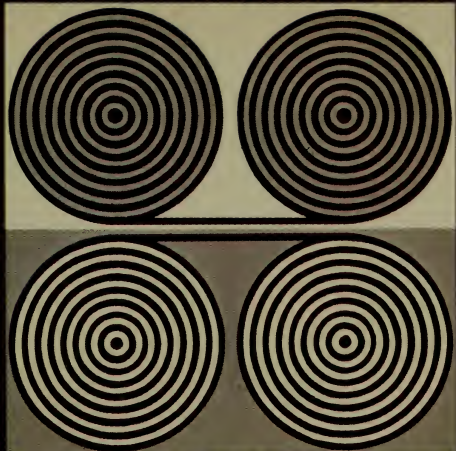


ace  
BOOK  
H-86  
60¢

AN ACE SCIENCE FICTION SPECIAL



□ D. G. COMPTON □  
**SYNTHAJOY**

**"New, vibrant and hair-raising."**  
LIVERPOOL DAILY POST



**FIRST U.S. PUBLICATION  
OF A MAJOR NEW  
SCIENCE FICTION NOVELIST**

"A very thrilling and nasty piece of electronic fiction . . . horrifying, entertaining, and pregnant with warning."

—GLASGOW HERALD

"New, vibrant and hair-raising in a subtle, unsuspected way. Placed somewhere towards the end of this century, the story is told by the widow of the doctor who invented Sensitape, the machine that can control the human brain."

—LIVERPOOL DAILY POST

"Complex and interesting . . . the vulgarity of eavesdropping on and exploiting other people's emotions, whether during sexual intercourse or while dying, is treated in a steady, liberal way. A sane book, though its subject is near-madness."

—TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT

"Frighteningly chilling . . . written with factual underplaying of the ultimate horror."

—SOUTH DEVON TIMES

Edward Cadence was a brilliant man, and a dedicated scientist. He had invented Sensitape, a means of recording the thoughts and emotions of great musicians, religious figures, etc. so that others could experience at first-hand just what it was like to play a magnificent concerto, or to slip peacefully toward an untroubled death with the sure expectation that Heaven lies waiting. And he had added Sexitape, whereby people whose sex lives weren't completely satisfying could experience everything that the most compatible couple in the world felt together.

For all this he was given the Nobel Prize, became enormously wealthy and famous.

But finally he set to work on the ultimate application of his experiments: SYNTHAJOY. And when the enormity of this dehumanizing process became clear, he was murdered.

*Here is a novel of the day after tomorrow that will grip your imagination from start to finish . . . and that will make you think.*

**D. G. COMPTON** was born in London in 1930; both his parents were in the theatre, and he was brought up by his grandmother. After eighteen months' National Service, he tried a variety of jobs—as a stage manager, salesman, dock worker, shop display manager, jobbing builder—then he gave up working in order to write full-time.

He is married, with children, and lives in Devon, England. His hobbies are music, sailing and vintage cars. Mr. Compton is the author of several radio, stage and television plays, and of three previous science fiction novels. **SYNTHAJOY** is his first novel to be published in the United States.

# SYNTHAJOY

---

D.G. COMPTON

ACE BOOKS, INC.

1120 Avenue of the Americas

New York, N.Y. 10036

SYNTHA JOY

Copyright, ©, 1968 by D.G. Compton

An Ace Book, by arrangement with the author.

All Rights Reserved

Printed in U.S.A.

## DAY 25

Mrs. Craig has just asked me yet again to remember that she is a nurse, and to address her as such. I wonder if it is simply small-minded for me to persist in calling her my wardress.

We returned from today's tape therapy five minutes ago. She evidently imagines that she has to lead me everywhere, as if I were either very old or an idiot. Unless it's simply that she's so foolish she obeys the letter of her training even with patients who would be much better helped by the spirit. Now she's helping me tidy my room. As I watch her I know that I'm right to call her my wardress. No woman who wasn't a wardress would want to make the folds of a curtain as regular as corrugated iron. She's doing it now, tugging at the hems one after another. . . . She tears off lavatory paper in just the same way—a neat sharp tweak that separates it straight along the perforated edge. The pieces of paper Mrs. Craig offers me, folded in two, are as neat and as sharp as envelopes. We know a lot about each other's habits, she and I: I am her charge and she is my wardress

She tidies my room really so well and so quickly that there's nothing left for me to do at all. It's the same with all of my life now—either from a lack of imagination or a malicious need to destroy me, she's taken over my every department. I find myself left without will or energy. Doctor would say this is a result of my personality break-up, that it started months ago, long before I came to this place. But I know different. I know the will and the energy that I had the day before. No, on the very day that. The very day that. I know it's the result of having Mrs. Craig for a ward-

ress. And a wardress for Mrs. Craig. That's not a silly thing to say—Mrs. Craigs are essential to most of us, but they don't have to be so noticeably wardress.

She's seen now that I'm watching her in the plastic mirror.

"Do you like your hair hanging all over your face, Mrs. Cadence?"

That's her way of pretending that she wants me to make a decision for myself. I don't answer.

"It's the way Doctor puts on the headset, Mrs. Cadence. It upsets all your good work. And it really isn't necessary, not with these new units. I'll speak to him about it."

Her ideas of how to flatter me into doing things are quite childish. I may be in her charge, but that doesn't make me either paranoid or half-witted.

"There are things about this place that have to be resisted, Mrs. C." Don't call me that. "I don't agree with every aspect of your treatment. I shall speak to Doctor again about having you moved into a ward. This single room is doing you no good. No good at all."

She goes to the door. What she doesn't know—though she must really—is that dignity and self-respect can be entirely interior and that I intend to hang on to these whatever may be done to me. To her I must look like just another sulking psychotic.

"I think you're wrong, Mrs. Craig." I don't know why I'm bothering, why I'm calling her Mrs. Craig even. "Surely the reason for my being here is so that I may come to terms with myself and what I have done? I doubt if I'd get on with that half as well in the friendly atmosphere of a ward."

I wish I hadn't chosen my words so carefully, hadn't wanted so badly to show her.

"It's not that I like being alone in here. It's just that I believe it's good for me. And so did the judge."

I don't hear her reply. Now that her hand's on the door-knob I'm soon going to be left alone again. I shake my hair back from my face and look at myself in the mirror. I try to see from my reflection's eyes what my reflection is thinking. Nothing shows.

"The tapes should be doing that for you, Mrs. Cadence.



For the rest of the time you'd find you were helped by a more normal social life."

"But haven't you read reports of the trial?" Allowing a note of hysteria. Not able to keep it out. "All about how I hate Sensitape? Can't you see how much more valuable my salvation would be if I arrived at it on my own?"

"Some diseases are hard to cure by an act of the mind alone, Mrs. Cadence."

"The past isn't a disease, Mrs. Craig. To talk of curing it is ridiculous."

I can't read her eyes either. With subtle people one seldom can.

"The past doesn't exist, Mrs. Cadence. Only our different ideas of it."

Not a bad exit line. And afterward the door is neither more shut nor less. Which I say to myself by way of reassurance since it seems in fact to be more shut than any other door I've ever seen. And in my mind, because of the guilt which is there—what guilt, what particular guilt is this?—the door shuts unfairly, separating off past happiness, leaving on my side of it only past sorrow.

There are other concepts of time, Wardress. Sometimes it is seen as a fixed landscape through which we move, so that the past and the future all exist at once . . . She does everything knowingly; why has she decided to try to take the past away from me? All the past, that is, before the murder. She's not likely to be doubting the reality of that. The eyes in the plastic mirror tell me nothing. Indeed, they feed back into my own, canceling thought. I go to the door and, because I am calm and sensible, I open it. The corridor is pleasant, carefully domestic. They got the scale right.

Oh my darling.

I remember how slow the bus was all the way along from the Tottenham Court Road. The trees hiding all but the highest roofs of the zoo and a distant giraffe, I sat on the top of the bus and watched their pale, tiny leaves, so out of place in the seasonless city. If spring belonged anywhere it was in the crocus shop windows, and in the women's clothes. A sour thought, from present cynicism. At the time the leaves were young and delicate, the sky was cloudless, and I was three bus stops away from Tony.

"Thea. Thea, my dear. . . . My little love—"

I'd jumped from the bus while it was still moving, nearly broken my ankle, run between the amiable people and hung myself up around his neck. Nobody minded how ridiculous it was, me at thirty-one still like a schoolgirl, nobody on the whole pavement. Baker Street was golden. We moved on another plane, and everyone who saw us.

"We're going to the park," Tony said. "I've brought you a present."

It was silly. It was a tin opener and a tin of frankfurter sausages.

The buildings were so clear that afternoon, so tall, so exquisitely detailed. I stopped Tony in front of a blank shop window, trying to see in his reflection the ordinari-ness other people must see. The reflection was even more marvelous than the reality. He was easier than usual. He took off his hat to it. Then we walked on. A side road gave us a glimpse of a cobbled mews and expensive houses with window boxes. There were daffodils, and some kind of blue flowers, and a cheerful car in front with a spotted perspex roof. The bricks of the house were earth red, the cobbles brown. None of it was real. As we watched a man in a green fake baize apron came out with a watering can and began to water the ground floor window boxes. He disturbed a cat from one and she moved onto the top of the car. Only

we saw all this, and it was ours. We went toward the park, humbled.

We held hands.

"Theory, Theory, I have a Theory and I love my Theory."

I didn't ask him what his theory was. It would have involved some comic mathematical formula and would have reminded us of his work. So silk thin was our happiness.

"In fact," he said, "my love is entirely Theoretical."

His name was Tony Stech (not quite English, you see) and he regarded puns as the apostles must have regarded the tongues of flame.

At the crossing there wasn't a car in sight. The road stretched as clear as a triumphal route right along to Lancaster Gate. We went over the road and into the park. I wish I could remember what we said to each other—there was nothing capable of being talked about. There must have been words, though, helping to build an isolation, communication between us that preserved and enlarged what was ours, our happiness, our suspension. I can remember no effort in finding things to say to Tony. We may even have made plans, but I doubt it. Dogs passed, and people who smiled at us, and once a brewer's dray with polished horses practicing for the parade. Enormous, they flourished themselves like banners. Their brasses caught at the sunlight, the wheels behind them spun silver, the driver cheerfully self-conscious in his fancy dress waved at us as he went by. We waved back, extended by the contact.

Tony found us a bench by the canal, sat me down and opened the tin of sausages. He fed them to me, shiny little things that tasted of salt and herbs and not much else. But they snapped satisfactorily and between us we ate the whole tin. I can experience their feel even now, and the feel of the bench against my back, and the feel of the sharp unlit air that was different from any other day's, and the feel of being with Tony and in him and a part of him. The frankfurter sausages of that particular day too—no other food has ever been so deeply involved in the totality of experience. The totality of experience, jargon words, worked to death by Edward in his Sensitape handouts—but everything he said and did had been a Sensitape handout, had

been for seven years—but even so I know of no other. We lived inside out, our souls and our senses indissoluble. This is probably what being in love means. This is probably what made it possible for us to be happy.

Houses showed, cream-painted and regular, through the trees, fine rich houses with fine blank windows. In my mind they were unattainable—also undesirable—though through Edward's money, Sensitape money, I could easily have encompassed any one of them. While I was with Tony neither the past, nor the real present, nor the future existed. Doctor is wrong. If my personality ever disintegrated it was then, more than a year ago. More recent months have in fact seen a coming together.

Tony poured the saline solution that had contained the sausages onto the grass, and threw the tin into a litter basket. He insisted that I keep the tin opener. He said he was giving me the key to his heart, so for the sake of his joke I tried to put it down the front of my dress. In the end it went into my handbag. He had the sense of humor of a much uglier man.

We did usual things. They were there to be done, each one a personal magic. Mostly we walked. Walked. Lovers do walk. There were birds to be fed, and the pointless race up over the bridge and down the other side which Tony won, and my silly shoes to be laughed at, and the page of newspaper that we picked up and read for omens, and buttoned children who thought we were mad because we were not sane, and the final slope of damp bald grass not to be minded as we lay on it and got our breaths back and watched the sky through the tiny leaves (why is it always spring in fairy stories?), and didn't need to kiss or make love at all.

At four o'clock Tony took me to a café for tea. Time was running out, had been from the moment I got off the bus. The place laid on a special tea for men out with other men's wives, weak, with dry yellow scones and a dusty slab of cake. The men never noticed and the wives were too polite to. But it was quiet, and respectable, with a spinning wheel in one corner and a respectability that was catching. It helped us back into the necessary constraint. I had to be

in Richmond by six, when Edward's first private patient arrived. The constraint worked so well that I remember Tony asked me when he'd see me again. Memory safe now and not able to hurt, I remember my answer and what followed.

"At the conference tomorrow morning," I said. "Had you forgotten?"

"No, I meant *see* you." Poor Tony, he was embarrassed. "See you alone."

"What's the conference going to be about?" I said, not answering him.

"Hasn't Edward told you?"

This was the important conversation. This was the one that could be remembered.

"A new process, he told me. And he gave me a list of the important people attending."

"And he didn't say what the process was?"

He hadn't told me because I hadn't wanted to be told. I'd had more than enough of new processes. Now Tony would tell me if I didn't stop him, and then it would be time for my train out to Richmond. I gathered together my gloves and my handbag. My face could wait for later, for the cold summing-up on the train home. Already we were running out of isolation.

"Actually he did tell me. I suppose I tried to forget."

Tony, so distant, didn't see my lie. He put his hand across the table and onto mine, a gesture as much a part of the Spinning Wheel as its red gingham curtains or the genuine beam.

"You don't approve," he said.

"What's the use, Tony? You don't stop technical progress by not approving of it."

"There will be medical advantages, you know. With Synthajoy we'll be able to analyze deficiencies in—"

"Don't go on, Tony." Aching. Bleak. "You show the whole thing up so."

"Show it up?"

I couldn't bear him pretending he didn't understand. I took my hand away, began to put my gloves on. Fine black

leather, hand-stitched. Possessions were mattering a lot by then—they were all Edward gave me.

“We’re a part of the entertainment industry now, Tony. We’d better face it.”

“That’s not true. You oversimplify, Thea. Edward’s clinic does very fine work.”

“And the Governor’s Wife? Does she do very fine work?”

“You do what you can. The clinic is the one decent bit of Sensitape left. Without you it wouldn’t function.”

“The clinic is a face-saver.”

I knew I wasn’t being fair, not fair in the way I was blaming Tony. To stand up to Edward would have needed an equivalent ruthlessness. And even then, it wasn’t Edward who needed standing up to, but twenty million Sensitape users. That sort of strength would have made Tony different, a fanatic, a man whom I could never, warned by Edward, have loved.

“Leave it, shall we, Tony? It’s not worth quarreling about. We’re all caught up in the same thing—you should tell me not to be so bloody self-righteous.”

“Years ago—three years ago—when you were showing me the Richmond house for the first time, I told you then what was going to happen. Do you remember?”

“I prefer to remember that afternoon for something else you told me.”

“It does worry me, Thea. It worries me sick.”

“Tony—stay in your laboratory. Edward’s shoulders are broad enough for all of us.”

I stood up. He helped me into my coat. The dishonesty of what I had just said closed the subject, closed almost any subject. Otherwise he’d have told me again about the tigers and crocodiles, and the cage it was my responsibility to build against them. I’ve always thought it a nonsense, this in the world but separate from it, but I loved Tony far too much ever to argue.

Loved him too much. . . . This love then, does it make morality irrelevant? Does body take over, and soul, leaving conscience safely tucked away in the mind? I don’t like to think of my knowledge of right and wrong being situated entirely in my mind. It’s my mind that Doctor treats each

afternoon with guilt—yet he doesn't reach me, not the part of me capable of love. Love deeper than conscience? I know what Pastor Mannheim would have said. The trouble is, I don't know how he would have justified it.

The corridor has a carpet—I chose a lot here in the Kingston;—did I choose that carpet?—and a comfortable unstylish cupboard with a vase of flowers on it. Have the daffodils come from a hothouse or do they mean that outside it's spring? The Superintendent seems capable of knowing the importance of truth in such a matter. I can't tell from the few times I have met him how he would use that importance, though. The cupboard is slim against the wall so that nothing interrupts the full width of the carpet: it spoils the domestic effect, this clearway for trolleys. Still, the attempt is appreciated. Peace of mind, however evilly used, is a welcome gift. In the Kingston we give in almost without noticing. Dungeons and thumb-screws, while easier to fight, would be infinitely worse.

A warder is coming down the corridor. With his neat white coat and his glasses he might perfectly well be a young doctor, even a superior barber. That's probably a comb sticking up out of his top pocket. He looks at the strip of me he can see between the door and the jamb, and he smiles. Encouragingly. He sees a door painted ivory white, and the dark strip of an old woman with wild hair. He knows that the woman isn't old—he knows every single thing about her. He protects her from society and society from her. Feels himself a universal benefactor, smiles at her again. The old woman makes a face at him—perhaps the poor thing sees him as a warder—and closes the door.

Synthajoy. I suppose that was the first time I had heard the word. And I let it slide. Not wanting to know. And I gave the meeting next morning a miss for the same reason. And in the afternoon it was all. In the afternoon it was. In the afternoon it. I like this room.

I like my room. I dare like it because I know they haven't got any circuits capable of making me like it. With me they're at a disadvantage: Edward and I worked together so closely that I know everything he achieved, everything he planned to achieve. It was his work on prison reform that won him the Prize. This room is what it seems to be, and nothing more. And, most important, Sensitape has been found to have no post-experiential effect whatsoever. Their only hope is to establish a habit of feeling by long repetition. They subject me to guilt so that in the end I will need it like a drug. They. They do . . . I must avoid thinking of *me* and *them*; it's the beginning of a psychosis they'd love to foster.

I suppose I ought to be able to remember a time when I was in love with Edward. Perhaps I can. And even he with me—in his own way. That's a sour qualification, the patronizing dig of every aggrieved wife with not enough to be aggrieved about. Edward was in love with me, up to and even after the time when I stopped being in love with him.

Young Dr. Teddy Cadence. (He quickly ironed out the Teddy.) He'd been fascinated by the patterns of the electroencephalograph ever since his first days at medical school. No doubt they were all he talked about on our first date. I remember little of the occasion except the pain in my guts. There was a mild form of dysentery going around the hospital at the time—if he hadn't been considered a catch by the other young nurses I'd never have accepted his invitation. I have an impression of his mouth as he talked, and of his hands explaining things. Dr. Cadence used his hands a lot in those days—it was a habit he dealt with as he became more momentous. My only other recollection is of the sound made by the cistern in the Ladies'. The water fell from a great height, arriving with a thump. Rather like a bidet and, oh Lord, I needed it. I don't even remember very clearly where the dance was being held. The old Royal, I think, the tall hotel near Paddington



that was pulled down to make room for the thruway. So Edward talked about the electroencephalograph and I thought about how soon I would need to get back to that cistern.

The evening can't have been a success, but I got asked out again all the same. He said afterward it was my anxious expression—he'd thought at the time that it showed a serious mind, an earnest attempt to grapple with what he was propounding. He didn't often just talk; mostly he had some theory to batter you with. He wasn't the only one, of course—the hospital was full of young doctors and the young doctors were all full of theories. We nurses put up with the latter for the sake of the former. I don't think any of us sensed that Dr. Cadence was different from the others. I know I didn't, not that first evening. But he was handsome, and he wore his clothes well, and information from the teaching side said he would pass his examinations easily, distinctions all around, so I received that second invitation with a considerable sense of triumph. If I'd managed so to bewitch him when my attention was, to say the least, divided, what marvelous progress I would be able to make this next time. I might even be able to hear what he was saying. And perhaps even understand it.

"It's a question of electrical wavelengths, you see, Miss Springfield."

Springfield. I can see him and hear him precisely. He had a beautifully shaped voice even then—perhaps his later work on it made it too beautiful. Thea Springfield.

"It's a question of electrical wavelengths, you see, Miss Springfield."

I'd forgotten all about Thea Springfield. It needed the name in his voice, young, to remind me. I've been making the mistake of remembering past events clearly and then placing myself in them as I am now, thirty-two, tired, deadened by experience that should not be mistaken for wisdom. Experience is like lead, a lead for which the philosophers' stone really exists. Twelve years ago I possessed neither, neither gold nor the base metal from which gold may be made. Twelve years ago I had hardly begun.

"I know about electrical wavelengths, Dr. Cadence." Thea

Cadence really did. "They're the impulses the brain emits all the time it's working. They form patterns we can record and measure and analyze."

"Measure? You call it measure, Miss Springfield?"

I must forget the ways I learned later of dealing with his scorn.

This was Thea Springfield's second date, the one that's supposed to be so important. And she had thought she was doing well.

"I've seen the encephalograph at work, Dr. Cadence. Mr. Deighton analyzed some of the graphs for us."

"And what did he tell you? 'At this point, ladies, the patient opened his eyes.' (It was a good imitation.) 'At this point he closed them. At this point he went to sleep. And here, ladies, is the reading for an epileptic fit.' Is that what you call measurement?"

"He showed us other things too. When the patient became angry, for instance." So eager.

"That's not measurement, Miss Springfield. I look at your dress, I perceive that it is blue. I go further—I say it is dark blue. Have I in any way measured the quality of blueness that your dress possesses?"

Her main thought at this point was pleasure that he'd noticed her dress. To cover this she sought words that would show she was intelligent.

"Aren't colors subjective, Dr. Cadence? I mean, doesn't each person have his own idea of what they are? Like greeny blue or bluey green, for instance."

"I do know what subjective means, Miss Springfield."

She didn't find his manners insufferable. He was Dr. Cadence, and he'd asked her out to dinner. I expect she fiddled with her knife and fork, and cursed herself for being gauche.

"Actually, Miss Springfield, you've accidentally put your finger on the big fault in my analogy." She brightened, in spite of the accidentally. "Although colors do in fact exist as light waves easily measurable with present-day instruments, the electrical waves emitted by the brain are never likely to be so easily systematized. The machine sensitive enough, subtle enough to measure these would need to be

as sensitive and subtle as the brain that was emitting them.”

At future meetings, parties and student sociables, Thea Springfield was to hear this preamble many times. Otherwise it would never have remained so word-perfect.

“Perhaps then brain waves are in fact to some extent—using your own word, Miss Springfield—subjective. Existing only in relation to the brain that emits them.” He leaned forward, his tie trailing unheeded in his food. “Or in relation to another brain perhaps, Miss Springfield?”

The lift in his voice told her that something was expected of her. She tried to be sober and sensible and adult.

“Your tie’s in your gravy, Dr. Cadence,” she said.

I wonder why he persevered with her, a third year psychiatric nurse who could so monumentally miss so monumental a point. Later on, as young Mrs. Cadence, she looked back and decided that it must have been the blue dress after all. My present perspective offers a second, more flattering reason. He didn’t bore her. She was the only one of all the nurses who unconsciously recognized his potential—not the potential in his theory, the potential in him. When a man has recognized his own potential he likes his woman to recognize it also. So it wasn’t the blue dress, or the breasts it showed to such fine advantage. Ultimately it was her perceptiveness that won her Dr. Cadence for a husband.

But she was looking for love. She was looking for Regent’s Park with Tony. It’s not tragic that she, that I, should have had to look so hard, not even surprising. Thea Springfield drifted into love too naturally, too easily, too much without pain. Every day was a marvel. The excitement of being alive overwhelmed thought, so that she moved in a state of heightened unconsciousness, of gloriously unheeded revelation. And everything went right for her. Even sex. So that right from the beginning she

Now that the wardress is gone I'll see to my hair. It's not important that I should avoid looking mad—with my presumed kind of madness and with my known background of self-discipline, the maddest thing I could do would be to avoid looking mad. In all I must be careful to do whatever I do for its own sake and nothing else. To consider its effect on the received ideas of Doctor or Mrs. Craig is obviously idiotic. I sit here doing my hair because brushing my hair, feeling the tug, scratching my ear with the coarse brush bristles, I sit here tilting my head against the pull, because watching the dark hair flow like water, rush in a shining torrent, separate at the rock of my shoulder and pour on down the front of my hospital dress, down almost to my waist, I sit here doing my hair because . . . because I am not yet ready to think of Thea Springfield and sex. Because there's too much in the way.

Dr. X and his wife had an appointment for seven-thirty in the evening. I remember the time so precisely because they were late. He worked at a hospital over on the other side of town and hadn't been able to get away as early as he'd expected. Edward and I hadn't yet moved out to Richmond of course—we were still using the consulting room provided by the hospital. Edward wasn't even a consultant then, merely one of the hospital's team of psychiatrists. They worked him very hard. But he'd got me off the wards as his assistant by then, and neither of us minded the hard work.

I'd been in the outer office catching up on paperwork, case histories to be duplicated and the file to be brought up to date. After seven the hospital quieted down. I liked working there, being contained by its power—in the evenings this power was somehow more apparent: the stillness of the enormous building, and the small noises, expressed it more personally to me than the obvious activity of the days. I worked at my neat files, the strength of the hospital humming in the silence. At seven-thirty I buzzed Edward to

warn him to expect Dr. X and his wife. There was no answer, so I went through to see if he was still there. His room had its own door onto the corridor; sometimes patients preferred to leave without running the gauntlet of me.

He had on a Sensitape headset, the new lightweight unit Tony had recently perfected. He appeared to be asleep—Sensitape subjects always do. The tape was turning slowly, an advanced relaxation tape we had recorded some months earlier, from a Yoga expert.

I turned the volume down very slowly. It was almost sad to see how peaceful he was. I loved him then, married love, a structure seven years deep and still only on the edge of self-awareness. Around point two on the dial he roused.

"What's the time?" he said. "Are they here?"

"Not yet," I said. "Something must have held them up."

He took my hand and squeezed it.

"I was only showing off. No side effects, my mind instantly as sharp as a razor."

"You feel better now? Not tired?"

"I've been wondering, Thea, about habituation dangers. To have the day's jangle so completely smoothed; it's an effect I could easily become hooked on. Would it be a bad thing if I did?"

"It shows you how, Edward. Then in time you don't need it."

This was Sensitape dogma. Necessary in those days when Edward did more than nod at morality in passing. If patients experienced the prescribed emotional state often enough they had something to build on, to work toward on their own account. He drew my hand up and rubbed the side of his face with it.

"It's marvelous, Thea. An emotional state it took Grainger forty years to achieve—now I can plug into it just like that."

"Of course it's marvelous. But it's not for you to say so."

"I don't see why not. Sensitape is like a painting. For the artist a painting grows, makes itself almost, so that really all the artist is entitled to feel is a sort of gratitude." He looked up at me, suddenly concerned. "I'm not noticeably conceited, Thea, am I?"

I told him he wasn't. As he moved about the room getting

ready I thought about it. I watched him take out the sherry. No, he wasn't conceited—he was too ambitious to be conceited. Ambitious for his machine, I thought, not for himself. He fetched his white coat from the back of the door and I helped him put it on.

"Formalization," he said, apologizing. "This interview's got to be impersonal. Wearing my uniform will help."

Was it then love, me so aware of his imperfections that he had to apologize for them? Tony in Regent's Park was without imperfections. Tony in Regent's Park simply was. We both heard a knock on the door of the outside office. I went to let Dr. X and his wife in, Edward calling me back.

"This is going to be important, Thea. Listen in on the intercom, will you? Better still, record the whole meeting. I don't want there to be any misunderstandings."

I left him nervously straightening the furniture. The consulting room was comfortable precisely to the scale laid down by the hospital management committee. No desk for the psychiatrist to hide behind—it had been decided that desks gave a fatal employer/applicant, headmaster/malcontent atmosphere. The room had dusty orange wallpaper, a sage green carpet, a coffee table and several not too low armchairs. Our particular coffee table had a finely produced volume on Egyptian archaeology and—as a really domestic touch—a copy of *Radio Times*. The medical machinery was hidden in something that might have been a hi-fi cabinet—the intercom, the hypnophone, Sensitape, the various recorders for voice, blood pressure, respiration and so on. The final effect was perhaps of the waiting room to a not very prosperous airline.

And my room? The room over my shoulder in the mirror? I know too much to be able to find it as pleasant as I should. It's hardly more than painted scenery to me, for I know the spec. behind it and the squabbling behind the spec. "We're not running a luxury hotel, Mr. Chairman," and the painstaking explanations. I can remember the battle fought for the window seat, for the washbasin's fancy taps. It gives them a tenuous hold; things could so easily be taken away. No, not taken. Voted.

Dr. X was large and scrubbed, analysis of his audition tapes killing forever the notion that big men are undersexed. His wife looked more conventionally bedworthy, long-legged and plump and slightly greasy. I look through a today-shaped hole, of course.

I showed them into Edward's office, returned to mine and switched on the intercom. I loaded the recorder with a fresh spool. I've listened to the conversation that followed many times. Of the four of us present it was Dr. X who would forget it first, his memory cut short by death.

I had missed the first few words.

Edward. . . . good of you both to come. Please sit down. Make yourself at home—this is going to take some time so you'd better be comfortable.

Dr. X. I'm afraid we're rather late. Joan made me have supper after coming off the ward. Otherwise we'd have been here sooner.

Mrs. X. Well, Dr. Cadence, you know how it is . . . important interview this—no use coming to it on an empty stomach.

There's an American inflection here. So it's to be an Anglo-American effort. How suitable.

Edward. You believe in feeding the body, Mrs. X. (She makes an indeterminate noise, not knowing how to take him.)

No, I mean it. Women who take food seriously are very often the most wholehearted sexual partners.

Dr. X. Is that a statistical fact, Dr. Cadence?

Edward. Inspired intuition, Dr. X. Often more valuable than whole pages of statistics.

I'd learned something. Up till then I'd always felt a sense of humor to be a great help in bed. Dr. X got fine results without it.

Dr. X. I'll remember that, Dr. Cadence.

Edward. Sherry for you both?

(The glasses clink.)

The first thing I suppose I ought to do is congratulate you on the results of all your

preliminary auditions. As I'm sure you've been told, they were quite outstanding.

Mrs. X. It's how we were made, Dr. Cadence. We fitted, right from the very first time.

I wonder if it's hindsight that makes me detect a speculative note in her voice even then? Certainly there's no sign in Edward's voice that he noticed anything.

Edward. It places you two in a very responsible position, Mrs. X. No doubt you realize this.

Dr. X. (clears his throat) All this 'Mrs. X' and 'Dr. X'—it seems a bit like a spy story. Couldn't we get down to names? I'm—

Edward. Please. I don't know your name, and I don't want to. I consider it vital that to everybody involved in this project—even myself—you should both remain anonymous.

Dr. X. We were told that our names wouldn't appear on the tape sleeve. That seemed reasonable. It was just that—

Mrs. X. I'm sure Dr. Cadence is right, dear. If nobody, but nobody knows our names, then if they ever get out then we'll know who to blame, won't we?

Edward. They must not get out, Mrs. X. Apart from questions of medical etiquette, this measure also is for your own protection. Public opinion on our project is bound to be divided. There will be sections of the community, those with warped minds, who will sling all the mud they can gather. We must do everything we can, Dr. X, to protect you and your wife from these attacks.

There is an awkward pause. Obviously the X's have been so busy congratulating themselves that they've never thought of this. Edward lets it sink in, then continues.

Edward. I was talking about your responsible position. You've already said this was an important interview. Why important? Important for whom?

Mrs. X. Important for humanity, of course.



Edward. You answer off the top of your head, Mrs. X. You really have thought about what you're doing? You're convinced that it's right?

Dr. X. She understands completely, Dr. Cadence. (His voice becomes incantatory.) To show sexually disturbed or inadequate people the feel of real sex—the successful heterosexual experience, I mean—will be a major step toward curing them. A major step toward the elimination of sexual neuroses in society.

What he offers is a close paraphrase of the handout circulated by Edward around the profession in his search for audition subjects. Edward must be noticing the similarity, for he sighs. I can imagine him reminding himself that Dr. X and his wife have been chosen for their sexual rather than their intellectual prowess.

Edward. I have an agreement here for you both to sign. (Rustle of Agreement.)

Briefly, it establishes that the patent in this method of recording electrical brainwaves for the purpose of subsequent playback into another individual who will then experience the emotion and sensation as they were recorded, reposes in myself. As do all rights in any such tapes as you or your wife may make. Also there is a pledge that you both preserve your anonymity for a minimum period of fifty years.

Dr. X. That sounds reasonable. We want nothing out of it for ourselves. Nothing at all.

Edward. But before you sign it I want you both to think very carefully. You must be absolutely convinced that what you are doing is right. Morally right.

Mrs. X. We have thought about it, Dr. Cadence. The advancement of medical research, it's a moral duty everybody has.

Again the slick phrase. They don't understand how carefully Edward is choosing his words.

**Edward.** For an initial period, determinable at my discretion, any tapes of yours that I may preserve will be used exclusively by accredited students and for the treatment of certain psychiatric conditions that have failed to respond to more conventional methods. We are not peddling cheap thrills. Whatever royalty may be paid for the use of such tapes will be devoted to financing further research into the development of Sensitape techniques.

**Dr. X.** Where do we sign?

**Edward.** It's a serious step, Dr. X. If you would rather consult a solicitor before signing I will quite understand.

**Dr. X.** I told you, we want nothing out of it. If ever anything was wrong, it'd be to take money for a thing like this.

**Mrs. X.** Prostitution, that's what it'd be.

**Dr. X.** So if we don't want anything, then we can't be diddled. It's as simple as that.

Poor scrubbed young man. And his hot wife. Innocents, both of them. I can't blame him—at that time I'd been married to Edward for seven years and I still believed in his devotion to the advancement of medical research.

**Edward.** In that case I shall send for my secretary to witness your signatures. As soon as you have both signed, fold the sheet over where marked. That way neither she nor I will know your identities. You will keep one copy, and the other will be placed in a sealed envelope in my personal safe. Understood?

(A pause in which presumably they nod.)

**Edward.** (loud) Thea—could you come in please?

**Thea.** At once, Dr. Cadence.

My own voice. I was there all the time. I was present. Involved. Unavoidably responsible. Believing in him should not have been enough. An excuse comes to mind, that of the guard in the concentration camp: what could I have done? What notice would they have taken of me? But I

ought at least to have doubted. I ought not to have had to wait for the more superficial horrors that came later. The merely electronic obscenity of the recording session.

I looked down on the recording van from the window of Dr. X's flat. The block, one of a small group, was in a development area where vehicles were not normally allowed. For the Residents' Association we produced a good cover story. The van was lettered B.B.C., Edward and I were interviewers, Tony was the B.B.C. engineer. Dr. X was taking part in a proposed sound feature about the hospital where he worked. All perfectly plausible, nothing to connect it with the Sextape that would finally be produced. Dr. X—I still think of him as that, even though I did finally, after he was dead, find out his real name.

The van stood on the large rectangular lawn in the center of the three-story block. There was a dark pond and beside it a laburnum tree shifting its kite tails in the moonlight. The window in the side of the van shone an electric bright square onto the sage-colored grass. Down there I could imagine Tony Stech overhauling his circuits. For this recording two simultaneous tracks had to be used—he'd built a special control unit for the job. I called him Tony Stech in those days, both names in order to mock, in order never to have to take seriously. Tony Stech.

Above the flat roofs of the building across the court the city sky was faintly orange. And it flashed occasionally.

Inside the bedroom the lights were discreet. I don't know why I was there. I certainly needn't have been. Two thick shiny cables, contrasting vividly with the pink beige bedroom carpet, lay across the floor to the window. They moved secretly as Edward adjusted the headset panel. Dr. and Mrs. X were already in their night clothes and I offered to help them with their headsets. They didn't need help, not after their preliminary auditions. They were sitting on the edge of the bed and it was evident through his pajamas that Dr. X had an

It's nearly teatime. After my daily session with Doctor my wardress always leaves me for half an hour or so, then brings my tea. Perhaps I am supposed to need the interval in order to recover from what Doctor has done to me. This is ridiculous, of course, for what he does makes no impression at all. He feeds me guilt when I have been borne down by guilt for too many years. Later my wardress feeds me with bread and butter and cake and tea (sedated). If only she fed me with gingerbread then there might be material for a joke. Something to do with Gingerbread and Guilt. My wardress would appreciate a joke—it would show a change in my attitude of mind. . . . Everybody watches you, so very soon you watch yourself. Even if you were not egocentric to begin with, a fortnight in here would make you so. I wonder if I began watching myself before coming here, or after. Just before, I think. Up to then I had always watched others. Now I watch myself. I watch myself putting the table ready for my tea when my wardress brings it. I sneak a glance at myself, colorless old woman, in the unbreakable mirror.

Everything here is unbreakable, molded, blunt, harmless. Obliquely this fact cheers me: perhaps one day they contemplate doing something to me positive enough to make me want to kill myself. And I won't be able to.

Oh look, I was right. Here's tea. Goody.

"You may put the tray there, Wardress."

I know what it is. I speak to her as if she behaved as I'm always afraid she will. And she rarely does. She's rarely brisk, or sensible, or heavily maternal. In fact, she's

probably a very intelligent woman. So I shouldn't talk to her the way I do at all.

"I wonder if you'd like to start taking a daily paper, Mrs. Cadence? It might bring you out of yourself a little."

"I thought Doctor had forbidden it."

"I can always say I thought he meant only at the beginning. When there were still reports of the trial to upset you."

"Not very responsible of you to go against Doctor's orders."

"I see you more than he does. Besides, I'm a woman."

How right she is. Like me, she squats to pee. I'd like to believe there's nothing more to it than that. But the power of our shared sex is often overwhelming. So I separate her off by calling her my wardress.

"You can bring me what you like, of course. I can't possibly stop you."

"You know damn well you can, Mrs. Cadence. You can tell on me to Doctor."

So down to earth. (I wonder if even the "damn" was calculated.) It leaves me nothing to dramatize. And it shows that in some small way she's willing to put herself in my power. I shall be trustworthy and at the same time incorruptible. I shall let her bring the paper and I shall not read it.

"I'd never tell on you. At least you're slightly more on my side than Doctor is."

"You're always trying to convince yourself of things that aren't true, Mrs. Cadence. We're all on your side in the Kingston."

We're all on your side in the Kingston. Rumpetty, tumpetty

"It doesn't always seem so. Not from where I'm standing."

"Perhaps not. But your treatment, for example—don't you find the tape is helping you?"

"To discuss a patient's treatment with her is against the rules."

"But—"

"You forget that my husband set this place up. I probably know more about the Kingston even than you do."

I cannot bear confidences. Not with my wardress. We've got to face each other for a long time to come. Distance between us is essential.

She fiddles awkwardly with the teapot. It's almost as if I had physically hurt her. I can imagine that in different circumstances she'd be an attractive woman. The way she does her hair softens the square shape of her face. And her brown eyes often contradict the professional line of her mouth. Just now they're worried. She looks down at the teapot, then up at me. Now that I'm officially psychotic I can stare at people without myself feeling any embarrassment. It's a sour pleasure, one of the few left. My stare disconcerts her, for I suspect that she knows my real mental condition only too well. She may even have realized that I am aware of the contents of the teapot.

"You're wrong not to trust me, Mrs. Cadence." She pulls the folds of her overall, herself together. "But that's your loss. Come and drink up your tea now, while it's hot."

"I don't feel like tea today." A little game with her. "In fact, I don't think I'll have anything, thank you."

"I'll take it away then."

"You do that."

"It interests me, Mrs. Cadence." She still hasn't picked up the tray. "I'd like to know why you so often pretend irrational behavior."

She will persist in dealing so directly with me. It pushes me further and further off.

"I wouldn't call this irrational. People don't always want tea at teatime. Sometimes they may prefer coffee instead."

Will she offer coffee? She picks up the tray and starts for the door. I see now that it's a situation she can perfectly well deal with in another way later on. Just give me a pill. So much less dignified, to meet her eyes and take it.

"Bring the tray back, please. I'll drink the tea, now that you've brought it."

I pour the tea out for myself, thin and golden and faintly musty. The room is close-carpeted, its corners rounded for

ease of sweeping. The door wouldn't slam for the air so excellently contained. There is bread and butter, a small pot of jam, and two round coconut cakes on a plastic plate. There is a linen tray-cloth—such an odd attempt at the homey, so strangely out of date.

My wardress doesn't bother to watch whether I drink the tea or not. She goes out, obeying her instructions not to make the patients feel awkward about their meals. If I'm not sedated by the time she returns for the tray, there are plenty of pills. For what purpose will I have gained an extra ten minutes of awareness? I expect they know best; no doubt the half hour prescribed for me between treatment and tea is the most that is good for me. I add milk and a very little sugar, then drink. Two cups. Tomorrow's return will be my new day. Waking is painless, masked by the treatment. I eat my bread and butter without jam, and then one of the cakes. My comfort lies in knowing precisely what they are doing to me. The drug creeps in like a mist. So that I can't.

## DAY 26

The sound of the doors of the treatment room flapping shut behind me comes as a slight shock. So the day's treatment is already over. This is my first gulp of reality. It saves me from drowning; why don't I receive it with joy? Enthusiasm. I must muster enthusiasm.

My wardress leads me by the hand as if we were both girls. Curiously sympathetic, I come near to giving in. But the association is wrong, of someone whose name I won't remember. It leads down a hot school corridor to a situation I can't remember. Only the corridor, glass on one side looking over a patch of grass with a lily pond to tennis courts, three boys and a girl playing a sort of mixed doubles, and the resonance of bare tiles and walls and the smell of gym shoes and someone's scent, and this cool soft corridor smells carelessly of nothing. It's comfortable not to be able to remember.

"I've brought you a newspaper as I said I would." Bold on account of the close fit of the door behind us. "There's been an accident on the Manchester Monorail. There's nothing like a good healthy interest in disasters."

"Thank you."

"I've also spoken to Doctor about moving you into a ward. He's going to put it to the Committee."

Edward chose every single member of the Committee. How deeply responsible they'll feel.

"Doctor's being more reasonable, Mrs. Cadence. He let me put your headset on. You'll find your hair is quite undisturbed today."

"You always do what you say you will."

"Of course I do. If you've had any training at all you'll know for yourself how important to the patient it is."



"We present each other with problems, Mrs. Craig. You're afraid I know too much so you pretend to treat me as an equal. For myself, I'm not sure if you know everything, or nothing at all."

"So you pretend to treat me as an inferior. It's quite understandable."

An error, to be so knowing. She'll worry about it afterward, realizing that I won.

"There's a concert in a few days' time, Mrs. Cadence." She opens the door into my room. "If you'd like to go to it I'll ask Doctor. I'm sure it could be arranged."

"You know I can't stand music."

"I know you have an irrational fear of it."

"Not fear. Revulsion."

I close the door behind us myself. She doesn't suggest that my differentiation was false. Thank God such simplifications are over between us.

"It's a neurotic symptom, Mrs. Cadence, that I believe you will find you have grown out of."

"Paul Cassavetes hasn't grown out of it."

"You're being melodramatic. He was a very old man."

"He was a very great musician."

Which is why he was a natural choice.

"Which is why he was a natural choice."

A Sensitape made by him would have been of historic value.

"A Sensitape made by him would have been of historic value."

"He was a great man, Mrs. Craig. He had something none of you will ever understand about."

"Shouting is unsuitable, Mrs. Cadence. Unsuitable for you, I mean."

She's wrong, of course. For me in some situations there is only shouting. In others bullets, so some say.

"Edward hounded him."

"Dr. Cadence pursued a vision."

"And the effect of Edward's vision on Paul?"

"Like the effect of your vision on Edward, perhaps."

She calls him Edward for neatness of phrase, which is offensive. Her theory—a polite word for hope—is that what

she thinks I did to Edward may have cured my hatred for what he did to Paul. But to have killed Edward would have cured nothing. So many things I ought to do, ought to feel differently. Now she reads into my silence God knows what.

"I'll tidy your room, Mrs. Cadence. I've left the paper on the end of the bed for you to read."

Three-pronged. To help her or to read the paper—either would show a weakening. While to do neither would be childish.

"Did you ever meet my husband, Mrs. Craig?"

"I heard him lecture on several occasions."

Conversation. The last thing she must have expected.

"People used to say he lectured very well. I knew him too intimately to be able to judge."

"He lectured brilliantly." Tweak, tweak, tweak on the curtains. "His sense of pace was faultless. He seemed to know exactly when he was going over and when he wasn't. He must have had a sort of thermometer with which he constantly took the mental temperature of the audience."

"That's interesting. So he was good with masses. He was quite hopeless with individuals."

She'll have to allow some level of criticism. She takes her time, fills in by picking up clothes and putting them away.

"You'll agree that he was a great champion of the individual, Mrs. Cadence. Nobody who wasn't could ever have invented Sensitape."

Cant. So I lose interest.

I stare at myself in the mirror, at the hair my wardress has been careful not to mess. This, of course, is Edward's great achievement; he brought all the implications of Sensitape down to the simple doubt as to whether it would mess up a person's hair or not. He helped us to get our priorities right. He gave us the means with which to have mental stability. Now we concentrate on our hair.

"I'll just go and get your tea, Mrs. Cadence."

She must be used to losing me somewhere in mid-flow. To losing all her patients.

"Mrs. Craig, at the moment have you any other people you're . . . looking after?"

"Good gracious yes, Mrs. Cadence. Five others. Staggered consciousness periods, of course. You're not the only pebble on the beach by any means."

A comfort? Or a warning? Or just another of her exit lines . . .

Eyes staring into eyes staring into eyes staring into eyes. With brain at one end of the exchange to give it an extra nudge. Interesting to imagine uncertainty as to which end. Me looking at myself or myself looking at me. But I'm not there yet. Acoustically the effect would produce a crescendo feeding on itself. They shut me in my own system of hard-back weeks ago. But I can still look away. It's as simple as that.

Neat washbasin, neat taps, neat paper towel. And a neat plastic foam mat to catch the drips. Edward didn't invent Sensitape. The vision may have been his, but the actual process of invention was Tony's. If the two hadn't come together the thing would never have happened.

Old Jacob Stech was Edward's patient. He'd been admitted to hospital in the final stages of UDW—Uncompensated Death Wish, a terminal condition prevalent in those days. So common that we in the trade simply knew it by its initials. Like TB or VD or MS it was a complex condition needing diagnostic subheadings. On his admission card Jacob Stech's action was described as Archetypal. Archetypal UDW. He was an archetypal old man—old Jew, to be more precise.

He was a bed patient of course, since by the time he came into our care he was too weak to be kept up and about. He stayed cheerfully in the end bed of Ward K and watched, with us, the course of his Archetypal UDW. And, like us, he was in no doubt as to the final outcome. We got him eating again fairly quickly—his former starvation had been rather from neglect than from intent. When you've decided to die eating becomes pointless. But he gave into our persuasions out of innate courtesy, and dutifully gained weight. When his son came to visit him, the young man was delighted.

Edward took him to his office afterward. The same office that modernized would be used four years later by Dr. X and his wife.

"Mr. Stech, I judge you to be a man who would like to be told the truth. In my opinion close relatives have a right to know these things, especially when the patient himself so obviously knows. Your father is very sick. With medical science at its present stage he will die within a matter of weeks."

"I don't understand. Since coming here he looks so much better."

"We're feeding him up, Mr. Stech. In this way his body fights his mind. But we have found that the body never wins in these cases. Our technique is to prolong the struggle as long as possible in the hope that something external may happen to change the mind. It's an inadequate treatment, and in my experience it never works."

"Last time I came you told me he'd made up his mind to die. There must be some reason for this. He's always seemed so happy."

"In Archetypal UDW there are never any discernible reasons for the decision—this is what gives it its 'A' classification. The others, the neurotic conditions, are much more easy to deal with."

"I suppose it's a sort of short circuit, Doctor. So that life becomes the reason for death."

I remember Edward looking up sharply from his papers, then across at me. The familiar conversation had taken a new turning.

"Exactly so, Mr. Stech. And a malaise as deep as that is inaccessible to any of our present techniques. Shock treatment, hypnosis, narcosis, nothing reaches far enough in."

"Then my father is going to die."

"I'm afraid so."

Stripped of technicalities, the words were violent. Tony weathered them, frail-looking though he was in the days before he had found a center. I'd seen him and his father together—there was a feeling between them my hospital experience had already shown me to be peculiarly Jewish. It certainly wasn't callousness that gave Tony his strength.

"Let me understand you properly, Doctor." The occasion forced a formality on him. "You are not trying to say that my father will finally commit suicide?"

"Not as we at present understand the word. One day he will simply cease to live. All we can say is that there is a determination quite separate from the mind. With our present equipment we cannot touch it. We cannot even detect its presence. His body is as fit as yours or mine. And so, as far as we can tell, is his mind."

The office was not as grand, not as insidious as it came to be later. Desk, upright chairs, examination couch, five instructions on the wall, three filing cabinets and an unobtrusive table behind the door holding teacups and an electric kettle. If it was a room that made not enough effort to be nice, it was at least a room without a devious, psychiatric purpose. The subtle rooms existed even then, of course, in the suites of private consultants where you paid for what you got. Tony Stech stared at the burnished floor of our little office, moved one foot along a join in the linoleum.

"Perhaps the world has got to be too much for him. Poor old man. . . . The papers say UDW rates are mounting."

"Statistics are difficult. But it's safe to say that there's been a marked increase in the first three months of this year alone."

Tony Stech was silent. I was to find out later how fervently he believed in life—UDW to him was utterly shocking, utterly inconceivable. He believed in life . . . how else can I describe the passion with which he took, turned over in his hands every experience the world offered him?

"It shows you how close we still are to the primitive," he said at last. "Natives have been doing this sort of thing for centuries."

"You must come and visit your father whenever you like, Mr. Stech." Edward stood up. He was admittedly overworked. "You can see we're doing our best for him. He's quite contented, and I'm sure your visits cheer him up."

"How long will it be?"

"Two weeks. Three at the most."

"I'll call every day." He began putting on his gloves, for it was cold outside, had been snowing. "I suppose I ought to thank you, Doctor, for being so frank with me."

"Not at all. My name is Cadence. Any time you want to, come and have a talk with me."

Again silence. Edward glanced unobtrusively at his watch.

"Is my father right, Dr. Cadence? Is the world really such a rotten place to be alive in?"

"I'd hardly be a doctor if I believed that. Now, if you don't mind . . ."

They turned. Tony Stech saw me, probably for the first time.

"And thank you, nurse. My father has already told me of you in his letters. We both appreciate your kindness very much."

And I, no longer Thea Springfield, still couldn't find enough voice to answer. I nodded up and down and smiled grotesquely, as if to a deaf person. He didn't smile back. Why should he; there was nothing to smile at. He made something almost a little bow to Edward, and went out. His slowly fading footsteps kept him in the room with us just that much longer.

"An interesting young man," Edward said. "A powerful personality. What does the file say about his job, Thea? I wonder what he does for a living."

The file was reticent. His job was the same as that of his father—shopkeeper. Then the telephone rang, calling Edward away. And Sister sent word, wanting me to help with a shock therapy. The feeling of strangeness and yet of recognition that had been in the office was gone, and even very quickly forgotten.

At that time there was still an excellent chance that Tony might have escaped, might have missed his share in the glory, might never have come to love Dr. Cadence's wife and ultimately be loved by her in return, might never have been destroyed by what he had helped to make. Which of course is melodramatic nonsense. Tony was never destroyed. He never could be.

Seventeen days later it became clear that Jacob Stech was ready to die. During the afternoon the sight retreated

from his eyes, not blindness but rather the choice not to see. It was a bitter evening, snow piled against ward windows as I went around drawing the curtains. To me, never ill in my life, insulated by my own vitality, the brightness of the ward was reassuring. I arranged to do night duty. The old man would die in the lost hours between two and four. His son had been that morning, had probably known. An obscure selfishness made me not call him, almost as if I wanted the death all for myself.

The windows in the double doors at the end of the darkened ward glowed a dull yellow, two small discs of light. The patients had all settled by eleven, a barbiturate calm, close, storm-heavy, immovable. I'd accepted his refusal of the tiny pale cylinders without comment. Now I stood at the foot of his bed and watched his light sleep, and its contentment. Expecting him to wake, maybe I brought it about. He frowned, and opened his eyes. He saw very clearly.

"I tell you," he said, "we manage to do one big thing. We give the children a whole lot of happiness. It's my big consolation."

"More than just our children, Mr. Stech."

Not understanding, I shouldn't have spoken. After that I don't know why he bothered.

"We have a saying, nurse. It is the only thing that bothers me. We say that dying makes a space for the new life, for the new life that's waiting."

I think I kept silent. He smiled, sorry for me.

"You're thinking that's what's wrong all the time. All the time too much coming in, and not enough spaces, not enough dying. But that's not it. That's not it at all." He held his hands out to me, cupped a little, elbows close to his sides. "The night is a long time for you. So maybe you wouldn't mind talking a little?"

"Of course not. I'd be very glad to."

"Then sit down here, close beside me, so I don't have to shout. Oh, I know nothing wakes those who sleep here in the hospital. All the same, the middle of the night is for being close, and for whispering like children."

I sat by the head of his bed, took his hand. Even then I think I realized who was comforting whom.

"You see, nurse, God could provide. God could provide so easily. What is quantity? I ask you, when you are God, what is quantity?"

Trying to talk his language, I mentioned the Christian parable of the loaves and the fishes.

"I know it. Don't I know it? When you are God—twice times two, it doesn't matter. But quality—that is where you begin to feel the shoe pinching. No good quality, not the right stuff at all. You understand what I'm saying?"

Footsteps passed in the corridor, growing and fading with dream-like slowness. He allowed the dream to complete itself.

"All this interests me, nurse, knowing I will soon die."

The words shocked me. A child such as he was should be afraid of death. I justified this. The unknown is always frightening, I said.

"What I mean, nurse, is that I examine this knowledge. I try to remember when it came, and how. In my shop the days are very much the same. How do I know when I have had enough? Only one day I do know, and my dinner is there for me, and I say to Tony, 'No dinner for me today, Tony.' And he thinks I am ill and in the end he sends for the doctor."

"He was quite right to, Mr. Stech. You were ill. You still are."

"Do I feel ill? Do I look ill? Don't I know best if I am ill or not?"

"Your mind is ill. Nobody dies unless they're ill or very, very old."

"It's not me that's ill. Not me at all."

The words of his sickness. Now that I understand them so well, are they only the words of my own sickness? I recognized him as a happy man, but denied him a right to this happiness. I thought him happy because he was dying. I know now he was dying because he was happy—dying for the sake of his happiness, if you like. Thea Cadence then and Thea Cadence now.

"What about your son?" I said. "Doesn't he still need you?"



"You go ask him, my girl. After I am gone you go ask my son if he still needs me. Tony will go up, all the way. Tony needs nobody."

The dim light above his bed left shadows under his eyebrows, so that I scarcely saw the sharp movement of his eyes as he looked sideways at me. I wondered if he was wanting me to correct him. I watched the light motionless on the white bedrails down to the end of the ward and the two yellow dials. I was young and I denied him my honesty.

"Not true, of course." He corrected himself instead, sadly. "We are put in this world to need people, and my God we do need people. Tony needs in a different way, that's all. You go ask him."

It's hysterical, this feeling that all my life has been spent in hospitals, and quite false. I can remember holidays, and journeys. And after Sensitape was a success hardly a sight of a hospital for three whole years. And the journeys, their reasons—conferences, consultations, holidays—quite forgotten in the joy of mechanical progress. I can call it nothing else, just an acute pleasure in being propelled along the ground at great speed, at seeing people for whom I could by no stretch of the imagination be held responsible, and places that were, decorative or ugly, gloriously irrelevant. This progress had to be mechanical, for nothing else would have been separate enough, fast enough. I remember a trip to Bristol, a meeting at the neurological center there, and the tour around Wales afterward, the hills we roared up and the uncontainable views like clouds streaming by.

Edward drove very well. He didn't do everything well—I was never besotted enough to think that—but he had a great mechanical competence, getting the best out of whatever machine he was presented with. In his hands the various cars did all that the makers said they would, and more, from the old Austin up through the Rovers and Lancias to the big Chev-Bentley of his tycoon years. That

was the car I wrapped around a Keep Left sign on the night of

Traveling. An activity magnificent in its own right. Never merely a means of getting there. Traveling. A means of not being where you were before. A time when nothing is expected of you.

To understand—is it inevitably to judge? Is it inevitable that I should sour past joy by declaring its reasons to be unworthy? And anyway, what is this sanctimonious word? It comforts, for it assumes in the first place worth, and then a fall from worth. It also feeds and is fed by luxurious guilt, which—as Doctor well knows each time he gives it me—is wholly destructive. And I really thought my treatments weren't affecting me.

Better to go back to Tony. And Tony's need.

I got his address from the file and went to see him that same morning, as soon as I had eaten some breakfast after coming off duty. His father had died at two fifty-seven, the death I had been so eager to be in at. I'm glad now to say that his dignity denied all possibility of trespass. I learned nothing and felt nothing and should not have expected either. His body was taken away for postmortem examination. As I left the office after consulting the file I saw UDW penciled in on the death certificate in Edward's neat handwriting.

Stech and Son turned out to be a radio and television shop, covering the more expensive end of the trade. I hesitated outside, shuffling my feet in the thawing slush of the night's snowfall and shading my eyes to see the goods in the window, the color TV sets, video tape recorders, cameras, wrist radios, hi-fis. Jacob Stech had liked a lot of light—it was one of those shops one dreaded to enter. Its deathly fluorescence beamed out onto the dirty snow. My eyes hurt, their pupils unable to contract enough. And a minute before I had found the gray light of the morning depressing.

I went in, my skin prickly. The shop was warm and in spite of the lights I began to feel better.

"Miss?"

After twenty hours on duty too. Well, I suppose I can only have been twenty-three.

"May I see Mr. Stech, please?"

"Mr. Stech senior is not available, Miss. Was it food mixers or washing machines?"

I saw the man's point. No one except a representative would enter a shop like that at ten past nine on a dirty morning.

"It's Mr. Tony Stech I want to see. I'm from the hospital. It's about his father."

"Mr. Stech senior has been away for a long time, you know. In his absence the shop is my responsibility."

He wasn't stupid. He just hadn't listened. He raised his eyebrows encouragingly and waited for me to sell him a food mixer.

"May I see Mr. Tony Stech please? My name is Cadence. I'm from the hospital. I have news of his father."

"Mr. Tony Stech?" A pause. Nobody ever asked for Mr. Tony. "Just wait here, please. I'll see if he's available."

The triteness of the delays, the utter triteness of the man who caused them, is much clearer in my mind than my eventual interview with Tony. I remember the electric color of the manager's skin and the workings of a sectional demonstration shaver on a shelf by his head. I remember his savagely bitten nails, how they surprised me, revolted me, and how he hid them quickly under the lapels of his jacket. So many things I remember to blur my first real sight of Tony.

I remember his room, tangled, chaotic, cathode ray tubes and ranks of aluminum casings. There was the smell of electricity I was to come to know so well, of hot transformers. A workbench littered with minute instruments. A lathe in one corner. His room should have showed me at once the part Tony was going to play in the plans of my husband.

Tony himself was doing sums in the corner of a home-made diagram. He didn't look up.

"So he's dead," he said.

"Early this morning."

"Peacefully, in his sleep."

"Not in his sleep, but very peacefully."

He was staring down at his sums, his pen no longer moving. His stillness held menace.

"You're the nurse from the hospital. You must see a lot of bereavement. Does it really still give you a thrill?"

There was no answer. I wondered whom he was wanting to hurt, and why.

"What have you come for? Somebody could have telephoned. Your name's the same as that doctor I spoke to. I suppose you're married."

I nodded. It was as if he was trying to find something to blame me for.

"He said you were kind." Tony looked up at me, the hardest eyes I had ever seen. "You were kind for five weeks, and then he died. You—and your husband—you did nothing for him. Less than nothing."

"What was needed was a reason for living. I don't think we have one."

"What was needed, nurse, was a reason for not dying. Women give birth astride a grave—our only disease is life—we read Spinoza but we manage. Or most of us do."

"Many don't, Mr. Stech. In this country half a million last year. Now that the psychological possibility exists people are making use of it."

"And all you do is offer kindness."

He shouted, the room giving back nothing at all. Totally insulated, a room you couldn't hurt yourself in. A padded cell. He got up awkwardly and turned away.

"I'd much rather have been told over the telephone," he said.

"Your father asked me to come and see you."

That wasn't the reason I was there. Nurses receive too many deathbed requests to be able to obey them all. I was there because I was cold, and already dead, and I wanted to see how Jews kept warm and alive.

"I can't be bothered with manners, nurse. He was an

old man, and a foolish man, and where he is now he would much rather you had kept away."

"He said I was to ask you if you needed any help."

"Now you've asked." He stayed with his back to me. "Thank you for calling."

"Suppose we could have cured him, Mr. Stech, do you think we should have?" He turned to me, incredulous, then deeply angry. I went on. "Must there never be a time when a man may simply choose to die? Do we have to attack him with mechanisms? Aren't we right just to offer them kindness?"

His answer stretched far into the future. It shaped his death.

"That, nurse, is an attitude of mind, an attitude of mind that I will fight with everything I possess. I believe in life, Mrs. Cadence. In the pain of staying alive."

So that's where I got it from. He could say these things and still not sound grandiloquent.

"Half a million UDW's this year, two million next—it's beguiling, this final permissiveness, this admission that life as we have made it is not worth the bother. And it's not true, Mrs. Cadence. UDW is not a noble civilized device—it's a squalid social evil. It rots minds just as leprosy rots bodies. I shall fight it, Mrs. Cadence, in any way I can. You might say I've received the call. I believe in too much. You and your husband must keep away from me."

We didn't keep away. Between them Edward and he for their different reasons developed a machine that reduced UDW mortalities from a peak of three and a half million to last year's figure of I believe seventeen. Thus Edward oozled Sensitape in under the banner of Tony's idealism.

I'm supposed to be reading the newspaper. My wardress mentioned a monorail disaster. Added some quick cliché about an interest in disasters being healthy. Healthy, normal, yes. Thea Cadence's thoughts on Being Interested in Disasters: fondling other people's disasters will make you appreciate your own. And there's a mawkish sentiment for you. The Patience Cadence Column—Count your blessings while you've got 'em, or Fate may come and spank your

Pompom Circle Dance, Pomp and Circumstance, Round the Mulberry Bush, Here Comes Everybody as somebody called him. And if I don't look away, what then? I seem to have been carrying on the same argument for seven years.

"Cassavetes was a great man. He had something none of you will ever understand about."

"Shouting is unsuitable, Mrs. Cadence. Shouting is unsuitable."

"He was a great man, Tony. He had something none of us will ever understand about."

"He had the prejudices of his generation, darling. A tragic romanticism."

"But Tony—"

"I agree that Edward shouldn't have pressed him. It was a mistake, and Edward's genuinely sorry for it. But—"

Perhaps lovers are always generous to wives' absent husbands. It was so easy, talking in the sun, or above the noise of a pub or theater foyer, so easy for someone with a belief, even a belief in Sensitape. But Tony hadn't been with Edward on that last visit to Paul Cassavetes, and I had.

"They have a right to buy this with money, Dr. Cadence?"

"Nobody wants you to make up your mind at once, Mr. Cassavetes." Edward was sorting through a pile of music, his mind apparently only half on what he was saying. "The musical experience would of course be far more complete than anything ever known before."

"You do not answer my question."

"The money isn't important, Mr. Cassavetes." Gentle. So casual. "Everybody has money—a price tag is either convenient or inconvenient. In this matter money is irrelevant."

"That I do not see. You are asking me to sell my soul."

"Rather to give your soul away, Mr. Cassavetes."

It was a room that in all its hundreds of years could never have known an equal sophistry. Three high, uncurtained windows, sunlight between their half-closed shutters standing in long white-gold columns across the floor, its centuries of polish calm and grave, dust moving slowly to and fro and around and down, as if in some ancient passepied to remembered music. A piano, and a cello lean-

ing on a chair. Shelves of music and small stone sculpture. Spaces of gray-green shadow, caught from the garden, carried precious far back to the distant door with the shining brass finger plate.

Edward looked as fine as ever. He had positioned himself easily by the end of the piano, his feeling for the vertical line of his light suit against the coffin bulk of the instrument quite instinctive. The absence of anything to sit on worried me, and I wished I hadn't been brought. I moved to the mantelpiece, then dared not lean on it. Edward stood motionless, completely restful. Nothing external about him could justify the strange impression of aggressiveness he gave.

"My soul is my own, Dr. Cadence. One thing not for giving away. Another is this that I feel, that I know, when I play."

"Your greatest strength is Beethoven. . . ." As if the old man hadn't spoken. "I suggest something popular. The *Moonlight Sonata*, perhaps. Issue the Sensitape and the record together. To hear what you hear, Mr. Cassavetes. To know what you know. Or perhaps you think ordinary humanity is not worthy."

"You pretend to serve humanity, you doctors. Your real hope is to be God."

"Thea my dear, tell Mr. Cassavetes about Sensitape. My wife has worked with the apparatus since its inception. She'll tell you anything you want to know."

"I want to know nothing."

"Thea, tell Mr. Cassavetes about Jael Claxton."

Idiotically I had begun to tremble as soon as my name was mentioned. In the cool room I sweated.

"Oh yes . . . Jael Claxton. I'm sure you've heard of him, Mr. Cassavetes. The painter, you know. Such a high reputation. He's the man who painted that beautiful Crucifixion. He's one of the few artists today who work from a genuine Christian conviction. He—"

"You don't have to sell Jael Claxton, my dear. Just tell Mr. Cassavetes about him and Sensitape."

Quiet. Quieter than ever. He was using my fear of him as a demonstration. I didn't realize at that time that I

feared him. I thought instead that I was a foolish, scatter-brained woman. And that Paul Cassavetes was obstinate and wrong.

"Oh yes . . . Sensitape. You see, Jael Claxton was working on a painting. We made a recording of the creative process. It turned out to be—"

"I am sorry, Mrs. Cadence, but I have already told your husband. I want to know nothing."

"Like Claxton, you too are an old man." Edward spoke as from a long way off. "You have a unique gift."

"And it shall die with me." Painfully vehement. He allowed a long pause. "As is the nature of unique gifts."

He was a small man, thick and broad, with thick broad hands, and below his bald head veined temples and heavy, almost eyebrowless frontal ridges. He had the sort of strength that Edward would coldly wear away with gentleness. Already his eyes in their old brown hollows were too bright for comfort. Edward's voice retired still further, every word like glass.

"You have many charitable interests, Mr. Cassavetes. A quarter of a million pounds could mean a great deal."

"You are a visitor in my house, Dr. Cadence. But if you continue to—"

"Donated anonymously, Mr. Cassavetes. Nobody but us three need ever know."

"I shall never feed your need for power, Dr. Cadence. Will you please go now."

"Certainly. It was very good of you to see us." Still no movement. "When may we call again?"

The old man had half-risen from the piano stool. He sat again, where he was safe. The room was huge around him.

"No doubt you will call again. I shall give instructions for you not to be admitted."

"Just as you wish." Nine quick paces to the door, me following, inadequate. "At your age I'm sure you're entitled to some small self-indulgence."

Cassavetes said nothing. He seemed to have stopped listening.

"My need for power. Your need to be inviolate. Other



outside needs we can only guess at. You might say it's a conflict beyond any resolution."

The force of will he turned on the hunched figure at the keyboard was monstrous.

"You must understand, Mr. Cassavetes, you have to *want* to make this recording. Any shade of reluctance will come through clearly. So we're all entirely in your hands when it comes down to it."

"Dr. Cadence, your talk is like a sickness." He muttered to himself for several seconds, unheard. "I must have nothing to do with you ever again. Your talk is sin. Sin. I have no words for my horror at what you are doing."

"What I do is to enrich human life."

"What you do is to . . ."

The strength of his voice failed. He sat very straight, showing a sudden surprise in his eyes. Then he fell off the stool—in a detectable way no longer human—onto the tiny polished blocks of the floor. Edward looked at me. A sensitivity in him—he was always immensely sensitive—suggested to him that I might prefer to be the first to go to the old man. I shook my head, for I couldn't move, either to him or blessedly away out of the room to call servants. Call servants—or his wife. Christ, his wife.

*"Here's your tea, Mrs. Cadence. I've brought honey today, seeing you didn't fancy yesterday's jam."*

Edward squatted beside the old man, first neatly tucking up his trouser legs. One old square hand was flung out, lying palm up in the strip of sunlight from the center of the three, unreal and casting a long shadow. Motes whirled above it, agitated.

"He's not dead. Send for his wife, will you, Thea?"

I suppose I must have done.

*"Are you all right, Mrs. Cadence? I've brought you your tea."*

My impression of the room is continuous, with his wife now in it. But her husband had been moved, composed now, Edward's jacket rolled up for a slight pillow.

"Cerebral hemorrhage, Mrs. Cassavetes. For the moment his right side appears to be affected."

"Affected? What do you mean, Dr. Cadence?"

"Paralyzed. I suggest that you send for his regular physician immediately."

"Tea, Mrs. Cadence . . . ? My goodness, you're miles away, aren't you?"

"You two—what have you done to him?"

"You must keep calm, Mrs. Cassavetes. Quite possibly there is no lasting damage whatsoever. Modern electronic reeducation techniques work wonders. With the patient's cooperation a complete recovery is often possible."

The old woman stiff, not with pride but with the pain of what had been done. The sunlight moving as I watched it, so long we stood and waited. I wondered what would make Paul Cassavetes want to give cooperation. Nothing in the world that I could see.

"I shall have to send for Doctor if you go on like this, Mrs. Cadence."

Soon finished now, Wardress. It is necessary to remember how they carried him away, carried away what Edward had made, what I had made, carried away the face already lopsided, the good side shaking with what we played we thought was grief. But we knew then, as I know now, that it was really laughter. He's still alive, trundling around his beautiful garden and feeding the goldfish. For me in here it's a fine thing to be able to remember.

"It's a fine thing to be able to remember, Mrs. Craig."

"You're not thinking of losing your memory, are you?"

"You misunderstand me."

"You've been miles away. I could hardly be expected to follow you."

How she disciplines me. How easily I could spill out of the shape of the present, run idly down uncertain corridors.

"I live a lot on memories at the moment, Mrs. Craig."

"Memories of what really happened?"

"Of course."

"Tea, Mrs. Cadence. And I've brought honey instead of jam."

She means something. I prod the honey suspiciously.

"Bread and honey? Comfort and knowing what's what. Why have you brought me honey?"

"We're not trying to get at you. You didn't seem to like the jam, that's all."

Jam or honey?—and what nice cakes on such pretty china. Edward's mother managed talk about such things for most of a long afternoon. And Thea Springfield panted along behind, astonished that this was the form the exam should be taking, too young to detect the performance learned for the sake of a son who would operate within the system, too young to be insulted by it.

"Have you had a chance to look at the paper yet, Mrs. Cadence?"

"I'm afraid not." No need for distance to entail bad manners. "But it was kind of you to bring it."

"Not kind at all. I have very good reasons."

"I remember you said you thought contact with the outside world would be good for me."

"More specific reasons, Mrs. Cadence."

"Tell me what you mean."

"There are other things than monorail disasters in a newspaper."

I don't want to know. Whatever it is you're trying to tell me, Wardress, willing me to discover, I don't want to know it. My relationship to the knowledge I already have is too precarious.

"Perhaps I'll look at it later. After I've had my tea."

"I'm sure you can imagine, Mrs. Cadence, how careful my briefing was for this case. The proceedings against you, for instance, were not to be brought up by me in any way at all. They were to be dealt with by Doctor under tape therapy."

"To disregard clinical instructions, Mrs. Craig, is to risk your whole career."

"I never would, Mrs. Cadence. Believe me, I've checked the paper carefully for any reference to *your* case. There isn't one. I'll take the paper away when I come for the tea things."

*Your* case. . . . Why the emphasis? What other case would be likely to interest me? Surely she knows the extent of my egocentricity? I smile at my wardress and she goes out quietly.

Nothing on the front page except the disaster. Photographs of twisted steel, lists of the dead and injured, a message from the Queen, a visit from the Prime Minister. Back page—all sports. What paper is this? I don't remember any sports in the paper Edward had. Must I go through this one column by column? I can't hold it still, can't manage it, can't turn the pages. The huge, noisy pages.

It is extraordinary to watch my hands. They smooth and fold, now so neat and expert, so accomplished now that they act without mind, without my volition. The paper is put away. As I said before—whatever it is, I don't want to know. Hope is like a fever, a heat engendered by battle, and it leaves a deadly chill behind it. My arms ache. My hands tingle and creak. I don't want to know. Suddenly I'm so tired I could cry. No longer with even the energy to pour tea and find rest.

I wish nurse would come.

Mrs. Cadence senior poured tea with little difficulty. I hid in my admiration of how well she poured tea.

"Milk and sugar, Miss Springfield?"

"Thank you."

Edward told me later what an intelligent woman Rachel his mother was, how even before sexual intercourse with his father she had laid down the terms on which she would accept motherhood. The career she was building for herself—she was a social statistician—would be interrupted for a bare ten months, three months before the child's birth and seven months after. And so it had happened. She was

a woman of her time, aware of her child's needs (hence the seven months' mother-love), and also aware of her own. Grading the easing of the physical bond between herself and her son carefully, she delayed full-time work till he was three years old and capable of relating to the larger unit of the nursery school. During these three years she resisted instinctive nest building—she and her husband had lives of their own to lead, outside the material confines of an elaborate home. Psychologically a center was needed, a home territory. Nothing more.

It would not have been fair to say that Edward married me because I would be useful to him. But that he allowed himself to fall in love with me for this reason I have little doubt. And with my very different background—Rachel researched this background most carefully—he reasoned that care must be taken if I were not to be put off. He didn't realize, never realized, how helplessly I loved him.

The steps his mother took as part of her unquestioned motherly duty were all her own idea. That was the great thing about Rachel—you never had to tell her what to do. She could be relied upon to find out for herself. Her responsibilities hadn't ended at seven months. They occupied her intelligence up to the day she sanely died.

"Edward tells me you haven't any brothers or sisters, Miss Springfield."

"I'm afraid not." Thea Springfield felt this to be vaguely improper. "My mother couldn't," she explained. "There was a blood incompatibility."

"So sensible of your parents not to turn to AID. Compound families seldom seem to be successful." No doubt the relevant statistic appeared in her mind and was dismissed as unsuitable. "Do have a biscuit, Miss Springfield," she said. She watched the girl with a kindly expression. Edward was on duty, so Thea Springfield was facing the ordeal on her own. Rachel had already commented on this, putting the other at her ease with a reminiscence about her own first meeting with her future mother-in-law. Which was back before the second world war.

"Edward also is an only child, you know. My husband and I were always going to have more—three is probably

the ideal number. Then he was killed in one of the early supersonics."

"It must have been dreadful for you."

"It's a long time ago now, my dear."

I think it must have been Mrs. Rachel Cadence who started my uncertainty in the presence of other women. Her motives were obscure. No more or less than men, women judge you, dominate you, flatter you, compete with you. But unlike men, their motives are unfathomable. My wardress, if I understood her motives I could deal with her entirely. Even allow friendship. Mrs. X, to have understood her motives earlier would have been to save the whole structure of my life. The similarities between me and other women, our clothes, the reasons for our bodies, the hinges of our minds, have always seemed to me, since Mrs. Rachel Cadence, like tricks. Mirrors reflecting what isn't there.

"More tea, Miss Springfield?" Then the dainty teapot (bought specially as was whispered later that day in a post-coital confidence) was suddenly set down with a firm, sensible gesture. "You know, this is all very silly. Edward talks of you as Thea. I think of you as Thea. It's an unusual and beautiful name. So the sooner I start calling you by it the better. Don't you think so?"

"Yes. Please do. Yes, of course." Her mind twittering at the thought that she might now be asked to call this woman "mother." She needn't have worried.

"You call me Rachel, my dear. Edward does. They all called their mothers by their Christian names at the school he went to."

Bourgeois criticism was disarmed. And the girl's mind too confused to extend that criticism to the Cadence family's choice of school.

"Thank you. I will." She couldn't bear to. "Edward tells me"—seeking wildly—"that you haven't been in this flat very long."

"I move around a lot. My work often takes me to America. It's never seemed worth keeping up a permanent home anywhere."

"How funny that must be. My parents have lived in the same house all their married life."

"It's a very valuable ability. Western society needs a stable element. I think my own ancestors must have been nomadic."

To Thea Springfield this attitude of mind was quite new. This habit of relating even the smallest personal act outward to society, and then backward and forward to the past and the future, gave the girl an uneasy feeling of continuity, of being infinitely responsible. The Springfields, on the other hand, were very finitely responsible. Professor Springfield was responsible to his head of department, to his daughter, and to his wife. Mrs. Springfield was responsible to her position. And Thea Springfield was responsible to . . . to an impersonal thing called Suffering Humanity. Hence the profession of nursing.

"Edward's restlessness is more directed than mine, Thea. He's very ambitious—though I'm sure I don't have to tell you that, my dear. It's difficult for me to remember that another woman now probably knows him even better than I do."

"But that's not true." Thinking reassurance was needed. "We know him differently, that's all."

Her sudden blush at the unintended double meaning was ignored. Rachel had decided it was not suitable for her to be aware that her son and this girl were sleeping together.

"Anyway, Thea, ambitious is not really the right word. Single-minded would be better. He pursues a vision. It won't make him easy to live with, I'm afraid."

"I think it's marvelous." Deb word. "I shall do everything I can to help him."

"I'm sure you will, my dear. He tells me you plan to get married after his finals."

"At the beginning of August, we thought. Just a registry office—nothing grand or fancy."

It sounded modern and sensible. She had no idea then what it meant. The formica-topped desk and the bland satin-bronze clock. The sad air of an unnecessary formality.

At least, it seems sad to me now as I look back on it. For Thea Springfield it was as magical as everything else that year. A girl in love. Doubled. Surprised at how un-

aware the last nineteen years had been. Surprised at the inadequacy of every earlier experience, the poor sort of interest earlier men had aroused in her, the poor sensible indifference to the ugliness of their private bodies nursing had given her, squashy organs obviously meant to be guts and only hung outside as a rather poor joke. A girl in love, finding beauty. Incredible, where Thea Springfield could find beauty. My memories of her are so vivid, they point the painful differences between us, what our eyes see, what our hands feel, what our minds know. Each morning I put clothes onto the unscrubbable staleness of skin, try not to touch myself, not to look. Thea Springfield retained a man's sweat on her, too romantic to wash it off.

I go now to externalize a psychological cleansing. Knowing what I do, I still do it. The thermotap insults me even more than usual—why shouldn't I scald myself if I happen to be careless? Are there to be no penalties for inefficiency? Lather between my fingers, and disgusting sliding. Rinse off and dry. As I hang up the towel my wardress returns.

"Still not drunk your tea, Mrs. Cadence?"

"I meant to. Will you pour it for me?"

She does so, hands me the cup and I drink.

"You've been crying, Mrs. Cadence."

"Not crying. Only washing my face."

"Do you think you could live like this for a long time, Mrs. Cadence?"

"All my life." What a strange question.

"Doctor asked me to tell you he wasn't satisfied with the progress of the treatment."

"Tell him to try another tape. This one is too generalized."

"I don't think he was asking for advice."

"Give it to him all the same. The guilt needs to be more specific."

"Not guilt, Mrs. Cadence. Contrition. It's a contrition tape."

I suspect fine differences not my own of being artificial, put in to confuse me. Besides, her hands are gathering up the paper, feeling its untidiness, deducing that this has been opened and read. She's not going to comment.

"More tea? Before I take it away?"



"Please. The dose is calculated on a basis of two cups, I believe."

She stares thoughtfully. She won't be needled.

"I wonder if the tape really is wrong for you. If all you're getting out of it is a generalization."

"The specific must be very hard to come by. Guilt-ridden homicidal wives are rare. I expect he's doing his best."

She pours the tea while I walk, disjointed, around the room. Before contrition there must be guilt. Obviously she knows this as well as I do.

"You didn't wash your face, Mrs. Cadence. Only your hands."

Let her think it's because of the newspaper, that the yeast is working. I take the refill of tea and drink it. Rachel too thought she was handling me. And she was.

"I'll be in again soon, Mrs. Cadence, to see how you're doing."

So many of her remarks have the same rhythm. They're the same remarks really, only with different words. Leavened bread needs space in which to rise. To the bait? And Doctor says he isn't satisfied with the progress of the treatment.

## DAY 27

"How are you feeling, Mrs. Cadence?"

This is which minute of which hour of which day? And which repetition of that disgusting question?

"I asked you how you were feeling, Mrs. Cadence."

"Guilty."

"No need to shout, Mrs. Cadence."

"I feel like shouting."

"And I feel like slapping your face for shouting."

"Do so. Go on as you have begun."

The room jolts. We both know where we stand.

"What was I supposed to say?"

"You're very aggressive today, Mrs. Cadence."

"It's the treatment working. It's what guilt does to you."

"Contrition, Mrs. Cadence. It's what contrition does to you."

"You're a bloody liar."

"Another slap would put us one all. I'm learning how you work, Mrs. Cadence."

"Tell me why you say my name so often."

"To reassure you."

"Another lie."

"To remind you."

"I wish I needed reminding."

"I'm glad you don't,

Mrs. Cadence."

Such a pause he hopes as one could grow old in. I merely use it to remove the headset in. Progress has slowed—it's the same model I fitted to Dr. X five years ago. But then, later refinements are hardly necessary in the Kingston.

Five years ago, to Dr. X and his wife. Which is what wife means.

"I'm in heat, Doctor."

"A complication."

"Wouldn't you masturbate in me?"

"An original request."

"You have a sense of humor."

"The humor lay in your choice of words, Mrs. Cadence."

"Loveless sex—mutual stimulation—I've been a nurse. I know the jargon."

"You're whipping up hate, Mrs. Cadence. You're wanting the normal to sound nauseous."

"How puritanical of you, Doctor. What's nauseous in . . . in what I said?"

"To me, nothing. To you, so much that you couldn't say it again."

The door opens. It's my wardress come.

"Wardress, the stepped-up treatment's wonderful. I've been telling Doctor I'm in heat."

"How very theatrical of you."

"It's what you put in the tea, Wardress. There's a nineteen day backlash."

I don't care how many pretenses I spoil. I like to see them controlling their faces. Tells me nothing about the accuracy of my date guess, though.

"The patient is ready to go back to her room now, Nurse."

"At once, Doctor."

"Hadn't you better come with us, Doctor, just in case?"

"You know Nurse's training, Mrs. Cadence."

"I ought to. I received it myself."

"A long time ago, Mrs. Cadence. You haven't kept it up as Nurse has."

"But the insane have the strength of ten. It's all in the adrenalin."

"Which doesn't apply to you, Mrs. Cadence, for you're not insane."

The treatment room has a rooflight, with variable transparency glass. It's fully clear now, a high blue sky filled with hawks and small hand-saws. But I don't bother—we're all professionals here, in our own particular ways.

"Come along now, Mrs. Cadence. We mustn't waste Doctor's time. He's a very busy man."

There's an importance in not going out in style. Along the corridor meekly (different flowers today, tulips), she knows me too well to think I'm beaten, then into my room and the door is closed. I never see other patients, not even in the lav. My wardress talks of putting me in with others, but that's likely to be her joke. The Kingston's a huge building. It never breathes in the night as other buildings.

"I've just had an amusing idea, Wardress. The Kingston has been abandoned and taken over by two of the patients. I'm the only member of the staff left, and you daren't let me out to tell on you."

"Why don't we kill you?"

"Patients are like that. They hate simple answers. Besides, then they'd have nobody. Nobody to look after." To torture.

"You should write a play about it."

Busily she tidies nothing. Doctor is right—she's hard muscled, mind and body. I wonder how Mr. Craig managed.

"Are you a widow, Mrs. Craig?"

"What makes you think that? My husband's very much alive."

"Do you worship him with your body?" Ho ho.

"I was married in a registry office."

"So was I. On the fourth of August. With mimosa. But it still applied."

"Worship is too one-sided. I've tried to understand him. We've both tried to understand each other."

"Christ. How serious-minded of you both."

"I thought yours was a serious-minded question."

"It's a big place, America."

She doesn't recognize the allusion. Flummoxed for once.

"I'll get you your tea."

Normal, he said. Normal.

## NORMAL.

Edward and I went down to the van to watch the dials of normality. It was hot and passionate for us out in the recording van. Tony was absorbed in his levels, and he left us nothing to do but watch. All engineer inside his headphones, not human at all. I saw a needle jump, and counted nine times. And a sort of floating one.

"He's counting her ribs," I said to Edward.

"Wrong register," he said. Then he caught my eye and laughed. "But it's an interesting interpretation."

The reels spun, and a gauge somewhere ticked imperturbably. The van generator gave a discreet cough.

"I think he's gone to sleep," I said.

"Not with that pulse reading." Reverence in his voice. A CR tube gave off a pattern like an angry porcupine.

"Tactile excitation, reading nine."

"His or hers?"

"His on this side, hers on that." Edward gestured.

I wrote HIS and HERS with my greasy finger on the polished instrument facings. The porcupine was HERS. It was followed by a respiration seizure, forty-three seconds. Tony concentrated on his knobs and switches, navigating a now familiar sea. He'd been in charge of the auditions, learning all the time. The machinery emitted a small electric whoop.

"Peaking beyond twelve," said Edward. "His turn now."

The tactile register on his side scribbled complicatedly,

filling HIS screen with a dazzling concentration of rockets. HER porcupine became restless too.

"Blood pressure up," said Edward. "And he's closed his eyes."

The tubes signaled to each other frantically across the van. His audiometer climbed to five.

"From her speech signal that can't have been more than a very faint whisper. Interesting example of heightened perception. Normally he'd hardly have heard it."

"They are rather close to each other," I said mildly. Edward ignored me.

"Look, Thea—she's telling him to stop it."

"How sweet."

HER porcupine had calmed to a rolling swell. HIS rockets burst brighter than ever. Both audiometers rose and fell. Dr. X and his wife were addressing each other in low speech signals. My legs were beginning to ache—this was overtime, after a full day in the hospital. I pulled out a hinged seat and perched on it. The conversation continued, perception evaluators showing very little cerebration. No abstract concepts, apparently.

"We'll edit some of this out," Edward said, "if we find it drags on playback."

There was sudden activity on every tube and dial in the place. Mercury leaped up gauges, needles spun, screens gave off pulsing psychedelia.

"Oh look," Edward murmured softly. "They're kissing."

As the kiss continued, respiration was resumed around it. The twin tapes slid smoothly on, down the guides, past units, and up to the receiving reels—bland brown ribbons now bearing the finest ardor Britain could muster. It irritated me that the charged and passionate reels should look so exactly like the calm empty ones. This was foolish, of course—a calm brain looks no different from an excited one. Emotion is of the electric soul.

The kiss merged into something else, hard to identify. Different readings for HIS and HERS, no pattern at all that I could discern. Edward's eye, however, was more skilled. He slapped one of the HERS dials triumphantly.

"That proves it," he cried. "I obtained an identical read-

ing last month from a nursing mother. Mammary stimulation—it must be.”

He photographed the screen excitedly.

“Another breakthrough,” I said.

“One day they’ll all be cataloged, Thea. Think of that.”

A bank of insulators began to buzz, bringing overload relays into circuit. Tony juggled adroitly with the compensating switches.

“I hope the resistances can take it,” he said, not looking up.

“They did on the trial runs, Tony. I shouldn’t worry.”

“People have a habit of saving their best for the final performance. Just our luck if they blew something.”

“Do what you can, boy. A retake at this stage would be very troublesome.”

“You can say that again.”

I wondered if it was my imagination, or if the interior of the van was really becoming rapidly hotter. I suspected that my growing dizziness was attributable to other causes, to my secret raid on Dr. X’s whiskey in fact. I’d thought I might need help to contain my frustrations. All the same, the machinery was evidently excited on its own account. The feedback whoops became more frequent. Indicator needles flicked like windshield wipers. And the CR patterns came on top of each other faster than the eye could register, filling the van with an eerie radiance. And the warmth was neither imagination nor whiskey—at that moment the thermostatically controlled cooling fan whined into action.

Even a positron will creak, if pushed beyond certain limits.

“Aha,” said Edward. “Penetration.” And he made a note of the exact microsecond.

Nature’s orchestra. The noises increased and held, a raucous chuckling sound interspersed with piercing whistles. The van leaped about on its springs, windows rattling, sides bulging outward. Edward raised his eyebrows speculatively, watching meter after meter climb into its red sector. Perhaps the three of us were in great danger. Tony tore off his jacket, the sweat gathering in rows along his forehead. He returned to the battle. And the two tapes,

HIS and HERS, recorded dutifully the magnetic intimacies of fervor.

There is a point beyond which crescendos become meaningless. They move beyond known dimensions, beyond experience. Tick chuckle whoop whine into a world of moving lights and heat and timelessness, only the dial pacing the excitation torrent from the room above. I saw the poor clock had opted out, its face obscured with heavy condensation. I began to laugh, and roll about.

"For God's sake, Thea, control yourself."

"It's so funny, Edward . . ."

"Nothing remotely funny. Your thinking so is a clear denial symptom."

"Clicke, tickle, chuckle, snuckle, wheeeee . . ."

"You're quite hysterical, my dear."

"Blow for half time, Edward. Half time and change ends."

"Keep still, Thea. You'll break something."

"Ninety-nine, a hundred. Change ends."

"Schoolgirl obscenity. This is a serious scientific experiment. I believe you're drunk, Thea. What a disgusting state to be in at a time like this."

I was past speech. I rocked helplessly and the van rocked with me. A switch fell off the wall and dangled, smoldering. Tony leaned sweatily over his indicators, as fast and as secret as a poker player. Edward smoothed his hair, a sure sign of near collapse. Whatever havoc Dr. X and his wife might cause, they were obviously quite unconcerned. I tried blowing on various tubes to cool them.

Outside there was moonlight. A grassy court surrounded by the pale fronts of houses in which no doubt other similar electrical excitations were passing unrecorded. Similar but lesser. Nice people, too nice, perhaps. But Dr. X and his wife—hell, they weren't nice at all. And I was drunk enough to find it amusing.

There had to be an end, even for Dr. and Mrs. X. The needles stuck against their stops, the relays screamed like elephants, and a final blue haze poured from the apparatus labeled HIS. (No reflection on HERS, as it turned out.



Merely a faulty winding.) The seconds passed. Tony gave up, turned away.

"They can't still—"

"They bloody can, boy."

Even ends have ends. At last the counters sank, the screens came to gentle satisfied curves, the relays purred, the generator cleared its throat. Suddenly my head was throbbing louder than anything in the place.

"Keep 'em turning, Tony. We're not losing signal, are we?"

"Plenty there, though God knows why. These resistances were never designed to—"

"I don't care a damn about that. Getting the next few minutes is absolutely vital. Their complete lack of post-coital depression was one of the big things in their favor. It's one thing to peak beyond twelve, quite another to . . ."

The post-coital depression was all mine. I climbed stiffly out of the van and was sick on the grass. A dim yellow light above me showed around the curtains of the Xs' bedroom. I imagined their warm contentment and was sick again.

This room is for me to be alone in. They leave me here with myself, leave me to disgust myself into some different state. Contrition, they call it, and deny me any mortification save another's electric guilt. And they offer comfort as an insult. I wonder what poor psychopath they taped, what man's intensity of suffering they took and wrapped up neatly on a plastic reel. He believed in guilt and gave them what they wanted with delight. I hadn't felt this quality of demonic joy before—until today. Doctor must have filtered off the edge of it. It's a triumph that comes near to unhinging me. Another time and it may. I wonder what else they have in reserve along in the treatment room.

My bedroom has a carpet with a pattern of small roses on it—completely washable, in case I should disgrace my-

self. I know about the carpet because I chose it. Edward said the women's wing should be basically feminine and gave me a free hand. I could do no more than choose things I liked and trust to their basic femininity; curtains, light fittings, chair covers, bedspread, pictures, furniture, wallpaper, not the washbasin, that was standard. My taste has changed little in the three years since. The rooms I made were pretty—I find this one pretty now. I wish to God I didn't.

If admissions of guilt are what is wanted, I'll say it at once. All this, the whole hellish structure, is my fault. After meeting Tony I could have held my tongue. I could have altered the fate of the human race. And that's not kidding.

"You ought to go, Edward," I said. "You ought to go and see young Mr. Stech. The son of the latest UDW. Apparently he's the electronics king of West London," I said. "He's invented a colored video tape that really works."

"You know how I hate color TV, Thea. Why the hell should I be interested in a machine to record it?"

"I talked to the shop manager. He says Stech has made a special meter for measuring microwaves. He says it's more sensitive than anything known before."

Edward stopped what he was doing.

"But that's marvelous, darling. He'll be able to help me with my—"

"He says he'd like to try. I haven't told him much—you know how I get things muddled. I thought you'd rather go along and explain for yourself."

I was always an efficient sort of person, not in the least liable to get things muddled. But Edward needed the myth of a poor weak woman and in those days I loved him enough to be willing to connive at it. No, in spite of Mrs. Craig I must speak the truth. I worshipped him. With my mind and with my soul and with my.

"Oh, and by the way, Edward, Stech has an obsession about curing UDW. Tell him you're working on that and he'll be your slave forever."

"And so I am. If my idea ever works out I mean UDW to be one of the first things I tackle."

I didn't go with him to the radio shop. I was on duty

at the hospital that afternoon, so when the night staff finally came on I hurried home to hear how Tony and he had got on. I remember banging in at the front door and the emptiness that the flat flung back at me. At that moment I really did see the sort of life I was to have, the succession of empty rooms I would enter hopefully, the sort of life that being married to a man with a vision would entail. And I didn't mind. Ever since I had known him Edward had been searching. He had hoped for help from my father and had been patronizingly offered research facilities he wasn't trained to make use of. He had hoped for help from the hospital authorities and had received nothing but angry incomprehension. The committees of several scientific bodies had listened to him in a kindly manner, offering nothing except invitations for him to address their members. Now Edward was no longer searching. And the responsibility for this change was mine. I felt proud. The Thea Cadence of that time—Thea Cadence, B.C., Before Cynicism—was proud.

I looked up Tony's father in the telephone and rang the shop. I counted the rings. At fifty I gave up. The place was obviously empty, the shop staff gone home long ago, Edward and Tony on their way back to the flat. They'd have supper and go on talking far into the night. I pictured the wife whose self-effacing devotion helped the vision to become reality. I began to cook the supper, preparing for a guest. I was twenty-three.

At nine o'clock I had an idea, and rang the hospital. I'd stared between the curtains down the slushy street so often that the houses and lamps had become unrecognizable. The girl on Reception was wonderful, pretending not to know who I was, not to notice how I was crying. Yes, she said, Dr. Cadence had come in three hours ago. With another gentleman. They'd gone through to the lab block. She'd ring through to them if I wanted. No, I said. If Dr. Cadence was busy it didn't matter.

I ate my first spoiled supper. Already the self-effacing devotion was wearing thin. At eleven I woke with a start, my head on a carefully cleared space on the table. With the edge off my tiredness—I'd been on duty since six that

morning—I became angry. I walked to the hospital slowly, through streets with piles of snow wet-hardened in the gutters. An avenging angel, dark and hooded, through the city jungle. He should have phoned. He should have said he would be late. He should have phoned.

Nobody importuned me. I was too formidable.

Across the hospital forecourt and up the stretcher ramp. I noticed Edward's car neatly parked among those of the night staff. He should have phoned me. No man ought to treat a wife like that. Even a hotel keeper would demand more consideration. Ritual thoughts. Ritual comfort.

"They're in the lab block, Mrs. Cadence. Would you like me to—?"

I was past, the double doors flapping slowly shut behind me. I knew which laboratory to go to. On the door: ELECTROENCEPHALOGRAPH. Authorized persons only. Inside the lights were so bright I had to shade my eyes.

"Ah, Thea. I was wondering when you'd turn up. You've met Tony Stech, I think."

You should have phoned. But I couldn't say it.

The place was in chaos. Unrolled graph strips were draped everywhere. Cables hung about the room, control boxes turned back to front, their insides half dismantled. Tony Stech lay on one of the treatment couches, shirtless, electrodes and pads and gauges taped to his chest and temples. He raised his head.

"How d'you do," he said. Then he returned his gaze to the ceiling.

"I'm glad you're here, Thea. You can make yourself useful."

I stood quite still, my hand on the door behind me.

"What if the Director comes?" I said.

"He's out of town. I'm not a complete fool, you know. Now, see this?" He picked up an unfamiliar metal box that trailed cables, a sector of glass let into its upper side. "I can't be in two places at once," he said. "You watch this while I apply the stimulus."

"What stimulus?"

"Auditory stimulus, level ten. We're dead scientific in here, woman."

From Tony Stech there came something that might have been a suppressed giggle. I was the outsider. I approached the metal box. Behind the glass sector I saw a strip of brilliant green light.

"It won't bite you."

He thrust it at me and I took it. The box was warm and vibrated slightly. Edward moved away, stepping over furls of paper. He spoke to me as he went.

"Look at the glass squarely and you see a number. What is it?"

Two figures were projected onto the glass. I was gratified that they had appeared for me.

"Seventeen," I said.

"Rotate the knob on the right till you see the number ten. That gives us enough to play with either way."

"Either way . . ." It wasn't a question. I was too absorbed in making the numbers change. Fun.

"Plus or minus, you fool. We're not sure which way it'll go."

I found ten. It was just after eleven. I was a success. Looking up, I saw Edward standing beside Tony Stech. He seemed younger than I remembered, and more alive.

"In a minute I shall apply the stimulus. I want you to notice any change, either in the number or in the position of the green light. Any change at all. You understand?"

I nodded. It was a night when great things happened. I had a mind above such things as burned potatoes. Edward stooped, and cupped his mouth to Tony's ear.

"YAAAAH."

Auditory stimulus, level ten. I flinched, but held fast.

"Well? What was the reading?"

"No change."

"We'll try again."

Louder this time, but I was ready for it.

"YAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH."

Pause.

"I think the green light may have swelled a little."

Tony Stech raised himself on his elbows.

"Knob on the left," he said. "Turn it fully clockwise. We'll try again."

I did as I was told, and they tried again. The ten remained, and the green line never wavered. Tony sat up and started peeling connections off himself, while Edward consulted various graphs.

"I don't understand it, Tony. The reaction's there all right. The pen has swooped all over the place."

"Purely quantitative. What my meter's after is a qualitative reading. From what you've said there ought to be a qualitative change as well."

"Very tiny."

"Christ, Edward, that thing goes down to a power of minus twenty."

"But you heard what my wife said. It's not registering, and that's that."

They checked leads and terminals, the argument continuing all the time. I put my metal box down and wandered idly around the room. I was a failure. Perhaps there'd been a reaction after all, and I'd missed it. I knew I dared not ask for a replay. Perhaps it was a failure of faith on my part—if I'd believed in a reaction strongly enough it might have happened. It was so important for Edward, his frustration lay like a weight on the whole room.

"For God's sake don't touch anything."

I made myself as small as possible. I wouldn't have dreamed of touching anything.

"We might try a smoke box," Tony muttered. "You can measure a single electron in a smoke box."

"I went into that eighteen months ago. Apparently there's a location difficulty."

"Yes . . . Yes, there would be."

I watched them run down. The checks they made were obviously pointless, confirming certainty with still further certainty. They slowed, lost impetus, and finally returned to the treatment couch where they perched side by side and stared at the surrounding litter. I wasn't there.

"We've had these machines for forty years." Edward pounded the couch with his palm. "Forty years and we still can't measure the impulses, let alone reproduce them."

"What about the Russians? I thought—"

"Crude. Hit or miss. Sticking electrodes in on a trial and

error basis. Twenty years ago the results looked spectacular. Rage, laughter, that sort of thing. But there was no grounding of measurement. It petered out, as a lot of these flashy results do."

He paused, looked up at the clock. It was after midnight.

"I've said it a thousand times. Before we can induce even the simplest emotion it's essential to know precisely how that emotion is made up. The shape of the change involved. Its quality is what we need to know."

"I'm sure it can be done, Edward. It's a problem of isolation more than anything. You'll just have to leave me to work on it."

"Once we understand the changes, then we can reproduce them. There are all sorts of conditions against which this is our only hope. UDW, for example."

"You know my feelings about that, Edward. I'd do a lot to get that beaten."

His sincerity was embarrassing. Sincerity usually is, God help us. And the way Edward was using it.

"Design me a machine, Tony, that will measure the entire range of electrical activity in the human brain and I can promise you a cure within months."

Next day Tony Stech would put his shop on the market. With the capital thus gained he would equip a laboratory, and eighteen months later the first Sensitape would be made. Twenty-seven thousand pounds the experimental period would have cost him.

Tony Stech put on his vest and shirt. He looked around for his coat.

"Christ, what a mess." I really believe he'd only just seen it. "We'd better start clearing up."

After my failure with the meter, neither of them had taken the slightest notice of me, except to tell me not to touch. I didn't mind. Those who will one day alter fundamentally the shape of human life had a right to proper nourishment. I was Edward's proper nourishment.

"Have you tried," I said, "feeding a reaction straight from one person into another?"

Edward found me indistinct and kind of hard to focus on.

"What would be the point of that?" he said.

"It was only an idea."

"Mrs. Cadence may have something, Edward. If it did nothing else, it'd provide a useful check on our apparatus. If even another human brain failed to pick anything up, then we'd know there was something more fundamentally wrong."

"More fundamentally wrong?"

"Couldn't it be that the electrodes we're using, or the cables even, simply aren't capable of carrying the type of current involved? The impedance could be wrong. Anything."

Edward looked from me to him and back again.

"That's not a bad idea, Thea. Not a bad idea at all."

Science is a great leveler.

They put me on the treatment couch and Tony beside it, wired to me with encephalograph contacts. Quite soon I slept. Edward let me, knowing that I'd been up for nearly twenty hours. Each time they were ready for an experiment they woke me up. As Tony and I were so close to each other the stimulus applied to him couldn't be auditory for I would have heard it almost as well as he. Instead Edward would stick a pin in the back of Tony's hand. He was bad at pain, leaping and writhing while I felt nothing. Nothing except an overpowering weariness. When they woke me up for the last time it was half past five and I had to be ready to relieve the night staff on my ward at six. Edward had decided that the cable they were using was too heavy, that the current was being swallowed before it reached me. Tony rang a friend who might be able to help them about low resistance metals. The time was twenty to six in the morning and the friend was uncooperative. Tony banged down the receiver. He and Edward had been working all night and were hardly sane.

"What now?" he said. I was washed and was trying to do my face in the side of a stainless steel sterilizing cabinet.

"Try again later. You must learn patience. I've been at this thing for five years already."

"But we're so near—"



"Near? Near to what, for God's sake? We're no nearer to anything than I was five years ago."

Edward's dedication was above the illusions that mere enthusiasm needs. He started tidying the laboratory. Tony watched.

"I tell you what. I'll bodge up an amplifier. Boost the signal and we're bound to get something."

"I went into amplifier characteristics years ago. Nobody could guarantee me the lack of distortion I need. Any measurements would be worthless."

My reflection in the sterilizing cabinet bulged grotesquely. But it reminded me suddenly of the clothes I was wearing. The clothes in which I had hoped to entertain a guest to supper.

"Edward—I'm very sorry, darling, but you'll have to drive me home for my uniform. I'm bound to be late. Perhaps you could have a word with Sister."

"Come on, then." Edward never argued where hospital discipline was involved. "If we hurry we may make it. I dislike asking favors of the ward staff. You know that."

He paused in the doorway.

"Sort this mess out, will you, Tony? I'll get back as soon as I can. I'll be out of a job if the place isn't in full working order by eight-thirty."

He took my arm and rushed me down the corridor. The lab door bounced open again behind us.

"I've had an idea," Tony called after us. "These video tapes I work with. I never measure the signals—simply record them. What goes into the machine comes out unchanged. The distortions cancel. I think this measurement theory of yours is a dead end."

A dead end. Edward kept going, across Reception and down the ramp to the car park. Outside the hospital it was still as dark as night. He opened the car door and helped me in. By the courtesy light I saw he was smiling. I slid across and he climbed in beside me. Later I would learn to drive for myself. He started the engine, reversed briskly, swung out into the road.

"It's funny," he said, "how for years you can miss the

obvious. This Tony of yours is quite a discovery. What he said just now makes sense."

He got me home in seven minutes, into my uniform and back to the hospital just as six was striking. And he sent some pills along later to keep me going. What really kept me going was to know what an attentive husband I had.

There's guilt for you. That Tony of mine . . . And the first guilt of all, not to have pushed Edward under a bus before it was too late. Poor Doctor along in the treatment room, pumping me full of psychopathic guilt when a simple comparison with the indigenous brain waves would tell him he was wasting his time. He goes on the trial, I suppose. Not guilty, I said. NOT GUILTY. And detectably meant it. But I shall not tell him he's wasting his time when he moves on—if he ever does—to contrition.

Anyway, perhaps what I feel is not contrition. Perhaps it's only shame.

I stare at the door, willing my wardress to arrive through it with my tea. She does so.

"I'm glad you've come, Mrs. Craig. I want to apologize for my bad behavior after treatment."

"I've known a great deal worse. As I'm sure you have yourself, Mrs. Cadence."

"And for that reason, if nothing else, I ought to know better."

"Your position is very difficult, Mrs. Cadence. Believe me, I do understand."

The silence beyond the still half-open door. Passages and other doors, and I can't remember the way.

"Mrs. Craig, how will I get out of here?" Through the silence?

"It's a decision for the Home Secretary. You know that. And he's advised by the Committee. And the Committee is advised by Doctor."

"You said he wasn't pleased with the progress of the treatment."

"Slow, he said. Too slow."

"But that was yesterday. How about today? I know so little. What does he expect?"

"You should ask him yourself, Mrs. Cadence."

"This guilt he's applying, it seems to—"

"Contrition, Mrs. Cadence."

"I tell you, guilt. Guilt."

She's staring at the side of my face. Why should she stare so?

"You told me the rule yourself, Mrs. Cadence. Treatment not to be discussed with patients."

She closes the door behind her with one foot, goes to the table and puts down the tea-tray. The hand she held out to me withers, its touch dry and cold. I move unobtrusively to the mirror, wanting to see what it is about my face that made her stare. The reflection I see is a mold into which I quickly pour back my unmindful identity. The cheek she stared at is clean, reasonably unwrinkled.

It's odd how long it takes me to remember Doctor's slap. And then only as an outsider would, seeing the red mark linger.

"You haven't brought me another newspaper."

"I don't like wasting my time. You never read yesterday's."

"How d'you know I never read yesterday's?"

I pitch my voice carefully, giving nothing away. She doesn't look at my cheek at all.

"Besides, knowing so little it was silly of me to interfere."

"Yesterday made me too tired to want to begin it all again. There was something about the trial, wasn't there?"

"Which trial?"

"There's only been one trial."

"I . . . told you. It was silly of me to interfere."

She speaks with such kindness. Her warmth of course is entirely professional. I wish I could get through her warmth.

"Will I ever get out of here, Mrs. Craig?"

"Usually when patients ask that question I make a comforting noise."

"You mean I won't."

"I mean I don't know. I'm told really very little."

"When they took away UDW they took away everything."

"You jump about, Mrs. Cadence. And I dislike cynicism more than almost anything."

"They took away a last hope of dignity. And it's no jump at all."

"You'll be released, Mrs. Cadence, when you have become habituated to contrition. The terms of your sentence are quite specific."

"You're right to hate cynicism. I hated it at first, when I found I'd been loving it."

An elliptical remark, conceited of me, but she fields it easily enough. Nothing will really get through to her, not ill manners, not pathos, and now not even an attack upon her sacred Dr. Cadence. She stands over the tea-tray and watches me—not looks at, watches. I've never seen her sitting down. And—even for the sake of Mr. Craig—the idea of her supine is unthinkable.

"The trouble with cynicism is that people enjoy it. That seems to me a sin. Pour your own tea, will you?"

As she goes out I speak to her back.

"As far as the trial is concerned I'm dead. Exhumation may uncover a lot of ugliness, but it doesn't help the corpse. If I get out of here I want to be myself renewed, not just dusted and put back in the window."

Her wariness is more than professional. She seems almost afraid, using the door as an escape, closing it firmly on all knowledge of me. Yet in fact she must take me with her—we are by now too involved for her to be so compartmental—just as I retain her here with me. So many things I ought to tell her, so many explanations. But blasphemy, my real reason for being here, is never capable of explanation. Inexcusableness is built in. Gods are gods, men are men; to justify blasphemy is to question this necessary order.

Besides myself now and Thea Springfield, there is another identity I can remember. There is Thea Cadence, B.C., the woman who worshiped Dr. Cadence before everyone else did. And even after. Nearer to me, she is at the same time

farther, more incomprehensible. Her eyes saw more nearly the things I see, but saw them so differently.

I'd just put through an outside call, a woman who wouldn't give her name. This must have been about a year after the Sexitape recording. The day before Pastor Mannheim. Before unplugging my line I'd caught her first question, "Is this line private?" and Edward's reply, "My secretary never listens in to patients' calls." Her voice was vaguely familiar—as a psychiatrist he had patients who rang him at all hours. I returned to my typewriter; although an assistant had been engaged I still had to do some envelope addressing to help cope with the orders for Sexitape that were coming in from medical institutions all over the world. The woman's anxiety amused me—if only she knew how little time I had for listening in. I typed half an address and then the internal phone rang.

"May I speak to Dr. Cadence, please? This is the secretary to the Management Committee."

"I'm afraid Dr. Cadence is occupied with a patient. Can I help?"

"It concerns the meeting he attended yesterday. The Chairman is awaiting his decision."

"I'll mention it to him as soon as he's free. Get him to ring you."

"His reply will need to be in writing. But he knows all about it."

And the man rang off.

His abruptness was strange—in the last few months relations with the Management Committee had been friendly, effusive even. I made a note, finished the address and took another envelope. The indicator buzzed as Edward finished his call. I spoke to him on the intercom.

"I've had a call from On High," I said.

"Oh Lord, yes. I was forgetting."

"They seem to want a decision of some kind from you. In writing, so the little bureaucrat said."

"Come through, will you, Thea? I like to see you when I'm dictating. Hell—I just like to see you."

Pleased to hear him so cheerful in spite of everything, I went through. His room hadn't received its final restyling

then, it was still basically an office, though smoother than it had been at the time of old Jacob Stech's death, with a plastic-topped desk and a leather swivel chair. A Sensitape machine stood beside the examination couch. The desk lamp was the latest thing, variable intensity.

"These women." He indicated the telephone. "She sees me tomorrow morning anyway. She could perfectly well have waited."

"From what I heard of her she sounded quite calm. Not like some of them."

"Calm? She's always calm. She'd be better for a storm or two."

He changed his position, making it clear that he was also changing the subject. He rarely told me even as much as this; I felt honored.

"This memo, Thea—in your very best typing please. Layout, everything as formal and official as possible."

I sat down with pad and pencil and waited.

"To the Chairman of the Hospital Management Committee. Sir"—then a capitalized heading underlined . . . 'REF. YOUR DEMAND FOR THE RESIGNATION OF SELF.' New paragraph. 'After careful consideration of the arguments advanced by the Committee I have decided—' "

"Resignation?" I couldn't help myself. Why hadn't he told me? "They can't be serious."

"Deadly serious. And secretaries should be seen and not heard. 'After careful consideration of the arguments advanced I have decided that it would be—' "

"But, Edward, you should have discussed this with me. You can't just—"

" . . . I have decided that it would be in the interests neither of the hospital nor of the advancement of medical science as a whole for me to tender—' no, 'for me to presume to tender my resignation from membership of your staff.' Have you got that?"

I nodded. He smiled at me, arranged his fingertips in a mocking gable.

"The discredit mentioned is to my mind both transitory and greatly exaggerated. I am confident that any examination of the true state of affairs—' I suppose to underline *true*

might look insulting. A pity . . . 'any examination of the true state of affairs will show myself to have behaved at all times with complete propriety. I deny categorically all accusations of unprofessional conduct and would welcome an official inquiry into my financial affairs—' no, we've had *affairs* already. 'Into my financial . . .'

"Financial arrangements?"

"*Arrangements* will do very nicely. Just the right squalid tone. 'The Committee will understand that any resignation on my part at this stage would amount to an admission of guilt.' Full stop. No signing off—just a space for my signature, and then all the letters and official clap-trap you can think of. How many fools sit on that Committee, Thea?"

"Seven, I think."

"Then I'll need eight copies. One for the file, of course."

I stood up and walked toward the door. If all he wanted was a secretary, that was all he'd get.

"Now for God's sake don't get on your high horse, darling. You say I should have discussed it with you. In fact there was nothing to discuss. In my mind there was never any question at all of resigning. And if there had been, it would have been my decision, my affair, nothing to bother you with."

But I'm your wife, I thought.

"Why on earth did it happen?" I said. "What's biting them?" He was my husband.

"An article in the *Lancet*. Some Jeremiah carrying on about professional etiquette."

"To do with money? I don't understand."

"Sexitape, Thea—it's selling well. The suggestion is that I must be lining my own pocket."

"But that's ridiculous."

"Not so ridiculous. I quite easily could be. The whole system's open to any number of fiddles. The X's contract says that royalties must be devoted to the advancement of Sensitape. I might easily argue that Sensitape would be advanced by us having a new house or a new car or something. If I wanted money that badly there'd be no

difficulty at all. In fact, between you and me, I framed the contract with that possibility in mind."

"But your salary's more than enough to live on. Not to mention mine. Why on earth should you want more?"

He'd never wanted money, possessions, things. He knew and I knew, so it wasn't a question worth answering. Suddenly he looked up at me, forgetting the whole business. He looked up at me as a normal wife would pray to be looked at by her husband. Not up and down, assessing meat, but in my eyes. In my eyes, asking me, disregarding eight years, asking me.

"You're a very beautiful woman, Thea."

"Please don't."

"Why not? It needn't . . . imply anything."

"But it does, Edward. You know it does."

"We're civilized people. We know which implications to ignore. For the sake of—"

"Will they sack you, Edward?" I had to stop him. "Now that you've refused to resign, will they sack you?"

"I'm sorry, Thea. You must see it as a sophisticated form of nagging. But your need to be appreciated is even more deep-seated. You'd be lost if I didn't."

"I asked you a question, Edward."

Hysteria. Anger. Running to his desk, leaning over him, needing him, rejecting him. Flushed cheeks, quickened pulse, suppressed tears. Sexual despair. A year of it.

"Will they sack you, I said."

"I doubt it." Always the psychiatrist. Thank God he was willing to go along with me. "That's why I've suggested the face-saver of an official inquiry. They know I'd fight—and they know the publicity would do them no good at all. This hospital has a reputation for progressiveness, Thea. And on the psycho-neurological side they have nobody to thank but me. Sexitape has great popular appeal. Think what the press could do with my dismissal. They'd never dare."

The light on his desk was turned down low. Beyond this silenced room the corridors and wards were bright, endlessly demanding. His confidence was more than anybody had a right to.



"You would go on working here," I said, "knowing how they've tried to get rid of you?"

"People in offices get out of touch." So tolerant. "They get frightened. A man who has nothing but his job is always afraid of losing it."

"And you have your vision." Dangerously near to scorn.

"Thea—the whole future of *Sensitape* depends on the unique research facilities this hospital has to offer."

And is the future of *Sensitape* the only thing that matters to you? I was Thea Cadence, B.C.—Before Cynicism. I didn't ask the question for I thought I knew the answer. It would be yes.

Yes.

"So long you've worked here, Edward—and they still thought you'd go like a lamb. They really should have known you better."

"See to those eight copies, will you, darling?" He pushed back his chair, the ordeal of me survived. "I've got one more patient to see, and then we'll call it a day."

"It wouldn't make much difference, would it? If they did sack you, I mean?"

"Tony has his laboratory, God bless him. We'd manage somehow. Might have to live on your salary for a bit."

"Wouldn't they sack me as well?"

"Not a chance. Good nurses are rare. Even rarer than beautiful ones." He called to me as I was going out through the door. "Thea—let's go out somewhere tonight. It seems like years since we went out together."

I looked at him doubtfully.

"No strings," he said, spreading his hands in Tony's Jewish way. "A nice evening, then separate beds. No strings at all. And no reproaches."

The offer itself was a reproach, yet I couldn't refuse it. While he saw his patient I finished the typing, his memo and the rest of the envelopes. Then we drove home, dressed ourselves up, went out to a night club. Waiting for him at home was a stack of results Tony wanted analyzing. And this on top of his hospital work and the business side of *Sensitape*. He'd get up early, analyze them in the morning. Watching himself carefully he'd cut his sleep requirements

down to four hours. And still he'd have slept with me two or three times a week if I'd been willing.

He was working on that too, but so far the sedatives he had tried were useless. Either they had no effect at all, or they doped me down to the level of a warm corpse.

"Good band," he said. "Thank God we've grown out of those everlasting groups."

"I suppose they made identification easier, with the individual members, I mean." Nobody could say I wasn't trying. "Nowadays we're back on the band leaders. And they tend to be older men."

"Thea, forgive me. Forgive me if you can."

"Forgive you?" Quaking. "What for?"

"I've turned you into a jargon machine. No crime could be worse. As penance I swear to recite a thousand Hail Freuds every morning before breakfast."

I suppose he must have been trying too, but it didn't seem like it. He seemed happy and foolish, uncomplicatedly jolly along a prickly girlfriend. He made me laugh. It was the nonsense he talked, and his distinguished air, and the beautiful way he wore his clothes.

A German woman came onto the tiny stage and sang a mordant song.

*These little things would never trouble you  
If only they'd give you back your UDW.*

I was a little drunk by now, and could laugh without bitterness.

*So your cookie gets cancer and your whole world  
tumbles,*

*Cheer up, son—it's the way the cookie crumbles.*

As I remember it, it was a very funny song.

The German woman then did a sketch with a man in old-fashioned headphones, the flex from which led up under the front of her skirt. It was all very decadent and topical—and couldn't have been more apt if they'd laid it on specially for Edward's benefit. He watched attentively, leaned over to me once and spoke under cover of general laughter.

"They'd as soon try to sack the Archbishop of Canterbury," he said.

Though its meaning escaped me at the time, his remark seemed enormously funny. I forgot it in the next second, my subconscious filing it deceitfully away for future disquiet. I laughed, and drank the champagne Edward poured for me. I was warm, I was in a crowd of happy people, and my husband—meaning it—had said I was beautiful. And he was beautiful too. Beautiful in his—I remember thinking the word very clearly, repeating it round and round the lights and the cold feel of the champagne glass and the unladylike trickle of sweat down the front of my bra—beautiful in his dedication.

He pulled back my chair, guided me to the foyer, where he settled me while he fetched my cape. My shoes were transparent, with a pattern of small gold stars. A porter brought our car around to the door. The night was clear and cold, the hospital no more than something out of a bad film I had once seen. Edward drove carefully. I put my hand on his knee and moved it up the inside of his thigh.

“No strings,” he said.

“No strings,” I agreed, letting my hand continue.

“You’ll make me have an accident,” he said.

At that point I must have gone to sleep. I didn’t wake till next morning. I think he engineered the whole thing. In the mood I was in that evening, relaxed, full of love, I might easily have been cured of my . . . my little trouble. And by then he had other plans. He’d had his phone call. He’d—

“Back again, Mrs. Cadence. Hope I didn’t make you jump. Two tablets for you, from Doctor. Take them with a little milk. Don’t bother with the tea—it’ll be stone cold by now anyway.”

At least my shaming exhibition has brought about new knowledge, and a new degree of honesty.

## DAY 28

We were talking about UDW.

"You can see what society is, Tony. Haven't people a right to opt out if they want to?"

"Society isn't life, Thea. It never has been. The one in spite of the other—life goes on inside, Thea, so does growth. Abandon one and you must deny the other. If there are any sins, that's one of them. Sin. Deep sin."

His wide-apart eyes, frightening, intense. The angle of his head, as if listening, a frown creasing his forehead. The sunlight casting long shadows down from the left. And the lower part of his face lit with a curiously rippling green light off the river. Then the moment gone, Edward unseen laughing easily, myself turning away to fuss with the food for the picnic, impatient, hardly having noticed, never imagining the vividness with which the picture would come back to me. Tony squatted with his arms on his knees, and behind him willows, a cornfield, the possibility of belief.

"You're coming around now, Mrs. Cadence. No more treatment for today. Soon be your teatime."

Behind Tony's voice the noise of insects. And the smell of hot grass. I remember my eyes were sore after so much driving.

"Take my handkerchief, Mrs. Cadence. Now relax. Cry some more if you want to."

Possibilities die. Cold. So cold.

"I'm all right, Doctor. Thank you."

"I'm sorry if the treatment seems cruel, Mrs. Cadence. Sometimes emotional pain is necessary to—"

"It's not the treatment, Doctor. Honestly, it hardly touches me."

"It touches you more than you think. I'm on the outside, you know. I see a lot."

"Doctor, you puzzle me." He waits, his face mildly questioning. "You trained under my husband, I think?"

"That's right. My last three years."

"Edward used to talk a lot about consistency. The need for a psychiatrist to match his mood to that of his patient and yet at the same time maintain a basic consistency."

He reaches to cloud the rooflight above me, seeing that the light is bright in my face.

"My work here is rather different, Mrs. Cadence. After leaving your husband I did a further course. I specialized in penal psychiatry. That may sound ugly, but it's not really. The only difference is that in penal psychiatry we have a known end to which we are always working."

"That must make things easy for you."

"A great deal more difficult. Society lays down what it wants, and it's up to us to guarantee permanent results. Sometimes we find we cannot do this."

I wonder if the personality he offers me, this image of a disintegrated mind, could possibly be assumed for the purposes of my cure. It's a refinement I hadn't thought of. It makes reaching him even harder.

"Doctor, this guilt you're feeding me with—"

"Contrition, Mrs. Cadence."

"I'm no stranger to guilt. I'm also very experienced in Sensitape reactions. I'd hardly be likely to make a mistake in such—"

"I suggest that you're practicing a psychological substitution, Mrs. Cadence. Refusing to accept an unpleasant reality. You know Court Instructions. You don't imagine we'd go against them, do you?"

"Doctor—I've been familiar with guilt for most of my life. You can't imagine I wouldn't know the difference."

"You honestly think we're exceeding Court Instructions?"

"But I know what guilt feels like."

"In that case we'd hardly bother to feed you with it."

He's made the window above me gray. It shines indifferently on me, on Doctor, and on the vast clinical tape

machine beside my couch. At least the machine is neutral. I control rising hysteria.

"Please don't treat me like a fool, Doctor. I know—we both know—that my feelings have to be focused. And we both know that the emotion on that tape is so tightly focused as to be paranoia."

"I'm sorry. It's clear to me that you're substituting. It can happen with a patient who is strong-minded enough. Court Instructions specified contrition. If you like I can show you the reference number on the tape sleeve."

He smiles. He speaks so gently, to destroy me. He looks at me with such sad understanding. Perhaps yesterday never happened.

"Ask my wardress to come now, please, Doctor. We're both wasting our time."

"Mrs. Craig will be here soon, Mrs. Cadence. And you must know that conversations of this nature are never a waste of time. We make minute changes in the stimuli—it's all very much trial and error, of course—and we note the results. We're only working on you for your own good, you see."

His words bring up ghosts, crowd the room with faces. The air becomes heavy with grieving faces, priests and noblemen, inquisitors, camp commandants and unnumbered saddened hating fathers. It's no hallucination. They gather, more and more smiling and nodding, stacking the centuries closely into the space around us. He has their face and they have his. They blossom, multiply. And all at once there's only Doctor. And nothing I can say to him.

"Mrs. Cadence, turn back to me. Turn over now, Mrs. Cadence. Nurse has come. Sit up now, Mrs. Cadence. Nurse is here. You said you wanted her to come. Remember?"

I don't have to go back. I can stay on the river bank. They can make me walk, and go through doors, and stand, and sit, but they can't get me back if I don't want to. The river bank was sun-warm, in days when I was never tired. We'd driven from London, attended the conference and driven on. I was Thea Cadence, B.C., before Dr. X, before Paul Cassavetes, before Pastor Mannheim, Thea Cadence out for the day with the young inventors of Sensi-

tape. Relaxatape, we called it then, since that was all we could make it do. The adventure had just begun.

"How about there? That field there, beside the river. That looks like a good place."

"Pull in then, darling. We'll have a look."

We'd been seeking a good place for the last half hour. The car behind tended to herd us on. This time Edward ignored it, braked, and turned off onto the shoulder. The other driver accelerated to fill the gap. Edward switched off.

"We're here now," he said, "whether we like it or not."

The grass we carried our picnic across was dry and tussocky, with fresh, fly-covered cowpats. The three of us pretending not to mind the cows in the far corner under the trees. We crossed that field, and the next, till the noise of the road became inaudible. Following the river along, we came to a lock with white metal railings. The river must be one of the routes maintained by the Leisure Ministry. We laid our picnic near to the trim white railings; they were exquisite among the rough grass and daisies and buttercups. As we sat down, accidentally we were all suddenly silent, hearing the country sounds, river and insects, and the cry of a small dark bird that paddled quickly away across the water. I said it was a dabchick, Tony said a moorhen; they were both no more than words. Then we were silent again. A tractor passed behind the distant hedgerow, towing something we couldn't see that made a rhythmic creaking. Tony picked a single stem of grass, spread the dusty pattern of seeds between finger and thumb.

"Just show them one of these," he said. "You'd think that would cure them."

We knew what he was talking about. Edward slapped a fly off the back of his hand.

"You can't win, Tony. The association would be with man's alienation from the natural world. Not spoken, of course. Probably not even conscious. But there all the same."

"Morbid." Tony peered at the grains in his hand, angry, thinking perhaps of his father. "Christ, Edward, how much longer before we get the thing beaten?"

"You're like a soldier hurrying to get to the battlefield

before he even has the proper weapons. I shouldn't worry—this particular war will wait as long as you like."

Tony looked up sharply, worried by such callousness. It surprised me that he still wasn't used to Edward, to the scientific detachment my husband had been forced to cultivate. I interrupted before he could reply, changing the area of the discussion.

"You can see what society is, Tony. Haven't people a right to opt out if they want to?"

"Society isn't life, Thea. It never has been. The one in spite of the other—life goes on inside, Thea, so does growth. Abandon one and you must deny the other. If there are any sins, that's one of them. Sin. Deep sin."

At this point the film sticks, is reluctant to go on. I urge it past the wavering green light on Tony's face and Edward's easy laughter. Thea Cadence opens the picnic box, defensively absorbed in the movement of her fingers, and the moment passes.

After eating we lay back on the ground, watching the sky. We talked about nothing, about Tony's landlady, about the shop to go to for pimentos. Something about the rough stalks of the grass pressing against my back and sides reminded me of my body. I brought my hands down from behind my head, and then sat up. I hadn't been thinking of Tony—if I glanced first at him it was the purest accident.

"Let's walk down river as far as the next lock," I said.

"Let's not," said Edward.

"But it's pretty. And there seems to be a sort of island."

"You go, my dear. You're the one with all the energy."

Tony was watching, ready to jump up and be gallant. I stayed sitting where I was, shoulders up around my ears. A silly thing, but I'd wanted Edward to come with me very much.

"It's too hot," I said. "I can't really be bothered."

There had to be things that didn't matter, after five years. Tony settled on Edward.

"I was going to tell you about the extension I'm planning for the lab," he said.

"No shop." Edward scratched. The flies seemed to like



him more than us. We should have brought some repellent.

"But we're three obsessionalists," said Tony. "If we don't talk shop, what do we talk?"

"Obsessionalists . . . ? I suppose so. But we ought to fight against it. To have an obsession is to be less than half."

"Since my father's death I've had something to live for, Edward. I wouldn't say that made me incomplete."

"It makes you exclude, Tony. It must. You ask Thea how much I exclude as inessential." He paused. "I exclude her for a start," he said.

"Nonsense, darling. Of course you don't."

The grasses rattled faintly as he laughed. They hid his face, so deep he lay among them.

"See how indignant she is, Tony. She dislikes being classed among the inessentials."

Tony was silent. He remembered his father's and mother's different talk together.

"I tell her, Tony. I'm a rotten awful husband. But at least she's quite free, not even tied by children. I'd never stop her if she wanted to leave me."

"You wait." I sounded bright. "You wait till the day I take you up on that."

He rolled over suddenly, caught hold of my foot and pulled me down to where he was lying. My skirt rucked up and thistles scratched the backs of my thighs. He pulled me down till he could put his arm around my hips. He held very tight. We laughed and pretended it was all a game. I remember he bit my stomach, and it was all foolish and a little degrading, and I let him because I thought he was telling me he hadn't meant a word of what he was saying. And telling Tony too, of course.

We stopped wrestling to watch a boat go by on the river. She nosed in till her bow actuated the electric eye. Then the gate closed behind her and she slowly dropped out of sight. The music from her radio faded, and the tick of her echo-sounder. We watched the top of her mast edge out, her engines echoing in the dripping hollows of the lock. Whoever was on board kept out of sight—they might have been asleep, or dead, or making love. The boat ap-

peared beyond the lock and glided away, high among the water into long dark lines. She stayed in sight between the willows for a long time, gleaming blue and white and chromium.

Afraid of firing the grass after so many weeks of dry weather, Edward burned our rubbish in the middle of the upper lock gate, closed now after the passage of the boat. He leaned on the rail and held his lighter to the paper cups and plates and packaging. A gentle wind blew pieces against the raised base of the railing. They lodged there and as the fire burned he pushed them into it with his foot. Below him the lock gate was dark and slimy, white water fountaining through the vents. A curl of burned paper lifted over the edge and hung silvery gray for seconds till the cold river air caught it and drew it down out of sight. Edward burned the paper carefully, well, leaning on the rail with unavoidable grace, as preoccupied with the simple thing as he might be with the most complex. I smiled as I watched him, thinking how little my parents must have understood to let me marry a man so far outside their framework. They'd asked me if he loved me, and I'd said he did. He still loved me now, his love my only path through the lost and private world he inhabited.

"Are we ready, Thea? It's time we were making a start."

We picked our way back to the car. Tony was quiet, watching Edward as he walked on ahead, talking all the time about the traffic we could expect, and his plans for avoiding it. All the way back in the car the scratches on the backs of my legs hurt against the material of my skirt. I remember a place near Cambridge where—

"Don't leave me, Nurse. Please don't leave me."

"I have to, Mrs. Cadence. I'm expected in the kitchen for your tea."

"Later. Please go later."

"But Mrs. Cadence—"

Her hand is warm and dry. I try to hurt her, squeezing it so hard.

"He never loved me, Nurse. Do you understand how a man like that cheats? He can't help it—to get what he

needs he has to pretend he's a part of the human animal. He's a part of nothing."

"You're talking about your husband? I really don't think you ought—"

"He cheated me of simplicity. He made love disgustingly, and I didn't know."

"We know about the sex recording session. Dr. Cadence should have realized what a deep impression it would make on you. We admit that he should not have let you be—"

"I'm not talking about the recording session."

"You'll upset the other patients, making a noise like that."

We've been through this before, been through the idea of the other patients. I only know that I never see them, never hear them. Do they see and hear me?

"I'm not talking about the recording session."

"We do agree that you shouldn't have attended it. That it upset you seriously—as it would many people. It's an explanation for what's happened since. An explanation—not an excuse, Mrs. Cadence."

"I am not talking about the recording session."

"You may not like to admit it, but all the same I think you are."

"I'm talking about a whole way of life, Nurse. The nine years in which I was a young woman."

"Self-pity never gets anyone anywhere. At thirty-two you're still a young woman."

If only she were like Doctor. At least his not meaning well makes him honest. All her sympathy and I still can't reach her. But she can't go away, not for as long as I've got her hand.

"Nurse—I don't expect you'll want to hear, but I'm going to tell you about the first time we slept together. Edward and me. It's only words—we know what they mean, it can't do any harm to say them."

"If you're sure you want to."

Professional gentleness. I shouldn't let it affect me so. But it gives me difficulty in speaking.

"We were both students, he in the last year of his psychiatry course. I was nearer to my finals by three months. I'd gone on to specialize in mental nursing. Medical students

did it all the time, of course. Mate, I mean. As uncomplicatedly as rabbits. But without rabbit-type families. No doubt they still do, in spite of Sexitape. . . .”

Not I, of course, but Thea Springfield. Will I be able to tell you, without corn, that Edward Cadence and Thea Springfield were different? Different from most students and—although she didn’t know it—different from each other? It’s important, this separation they shared that she saw as a bond and that Edward knew was a means. It’s important that for their different reasons they’d neither of them slept around; it was important to Thea Springfield at any rate. Shall I have to begin, Nurse, by telling you about that Thea, her background, the hats she wore, the words she wrote down to look up later in her dictionary? And what can I begin to tell you about him? He was distant, almost brusque till he felt he had his companion’s interest. Then he changed so that you could warm your hands at him, at his enthusiasm and vitality. She felt this almost painfully, having so little of either. Of course, he could switch off again just as quickly. It was his sensitive soul, she thought.

“He was very charming, you know, Nurse. . . .”

And she has removed her hand so quietly that I never felt it go. I still have the sensation of her fingers in mine, the bunch of them and one nail sticking into me a little. They have thickness, and blood in them, still her warmth although the rest of her has gone. I keep the pattern of her hand for as long as it can resist the reasonable fact that she has gone. I can’t blame her. I’d wandered off myself. And I could never have told her anything so that she’d understand.

I have to remember the terms themselves, before I can begin. She was in love, unclouded, with limitless perceptions of joy. (How could I ever have said that to my wardress?) They both took the same free afternoon when they both should have been working, and they both went to the zoo instead. It rained as soon as they arrived so they went straight to a restaurant where they sat overlooking the seals who preferred wet weather. One wall of the restaurant was an aquarium with a sunken Spanish galleon in which

—so the waiter told them—an octopus lived. The whole room was greenly lit, with a foliage ceiling real enough for her to imagine spiders. A shocking pink parrot perched glumly on a piece of bamboo. Edward brought them both an expensive fizzy drink imported from Africa—though reputedly native it appeared to have been modeled on Coca-Cola. Which is what the need for a world market does to you, he said wisely. The restaurant became increasingly crowded as more people were driven in by the rain. Finally the noise and the pushing drove Edward and Thea out. They made hats for themselves out of paper napkins. With lovers' luck no sooner had everyone in the restaurant ordered lengthy things to eat and drink than the rain stopped and the sun shone brilliantly.

I remember nothing about the zoo itself except the vivid shadows cages made on the gleaming paths. And the feel of Edward's fingers between mine. It was an afternoon spent in unspoken anticipation of the evening.

Edward had a flat of his own, four furnished rooms with central heating. As a qualified doctor, his grant was generous. The day progressed quietly and logically toward his bed. Even so, the moment still came when dinner was finished and the first conclusive move had to be made. They'd been sitting in his big armchair for some time, still keeping to safe paths. Then Edward moved back and looked at her.

"Well?" he said.

"Well . . ." she said, trying to sound practical. He stopped her.

"Bedtime," he said.

Three sufficient, insufficient words and the paths were gone. They were together in a dark forest. He kissed her for comfort. In the bedroom she let him undress her.

"I love you," she said.

"I know."

"Do you love me?"

"Never ask a man that when his eyes are red. He'll say anything. Besides, you know the answer."

"I can't see your eyes red."

"Because your own are similarly afflicted."

"I wish red wasn't the color of passion. It's all wrong. I wish our blood was golden."

"Precious and incorruptible. . . . Yes, the myth-makers slipped up badly there."

He placed her hands for her to take off his clothes. The rituals were important, a solemn way into the forest. And beauty. She hid under the bedclothes, suddenly self-conscious. His feet padded around to the other side, and then he climbed in. It was easy to turn to him, to feel the cold sheet lifted off by his arm and by the breadth of his body. The forest was set with bright flowers, making it easy to slip out of self, to lose mind in the dark tracks between the trees, to be safe along the unthought path.

But this is Thea Cadence, old, hiding behind metaphor. Thea Springfield, young, had no objection to penis and vagina, erogenous zones, orgasm. They were textbook, meaningless until physically understood. Even the dead hand of calling what they did sexual intercourse was nothing to her. Sexual—schmexual—who cared?

Her orgasm was small. This first time she derived her deepest satisfaction from his.

They lay still, and she thought he had gone to sleep. The smell of him stirred her with strange pity. Suddenly he laughed.

"What's the matter?" She had the quick fear that she had failed in some way.

"I'm happy."

But she felt there was something else.

"And I've been waiting for you to ask again."

"Ask what? What should I ask you?"

"My eyes are golden now, golden with contentment. And I love you."

She remembered.

"I don't think that's very nice." She'd always wondered how people could talk to each other. Afterward. "Almost as if you had tried me out first."

"If we hadn't fitted, then all the love in the world wouldn't have made a good marriage."

"We did fit . . . didn't we?"

"You have a marvelous eye for essentials, Thea. It's even made you pass over my proposal of marriage."

She lay quiet still, terrified. Happy.

"Marry you . . ."

"Please, Thea. We've known each other nearly two years. If you love me, please marry me. I'll make you happy. Marry me, Thea. I love you so much."

And the bloody fucking bastard cheated her. Cheated her all the shitty way.

CAMERA ONE ON WITNESS 27. SUNLIGHT EFFECT THROUGH CIRCULAR WINDOW BEHIND.

WITNESS 27.

Your worship, he never loved her.

JUDGE.

And who are you?

WITNESS 27.

Their grocer, your worship.

DEFENSE COUNSEL.

Just tell the court, in your own words, exactly what happened.

WITNESS 27.

What happened when, Miss?

DEFENSE COUNSEL.

Don't call me Miss. I am counsel for the defense. Just tell the court what happened on the occasions when he didn't love her.

WITNESS 27.

But he never loved her.

DEFENSE COUNSEL.

Then tell the court what happened never.

CAMERA ONE MOVES IN. WITNESS SMOOTHS HIS FOUR STRANDS OF HAIR ACROSS HIS SHINING BALD HEAD. CAMERA WATCH FOR DAZZLE.

WITNESS 27.

The way he always carried her basket, your worship. He never fooled me for a moment. When he ruffled her hair—never more than a performance. And she never noticed his eyes; to me they

were as cold as a cash register. And his smile, like packets of detergent.

DEFENSE COUNSEL.

You were telling the court what never happened.

WITNESS 27.

He never lit up, your worship.

JUDGE.

Never lit up?

DEFENSE COUNSEL.

Never lit up?

JUDGE.

Never lit?

WITNESS 27.

Not once, ma'am. Not in seven years of groceries.

COMMOTION IN COURT. CAMERA TWO ON PROSECUTION COUNSEL AS SHE RISES.

PROSECUTION COUNSEL.

Acting on instructions from the Crown, your worship, and in the face of the overwhelming weight of evidence presented by the defense, I beg leave to state that the Prosecution withdraws its case.

FURTHER COMMOTION.

JUDGE.

About time too, in my opinion, Mrs. Wilberforce.

PROSECUTION COUNSEL.

Furthermore, damages to the figure of seventeen thousand pounds are offered to the defendant in consideration of her wrongful arrest.

QUICK CUT TO CAMERA ONE. DEFENSE COUNSEL POWDERS HER NOSE.

DEFENSE COUNSEL.

May I suggest, your worship, that while mere money is very nice and my learned friend's offer at least provides a basis for negotiation, what is needed is not so much recompense as a lasting token of national gratitude.

PROSECUTION COUNSEL.

I was coming to that, your worship. In addition we suggest that a medal be struck, a special award in recognition of Mrs. Cadence's outstanding serv-



ices to mankind. With one minor qualification.

DEFENSE COUNSEL.

Shame. Withdraw.

PROSECUTION COUNSEL.

The Crown appends the comment that in the opinion of Her Majesty's counselors it is to be regretted only that Mrs. Cadence did not see where her duty lay some twelve years earlier.

CAMERA TWO PANS R. CENTERS ON THE DOCK.

MRS. CADENCE.

Your worship, may I speak?

JUDGE.

Madam, anything you may have to say will be of the liveliest interest to us.

MRS. CADENCE.

Your worship, ladies of the jury—I am a woman.

PROLONGED APPLAUSE FROM ALL PARTS OF THE COURTROOM.

In earlier days a woman's duty lay first to her husband. Even today, even after the Married Woman's Supremacy Act of 1988, some shreds of this feeling remain in most women, to be fostered treacherously by their menfolk. I married young, my mother told me nothing. Brainwashed from the very first moment of meeting my husband, how else could I act? For enlightenment finally to penetrate took twelve long years. The Court has already before it evidence of the chain of circumstances that showed me where my duty really lay. This duty once seen, your worship, it was done. And with dispatch.

THE NOBILITY OF HER DELIVERY CASTS A HUSH OF AWE OVER THE COURTROOM. THE JUDGE CLEARS HER THROAT.

JUDGE.

Mrs. Cadence, the case against you is withdrawn and you are hereby discharged without a stain upon your character. The Crown further admits wrongful arrest on a charge of first, second, third, fourth, or fifth degree murder, and promises compensation at a figure to be agreed upon out of court. In addition, at the special investiture to

be held this afternoon, Her Majesty the Queen has graciously consented to invest you with the order of—

What might I have been invested with? What suitable order could they have devised? Not that it matters, of course. The real trial was quite a different matter.

Behind the witnesses there was a window, and three feet beyond the window a mottled gray-brown wall. The courtroom was quite sunless, and yet not in the least cool since the judges who came all suffered from the idea of drafts. My judge was a small man, made ugly by many years of understanding and administering the law. He brought a small Sensitape with him and during all recesses he stayed where he was, one contact pressed to his left temple, his eyes closed. With the volume high enough I suppose he might have got something out of it. I've no idea what tape he used, but it seemed to calm him. By the end of a long sitting he would be thoroughly ragged.

"The witness is doing his best to answer, Mr. Vincent-Clarke. We would all be very pleased if you could refrain from harrying him."

Or again—

"The facts speak for themselves, Mr. Siemens. You would make a more favorable impression if you let them."

Mr. Siemens was my counsel. He maintained a brisk confidence in the case's outcome right up to the moment of the verdict. Even on the limited evidence I gave him he seemed certain of an acquittal. Yet he was a subtle man—he must have been aware of the pressures against him. When a national figure, a national hero, is murdered the case can't be allowed to slip away into decent obscurity. If not me, then somebody else would have to be found. The police had their reputation to think of. The nation had its pride. Not only had I to be found guilty, but also for the right reasons. For myself, I just didn't care.

"Mr. Bowden, you are a taxi driver?"

"That's right."

"On the night of June 3rd, this year, you took a fare out to an address in Wimbledon?"

"That's right."

"Please tell the court what happened then."

Mr. Bowden had a pale face, and pale eyes behind contact lenses. He wasn't a good witness—he wanted too obviously to please.

"I'd dropped my fare in Wimbledon. I'd decided to make it my last. I was on my way back home across Putney Common. The time was just after eleven-thirty."

"How can you be so sure of the time, Mr. Bowden?"

"I was going home. I reckoned on getting back before midnight. I live in one of the new Highgate Estates. With the theater traffic over I could easily make it through the West End in half an hour."

"So you can swear to the time being eleven-thirty?"

"That's right. Give or take a few minutes. Halfway across the Common I was hailed by a woman. I wasn't showing my light and I was in two minds whether to stop. In the end I did. The woman asked me if I'd take her to Richmond. A house on the Green, she said."

"You don't remember the exact address?"

"She may not have given it to me. It's not a large green. She may just have said, 'A house on the Green.' I don't remember."

"You took her there."

"It wasn't far out of my way. I could pick up the thru-way in Chiswick. I dropped her off on the Green at eleven-forty."

"You didn't see where she went."

"My mind was on my bed. It'd been a long day."

"But you're willing to swear that you dropped her off at eleven-forty?"

"That's right."

"I draw the jury's attention to the fact that Mrs. Cadence's call to the Richmond Police Station came through at eleven-forty-seven. Also I would like to remind the jury of the relevant passage in Mrs. Cadence's statement, made that same night to the police. I quote: 'I came home by taxi from Putney Heath. As soon as I realized what had happened I phoned the police.'"

Mr. Siemens closed his folder noisily. No doubt his in-

tention was to give the impression that he had proved something. Mr. Bowden fidgeted.

"Can I go now?"

"Just one more thing from me, Mr. Bowden. After that I expect the prosecuting counsel will want to have a word with you. Mr. Bowden, am I right in saying that you cannot positively identify Mrs. Cadence as the woman you took from Putney Common to Richmond Green on the night of June 3rd?"

"That's right. It was dark, and I was tired. Besides, one fare's very like another."

"You cannot positively identify her by her voice either?"

"She hardly said three words to me. Just 'Richmond Green' and then 'thank you' at the other end."

"So you cannot positively identify her. On the other hand, can you positively say that the woman in question was *not* Mrs. Cadence?"

"How could I? I hardly noticed her. I just took her where she wanted to go."

I didn't remember him—why the hell should he remember me? It was a complete fluke that we'd got hold of him at all. Now Mr. Vincent-Clarke was on his feet, slowly removing his spectacles. Everything was drama to him, even removing his spectacles.

"Mr. Bowden, you seem to remember very little about this mysterious fare of yours."

"That's right."

"Yet you say she hardly spoke three words to you. And you tell us what those words were."

"I meant she said what fares usually say. I didn't mean that those were her exact words, only the sort of thing she might have said."

"You're under oath, Mr. Bowden. When you tell us exactly what she said, we believe you. Now you tell us those mightn't have been her words at all."

"That's the sort of thing she said. I mean, she wasn't chatty."

I couldn't share Mr. Vincent-Clarke's evident opinion of his own virtuosity. The driver's evidence was so inconclusive I couldn't see why he bothered.

"You remember that she wasn't chatty."

"It's the other way around. If she had been chatty, then I'd've remembered."

"But you might have forgotten. Even if she'd been chatty, you still might have forgotten."

"I don't remember what the hell she said. I don't see why it matters."

The judge became agitated, about to complain at the witness for swearing, I suppose. Mr. Vincent-Clarke cut in quickly, not wishing a defense witness to gain the jury's sympathy.

"You're an intelligent man, Mr. Bowden. You know quite well why it matters. Mrs. Cadence has a fine speaking voice—exceptionally fine and well-modulated."

Except when drunk.

"If she had spoken more than a very few words you'd have been likely to recognize her voice easily next time you heard it."

"Is that a question?"

He'd got Mr. Bowden angry. Perhaps on purpose.

"You've said that one fare is very like another, Mr. Bowden. May I suggest that in a taxi driver's life one day is very like another?"

"You may suggest what you like."

"And your reply to that suggestion?"

"I remember nights when I'm out after twelve. It's a sort of deadline for me. I remember that Friday because I didn't get home till twelve-twenty. And I remember why."

"Friday, did you say, Mr. Bowden?"

"I meant Thursday."

"Which did you really mean, Mr. Bowden? Thursday or Friday?"

"When I picked her up it was Thursday. When I got home it was Friday."

"Thank you, Mr. Bowden. No further questions."

Bowden had covered his slip of the tongue very neatly. As far as I could judge he was telling the truth, for what it was worth. Mr. Siemens waived his right to a further examination, and the taxi driver stood down.

The purpose of all this, of course, was slightly squalid.

Medical evidence indicated that Edward had been shot very soon after sexual intercourse. If I had arrived home at eleven-forty and rung the police less than seven minutes later, then it could hardly have been with me. (There were other reasons also, of which the court was only partially aware.) And if not me, then there must have been someone else. And the strong possibility that I might have seen her. I admitted seeing nobody, so the prosecution's contention was that I had in fact got home considerably earlier than I claimed, early enough to have been available for Edward's pleasure. So Mr. Bowden's evidence might have been quite useful.

All this was merely chipping at the extreme edges. Like me, Mr. Siemens knew perfectly well where the core of the argument lay. The prosecution—and the nation—wanted a verdict for fifth degree murder: murder while the balance of the mind is disturbed. This and a suitable plea for mercy. With no real evidence on either side, the case hinged on this insanity and on its causes. With the motive established and the psychological capability, the lack of real evidence against me wouldn't seem too important. The result was exactly the sort of psychological muckraking that the public loved.

And Mr. Siemens was surprised that I refused to take any part in it.

"You are Dr. Mbleble. You are a consultant psychiatrist at the Kingston Home originally set up by Dr. Cadence?"

"That is my present position. Yes."

"You knew Dr. Cadence well?"

"Very well indeed. We worked together in the Fairbairn Hospital and later I assisted him in his Richmond Clinic."

"You would discuss patients' case histories together? That sort of thing?"

"Certainly. We were colleagues—and also close friends."

That was a lie. Edward had never had a close friend in his life—only people who served his vision. But Mr. Vincent-Clarke was satisfied. He leaned forward, paused, and then relaxed again. When his question finally came it was thrown off with studied casualness.

"Did he ever discuss his wife with you, Dr. Mbleble?"

"Many times. He was very worried about her."

"Would you say he had good reason for his worry?"

"Certainly. His wife's mental condition was not good. In the last years of their marriage she suffered a severe sexual block."

"How severe?"

"Intercourse was quite impossible for her. Uncontrollable nausea would set in."

The court observed me with new interest, the poor woman for whom intercourse was quite impossible. I stared back at them. In my mind I composed tomorrow's headlines.

SICK OF SEX  
Mrs. C. Sees Green

"Did you and Dr. Cadence arrive at any conclusions as to how the block had come about?"

"It is by no means unusual in people of both sexes who are subjected to the sort of repressive puritanism Mrs. Cadence was brought up under."

"And the precise effects of such a block, Dr. Mbleble?"

"If you dam a river, Mr. Vincent-Clarke, the river does not cease to exist. It builds up, increases pressure, finally finds some other way out. Repressed sexuality can be productive of great artistic creativity. It can also produce blind destructiveness. Besides many other dramatic psychological disturbances. The sexual may not be the only drive, Mr. Vincent-Clarke, but it is certainly one of the more important."

We live in an age of enlightenment, thank God. The gleaming doctor was able to go on to explain my mind's agony and my body's deprivation in excellent detail, without any fear that either I or the public at large would suffer the slightest embarrassment.

". . . Mrs. Cadence's case is undoubtedly one that would have benefited at once from treatment with the Sextape, limited frequency, female edition. Unfortunately, as sometimes happens, her early conditioning was so powerful that areas of her psyche in fact did not want to be cured. She refused the Sextape treatment categorically. In the

circumstances there was nothing that either Dr. Cadence or myself could do."

Observe the poor woman, the woman who didn't want to be cured.

In the circumstances there was nothing that anybody could have done, not even Tony Stech. And Christ, he tried hard enough. I listened to Mbleble's voice roll musically on, comforted by my own private knowledge of how wrong he was. Mr. Siemens, with whom I had refused to discuss the subject (this fitted perfectly with the rest of my neurotic behavior, after all), had decided against calling a rival medical expert. If juries get muddled they tend to lean toward a psychological explanation rather than away from it. Mr. Siemens preferred to rely on cross-examination to make his few points.

"Dr. Mbleble—would it be true to say that until the last three or four years Mrs. Cadence's sex life had been completely normal?"

"To the best of my knowledge, yes. As far as any norm exists, that is."

"At any rate, Dr. Cadence never mentioned any earlier disturbance?"

"That is correct. And he probably would have. Our later discussions of her condition were very thorough."

Dr. Mbleble had come out to meet my man halfway. He must feel very confident.

"Is it usual, Doctor, for such a block to occur for the reasons you describe after a long period of normality?"

"No. It is most unusual."

"This vomiting—is it not a symbol of moral distaste? Disgust even?"

"Certainly. A splendid symbol. Crude, but splendid."

"Disgust for what, Doctor?"

"Disgust for the sexual process, Mr. Siemens."

"Could it not rather have been disgust for the person of Dr. Cadence?"

I'd thought of this argument myself, and it hadn't worked.

"That is possible, Mr. Siemens."

"In that case the river you were speaking of needn't have been dammed at all. The sexual drive could simply have



found a perfectly normal outlet with some other partner."

"Certainly. All the same—"

"And if Mrs. Cadence herself understood this—and I remind you that she has considerable psychiatric training—if Mrs. Cadence understood this then she would also understand that the Sextape treatment would be useless."

"But she did not understand this, Mr. Siemens. We tried repeatedly to discuss the matter with her. She understood nothing."

"Would she have been able to admit to anybody that her husband disgusted her? Bearing in mind that she loved him, would she have told you, knowing that you would be bound to pass the information on?"

Dr. Mbleble inclined his head to one side, leaning forward slightly, patiently willing to explain.

"It's this love that makes the whole thing so much more dangerous, Mr. Siemens. Her disgust with sex left her no primordial outlet for her love. Therefore—"

"You are evading the question, Doctor. I had put it to you that Mrs. Cadence might not have felt disgust for sex at all, and you had agreed with me."

"But—"

"And you had agreed with me."

The judge's voice started up, like a slow audio tape.

"Counsel must not bully the witness."

"But, your worship—"

The rest of Mr. Siemens' reply was lost in the general laughter. Dr. Mbleble was six feet seven, with neck and shoulders like a big black bull. He could have crushed Mr. Siemens' head in one broad hand.

I wondered if perhaps Dr. Mbleble was right—perhaps my upbringing really had crippled me. What other explanation could there be for the agony given me by the frank and reasonable discussion? And for my anger at their gross laughter? This was my life they were picking to pieces. Me. And they could take time off to laugh at the antics of a huge Negro and a little white man in a fuzzy white wig.

"Dr. Mbleble—total sexual repression such as you claim

Mrs. Cadence was suffering from is a serious affliction, is it not?"

"Certainly. But this is more than just a wild claim, you know. Both I and Dr. Cadence had—"

"Please answer my questions, Doctor. A person suffering from such an affliction is liable to show symptoms of mental stress, is she not?"

"Probable. But not invariable."

"Did Mrs. Cadence display any such symptoms? And if so, could you please describe them to the Court?"

"Certainly. She was irritable."

"She was irritable."

"She was often depressed."

"Often depressed."

"At other times she showed an almost irrational cheerfulness."

"Irrational cheerfulness."

"You asked me for symptoms, Mr. Siemens. Every one of these is typical."

Mr. Siemens met his anger with a small deprecatory smile.

"I must admit to displaying all those symptoms myself, Dr. Mbleble. My mistress will be astonished to learn what they prove me to be suffering from."

Again the laughter. Ominously polite, Dr. Mbleble waited until it had subsided.

"The defendant also suffered a complete mental breakdown on one occasion, Mr. Siemens. Some eighteen months ago. State of total amnesia."

"Ah yes—I'm glad you reminded me of that, Doctor. That would be just after the suicide of her husband's partner, Mr. Stech."

"To connect the events is deceptive, Mr. Siemens. Stable personalities do not suffer total breakdown on the suicide of a business associate, or even a friend."

"Of a friend, Dr. Mbleble?"

The implication was clear enough. It shattered me—I had had no idea at all that Mr. Siemens would use it, that it existed in his mind even. I searched the Negro doctor's face, finding to my relief only careful surprise. Of course,

I thought, of course Edward wouldn't have told him. Not out of shame—simply because he wouldn't have bothered. It wasn't significant enough, not by then.

Dr. Mbleble shrugged his shoulders.

"We have no proof that any such outlet was psychologically possible," he said.

"But if there were, Doctor—and you certainly have no proof to the contrary—would there not then be adequate grounds for the breakdown you described, quite apart from any deep psychological disorder . . . ?"

"Certainly there would. However, I must repeat that—"

"Thank you, Doctor. No further questions."

Mr. Siemens was very pleased with his progress. For myself, I was so angry I could have wept. I had intentionally told him nothing about my relationship with Tony, and yet he'd come up with the whole thing on his own account. However obvious it was, he should have let it lie. He had no right to trespass and trample; none of them had. God, how I could have done with a breakdown at that moment. To be able to stand and scream and pound the shelf and vomit on the floor and show them I was all they wanted to prove me and more. To scream and roll my eyes, shouting "Sex! Aaargh! Sex!" and shut them up. But I sat on, puritanically docile, my face calm, my hands folded meekly over the cause of all the trouble. My awareness of body, of flesh, was such that I dared not move.

Of course Mr. Vincent-Clarke could not let the doctor go without a further picking at my genitals. He had to undo the misguidedly good work my Mr. Siemens had done. He led Dr. Mbleble through several other case histories, all outwardly similar to mine, and all ending in sudden violence. He was able to prove that—

"Mrs. Cadence—Doctor slapped your face yesterday, didn't he?"

Mrs. Craig. Nurse. She's come back.

"What did you say, Nurse? I wasn't listening. I'm sorry—I didn't hear you come in."

"I've brought you your tea, Mrs. Cadence. You wouldn't have any lunch so there's a poached egg as well."

"How kind of you. Perhaps that's what's wrong with me—perhaps I'm just very hungry."

For her sake it seems necessary to simplify. This afternoon I'm sorry for her. She looks so worried as she puts the tray down.

"You were talking about Doctor slapping my face, Nurse."

She jumps. Obviously she'd hoped I really hadn't heard her after all.

"I was wondering if he did it because you were violent, Mrs. Cadence."

"I shouted at him. But I wasn't at all violent. Perhaps he thought I'd disturb the other patients."

"The treatment room is soundproofed, Mrs. Cadence."

"What did you tell me that for? Frankly I'd rather not know."

"I thought you would know, your husband having designed it."

If our noses aren't pushed in them most of us cannot know the things we'd rather.

"Was this yesterday, Nurse? I'd have thought it was much longer ago than that."

"Doctor shouldn't slap you. I'll speak to him about it."

"I'd prefer you not to. Today he was kind to me. I find that much more disturbing."

"Your egg will get cold very quickly, Mrs. Cadence."

A piece of buttered toast, and on it the neat round of eggwhite and the marvelously yellow yolk. Cut gently, turn the knife, and watch the yolk bleed down onto the dull buttery surface of the toast. Twist the pepper grinder, brown flakes in a light shower, and add salt. Instantly the salt crusts over. For me poached egg on toast is a delicate ecstasy, a fleshy delight, emotive, a blending of texture and flavor, of present and past. Fork prongs through the eggwhite, held in the softened toast, and eat.

"The paper I brought you wasn't about the trial, Mrs. Cadence."

Concentrate. Concentrate on the toast. The egg, salt, pepper, and the butter.

"There was an item about someone the papers call Mrs. X. She's suing Sensitape for a lot of money. There seems

to be a missing agreement involved. It's all most sensational."  
Egg. Toast. The edges still crunchy.

"I thought you'd be interested. That's all."

My simplification was correct. This food makes me feel much better.

"Am I to have tablets again, Mrs. Craig? Or does the tea contain the necessary?"

"Tablets."

"I'm glad you've told me. I'll be able to enjoy the tea a lot more now I know."

"And it's twenty-eight days you've been here, Mrs. Cadence. Not nineteen."

"Thank you, Mrs. Craig." I go on eating, go on smiling.  
"Thank you for telling me."

"I want to help you in any way I can."

Then why, in God's name why chip nine days out of my life and show them to me, gloating? Why drag me back to what I have blessedly forgotten with your vulgar talk of Mrs. X? Why tell me the noises I make under treatment are so animal that they must be soundproofed out of general existence? Why tie me so tightly to reason when what is obviously needed to get me out of here is complete insanity?

"I'm sure you do, Mrs. Craig. It's very kind of you."

"You don't believe me."

"Indeed I do. You want to help me. You'd have to be a monster not to."

"I have plans, Mrs. Cadence. You must trust me."

Pause.

"Have you ever heard of Synthajoy, Nurse?"

"No. What is it?"

"No, I thought you wouldn't have."

Tea. If I tilt the teapot gently enough the tea swells out of the spout, round and smooth, not spilling, held firm by surface tension. Exquisite. One degree more and it breaks, runs down the spout onto the traycloth where it spreads as quickly as an opened hand. Destructive of me—tea stains are the very devil. Ultrasonics useless, chemicals are needed, extra work for all concerned. If they're wise they'll make me put up with a stained traycloth.

She's gone. Thank God she's tactful at least in the easy things.

Was my upbringing really as puritanical as they say? My father the Professor, Thea Springfield's father, was he really so narrow, so repressive? Thea Springfield's mother, did she really hold the views she said she did? Or did she merely utter them, expecting nobody—least of all her daughter—to believe in them?

"Eat your crusts now, Thea dear. Millions are starving, dear." For this was 1966. "I hate to see you be so fussy." For Thea Springfield with no front teeth the crusts of toast were torture. Being only small she didn't think of telling her mother to eat them herself. She would never think such a thought, not then or later. Through love though, not repression.

"We live in the lucky half of the world, dear. We should always remember it."

The lucky half of the world looked nice—without the understanding that coins have two sides *lucky* was meaningless. Sunday afternoon tea in Daddy's study; pine paneled, with angular metal lamps, and hundreds of books, and a huge view of the garden and the house next door. Thea liked the house next door; it had a spiral staircase. Daddy said of course it wasn't spiral at all, spirals got bigger or littler, like the spring in Thea's clock. And anyway, what happened when next door's party guests had to go up it drunk? Something in the frank way he and Mummy said *drunk* made it sound very naughty and exciting. The house next door took on the aura of the people who lived in it—naughty and exciting. Daddy sat very comfortable in a leather chair. When Thea climbed on his knee he would bounce her, saying the leather would split. It often split in Thea's nightmares. Daddy was allowed to have his plate in his lap. This scene rather than any of the others because of the poached egg, of course.

"They're broadcasting a teach-in on Vietnam tonight, Pam. Open-ended."

"Don't forget we're half-expecting John and Carol. They said they'd come if they could get a baby-sitter."

"Damn. Well, we'll make them listen. Do them good."

"Don't be dishonest, David. You know how you show off if people come. You'd never dream of shutting up and listening to the radio."

Egg. Huge. As large as Thea's hand almost. And crust easily dealt with if sucked a bit first.

"The moral is, Pam, that we ought to move. Disengage. Knowing our limitations—my limitations, if you like—we ought to get out. Gain ourselves time to think."

"And your job? We're commuter-belt people, David. Where is there time to think within a hundred miles of London? Besides, Thea's just settled in at her school. You love your school, don't you, Thea?"

"The thing I like about you, Pam, is that you give me good reasons for doing the weak things I do do. But I still hope John and Carol won't come."

Thea drank her hot milk. On Sunday she was allowed soap flakes in her bath to make bubbles. She had a submarine that would sail around out of sight under them. It wound up with a key and there was a cork for the key-hole. The cork fitted very tightly.

"Will your diet allow you another piece of toast, David?"

"Of course it will. If there's one thing I hate, it's diet bores."

"Not to mention how-I-gave-up-smoking bores. And of course people who—"

"All right, all right . . . I know I'm over-critical." He laughed easily. "It's a reaction against the permissive age we live in."

Thea Springfield thought a lot about her parents' conversations. If they often went on at her—'going on at you' was a precious new phrase learned at school—at least they went on at each other just as much. And it was all, they told her, only because of loving each other and wanting each other to be good. Even in those days she understood this good to be different from the more specific good that was the opposite of naughty.

She glanced sideways at the Sunday paper on the coffee table beside her. She sat up to the low table on a stool, her legs fitting neatly under it. She knew the paper had a

picture of one of the poor hungry babies in it. She ate her egg on toast, every crumb.

And sex? Well, in later years the word that came up most was respect, respect for herself and for the boy she might want to sleep with. Sleeping around was inadvisable. A bad thing. But in the end it had to be up to her. No rules existed; it was all up to her.

I suppose it might be called repressive. It certainly wasn't like the guidance Edward got from Rachel. She advised him to have a bit whenever he could. Facts had to be faced, she said. It was the male way, the male prerogative. He told me this himself, laughing, considering it nonsense.

"Here you are now, Mrs. Cadence. I've brought you your tablets. I couldn't find Doctor for the moment but I shall certainly have a serious talk with him later."

I never poured out the tea. And now it's cold. At least Mummy and Daddy never allowed Thea Springfield to let her tea grow cold.



## DAY 29

It's strange to feel so comfortable when walking along, supported and warm all over. It must be the effect of the dream I was having. The walls of the corridor are luminous, and curved slightly—as if I were walking around the inside of a huge white balloon. Only not so, for the other wall of the corridor curves the other way, both of them inward. Then the corridor should get rapidly narrower, and stop. But it doesn't, not even behind me, behind my companion, not even when I turn suddenly to catch it. So the curve I see is the curve of my eyeball, the curve of the inside of my head. The curve I take with me, part of the dream I was having.

Dream? What dream was that? It's a dreamless sleep, the sleep brought by the tablets. And nothing is colder than the awakening. The corridor is hard, and the hand on my arm, and the pair of double doors that grow and grow and grow. And then part silently.

"I'm afraid the patient is ninety percent today, Doctor."

"Are you sure, Nurse?"

"Quite sure. Approaching a hundred. Stiffened noticeably as we came along the passage."

"Can't be helped. We'll just have to increase the dosage."

He turns to me. He's doubtful.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Cadence. Time for your treatment. Are you ready?"

"Could you tell me my percentage for the rest of the twenty-four hours, Doctor?"

"Between thirty-five and forty."

My God, that's barely human.

"We keep you low, Mrs. Cadence. It rests the brain. And of course it makes nursing so much easier."

And the half hour or so of consciousness that much more intense. And the tape that much more persuasive.

"Are you ready, Mrs. Cadence?"

I sit on the couch and they fit the headset. Mrs. Craig makes an ostentatious fuss not to disturb my hair. Doctor tightens the screw and the electrodes move in, pricking slightly. I lie on the couch, cold to the backs of my legs. Doctor sees that the rooflight dazzles me and he dims the glass. I stare up at the white glow. I wait.

My one hundred percent mind-brain-memory complex offers pictures and sounds. Offers me Mr. Siemens.

"Can you think of anyone else who could have been in the house that evening, Mrs. Cadence?"

"Nobody at all. I've thought and thought."

"And nothing was disturbed, you say?"

"I do understand how important these questions are, Mr. Siemens. I only wish I could give you more helpful answers."

I wonder why I lied. The first lie, and the covering up to the police, it can't have been prompted by pride. Not dignity either. Was there an instinctive wish to preserve the Cadence myth? And the later lies? I'd had plenty of time for second thoughts. I wonder if I really thought I was pursuing a course of heroism. I knew damn well who had been in the house that night. I tidied up after her. Expiation? Or vengeance? All I can remember now is

"We're beginning now, Mrs. Cadence."

Pain.

As long as I resist, pain. A huge frozen lake that cracks from shore to shore. Echoing cliffs, pressure of starlight. Finding words to describe it helps. It comes in waves, flashing like an ax. Bites deep. And if I stop resisting

Somewhere Doctor is telling me, I think it must be Doctor, is telling me to, telling me. It's as if

Crying again. And from the feel of my mouth, for a long time. A weight beyond endurance, squeezing out groans and moos and gross animal bubblings. Nobody should see me like this, nobody.

"Do you remember anything, Mrs. Cadence?"

"These questions are important, Mr. Siemens. I wish I could give you more helpful answers."

"I'm talking about your treatment, Mrs. Cadence. I want you to try to remember."

I must cut my nails. They've made my palms bleed.

"I'm sorry about your hands, Mrs. Cadence. I didn't notice till it was too late. I should have inserted pads."

"My God, Doctor, how many stechs were you using?"

"Maximum. I thought it was time."

"You've gone beyond memory, Doctor. Perhaps it's an effect you're not familiar with."

"Tell me."

He knows. He knows the mind can be pushed beyond sensation, beyond thought, memory, pain, guilt, beyond humanity. He knows damn well.

"It's all in Edward's book, Doctor. Look it up. Under Blanket Stimulation Effect, if I remember right."

"Nurse tells me she thinks I act unethically, Mrs. Cadence."

"Does she?"

"Have you been complaining about me, Mrs. Cadence? She says I slapped your face, Mrs. Cadence."

"You like saying my name."

"My intention is to give you a sense of identity."

"We've been through this before."

"You might not have remembered."

"I didn't tell her about my face. She saw for herself."

"There's nothing I'd like better than to be taken off your case, Mrs. Cadence. You still have rights, you know. You have only to put in a formal application."

"If I were going somewhere it might be worth it. But I'm not."

Strangely enough it's that sort of prevarication that satisfies him. His mouth remains serious. I never see his features as components of a whole, rather as separate items. Thus I have no real idea what he looks like. But his mouth remains serious. Not tight enough to be sadistic or relaxed enough to be simply pleased. So I deduce from this, and from his silence, a level of negative satisfaction.

And I really don't want him replaced. They allow me half an hour a day and he takes up commendably little of it. Another man might try analysis, suggestion therapy, anything to pare off a few more minutes of my life. My half hour. My search.

Now he sits quiet, content to wait for Mrs. Craig's arrival.

It was the day after I had sent around the copies of Edward's memo laying out his reasons for refusing to resign. The morning after our visit to the night club. Edward was busy down on outpatients and Tony was waiting in my office until he should be free. I remember Dr. Mbleble stopping in for a few minutes and then hurrying off. He had a schizo under a variant of the anti-UDW tape and he was interested to go and check progress. That left Tony and me alone again.

I'd known Tony for five years now—we should have been old friends. Yet in fact I was finding him increasingly difficult to talk to. I hid behind the pretense of a lot of work to do. I really did have plenty of work, but I'd

have put it on one side if the relationship had been easier. He passed the time rereading the report he had brought to discuss with Edward. Suddenly he spoke.

"Any reaction from the Management Committee?" he said.

"Not yet."

"I suppose it's a bit of a facer for them. Nobody likes a bluff to be called, especially a Committee."

"They'll be having another meeting this afternoon. We'll hear after that."

I wasn't really attending. My mind was on the case history in front of me. It took some seconds for what he was saying to connect. I looked up.

"He told you about it, did he?"

"Days ago. As soon as he received their letter."

I wondered how this letter had got to him without my seeing it. Personal messenger, I decided. My uncertainty must have showed.

"I expect he didn't want you to worry," Tony said. I wished he wouldn't. There was no need. "He obviously likes to settle anything difficult in his own way."

"He's quite right, of course." I typed a few words. "It would have worried me a lot."

Too often the things I said to Tony were too obscure. There was no way of refuting his unspoken concern. Silence would have been as bad.

"There's no chance at all that they'll sack him," Tony said. "They'll just set up this inquiry as a face-saver."

"A lot more paperwork for all of us." I was glad of the new topic. "Invoices, balance sheets, cash appropriations. Sometimes I wonder how we get any real work done at all."

"Yet you were trained as a nurse, Thea. It seems a pity you should end up as just another secretary."

"My training's not wasted"—I indicated the file of case histories—"dealing with this lot."

"All the same, it's people you should be working with, not pieces of paper."

The outside telephone rang.

"People," I said, and picked up the receiver.

It was the woman who had called the day before. Again she wouldn't give her name. When I told her Dr. Cadence wasn't available she said she'd ring again. She seemed calmer than on the last occasion. Again I thought I knew her voice but couldn't put a name or a face to it. I ought to have. After all, I'd known her well enough.

As I was finishing an orderly put his head around the door.

"Urgent," he said. "I'm looking for Dr. Cadence."

"He'll be on his way up from outpatients by now, John. I'd wait here if I were you. You'll only miss him somewhere on the way."

"It's very urgent, Mrs. Cadence." He looked doubtfully at Tony. "I'm from Ward S."

"You know Mr. Stech, don't you, John? He's the technical half of Sensitape."

"I've seen you around of course, sir. But I wasn't sure. Glad to meet you, Mr. Stech."

They shook hands. John was edgy. He couldn't sit down.

"Ward S, you said?" I tried to remember. "Is that where Pastor Mannheim—"

"I don't think there's much time, Mrs. Cadence."

"Sister should have rung down if it's as urgent as that."

John glanced awkwardly at Tony.

"We understand Dr. Cadence is in a . . . a difficult situation. The exchange girls listen. Sister wanted to be sure nothing went wrong."

There was something he wasn't saying.

"What could go wrong?" Tony said. "The Pastor agreed to this recording. Surely the authorities wouldn't—"

"I don't know, sir. Sister just didn't think it worth risking."

"She's probably right," I said. "Your ward staff often have a much better idea of what's going on than we do."

Edward burst into the room, followed by the Chaplain. That made five of us in my tiny office.

"Damn," Edward said. "Damn, damn, damn. This couldn't possibly have happened at a worse time. I met Harry on the way up. He tells me the Pastor's dying."

John straightened his tie. Already Edward was a great man.

"I'm from Ward S, sir. Sister thinks there's still time if we hurry."

"Haven't you heard, man? Emergency Committee meeting this morning. I'm suspended pending the findings of the special inquiry. They've bloody well suspended me."

The Chaplain coughed like a man of the world.

"Notification of your suspension, Dr. Cadence—has it yet reached you?"

"I heard it from one of the messengers, Harry. There's no doubt it's true enough."

"My point, Dr. Cadence, is that you have not yet received official notification."

"That'll take hours yet. It's got to go through the typing pool."

"Surely you can't consider yourself suspended on the mere word of one of the messengers?"

Edward stared at him. John moved to the door.

"There's no time to lose, sir. If—?"

"Chaplain, you have a magnificently Jesuitical mind."

"You do the Order an injustice, Doctor. However, there are occasions when I feel—"

"Your beautiful prevarication will have to be lost, Harry. Lost under the pressures of modern life. Stay here, will you, while I go and organize things?" He turned to me. "Get the room ready, Nurse. I'm going to have the Pastor brought down here."

"But, Dr. Cadence—"

"Discretion, Nurse. We're less likely to be disturbed in my own private room. And if we are, then we can lock the door. And argue afterward."

He hurried away, giving John instructions as he went. I led the Chaplain through into Edward's room and sat him down in a corner where he'd be out of the way. I turned up the heating. Tony helped me to prepare the Sensitape machine, thread a new twelve-inch spool and connect the recording headset. He went over the machine for me, checking levels, cleaning the recording heads, testing the monitor, while I moved the treatment couch out of the way. Then we waited. The room was very hot now, and the Chaplain made light conversation.

Edward came back.

"They're bringing Pastor Mannheim down on a trolley. I thought it best to keep out of sight. He's being taken to the Intensive Care section, if anybody asks."

The outside phone rang in my office. I went through and answered it, recognizing at once the woman who had called earlier.

"It's for you, Dr. Cadence. Outside call from a patient."

"Tell them I'm busy. Tell them to call later."

"She says it's important."

"What I am doing is also important. Tell her to call again later."

"She called while you were down on outpatients. I think you ought to speak to her."

Obstinacy on my part? Was I curious? Edward came through, took the phone out of my hand.

"Dr. Cadence speaking. What I am engaged in at the moment, madam, is a matter of life and death. If you could please—"

He stopped and listened for several seconds, his face registering nothing at all.

"I see."

Two careful words. His eyes met mine and he smiled, made an exasperated face.

"Yes indeed. I'll . . . attend to it. At the time you suggested. Certainly. And thank you for calling." He rang off. "What an insistent female." He turned back into his office.

A lover. Nobody else would have known, only his wife. An explanation of the night before, the way I had been bought off with fine food, with champagne and dancing. Bought off and then left.

I remained standing where I had throughout the conversation. It was perfectly reasonable, perfectly natural that he should find a sexual outlet somewhere else, now that I had become so . . . unsuitable. I tried to pretend I didn't mind. But for his last night's indifference I might have succeeded. But that he just hadn't bothered, hadn't bothered in a situation that might have saved me future hell, this made me very angry. I wasn't repulsive. He'd never found



me repulsive before. Satisfied elsewhere, he just hadn't bothered. Being angry made me feel better. More a person.

I heard the door of his office open, a murmur of voices, and the soft clang as some part of a trolley jolted on the door frame. I went through into the next room.

"Ah, Nurse. Help me prepare the patient, will you?" We were always formal when on duty. But the way out it now gave only angered me still further. "Over here now, hold his head. Come along now."

Then I saw the old man on the trolley.

Pastor Mannheim was fully conscious. He was consumed beyond pain now, his eyes piercingly aware. He saw me and smiled, and made the faint rasping that was all the speech left him. I took his hand and shook it gravely—I'd discovered on my visits to the ward that he preferred the stiff Germanic greeting. With his formality became dignity, completely unassuming. His hand returned my grip with surprising strength. Then I moved away to pick up the headset. The stylized things I might have said were quite unnecessary.

After passing the headset to Edward I leaned forward and lifted the Pastor's head an inch clear of his pillow. Edward fitted the casing delicately. I could feel him holding his breath. Against the old man's face my hands were fat coarse-textured lumps. I took them away as soon as I could, their greasy heat would corrode his skull, and hid them below the edge of the trolley. I can still see his eyes, and his gray lips smiling from within.

"Pastor Mannheim, we have the hospital Chaplain here." Edward pitched his voice accurately, neither brisk nor over-reverent. "Perhaps you would care to . . . ?"

The old man acquiesced politely, though whether for his own sake or for the Chaplain's I couldn't guess. I fetched a chair, set it beside the head of the trolley, and then moved back out of the way. The trolley smelled faintly of metal and of the grease on the wheel bearings.

Tony had started the machine. Reflected light off the spools turned in a slow pattern on the opposite wall. Tony checked his gauges, made a note of the starting time. Edward had seated himself behind his desk, watchful but

quite relaxed. The spools revolved in complete silence. Stillness settled over us, shaped us so that soon the spools made the only movement in the room. And the only sounds were the hospital sounds from beyond the door, loud footsteps down the passage, the whine of a lift. I became aware that Edward was trying to attract my attention. He nodded toward the door, made a turning motion in the air with his right hand. I walked to the door and locked it. Without being told I went through into my office and locked that outer door as well.

My office seemed hardly to be real. I straightened its two chairs and removed both the internal and external telephone receivers from their cradles. The dialing tone buzzed loudly. Returning to the next room I was halted in the doorway, coming on the scene as if for the first time. And suddenly I heard an offbeat piano, night club cheerful.

*... little things would never trouble you*

*If only they'd give you back your UDW. . . .*

There was nothing dramatic about the scene. Gray daylight, people untidily grouped, a tawdry aluminum trolley. And the reflections turning like a Christmas decoration. The Chaplain leaned forward slowly, placing his head close to the dying man's lips. He stayed for a long time, then sat back.

"Could it all be a bit more normal?" The Chaplain's voice came out slightly too loud. "He knows it will be difficult, but couldn't you all talk, or something? He liked the ward, it was always so alive."

And the verse—

*Cheer up, boy, that's the way the cookie crumbles.*

And Edward laughing and laughing. Edward who had sat up straight, put his elbows on his desk and taken his pen out. The things he always did to remind himself of his position. He cleared his throat. Regretted it.

"Tony—I should have asked before, what on earth are you doing here anyway? I thought you were going to be busy at the lab all day."

"I've been analyzing CR tube readings on Blayne, Cough-ton and Hildesheimer—the musicians we taped last year.

Before the Cassavetes episode. I think I've hit on a common factor."

"Slow them down, did you? See a lot more in slow motion."

"Matter of fact I filmed them. Compared them frame by frame."

"Well, Tony, that's wonderful. What have you got to show me?"

"It's all a bit complicated. You see . . ."

Like a television interview, careful question and careful answer. Not much to do with life, with the grumbling humanity of Ward S, with what Pastor Mannheim wanted. And even this ran down fairly quickly.

*Cheer up, boy, that's the way the cookie crumbles. . . .*

"It's getting stuffy," I said. "I'll see to the air conditioning."

Tony started mumbling something to Edward, something about hoping the reel was long enough. I adjusted the conditioning unit and went back to my position by the open door into my office. I needed an escape route, the feeling of one. I watched Tony, the non-medical one, unused to death, the technician. And we, weren't we the ones unused to life? I became obsessed with the idea that somebody was about to knock loudly on the door.

"Hush a minute, please," said the Chaplain. "He's trying to say something."

The Pastor's lips quivered like a moth, shaping his breath into an unheard whisper. It must have been a prayer, for the Chaplain said "Amen." The old man's fingertips moved uncertainly on the white hospital sheet. He and the Chaplain held a painful, silent conversation. The Chaplain raised his eyes to where I was standing.

"He wants to speak to you, Nurse."

I shivered. It was mediumistic, like being named in a seance. The bones had fallen, pointing at me.

"He would like you to accept his blessing, Nurse." The three steps to the side of the trolley. "He knows you aren't a Christian—he hopes you might value his blessing all the same."

Edward watched. I stooped down, I would not kneel,

and felt the impossible weight of his hands on my head, put there by the Chaplain. Real. A real old man, real faith, real death. I tried to hear what he was saying, sibilants and a faint ticking in the hollow of his mouth. Everything would look different if only I could hear. Like the dreamed revelation never quite regained. Everything would be explained. It's four years now, and I still try to hear sometimes.

He finished his blessing and died. Looking in his face I saw it. I put my hands up to my head, felt the huge hands of the Chaplain covering his.

"He's dead, Chaplain."

"Yes . . . Yes. Well . . ."

"I shall be interested to see," said Edward, "how much of the specifically religious flavor comes over. Keep it running, Tony. The waves fade slowly."

The Chaplain put Pastor Mannheim's hands together on his stomach.

"Dr. Cadence—if the experience wasn't religious it wasn't anything. Sometimes I wonder how much you experts really comprehend."

"At least we're always seeking, Harry. We keep open minds. There's nothing we'd say we're certain about."

"The scientific approach. Yes. . . ." The Chaplain watched himself interlock his fingers. "I believe the human mind needs certainty. We're making tiny certainties all the time. Often false."

They were both of them manufacturing words to fill out the decent interval. The tape reels spun.

"Anyway," Edward said, "the Pastor's death should be a model to us all. Personal confidence, a mind at peace, and a concern for others. It ought to be very useful."

"Nobody need ever die unhappy or frightened again," Tony offered, more to his spools than to us in the room with him. "Mystical reconciliation . . . it's frightening to have such an experience almost in one's hand."

The Chaplain was staring down at the dead man. He might have been praying. The room was painfully the same, painfully undiminished. Edward put his pen back in his pocket.

"If the Chaplain's right, Tony, then uses for this tape may be rather more limited than we'd hoped. If the Christian elements are too strong they may war with indigenous agnostic or atheistic patterns. We may have to make a humanist recording as well, for example. Compatibility is going to be our problem."

I went back to my doorway.

"I'll ring for John," I said. "The Pastor should be taken back to Ward S as soon as possible. If we can avoid getting awkward questions asked, then so much the better."

I rang the ward, then unlocked both doors. Tony checked the monitor for negative signal, switched off and began winding back. Edward loosened the headset, eased it out from under the dead man's head. White hair spilled onto the thin trolley pillow. I remember myself with distaste, my anger with Edward, the squalor of our lives. Not in their details but in their aspirations, that was where the squalor lay. Human detail is always squalid. Universally so.

My room. Myself alone in it, the door shut. Carried here, or brought here like a goat on a string. Either way I had hidden in my head, spared Doctor and spared Mrs. Craig. The woman is becoming high-pitched. She genuinely wants to help me, but has no idea at all how. Nobody has ever known, except Edward, who had other priorities. Nobody could have known—I kept all the data to myself. I'm forced to the dreary conclusion that I must just like to suffer. It's no use telling my wardress that—she'll only see it as another defense to be brought down. Never a face value to anything, not in the world of mental nursing.

Yet I'm calmer today. Blanket stimulation must have changed me. And yesterday is even harder to remember than

was yesterday's yesterday. And tomorrow's yesterday seems scarcely to be happening. I'm amused by words, rather than by their meaning. Games. I'm calmer and more rational. That much was clear in the way I dealt with Doctor.

I've remembered something funny.

It can be funny because it happened not Before Cynicism but After Innocence, when Edward could no longer shock me. It's like another word game, amusing on the level money can be if looked at as separate from the life that uses it. After Innocence—that means after Tony's death. Exactly how long after I don't remember. A few months—it doesn't matter. There certainly wasn't long between it and . . . my coming here.

Edward was working harder than ever. Mornings at the hospital, two afternoons a week teaching, running the Richmond Clinic, managing Sensitape Ltd., and also somehow fitting in his affair with Mrs. X. It was Thursday, when he spent the whole afternoon and evening in the Clinic. He made a point of finishing on these days at eight—to spend some time with me, he said, though we both knew he physically needed the free time if he was to keep going. The last patient on this particular day had been a depressive. I remember this because I'd handed Edward the wrong treatment tape and he'd been very angry. The last patient of a long day—I didn't blame him for being irritable.

I'd seen the patient out and was on my way upstairs to ask Muriel to serve dinner at once, when the doorbell rang. I remember looking down the stairs and across the magnificent entrance hall to the closed face of the door. The glory of it all, the chandelier, the Louis XIV furniture, the gleaming black and white tiles, and the misery it dressed up.

Then I went back downstairs to see who was ringing.

Two men, quiet, smoothly dressed. Hindsight makes me say too smoothly dressed.

"Could Dr. Cadence spare us a few minutes, please?"

"The Clinic is closed, gentlemen. If you'd care to make an appointment I—"

"This isn't a medical matter, Nurse. Purely business."

Somehow they were both in the hall, the front door closed behind them. "If you'll just give Dr. Cadence my card, Nurse, I'm sure he'll see us."

"Dr. Cadence has just finished an exceptionally long day. He's tired."

"Only a few minutes, Nurse. Show him my card. I'm sure he'll see us."

Jasper Thomson Pheeny. I.D.S.

"I.D.S.?"

"International Drug Supplies. Suppliers to the Royal Family."

His companion sniggered.

"Mrs. Cadence—I've just checked. The tape is guilt, after all."

Oh God, not you, Mrs. Craig. Not just when I was trying to remember something funny.

"His card said I.D.S., Mrs. Craig. How was I to know it was a bad joke?"

"Mrs. Cadence, you must listen to me. Doctor's disobeying Court Instructions. The tape sleeve's cataloged as Contrition but I've just been trying it. Guilt, I tell you. The most appalling guilt."

"The things under stones are etiolated, Mrs. Craig. Etiolated. It's a beautiful word."

She puts down the tray to give her emotions greater freedom.

"But the Court Instructions said—"

"Has it never occurred to you that there might have been two sets of Court Instructions? One set for publication and one for authorized persons only? You are not an authorized person, Mrs. Craig. Neither, unfortunately, am I."

"That couldn't happen. Not in England. Not nowadays."

I allow a short pause. Derisive, I hope.

"I was telling you about these two men who called on my husband. The name of one of them was Jasper Thomson Pheeny. The other I only ever heard called Bunk. He had a scar."

"Mrs. Cadence—you must listen. It'll be a mistake. I'll

Speak to Doctor about it. It's sure to be some sort of mistake."

Her poor thick hands are clasped and sweating. She's only a simple harassed nanny after all.

"Mrs. Craig, please humor me. Please listen to my story. I'm insane, Mrs. Craig, so please humor me."

"You're saner than most, Mrs. Cadence, holding out against what I've just experienced." So earnest. "I believe you're innocent after all. I believe the Court was wrong."

I have to shut her up. I scream.

"Sit down and listen. Just do something I want for a change. Listen to me." She stares. Perhaps I am insane after all. I bring my voice down almost to a whisper. Drama. "Please listen to my story, Nurse."

She sits on a chintz-covered chair. The silence in the room after my shouting is very pleasant. I enjoy it. Then I too sit down.

"I took the card they gave me into the consulting room. Edward was under the Relaxatape so I turned it down and roused him. He removed the headset. As I handed him the card I felt the two men come into the room behind me. 'Just a short talk, Dr. Cadence. We won't keep you any longer than is necessary.' Have you guessed who they were, Nurse?"

She stares blankly. I wonder if she's even been listening.

"They were gangsters, Nurse. Real gangsters. I was going to leave the room but the one called Bunk produced a tiny gun—he said it was disposable—and said I must stay. They were afraid I might call the police, I think. Edward wanted me to stay as well, so I stayed."

"That was brave of you, Mrs. Cadence."

"Brave of me? I had no alternative. Edward needed an ally, a witness. That was all."

"What were the two men after?"

"Don't hurry me, Nurse. First the Pheeney one searched the room for hidden microphones. He had a little detector of some sort. They were both highly mechanized. Then he sat down in the patient's chair opposite Edward and made himself comfortable. The Bunk one was still showing his gun. A chopper man, I suppose he'd be called."



"And this is a funny story, Mrs. Cadence?"

"It really is funny. Grotesque, like a vintage spy film. Pheeney started the conversation. He said his company had been following the development of Sensitape with great interest. Edward asked him exactly what his company was. 'You have my card, Dr. Cadence. International Drug Supplies. It's perfectly genuine.'

" 'I've never heard of it,' Edward said.

" 'We don't operate in your area, that's all. The drugs we supply are more . . . more old-fashioned.'

"I put two and two together. So did Edward.

" 'In that case,' he said, 'you've probably heard that I'm soon going to put you out of business.'

" 'Which is precisely why we're here tonight, Dr. Cadence.'

I should have been an actress. I do the voices so well. Nurse's eyes are popping.

"But he did. Put them out of business, I mean. True drug addiction has ceased to exist."

"Hush, Nurse. Wait and see.

" 'Experiments have been held back by the recent death of my technical adviser,' Edward said. 'However, preliminary results show that we should have no difficulty in producing a series of tapes giving the whole range of drug effects, from pot to main line heroin and cocaine.'

"Pheeney nodded sympathetically.

" 'So our information has it,' he said. 'And believe me, it's welcome news.'

"Edward sighed loudly. I honestly think he was bored, Nurse. He didn't find the smoothy gangster talk as amusing as I did.

" 'Please come to the point, Mr.—er—Pheeney. There must be one.'

" 'As we understand it, Dr. Cadence, you do not claim to cure addiction. You merely switch the addicts from our product to yours.'

" 'And mine is totally harmless. There is no physical deterioration and addicts will be able to lead relatively useful lives. The moral slur will be removed from addiction and the whole of society will be healthier.'

“ ‘And the addicts will live longer?’

“ ‘Certainly they will. With their need satisfied they will otherwise be fairly normal citizens.’ ”

“He was a man of vision, Mrs. Cadence. It’s all turned out just as he said.”

“At this point, Nurse, Pheeney became more relaxed than ever. I guessed we were coming to the crux.

“ ‘That sounds like good business, Doctor. Big business. Business we want a share in.’

“ ‘Good business, Mr.—er—Pheeney, but not big. The mark-up on the machines is small, and the tapes—as you know—are just about everlasting.’

“Bunk sniggered. It seemed his only noise. Pheeney lit himself a cigarette to spin out the theatricals.

“ ‘Our information has it, Doctor, that a very small change in tape composition would . . . improve the situation. We have decided therefore that the tapes you make will wear out. Wear out as quickly as we say they will.’

“Edward cut short an exposition that Pheeney must have been looking forward to for days.

“ ‘I think I understand you, Mr.—er—Pheeney. Your organization wishes to act as sole distributors for addiction tapes. And to boost business you suggest a built-in instability of some kind.’

“ ‘We have the contacts and the organization. You have the product.’

“ ‘And the commission you require will be large?’

“ ‘Not unreasonable. Fifty percent of retail, our directors thought.’ ”

“I think you’re making this whole thing up, Mrs. Cadence.”

Poor Nurse, she’s way out of her league. The things Edward got up to put him out of everybody’s league.

“The tea’s getting cold, Nurse. Would you pour some, please? You have the cup—I’ll get my tooth mug.”

“If you’re just trying to prove you’re mad, Mrs. Cadence, then—”

“I’m in the Kingston. Once you’re in the Kingston you don’t need to prove anything.”

She seems to find Bitterness and Despair more suitable.

So I go haggardly and get my tooth mug and hold it out for her to fill. She does so, watching.

"Edward frowned at this. He drummed his fingers on the desk. Pheeney's style of performance was catching.

" 'And if I don't agree, Mr.—er—Pheeney? The usual unpleasantness, I suppose?'

" 'Scientific equipment is very vulnerable. So are scientists.'

" 'So I really have no alternative, Mr.—er—Pheeney.'

"At that moment I almost loved him again for his 'Mr.—er—Pheeney.'"

"You're not going to tell me Dr. Cadence agreed, are you?"

"Of course he didn't, Nurse." Wait for it. "He demanded sixty percent and settled for fifty-five."

I believe I've embarrassed her.

"That's the punch line, Nurse. Why aren't you laughing?"

"What happened then, Mrs. Cadence?"

"Pheeney produced a contract which Edward signed. I witnessed his signature as I had done on a previous occasion. The contract nominated I.D.S. as sole distributors of anti-addiction tapes on a sales commission of fifty-five percent. I checked later—I.D.S. really did exist. They were listed as holding an agency for a harmless sleeping pill, Panadorm. So the contract Edward signed was perfectly legal."

"Dr. Cadence must have had his reasons."

Of course he had. He wanted a quiet life. And if he pushed tape prices up fifty percent he'd be back more or less where he'd started. He could easily do this—as a recent Nobel prize winner he could do anything. Sensitape had changed the face of society. He was a national hero, almost a god. But I'm sorry for Nanny, poor faltering Nanny.

"His reasons were quite clear, Nurse." Errand of mercy. "Any trouble from the strong men of the I.D.S. organization and the development of anti-addiction tapes might have been held up almost indefinitely. It was a risk he dared not take."

He'd explained it to me very carefully after his visitors had left. As a doctor he had felt obliged to make the deal.

The other Sensitape directors would object, but it was a small price to pay for the permanent end of international drug trafficking. Instead of trying to beat him the traffickers had joined him. Together they would work toward a happier mankind, even if for rather different motives. I don't know why he bothered to try to fool me. He was certainly too intelligent to be trying to fool himself.

Because her tea is there, Mrs. Craig drinks it. She's quite lost. She has so little information on which to base her judgments.

"The story you've told me isn't funny, Mrs. Cadence." Of course it isn't. "Great men have to make difficult decisions." Edward was great all right. "And it's easy for other people to criticize them afterward. But—"

"I wasn't criticizing him, Nurse. You might as well criticize Stonehenge. I was trying to find out about him, that's all."

"Did you kill him?"

"I was involved with him for over twelve years. Then he died."

"Being in the Kingston may have taught you to be evasive. But surely not to be pretentious as well?"

Wow. You're clearer-sighted than I thought. Thank God I have the edge on you.

"You know quite well what my question meant, Mrs. Cadence."

I cannot be bullied. Twenty-nine days in this place and help that is offered as questions and one-word answers is more than I can bear. It should be easy for me to say yes or no, nod or shake my head, but that's something not even Mr. Siemens expected of me. His job was to prove that I was sane, and he failed. Mrs. Craig came here this afternoon believing in me and I talked her down. She's still willing to make the effort. I stand up, walk around her, go to the mirror, stare at the reflection in it. I knew the answer to her question once. I stare at the woman in the mirror, tired, capable of nothing. She won't even meet my eyes.

They'll have to feed her up if they're ever going to let her out of here.

She's the woman Edward never loved.

"You remember Tony Stech, Nurse? My husband's partner—the man who committed suicide?"

"I've heard about him. I never met him."

It's no use telling her. It's despicable to go around assuring people that you did after all once arouse love in a man. Or was it pity? Search, Thea Cadence. Search.

"Mrs. Cadence, you must help me. I took a risk to find out what I did this afternoon. But you're like shouting into cotton wool—nothing comes back. I know now that the tape you've been under is damaging. But you must help me. I've got to decide what to do."

Search. Drive her out. Get your priorities right.

"If Doctor is disregarding Court Instructions, then he must have a reason. Did he know you before you came here? Can you think of any reason why he should want to destroy you?"

At first I suppose there can be no doubt that all Tony felt was a mild sort of pity for me. He had a sympathetic nature. He must have felt pity for hundreds of people.

"You mentioned two sets of Court Instructions. Have you any proof that there were two? If so, do you know why? Please, Mrs. Cadence, this opting out helps nobody."

But in my case his pity was complicated by his admiration for Edward.

"Will you listen to what I'm saying, Mrs. Cadence."

No.

"If it goes on, that guilt tape will destroy you. You know that?"

Tony loved me. He believed it was wrong, but he still loved me.

"I shall be back later with your tablets. I very much want you to be more cooperative."

Shut the door behind you. Shut the door behind you. Get out and shut the door behind you.

It started in the most ordinary way imaginable. In any society patterns must recur and recur. The three of us—by then it was usually the three of us—had to attend a Sensitape board meeting at the factory in Teddington, near the television studios. At that time, still only six months or so after the Sextape recording and before it was released

on the general market, Sensitape as a commercial enterprise wasn't doing very well. The reproducing equipment was expensive, the range of tapes limited, and as yet only one Sensitape parlor was in operation. Edward had of course weathered the hospital's attempt to make him resign; since the accountants who investigated his affairs could find no evidence at all of fund misappropriation medical opinion in general was now firmly on his side. Public opinion was less predictable, swinging in response to press coverage which was equally undecided.

We drove out along the Hammersmith thruway. The atmosphere in the car was uneasy. Edward was silent, hiding behind his driving. I sat beside him, staring out at the ends of houses cut off thirty years ago by the road engineers, the temporary buttresses and cement rendering now decorated with posters and huge graffiti. DEATH TO ALL JEWS and FEED STARVING INDIA. A fine drizzle was falling, and I found myself hating the townscape which was all I knew. Lamp posts flicked by, and barn-high road signs. I was alone, afraid of Tony and totally isolated from Edward by the civility which was now all we offered each other. Without even sex, all we had in common was an interest in Sensitape.

Tony sat hunched sideways in the back seat, all knees and elbows. He had nothing to say and wisely said it. This was unusual for Tony—mostly he had a flow of heavy jokes that were endearing in their awfulness—and his silence depressed me still further. In his silence I was able to sense his thoughts—or what I imagined his thoughts to be—and they frightened me. They threatened contact. I watched the road signs and the heavy wet leaves of the ornamental trees.

We drove through Teddington, past the big black church and the fashionable pubs. It was the time of year for geraniums. We turned right, along beside the river till we came to the Sensitape building. Edward parked the car among those of the other directors—we were a little late—and ran around to open the door on my side for me. He avoided my eyes. We went into the foyer and straight

up to the board room. The meeting had been delayed for our arrival.

We listened to the company secretary's report: the six months' trading figures poor, profits on sales to the Health Service unsatisfactory, no chance of increasing prices while the present government was in power, laboratory costs mounting, new equipment needed, insufficient capital for an all-out promotion drive. And so on. I occupied my time observing the other members of the board, businessmen, a phenomenon I had only recently come into contact with. Everything about them fascinated me, the way they worked, what they thought, the faces they made. Merchants, with merchants' eyes.

Now Edward was on his feet. I had no idea what he would say. I didn't expect to.

"I should like first of all to thank Mr. Wheeler for the conciseness of his report, and for its accuracy. To my mind he neither minimized the seriousness of the situation nor exaggerated it. By making a few cuts it would be possible for the company to continue trading more or less as at present. Certain sections are at the moment overstaffed, and a balance sheet such as we can show today should ensure our having no difficulty with the unions about redundancy."

The thing about Edward was that he managed to be both. Or rather, he managed to be everything. Everything except what I needed. So I was the unreasonable one, certainly unreasonable in that I still loved him.

"However, ladies and gentlemen, none of this should be necessary. I am happy to be able to tell you that I believe I have the immediate answer to our problems. Mr. Scrutton—could Statistics please give us a breakdown on the broad types issued so far?"

Mr. Scrutton was young, square-jawed, manly. With merchant's eyes.

"Expressed as percentages of total sales, Dr. Cadence, the Goofy Benson tape alone accounted for nearly half the market. The explanation here seems to be that it attracted the jazz club organizers who saw a way of increasing

membership by installing a machine. Also the screamer chosen made considerable impact."

I remember that screamer. It made my toes curl. Really Live It With Goofy Benson, the posters said.

Mr. Scrutton spoke with little expression, but warmly enough. He might have been discussing the fortunes of some distant cousin.

"On the other hand, Tune In To Great Minds has made only very slight progress. The Poet's Ethos, The Mind Of A Painting, and Mysticism For All, together only take up eight percent of the total market. Classical Music has done rather better, with twenty-three, more or less equally distributed between the three virtuosos involved. The biggest single seller after Benson has been the simple Relaxatape at twenty-two."

He smiled at me meaninglessly. I was the Chairman's wife.

"Shall I cover the medical side as well, sir?"

"No need, Mr. Scrutton. It's on the retail commercial side that this firm has to expand or die."

Mr. Scrutton sat down; he had spoken without notes, and attended politely to what the Chairman had to say.

"From what Statistics have given us, ladies and gentlemen, it's obvious that Sensitape is missing out on the mass market. Not that we really needed Statistics to tell us that. Certainly Mr. Benson's tape has broken new ground, but the royalty paid to jazz musicians is very high, and anyway I doubt if further issues in that field would do very much. It's new machines that we need to sell, new machines for the home, and new machines in a chain of parlors right across Britain. In order to do this our tapes must offer an experience intensely desirable to the majority of consumers. This is a consumer durable, ladies and gentlemen, one nearly as expensive as a motor car. The incentive to buy must be very high indeed."

Edward was offering the statutory amount of gab. Directors like to arrive at the Chairman's conclusion long before he does so himself, in order that they may have time to think about it and decide their own attitudes. Edward gave them what they wanted—to cut it short would



have been to destroy the patterns within which they worked best. He ground on for another ten minutes. Then he arrived.

"We must remember that we are not in this business only to make money. We are here to enrich human life, to heal the sick, to extend the experiential potential of the meagerest member of society. Until our appeal is universal, until we can offer personal fulfillment to everyone, we are failing in our human duty."

He held up the fingers of one hand, ticked them off.

"Basic human requirements—air, drink, food, sunlight, companionship. The first four of these are not within Sensitape's province. The fifth of these has many facets, the most important being sex. It is in the field of companionship—which in general may be equated with importance—that Sensitape can play a vital part."

He'd slipped the word in casually enough, but not one of the directors had missed it. Their attitudes already safely decided, they waited eagerly for a chance to give tongue.

"Sexitape is my own private property, ladies and gentlemen. I have come to the conclusion that society at large should be able to benefit from it. Therefore I propose licensing it to Sensitape for immediate commercial use. Obtaining a Medical Council certificate will present no difficulty—its efficiency has been tested clinically in literally thousands of cases."

As he paused for breath Legal Department was on her feet at once, asking to inspect the copyright agreement in respect to Sexitape. Public Relations was shouting his head off about Company Image and Pressure Group Diplomacy. Sales murmured something about Invitation to Censorship, but I think only I heard him. Research and Development asked prickly questions about side effects—he'd had nothing to do with Sexitape and was obviously determined to be awkward. To use Sexitape under clinical observation, he said, was very different from flinging it out for any Tom, Dick or Harry to dabble in. Besides (the clincher) what about the protection of minors?

Edward dealt with the questions and objections patiently,

one by one. He'd never have started if he hadn't known he could. He also wisely involved everybody in the project, handing out jobs to make them all feel needed. Legal Department was instructed to check carefully on the Obscene Publications Act. Public Relations was handed a list of archbishops, chief constables and television personalities whom Edward had already approached privately and found to be sympathetic. Sales was asked to get together with Promotions and decide on the agency best fitted to handle this new development. And Research and Development was pacified with an extensive program of Graded Response Experiments to ascertain the best level for general issue. Edward was able to assure him, as a psychologist, that to anyone not yet sexually developed the Sextape brain patterns would be meaningless.

Finally the meeting broke up. Outside the board room Edward paused, glanced at his watch—never registered the time it said, I'm sure—and smiled at me as if at someone else's child.

"I shan't be coming home yet, Thea. No point in you hanging around. Take the car. I can easily get a lift in with young Scrutton or somebody."

"You know I hate driving on the thruway."

"Ask Tony to drive you then. I know he wants to go straight back, once he's had a short chat with Research and Development."

"I wish you'd come, Edward." A million other wives, a million other pleas not to be pushed to infidelity. "I don't mind waiting till you've finished."

"Nonsense, dear." Another echo. "There's so much to see to I shall be ages. You go off with Tony. It'd only worry me, knowing you were having to wait around somewhere."

I walked slowly away down the carpeted corridor to the lift. If I wanted to I could now feel that the decision had been taken for me, that whatever I let happen now would comfortably not be my fault. I left word for Tony in the Research Department two floors below and then went on down to Reception.

"It's stopped raining, Mrs. Cadence. I think it's going to turn out nice after all."

All a part of the conspiracy.

Across the foyer, through the automatic doors, and out to the car. I climbed in and sat. Tiny pebbles of rain on the polished hood glistened in the sunlight. Public Relations came out to the car next to Edward's and drove away. He had Edward's list sticking out of his pocket and he didn't see me. His tires made dark stripes on the already drying pavement. A huge scenery van passed on its way to the studios just down the road. Behind Sensitape on the river a pleasure steamer approached with a small jazz band. Thick shadows sat under the ornamental cherry trees along the edge of the pavement. Inside me nothing happened at all. I loved Edward.

"Edward says I'm to drive you back into town."

"I know."

Tony climbed in, adjusted the seat. He was shorter than Edward.

"I hear you're thinking of buying a house in Richmond."

"Edward's going to open a clinic. He needs a smart address."

"Expensive place, Richmond."

A remark needing no answer, the implied criticism slightly insulting. I sat as thin as I could, my leg well away from the drive selector. Tony drove slowly out onto the road. We gathered speed, the stiff shadows of the trees clicked under us as we passed, like a stick along a fence.

"I'll take you to the flat," Tony said.

"No, not there." An immoral proposal? Or did I just not want to be left there alone? "I don't feel like going home, Tony. It's . . . the weather's too nice for stuffing indoors."

"Where then?" So minimal. Hypersensitive, it seemed to me all that remained sayable perhaps.

"I tell you what, Tony. You're not in a hurry to get back, are you? Why don't we have a look at the house in Richmond, the one Edward's going to buy? I love empty houses. It's not far out of the way. I've got the key—we were supposed to give it back to the agent this morning on our way out but somehow there wasn't time." Babble.

"Will you come, Tony? I'd love to know what you think of it. I've told Edward it's too large. He says he'll get a housekeeper. I suppose he knows what he's doing."

"He knows what he's doing all right. I've never met anyone who knew better."

A flat tone of voice, indicating nothing. I knew he'd come.

"It's one of those high brick houses overlooking the Green. A scheduled Ancient Monument, so the agent said. Edward's determined to do the thing in style."

"I'm sure he's right. It's what private patients like. It makes them feel they're getting their money's worth."

Tony didn't approve of private patients. We talked about it along the thruway as far as the sign for Richmond, a general issue, safe. Once on the road through Chiswick the conversation became more particular. I altered it myself—the morning's board meeting had worried me.

"When you started out with Sensitape, Tony, did you think where it would all lead?"

"Does one ever think like that? I was working on a cure for UDW. By the time we'd found it I was committed."

"Do you wish you'd backed out?"

"There's no answer to that. We can't choose where to stop, what to discover and what's better left unknown."

"Wouldn't you say Sensitape has gone too far?"

"I haven't given it much thought. I'm an engineer, not a philosopher."

Traffic was heavy. We had to wait at the Mortlake roundabout for some minutes.

"My father used to say we'd become a nation of spectators, Tony. I visited him and Mummy a few weeks ago, the first time for years. They're in a gimcrack duplex, with a Sensitape as big as a battleship. It all seemed so sadly unsuitable, somehow."

"You're falling into the trap of thinking that what Sensitape offers is secondhand. It's not. What happens inside your head really does happen. There's a range of experience most people hadn't even dreamed of."

Oh Lord, not the handout.

"You know it's wrong, Tony. I'm sure you do."

“Wrong? What is ‘wrong’? It’s your puritan upbringing, Thea. We’ve grown out of ideas like right and wrong.”

I didn’t answer. The cant words that year were “enriching” and “impoverishing.” Tony didn’t believe it any more than I did. Only a part of truth. A dangerous part. Tony stamped on the kick-down and shot forward into the line of traffic.

“There are too many people, Thea. Congested living breeds neurosis—take the terrifying logicity of UDW, for example. Isn’t anything that keeps men sane and happy in their environment ‘good’? Sensitape gives every sign of being able to do just that.”

We were coming into Richmond, the Twickenham stadium away on our right. The road was lined with residential blocks forty stories high, and behind them countless others patterned the surrounding grassland. It was luxury living, proportioned and angled with subtlety, far different from the way the millions further out managed. The aspirations stacked here had a sort of chance. I remembered that in the middle ages, the dark ages, men had fattened pigs in boxes, getting box-shaped pigs.

“You realize he won’t be home till late this evening.” The first words after a long silence. “Your husband, I mean. He probably won’t be home till the early hours.”

“He works too hard.” Please, Tony. Pretend with me. “I often tell him about it. Half an hour’s Relaxatape and he reckons he rested. It’s complete nonsense, of course.”

“He won’t be working late today, Thea. And you know it.”

“Puritanism from you too, Tony?”

“Common humanity.” He spun the wheel and we turned onto the road leading around the Green. “Some wives wouldn’t mind. You do.”

“I’ve no right to mind. It’s not as if—”

He interrupted me.

“You must tell me which of these bloody palaces it is. I’ll drop you and find somewhere to park the car.”

“Halfway along. The white door with the fanlight.”

He dropped me. I leaned in at the window, ignoring the line of angry cars behind.

"You'll come back? You won't just go off and leave me?"

"How could I? It's your car."

There was a short path up to the front door. On the step I turned and looked back—the car was already out of sight. I unlocked the door, pushed it open, shuddered slightly. I'd said I liked empty houses. Facing alone the life that would be mine was another matter.

The hall was airy and brightly lit from a glass dome high above the staircase, its calm certainty protected by an invisible screen. The contained air pressed against this screen, ready to spill its assurance, pour it past my face, lose it among cars and Do not walk on the grass. I dared not break it. The door began to swing shut again. Another person would go through that screen as if up through the surface of a lake. It would close behind her and the air on the other side would be cool and fresh. I stood on the step and the door closed in my face. I was not more shut out than I had been when it was open.

I rested my forehead on its smooth surface, told myself I was carrying sensitivity to the point of madness.

So I went in and stood firmly in the middle of the hall. The door swung shut again behind me. I'd made a fuss about really very little. To be haunted by the future was singularly unproductive, not as if anything could be done about it. I went up the stairs, making a clatter on the bare oak. As I climbed toward the glass dome the air became warmer.

I wandered in a practical way through the upstairs rooms, checking on cupboards and electric light points. If we had a housekeeper as Edward wanted then she could have a flat up there and be completely self-contained. The view across the treetops on the Green was pleasant—even the distant housing blocks had a cheerful grace about them. I looked down at the pavement, saw Tony's untidy mass of hair among the Richmond homburgs and American peaked caps. I watched him open the gate and walk up the path till he was out of sight under the curved roof of the porch. He'd come as he said he would.

"I'm glad it's you, Thea. I had the sudden horrid feeling that I'd come to the wrong house."

"Come on in, Tony. I feel overawed, alone in all this grandness."

I stood back to let him in, then closed the door. He talked through what might have been a moment of constraint.

"I found a place in the Karstak by the station. Very lucky really. . . . So this is the place Edward has chosen for the center of his empire. Government House. Let's hope some of this dignity rubs off. It's a fine building. . . . How will you feel, Thea, being mistress of all this?"

"It's nothing to do with me, Tony. I'm just the parlor-maid."

"Governor's Wife, my dear. You stick up for your rights." He wandered into the big room on the right, the one Edward had earmarked for Reception. "What's left of them."

He frightened me.

"Governor's Wife, Tony? What d'you mean?"

"Power." He went ahead of me, through the double doors into the room beyond. I heard his voice echoing against the bare walls. I said I didn't know what he meant. "To control Sensitape is to control man. I mean that, Thea. I've given the subject a lot of thought." He reappeared in the doorway. "Sensitape will make him rich, of course. But that's nothing to the other power Sensitape will bring."

I'd never dared.

"Why have you helped him, Tony?"

"I'll go on helping him. The usual reasons exist. If I don't help him someone else will. Scientific advance continues independently of the individual. And so on. And so on. Probably the real fact is that I enjoy the sense of vicarious triumph."

The floorboards narrowed in a steep perspective under his feet. Behind him on the far wall a mirror above the fireplace showed me his back view, vulnerable. This mirror gave me a strangely new, outside view of him. Unlike Edward, he was a man who needed an identity. At the moment he gained this from my husband.

"You know who his mistress is, of course?"

We shared lines of thought. He merely spoke the end of his.

"No, Tony. I don't want to."

"Mrs. Malinder. Only we're supposed to think of her as Mrs. X. I'm surprised you didn't guess long ago."

"I could have. Without a name or a face she was less real."

"It's the done thing, Governors having mistresses, I mean."

"I wish you hadn't told me. I asked you not to."

He came toward me. The ceiling above his head was covered with a deep plaster molding of oak leaves and ivy and bunches of grapes. He took my hands.

"The business partner. The husband's best friend. The unregarded wife. It's traditional."

I looked away, at the long shutters neatly folded by the windows.

"But at least you needn't be alone any more, Thea. Governor's Wife is a pretty lonely job." He lowered my hands down to my sides. "You'd better show me the house and get it over with. These rooms have seen too much—they're too old and cynical for my liking."

I showed him the small salon and the big salon, the dining room, the study, the automated kitchen quarters. Behind the house there was a small rectangle of ancient paved garden, an overgrown lily pond and a catalpa tree. He had little to say about it all, the house where my husband and I were going to live. Often I caught him watching me instead of admiring the fine big rooms. Could it really have been no more than pity?

We went out into the tiny garden, blue-green shadows smelling of ferns. He hadn't touched me since releasing my hands in the main drawing room. Nothing had been said about our new relationship. He found a stick and stirred the rusty pond water.

"You'll never leave him," he said.

"Are you asking me to?"

"He doesn't love you."

"That's not so important. Not if you—"

"You see what I mean, Thea."



He'd stopped me in time. Words have separate existences that change the things they describe. He poked deeper into the pond, releasing a stream of bubbles.

"Has Edward told you about me, Tony?"

"Told me about you? Hardly ever mentions you. What should he have told me?"

I knew he'd been discussing my sexual difficulties with his colleagues at the hospital, with the Nigerian sexologist in particular. I wouldn't have been at all surprised if he had spread the news more widely. No doubt his reticence was partly to do with Mrs. X—she made my inadequacies not matter to him.

"What should he have told me, Thea?"

"Oh, I don't know. That I'm demanding and possessive. That I nag. That I don't understand him. All the usual sort of things."

"If he had I'd have told him he was a bloody liar."

Perhaps I should have warned Tony about . . . myself. But my disgust was for Edward, for his cold grasping body, for what he made sex into. Tony's sexual nature was different, and I would be different too.

"We've been leading very separate lives for some time now, Tony. He'd have been perfectly justified in complaining about me."

"Mrs. Malinder came to the lab one day to fetch him while I was there. They weren't very nice together. It wasn't that they were open about their interest in each other. It seemed more that with them sex was being used as a cover for something else. Something cheap. Edward's no fool. Since that evening the only conversations we've had have been strictly to do with Sensitape."

He thrust his stick right down into the water and let it go. We watched it rise up again, then fall over sideways. He turned away.

"What's happening, Tony? What's happening to the world?"

"All you can do, Thea, is have faith in life, in your own strength. Build a cage for yourself to keep the crocodiles and tigers out. Inside that cage you can find everything. We're alive, Thea. The past is gone and the future hasn't

happened. This moment—each individual this moment for the rest of our lives—is unique and marvelous. We must live it as such.”

I suppose he was being sententious. As he spoke I found myself apologizing for him. At least he’s got something to say, I thought. And my question too had been sententious. Without words now, we stood at the green bottom of a high brick well, an irregularly angular patch of blue sky far above us, chimneys and barred windows, and closer the startling shiny leaves of the catalpa. The traffic sounds were dulled and distant. If any moment in my life would be unique and marvelous it was this, and at the same time peculiarly continuous before and behind.

“It’s getting late,” Tony said. “We must go and have some lunch.”

The restaurant was on the point of closing, but expensive enough for the waiters not to stand over us or start clearing up before we had finished. Unlike Edward, who exacted good service as his right, Tony won it by his.

“Mrs. Cadence, I’ve brought you your tablets.”

Oh God. Not Nanny again.

“Do you know, Nurse, that if Edward had lived a few months longer you’d be addressing me now as Lady Cadence?”

“No. No, I didn’t.”

“Wouldn’t that have been shit, Nurse? A knighthood for *him*? Thank God he died when he did.”

That’s thrown her. She came in full to bursting. Tony loved me, you ponderous blob. Not for what I had suffered but selfishly for what we could share with each other. He loved me.

“I’ve been thinking about your situation, Mrs. Cadence. I was wrong to expect cooperation from you. Your treatment here must have . . . had an effect.”

“If you mean it’s made me bloody-minded, you’re damn right.”

“Do you want to get out of here, Mrs. Cadence?”

Do I? There’s a Sensitape fortune waiting for me. My husband is dead and also my lover. The crocodiles and tigers are as loud as ever. Do I want to get out of here?

"Your life, Nurse, do you celebrate every moment of it? Is every moment unique, marvelous?"

"In here people die, my dear. The Kingston is the outside world, ten times larger. You'll preserve nothing staying here. Nothing at all."

I'm always making the mistake of trying to leave her behind. I don't want to be met and equaled—it disquiets me. I should have known they'd never put a fool in charge of so significant a prisoner.

"Just give me the tablets, Nurse. Do your job and give me the tablets."

"Your husband's death was a national tragedy. I think we should have distrusted such an easy uncomplicated answer."

The tablets stick in my throat, burn unfelt into the epithelium. Why shouldn't a great man be killed for an easy, uncomplicated reason? Swallow, and swallow again. A vapor of aluminum and stale urine rises, incense of contemporary joy. Swallow again, for the negative ecstasy of cessation. More practically, for a blessed relief from the pressure of Nurse's good intentions.

Now she stands watching me. Soon she'll have to put me to bed, woman indifferent to woman. Is she basically as indifferent to me as she is to my flesh? Is her interest rather in the abstraction of justice? As Tony's was in the abstraction of pity? Or might have been. Or did he love and does she . . . I stand for so many things. The truth about Mrs. C. Not enough of me that is me for me to know.

## DAY 30

In bed? Not got up and dressed and potted and propelled along the corridor? It's a funny thing, but I'd forgotten what bed felt like. The tablets are holding me less and less. Yet I shouldn't still be in bed, not if the clock is right and the time really is four-thirty. They could easily cheat me, of course.

Stretch. Feet down to where the sheets are cool. Like the freedom it was when Edward gave us separate beds. And the poor man meant it as an insult. I don't mind, though I ought to, that they could make the clock lie to me. Before I came here I'd have minded—to know the exact time was to know the shape of life and to be in control of it. That's one illusion, one tyranny the tablets relieve. Perhaps my treatment is still to come and the clock is meant to fool me. I can't imagine for what reason. It doesn't worry me.

I feel loved, lying here. The sheets love me. The Kingston, Mrs. Craig, Doctor, the High Court Judge love me. I should never have doubted it. In his own way Edward even. There's not room in any man for everything. Washington managed it—I wonder who else. That makes Washington the greater man, but I was the one married to Edward Cadence and that must be something. This room is a benediction. I shall ask them to allow me the transcendence of this bed again. To avoid searching, that is the gift. To exist solely in the peace of the body. No shadows. Nothing to be remembered and not to be remembered, to be forgotten and to become unforgotten.

"Mrs. Cadence."

A nest of my choosing. Pretty curtains, gentleness in the air.

"Mrs. Cadence."

A man. He wears a white coat. Curiously bright, his face flickering like the flame of a candle. Doctor.

"Are you awake, Mrs. Cadence?"

"I was thinking how very like a candle you are, Doctor. The longer she stands the shorter she grows."

"Mrs. Cadence, you won't be having your period of treatment today. There's been a slight accident along in the treatment room."

"Ninny Nanny Netticoat, in a white petticoat. . . . It would have been nice to have children. Never room in Edward's life for children. He used to say he was my child but it wasn't true. He was a cliff I'd never climb."

"Nothing serious, you understand, but the tape has been damaged. The contrition tape."

"Did George Washington have children? He wrote such beautiful letters."

"Don't cry, Mrs. Cadence. You know we'll look after you."

Cry? I hardly knew it. My body cries, not my mind. It's my body that's mad, Doctor. My body.

"You said there'd been an accident, Doctor."

"Good. I wasn't sure you were listening to me. There's been an accident in the treatment room and the contrition tape has been damaged."

"Contrition tape?"

"The one we've been treating you with."

"I see." Why not? "And you say there's been an accident."

"I've sent for replacement from the Central Library but it won't be here in time for today's session. Nurse Craig has suggested that you might like to read the newspaper to pass the time."

"Pass the time."

"I'm beginning to agree with her. Isolation works both ways: it helps you to come to terms with yourself but it also hinders the creation of a social integrity."

A cold wind. A shriveling blast of former realities. I remember now.

"Would it not be truer to say, Doctor, that isolation helps

to destroy the self, so that it no longer needs to be bothered with? That we gain most of our ideas of what we are from other people's faces?"

"It's interesting, Mrs. Cadence, how suddenly the drug effect drops away."

I've never seen him outside the treatment room before. He's always been the extensor of some electro-therapeutic complex. He still is, operating now by remote control.

"An accident, you said?"

"Three times."

"And Mrs. Craig?"

"I'll be sending her along in a minute. It hardly seems worth while, getting you up and dressing you." He pauses to let me feel his distaste. "Mrs. Craig is taking a great deal of interest in your case. I hope her reasons are suitable to her profession."

"We're not Lesbians, if that's what you mean. Neither have I bribed her."

He laughs and pats my cheek. If he ever does that again I'll—

"You could only offer promises, my dear. The disposition of your fortune waits our decision on your progress. Which is all the more reason for getting better as quickly as possible."

"I like your 'getting better,' Doctor. A charming choice of phrase."

"A humble and contrite heart, Mrs. Cadence. It opens many doors."

I wait for another of his little laughs. Sadists are like pornographers, faulty in artistic judgment, their prose style terrible. "These people are mine," an Auschwitz guard once remarked with noble simplicity, just to prove the rule. My father used to read the trials aloud when I was old enough, saying it could happen again, and I never believed him.

But I overdramatize. Doctor doesn't laugh. He goes out quietly, without effect.

I know there's a proof of Tony's love. There's a scene that evades me. It's sickly to be so constantly afraid that he should only have been sorry for me. Edward wasn't

cruel. And I had no children for him to disregard. Hunger, thirst, cold—I suffered none of these. So where does this mawkish assumption come from, the assumption that I must have been pitiable? That I was functionally a victim? If it showed then he couldn't have pitied me. Nobody could.

We had spent the afternoon together in his flat. Sensitape royalties were at last bringing him a decent living so that he had been able to move from the small rooms over the lab that had been his home for seven years since selling up after his father's death. His new flat was the first floor of a big house on the Boltons in Kensington. The day after moving in he had rung me at the clinic to say it now took forty-three paces to go from the sitting room window out across the landing and down the passage to the bathroom. That was a long way. And thirty-seven paces from the bed to the refrigerator in the kitchen. The space he inhabited meant a lot to him. He considered himself now almost a landowner.

I'd got lunch for us both. The day before, after our visit to Regent's Park, he'd bought me a bottle of scent and he kept sniffing me to make sure I was wearing it. Still shy—two years after we had looked over the empty house in Richmond—he liked an excuse before he would touch me, liked an excuse to laugh off his inclinations. Halfway through the meal he became serious for a moment.

"When did you last cook—I mean *really* cook—a proper meal, Thea?"

"Not for years. Not since the early days with Edward. It'd be so false, love. So artificial. Back-to-nature fiends are always such phonies."

"Don't you think you miss something?"

"Of course I do. I miss getting my fingers puddled peeling potatoes. I miss saturating my hair in the rancid smell of frying."

"You'd laugh at me if I talked of the old-fashioned joys

of actually making something. You're such a child of your age, Thea. But I'm sure it's basic, the pleasure of being really involved in the food your man eats."

I remember laughing, just as he said I would.

"Do-it-yourself's gone out. We saw through it years ago."

After lunch he settled down to read a scientific paper that had come by the two o'clock post. I sat with him in the controlled atmosphere of the living room while kitchen electronics disposed of the dirty dishes and garbage. Once Eskimo women had softened their husbands' shoes every morning by chewing them. Was it really their gain that the shoes were now synthetic, unaffected by snow or freezing? Love was so cerebral now, and the brief effects of skin on skin. And once Edward had succeeded in isolating it, love would be available as a magnetic tape.

I became aware that although Tony still had the pamphlet held up in front of his face he was no longer reading it. Outside the window was a big chestnut tree in the railed garden around the church. Over the top of his paper he seemed to be observing its solid mass against the towers of Drayton Gardens beyond. He moved his head slowly from side to side, concentrating. He was haggard these days. His nerves were bad and he was often depressed. The factory psychiatrist had tried in vain to talk to him about it. It hurt me how little even I could do to help.

"You weren't at this morning's meeting," he said.

"Too many meetings. The Governor's Wife suffered a vapor."

"Then you missed Edward's report on the new process."

"Too many new processes. The Governor's Wife preferred to nurse her poor head on a chaise longue in the garden."

"Pity." He closed one eye, moved his head again, lined up the window frame and the edge of the tree and a particular tower's lift shaft. "It's a development you ought to know about."

"Why ought I? I don't find the awfulness of things amusing any more. Not since us."



"Know thine enemy. That's why."

"Such a lovely afternoon, Tony. Don't spoil it."

He threw the pamphlet across onto the sofa and looked at his watch.

"I've got to be in Teddington by four. Are you coming?"

"What a horrible idea. Must you go?"

"Governor's official invitation. Actually it's my work that will be on test so of course I've got to be there."

"Tell me about it, Tony. I know you must."

He'd waited till now, till the last minute, to tell me. Usually we discussed everything as soon as it happened. What he had to say now would be unpleasant. He'd been worrying about it all through lunch. He leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes, as if to pretend it was not he himself speaking.

"For three years," he said, "Edward has been photographing, analyzing, cataloging. Till a few months ago I thought this was just another example of his methodical nature. Perhaps he wanted some way of identifying a tape visually without having to experience it personally. Too much Sensitape exposure leads to a general dulling." He opened his eyes. "That's a little gem we've recently discovered. Had you heard?"

I nodded. Edward had passed a sheaf of receptivity graphs across to me during breakfast a few weeks earlier. They weren't significant, he said. There wasn't an absolute—these things were entirely relative.

"As usual, Thea, I was underestimating him. He now has film of more than seven hundred clearly defined CR patterns. He knows the emotions they indicate, and he asked me months ago to work on a modulator sensitive enough to reproduce them artificially. I've been reasonably successful. That's what this morning's meeting was about—giving a report on the results so far."

"I'll never understand the sort of work you're willing to do. What were these results?"

"Roughly what might have been expected. My modulator does the job, but not so well. There's a loss of definition I can't seem to attribute. In fact, there are still a few things that the human brain is better at."

"I expect you're working on it."

I must have sounded very bitter. He got up and crossed the room to where I was sitting. He was a man whose work was his life, yet the outcome of this work was inconsistent with everything he believed most deeply. This dichotomy I found infuriating. He squatted on the floor beside me.

"These reports are all the same—they leave out the most significant bits. No mention at all was made of the real purpose in Edward's mind."

"You're obviously appalled, Tony. Why the hell don't you do something about it?"

"I sometimes feel that Edward and I are parts of the same man. A sense of common identity—I felt it that very first time he came to visit me, when I was still in that little room behind the shop. In some disgusting way he completes me. That's why I do nothing against him."

"You were telling me"—I couldn't bear the truth of what he had just said—"about the real reason for all this research."

"Edward's aim is to create new pleasures, not merely reproduce the old."

He let this sink in.

"By combining patterns from different tapes, superimposing them, alternating them, computing complex sequences for them, he intends to produce new, higher forms of experience. We've been working for weeks now blending mystical ecstasy with certain musical elements and compatible extracts from Sextape. This afternoon we'll be making the first clinical test."

It was logical, of course. It grew out of our society as organically as the concentration camps had grown out of Nazi Germany. It was unreasonable to object to Tony's dichotomy. Separate existences go on in all of us, the social and the individual. Denying the social motivations, the shared needs, I left myself truncated, terribly alone. However many of us there were who did deny, we were still—in this totally instinctive world—the freaks, the sports, the odd ones out, the enemy.

“Poor Tony,” I said. “Don’t look so solemn. I still love you.”

“There’ll soon be a substitute for that too.”

“Never. I wouldn’t let there be.”

He kissed me. I pressed the back of his head with my hand—for once I felt stronger than he.

We took the train out to Teddington station, then walked slowly through the shopping center to the riverside. The day was hot, the sun standing behind a fine haze under which the exhausted air circulated and recirculated. There wasn’t a breath of wind, the flags and mobile advertisements hung motionless. We passed a Sensitape parlor, its door tight shut against the weather. It was offering the Art Appreciation tape, plus spoken commentary and framed reproductions of the pictures, on hire for a bargain twenty new pounds weekly. With art schools springing up like supermarkets it ought to have been doing a good trade. The receptionist had obviously seen Tony’s photograph in some company journal, for she recognized him and waved. She was charming. She was part of the organization in a way I could never be.

We went on down the walkway to the crowded river esplanade. The water was dotted with scooters and tiny high-performance sailboats. Tony went ahead, clearing a way for me through all the people. Brought out by the heat of the sun like flies, I thought. Inexcusably. We entered Sensitape by the side entrance, staff only. Building was going on, an extension to the main block on fine gold-flecked concrete pillars. The contractors were sinking foundations with a sonic drill. A pump droned shrilly, lifting out the river water that continually seeped in.

Inside Sensitape there was a prepared hush. They were proud of the soundproofing, offered working conditions better than any others in the district. The lift took us up to Research and Development where Edward was waiting. His persona for the afternoon was to be doctor—he wore his white coat, complete with stethoscope. He wasn’t the first great man to have enjoyed dressing up.

“You don’t look too good, Tony. It’s the weather, maybe. I see you’ve brought Thea.”

It was a pointless comment. We went to most places together.

"I'm glad, of course. I'd like her to be present. Come on then, into the E.T. room. Quick as you like."

Small and fussy. Did I say great?

The Experimental Treatment room had one window wall shielded with green venetian blinds, making the place like a cave where the only light came through deep water. Another wall was taken up with low computer consoles and control equipment for the various test machines. There was the usual treatment couch, more chairs than seemed necessary, and a bank of tightly directional lights in the mirror ceiling. Edward began by going over the room carefully, looking for listening devices.

"Industrial espionage," he said. "It'll seem melodramatic to you, but I'd rather not take unnecessary risks."

He used the sort of detector he had first seen in Mr. Pheeney's hand the year before. He was quick to adopt any new gadgets that came to his notice. He'd bought a gun like Bunk's as well, I knew.

Finally he was satisfied.

"Now, Tony, the cover story here is very simple. A complaint tape came in yesterday—flutter and interference like tiny sparks of light, so the customer says. It's the third complaint of this nature in the last month. I have the tape here. If anyone asks, you're here, Tony, to help me analyze the faults and deduce their cause."

He turned to me.

"I expect Tony has told you the real nature of this experiment. If it comes off it'll be our greatest achievement so far."

"It'll come off, Edward. Your experiments always do."

"I'm glad you have such faith in me, Thea."

He put the complaints tape on the shelf above the tape deck and took down another. He showed me the sleeve: Animal Reactions: Cat, Test Conditions I & II.

"Looks uninteresting enough. Well, Thea—would you care to be the first ever? I think I shall call it Synthajoy."

I backed away.

The first successful tape had been seven years before,

the simple relaxation tape. We called it Relaxatape. We thought it would cure UDW straight off. I remember how we passed the big awkward headset eagerly from one to another, the first experience of total submission to an outside wave source. And we the first people ever to know it. I remember Edward tried it first, then me, and then Tony. It was enormously exciting. As a cure for UDW it turned out to be only the first stage. But seven years ago it was enormously exciting.

"Well, Thea? Are you caught up on one of your principles again?"

"Just frightened, Edward. I'd rather not."

"I suppose I ought to make you. You ought to be made to aspire to higher things. But I'm not going to bother."

I hate these rooms with mirror ceilings. In my training days lecture rooms often had them so that we students could all properly see the recumbent patient. I have my own dream picture of what I look like from up there and I don't want it challenged. Edward turned away and fitted the tape onto the tape deck.

"Lie down, will you, Tony? I'll operate and Thea can take notes. Not that I'm expecting very much external to happen. That arrangement all right with you, Tony?"

"Of course." Formal with the moment's importance. "And I appreciate the opportunity to—"

"Something to tell your children, eh?" Both of them glanced at me. For their different reasons. "A new experience, Thea. A blending of synthetic ecstasies. Are you sure you don't want to be the first to know what it's all about?"

I shook my head, went to the window, bent the slats of the blind apart with two fingers. I was looking down onto the construction work, the soil flying away beneath the drill and the quick bright people beyond as they hurried to and fro on the esplanade. Sunlight flashed off the river like pins. Their brilliance made the scene more real. Behind me I could hear preparations going on, the slight creak of the couch as Tony lay down on it, quiet conversation between the two men. The colors and movements of the world outside were quite silent, so that I saw one existence and heard

another. And belonged to neither. I let the blind slats flip back together, bringing abrupt darkness. I closed my eyes. The voices behind me came louder.

“. . . fifteen minutes, I thought. Enough for you to make a fair judgment.”

“The buildup is slow, of course. Don’t hurry me out of it if all seems to be going well.”

“I’m hoping for visual images, Tony. Try to remember them. God—look at my hands. I hadn’t realized I was so excited.”

Pause. Then Edward again.

“I plan to analyze thousands of reactions, Tony. Once we can associate a particular picture with a particular wave pattern, then we’ll be able to—”

“I’m trying to relax, Edward.”

“Here—I’ll help you fit the headset.”

“You’re no good, man. You’re as tense as I am.”

“Thea—come over here and fix this headset for me. I can’t make it expand enough.”

He had to call me twice. Then I went and fitted the headset around Tony’s thick hair. I wound in the needle electrodes and inserted the temporal pads. Under the helmet-like contraption Tony was unrecognizable. It wasn’t Tony—just another face, another patient, another subject. I heard Edward running water at the sink in the corner, washing his hands. Then the roar of the hot air as he dried them.

“All ready, Thea? Just check the levels for me, will you?”

I crossed to the tape deck, took the monitor, pressed it against my temple and tested the signal peaks. Nothing but a mild blur.

“Levels well below saturation, Doctor.”

Edward came across the room to the treatment couch, dangling his dried hands, his sleeves still rolled up. He took Tony’s pulse. Tony smiled up at us.

“The patient appears to be alive, Doctor. Make a note of that, and the time, will you, Nurse?”

Admittedly not a time to be funny, but I loved Tony, heavy jokes included. So I obediently made a note of the

time on my data sheet. Edward threaded the spool, spun it a couple of times with his finger.

"Amplitude of four, I think we agreed on?"

"Amplitude of four."

"Good luck, Tony. You're off into unknown waters."

And he started the tape.

Familiar as I was with subjects' reactions under Sensi-tape, I suppose this time I had expected something special. Of course nothing special happened. Tony closed his eyes, began breathing very slowly. After a few seconds his face relaxed into a gentle smile. The tensions faded.

"Reaching you, is it?" Edward said.

Tony frowned, his eyes still closed, and shook his head, as if shooin' a fly in his sleep. Edward watched him in complete silence for several minutes. I looked away, at the bright spools revolving at their different speeds. Silence stood like a fourth person in the room with us.

"I hope you made a note of the starting time, Thea." I didn't bother to answer. "Look at him. . . . Gone on the strangest journey man has ever known. This is a great moment, Thea. You do realize that?"

"For a Governor's Wife I'm afraid I have a very poor sense of occasion."

"This Governor's Wife joke of yours and his. It's very troublesome." Again I didn't bother to answer. "You've always been against Sensitape, haven't you, Thea? Right from the very beginning."

A remark as stupid as that could have only one purpose—to bait me.

"If I'd thought about it properly, Edward, I would have been. Not that it would have made any difference."

"People's needs, Thea, they're not an absolute laid down by gods or philosophers. We're stacked high and we're going to be stacked higher. Unnatural conditions produce unnatural needs. The world must be dealt with as it is, not as you'd like it to be. If we can't change the conditions, at least we can do our best to satisfy the needs."

After a string like that, what could I say?

"What you're doing to Tony there—can you justify that as satisfying a need?"

"Of course I can. The need for innovation. It's as potent as the need for sex, or for power."

Against his rationalizations I could only range a deep, instinctive repugnance. We had talked this way before. We would always talk this way. It was our differences that made it possible for me still, at this moment, to love him. To love him as one animal and Tony as another. And to respect them both. Parts of a whole, perhaps, but emotionally separate.

He watched my decision to end the useless dialectics, and wouldn't accept it.

"You were happy enough till Sextape, Thea. We must face these objections for what they are, signs of a profound sexual immaturity."

"Don't bully me, Edward. Isn't this supposed to be your great moment? Don't spoil it."

"My God, Thea—back in the sixties they were going around with stop watches and tape measures. Was that better? Was that less an invasion of the individual?"

"It's meaning too much to you, Edward. You should apply some of this analysis to yourself."

So cold. So cold together. Is it really honest of me to maintain there was also love?

At least I shut him up. He turned back to Tony and leaned over the couch, staring into his face as if to find external proofs of success or failure. The time was four-thirty-two. The tape had been running just over three minutes. I timed his pulse at sixty and wrote the figure in the four minute space. Slow, but not dangerously so. Edward had moved away and was checking levels on the monitor. He raised the amplitude half a degree, made sure I had noted the change.

"It's time we had a talk about Mrs. X, Thea."

"I don't see why."

"She's an ambitious woman." He needed to. Captive, I could only endure. "Ambitious for money. She sees her association with me as a way of getting it. For my part, I see the relationship as a way of keeping her quiet. I intend to keep her traveling hopefully for as long as possible."



A course that had its compensations.

"She reckons she's chipping away at my resolve. Sextape sales have gone to her head and she wants me to tear up the old contract. Do you think I should?"

"Why ask me?"

"You're my conscience. You must know that."

If I was his conscience then he should have tried harder to fool me. Always I'd believed that whatever the worst was, I knew it. His words made me uneasy.

"It's modern to be sensible about these things, Edward. Your wife fails you, so you take a mistress. An accepted, modern reaction. But isn't it plain sadism to discuss the new woman with the old?"

"But I'm not discussing Mrs. X with you. I'm talking about business morals."

"And for God's sake stop calling her Mrs. X. You make her sound like some passé divorcee. You must know her name—why not use it?"

We both looked across at Tony. My raised voice hadn't shifted him. He was far away on a strange journey.

"Mrs. Cadence . . . Mrs. Cadence, are you dreaming? Are you having a bad dream?"

Peace. I just want peace in which to remember. I open my eyes and see . . . Edward standing over me, trying to explain about calling her Mrs. X. Edward who I thought was dead.

"Mrs. Cadence—Doctor has sent me to ask if you want to get up or not. Are you all right, Mrs. Cadence?"

Edward? Why should Doctor send Edward? What Doctor would ever send Edward?

"You've been having a bad dream, that's what it is. Come along now, Mrs. Cadence. All over now."

He leans over me. His hands are firm. He calls me Mrs. Cadence, like in the Dickens books.

"You've been in bed quite long enough, Mrs. Cadence. I'm going to get you up. It's selfishness really, saving me a bedpan. You don't mind, do you?"

Mind? He's gentle, why should I mind?

"Shall you dress yourself, or don't you think it's worth the bother?"

"Dress me. Please dress me."

"Doctor's been in. I can see that. I wonder what he's been saying."

"He wasn't unkind. I don't think so. . . . Was it you who talked about Mrs. X or was it he?"

"I told you about her a couple of days ago. How she's suing Sensitape for three years' royalties."

"Dress me. Please dress me."

"Stand up then. Help me slide your pajamas down."

I'm not ashamed in front of him. I brought him a lot of contentment in the old days.

I'd forgotten the feel of his hands on my thighs. Step out of the trousers. Meekly leave him to undo the jacket fastening. He used to like the rituals. Only handle me gently, Edward.

"Arms out, now. That's right. . . . I'm sure Doctor told you about the damaged tape. I worked it so that it looked like an accident—tipped over the contact fluid. Now he'll have to order a replacement."

Edward, is there never anything in your mind but work?

"Is there never anything in your mind but work?"

"I'll be able to get a look at the order form. He'll have to order the tape by its proper catalog number. Then I'll know for certain if last time was only a mistake. Arms up now, and I'll slip your dress over your head for you."

Try me, Edward. Try me. I won't fail. Throw the dress away. Try me . . .

"Please try me."

"Lucky I was able to catch you, Mrs. Cadence. Staggering about like that. The change in your routine has

upset you more than I realized. Sit down and wrap this around you. My goodness, how you're shivering."

. . . shivering. Laid out under the quilt in my dress. Utter depression weighing on my forehead. A sense of uncleanness. I have a vague impression of Nurse being here yet the room appears to be empty. Gray light through the frosted glass of the window—I never ordered frosted glass for these windows. I never thought how the real world would need to be excluded. Real world? I never thought how—

Oh God, how the existence, the idea even of Mrs. X broods over me, crushes my eyebrows down onto my eyes. Nurse told me yesterday—was it yesterday—told me Mrs. X was suing, told me that nobody could find that contract. I hope she succeeds. She'll be a very rich woman. Her thrills are curling the hair of millions, frigid bitches, wives of unmen, virgins, the unmateably hideous. She deserves it. Her husband would have deserved it too, if his bits had deserved anything other than instant cremation. Cheap bitterness, Thea. But witnesses of the car smash said he must have been drunk. Dr. X drunk? Why? He'd been so innocent. And after Sextape so drunk he

died. Bitterness is reasonable. And his name wasn't X, it was Malinder.

"I was wanting to know, Thea, if you thought I should tear up the old contract and give Mrs. Malinder a share in Sextape."

"I have no opinion. The name alone puts me off. You might have called it something a little more dignified."

"It buys us dignity, Thea. We have a fine house, universal respect. We get known as benefactors of humanity."

Sometimes it was hard to tell if Edward wanted to be taken straight or not. He had that in common with many great orators, his dialogue read very badly.

"I shall give her nothing," he said. "She's grasping, deceitful, with her brain between her legs. She's everything you are not, Thea."

I shall give her nothing—thus spake the Lord. He mated with her for the same reason. Tony had been right. Power.

"Thank you for the compliment, Edward."

"I watched you a lot, Thea. You consistently underestimate yourself. I've always known how much I need you. And the higher we go, the more I'll need you. If a psychiatrist doesn't know his own weaknesses, nobody does."

I was needed by Tony. Our mutual need built joy, airy towers, celebration.

The time was four-thirty-four. I wrote it on my data sheet, then took up Tony's wrist to record his pulse. The tape had been running for five minutes. I changed my grip, not able to find his pulse. He had none. I tried once more to be certain. After that I crossed to the tape deck and switched off.

"What the hell did you do that for?"

"You've killed him," I said.

The real and the mirrored were equal. Face up, face down, pale, surrounded by doubled improbable apparatus, two heads in two identical helmets, two white shirts, two known bodies. And two doctors, head to head, hair almost touching. Edward switched on the searing lights over the couch. He had never looked so tall.

"There's always a measure of risk in these things." He

was calm, his hands busy. "We knew alien patterns might set up a dangerous period resonance. A moment or two on the cardiometer and we'll soon get him back again."

The machine gliding over on its huge castors, and—

"I've brought you a pick-me-up, Mrs. Cadence. I told Doctor how you were. He said, take one of these. He said you were having a difficult time."

Don't touch me. You make me sick.

"Take this, Mrs. Cadence. Yours is only an artificial depression. I know how it feels like, mind—we are made to experience one during training. But of course, you know that."

"Don't touch me."

"I wasn't going to, my dear. Here are your tablets. Mephelmidone, if you like to know what we're giving you."

"You talk and talk and talk. We put him on the cardiometer, got his heart working. But—"

"It's supposed to take the patient's mind off things to chat happily. Most patients are too polite to say how irritating it is."

"For God's sake, Nurse. He was dead. Dead. Killed. Tweaking his heart into action with electric shocks wasn't going to help him. Edward injected something. I should have asked him what."

"Once a patient of mine died under treatment. You can't help feeling guilty."

"But this was Tony Stech, Nurse. Tony Stech."

"I think you're confused, Mrs. Cadence. Mr. Stech committed suicide. I read the coroner's verdict."

How can you be so stupid?

"Of course he committed suicide. What would have happened to Sensitape sales if someone had actually died while under? You really have to admire Edward's quick thinking—the injection he gave Tony was of a strong barbiturate. The cardiometer pumped it around." Do you see now? "He was found in the E.T. room next morning. We said when we'd left him he was alive and kicking. Self-inflicted death. Everybody knew how distraught he'd been in the months before."

"You're suggesting that Dr. Cadence murdered his partner?"

Am I? I wish I were.

"I thought so at the time, Nurse. Just for a few seconds. I thought so, and I said—

"'You've murdered him,' I said.

"'Murdered him?' he said. 'What on earth for?'

"Then he looked at me.

"'Because he was your lover?' he said.

"And he laughed. He laughed. And I knew he hadn't murdered Tony, and I wished he had. I wished he'd cared enough to."

"Then you mean this was an accident, Mrs. Cadence? An accident during some experiment?"

"It's ancient history, Nurse. It doesn't matter. Synthajoy, Edward was going to call it. But we can only accept so much joy, Nurse. Tony Stech was given too much. It killed him."

Poor woman. She's afraid I'm raving.

"It was a beautiful way to go, Nurse. I shouldn't grieve for him."

I grieve. When my mind allows it, I grieve. . . .

She puts the tablets and the glass of water down on the table. She stands watching me, not knowing if she should smile, if a smile would look nervous. I remember that feeling; easy attitude, mild expression, pulse racing, muscles ready for the attack that so seldom came. And one's mind trying to find something peaceable, totally neutral to say. And at the same time not too idiotic.

"Why don't we make your bed, Mrs. Cadence? It looks in an awful mess."

"All right." Guarded. Keeping her in suspense. "All right. I don't mind."

We strip the bed down to the mattress. Remake it, foam insulator, sheets, overlay, quilt, each smoothed neatly onto the magnetic sides of the mattress. The occupation is supposed to keep my interest while she works out her next move. I enjoy the job, I enjoy doing something after all these weeks. Stoop a few times and I'm short of breath. No use trying to run away in my present condi-

tion—I wouldn't make it to the end of the corridor. She's around the other side of the bed watching me, uncertain, kindly. Yet she revolted me for some reason when she first came in. Perhaps I am a little odd after all. She's well-meaning, quite a fine looking woman, managing a difficult situation better than I'd ever have done. And she's concerned for truth even to the extent of risking her job for it.

"Mrs. Cadence—your husband said Mr. Stech was your lover—"

"That's right. He didn't care. He laughed."

"Was it true?"

A brave question for her to ask. And hard for me to answer.

"True? We loved each other. Which was more important than physical details."

"And you say Mr. Stech died as a result of your husband's experiment."

Motive enough, which the Court failed to find. She's deciding I was guilty.

"It was an accident, Nurse. I couldn't consciously blame, couldn't hate. But I did stop loving him. His coldness did that, his detachment. It wasn't scientific, Nurse, it was insane."

"And the death was arranged to look like suicide? You didn't mind?"

"You don't understand what he had been to me. I didn't mind anything after that."

The things we women talk about over the beds. She still thinks I was guilty.

"It doesn't matter, you know, Nurse. Court Instructions should be obeyed, guilty or not."

"Of course." Too quick. Intellect only. "Of course they should." And she goes away to tug at the curtains.

How clear my mind is. I think of Par Bay, where the china clay river in spate pours a white path out across the sea for miles, cutting the clear bay water in two. Without this river, without my treatment, the sea is whole, unclouded. I dare see anything. I dare see the day

the day I went to Rachel Cadence's committal. The fomality necessary even to the sensible mother of Edward Cadence after the anatomy students had finished with her. Edward of course was indifferent, much too busy, so I went alone. He suggested I take in a show afterward, in case I was depressed. In case I was depressed.

"Well, Mrs. Cadence, I really can't do much until I've seen Doctor's order form for the new tape. We need proof, you see. Otherwise he might say it was just a mistake."

"Don't bother, Nurse. The verdict was necessary. A national hero shouldn't have a scheming mistress. The people might have understood a gentle, loving one—but not that hard-faced, soft-bodied bitch. Much tidier to blame the unbalanced wife, poor thing. A political verdict, Nurse—you'll never be allowed to challenge it."

"I don't want you to tell me anything, Mrs. Cadence. I don't want to challenge anything. If I find an irregularity it is my duty to report it. I know nothing more and I want to know nothing more. Our rule book—it's the one strength we civil servants have."

She's tidied everything there is to be tidied. She'll be off now to the kitchen. Teatime.

"Teatime, Mrs. Cadence. I'll be off now to the kitchen."  
Thank God.

Rachel's ashes were committed at three-thirty in the afternoon. Which is to say that they were given to me in a sort of plastic tobacco jar at the end of a short memorial meeting. The Head of her Statistics Department read a short report on her behalf, someone else explained the great favor she had done the world by giving it her son, and the chief of some surgical department announced to



mild applause that already a blind man had been made to see by the gift of her one good eye. Apart from these three gentlemen I was the only member of the general public present. One crematorium official, and the rest of the hall filled with newspapermen. It was the silly season, so somebody told me.

Then they gave me the jar. I smiled at the cameras as I accepted it. On behalf, of course, of my husband, whose duties unfortunately kept him away. His ceaseless service to humanity. I found I was expected to make a short speech, so I made one. I said all the things about my deceased mother-in-law that a Governor's Wife would say. In point of fact I'd hardly seen her in the last seven years. She'd rung up after the public inquiry into Edward's affairs to congratulate him on the satisfactory outcome—in the anxious weeks before she had remained conspicuously silent. She had her position to consider. The reporters taped my speech and in one case it made the front page of the evening edition.

#### DEATH OF CADENCE MATRIARCH

Mrs. Cadence tributes Mrs. Cadence.

More applause, then organ music switched on as we went out between the classical pillars of the crematorium. Simple yet dignified. I tried different ways of carrying my tobacco jar—it tended to seem either a trophy or something I was slightly ashamed of. I stood on the crematorium steps and chatted with the Head of the ashes' Department who had known them so much better than I. We posed in the afternoon sun for some color photographs.

*"The bereaved Mrs. Cadence, sweetly solemn, wore silver-gray crylene, her lemon-yellow shoes and shoulder bag providing discreet contrast. Lightly made-up, her face held a tranquil sadness. Her hat was a structure of metallic flakes that shimmered like the skin of a snake as she moved her head. The total effect was forward-looking, the keynote that would surely have pleased the deceased, well-known for her progressive views."*

If things had turned out differently I might even have started a fashion for gray and yellow committals.

As soon as I could get away I hurried to the crematorium Karstak, stuffing the jar into my shoulder bag as I went. I wasn't, as Edward had suggested I might be, in the least depressed. If anything I was cheered—it was one of my days for finding awfulness amusing. But his mention of taking in a show made it perfectly clear that my presence at home that evening was not desired. Mrs. X—I preferred calling her that, it made her seem ridiculous—had been taking up more and more of his time in the months since Tony's death. I tried not to intrude on their privacy.

I drove in to Battersea and left the car in the underground car park there. I walked slowly back across the river, over the new Albert Bridge. I stopped, primitive, in the exact middle, leaned on the rail and looked down into the water. I believe I thought of nothing, just water slipping by in my head. A tug passed underneath, pumiced deck, spirals of white ropes, and a glimpse through a deck-light of engines. Into its wake I dropped the jar of Rachel's ashes. It floated, remaining in sight till my eyes ached with watching it and the silver water danced like anesthesia. I walked on, took a bus into the West End.

The titles of the plays were not encouraging, neither were the photographs outside the theaters. From an agency I learned that stalls were available in two theaters, boxes in another three, no seat at less than five new pounds. The non-plays being presented in the fringe non-theaters were all booked till the autumn. I could try queueing for a gallery seat if I hurried. I've never belonged to the esoteric group of live theatergoers and on that particular evening the prospect of observing them in action for two or three hours repelled me.

Unwilling to go home, I wandered about the gaudy streets at a complete loose end. My cheerfulness ebbed rapidly. On impulse I turned into the Sensitape parlor on the corner of St. Martin's Lane and Long Acre. I had never been in such a place before. I was so ready to be shocked it might almost have been a brothel. The tone of the reception area was that of a small private hotel. I picked up a list of the tapes available.

"Good afternoon. You have something in mind perhaps, madam?"

"No. I—er—I just thought I'd see what you've got."

"A very wide range. All new tapes. In some parlors the tapes are played to death, you know. We aim to give only the finest definition. All tapes are replaced after ten playings."

This I knew to be nonsense. Except for the special addictive tapes, Sensitape kept full frequency response virtually indefinitely. I looked down the list.

"This is madam's first visit, perhaps?"

"Well . . ."

"Prices are laid out clearly. The experience lasts from half an hour to forty-five minutes. Replays for seventy percent of the original fee. Both cubicles and private sensing rooms are available. We don't provide group sensing rooms here—we find our customers prefer to pay the small additional fee and enjoy complete privacy. Refreshments can be served after sensing. We are fully licensed and have an arrangement for light meals with the restaurant next door. All experiences are confidential and the superior quality of the equipment is guaranteed."

I looked at the receptionist, trying to find a person behind it all. Sensi-drunk, to coin a word.

"We're slack at the moment, madam. Perhaps you would like to see a cubicle and a sensing room before making your choice."

"That would be best. I like to know what I'm letting myself in for."

A little laugh. In new situations I'm bad at knowing on what level to operate. I followed the receptionist through and was shown a carpeted cubicle eight by four, containing nothing but a couch and a Sensitape machine. The place was air conditioned and had variable intensity lights. It was one of a dozen sound-proofed cubicles arranged around a small central foyer with leather seats.

The sensing rooms were on the next floor down. The one I saw was twice the size of a cubicle, and better swept. As well as the couch and the machine there were indoor plants, an aquarium with tropical fish, a table laid out

with that week's magazines, and a comfortable chair—in case clients wanted a friend to sit with them, the receptionist said. A shower was available as an optional extra—sweating sometimes took place under the more intense experiences.

I chose the room, but did without the shower. I was not reckoning on one of the more intense experiences.

"You're not a journalist by any chance, are you, madam? We offer special terms to journalists."

"No. No, I'm afraid I'm not a journalist."

"Between you and me, madam, that's a bit of a relief. It's dying down now, of course, but at the beginning we did receive a certain amount of adverse publicity. Turning the nation into sensi-slaves—I'm sure you remember the sort of thing. Public opinion was too strong, of course. It's only the reactionary oddballs who are still against us. Only the reactionary oddballs."

The words seemed to give the receptionist satisfaction. They were repeated several times. The worst thing in the world was to be a reactionary oddball.

I chose a musical tape—Beldik conducting Brahms' second symphony. I remembered Edward's excitement when he finally persuaded Beldik to cooperate. Fifty percent of all royalties it cost us, but the prestige gained was enormous.

The receptionist circuited the record player in, synchronized it with the tape machine and tried to help me into the headset.

"Thank you—I can do it."

"You've fitted one of these before. I can see that, madam."

"I'm a nurse, you see."

The receptionist took my hat—a hundred and seventy new pounds of it—put it carefully on the table and went out. If I wanted to pretend, in my Vega suit and my Baretti shoes, that I was only a nurse, that was up to me. I started the tape and the record player.

To buy (with money) what Beldik had recorded (for money) was to compound a moral felony. The music lived in him as in a noble palace, echoing down the generations of his sensibility, lit by his intellect, fired by his passion. It didn't matter that the palace was being let out to a five

shilling visitor. It didn't matter that somewhere in the design of the palace there must be a flaw. Beldik knew the music's subtlest changes, shared himself with it, loved it as I felt it loved him. Some people say the truth loves them. Without a doubt music loves Klaus Beldik. To experience the tape was to trespass on that love, on that act of love.

I had gone into the parlor expecting to be shocked. By squalid conditions, I suppose. Or by the blank-faced customers staggering out. In the event I saw no customers and found no squalid conditions. But I was shocked nonetheless. I was appalled.

The receptionist tried to press a card into my hand as I passed, hoped I had had a satisfactory time, suggested that I recommend the place to my friends, offered me a glass of something before I left. As I went out the words were still being voided.

I was too appalled to do anything but get away, stumble away down the road past the theaters and shops. Appalled and angry. I found myself in Trafalgar Square, the sun low, catching rainbows in the huge fountains. All my theoretical objections, my appeals to Edward, were nothing. I talked always about something I had not myself experienced, declaring it in theory to be an evil. In theory. Now the thing had entered my soul and I knew.

Just a reactionary oddball.

I must have made a sad show of myself. I think I ran about staring into people's faces. I talked to some of them, shouting to make myself heard above the fountains and the swirling pigeons and the traffic. I remember an Indian woman with a little boy who gazed up at Nelson and took no notice of me at all. I told her she should die rather than let her country get this thing. She must go home, implore the politicians to keep it out whatever happened. She was polite to me. I told her it was better to starve than to die of the soul's degradation. She took her little boy's arm and moved politely away.

Just a reactionary oddball.

My loneliness that evening seemed total, terrifying, worse than the worst insanity. I've no idea for how long I stumbled from group to group among the fountains and the

litter baskets and the great stone plinths of the lions. The poor mad woman, people thought. Somebody really ought to do something for her. And probably I was mad. In the end a policeman came and asked me if I needed any help. He asked for my address and said he would arrange for a car to take me home. If he connected my name with the great Dr. Cadence he gave no sign.

I was calm now, but even less balanced. I waited quietly by him while he called up Headquarters. I spoke to him soberly, and said I was sorry I had made such a fool of myself. I knew him as one of the enemy. I remember with great clarity the two of us standing together and talking sensibly about all the foreigners who were in London at this time of year. We were waiting for the police car to come. I asked him if I could go to the lavatory and we crossed the road together to a public convenience. As there were two entrances he positioned himself centrally between them. I left my conspicuous hat in the cubicle and went out in the middle of a group of four other women, my shoes carried in my hand to make myself that much shorter. The crowds were so thick that the policeman never saw me. I hoped the lavatory attendant got the hat—it would have fetched fifty, even secondhand.

In the first shop I came to I bought myself a new suit—a horrible flowered affair that made me look fat and forty—and a new red velvet hat. Then, my bright yellow shoulder bag packed in the parcel with my Vega crylene suit, I went out into the streets a new woman.

London was hellish, the chicken to Sensitape's egg, impossible to tell which had come first. I thought of farmers with their rented Sensitapes, and fishermen, and foresters. There was nowhere I could go to get away. So I decided to take the policeman's advice and go home. I wasn't thinking of Edward then, or of Mrs. X. I was thinking of Tony, how glad I was for him to be dead and out of it.

It was the car that reminded me first of Edward. It would. I'd taken a bus along the Embankment and across Chelsea bridge. Then I'd walked through the park to where I'd left the Chev-Bentley. Everything about the huge

vehicle reminded me of Edward; it was the sort of machine he so instinctively made his own. I disliked the car and was afraid of it.

The corollary was clear enough.

I thought of the successful, unprotesting body of Mrs. X. I thought of how near Edward now was to perfecting Synthajoy, how Tony's death had if you like done no more than show him the way. I'll admit this was the moment when the idea of murder first came into my mind as a serious possibility.

The sun had set and the streets were lit by moon-colored neon. I set out for Richmond, the accident happening as I was just coming up out of Wandsworth. I've no idea why the accident occurred, for the road was quite deserted, clear in both directions. Suddenly there was a Keep Left sign on an island in front of me and I was driving directly into it. I doubt if I even applied the brakes. The sign approached and steadily entered the hood of the car. The windshield crazed over and I suppose there must have been some noise. The car's chassis was built on a principle of graded resistance, so that I was able to climb out unhurt, reach back in for my parcel and walk slowly away. The pavements were deserted, the shops unmoved, and the flats above the shops. When I looked back after about a hundred yards a motorist coming up the hill had stopped and was climbing out to investigate. I kept on walking. Some time later a police car passed me, going fast. I unpacked my handbag and had a few drinks in a pub. I hadn't eaten since before the committal.

I don't know. Perhaps I had hoped to get away with killing the car instead of its owner. Get away with in relation to my own internal police force, at that moment very active. After the accident I felt calm and eternal. I had several measures of brandy in the pub, watched telly for a bit, and then started walking again. I have no memory of how long I walked, or in what direction. I must have been drunk. The first thing I do remember is feeling tired and hailing a taxi.

I let myself into the house with my latchkey. Mrs. X Mrs.

Malinder Mrs. X Mrs. Mrs. was coming down the stairs. She looked almost beautiful against the fine scarlet sweep of the staircase. I thought of myself in my fat and forty suit and my bright yellow accessories all wrong.

She sees Mrs. Cadence coming toward her across the jeweled hall. She thinks *What a sight, poor thing* and steps graciously to one side, allowing Mrs. Cadence room to pass. Against her smooth belly beneath her gown she still feels the pounding, the slap of sweat on sweat. At will she can mock it or find magnificence in it. She moves on down the hall, a piece of paper held unobtrusively in one gloved hand, her handbag in the other. She fetches her stole. The car Edward has bought her is just outside. She drives away into the star-shot night.

Mrs. Cadence has plodded upstairs in her red velvet hat. She finds her husband naked in his room, shot four times in the chest and quite dead. So Mrs. Malinder has done the job for her, she thinks, with a mixture of relief and resentment. The wall safe is open, its contents spilled out onto the floor. She doesn't have to go through the papers to know which one will be missing. She rings for the police from the telephone by the bed, then replaces all the papers in the safe and closes it. Mrs. Malinder has style. Mrs. Cadence, not to be outdone, determines to achieve the only sort of style now left to her.

"Tea up, Mrs. Cadence. Settled down now, have you?"

"How promptly you come, Nurse. Right on cue."

"That's nice. You mean you were ready for me."

"I have a little silent film I run through in my head. Or I used to during the trial. Before the treatment started."

"You're looking better, I must say."

"They never found the gun, Nurse. She took it away in her handbag. I must have brushed against it as we passed on the stairs."

"I've told you, Mrs. Cadence, I don't want to know anything."

"I suppose I needed all this, the verdict, the treatment, as a sort of atonement. Which is a perverted joy."



"I've poured out your tea, Mrs. Cadence. Why don't you drink it?"

Which I do. It tastes nasty this time, stronger, but I feel it hit me hard and quick. So that I barely have time to

## DAY 31

"I've given your Mrs. Craig a few days off, Mrs. Cadence. You're so much better I think you can perfectly well go back to your room on your own."

The shapes unmerge. They separate and become the treatment room. Doctor looks as bland and faceless as ever. He's been giving me treatment. It was the same treatment but he's right when he says it's made me better, made me feel better. Or, to put it more accurately, I will feel better the moment I choose to take on the responsibilities of feeling better. He's been feeding me with the guilt again, but my day off has made me stronger against it.

"Do you think, Doctor, that I'm better enough for you to tell me what's happening about Sexitape? I understand this Mrs. X may sue."

"The case comes up at the end of the week, Mrs. Cadence. Four years' back royalties are being claimed for herself and her late husband. The defense seems to be based on an agreement that can't be found."

He must really believe I'm better, telling me this.

"I was there when the agreement was signed, Doctor. I witnessed the signatures."

"But you are in the Kingston, Mrs. Cadence. Your testimony will be of little value."

Thank God for that. I want her to succeed. Success is the greatest punishment. A murderess lives with her crime. I want nothing to happen to her that could possibly count as atonement. Success and more success. How clear everything now is.

"Headset off now, Mrs. Cadence. Time you went back to your room and tidied up."

"You've given Mrs. Craig the day off?"

"Several. She deserves a holiday. I'll drop in myself later on and see how you're doing. May even bring you your tea. Then we could share a cup."

Mrs. Craig's gone. Found out for certain about the tape and said something. I wonder exactly what Doctor's reaction has been. Amusing if she turned up in the room next to mine, undergoing treatment. Not that we'd ever meet, even if she was there.

"Last time we met, Mrs. Cadence, you asked me about George Washington's children. I looked it up for you. He married a widow, apparently. They had no children of their own, but he was devoted to hers. Was it his mythical truthfulness that interested you?"

"His letters to his wife. Have you never read his letters to his wife? He managed to be a great man, Doctor, and also a loving husband."

"I follow your line of thought and arrive at Dr. Cadence. You'll remember that I knew him quite well." Remember? Have I seen you before I came to this place then? "You probably never guessed at the time how intensely I disliked him. He was neither mad enough to be great nor sane enough to be big." This isn't the first time he's said that, I bet. "Dr. Cadence was riding for a fall. For a man in his position he had too little charm. In many ways it's a good thing he died when he did. The pioneering work is done. At least he's in the Abbey now."

"This isn't the hospital common room, Doctor. You're talking to his wife."

And what about Synthajoy? Is the world never to have Synthajoy?

"On your feet now, Mrs. Cadence. That's right. . . . There's no harm in giving you an outside point of view. It's often helpful."

"And what about Synthajoy? Do you really think it's a good thing he died with that uncompleted?"

"It's a word I'm not familiar with, Mrs. Cadence."

Thank God for that. I wonder if I do remember him. Or why I should so definitely have forgotten him.

"Remind me, Doctor"—on my way to the door—"remind me when we met."

"I imagine you were too much in love to notice. I was at a conference on the final design stages of the Kingston. Mr. Stech was there as well."

"I remember you perfectly." I do too. "Your name is . . . Harvey. With an 'a.'"

The doors of the treatment room slap shut behind me. I see the conference table, and my own hands gathering folds of curtain stuff. There's a clip of chair designs I've just passed around, and samples of carpeting. Tony watches me across the table. And Dr. Harvey, unmemorable except for his comprehension of us which I disregard. He talks about . . . he talks about colors, full of new Japanese theory of wavelength significance in the treatment of mental disorders.

"Do you want help along to your room after all, Mrs. Cadence? Or were you just thinking?"

"Just remembering, Dr. Harvey. It's a long time ago."

"It must seem so." Watching me as I walk away to my room. "All of three years."

After the meeting Edward stayed on. He always left me to go home with Tony. I know he assumed we were sleeping together. In fact, more than a year after that morning in Richmond, I still hadn't risked it. We'd never even talked about it, Tony and I—his attitude was non-medical, instinctive, tender. I believed that when the time was right my body would be right also.

That afternoon I suddenly knew the time *was* right.

We drove back into London in Tony's car. To him cars were enemies, needing to be placated. He hadn't yet moved to the Boltons, and we went to the laboratory he rented, with the three rooms over. When we arrived his assistant had been turning a tiny nylon insulator and was busy collecting up the swarf. Tony told him to pack up, take the rest of the day off. I smiled bravely. Whether true or not, the three of us knew what that implied. Tony and me standing together, within an almost tangible aura of sexuality. The assistant dusted off his coat, hung it by the door and went away. Tony turned the key in the lock

behind him. By now I was over by the foot of the stairs and he threaded his way between the benches and the stacks of equipment till he reached me. He switched off the lights. We were left with daylight, gray and full of shadows. London in November.

"You're a bloody Goy," he said.

- "And you're"—grasping the nettle—"a circumcised Jew."

"Any objections?"

"Not if you haven't."

We went upstairs to the bedroom. And I have to remember.

I remember he kept up a soft flow of talk, telling me how he loved me, what it was of me he loved, the years when he'd had to keep his love hidden. I remember how even around our kissing he made gentle nonsense noises. He seemed to think I would be afraid, and for reasons he didn't know about perhaps I should have been. But I was safe with him, and confident. He left me for a moment to go and draw the curtains. He thought I would be afraid of the light. Even the movement of his arm was an exquisite pain, his shoulder muscles, the creases of his shirt, his strong legs. I was safe with him, needing him. We undressed solemnly, like children, and lay together on top of the bed.

I have to remember his hands on my breasts, mine touching the strange scars of his circumcision. Kissing me, legs over mine, his weight pressing me down. And, oh God, my stomach knotting, bitterness in my mouth, face wrenched away, the labor of getting his body off mine, heaving, stumbling, hurrying to kneel by the lavatory pan. I tried to kick the door shut behind me, but he came in and knelt by my side. I wanted him never to see me again. I wanted to hide from him, from the whole world. And I wanted him never to leave me.

We knelt naked, side by side in front of the lavatory with its tipped-up seat. He stroked my hair, and when the retching had stopped he kissed my teary cheeks and my eyes. His softness was beautiful, if nothing else was.

"I didn't know," over and over, "I didn't know what it had done to you."

I flushed the pan and we stood up. He wiped my mouth very earnestly. I hid my face in the hollow of his shoulder, smooth and smelling of skin.

"I didn't know, my darling. I didn't know . . ."

I rinsed out my mouth, tried not to look at myself in the mirror. I caught sight of his expression as he stood behind me, compassion and love. He suggested some brandy, was going for some into the tiny sitting room. I caught hold of his hand as he passed.

"No, Thea, there's no need. . . . I didn't know, darling. I didn't understand."

"Come back to bed, Tony."

"No, my love. I shouldn't have made you go through that. I should have known."

"Please, Tony. Please come."

My shivering stopped quickly under the bedclothes. He kept himself away from me till I had to find him. We did what we could, discovering ingenuities. Like a rope in a high wind, his fingers tight for fear of falling. As necessary, as inevitable as sleep. Amniotic. At once simple and complex, leaving happiness.

But for all the good my sexual parts would ever be to me, Edward might just as well have stitched them up.

And Tony's dead.

Doctor said I should tidy my room. It doesn't look too bad. Just straighten the bed, fold my pajamas, jerk the curtains out of respect to Nurse's memory. Observe a minute's silence even.

Yesterday's withdrawal of the treatment (for which I can thank her alone) has changed my life. As has the sense she gave me of not being alone. No longer them and me, the sane realism of them and us. An acceptance of myself. After thirty days in here I can look at the extent of my injuries, and the way Tony loved me in spite of them. Thirty days before I could again examine the circumstances of Edward's murder.

And thirty-one days before I could wonder at my perversity in concealing them. Had I needed, demanded, enjoyed my suffering? And for what squalid reason? There's nothing more tedious, more corrosive than guilt, wallowed-in guilt, vainglorious. Oh God, how boring I am.

I promise not to wave my stump ever again.

You know, I've decided my hair's a mannerism, a cliché like going mad in white linen. Fancy Mrs. Craig putting up with it. I must see about getting it done—perfectly possible to have a hairdresser come to the Kingston. A new face. It's not as if I were poor. . . . A new face. I'm an urban creature, I love remote faces, faces distanced by the necessity of their numbers. The countryside I stare at out of car windows. I perch precariously on blades of grass, sensible of my daring. I love townscapes that don't ask anything of me, and faces.

Yes, I shall order a hairdresser. It's in the regulations. And it's not as if I were poor. In fact, I'm very rich. I'm the Sensitape heiress.

"Do you know something, Doctor? I'm the Sensitape heiress."

"Quite right, Mrs. Cadence. The head of a great company. A position with advantages and responsibilities."

"Don't be so pompous, Doctor." Put the tea-tray down, man. Don't just stand there with it. "If I choose, the advantages can be mine and the responsibilities all left to the Board."

"I doubt if that will be your way. Tea on the table here, is it?"

He talks as if he believes I'm going to get out of here.

"I think you ought to know, Doctor, that yesterday's missed treatment has made a lot of difference."

"It has?"

"It's let out a lot of things you were hoping to block."

"Milk and sugar?"

"How English of you, using tea to hide behind. Yes, it's allowed me to remember about love."

"I've brought two cups. You don't mind if I serve myself?"

Social chitchat? He must be trying to establish a new relationship. At least the tea can't be drugged. Is he afraid of me now?

"I want to tell you the truth about the murder. Something I've told nobody."

"That would certainly be a help, Mrs. Cadence."

He's retreating already. Behind a polite interest, behind professionalism. He's come to do my hair really.

I tell him the story of the film. It's easier that way.

" 'She sees Mrs. Cadence coming toward her across the jeweled hall. (That's me—I'm Mrs. Cadence.) She thinks *What a sight, poor thing* (which is fair enough) and steps graciously to one side, allowing Mrs. Cadence room to pass. Against her smooth belly beneath her gown she still feels the pounding, the slap of sweat on sweat. At will she can mock it or find magnificence in it.' You're following me?"

"You ought to have been a writer, Mrs. Cadence."

" 'She moves on down the hall, a piece of paper held unobtrusively in one gloved hand, her handbag in the other. She fetches her stole. The car Edward had bought her is just outside. She drives away into the star-shot night.' "

"Flowery. But I know what you mean."

"Do you know what the piece of paper is, Doctor?"

"Please go on. I'm sure it all comes clear in the end."

" 'Mrs. Cadence has plodded upstairs in her red velvet hat. (She bought the hat as part of her disguise after escaping from the policeman.) She finds her husband naked in his room, shot four times in the chest and quite dead. (That's Dr. Cadence, of course.) So Mrs. Malinder has done the job for her, she thinks, with a mixture of relief



and resentment. The wall safe is open, its contents spilled out onto the floor. She doesn't have to go through the papers to know which one will be missing.' ”

“Ah. Now I see.”

He's not believing me. I only tell it this way to make it possible. But the truth is inconvenient, so obviously he withdraws from it.

“She rings for the police from the telephone by the bed, then replaces all the papers in the safe and closes it. Mrs. Malinder has style. Mrs. Cadence, not to be out-done, determines to achieve the only sort of style now left to her.' ”

“Mrs. Malinder?”

“You know who she is, Doctor. You must.”

He drinks tea, demonstrating how steady his hand is. Mine is going like a coil vibrator. He can't believe me or he'd show surprise. Show something. How capable men are of calculation.

“Why have you told me this, Mrs. Cadence?”

“I've only just been allowed to remember it.”

“Not an answer. Why have you told me this?”

“Nurse. Mrs. Craig . . .” What was I going to say?  
“She believes in me.”

“We all believe in you. As we do in Nelson's Column.”

Always barriers. It's word-play now. He may have told the truth about Mrs. Craig's day off. Why did I mention her? Now I'm stuck with not giving her away.

“I've always thought of Mrs. Craig as an . . . ally, Doctor. A friend. She's helped me a lot in these last few days.”

“Mrs. Craig is a very good nurse. She does what she's told.”

Dropping away under me.

"Procedures at the Kingston have changed. We've become more efficient. Rather more efficient."

Dropping away.

An impression of the room running down the room like wax. Dropping away fast. And myself left impossibly high and alone on a singing pinnacle, wind in my ears, the countries of the room running out below me.

Doctor is down there, shouting. His words arrive tiny and clear.

"This Mrs. Malinder—as she passed you on the stairs, didn't she say anything to you?"

"To me?"

As tiny as he, as far away from my mind.

"A bit melodramatic, this sybilline silence as you pass."

"She said

She said we really ought to have got together ages ago. She called me 'my dear.' "

An outrageous thing. Why should I ever have got together with her?

"What then? What did you say?"

"I said nothing. She looked surprised. She said he'd told her I was being quite civilized. Civilized. She said she hoped we weren't going to have a sordid quarrel."

"And did you have a sordid quarrel?"

"Certainly not. I told her the word civilized held different meanings for different people. Then I went on up."

"You swept by."

A duologue from which I can keep myself separate. It uses cheap words and moves in fantasy.

"She called after me. She said, 'He's in his room. I shouldn't go in to him.' She's an American, you know. 'Why not?' I asked, pausing. She turned and went on down the stairs. She closed the door after her very quietly."

"No stole?"

"Stole? Certainly there was a stole. I'm sorry if I left it out."

"And no piece of paper?"

"And no piece of paper."

Cheap words, and moves in fantasy.

"And you went up to your husband in spite of what she said."

"He was on the bed in his room, quite naked. I've never seen anything as disgusting as his condition in all my life. And me a nurse."

"And you a nurse."

"He was just as she'd left him."

"The comforts of central heating."

"He was just as she'd left him."

"So you shot him."

"He was just as she'd left him."

"Spent."

His tiny face smiles, and his tiny words curve up and drop into my hands like pebbles.

"He opened his eyes and saw me and didn't move. Didn't care. The safe was untouched. His brown skin crept with life of its own. He was sleepy and contented. He said, 'My God, Thea, we're selling a million of that every month. And believe me, we're giving good value.'"

"And you shot him."

"I mightn't have. He said, 'Don't look at me like that,

Thea. It's not my fault her husband got killed in a car smash.' He meant that otherwise I could have had my share of fun with him."

"He resented your frigidity so you shot him."

"He said that. He said, 'No use being pi, Thea. Tony served you well and often before he died.'"

"And so you shot him."

"Don't keep saying that. All I have left is my story. . . . The gun he had got after Bunk and Pheeny, he kept it in the drawer by his bed. I took it out of the drawer and he said, 'You're not going to shoot me with that thing,' and I did."

"Because of Tony."

Let me stop now. The pinnacle has gone. He was so dead. To shoot a naked man makes holes you can see. They were hard to bear, hard to keep away from. I'd seen plenty of dead people, but now with the blood I was seeing Thea Cadence dead. Please let me stop now. Please.

"Because of Tony."

Or put me back on my pinnacle.

"Because of Tony."

"Because of everything. Because of the committal, because of Sensitape, because of the receptionist, because of Mrs. Malinder, because he'd never loved me—"

"Because of Tony."

"If you like."

No, not even if you like.

"That's not true. I killed him because I hated him. And I hated him because I hated myself."

"Oh, the melodrama."

"It's true."

He empties his teacup and puts it back on the tray. He hopes he is godlike. It's terrible to come back to how the muscles of my face and throat ache from crying. And degrading to have to get up from my knees on the floor.

He's too tactful to help me. Too tactful even to notice.

"We'll have you out of here in no time at all now, Mrs. Cadence. A day or two on the contrition tape and you'll be as right as rain. I'll get Mrs. Craig to fix it. We'll give you a spell before your rest."

Spell. What an apt word.

"Isn't it Mrs. Craig's day off, Doctor?"

"Only in a manner of speaking."

"Establish an ally and then withhold her?"

"I was afraid with your training that you might have guessed. Every smallest detail of your stay here has been intentional. But you know that. Now."

I hear the tigers and the crocodiles roaring. Crocodiles must roar, or Tony wouldn't have said they did. All you read about is the musky smell. Or is it musty?

"She says you were very hard to get through to. You have a very strong mind, Mrs. Cadence."

"I really believed she was my friend."

"But, Mrs. Cadence, she was—she still is—your . . ."

"All right. Please don't say it. We all operate within a framework, and within the framework she is my friend. What I must build is a framework inside the framework.

A cage, Tony called it. Far enough inside, and you're outside. Or does that sound too tricky?"

I play with words as Doctor did. And for the same reasons.

"How many of the things you've told me are true, Doctor? What, for example, about Mrs. Malinder suing Sensi-tape?"

"Perfectly true. The case comes up at the end of the week."

"I'm the only person who knows about the agreement. Will I be able to give evidence?"

"Doubtful. Your release from the Kingston needs three expert opinions. And that takes time. Why not pay her off? The firm can well afford it."

I'm damned if I will. Cheap little gold-digger. To connive at her success would be perverted.

"I destroyed the agreement myself, Doctor. Like the disposable gun, down the kitchen garbage unit. I made Mrs. Malinder so guilty that I even believed in it myself."

"And then you protected her and became heroic."

It uses cheap words and moves in fantasy. A different fantasy, that's all.

Edward. Sherry for you both?  
(The glasses clink.)

The first thing I suppose I ought to do is congratulate you on the results of all your preliminary auditions. As I'm sure you've been told, they were quite outstanding.

Mrs. X. It's how we were made, Dr. Cadence. We fitted, right from the very first time.

Edward. It places you two in a very responsible position, Mrs. X. No doubt you realize this . . .  
. . . I have an agreement here for you both to sign.

(Rustle of Agreement.)

Briefly, it establishes that the patent in this method of recording electrical brain waves for the purpose of . . .

A different fantasy. Doctor stands up.

“Well, well, well. I must go and see about laying on some contrition. Hardly more than a formality, of course. Also I must tell Mrs. Craig the good news. She’ll be so pleased.”

He goes to the door.

I shall call him back. I shall tell him about the tape still in Edward’s safe. Also I know enough to perfect Synthajoy. I shall annihilate Mrs. Malinder and then I shall give her one hundred thousand pounds which she will take because she’s only human. And so am I.

Don't miss these

**ACE SCIENCE FICTION SPECIALS**

A distinctive new series of quality science fiction novels.

---

**H-42 — 60¢**

**WHY CALL THEM BACK FROM HEAVEN?**

by Clifford D. Simak

**A-13 — 75¢**

**THE WITCHES OF KARRES**

by James H. Schmitz

**H-54 — 60¢**

**PAST MASTER**

by R. A. Lafferty

**H-58 — 60¢**

**THE REVOLVING BOY**

by Gertrude Friedberg

**H-62 — 60¢**

**THE LINCOLN HUNTERS**

by Wilson Tucker

**A-16 — 75¢**

**RITE OF PASSAGE**

by Alexei Panshin

**H-72 — 60¢**

**PICNIC ON PARADISE**

by Joanna Russ

**H-79 — 60¢**

**THE TWO-TIMERS**

by Bob Shaw

---

Ask your newsdealer, or order direct from Ace Books, Inc. (Dept. MM), 1120 Avenue of the Americas, New York, N.Y. 10036. Please send price indicated, plus 10¢ handling fee for each copy.



ACE BOOKS PRESENTS  
THE MOST HONORED SCIENCE FICTION WRITERS  
OF THE DECADE

---

ROGER ZELAZNY

**F-393 — 40¢ THIS IMMORTAL**

Winner of the Hugo Award as best sf novel of 1965.

**F-403 — 40¢ THE DREAM MASTER**

The full-length version of the Nebula Award winner as best sf novella of 1965.

**M-155 — 45¢ FOUR FOR TOMORROW**

Four exciting adventures in the future, including the Nebula Award winning best novelette of 1965.

---

SAMUEL R. DELANY

**G-706 — 50¢ THE JEWELS OF APTOR**

"Extremely accomplished . . . streaked through with poetry and crammed with vivid images." —*New Worlds*

**F-199 — 40¢ \*CAPTIVES OF THE FLAME**

**F-261 — 40¢ \*THE TOWERS OF TORON**

**F-322 — 40¢ \*CITY OF A THOUSAND SUNS**

\*Three full-length novels comprising the trilogy *The Fall of the Towers*.

**M-121 — 45¢ THE BALLAD OF BETA-2**

**M-139 — 45¢ EMPIRE STAR**

**F-388 — 40¢ BABEL-17**

Winner of a Nebula Award as best sf novel of 1966.

**F-427 — 40¢ THE EINSTEIN INTERSECTION**

The Nebula Award winner as best sf novel of 1967.

---

Available from Ace Books, Inc. (Dept. MM), 1120 Avenue of the Americas, New York, N.Y. 10036. Please send price indicated, plus 10¢ handling fee per copy.

**CLASSICS OF GREAT SCIENCE-FICTION**  
from ACE BOOKS

- F-375 (40¢) THE WORLDS OF ROBERT A. HEINLEIN**
- M-153 (45¢) THE WEAPON MAKERS**  
by A. E. van Vogt
- F-422 (40¢) SWORD OF RHIANNON**  
by Leigh Brackett
- F-426 (40¢) THE GENETIC GENERAL**  
by Gordon R. Dickson
- F-429 (40¢) THE WORLD JONES MADE**  
by Philip K. Dick
- G-627 (50¢) THE BIG TIME**  
by Fritz Leiber
- G-634 (50¢) WAR OF THE WING-MEN**  
by Poul Anderson
- M-165 (45¢) WORLDS OF THE IMPERIUM**  
by Keith Laumer
- G-649 (50¢) THE WORLD SWAPPERS**  
by John Brunner
- G-661 (50¢) BIG PLANET**  
by Jack Vance
- H-30 (60¢) CITY**  
by Clifford D. Simak
- G-676 (50¢) THE SECRET VISITORS**  
by James White
- G-683 (50¢) THE BIG JUMP**  
by Leigh Brackett
- H-39 (60¢) EYE IN THE SKY**  
by Philip K. Dick
- G-697 (50¢) WE CLAIM THESE STARS**  
by Poul Anderson
- G-718 (50¢) SOLAR LOTTERY**  
by Philip K. Dick

---

Available from Ace Books, Inc. (Dept. MM), 1120 Avenue of the Americas, New York, N.Y. 10036. Send price indicated, plus 10¢ handling fee.