewarning. It's against our charter."

"I know, I know." George stood up slowly at his chair, paced absently behind the desk. "What are we going to do?"

"We're not going to do nothin'. Hear me? Nothin'. 'Cause she'll go to hubby, and hubby'll come to you, and I'll be out on my ass, my Yankee ass, I think it was." Marcia laughed, "George, you're gonna work your way out of this one. No input from me."

"Shut up, Marcia. Just shut up." George sat down, rubbing his temples. "Isn't the trigger switch locked up?" Marcia nodded, still smiling. "And doesn't it take a key to get into the panel and a key to unlock the switch?"

"Yes, but anybody could break the glass and ring it, George. It's a device for sane people, not for Bunny."

"Marcia, do you really think she'd do it? I mean, would she, if we told her no, told her she'd go to prison if she did, would she, still, do it?"

"Do what?"

"God damn it, Marcia, you know what."

"I'm sorry George, I'm a devout Christian woman, and I really can't answer you when you talk to me that way."

"I'm sorry, Marcia."

Marcia chuckled. "Don't be sorry, George, you're sorry enough." She wanted to carry on with him for the entire day, for the entire week if possible. She wanted to photograph his embarrassment, videotape it, have it on hand for parties, seal it in plastic, carry it in her wallet, keep a photo on her desk for inspiration. She laughed to herself. What a fool George Roberts was. But he needed her now, and this was her chance to save George's butt and, maybe, just maybe, move right into his snakeskin boots. "George, you've got to get rid of her. She can't go to the press, she's a crazy, they'd see that. So you're covered there. The worst she can do is go to Daddy, and Daddy can go to the mayor, but not in a week George. We'd be done with the teach-in and you'd be safe, at least until next Monday morning."

"What if she worked faster? What if T.R. made it through to me before Friday?"

"Seems to me that's your risk, George, but then again, you could always, always, . . . " Marcia stalled.

"Always what?"

"Doo-dooo," Marcia sang, "you could always shoot her down, Texan style!"

"Miss Yablonsky!" George scowled at her.

"Or how about running her out of town on a rail?" Marcia ran out of the office hooting and laughing, "EEEEEE, hawww!" She kissed

George's secretary straight on the mouth. She dropped her filing.

"Mr. Roberts, Mr. Roberts, she kissed me, yech!"

"So what? Just pick up that mess."

Marcia grabbed her purse, went to lunch early--not able to treat anything seriously for the moment, but she could imagine what George would do. He'd sit at his desk wondering, wondering what action to take. He wouldn't complain, he needed her now, needed her savvy, her steely decision making. He might open the drawer of his desk and pull out the phone book, look under Pickens, find T.R.'s number, write it down carefully on a sheet of his personalized note paper, but wouldn't call, would merely put it in his wallet. He'd wait 'til she got back. Marcia decided she could take her time. No sense in not enjoying this.

If it explodes as I think it will, I'll
certainly have a hammer on those boys.

--Harry Truman

Roger bent over his putter on the practice green of the Austin Country Club, scene of the NCAA Golf Championship. Friday dawned hot and humid, the heat at seven a.m. boiling the dew, creating a primordial soup on the greens. Coach Wheeler stood next to Roger, neither saying a word. Wheeler sported his gray slacks and scarlet Ohio State golf shirt. Roger dressed all in red.

"Don't want you thinkin' too much about leading, Walker. It's only Friday, and it's only two shots."

Roger looked over at Coach, watched him recite his least used liltany. It had been a long time since Wheeler enjoyed a first

round leader in the NCAA's.

"Sure, Coach."

"Watch number three. About everybody bogeyed that hole yesterday. It's deceiving."

"I know, Coach."

"There's something else I want you to know." Wheeler tossed two Titleists back at Roger's feet so that he could continue putting.

"I'm awful proud of you, and you've done good. But I've been watching the weather reports and I don't think it's going to hold up. I want you to plant that in your brain, now, today. I want you to play through it should the wind come up."

Roger didn't answer; he just kept putting. He looked around absently, wondered how many coaches would poison their best player's head with his worst fear. But it wasn't the thought of wind that scared Roger. It was the fact of wind. As long as it remained calm, no mere suggestion could fool him, but, still, he thought it strange, thought Rock Wheeler was somehow unconsciously trying to hold him back, make him look bad.

Late arrivers crowded the putting green. Roger had enough, it was time to go, too many golfers swarming around. He could smell their nerves, detected a faint hint of ozone, sniffed it around him, from others, across a distance. Wiping the face of his putter with his thumb, he made a check of his own nerves. He was feeling fine, in the groove, and he was the only person he could afford to worry about. There wasn't much of a crowd. Today there was no team, no Ohio State Buckeyes, just him, and his swing.

Few spectators at the first tee cared at all about the Bucks, mostly because it wasn't a team entry. Roger stepped up to his ball, breathing deeply, trying to chase a few butterflies. Air rushed through his nostrils and mouth, Roger hearing it whistle, sensing the gallery could hear it too. He sighed again, peered down the fairway, checked his alignment. When it struck him, it came as an odor, the smell of swamp, cedar trees, stagnant, fermenting water, then a sound, a slight rustling. Roger backed away. The starter smiled at him. Far down the fairway he could see the trees bend more than usual. Then a breeze hit him. In Columbus, at nine a.m., the air would have been cool, refreshing. The Texas blast was hot. Roger broke into a sweat trying to readdress the ball, incanting reminders for his swing, slow up, slow down, sweep, sweep, sweep, and drove the ball into the air. A polite round of applause greeted him. "Good shot, Buckeye," Wheeler said. Day two was underway.

Tomorrow is never the time to start your preparation.

--Dwight D. Eisenhower

Jimmy left his office early. He wanted to talk to his father-in-law before he heard through the grapevine that Ed McPherson had dumped the A-A account. Jimmy knew to be sure to tell Dad face to face, an obligation Dad demanded.

He waded to his Cadillac, it having sunk slightly into the asphalt, the afternoon sun melting the parking lot into a prehistoric death trap. Jimmy stepped out of his shoes as he slid his legs into the driver's seat, looked down, decided to leave them there, two white

Nunn Bush, stuck like dinosaurs, left to fossilize in the Australia Airways tarpit.

Anger seized him. The shoes, the Koala campaign, McPherson, all working to unstick him. "To think I used to be such a great guy, and now all I am is pissed off. . . always." His mind wandered back to Gwen. He wondered where she was, what she was doing, and if she'd married or not, living in New York or Los Angeles. He fixed his mind on graduation night, asleep in the costume closet. He bet himself Gwen still had her key.

Jimmy Rigley imagined what his name would have been had he gone into acting. He couldn't decide on anything specific, only that he would have kept "James." He liked his first name, it was a strong name. Jimmy guessed he would have changed his last name. Rigley wasn't right; he would have needed a completely different image, more dramatic, more active. Rigley was too. . . too what, he didn't know. "I might have been a completely different person," he whispered.

But, he had met his wife, her father taking to him at once. "Let's make a billion dollars and live forever," Dad said. Dad meant it, Jimmy felt. Dad lived by that creed, borrowed energy from it, could grow old with the idea, and happily, someday, leave his legacy behind. Jimmy tried to take the creed for his own, those many years before. Now, he didn't feel like he was going to live out the week, far less forever.

Jimmy turned the Caddy onto IH-35, one of Dad's little projects, little by Dad's contracts, and headed downtown. He'd made a million dollars; he said it aloud to himself, "I've made a million dollars,

I've made a million dollars," over and over. A million dollars. He wondered how he had come to his money, by whose work and brains? His? Or Dad's? Round trip flights to Australia, New Zealand, and new markets in the East, including China. Had these made him a millionaire? He didn't know, and he couldn't shake himself from feeling he was a sucker. He ceased being a nice guy somewhere along the way, people not taking to him like in the past. His father-in-law taught him how nice guys wouldn't amount to anything in the business world, Dad claiming the trait wasn't expected, or required. Jimmy longed to tell him about high school, about Gwen.

Jimmy's anger subsided. He looked into the mirror, let his face relax, let his eyes come out of their tight squint. It wasn't his fault. He had changed, but he'd been pushed. It wasn't his fault, it was their fault, Dad's, his wife Morgan's, everybody's. Jimmy felt a little better just having relieved himself of part of the blame. But it wasn't just that he had changed. His anger was rooted deeper. There was a question he couldn't answer, a question which nagged at him nearly twenty hours out of the day. The answer held the key, but no answer would come. Why did so many people fly one way to Australia? That was the million dollar question. Why one way? In six months, round trip sales had dropped thirty per cent; one way tickets were up. Way up. What did they know that he didn't? It would take months to survey. Dad would move to oust him before then. Why Australia? Oil in the outback? Maybe. The Australians liked Americans, treated tourists well. Why one way tickets? Jimmy didn't have a clue.

Dad's office decor defined Austin chic. On the rough hewn walls hung pictures replicating famous moments in Texas history, Davy

Crockett at the Alamo, Sam Bowie and his knife, flanked by photos of Remington pistols and the Mexican General Tortilla, or somebody.

Jimmy's father-in-law pinched him on the neck in greeting, "Hey, what brings you to the old man? Need money, ha-ha."

Jimmy flinched in his grasp. "Oh, I had a little problem. I wanted you to hear it from me first."

"Well my boy, little problems can cost a lot, 'specially in your business these days. Come on in and take a load off, let's hash it out."

Jimmy walked stocking feet under Dad's grasp into the barnboard interior office. He had always used McPherson advertising, never had to choose in the first place, inheriting Ed's Ads (as Dad called it) from Dad. He walked in knowing that half of his trouble stemmed from just such inheritances, compromises accepted a long time ago.

"Well, my boy, what can be so wrong that a million dollar businessman can't handle?"

There is some argument as to just what proportion of our population would be destroyed in a missile-megaton war in the next decade. But having recently attended hearings at which scientists and experts were testifying--in that detached, statistical manner that scientists have--about what would happen to this country and the world if war should come, I am sorry to say that there is too much point to the wisecrack that life is extinct on other planets because their scientists were more advanced than ours.

--John F. Kennedy

John Sennet rose from bed Friday morning, exhausted, tears running in his eyes. He waited for her all day Thursday, and the nurse hadn't

come, his dependable friend failed to show. He tried calling her at home, but there was no answer. He tried to sleep, but his heart rang in the bedcoils; sleep wouldn't come because he was afraid of dying, but death wouldn't come either. It simply teased him. John wanted to foresee the end, felt the fact would be a comfort.

He peered into the bathroom mirror. "It's up to you, old timer." He cleaned and reattached his catheter bag. "I better be careful," he said, "don't know when I'll get another visit." Pulling his pants up, he made his way to the front step, looked for the newspaper, couldn't find it, another wild toss by the newsboy. It was the nurse's big idea to read a daily paper; she said it would help him remember, improve his memory. "Not if I can't find it to read," he said and went back inside.

He shuffled into the kitchen to make some breakfast, his usual two slices of toast. Sitting at the table, he cleared away a dozen sheets of paper, paper with pencil jottings scribbled all over them. He looked at one without remembering what it was. What had he done with all that paper and all that figuring? John slid his chair back, stooped, gathered the paper.

The smell of his burning toast found him sitting on the floor. John struggled to his feet, popped his old toaster, and gingerly tossed the two black squares into the sink, waving his hands to clear the smoke from his tiny kitchen. Glancing back to the floor, he smiled, knowing that it didn't matter the nurse forgot him, didn't care that his son didn't visit anymore. John remembered. He had it figured out. John laughed hard, laughed at himself for being so silly not to think of it sooner. It hadn't been so hard; the numbers

plugged in easily. He knew when he was going to die. Why did the nurse leave him? She didn't matter anymore, though. Why did he lose all that sleep? The end was near. He knew the exact day, the answer to the only important question in life.

He carefully positioned all the scraps from left to right in front of him. Each piece had a name and a date. John sat, munching plain bread, his false teeth working slowly on the goo. The family Bible lay open on the table, the birth dates and death dates circled in pencil. The pages of his family tree, torn out, cut up, pasted on paper. The phone rang. It was the nursing home.

"Thanks for calling me back," John said. He asked if they remembered Mr. Hodges.

"Yes, Mr. Harry Hodges, he died some time back."

John hung up the receiver and jotted another date on a sheet of paper.

The trick had been adding up all those days. The years, converted to days, turned into numbers bigger than he was used to adding. It took him three times before two answers came out the same and he decided that was the right answer. The total number of days of all his friends' and relatives' lives, divided by his friends and relatives, 22,618 days. John added the total to his birth date. By his best calculations, he had two days to live. He would die on Sunday, May 27th.

If a quarter or even a tenth of our missiles survived, even if only one or two big ones were left--we could still hit New York, and there wouldn't be much of New York left. I

don't mean to say that everyone would be killed--not everyone, of course, but an awful lot of people would be wiped out. I don't know how many: that's a matter for our scientists and military personnel to work out. They specialize in nuclear warfare and know how to calculate the consequences of a missile strike against a city the size of New York. But that's all beside the point.

--Nikita Khrushchev

George sat at his desk, wondering why Marcia deserted him. This was no time to take an early lunch, he needed her, needed her to tell him what they might do. George pulled out the phone book, found T.R. Picken's number, wrote it down, and dialed. He hung up the phone on the fifth digit. He opened his wallet and tucked the note into the secret compartment. Some day, indisputably, he'd need that number.

Bunny Pickens walked into his office after lunch, remained standing. "Hi, Mr. Roberts. Boy, did I work hard this weekend. I must have visited every business in town telling them about us. And I had an idea I wanted to ask you about. O.K.?"

George peeked out at forty-seven-year-old Bunny Pickens. Why did such a nice lady have to be so overzealous? She didn't have to work, she had money. He couldn't fire her, he didn't even pay her. He didn't know what to offer Bunny, or what to threaten her with. She was a volunteer, a volunteer with connections. She was more difficult to control than a paid employee, harder than Marcia even. He ran his hands through his hair. "What do you need, Bunny?"

"Can I sit down?"

"Oh, excuse me, I'm sorry."

"You know, George, may I call you George? You know, George, that our people have never heard our siren. They've heard the tornado sirens, and some places use the same ones for all emergencies. But Austin's different, George. The people need practice. They don't know how to behave in an emergency. They need to know what it feels like."

"Well, Miss Bunny, I do agree. But timin' is important. When did you have in mind?"

"Next weekend."

George tried to stay calm, explain coolly, control his weak bladder. "We wouldn't have time to prepare. Some people wouldn't hear about it and they'd panic. That siren sort of curdles your blood, at least that's what I hear."

Bunny adjusted her vest. "I've already prepared. I reached almost everybody this weekend."

"Almost isn't enough, Miss Bunny."

"Oh, I can reach the rest this week."

George couldn't believe his ears. Everybody? He didn't know what to do, he didn't even know how to argue with Bunny. Where was Marcia when he needed her?

"Miss Bunny, let me put it to you this way. We will not test the siren system this weekend. It's a good idea, I'd like to hear the siren once too, and I really will think about it. But we could also make a tape for TV and do interviews on the radio and such, and teach people that way too. We can't run the risk of panicking people, now can we?"

Bunny slumped in her chair, the vest pushing up around her neck, making her look somewhat like a turtle. "O.K.," she said.

"That's fine, that's real fine," George smiled. His urinary urgency subsided. Along with his relief came a new confidence. He could handle emergencies. He was in charge, in control, and he was going to get hold of Marcia. He'd taken enough. George took T.R.'s phone number out of his wallet and threw it into the wastebasket.

Civilization is a race between education
and catastrophe.

--H. G. Wells

The wind whipping through his hair, Roger stood on number four, even par, routinely hitting each green in regulation and two putting. The wind was coming up, straight from the south, Gulf wind, picking up dust across southern Texas, getting stronger, sandetching Roger's face and arms, his shirt almost muddy. He stooped to tee his ball on number four and sensed it immediately, a shake, a quiver in his hand, and the ball wouldn't sit on the tee. It seemed like a pinhead, inverted, round on top, wrong. He squeezed his fingers closed, nursing the ball up onto the tee. His observer coughed, annoyed at Walker's slow play.

Roger's uncle, many years before, told him that a golf ball is wound in the same direction as the label is printed on the outside, told him to always hit the label. Roger looked down on his Titleist, and the label looked up at him, but he didn't take the time to rotate it, didn't think he could for that matter. The observer asked him to hurry. He was losing patience. Rock Wheeler frowned at him.

Roger stood, paralyzed, wondering if he could hit it with the label staring at him. He hadn't tried it since the eighth grade. He breathed deeply, gulped for air. The wind slipping through the St. Augustine stirred the grass, the sun blinking off four hundred million blades, epileptically, a miniaturized lightshow, threatening his concentration. Panicked, he addressed the ball, automatically checked his grip, and swung. The ball sliced, slightly, ever so little, drifted to the right. Wheeler sang out, "Good shot, Buckeye," another player followed, "Nice shot." Roger left his tee behind and ran from the tee box.

"I've got to take a leak, Coach."

"All right, but get your ass back here before that official gives you a penalty or a warning or something."

He hustled into some thick cover, trying to hide himself as best he could. The wind gusted; Roger sprayed his shoes, not noticing, thinking only of the fade. As in practice the week before, nothing Wheeler or anybody else would see, but a hint of collapse. He tried to relax. Walking back to his golf bag, he took off his shirt; the breeze on his body made him shudder. He pulled a clean one out of his bag, put it on quickly, felt better.

Roger hustled to his drive, discovering, unbelievably, that he was safe, had no trouble. He felt better with his clean shirt and thought he could fight through this. Why did such little things bother him when so many other gigantic problems were possible? His backswing must have been a little fast. He'd fix that, no problem. "This wind is driving me nuts. Let's face it, Walker,

you're gonna have to fight your way through this stuff."

The Cuban people did not hesitate to face the dangers of thermonuclear war, of a nuclear attack against us, when in our country and territory we agreed to the installation of strategic thermonuclear rockets.

--Fidel Castro

Jimmy looked up at Dad, tried to smile. The gray handlebar mustache was waxed across the entire width of his face. The eyebrows had not been trimmed in years, maybe never. His skin, deeply tanned and wrinkled, handsomely wrinkled, showed like fine leather. No sarcoma here. Jimmy forgot briefly how his father-in-law had made all his money.

"You know, son," Dad began, "Morgan tells me you and her ain't been quite right lately. She says you've been faraway, even nasty. What's wrong, son?" Dad drew the word son out, made Jimmy squirm, feel like crawling on the carpet.

"I don't know, Dad. I'm always, well, mad anymore. It doesn't take much and I fly off the handle. Somethin's buggin' me."

"Is this the problem you want to talk about?"

Jimmy tried to seem unconcerned. "No, no, something else. Ed McPherson dumped my account. It's probably my own fault. I got on his back once too many times."

Dad looked at him as if he had admitted to being an alcoholic, a confirmed boozier. "How could you rile Ed to the point of dumpin' you?"

"You tell me. I'm not sure. I think I threatened to take my

business somewhere else."

Dad jumped out of his chair, stalked Jimmy. "Somewhere else? What else you been doin' to your business?" Dad leaned into Jimmy's face. "What else you been doin' to my daughter? Screwin' around, are you, son?"

Jimmy looked at Dad with the old eyes that could never make anybody angry, only happy, tried to smile. But it didn't work. Dad was inflamed. Are my eyes failing, or can't I be a nice guy ever again? Even when I try to be. Dad launched a tirade, accusing him of being a selfish ingrate, robbing him of his daughter, ruining a fine business, and screwing around. After all, he said, who had set him up with Australia Airways? No oil field daddy could have done that. It took Dad, the Transportation King of Texas, a contractor who had landed so many federal highway bids he knew the inside of Dallas Federal Court like it was his own, it took Dad to get him into the transportation business. "You've never even been dirty a day in your life either!" he screamed.

Jimmy daydreamed, Gwen Humboldt, her key to the costume closet, her legs dancing to "Little White Duck," calling them out of long dormant dreams. Where was she? He wanted to know. Why were people flying one way to Australia? He wanted to know that too. Oil in the outback? Friendly natives? Special prices? None would explain one way tickets. Jimmy couldn't imagine the answer, and his million dollars were worthless to him. "If I hear you laid a hand on her I swear I'll drop you into one of my bridge abutments."

Jimmy wondered if Gwen had ever thought about him, squirmed

in his chair, sweating over the idea. He took out his handkerchief, wiped his face, and asked himself why a fantasy appealed to him so much, appealed to him more than anything real. "You laughin' at me boy, you think this funny?"

Jimmy smiled. Maybe she bought one of his tickets, maybe to be close to him without being close, like romance. Maybe she knew he was a millionaire and afraid of him. Maybe she was in Australia! Dad leaned down into his smiling, gleaming face.

Bingo. The million dollar answer was his, came to him from eternity, infinity, just like in high school. Jimmy believed Gwen was in Australia! At the worst, she'd bought a ticket, if for nothing more than a souvenir, and he could find that out. He knew, just knew, he could find her. The dream tickled him, seduced him, soothed his raw, burned nerve endings with old, cherished emotions. "You keep on smilin' Jimmy. I'll come down on you hard."

Jimmy let the metamorphosis sweep over him, let his body relax, felt good about the change, a narcissism lost long ago. His subconscious hopes had delivered him from misery, he thought, his anger and malaise out of control, trouble shortening his life, his good old self fought through. Winning, he was winning, and he loved it. Jimmy was going to be a nice guy again! He'd find Gwen in Australia because he needed her, because it would save him, and he was going to work on it, hoping on hope it would save his soul. "You've got one week to clear this mess up, or I'm gonna yank my money out, and you better know how hard this cowboy can yank."

Jimmy stood and left the office, leaving Dad agape in disbelief.

"You walk out of here and you're through, you hear me. You no good, boozin' jackass. Come back here!"

Jimmy wouldn't live forever now, no, not now. Dad would put plan A into effect on Monday, pull the plug on Australia Air. It was finished, kaput, all over, grounded. He would have to work fast to stay ahead of Dad. It was definitely going to be a long weekend, but he felt like his old self again, finding all the easy answers.

It is frequently the case that one side in a conflict tries to place the blame for the conflict on the other side. But one side is more right than the other.

--Che Guevara

John sat on the floor, gathering up the little scraps of paper, finally pulling himself up, pulling on the icebox handle to help him stand. It popped open, John grabbed a drumstick left over from a lunch at the diner. He wanted to eat as much of his food as possible. No sense letting it go to waste. He scanned the interior, planning his menus in his head, first the lunches, then the dinners.

He scratched a note on the back of one of his calculations and left it on the front door for the paper boy. Please stop the paper Monday, Mr. Sennet. He checked his calendar to be sure. He might want a paper on Sunday, he might make it until evening. No sense stopping delivery too soon.

He swept up his home as best he could, took out the garbage, and washed the few dishes he'd dirtied. He went to the bedroom, made the bed for maybe the second to last time, and took Sarah's knitted picture down from over the headboard. He held it in his hand,

kissed it softly, and opened the closet door, putting the photo into the vest pocket of his dark blue suit. He hoped they would bury him in his blue suit.

He tucked an uncashed Social Security check into the doily on the magazine table in front of his worn davenport. He scrawled another message on the back of a scrap. Someone will need to pay the electric bill, the gas bill, and the water bill. Keep the change.

The visiting nurse found John rocking away on his front porch when she arrived at two in the afternoon. John was asleep, smiling. Smiling and rocking. "How are you today, Mr. Sennet?" John made no reply of any kind. "Mr. Sennet, can you hear me?" She bent down and found his pulse. It was steady, more regular than usual. She put the blood pressure cuff on his arm, pumped up the sleeve, and listened. Blood pressure better than usual. She couldn't quite figure it out.

Watching him, she saw him smile, then laugh quietly. Pulling up a plastic milk crate, she decided to stay with him. He was fine as far as she could tell. "Are you all right? Can you hear me? Why don't you answer me?" He didn't respond.

His doctor told the nurse he might be losing it, advanced senility, chronic brain syndrome, or something, but if he seemed to be fine, just forget it for the time being. The nurse hoped he wouldn't sit outside all night. The doctor told her he wouldn't. She hung up the phone and tried to call John's son but there was no answer.

She saw the note stuck in the door cancelling the paper on her way back to the porch, shrugged, thought nothing of it, and resumed

her vigil on the crate. One giant tear had moved down his left eye and settled on his lip. He woke up as if the salty drop were magic, tried to focus his eyes.

"What are you doing here, it's Friday?"

"I told you that I'd be here Friday, this week, did you forget?"

"Yes, I guess I did."

"Are you feeling O.K.? You're not mad at me or anything are you?"

"No, I'm not mad, and I'm much better really. Want to check?"
He held out his arm.

"I already did, you're fine." He looked at her, puzzled. "I watched you while you were daydreaming. You were laughing, then you were crying. What were you thinking about?"

He looked up at her and smiled. "I don't remember." He didn't like to lie, but didn't have the heart to worry her.

Whenever hot wars are necessary these days, we conduct them in the backyards of the world with the old technologies. It is no longer convenient, or suitable, to use the latest technologies for fighting our wars, because the latest technologies have rendered war meaningless. The hydrogen bomb is history's exclamation point.

--Marshall McLuhan

Saturday morning came none too soon for Marcia. Her Introduction to Austin Civil Defense pamphlets were ready. The We're Here to Help booth was built, installed south of the Texas Union. The volunteer schedules were filled, the volunteers numerous and willing. Marcia scooted her chair underneath the long table, breathing uneasily. The

word volunteer sent a shock racing through her system, her heart beating spasmodically, the morning air hanging hot and moist. Where the hell was Bunny? What in the name of God could she be up to? Marcia hoped nothing. She hated Bunny for worrying her on an important day when she needed to be at her best. Marcia tried to conserve her strength in the rising heat.

As Bunny awakened, she knew T.R. had already left the house, gone to the country club to watch golf. "Some Yankee kid's in first place," he said. "I'm goin' to go change his luck, root for a Longhorn, and some Texas wind." Bunny wished T.R. was home now. She wanted to ask him again to make George Roberts ring that siren. But he'd just say no, one more time. He said he would not become involved in somebody else's affairs. He said that she had no business promising anything she couldn't deliver and that was the end of that.

Bunny cried. She cried and cried and cried. She worried about all the friends she promised. She thought they'd laugh at her, not realizing that her bragging had been ignored by many of them, in one ear and out again. Others would forgive her, yet she felt like she'd flunked the President's test, felt like she had betrayed the most powerful man in the world. "I've got to do something," she said.

One effective way of keeping out of trouble
is to lack the means of getting into it.

--Bernard Brodie

Roger Walker, happy about himself, proud of his concentration, proud he'd fought his way through the wind, made a fist and shook it.

It was Saturday, Saturday already, the sixteenth hole, Ohio State's Walker in the lead. Roger was happy to see Rock Wheeler relish the nightly socials. Rock felt like part of the crowd again. Not since Nicklaus and Weiskopf had the Buckeyes been given so much attention. Rock himself hadn't basked in the limelight since his playing days.

Roger slid his three wood out of the bag. Rock winked at him, "That's fine, Walker, go to it." Roger winked at Rock. In the wind, Ohio State's Walker had played tee to green better than any other player, better than the Wake Forest team, better than Houston's, better than all the rest of the southern golfers; better even than Crosby's kid. There was no stopping him now. An enemy had become a friend. His short but accurate style had conquered his foe, wind, Texas wind at that, wind that usually ripped him up so easily. He couldn't believe the gimmick that helped him do it either. When he felt shaky, when he'd hit a six or seven iron that faded just a tad, an iron he shouldn't fade, not in the least, he'd fix his swing with a gimmick. He'd point the label of the golf ball toward his target. Lots of guys did that when they putted, but not off the tee, never. There were too many other biomechanical considerations in a golf swing to allow a simplistic trick to work. But it did help. It was a mind game carrying Roger Walker in his personal battle against wind, the big name players, and his own head. Roger psyched and repsyched himself.

He lofted the three wood shot out into the fairway, with the wind, the ball landing perfectly, left side, for the approach to the pin cut in the right edge of the green. "Nice shot, Buckeye."

Wheeler's words grew on Roger. Coach was usually a pessimist, but his success had infected the Rock. Rock kept saying he had the next Jack Nicklaus or Tom Weiskopf, even though Walker was a lot smaller and played a safer game with less power. Coach said Roger was the beginning of a new golfing tradition at Ohio State.

Roger focused on keeping himself in touch with his feelings, his attitude; he needed to think about one shot at a time. There was no tomorrow if he carded a disaster hole. Keep the sixes off the scorecard. A seven or eight meant relinquishing three shots. It could not be allowed to happen. Tradition was fine, but first Roger had to help himself, one shot at a time. He turned the front nine in thirty-five, one under par, for a two stroke lead. When he hit a shot that bothered him, he'd hit the next one with the label looking up. Silly, he said to himself. "Good shot, Buckeye," Rock called to him. He liked the sound of it. It felt good.

A nuclear war will be more difficult to limit than a conventional one. Since no country has had any experience with the tactical use of nuclear weapons, the possibility of miscalculation is considerable.

--Henry Kissinger

Jimmy packed three suitcases. His wife wanted to know where he was going. "I've got business in Australia, dear. Rumors have it there's oil in the outback."

"Oil? What do you want with oil?" she asked him. He judged her wariness, knew he hadn't outsmarted her. "Daddy wants me to find out what's wrong with you."

He didn't tell her, but he could have. He'd rehearsed it. He

practiced it again, in his head, for the day he might really tell Daddy and his daughter. Screw Daddy. Daddy thinks he'll live forever, thinks he can buy his way to a good, long life. He can, I can't, not me Morgan. I used to have a great life. Everybody used to like me. I never even had to try. Now all I got is anger inside me; I'm trying to live with someone else's values, Morgan, your Daddy's if you have to know. I'm dying with them, Morgan, and I'm not sure I should have married you. I think I married your Daddy. I was going to make a billion dollars and live forever. Now I'll settle for the time I've got left.

Morgan held every second of Jimmy's stare, eyeball to eyeball. She left the bedroom when he turned away from her. He didn't hate his wife, he didn't want to hate anybody, though he'd need more practice. It was going to take some getting used to, some retraining.

Jimmy drew his one way ticket from his pocket, checked it again. Two hours to go. His own private charter would take him to Gwen at 2:30 p.m. He couldn't wait to get on that jet.

There is no sane description of a nuclear war. There would be only the blinding light of man's failure to reason with his fellow man and then silence.

--Lyndon B. Johnson

John Sennet decided to drive his Valiant for the last time on Saturday. He didn't want to risk it on Sunday, he might die at the wheel, hurt an innocent person. He couldn't drive after Saturday, and that was final.

He packed Sarah's old picnic basket, the one the nurse told him

was worth over a hundred dollars in an antique auction, and headed into Austin, some eleven or twelve miles. He'd picnic under the Tower, just like on his birthday, and think about Sarah and look at a thousand Sarahs.

The Shamrock station was his first stop. The self-service gas station required John to do his own pumping, and, crippled up with arthritis like he was, he found it difficult. He managed to unscrew the gas cap, start the pumps, and fill the Valiant, not thinking he wouldn't be driving very far. He always topped the tank. He did pretty good, other than the fact that he wanted regular and pumped unleaded. The cashier didn't notice. She paid no attention to the age of a car, merely the numbers on the digital display. John paid her and struggled back to his Plymouth.

He took the old highway into town. He liked the scenery better, reminded him of the Austin of his day, not so many stores and homes. With his eyesight being what it was, he felt more comfortable on the old road. There wasn't much traffic. If he weaved a little now and then, he'd just be another farmer out for a weekend drive; he'd get away with it.

--
We, not they, would select the time and
place for a test of wills.

--Barry Goldwater

Marcia wanted to convince herself that there was nothing Bunny could pull. She'd locked the alarm system and master control. She remembered locking her office and every filing cabinet and drawer in it. Breaking a policy she and George had established immediately

upon installation of their siren, she unplugged their connection to regional civil defense. If Bunny managed to ring the alarm, only Austin would be alerted.

She rested her elbows on the table, her forehead supported by the palms of her hand, reading the memo she'd give George. George, I wanted to note my precautions taken the weekend of May 27-28 in the event there are any questions. She noted opening the first lock, the lock for the glass panel, with its red warning letters, Authorized Personnel Only. She unlocked the second lock, manual activation, relocked it, slipping a piece of paper between the hinge and the cabinet frame, and relocked the entire panel.

Call Bunny. Call Bunny. No, keep her away, maybe she overslept. Marcia made a tight fist around her keys, recounting her precautions in master control, one, two, three, four, five, flipping the light switch off, closing the door. Holding the keys up in front of her face, she had made sure the first two were there, check, then the third, double-check. Marcia looked both ways, glancing down both hallways, and, stuffing the keys into her purse, ran to the elevator. All that, finished late Friday night.

She believed she'd done the right thing as long as the Soviets didn't attack over the weekend. Now, Saturday morning, she wondered why she hadn't simply unplugged the whole shebang. It was illegal for one thing, and, for the other, breaking one of George's policies was easy to do. Breaking the law was different.

"Lady, you paintin' a pit-ture or somethin'?"

"What, huh?" Marcia said, looking up, seeing the first visitor of

the day.

"You been wavin' your hands around, lookin' kinda crazy."

Marcia tried to explain, it wasn't a good idea for the assistant director of a city's civil defense to be a nut. "Can I help you?"

"When is that million dollar si-reen s'posed to ring?"

Marcia couldn't see the man very well, backlighted by the morning sun. "What?" she said.

"You know, your si-reen, 'specially 'quipped for Austin. The one the ole lady was tellin' us about."

Marcia explained to the man that there would be no test. There hadn't been time to inform all the people. Someone might have panicked. She was sorry for her volunteer's mistaken zeal.

"Ah, shoot." The man walked away.

Marcia turned to one of her assistants, "Make sure you explain to everyone who asks that there will be no siren today, and explain why. Maybe we can out-rumor the rumors."

The strength of nuclear weapons since
Hiroshima has increased a thousandfold.
The increase of shelter depth required to
withstand a direct hit by these bigger
weapons has been less than tenfold.

--Edward Teller

Bunny applied her make-up carefully and dressed in her favorite good luck dress. She preened herself in the mirror, determining that, after all these years, blue was indeed her best color. Feeling good about herself again, she made two pieces of thick toast and went out on the back veranda to think. "I've got to do something, I've got to do something." Over and over she chanted. She nibbled her

toast, watching the birds dart around her overgrown garden. Why wasn't a week enough time to publicize a siren test? She tried to hear Marcia and George explain. All she could recall was George saying how loud it was, "Louder than anything you ever heard, Miss Bunny," George said. Bunny couldn't repeat how loud Marcia thought it was, but Marcia also said she should remember what the siren represented.. It meant something terrible, nuclear war, might be happening.

Bunny mulled the word atomic over in her brain. She couldn't comprehend how explosive atomic bombs were; atoms were little, she knew. She did know about the newsreels, they spoke to her, told her they would have taken babies away from their mothers. Now, that was terrible. Nuclear war couldn't take babies away. Some evil people, probably Russians, had to do that. Bunny polished off her toast. She hopped into the kitchen and flipped her radio on.

Dear Sir: whatever happened to
 the sweet butterchurn mornings
 and the tow-headed boy on his bike
 flipping onto the porch
 the afternoon paper
 with its news faraway
 of trouble spots faraway
 in the distant night faraway?

--Eve Merriam, The Nixon Poems

Rhythm. Roger had a seven iron to number sixteen. Pace. Come on, slow up, slow down. He swung the club a few times to chase the butterflies, took a deep breath. The grass was thin under his ball, the ground sandy. Nothing fat, pick it. The ball sailed straight to the pin, but didn't bite on the green with all the wind behind it, rolled twenty feet past the flag. "Good shot, Roger," Coach said.

Roger chuckled. Coach was getting almost personal all of a sudden. He smiled at Rock.

Roger's drive was shortest. The Wake Forest player hit next, choosing an eight iron. Roger admired this guy. For three days he attracted large galleries and a couple television crews. He held up under the pressure. His eight iron fell inches short of perfect, but the ball spun back, resting fifteen feet from the hole.

The Okie hit an eight iron too, straight to the pin, and the ball kicked ten feet short, rolling to only three or four feet away. Roger would have to watch this guy, he was coming on. "Nice shot," Roger said. The kid looked up and smiled.

Then came the Longhorn, from UT, the home team's number one. A big hitter. He could hit a nine iron or pitching wedge, but as likely knock it out of bounds as Roger would with a two. This goon was all muscle, and wild, but he'd started playing better once an older man, dressed all in Texas orange, arrived. He talked to the Longhorn, relaxed him. He wasn't a coach, more like an advisor or sponsor. He didn't criticize, but talked positively, soothing the giant. "You're a Longhorn, boy, now hit this one in the hole." He responded by dropping his wedge shot twelve feet from the cup. "Nice shot, boy," the man said, "Now that Yankee's furthest from the hole. Let's see him putt now." The man looked directly at Roger, smiled, a grillwork smile. Roger couldn't believe his ears. He searched for the official who hadn't paid any attention. Roger strode to his ball under the man's steady gaze, planning to repay the intimidation.

Printing on California t-shirt: Oh no,
nuclear war. . . There goes my career.

Jimmy closed the study doors, started with the top shelves, scanning each title. The only picture he had of Gwen would be in his senior yearbook. Not finding it in the study, he searched closets, tearing open boxes, any container that might have held the Spectator, 1968. He was sure the blue binding would be in perfect condition. He may have looked at it once or twice, but that was all.

When he found it, in the attic, he let it alone, headed for the kitchen and a can of Lysol. Mildew was the last odor he wanted to smell. He didn't need a reminder that things get old and musty and boxed up and put away where nobody can find them. Jimmy was starting over, getting a second chance. His mind drifted to being young and happy and carefree and, mainly, to being in love. The pictures in the yearbook helped him recall long lost emotions, even though he laughed at how the entire senior class photographed remarkably naive, so juvenile as to cast an aura of stupidity over the group, even those who weren't stupid. He hadn't examined his youth in years, never really judged it at all.

He leafed to Gwen's class photo. There she was, Miss Thespian, all dressed up for the camera. He never liked this photo, it limited her, made her seem less than she was. He liked the action cameo shots, Gwen in The King and I with him and his baldness. He liked the group picture of the Drama Club, standing at the counter of the Fleetwood Diner, all of them made up to be losers, drunks, and whores, but all of them with smiles on their faces. It was a great yearbook

shot; Gwen had organized it. She was a genius.

Jimmy guessed she might even be a professional photographer, after all; there was the classic Gwen masterpiece. It had caused some trouble at the time. She found an old white horse at the riding stable. The decrepit steed was beaten down, curve-backed, ready for the glue factory, and Gwen wanted him as a permanent yearbook character. She squeezed into a body stocking, donned a long blonde wig, and pranced around a pasture, a nymph, enticing the horse to catch her. Gwen used an apple to attract him and the horse ached for the fruit, could taste it, coveted that apple, but couldn't move fast enough to catch Gwen. The apple could not be seen in the photograph, so the horse looked like he was aching for Gwen. The effect was enough for the school board to stop publication, but they didn't when the yearbook faculty went to bat for the photo. Jimmy was certain it won them their state prize.

Jimmy sighed a long sigh, closing the book, stuffing it into his briefcase. It would make great reading on the long flight to Sydney.

The danger facing the West during the balance of this century is less that of a nuclear holocaust than it is of drifting into a situation in which we find ourselves confronted with the choice between surrender and suicide--red or dead.

--Richard Nixon

John's tired Valiant chugged onto the campus, reacting to the unleaded gasoline working on the engine's fatigued disintegrating valves. The Plymouth burned a couple quarts of oil a tank anyhow;

the unleaded gas didn't help. The car made quite an entrance, blue smoke billowing from the exhaust pipe, the engine backfiring every fifteen seconds, a little wizened man, propped up and hunched over the wheel, driving. He managed to get the car parked before a university cop stopped him.

Walking with his heavy picnic basket toward the park benches, a crowd of people were pushing and shoving across from the union. A little plywood information booth had attracted two groups of people, one on the left and one on the right, from where he stood. The first shouted more angrily, gesturing with arms and fists, some signs too. The other group, on the right, tried to listen to a girl behind the booth, but even this group shouted back at the others. The people in the booth tried to calm both sides, the girl's arms alternately raised between left and right. "Those poor people in the middle have their hands full, 'specially that girl," John thought.

He found an empty bench, spread his lunch out on it, unwrapped the aluminum foil from around a hard boiled egg, and bit into it. He ate half of it, felt full, put the rest of his food away. The picnic jug rolled under his bench; he had to reach several times before he could relocate it and pour himself some tea. He sipped it, watching Sarahs, thinking of her.

I don't want to die and leave you alone.

John scolded himself, he should have said she wouldn't die, should have said it, that she wouldn't, even though she would.

The woman isn't supposed to go first; I'm not supposed to leave you all by yourself.

It's alright Sarah, I'll be comin' soon enough.

You're a good man, John Sennet. Jesus'll take care of you. You remember to let him. It's his job you know.

I know Sarah. He's got a big job, lots of people needin' comfortin' and such.

John wished he'd asked for some help. Maybe he'd come to his mathematics sooner. He wished that. He could have lived all those years without the mystery, could have known all those years when he was going to join Sarah. He could have planned everything. He could have looked forward to it.

If one had told any group of people in any previous period of time that the United States and the Soviet Union would have thousands of nuclear missiles available for instant action in literally a matter of minutes if not seconds, and that very few people would be nervous or seriously concerned that one of these nuclear devices might be launched by accident or unauthorized malice, they would be most surprised.

--Herman Kahn

"Please, please, everyone. There's no need to turn this into a shouting match. Hey, mister, come on, let these people evaluate us on their own."

"Lady, give up! Civil defense in the face of nuclear war is absurd!"

"Shut up, buddy."

"All right, come on, before the police break this up."

Marcia slumped in her metal folding chair, shut out the noise, the protests, the insults. She concentrated on Bunny, conjured her

up, tried to kill her telepathically, laughed at herself for trying. After George told her there'd be no test, she could see Bunny's actions, besides pouting. She probably went home to Daddy, complaining that they weren't cooperating with the President.

You can have a winner in a nuclear exchange.
--George Bush

Bunny wondered why the siren would scare people so much if it wasn't real. It would be a test, only a practice. They did it on the radio all the time. They told the audience it was a test. Bunny chewed and thought, not knowing what to do. She thought about what the President might do. She swallowed her last bite. She smiled. It came to her. Finished chewing, she could concentrate, knew what he would do. He wouldn't listen to a one of them, not a one, no sirree. Not Mr. President. He didn't care about what the experts said. He knew that he had to do what he had to do. If he didn't know what to do, he'd ask his friends, but if they didn't know, then he'd do it on his own. That was what Bunny had to do. She'd have to do it alone and know she was right. One way or another, she had to ring that siren. Bunny reached out and switched the radio off.

I'm in charge here.
--Alexander Haig

Roger loved going first. He loved watching the other players, confident in their shorter putts, loved to know they'd have to watch him prowl the green, watch him read his putt. He knew where this one

was going too. Now, he had to hit it there. Short. Slow. Roll the ball down the hill and put some fear into these guys. Roger wanted this one badly. He looked at the man, the initials T.R. emblazoned on his belt buckle. He smiled at Roger. Roger winked back, watched him flinch, spit over his shoulder. Stepping up to his putt, he checked the line again, struck the ball. Rolling over a thousand grass blades, breaking seven inches left, and diving six inches underground, Roger holed the putt, his Titleist swallowed like his competitors swallowed now.

Just ask these men who would have to fight
the war what are the essential weapons.

--Ronald Reagan

Jimmy planned killing an hour before his charter departed for Sydney. He shopped briefly for a book that might hold his interest on the long flight, but he didn't want to read, couldn't concentrate, except on the Spectator. He dropped a quarter into a television set. His mind wandered. Jimmy tried to dial home, tell his wife that he wasn't coming back; instead, he began with San Francisco, tried Los Angeles, New York, Minneapolis, Chicago, Miami, Dallas, and Pittsburgh. He tried long distance information for Gwen Humboldt. He forgot his obsession with Australia, knew it was a long shot that she might actually be in Australia; besides, he had the time to try. He knew she could be married, live in a suburb, could have changed her name for the stage, or live in any city in the U.S. He persisted with his crude phone search.

Our long-term goal is to be able to meet

the demands of a worldwide war.
 --Caspar Weinberger

John lost his appetite entirely. Tired, he started to cry. He belonged at home now, getting ready, preparing himself. He wanted to practice what he'd say to Sarah when he saw her again. He knew she hadn't changed. But it was time to go home, time to enjoy his last moments.

Question: Is it an exaggeration to say that the fate of the world is hanging in the balance?

Answer: No exaggeration. The fate of humanity is always in the balance. . . but more truly now than at any known time.

--Albert Einstein

Marcia wanted to grab Bunny and slap her once or twice, pull her hair, ruin her permanent, spoil her Tuesday regular hair-do. Most of all she wanted to make Bunny cry, cuss her out good, repay her for the week's aggravation, and get even for all the stupid questions about when the si-reen would ring.

"Hi, Miss Bunny, I thought you was with Miss Marcia."

"No, Thomas, I'm going to work here today."

"What's that you got with you?"

"Oh, this? Nothing, just carrying some office supplies."

Roger stepped to the seventeenth tee with a three shot lead, all competitors having missed birdie putts. The wind blew into his face on this long par four, 475 yards. If he hit an average three wood, it might leave a four wood to the green. Roger pulled his

driver from the bag. He was confident. He felt like he was playing in the zone, at his absolute peak. He wanted to shout, "I love it!" He wanted to turn pro after graduation, or come back to Ohio State to help Rock coach.

Bunny stepped out of the elevator, scooted to the control room door. She opened T.R.'s fishing creel, pulling out the little blue-steel crow bar.

Jimmy leaned down in the phone booth, his stamina fading, noticed the gum stuck under the counter top, assorted colors and amounts, left for archaeologists of another time to use as evidence in reconstructing Homo sapiens' jaw. He tried to pry one off with his fingers. It was stuck firm.

Opening her purse, she pulled out her hankie, wiped her brow in concern for her make-up, not used to sweating. Her breath returned slowly. She walked to the control panel, Warning, Authorized Personnel Only.

John cranked the Valiant to the brink of his battery's life, finally starting it. An explosive backfire banged into the air, throwing billows of blue smoke. He looked around, thought he heard something, put the car in drive, pulled slowly out of the parking place.

Bunny grabbed a ballpeen hammer, looked at its unfamiliar shape, puzzled over it, turned and smashed away at the glass of the control door.

"I know it sounds crazy," Marcia said, "but if you see Bunny, don't let her leave, and if she does, send somebody to follow her, you understand?" The aid nodded she would.

Bunny rummaged through the creel, looking for a screwdriver, found it, twisted out a screw and then another.

Roger looked at Coach who frowned at him and twirled his finger.

Streaks of mascara ran down her face; she tasted it at the corners of her mouth.

He dropped another quarter into the phone, the pile of change getting smaller.

The plate fell to the floor, the switch hung by three wires.

"Boy, something stinks," John said.

"I'm going to find her--I've got to find her."

She checked her broken finger nails, inhaled.

"Big club, easy swing."

Her hand moved, holding the switch.

"New Orleans, please."

Wiping under both eyes with her sleeves, she stained her dress, started to cry.

"This windshield needs to be cleaned."

Smudges of mascara stained the wall, the hole in the plaster ugly without its face plate.

"George Roberts, you fool."

"The people need practice."

"She's out to lunch, she's dangerous."

"I'm with you, Mr. President."

Inside out, draw, outside in, slice.

That will be eighty cents, sir.

It's smokey in here.

"God damn you, Bunny!"

Any fool can start a war, and once he's done so, even the wisest of men are helpless to stop it--especially if it's a nuclear war.

--Nikita Khrushchev

Roger couldn't check his drive as the sickening scream pierced his eardrums, like an ambulance had driven up behind him, or when his brother honked the horn instead of turning the engine over, a fire alarm ringing above his head.

The swing wouldn't stop, he tried, but it wouldn't stop, came down wildly, shanking the ball, sending it right, short, seventy-five yards into the rough. He hadn't hit a shot like that since the eighth grade.

"What the hell was that?" Rock swore.

"I shanked it," Roger shouted.

"I know that, Walker, I mean the noise." Wheeler turned to the official who was scanning the golf course.

DEFINITION: Ground Zero. The point on the ground immediately below the place where an atomic bomb explodes. It is at and close to ground zero that casualties are most numerous and damage most severe.

Jimmy noticed the people in the terminal starting to run, all of them in the same direction, toward the exits, away from the gates.

People dropped their luggage, grabbed their wives and kids, ran.

"Just a second, operator." Jimmy opened the doors. A siren, muffled, high-pitched, seemed to rattle the soundproof panes of glass on every window in the terminal. Ladies screamed, babies cried, shouted, children ran. A man dashed over and yanked Jimmy out of the booth, muscling his way in.

"What's happening?" Jimmy yelled.

"Air raid!"

"Air raid? What are you talking about?"

"You know, that billion dollar siren, Civil Defense, it's ringing, been ringing, thirty seconds or so!"

DEFINITION: Air Burst. The term applied to any explosive missile which bursts before it makes contact with ground objects.

Cars exploded onto the street in front of John, squealed their tires, fishtailed, escaped his Valiant. They honked their horns at him, people popped out their front doors, throwing prized possessions into their cars. It was a nice, sunny day. John gripped the wheel firmer, scared that the world had suddenly gone mad. "Move it, old man!" John headed for the old road as quickly as he could. The old highway wouldn't be crowded. It never was.

DEFINITION: X. The symbol calling for priority of removal of a casualty from an incident.

"Tornado probably," the official said. "I'll guess we should stop, head for cover, don't you think T.R.? T.R.?"

Roger watched T.R.'s smile fade. "Bunny," he gasped, started to run toward the clubhouse, his burly UT golfer lumbering after him, golf clubs rattling in his bag, running without lifting his legs. The official started for the clubhouse also.

"Wait," Wheeler shouted. The observer stopped in his tracks, turned around. "Why don't we wait for someone to inform us of the plan?"

"You ever seen a tornado, Coach?"

"No."

"Then take my word for it, we're leavin'. I'm sure it'll blow over. We'll come back out."

"There's not a cloud in the sky," Rock said.

"You know, there ain't. They come up fast, but not that fast." The siren continued.

"Let's go then," Wheeler suggested. "Look, nobody else is quitting, except that giant kid, it's only two holes."

"What do you other fellas say?" They shrugged, it made no difference, but they'd like to finish too. The ringing rang on.

Roger watched Coach talk, argue, persuade the official. Roger didn't much care. He was shaking, his heart pounded, hard enough he could hear it vibrate in his chest, broke out in a cold sweat.

He struggled to breathe, had to pee, wanted to throw up, wanted to run off the course, wanted to be finished. He held up his hands to the blue in the sky. They wouldn't stop trembling. His brain whined along with the siren.

DEFINITION: Blast. The violent rush of air caused by the expansive force of an explosion. May be likened to a sudden blow, and it is followed by a vigorous suction effect in the opposite direction.

Jimmy thought about Gwen. In her city, was there a siren ringing, people screaming, expecting the worse? Would people panic, hurt each other, run for cover? Jimmy wondered if this was the end of the world. End of the world, end of the world. One way tickets. One way flights to Australia. "That's it!" he screamed, "They've been escaping!" He looked around, ran to his charter, against the flow of traffic.

"Hey buddy, they're sure to bomb an airport first. You're goin' the wrong way!"

"They've grounded all the flights, you better get out of here."

He ignored the warnings, ignored the pushing and jostling, ignored the advice. He had a scheduled, chartered flight, he owned a jet, and he paid the pilots. They had better be there.

Scrambling out into the service runway, approaching his jet, the pilots and crew were invisible. He hustled to the bow, looked up into the cockpit, his two confused pilots sitting there. He waved his arms, showed his ID badge; the starboard door opened.

"They've grounded us, Mr. Rigley."

Jimmy went to work. "Guys, how much is it worth to you to fly me out of here without clearance? How much can I pay you? How long is the probation anyhow, six months?"

Each pilot looked at the other. "Mr. R., what do you think this is anyway? War?"

"People been sayin' as much. I reckon that's what it is. What do you say fellas?"

"I don't know, boss."

"I tell you what. You get me to Australia and you can have the jet, I'll sign it over, or we'll sell it and you can buy what you want."

DEFINITION: Clucking Hen. A Geiger Counter.

The first cars that caught up to and passed him sped by so fast he thought they were teenagers dragging a road where they wouldn't get a ticket. Soon, a line of traffic appeared in John's sideview mirror. Some could pass immediately, but the road was narrow and the shoulder overgrown with Johnsongrass; most had to wait for a clearer shot. They rode their horns incessantly, John hearing some of the noise.

He rolled down his window, waving for them to move around. Between his eyesight and the Valiant's smokey exhaust, the advice would have been suicidal. He kept waving. The cars kept honking, a few passed, and John's Plymouth lurched along.

"If you'll all just wait til tomorrow, I'll be sure enough out of your way," John said. He looked for a place to turn off, but

between the weeds, the smoke, and his eyes, he couldn't spot his chances until it was too late to turn.

A pistol shot, a crack, echoed through the car. All the red warning lights flashed on, lighted in an emergency chorus, but the engine chugged on, coughing, spewing noxious fumes and unleaded gasoline into the atmosphere, slowing the Valiant to a crawl, risking the wrath of a thousand tailgaters. John peered over the wheel, squinted his eyes, tried to find a place to ditch the car.

Along side him, two cars tried to pass at once, both drivers gesturing to him, waving him off the road, one lady hanging out the passenger window, the driver screaming for his wife and kids to shut up before he killed them. It was the car on the outside that saw the delivery truck approach, turned sharply to the right, bumping the car with the crazy lady hanging out the window, which bumped John, pinching him on the old narrow road, three cars across, with a delivery truck bearing down on them. He didn't stand a chance, and the Valiant rode out the crash, bumping along the weedy shoulder, John holding onto the steering wheel for dear life, as hard as he could, ending up sideways in the ditch.

DEFINITION: Eve's Method. A kind of artificial respiration performed by placing the victim on a stretcher and rocking it through a forty-five degree angle.

The siren stopped.

The official decided the group would finish. He'd write down where the incident occurred on the scorecard. The NCAA officials could decide later. Roger would play a provisional ball, and the

original shot. Rock was happy. The siren stopped. He told Roger to forget the first ball because he'd win this fight if it was the last thing he ever did. He noticed Roger, ashen, shaken. Rock put his arm around Rog's shoulder.

"Can you go on?"

"What was it, Coach?"

"How am I supposed to know. Somebody's idea of a joke, I guess."

"Coach, I'm a wreck. Look, my hands. I can't get 'em to stop."

Wheeler looked at the shaking hands. "Look, son, I've got some smelling salts in the bag, stay here." Rock ran to the bag and pulled out the capsules. He ran back. "Here, Walker." He snapped a capsule; Roger winced from the smell, Wheeler looked at him. "You're better, Roger. Look, you're not shaking."

Roger held up his hands. They looked better, sort of. He tried to swing the driver a couple of times, felt weak, anemic. He put the driver back, grabbed his three wood.

"You're going to play a provisional, Rog. Forget the first one, but you'll have to play it too." Roger teed up a second Titleist, laced it down the fairway. He made a bogey with the second ball, the tee shot had been too short. He carded a seven with the first ball, triple bogey. He parred eighteen, luckily, sinking a long putt after bunkering a six iron.

The clubhouse was nearly empty, though a few golfers remained on the course. Rock tried to find an official, someone in charge.

He couldn't. "I can't find anybody around here. I wonder if that siren meant something serious?" Roger sat, staring blankly at his name atop the day's incomplete leader board. Even if they didn't count the seven, how could he play after this? How could he fight this off? He couldn't. Nobody could, except maybe a pro, and they never had anything like this go wrong. Even pros would have been rank amateurs in this situation. Roger was sure of that.

Rock rushed up to him from the bar. "Roger, we have to leave."

"Why?"

"That siren. It's not sure, but it's an air-raid siren or something. The TV people don't know if it's real or not. They're getting so many calls they can't know for sure."

Roger guessed the siren was a false alarm. It had to be, twenty-five minutes had passed. No Russian attack would take that long, especially one that would end the world. He figured he didn't care either way, didn't care if it was war or not. The siren was real enough for him, it ended his world.

Rock helped him up and led him to the team car. They headed out toward the highway. "We'll follow traffic, we'll make it," Rock said. "Stop worrying about that shot too. There's always tomorrow, one more round, you know."

Roger didn't think so. It was all over. He'd never be able to recover in one day, never find the groove in only one night, would not enjoy the zone ever again; his idea of the future exploded and evaporated into the wind.

DEFINITION: Dose Rate. It has been found that the normal healthy human body can be dosed radioactively with 0.1 roentgens in each working day and 0.5 roentgens in each working week without ill effect.

The siren stopped.

One of the lower level terminal doors burst open and twenty people rushed the A-A jet, Jimmy, and his pilots. "Take me, take me! No, take me, please! Get us out of here, it's the end of the world." The mob shouted and rushed the jet, Jimmy, and his pilots.

"Let's get out of here!" Jimmy yelled, the three scrambling inside, closing the doors.

The pilot tried to radio for clearance. "This is Australia Airways Flight 110, charter to Sydney. We've got a mob out here, request clearance for take off."

"Please, clear all channels, please clear all channels."

"It's a damned recording."

"Damn it," Jimmy screamed, "they're gonna tear us apart." The mob banged on the windows, crawled on the wings, tried to open the doors from the outside.

"It's either them or us." The pilots started the engines, those behind the turbines scrambling out of the way, covering their ears, clamping their eyes closed. The blue, green, and white Australia Airways jet headed for the runway, both pilots craning their necks out of habit for incoming traffic.

Jimmy ducked back into first class, sat down. In place were the Koala Kits, the magazines, the pillows. He sat in one of the large

seats, thinking about Gwen. He was sure she'd be in Australia. There was no other way to explain all this.

He reclined in his chair, put his arms behind his head, musing, leaving a rotten life, leaving a rotten world. What an escape. He picked up one of the kits, opened it, took a deep breath of the eucalyptus fragrance. "Escape to Eucalyptus Land," he sighed, and bolted upright in his seat. Eyes bulging, he thought about turning the jet around. He found his slogan. Should he go back? Did it matter, or would Dad have pulled the plug already? The slogan might make him a billionaire, but Dad hated him, Morgan hated him. He smelled Gwen's perfume somehow, reminding him that he'd made his choice; the slogan wouldn't do him a bit of good. "Escape to Eucalyptus Land," he sighed, drew another deep breath and fell asleep. His dreams made him worry, warned him, that the way things were going, Gwen probably hated him too.

DEFINITION: Voids. Spaces left, following the collapse of a building, due to the partial support of debris.

The siren stopped.

The engine wouldn't quit, it sputtered on, spurting blue smoke, the southerly wind blowing it into the inverted car, into John's face, choking him. He tried wriggling the key in the ignition, but control had been severed during the crash. He tried to move, but his door was straight up into the sky, he was hanging by his seatbelt, down toward the passenger door, all the blood rushing to his head.

John breathed deeply to clear his head, calmed himself enough to

think what to do. If he released his seat belt, he'd crash down on the passenger door. He pushed on it, but didn't have the strength to open it, didn't have enough energy left to climb out the window.

He struggled to breath, swallowed hard. He was sweating, sweating from hanging almost upside down, sick from exhaust fumes, swooning on noxious gases polluting the car. John unsnapped the seatbelt and fell with a thud against the passenger door. He tried to turn himself around, drifted in and out of consciousness.

The noise along the road rang through his car, honking, screaming, roaring cars escaping the end of the world. The sun baked the Valiant, turned it into a crematorium.

Let Jesus take care of you, that's his job you know.

He sat on the armrest, using the seat for his backrest. He unzipped his pants, unstrapped the urine bag from his side and pulled the catheter out. He wouldn't be needing it, could die without it, threw it into the back seat, where it burst like a water balloon, the smell working to revive him, clear his head.

Nobody stopped to help him, any help at all would have saved him. He wondered where they were all trying to go, wondered why he'd been so unlucky to be out of his little house on the last day. "Help," he coughed. "Help me," he cried, started to weep, "I'm in here. Jesus, help me! My Sarah wanted You to help me."

John guessed he might die in only a few more minutes. The blue suit hung in the closet, he wanted it, wanted to wear it now, on his last day, be seen in it, open casket, for all his friends to see.

"Supposed to die Sunday, not Saturday. Where did I go wrong?"

John Sennet rested his head against the seat, cried softly. He'd miss his house the most. He'd miss the nurse. He'd miss the morning newspaper. Sarah came to him out of the light of the windshield, swallowed him up, carrying him off to a chorus of horns blaring, deafening, and the 1972 Valiant's last stroke.

DEFINITION: Presumption of Death. Except in obvious cases, such as the severance of a head, no Civil Defense worker should assume the responsibility of pronouncing a casualty dead.

Marcia Yablonsky marched with two security men down the corridor leading to master control. She looked in every doorway, tried every handle, knowing she only had to check one place. Her keys, held in her fist, were gripped in anger. She turned the corner and saw the door to master control, open.

"I know she's in there," she whispered to the first guard, a private security man, too small for his work, too small to be convincing.

He drew his gun, a gun he'd never used, motioned for his buddy to go around the other way. Marcia tip-toed to the doorway, peered in, froze. Bunny was dressed only in her underclothes, sitting on a desk, legs crossed, arms fanning herself with a desk calendar. Marcia had never seen her without her vest. Bunny stared, gazing out the window, watching Austin evacuate. She had been crying, Marcia noticed, her eyes red, her make-up ruined.

"I ruined my blue dress."

Marcia watched as the first guard helped Bunny to her feet. "I want handcuffs on her," Marcia said, much, much too loudly.

The guard rolled his eyes, "She ain't gonna be no trouble, now are you, Missus."

"Put them on her please." The midget lifted Bunny's blue dress, handed it to her awkwardly.

Marcia checked around the room, saw the tools, saw the fishing creel. She turned to George Roberts, white as a Yankee, shaking, standing in the door with the mayor. The mayor was appropriately concerned.

"We've finally managed to get the news out," George said to her. "It took us thirty-seven minutes." George stole away from her, her gaze, her hate, left her for Bunny, introduced her, almost naked, to the mayor.

"Mr. Mayor, this is Bunny Pickens, you know, T.R.'s wife, the one I've been telling you about?"

"Oh."

Upon the articulation of that "Oh," T.R. Pickens turned the corridor, "Bunny, Bunny," he called. Bunny was handcuffed, propped up by the second security man, a black man. T.R. looked at him and at Marcia staring at Bunny; the mayor and George gawking too. T.R. managed to stroll into the room. "What's going on here?"

"The mayor answered politely. "We found her here. She rang the alarm. She admits it."

"Can you prove it?"

"There's enough finger prints in here to convict her twenty times," Marcia cracked. She was not going to back down. No bigwig was going to get Bunny out of this without a fight.

T.R. ignored her. "Mr. Mayor, may I have a word with you in private?" he asked. The mayor and T.R. slunk into the hallway. George sought help from Marcia.

"What's he trying to pull?"

"Well, George, it looks to me like he's going to get her a good lawyer, but first, he's going to try to get her out of here. Hubby will vouch for her, so she won't have to go to jail tonight."

George asked the security guards if he could do that. They told him he'd better call the police if he wanted her in custody. George dialed. The line was busy. T.R. came back into the room. The mayor whispered something to the guard; he removed the handcuffs. George slammed the receiver down.

"What's going on here?"

"Shut up, Roberts," the mayor said.

"What's he just going to take her out of here?"

"That's right. Shut up or you're fired."

Marcia wanted to fight, by nature that's what she wanted. She wanted to scream too. She knew how all of this was going to end; George was beginning to understand. It'll all blow over because Bunny belongs to T.R. Marcia wanted to scream, but she couldn't, didn't remember how to.

George looked at her, she smiled at him. George screamed, an attack scream, the scream Marcia wanted to scream, grabbed the midget's pistol, pointed it at the mayor. "You wait til I get the police."

"The police will be busy all night, George. They'll be mopping up after this. There's nothing we can do," Marcia lied, trying to

help.

T.R. said to the mayor, "Take care of this nut."

"A nut? Your wife may have killed people. She caused how much property damage, I don't know. She's practically naked. You callin' me the nut?" George was no longer white.

"Maybe we better try the police," Marcia suggested.

"Look Mayor, I'm leaving. You work this out with your staff on your own time, not mine. I've got things to do," T.R. said.

George raised the gun. T.R. kept walking. George squeezed off a shot. Bunny dropped to the floor, spilled on it as if fainting, fell in a heap. T.R. swung around, rushing George, going for his throat; Marcia tripped him on the way by, kicking at the gun, accidentally knocking it to the floor. The guard scrambled to reclaim it, knowing he was in trouble.

"Now what do you say, shall we call the police?" Marcia said.

T.R. bent down over Bunny, whispered, "Why weren't you wearing your vest?" and started to sob. Marcia walked to the phone, dialed 911, waited, asked for the police. Later, with her hand against the glass, she looked out onto Austin. There was less traffic now. The mayor flipped on a television, the bulletins running on every station. She swore an oath that Austin would hear this story, one way or another, if it was the last thing she did.

The mayor walked up to her. "I want you to put this office back together. As of now, you're the boss," and, motioning to the panel, continued, "we've got to get rid of this thing."

Marcia nodded. She thought it was funny that she had to dismantle

the system she was hired to establish. But the mayor might change his mind, afterall, everybody was still on edge.

One day, Henny Penny was picking up corn in the farmyard when--whack! An acorn hit her on the head.

"I don't think I can live in a world without golf." "Me neither, Roger. Me neither." "Fellas, turn this jet around. We're goin' home." "What about the alert?" "Just turn it around, now!" "Come on, ole timer, snap out of it." "Roger, did you hear that? It's a mistake, a sick joke. We're safe. You're gonna play for the title tomorrow." "Sure, boys, you can keep the jet. But you won't want to. I've got a sure-fire way to make a billion dollars." "Where am I? Am I alive?" "I reckon so. I ain't Saint Peter."

"Coach, guess what? I plan to use the driver tomorrow. I'm feeling kind of lucky." "Fellas, we're gonna eat our plate of crow, polish it right off, and crawl on our hands and knees back to Daddy. You know why? 'Cause I've got it. We'll be rich, rich, rich." "Thank you for saving my life. Actually, I wasn't supposed to go until Sunday."

"Come on, Roger, sing." "Fight that team, across the field, show them Ohio's here. Set the earth reverberating, with a mighty cheer."

Jimmy dug fifty cents out of his pocket, slipped the quarters into a locker, and opened the door. He rifled the pages of The Spectator, just to feel the book one more time. He slid it inside and closed the door. Taking the key, he tossed it in the air, caught it,

and buried it in his pocket. A stewardess winked at Jimmy. He knew the crisis was over.

"Hit them hard, see how they fall. Never let that team have the ball!"

John turned the television off and called for the duty nurse. "If I die tomorrow," he said, "will you please make sure they bury me in my blue suit?"

"You aren't going to die," she said, a little alarmed.

"Please, promise."

"O.K. I promise. But you're fine."

"Oh, I don't know," John said. "Some days you never can tell."

"Hail, hail, the gang's all here, so beat them all right now!

Ohio! Ohio!"

"Goodness gracious me!" said Henny Penny.
"The sky is falling! I must go and tell the King."

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