

THE GENE POOL

A NOVEL
BY JOHN D. BOENKE

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John D. Boenke was born in 1926 in Rossford, Ohio and grew up during the Great Depression. He served in the U. S. Army in 1946 - 47 in the Medical Corps. In 1951 he received a degree of Bachelor of Science in Physics from the University of Michigan. After college, Mr. Boenke worked in research and engineering for the General Electric Company. Later he was the Manager of an engineering test laboratory for Lau Blower Company, then Chief Engineer for Halsey Taylor Water Cooler Corp. and Senior Design Engineer for The Werner Ladder Company. Before retiring in 1989, Mr. Boenke also owned and operated a small motel in Ashtabula, Ohio.

Since retiring, Mr. Boenke has been interested in reading and studying in the areas of Cosmology, Theoretical Physics and Philosophy. In addition, he has an interest in the origins of religions. He has privately published several short stories and some poetry.

Dedicated to
All those brave
persons who believe
in the future

Published By
John D. Boenke
532 Deer Ridge LN.
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Greg Adamski, a young Engineer
Jack Clark, a young machinist
Sylvia Smith, personnel dept secretary
Glenna Johnson, nurse - Greg's wife to be
Dr. George Thomas, Company doctor, Springhill

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Tom and Emma Roberts, Glenna's uncle and aunt
Bill Jamison, Manager of Engineering, Air Movers
"Hap" Powers, Senior engineer
Chuck Manley, Marketing Dept.
Paula, Drafts person
Harvey, Technician
Carole, Jamison's secretary
Dick Walters, Manager, Controls Division
Dr. Stanislov Morgan, Company doctor, Salem
Kathy Smith, nurse, computer operator, Greg's second wife
Mr. And Mrs. Smith, Kathy's parents
Carol Burns, Senior Engineer, VAC Corporation
Cynthia Brown, Jack Clark's cousin - wife
Mary Harrison, new engineer
Reverend Wilson, U. U. Minister
Dr. Maresh, Obstetrician
Meagan Ann Adamski, Greg and Glenna's daughter
Dr. Wendt, Emergency Room doctor
Glen Gregory Adamski, Greg and Kathy's son

CHAPTER ONE

Greg Adamski hurried through the VAC train gates just before they were closed and locked. He wasted no time in boarding the train where he found his assigned space and stowed his bag. After settling into his seat, and fastening his seat belt, he was ready for the beginning of this new adventure. The seat belt was well designed and no great inconvenience. For most people, using it had become an automatic response and part of the experience of riding the VAC train. The belts were accepted just as they were in many previous modes of transportation. There had never been a major accident on the VAC train system, and certainly the present day trains were much smoother and steadier riding than the first ones had been, but there was always the possibility of a rapid deceleration. In that event, the seat belt would make the difference between a safe stop and possible injury.

The solid train rumbled as the doors were sealed, and the internal power and air maintenance systems began functioning. The rigid metal and plastic structure of the train cars exuded the feeling of strength and security. The passengers and crew were in a separate existence in their own self-contained world ready to travel at high speed, but in the safest environment modern technology could provide.

As Greg looked out of the window, he gazed beyond the reflection of his wavy dark hair, square features and dark complexion to the polished tile and clean brick work of the station walls. He had sat like this many times before, and he recalled from those other trips the feeling of speed and power of the train as it raced along through the tunnel. He anticipated that exhilaration now, as he waited for the train crew to prepare for departure. The term, tunnel, was something of a misnomer, since the tube the train traveled in was mostly above ground. The name was a holdover from earlier times when the trains were new. They had been ridiculed as "A bubble in a tunnel," but as they proved themselves, the tunnel name stuck, and it became the common descriptive word for the structures.

As he looked around at his fellow passengers, no one particularly attracted his attention. The person next to him was fully absorbed in looking at some maps and papers and stowing them in his pockets. Greg fell into a reverie in which his thoughts wandered ahead to his destination. This was his first job since finishing five years of training last month. He was finally going to be earning money, and beginning his career. He wondered what it would be like living in a city like Springhill. Of course, he had been there several times before and had visited many other cities also, but he had grown up in a small town. The university was the largest "City" in which he had ever lived, until now.

It was easy to remember his feelings on his first day at Northern State University. He had started there in September almost five years ago. "Could it really have been that long?" he asked himself silently. The size of the school and the rush of activity in which he suddenly found himself was overwhelming and intimidating. But in due time, he became adjusted to the confusion and the hectic life style. It was a demanding environment which challenged the stamina of students just to survive for five years of intensive learning. He presumed his new job at Pressure Control Industries would seem similar to that time, when he was new at school, and he knew PCI would be confusing until he got accustomed to all the new surroundings and situations. He grinned unconsciously. He could hardly contain himself in his eagerness to get started.

He was jerked out of his reverie by the train suddenly moving forward. He turned to look out the window as the station platform slowly slid by. They picked up speed entering the interlock area. The electric motors were whining at a high pitch by the time they arrived at the vacuum lock doors. In his mind's eye he could visualize the doors opening just ahead of the train and the seals on the train contacting the vacuum tunnel walls. As they made the seal, there was a rapid acceleration forcing him back into his seat for several seconds as the train sped up to its cruising speed. Then they were running at a constant velocity, but the motion was hardly detectable because of the highly refined suspension system and roadbed. The only way Greg could know they were moving, was by looking out the window of the train to see the windows in the vacuum tunnel flash by periodically.

It was much quieter also, with the electric motors turned off, although there was still some wind and friction noise as they flew along through the tunnel. “Wow! That was some start,” commented his seat mate. Greg turned to look at the fellow sitting next to him, who had been so absorbed in his papers earlier, and saw he was husky, fair haired, and only a few years younger than Greg, probably in his late teens.

On speculation Greg returned, “This your first trip on a VAC train?”

“Yes it is. I can hardly believe it. Is it always like this?”

“Yes, I would say so. They're fairly consistent. Fast and safe.” Greg's curiosity was aroused. Where would a young fellow be going alone on his first trip? “How far are you traveling?” he asked.

“I'm going Springhill,” his companion answered, then continued, “I'm going to visit my cousins there.”

“Well I know you'll like Springhill. It's an interesting place with lots to do.” Greg realized suddenly he was sounding like an experienced traveler and man of the world, and smiled to himself.

“Do you live in Springhill?” inquired the young man.

“No,” Greg had to admit, “As a matter of fact, I'm just moving there myself. I've been offered a job with P. C. Industries.”

“You're lucky,” continued the teenager, “I've heard that's a good company to work for.”

“I certainly hope so,” Greg replied, “At least I'll find out.” Greg returned to his thoughts of P C Industries. He knew he was lucky to be starting with such a prestigious company fresh out of school. In a sense though, he had made his own luck. He had met Bill Jamison, the Manager for whom he soon would be working, two years ago, when Greg was working on a special project at school involving moving large volumes of air. He had been referred to Bill for information, and while talking to him on the phone, Bill had invited Greg to come for a visit to see some of the machinery involved with his project. They had gotten along very well, and maintained a friendship ever since. Nearing graduation, Greg started looking for a job and interviewed several

companies, but when the offer of a position came from Bill, there was just no doubt in Greg's mind, and he accepted it immediately.

Wondering what he would be working on, excited his imagination. He knew Bill's group worked on the largest of the air moving equipment, but he had no idea where he would fit in. He felt confident that he could handle any assignment though. After all, hadn't he just graduated from the most highly rated engineering school in the country? Nevertheless, he did feel some anxiety. This was no longer a classroom where there was always tomorrow to do better, if you made an error. School decisions were not of life and death proportions. Now he would have to prove himself, and do his best every day. It was well that he already knew Bill, and was a little familiar with what he was getting into. Time would tell how he performed.

The gentle rocking motion of the train caused his reverie to slip into sleep. He dreamed a wonderful dream in which he made fabulous machines. His co-workers were overwhelmed by his skill and ingenuity. The industry came to know his name, and products of his exploits were found in every corner of the globe. He was about to be elected President of the company when he was jolted awake to find the train decelerating. They were coming into the station at Springhill. While the train slowed, and he prepared to detrain, he spoke to his traveling companion again. "I hope you have a good time in Springhill. Are you staying for a long visit?"

"I'm not sure. My plans are indefinite. If I like it and can find a job, maybe I'll stay. It all depends on how I feel when my money runs out."

He sounded a little tentative and uncomfortable. Greg wanted somehow to help or reassure him. "Do you want to share a cab?" he asked, to be friendly.

"No I don't think so," was the rejoinder. "I'm supposedly being met at the station by my cousins. By the way, my name is Jack Clark. What's yours?"

"I'm Greg Adamski," Greg responded, "Maybe we'll see each other again some day in town. If not though, I hope you enjoy your stay here. 'bye' for now."

Jack smiled, "Thanks! Goodbye and good luck to you in your new job."

After collecting his bags, Greg hailed an Electricab to get to his hotel. which was not very far, but with his excess baggage walking would be awkward and impractical. So he opted to ride rather than walk as he had done on other occasions when he had been here. Within ten minutes he was at the hotel, checked in, and settled into his room. The room was on the 5th floor where he could look out over a large part of the city. He gave a passing thought to his permanent housing. Scanning in all directions, he wondered where he would find an apartment. The lights of the city were warm and friendly. Greg felt himself beginning to relax a little, and he began to anticipate his first day of work tomorrow. It made little difference where he lived, since he knew all parts of the city were nicely kept up, and there were many pleasant neighborhoods in all sectors of the city. Finding a place to live was one of the things he knew the personnel office would help him with tomorrow, so he felt very little concern.

Since it was late in the day, he decided to have a simple dinner in the hotel restaurant. Most restaurants strove to provide healthful meals attractively presented to cater to the tastes of the majority, and the hotel restaurant was no exception. It's spaciousness made it a favorite dining spot among the local populace, in addition to the hotel guests. Greg found a quiet corner where he could view the simple elegance of the dining room, and watch the other diners at their meals.

He chose a vegetarian dish, and was not disappointed. It was the usual excellent fare he had enjoyed on previous occasions. After dinner, Greg felt so content and drowsy, he returned to his room, and retired for the night. "After all," he thought to himself as he prepared for bed, "Tomorrow is going to be a very busy day." He fell asleep quickly, but in passing through the twilight zone, he found himself wondering what company presidents did all day at work. "Whatever they do, it must be fabulously interesting," he whispered to himself.

CHAPTER TWO

In many ways, the Twenty First Century had been the most significant inflection point on the curve of human development in modern times. Environmental, resource, medical, cultural and political disasters all conspired against the survival of the human race, but in the end, the rational surviving populations were able to regain control of events and work toward establishing reasonable programs for themselves, their environment and their societies.

As the century had progressed, much was being accomplished in improving the environment, but there were still many clean-up programs and conservation projects which had a great amount of unfinished business and were still in operation on a continuing basis for the indefinite future. More emphasis was placed on clean fuels and efficient use of resources. With the passage of time and extensive continuing programs in the education of the populace on the importance of preserving the planet, conservation was deeply ingrained in all human activities. There was continual pressure to achieve better utilization of resources without abusing them,

The unusual sweeping epidemics of the Twenty First Century coupled with the cultural adjustments they required, resulted in realistic programs which did more to solve the overpopulation problem in the world than all the bumbling of the politicians for decades before. As illnesses devastated the population, the biomedical industry worked overtime to develop the vaccines and curative medicines necessary to combat the onslaught, but by the time the epidemics were contained, the people of the world were shaken emotionally by the drastic loss of life.

These events more than any other factor caused a cultural reevaluation of human understanding of life and how to live it enjoyably and constructively. The events were also the impetus which spawned the international Hundred Year Program to stabilize world population. It was finally recognized that unlimited growth could not go on forever. The people and nations developed a more cooperative disposition which recognized the importance of the need for worldwide unity of purpose. The Hundred Year Program was something of a misnomer, as it was recognized it would take

longer than that to reach stability, but the process was started and the dedication to the end result was supported by most as the rational approach to the continuance of the human race.

Society had to absorb some cultural changes though. As the population came down in numbers, young persons recognized early in their lives that they would live differently than the way society was described in their text books, since there had been and would continue to be more restraint in the range of their activities compared with earlier generations. Pollution, energy constraints, dwindling raw materials, and overpopulation had become the prime movers of cultural attitudes and resulted in everyone being much more concerned with correcting or eliminating the threats they presented. Birth control, raw material consumption, waste and recycling were everyday considerations. In general, societies regressed to a more simple life style which everyone discovered was more satisfying and healthful than the frantic pace which had been the norm previously. At the same time education and the ability to recognize problems and to solve them with realistic solutions were held in high regard.

With the containment of the epidemics, there was renewed optimism. As a degree of normalcy returned, family planning and birth control became standard practices, resulting from the realization that a population size whose needs matched or were less than the credible productivity of each nation were the basis on which a stable society could be maintained with a reasonable amount of effort. It became the cultural norm to have only one child per family, which the experiment in China decades ago had demonstrated, with certain adaptations to local conditions, to be a feasible method for gradually reducing population to a reasonable and stable level in all countries. It was anticipated that after full stability was reached this restriction would be modified to accommodate individual society needs. It became obvious that a population size which did not overburden the planet would eventually result in a more pleasant and more healthy Earth with a worthwhile life for all in the foreseeable future.

Housing continued to be a problem during most of the century, since much of the housing and business space in the older cities had to be incinerated for health reasons. Constraints in available materials, made new housing typically more modest in size and slowed the rate of construction.

The quality of life remained relatively high, because the impact on life quality had become a primary consideration in all new developments and the continuing necessary human activities. The consumerism craze rapidly abated amid all the turmoil in the world while people were mostly concerned with surviving. Homo sapiens advanced by learning to be less demanding in having material things beyond the needs for a decent life. A cultural change occurred which rejected wastefulness and the love of excess possessions, and the so called “standard of living” as it was previously defined was lower, but life still had an exciting, worthwhile quality to it.

The new definition of “standard of living” resulted from declining resources and the corresponding increased costs for all raw materials, plus the re-education of mainstream society in the need for conservation. People had learned how to discriminate better between that which is necessary, and that which is wasteful indulgence in material possessions with transient value. The over consumption of the Earth’s resources gradually came under control.

By the mid 21st century, the increasing costs of fossil fuels made flying excessively expensive, and the considerations of environmental degradation became the overriding factor in limiting many aspects of life including long distance travel. As domestic air travel declined due to its impracticability,

alternative local mass transit systems grew in favor. The use of private cars had been on a downward trend for years, as more and better mass transit was developed. People did more walking or bicycling, and found they adapted to it quite well, but it was one more reason for people to decide to live in moderate sized cities with convenient shopping, inexpensive housing, more amiable personal services, and pleasant work opportunities

High speed electric trains and eventually vacuum tube trains powered by clean energy sources became more practical, and they gradually increased in popularity and acceptance for long distance travel. VAC trains are even the preferred mode of travel, since they are the ultimate in high speed transportation. The vehicles are sealed tightly and maintain comfortable ground level pressure in a quiet, air conditioned and controlled environment inside; as they are sent along evacuated tunnels much the same way as message containers travel in pneumatic tube communication systems. They are highly reliable and safe, since the manner in which they must operate with evacuated and pressurized spaces, only one train may occupy a tunnel at any one time. The speeds attained by the VAC trains are competitive time-wise with air travel, but less expensive and less destructive of the environment in addition to being more easily used.

VAC trains are all electric. Internal motors are the low speed power for the trains, and electricity also operates the air moving equipment situated at spaced intervals to evacuate the tunnel in advance of the trains passing. The VAC Corporation gained it's name from the Vacuum Assisted Conveyances it successfully invented, developed and pioneered in construction.

Electrical power is easily generated long distances from where it is used and has the advantage of being clean and convenient to handle. In theory, solar power cells located in Arizona can propel a train in New England.

A substantial number of VAC trains were rapidly put into place, and the use of other electric surface conveyances has expanded also, making an extensive and convenient transportation network. Quiet electric cabs and busses mingle with many bicycles on the clean spacious city streets. The modern life is lived at a slower pace compared with many periods in the past, but people are more content with their lives and find a calm and meaningful existence can be achieved without a plethora of material possessions.

By the beginning of the Twenty Second Century, the environment was better than it had been in many years, and innumerable careers were devoted to its further improvement. With the emphasis on conservation and the environment, there had developed a growing concern for the quality of life, and the resolving of many social ills also. Government had responded to the needs of citizens in providing comfortable living space with many nearby recreational facilities.

Though a few remain, large cities have shrunk dramatically in size due to the overall reduced population and the abandonment of unlivable areas. The recognition of the advantages of decentralization, promoted the growth of many smaller, more livable sized cities. The cities in general were cleaner, lighter, and better maintained than ever before, and public facilities were available and actually utilized by the public in a responsible manner.

The pressure of large numbers of people has been practically eliminated. With that fact, individuals respond by feeling more personally involved with

keeping their surroundings beautiful. People live and dress very much the same as they did in the recent past, but the living is more pleasant, more healthful, more satisfying. Many problems with the environment are solved or are being solved, and planning for a stable and reasonable size population is well underway. Living can be enjoyed in a less congested society. The world is a more stable place, and people find satisfaction in work and in contributing to the betterment of humankind.

So this is the modern world situation and the new society in which Greg Adamski grew up, was educated and started off in an engineering career. Nations and individuals are, in general, more caring of the environment, more inclined to maintain smaller more stable populations with a standard of living which is not wasteful of the Earth's resources and which is more aware of the need to preserve the historically proven methods of societal interactions that are fair for everyone.

There is one lurking problem however, which threatens the human race. Unfortunately, not many persons are yet concerned with it, except a dedicated few. Greg Adamski will come into contact with some of these people, and become a small part of the solution.

CHAPTER THREE

P.C. Industries sprawled over several hundred acres on the west side of the city. It was arranged in a park like setting. Buildings were connected by walkways lined with flowering bushes and grassy areas. The grounds were left in their natural state as much as possible, with access paths and roads put in only as necessary. Small shuttle buses ran between the main buildings and the more remote ones. It gave the impression of a busy thriving place, but in a spacious setting. As Greg stood in front of the main gate, he felt proud to have been asked to join their work force. After a moment of hesitation, he approached the gate to speak to the guard on duty.

"Hello," he started, trying to cover his excitement, "I'm Greg Adamski, a new employee. I am supposed to report to Mr. Jamison today."

The guard turned to her computer terminal and punched in some commands. After a moment and some more playing with the computer, she seemed to find the information she was searching. "Oh yes," she began, "I see you are expected, but first you must go to the administration office. They need some information for your employment file, and other details. Then you go to the infirmary for a physical examination. Here's a map of the company grounds for you. First, go to this building shown in blue, and then to one colored red."

Greg followed the movements of her delicate black finger as she indicated the buildings. "I'll call Mr. Jamison to let him know you are here," she continued, "He'll probably contact you later somewhere along your way." With that the guard gave him a small identification card, and sent him off in the

right direction.

Greg didn't tell her that he already knew where most of the buildings were. On a previous visit, Bill Jamison had given him a tour of the plant. Possessing that knowledge helped alleviate some of his present anxiety. Knowing where to go and what to expect were reassuring. When Greg reached the administration offices, they had his file ready and were prepared for him. He was immediately directed to a small private office down a long hall, and found himself standing in front of the desk of a matronly woman with gray hair. The name plate on the desk read "Sylvia Smith."

Ms. Smith was busy reading some mail, but looked up with a smile, and said, "Please sit down, Greg. Welcome to Pressure Control Industries. We have a lot to do to get you settled, so you can get started to work. Did you have a good trip coming here?"

"Yes," replied Greg as he sat down, "The VAC trains are marvelously fast and smooth, and they usually manage to be on time." Her easy manner made Greg feel comfortable, and he relaxed as he watched her pull out several forms from various files.

Ms. Smith helped Greg through the necessary mutual collecting and disseminating of information covering everything from payroll and insurance, to where he might find a room to rent, and whether he had enough money to last until his first payday. Ms. Smith was an outgoing and very helpful person. Her smile and easy laugh created a calm atmosphere, and made Greg feel as though he already belonged there. She reminded him very much of the librarian in his hometown. That person had been a friendly, elderly lady who had always taken an interest in Greg. Of course, Greg had been one of her best "customers," also. Books and recordings had been, and still were, the gateway to the world and the universe for him.

"One of your benefits for working here is a life insurance policy," she explained. "Whom do you want as your beneficiary?"

Greg had not even thought of that particular subject, but it seemed obvious to him. "Better make my parents the beneficiaries. There is no one else who would be interested at the moment," he replied.

Ms. Smith filled in the information as Greg gave it to her, then added with a gentle smile, "Maybe one of these days that will change."

After he had signed the forms, and provided all the necessary information, she sent him along to the infirmary for his physical exam. The Infirmary was a bright clean place, but a little more business-like and more impersonal than Ms. Smith had been. It had the typical cold appearance and the usual smells of a hospital. This was a little strange for Greg, since the only time he had been a patient in a hospital had been when he was born. He had been unusually lucky in keeping well and avoiding injuries, so had never had much experience with the medical profession. The receptionist sent Greg down a long hall to Dr. Thomas' office. As he entered the office, he immediately felt better about the exam. Sitting behind the desk was the prettiest girl he had seen in a long time. She had blonde hair cut short, and a clear clean looking complexion. She wore a nurses uniform and looked up with a smile.

"Greg?" she asked.

“Yes” he replied.

“Well, we are glad to see you here,” she continued “We will send you to get your vital signs, then blood work, then back here so the doctor can pound on you to be sure you won't fall apart.”

Greg grinned and answered, “He can pound all he wants. I don't think I'm likely to fall apart.”

The nurse smiled back at Greg, and handed him a form to carry. “Here,” she said, “Take this first to examination room A, then go to the Serology lab which is down the end of the hall and to the right. They will direct you back here when you are through. If you get lost, just ask anyone the way back to Glenna's office. That's me.”

“Oh,” responded Greg with a twinkle in his eye, “I thought this was Doctor Thomas' office.”

She caught his mood and came back with, “It is, but no one sees Doctor Thomas until they see me. Now take your paper and be off with you,” she added in mock officiousness.

Greg did as she directed. The various laboratories took care of him quickly, and it seemed no time at all until he was reentering the “Office of Glenna“. In a moment of inspiration, he put on his most downcast face as he entered.

“Why, what is wrong?” Glenna asked when she saw him.

“They gave me only three months to live,” he replied as somberly as possible.

“Oh dear!” she responded without batting an eyelash, “Then we will have to work as rapidly as possible. Sit here to rest, and I'll tell Dr. Thomas you are ready for him.”

Greg beamed at the way she accepted his joke, and admired her savoir faire. Glenna returned in just a minute with a file of papers in her hand. “Now,” she continued, “Go to examination room D at the end of the hall, and strip to your shorts. I'll - I mean, Dr. Thomas will be with you in a minute,” she added, impishly. By now Greg was feeling very comfortable with Glenna, and he had an even greater feeling of belonging. He dutifully followed her directions and waited for the doctor.

Dr. Thomas seemed only a few years older than Greg, and was of an athletic build, hard and lean. He looked like the kind of person one would expect to see playing handball or volleyball, and had none of the austere look of a physician. He was quick, sure, and thorough in his examination, and

left no doubt that he knew his business.

At the end, he sat and talked with Greg briefly. “Greg,” he said, “You seem to be an exceptionally healthy young man. I see you have not had health problems in the past, and I would not expect any serious problems in the near future. I believe you will be able to do anything that comes up, and be a great asset to the company. I will process your file, and I think we can send you on your way.” With that, he asked him to dress and return to the outer office.

As he exited, Glenna was busy at her computer. She continued briefly, then with a whirr and a buzz the machine ejected a small card. Glenna presented it to Greg. “Here, this is your medical card. Keep it with you at all times.”

“I will,” replied Greg, “but I hope I won't need it.”

“That's what we all hope, but it's reassuring to have it,” she replied. “By the way, Mr. Jamison called a little while ago, and I told him we would be through with you soon. He's expecting you anytime. Do you know your way to his office?”

“Yes,” Greg assured her, “I've been there before. I'm sure I can find it. Thanks for everything. Bye now, I'll see you later.”

“Goodbye, good luck,” said Glenna, then added as Greg went out the door, “Incidentally, will I get an invitation to the funeral?”

“Yes, you will even be asked to speak.” Greg grinned back at her as he closed the door with the feeling he had acquired a new friend.

CHAPTER FOUR

Greg whistled as he walked along the paths to the building where he would be working. He anticipated the pleasure of seeing Bill again, this time as Bill's employee. He wondered whether that would make much difference in their relationship. He hoped not. He had always enjoyed Bill's company and quick wit, but now with Bill as his boss, maybe that would change. It took him only a few minutes to reach the building, and check in with the receptionist. She sent him directly to Mr. Jamison's office.

As Greg came in, Bill put down his mail and his face lighted up. “Aha!” he exclaimed, “Now I've got you in my power. Welcome to good old PCI.” He extended his hand and enthusiastically shook Greg's hand. “Did you have any problems with the doctors or the paper pushers?” he continued, jovially. Bill Jamison was middle aged, a little overweight, and had thinning hair. His manner was usually friendly, but as Manager of a large, important section of Pressure Control Industries, he did not spend much time with non-essentials. He stuck to business, which was one reason his section was so successful, and he was respected as a leader throughout the company.

Bill had always made Greg feel at ease, which weighed heavily in favor of Greg's accepting the position in Bill's organization. He felt the same way now with Bill's exuberant welcome "No, everyone has treated me very well. I almost feel like I belong here already." Was Greg's rejoinder.

"Great, then let's not waste any time. You are to spend the next week on an orientation program. The rest of today we'll show you around our offices here. Tomorrow you'll spend a good deal of time in Marketing, the next day is Finance. After that will be some factory tours, and maybe we'll even introduce you to some of the Bigwigs." Bill's manner always exuded enthusiasm and a certain restlessness to get things done.

"That sounds interesting," answered Greg, "but when do I get to work?."

Bill laughed, "That will come soon enough, don't worry."

While they were talking, an elderly man had entered the office. He was neatly but casually dressed, and walked with a self-assured, poised look. He appeared as though he knew all that was happening, and had it under control.

Bill continued. "Greg, you remember Hap don't you? Hap Powers, Greg Adamski."

Hap Powers was the Senior Engineer in the department. Years of experience had given him the confidence to meet any challenge with equanimity. He had grown to relish hectic situations, and enjoyed being able to spread calm on chaos. He was, and had to be, the master of the situation. He studied Greg while being introduced, and in those few seconds sized him up as a new, young, green engineer, but perhaps, with a bit more potential than most. He remembered seeing Greg on at least one occasion in the past, when Greg had been visiting, but Hap had not paid much attention to him then. Now Greg was an employee, and Hap could find out what kind of stuff the schools were turning out these days.

"Hi, Greg. Glad to have you here." he offered, cordially.

"Glad to be here," replied Greg, trying to control his excitement, but offering his hand for Hap to grasp. The contrast was apparent, the smooth young hand and the gnarled old hand spanning a generation, but sharing a common interest in the design and construction of useful machines.

"Greg," continued Bill, "Hap is going to spend some time with you today, and introduce you around. I'd do it, but I'm scheduled for a meeting over in Administration, and Hap has the time. He's between projects at the moment." Bill and Hap exchanged looks which spoke silently of their close relationship, and they each chuckled at that comment. "If you need anything, anytime, see me. If I'm not here, see Carole, my secretary. She probably knows more about some of the operational mysteries here than I do anyway."

Bill's demeanor changed. He looked at Greg more soberly, and with obvious sincerity, spoke directly to Greg. "Greg, I'm really pleased you are here.

We have great plans for you, and we will need and challenge all your talents in the next few months, I am sure. Now I'll turn you over to Hap, and I know you are in good hands. Be sure and see me tomorrow.”

Then Hap and Greg were out of the office to begin their rounds. Carole produced some papers for Greg to keep with an organization chart, and an office procedures handbook for him to study. Hap took things slowly, but Greg felt that Hap knew exactly what he was doing every minute, and controlled their progress as he felt was proper.

They spent time meeting other engineers, then moved on to surveying the drafting room with all the design computer consoles. The computers were significantly more advanced than the ones Greg had used at school. Then there were the printing and reproduction facilities, the vault for important papers, hard copy records, computer records, and a library with real books. Hap explained, “Sometimes it's useful to have actual printed information, and not rely entirely on the computers.” Altogether, it took all day to see and learn a little about the entire engineering office.

They even spent lunch together. While they were eating, Greg was able to tell Hap something about Northern State, and the things he had studied at school. Then Greg asked, “What did Bill mean this morning when he said you were between projects? Was that a personal joke?”

Hap grinned, “No, It's sort of a running joke. It's not that I'm between projects, it's more like I'm among them. I have ten major programs going at the moment. It's sort of like being surrounded.” He chuckled, “Besides all those, I know another major project is coming along soon that will take some of my time.”

Greg was amazed, “How can you afford to spend so much time with me then? Am I keeping you from some important activities?”

“No,” Hap continued in his pleasant manner as he replied, “Actually many things are in process, and they will go on even if I don't oversee them for a little while. Besides I'm glad to get to know you and show you the ropes, so to speak. It provides a little respite for me too.”

While Hap was speaking, Greg noticed another familiar face on the far side of the lunch room. Glenna was sitting with some other women employees at a large table. They seemed to be having a noisy good time at their meal. Greg mentally sized Glenna up against the rest of the women at the table, and filed away for future reference the observation that she was the prettiest looking one and seemed to have many friends.

The rest of the day passed rapidly. There was much with which to become familiar, and new people, new names, and new places to become acquainted with and absorb. Hap showed where a desk and computer console had been set aside for Greg's use. It made Greg feel a bit more comfortable to have a place to call his own; sort of a base camp from which to operate. During the afternoon, Hap made arrangements for a tour of the Marketing department the next day, and before Greg realized the time had passed, it was time to quit and go home for the Evening

Greg's day was not over though. He spent the evening making the rounds of several possible apartments, and deciding which he wanted. He picked

one that was within easy walking distance of the plant, and near a little shopping center. Everything he needed would be very close and convenient. Since it was late in the day, he planned on moving from the hotel to the apartment in the morning. He had pre-arranged to be a little late to work, if necessary. It would not interfere with his plans, as his appointment in Marketing was not till mid-morning.

When Greg arrived at work the following day, he went directly to Bill Jamison's office, as he remembered Bill had asked him to be sure to see him. Bill however, was already off to another meeting, and Greg had to leave for his own appointment. Actually, Greg did not see Bill again for two weeks, as Greg had been fully scheduled in his orientation program, and was out most of every day learning his way around all the departments and areas of the plant. It was pleasant but intense, and at times he wondered whether he would ever get to do some useful work.

The morning of the beginning of the third week at the plant, there were two notes on Greg's desk when he arrived. The first was "Please see Dr. Thomas sometime today when you have a few minutes free." the second was more terse, "Be in Jamison's office at 1:00 PM." Greg did not know what to make of either of these messages, and wondered whether they were related. He had completed his orientation schedule, and had planned to review the material he had collected over the last two weeks. He could not settle down to concentrate on it however, as he continued to think of the two messages. After he realized he was just stewing and not accomplishing anything, he decided he had to do something about it directly. He told Carole he was going out, and headed for Dr. Thomas' office.

As he walked along, he enjoyed the feeling that this was somehow "his" plant. He had seen and learned a great deal about it in the last two weeks, and it was feeling very familiar to him. He also anticipated the pleasure of seeing Glenna again. She was busy on the phone as he came in, so he waited politely at her desk.

When she hung up, she smiled and said, "Well, hello there. Let's see now, it's been two weeks, how many days do you have left?"

Greg recalled their previous conversation, and sheepishly replied, "Well, I don't know. Maybe I'll surprise them. I feel very well just now." Actually, he was feeling a little apprehensive, since he did not know why Dr. Thomas wanted to see him. "Maybe I'll find out now, because Dr. Thomas left a note for me to see him when I had some time. That's why I'm here."

"No, actually I left the message for you." replied Glenna teasingly, "But you are right Dr. Thomas does want to see you. He is not busy now, you can go right in."

Not feeling quite as flippant as when he was first here, he returned her smile, and headed for the inner office door. "Thanks," he responded lamely.

Dr. Thomas greeted him warmly, "Well, Greg, how are things going? Are you getting settled in your new surroundings?"

"Oh, sure," replied Greg, "Everyone has been just great. I'm afraid I haven't done any useful work yet, though. Everyone has just entertained me. I

guess I'm beginning to feel guilty.”

Dr. Thomas laughed, “Oh, I'm sure you have been useful, even though it may not seem like it. It's good to prod everyone once in a while, and explaining themselves to a new person keeps them on their toes, so to speak.”

“Well I hope so,” answered Greg, a little shyly, “But you wanted to see me about something. Is anything wrong?”

“No not at all, Greg. In fact, everything in my estimation is right. You are a very healthy young man, and that interests me. I have been going over your history and exam, and I think a friend of mine would be very interested in you.”

“Why would he?” asked Greg with a confused look, “What about me could interest him?”

“Let me explain,” continued the doctor, “He is the company doctor at our controls plant just north of here in Salem, but he has a sideline, also. He is a geneticist, and is interested in many aspects of health and the human race. He has a program that I think might interest you very much. I just wanted to mention it to you so whenever you may be up there, you would take the time to visit him and get acquainted.”

Greg did not know what to make of this new suggestion. “What kind of program is it? Why would I be interested in it?”

“Well I don't have many details, but I am sure he will be able to explain it to you much better than I could. I would prefer not to say more, except to strongly encourage you to see him when you have the opportunity.” Dr. Thomas continued, “You will be making trips up to Salem, sooner or later, I am sure.”

“Is that all you wanted me for?” asked Greg. He felt a great amount of relief in realizing there were no great problems with him or his employment.

“Yes, that's all, except I really am interested in you. I want to be sure you are comfortable and happy working here. I want you to feel free to come see me, if ever you are bothered by anything.” replied the doctor. “Why, was something else on your mind?”

“No, no, I was only wondering why you wanted to see me again. I do appreciate your interest, but I have no problems just yet.” He added quickly, “I'll be glad to see your friend though, if I ever get to our plant in Salem. What is his name?”

“He is Dr. Morgan. You'll find him in the medical facility in the Salem plant. Tell him I sent you, and I'm sure he will see you.”

Greg felt very relieved, and suddenly wanted to exchange some quips with Glenna. As he left the doctor's office though, he was disappointed. Glenna was nowhere to be seen in the outer office or the hall. Greg returned to his building and sat at his desk again. Now he had only one worry. What did Bill

want at one o'clock?

CHAPTER FIVE

The morning dragged by slowly. Greg tried to concentrate on reading his orientation material, and spent time looking through the various manuals and instructions he had accumulated. It was no use, he could not get his mind off the upcoming meeting with Bill Jamison at one o'clock. He was relieved when lunch time came, and he was able to go to the lunch room with some of the other engineers, where it was possible to engage in some light conversation. They generally sat as a group, although that was a very loose arrangement. It was often more interesting to sit at other tables, and meet someone new. On several occasions, he had noticed Glenna in another part of the lunch room, and they had exchanged smiles, but he had not quite worked up the courage to sit with her yet.

Lunch time passed, and promptly at one, Greg walked into Bill's office. He was surprised to see Hap and two of the technicians there also, but no Bill. There was one other person, who Hap introduced as Chuck Manley from the Marketing department. Greg vaguely remembered seeing him in Marketing a few days ago on his orientation tour. Greg's impression of Chuck Manley was that he was a typical salesman type, who talked more than necessary, but he seemed pleasant and outgoing. His round head topped an equally round body. Traces of his black heritage revealed themselves in his features, though his coloring was not a whole lot darker than Greg's. Greg had just seated himself, when Bill arrived, and took his place at his desk very quickly, almost as though reflecting the fact that he was three minutes late.

"Greg," Bill started, "I've been keeping up with your progress, and am very pleased you are through with orientation. That has come at just the right time, as we have a major project beginning, and we need your help. Have you learned something about our operation in the last two weeks? How has it gone?"

Greg suddenly found himself the center of interest, and heard himself saying, "I think the orientation has gone very smoothly. Everyone has been very helpful in trying to get me familiar with their activities. I haven't absorbed it all, but at least I think I have the general ideas."

"Good," said Bill sounding pleased with Greg's honest answer. "You may have wondered why I haven't been around much, but that happens sometimes. I really have kept up with your progress, though. The people I have talked with feel you are catching on quite well."

Turning to Chuck Manley, Bill continued, "I guess we're ready to begin, Chuck. You've met Greg, haven't you? And you know Hap, of course, and Paula from drafting, and Harvey from the test lab."

"Right," commenced Chuck, "Let me say first, Bill, I always appreciate your organization here. This is a first rate team, and I'm sure this project will go very well. To the rest of you, let me remark that Mr. Jamison has not been here for a while, because he has been assisting us in negotiating this

contract, so he already knows most of the details of it. As you may have heard, the VAC Train Corporation is expanding its routes in the western states. The first consequence of this is longer distances, and it follows immediately that they want greater speeds, and larger trains. Plus, there have been some technological advances they would like incorporated in their equipment. They have decided to start at the beginning, and redesign the whole system, and are planning to apply it first to the new long distance routes, of course.

There are several sub-contractors, naturally, but the substance of the decision as far as we are concerned is that we need to develop new vane type air movers, and a new control system for the VAC Corporation. Our controls division in Salem will build the controls, and we will design and build the compressors here. I say compressors, because that's what us lay people would call them. Actually, I understand from Bill it is a multi-stage, axial-flow, air mover. Since this is the largest such device we have ever built, we decided to call the project 'Maxie'. It's good public relations to have a name which is a little bit cute. It sticks in people's minds better."

Greg had been listening to Chuck intently. When he paused now, Greg realized that not only was there no problem with his efforts so far, but that he, Greg Adamski, was going to be involved with an amazing new system that would be in use for many years. He suddenly felt a little overwhelmed by the thought. There was a moment of silence while everyone absorbed the information Chuck Manley had reviewed.

Greg's thoughts found his voice first, and he broke the silence. "How long do we have to do this development," he asked, "and when do we start?"

Chuck turned towards Greg, and thoughtfully replied, "Those are good questions. I know they want to start construction in about six months, and of course, it will take some time to build the tunnels, but with prototypes and testing, I think we are talking somewhere around two years to production of the equipment. I am sure it will take that long for the car company to design and build the train cars. There is enough time, but not any too much." Chuck looked around the room and asked, "Any other questions?"

It was Hap who spoke up next, "When do we get specifications?"

"The final specs are being written now," Chuck replied, "I had hoped to have them for this meeting, but with last minute revisions, they have not been sent to me yet. As soon as I have them, you'll have them. Until then, I do have a copy for each of you of the complete task force on the project with the Controls group personnel, and the engineering contacts at VAC Corp."

With that, Chuck Manley passed several sheets of paper to everyone. Greg glanced over them, but the item he noticed most, and which almost mesmerized him was "Maxie Project - Design Engineers, H. Porter & G. Adamski."

"How many of these will be built?" asked Hap, "What volume of production are we looking at?"

"Yes, that's an important consideration," replied Chuck, "All I can say is the initial order is for fifty, but that is open ended. If the design works out,

and I have every confidence it will, we will sell hundreds. You can consider in your designs, that we will be planning on mass production.”

Bill had been quiet through all this exchange, but now he interjected, “I don't believe there is much we can do in a concrete way until we have the specifications, but we can begin to put together schedules, and plan some conferences with the Controls group on the project. We can also begin to gear up our resources by scheduling design and test time.”

Chuck Manley agreed, “Yes, you fellows in engineering can take the ball now. I've done my part, but if I can help in any way, let me know. I'll leave you to your problems, and the specs will be in your hands as soon as I get them.” The meeting broke up, but Bill asked Greg to stay.

When the others had left, Bill began, “I wanted to spend a little time with you Greg. After all, you've been here two weeks, and I've been gone most of the time. I'm overdue to play supervisor and to talk with you. How do you feel about the job by now?”

“Well, sometimes I feel overwhelmed, and sometimes I feel like maybe I'm not too dumb,” Greg answered honestly. “It's similar to starting at Northern State. There is a lot to learn and become accustomed to, but I know I can do it. I did it at school, and I can do it here.”

“It sounds as though you have a good perspective on the situation,” Bill responded. “I'm confident you will adjust very well. I presume you have found a place to live, and are getting settled in that respect.”

“Yes,” confirmed Greg, “I have an apartment on Walnut Street, and there are shops and restaurants in the area. It's only five blocks from the plant, and I'm learning my way around.”

“Oh, I know that area. I lived near there when I first came to town, but that was a while ago,” he chuckled, then continued. “In regard to this project we're starting, I have discussed it with Hap, and although you are both in charge, he is busy with many other programs, so we both consider this really is your project. You will be spending all your time on it when it gets going, but Hap will oversee it and help you get started right. Then however, you're on your own. I'm sure you're aware Hap has plenty to do otherwise, and he won't mind not being the leader on this one.”

Greg took a deep breath. He felt pleased, but a little scared that he was being thrown such a big ball as his first job. “I'll sure try to do my best, Bill,” was all he could respond. “It does feel reassuring though to know I can depend on Hap, if I have problems.”

“You can depend not only on Hap, but on the whole group here. We all want to see every project succeed,” reassured Bill. “Now go get started.”

“Right,” returned Greg as he rose to leave. He almost floated out of the office, and found his way back to his desk through a cloud of thoughts and ideas crowding around his head like insistent insects. He spent the rest of the day writing down ideas and questions, making lists, organizing the necessary steps as he understood them at the moment, and trying to plan the course of the required jobs. He suddenly realized it was after quitting time,

and everyone had gone for the day. A little reluctantly, he put aside his work and headed out of the building.

As he walked out of the plant, he thought to himself, “I really could have stayed there a couple of hours more and not noticed it. I guess that's a good sign. It sure is interesting, and I'm going to do the best I can. It's difficult to realize I'm in charge of this kind of project so soon. Bill must have a lot of faith in me.” He was so absorbed in his thoughts, he did not notice another person join him from an intersecting sidewalk.

“Hi there!” jarred him out off his reverie, “You appear to be in very serious thought. Contemplating the end of the world?” It was Glenna looking at him with a curious smile.

Greg laughed, “No! Exactly the opposite. I'm feeling great, and have exciting news to share with the whole world. Would you like to hear it?”

“Of course. I'm all ears. Speak on,” she replied.

“Aha! Not so fast, there is a price to pay. This information is worth its weight in - in - well, in something or other, I'm sure,” returned Greg.

“I see. Now you really have my curiosity aroused. What is the price I must pay?” Glenna now was beaming with interest at Greg.

“Well it is simple enough,” Greg explained, “Just meet me for dinner this evening, and let it be my treat. Is that too high a price?”

“Oh ho, that's pretty steep. Now let me think, do I have any other pressing engagements tonight?” She furrowed her brow, and appeared to be thinking very seriously. “No, I think I can fit that in. I do need to go home and change, though. I don't normally go to dinner dressed as a nurse. But then, where shall I meet you?”

“How about Chings Chinese about seven, or I could pick you up at your place, and we could walk there together.” Greg was unsure which she would prefer, and noticed her hesitate a moment. Then she decided, “I'll meet you there. Chings is one of my favorite places.” They had arrived at a parting of their paths, and as Greg turned towards his apartment, he reinforced the arrangement, “Fine, I'll see you at Chings at seven. See you then.”

Glenna replied warmly, “Bye, bye, see you later.”

As Greg continued home, he again lapsed into thought. “Great going Adamski, now you've done it. You'll have to put on your best behavior and try not to make a fool of yourself with this lady. She obviously has a lot on the ball, and you are lucky she didn't just laugh at you. Although, I think I can hold my own with her, and she is fun to be with. I wonder what she thinks of me. We'll see.”

Chings was an average sort of eating place, and favored a relaxed atmosphere. Casual dress was appropriate, and Greg dressed accordingly. The

weather had been pleasantly warm, but evenings were cool, so he wore a cardigan over a sport shirt. He arrived in front of Chings at the appointed hour, just as Glenna was approaching from the other direction. He had to look twice to be sure it was really Glenna. Previously, Greg had seen her only at work, and a nurse's uniform did not do her justice. A light blue dress enhanced her sleek form, and Greg was impressed that Glenna presented a lot more attributes than were apparent in the work environment.

They entered the subdued atmosphere of the restaurant, and were shown to a small table in a corner. After the business of ordering was finished, Glenna smiled at Greg, and asked, "Now, do I get to hear this great news, or do I have to wait till the meal is over?"

Greg grinned, and feeling a little sheepish, started to explain, "Well, it's great news mostly for me, but I really do want to share it. Have you heard that the VAC Corporation is planning to expand and establish new routes?" Glenna acknowledged she had heard some reports on the news about it. "Well P.C. Industries is to supply the new compressors and the control system for the expansion. Would you like to guess who the Project Engineer on the compressor development is?"

"Let's see," answered Glenna with a look that said, I'll play your game. "I don't know many Project Engineers, so I'll go with what I know. How about Greg Adamski?"

Greg was smiling from ear to ear. "You win! I know you can see how pleased I am about it, but it will be quite a challenge, and I felt it deserved a celebration no matter how modest."

"Mister Jamison must place a lot of confidence in you to start you with a project of this size. Congratulations." Glenna seemed genuinely pleased also. "Thank you for letting me celebrate with you."

"I've been waiting for an excuse to ask you out." Greg admitted. "It seems it is always fun to talk with you, and I thought we should become better acquainted, but you have an advantage. You've seen all my records and know my history, and I don't know anything about you. I don't even know where you live, or where you were born, or where you grew up, or anything."

"I don't have any secrets," replied Glenna, "I have lived all of my life here in Springhill. My parents died when I was young, and my Aunt Emma, my mother's sister, and her husband raised me, in fact, I still live with them. I was lucky to get into a Nursing-Receptionist training program at the local community college even before I graduated from high school, and when I finished that program I was hired by PCI Actually, I'm fairly new there myself. I've worked for Dr. Thomas for only four months now. There, that brings you up to date."

While she was talking their food arrived. It was in portions larger than either of them would be able to handle, but the aroma provided incentive for them to do their best. "I'll trade you a little Egg Fu Yong for some Chow Mien," offered Glenna.

“Done,” responded Greg. Their dinner conversation turned to current events, and happenings at work. Greg found Glenna as easy to be with in the social situation as she was at work. Altogether, it was an evening of enjoyment, and certainly an appropriate way to celebrate a new beginning at work. They continued talking, as Greg walked Glenna home. It seemed they found many ideas to exchange, and too soon arrived at Glenna's door. “I'd ask you in, but I know my Uncle Tom is asleep, and it wouldn't be a good idea just now,” she explained. “Thank you for letting me share your good news though. I enjoyed the evening very much.”

“Thank you for indulging me in my little game. It was a fun evening, and I hope we might do it again sometime.” Greg wanted to kiss her, but thought he had better not push his luck just yet. He settled for saying only, “Good night, see you tomorrow, and thanks again.”

Glenna smiled, “Good night, Greg. Thank you for a nice evening.”

CHAPTER SIX

The following morning, a fat envelope was waiting on Greg's desk when he arrived at work. It was from Chuck Manley, and contained the Maxie specifications. This was to be the largest vane air moving compressor of its type that PCI had ever made. Greg spent an hour leafing through the sheets and trying to absorb some of the information. At the end of that time he was thoroughly confused. He packed the whole mess up, and tucking it under his arm set off to find Hap. Luckily, Hap was at his desk, but on the phone. Greg waited patiently till he was through, and Hap turned his attention to Greg.

“Hap, I've got the specs, but I don't know where to begin,” he began contritely, “What do I do first?”

“First, you let me look at them,” Hap answered in a slightly amused tone. He looked through the layers of paper for a few minutes, then continued, “Let's do it like this. Make several copies of these. One for me, one for Jamison, and several for you. Then take out the section on the connection of the compressor to the tunnels and give it to Paula to begin layouts of the metalwork. Next give a copy of all the material specs to Harvey, and have him begin getting sample materials for properties tests. You take what's left and begin the size and shape calculations. That should keep you all busy for a while.”

There was a little condescension in his voice, but it was masked by his usual good humor. He added, “This looks like it will be a very interesting development. You should have a lot of fun with it.” Hap's approach was so organized and logical, Greg filed it away in his memory for future reference on other jobs.

“Yes, that all sounds good,” admitted Greg, “I realize I was thinking of trying to do it all at once. Breaking it apart into separate jobs helps make it understandable. I'll keep you informed.” With that Greg returned to his desk to start again. This time he felt more organized. Following the process Hap had suggested kept him busy all morning. Paula and Harvey accepted the information and knew just how to go about their responsibilities. By late morning Greg was busy setting up information for the computer calculation programs, and was so involved, he forgot to go to eat until halfway through

lunch time.

Hurrying to the lunchroom, he had time for a quick sandwich, then back to work. He had seen Glenna across the room, and he smiled and waved. She returned the smile and wave, but there had been no time to talk. Suddenly his work world had assumed a rapid pace which continued all week. He met once a day with both Hap and Bill to discuss the progress, and was constantly in touch with Paula and Harvey to review their work. In between all these activities, he spent time on the computers doing calculations and looking at rough designs. Before he realized it, the week had passed, and it was Friday afternoon almost at the end of the day. Quickly he dialed the phone. After two rings, a familiar voice answered, “Dr. Thomas's office. May I help You?”

“You certainly may,” Greg replied, “but first let me apologize for not seeing you all week. I've been almost frantically busy, and I need some relaxation. Can you suggest anything Greg and Glenna could do over the weekend for fun and mental diversion?”

“Oh, you engineers are all the same,” she replied, “Your first love is your work. A girl doesn't stand a chance.”

Greg chuckled, “You are probably right, but could we take a shot at it anyway?”

“Well, let me think. How are you at bicycling?”

“I bicycled only all my childhood, and for four years to and from high school. Why? What do you have in mind?”

“There is a bicycle rental at Chalmers Park. We could go there, rent bikes, and spend the day Sunday. I have errands and weekly chores I must tend to on Saturday.”

“That appeals to me. It sounds like a good relaxing place. You can show me around. Shall I come to your place Sunday morning? What time?”

“How about nine AM. Can you find my house again?”

“Nine is fine, and I'm sure I can find your house. I'll look forward to Sunday, and, Glenna, thanks very much.” He hung up the phone relieved he had been able to reach her. Sunday promised to be a day of fun. Actually, he had errands to tend to on Saturday, also. Greg went back to work. Somewhat later he realized he was all alone. Everyone else had gone home for the weekend. With a sigh, he packed up the work, and put it away until Monday. At home, he fell into a routine he had established of watching television while preparing and eating a meal. Then he sat to read until bedtime, which these days seemed to be coming earlier. That was one way he could tell he was putting in a full days work.

Saturday passed rapidly with errands and shopping, and it soon became Sunday morning. Greg had not told Glenna, but he not only remembered

where she lived, he had noted the address, and looked up the phone number. He was starting his own little file headed “Glenna”, When he rang the doorbell, a man came to the door. The man introduced himself as Tom Roberts, Glenna's uncle. He got as far as saying, “So you're Greg”, when Glenna came hurrying out.

“Hi Greg, let's go. Bye Uncle Tom”, she rushed Greg out the door as though pursued by demons. Greg let himself be whisked away, but felt amused inside at Glenna's obvious insecurity with his meeting her uncle. They walked a few blocks to an interurban train station, and caught the train which would take them to Chalmers Park.

Chalmers Park was a typical multipurpose area found on the outskirts of most cities. There were three other similar parks in Springhill, but Chalmers was the largest, and had the most facilities. Glenna had been describing it to Greg as they rode on the train, but it appeared to Greg to be a much more pleasant place than he had even imagined. They went directly to the bicycle rental office, and picked out two bikes for the day. Glenna then set the pace, showing Greg all the areas, and commenting on them as they rode along. There were playgrounds with tennis courts, picnic areas, a pool, and a beautifully landscaped zoo. The park was very spacious, and there was no feeling of being crowded. One path lead to a more remote section where they finally stopped for a rest.

Glenna pointed out, “There are several hiking trails that start from this path, and lead up into the hills in both directions. They are beautiful any time of year, but I like them best in the Spring when the wild flowers first come out. Do you like to hike?”

“Yes, that's one of my sports,” answered Greg, “Besides biking, I ran cross country in high school, and hiked on weekends when I had time. You remember I'm a country boy, and sometimes walking was the only way to go, so I'm familiar with the art.”

“Maybe we could hike the hills here for a day one weekend”, Glenna said, almost shyly, “I'm sure you would like it.”

Greg was quick on the uptake, “I'm sure I would like it also. Let's plan on it.” Greg had been wondering a little at Glenna's rush to leave home this morning, and not spend a few minutes talking, and letting him get acquainted with her uncle. He thought this might be an appropriate time to pursue that and asked, “Why did we leave your house so quickly this morning? I would like to know your uncle better, or don't you want me to?”

Glenna hesitated a minute, then explained, “Well, I have some differences with my Aunt and Uncle. They raised me well, and I owe them a lot, but since I have been more on my own, some of my ideas have changed. Actually, I wish I made enough money to have my own apartment, but I can't quite do that yet. Also, I don't know you well enough to know how you feel about some things, and I didn't want to get involved just then.”

That made sense to Greg, but he replied, “I can accept most people without fighting. Won't you give me a chance?”

“How are you with fundamentalist Christians? That is how they identify themselves, and I did too, until I started thinking for myself. Now I've

rejected all that stuff, and it is a point of contention between us sometimes. I don't consider myself anything particular anymore. There! now you know." Glenna phrased the last statement almost belligerently, as though she thought Greg would take offense at it.

Greg sighed, "That's no big problem as far as I'm concerned. My parents raised me to respect everyone's beliefs. They were of the opinion that everyone accepted or rejected what seemed right to them individually anyway, and beliefs could not be imposed on anyone. Moreover don't tell me you're not anything particular. I think you are something very particular, and very nice."

Glenna looked at Greg for several minutes silently, and thoughtfully, then said, "I think you are very nice too, but what would you do, if my uncle asked you whether you were saved? That's what he'll do you know. They are very protective of me, and until recently, they didn't even let me go out on dates. See, you're learning a lot about me today. Do you think you can handle it?" She seemed on the verge of tears, and Greg instinctively put his arm around her. She laid her head on his shoulder, and cried softly.

Greg held her close for several minutes, until she calmed down, then began, "Glenna, you are a very sensitive person, and I like you for what you are, not for what anyone else is. I'm sorry, if you have problems at home, but that needn't affect us. As for your Aunt and Uncle, I have discussed religion with enough people in enough situations that I'm sure it will pose no difficulty for us. I know what I believe, and I can allow others to have their own ideas. I promise not to embarrass you when talking with them. Now, if you'll let me, I want to buy us some lunch. Can you guide me back to where we can do that?"

Glenna seemed to relax, and looked at Greg penetratingly. She was surprised that what she had seen as a problem, Greg absorbed very calmly and confidently. She felt as though a weight had been lifted from her shoulders, and her mind felt freer and happier. "I'd be glad to show you the way," she answered, "but let me warn you, I'm famished. Also, let me dry my eyes. I feel a little foolish."

"Honest emotions are the least foolish things in the world," he responded, "and wet or dry your eyes are beautiful."

"Come on," she challenged, "I'll race you." They set off down the path, and arrived at the restaurant in the middle of the park in a dead heat. Glenna laughed, "I won't challenge you again. I'm sure you would beat me."

Lunch was filled with small talk, and afterward they walked around in the formal gardens and enjoyed the flowers. Then they cycled some more, but at a slower pace. The rest of the day passed pleasantly, and time to go home arrived too soon. They were both quiet and thoughtful on the train ride home. Greg walked Glenna from the train station to her house. Her Aunt and Uncle were out when they got there, so meeting them was deferred again. "Thank you for a fun day." Glenna said at her doorstep.

"Thank you for showing me around the park. We'll do it again soon. I feel ready to tackle work again, so you must have done a good job reviving me today."

“Yes I'd like to do it again,” replied Glenna, “Bye, bye now.”

“Goodbye, I'll see you at work.” Greg headed home, and thought on all that had happened during the day. He had seen another side of Glenna, and learned there was more to her than a white uniform. He felt very good about the day. He felt very good about himself, too. With his job, the friendship of Glenna, and the independence of his own apartment; he felt he was really beginning to live.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The old man moved slowly to the train station. His bent form seemed to resist the demands he made on it as he progressed from the train into and through the station. Dr. Morgan was just arriving in Springhill for the annual medical conference with physicians from the other divisions of the company. Dr. Morgan did not enjoy these trips, but he did enjoy meeting other professionals and proselytizing them in his unique medical beliefs. He was glad this was only a two day meeting though. He wanted to be back in his own place by Friday and not have to travel on the weekend.

The meetings were held in different locations each year, and this was the first time for it to be in Springhill for quite a while. During the train ride Dr. Morgan mused on the meeting ahead. At last, he would be able to see the facilities his friend, Dr. Thomas, had to work with. He remembered meeting Thomas four years ago. Thomas had just joined the company then, and it was his first meeting. Being fresh out of medical school and having finished his internship, he was eagerly interested in new ideas in medicine. Stanislov Morgan smiled as he recalled their conversations. Young George Thomas had listened very intently as Dr. Morgan had expounded his ideas of modern medicine and the wayward path of modern humans. They had held interesting discussions every time they met, and now he would see him yet again. Stanislov Morgan made his way to an Electricab, and eventually, his hotel.

The meetings were the usual format, but tightly scheduled. However, during the day the two friends found time to chat and arranged to have dinner together in the evening. They chose the subdued atmosphere of the hotel dining room and lingered over their meal. “Well, Doctor, how is the battle going? Is humankind going to make it, or are we all going down the drain?”

Dr. Morgan smiled at the younger man's flippancy, but replied, “Ah, my dear George. I see I must work harder at educating you in the importance of my work. Look now; here around you. What do you see? Are these happy people? Are they persons who can confidently survive their environment? What hidden flaws do they have which will be their undoing ultimately? Eh? Can you answer?”

Dr. Thomas gazed with pleasure at his companion. He knew his remarks would set the older doctor's mind in motion and reveal any new ideas Morgan was currently considering. He thought carefully, then replied, “No, I can't answer. Not without knowing each person professionally, but on the surface they all look fairly normal. What is your point?”

“My point is exactly that the quality of human life is hidden in the individuals genes, it is not displayed on one's surface. The subtle variations there, in the basic cells, determine a vast amount of each individuals life, and even with all we know, we do not know enough. Negative trends which have been followed for years continue their merry way in spite of all we do. I am concerned that we as humans continue to be more and more vulnerable to our environment. We must learn more. We must discover the causes of these trends and reverse them. Even now, the average wild animal heals and repairs itself, when injured, more readily than the average human. Why is that? What must we do to improve our ability in this respect?”

“Yes, I know that is true. All I can say is, ‘Thank goodness for the medical profession.’ I know many people would be in great trouble without us.”

“Correct. A large percentage of humankind would not survive without us. What a dis-service we have done to them to make them so dependent on us for their very lives. How can we give back their natural lives to them, so they can live happily without us? What must we learn, what must we do to make future generations more independent of the medical profession and more able to live productive, happy lives without burdening the natural resources unduly? Maybe we can never change that.

“Perhaps it is inherent in the process of caring for people beyond the limits which nature had originally imposed. We may not be able to go back in any respect. That would be most unfortunate.” The old man shifted uncomfortably in his seat with his verbalization of the questions and fears which plagued him.

George Thomas regarded his friend with a sympathetic expression. He knew Doctor Morgan had spent years contemplating these questions and trying to apply solutions to them. Yet the human animal was as fragile as ever, and seemingly becoming less and less well suited to cope with its environment by natural means. It seemed to be a massively losing situation. Were there no encouraging signs at all? He pursued, “Aren't the evolutionary principles still working? Even though we interfere, and we help less well conformed persons to live, won't the natural process of the survival of the most adaptable still come into play eventually? After all, there are still many, if not most, people who have healthy characteristics which they pass on to their offspring. In fact, I examined a young man a few weeks ago who seems to me to be in exceptionally good health which I consider to be the result of inherited traits. I encouraged him to visit you sometime, so you will have an opportunity to enlist his aid in your struggle.”

“Yes, yes, The natural processes do not stop, but we are perhaps impeding them greatly. It may take much longer than it should to evolve the perfect human. What is your young man's name? Where does he come from?”

“He is a new engineer, just hired out of school a few weeks ago. He grew up in a small town, and has parents who have no unusual background, but he seems uncharacteristically healthy. He apparently never even gets colds or minor illnesses, and he has never had a major illness.”

“He does indeed sound interesting,” agreed Doctor Morgan, and repeated, “and what is his name?”

“It's Greg; Greg Adamski. I think you will find him to be an extraordinary person when you meet him.”

“Ah yes, I will look forward to the meeting with anticipation. Thank you for sending him to me.”

The conversation shifted to other topics, and the two men sat talking a long while. Anyone watching would observe the great difference in age, but that faded as a distinction, as they interacted in equal and vigorous discussion. Each obviously enjoyed the other's comments and company. They were mutually reluctant to end their talk, but eventually they slowly made their way out of the dining room and went their separate ways.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The following week was a continuation of the previous one. Greg found himself very busy, but very happy with the work. On Wednesday, Hap announced that they were invited to go to the Salem plant next week for two or three days, to coordinate with the controls people on the design. Greg had had no opportunity to speak to Glenna until Thursday, when he arrived at lunch late, and met her coming out.

“Hi there, stranger,” she teased.

“Hi,” Greg returned pleasantly, “Can we do a repeat this weekend? Would you go to the park with me again on Sunday? I'm going to be ready for some reviving.”

“Sure,” she replied, “Maybe we can see the zoo this time.”

“Great, Nine at your place Sunday?”

“OK, I'll look forward to it, but I've got to go now. See you then” She was gone, and Greg went in to lunch. The rest of the week passed quickly. Greg was feeling very comfortable with work, with his surroundings and fellow employees, and with his home life. He had always been able to take care of himself it seemed. Even as a child, his mother had let him help with cooking, and he had gained some expertise then, which stood him in good stead now. Fixing his own meals came as second nature, and he enjoyed his little apartment and his privacy. He felt his life was being fun, but challenging. It was certainly rewarding. He felt more as a real person who mattered in the world. Part of his good feeling related to Glenna, also. She was filling a part of his life that had been empty for a long time.

Sunday morning came soon enough, and Greg found himself again ringing Glenna's doorbell. Tom Roberts answered the door, and let Greg in. It seemed Glenna was not quite ready, and Tom invited Greg to sit down, offering him a straight backed chair. The parlor was small, not fancy, but neat. It was a plain room, modestly decorated. The furniture was undistinguished, like that found in any of the low cost stores which featured mass produced merchandise. It matched the plain appearance of the house and yard. The taste of the people who owned the house, and who had furnished it, was

obviously influenced by careful awareness of value versus function. Greg let the atmosphere of the room seep into his awareness, and formed a nebulous opinion of the occupants.

Tom was a large man, and seemed to overflow the small chair he sat in. His strong looking hands testified that he had worked hard all his life. His rough features were not handsome, but hid any feelings behind an impassive mask. Tom looked intently at Greg, and in a gruff voice asked, "Wouldn't you two like to come to church with us rather than running around the park all day?"

"Well, in a sense, we do go to church," Greg replied, "Enjoying and appreciating the world given to us is inspirational for me."

"That's not the same as going into church and worshipping God," was the comeback.

"I believe we can all worship in our own way, and besides, I've worked all week. Yesterday, I was busy with taking care of the necessary details of life, but this is the seventh day, and even God rested on the seventh day. Right?"

"Well, yes, I agree with you there," was the grudging response Tom gave, just as Glenna entered the room.

"I'm glad to hear you agree on something," she said to them both, then turning to Greg added, "Shall we go?"

They immediately began small talk as they walked to the train. Each had interesting and sometimes amusing incidents to relate about happenings during the week. They relaxed as they began to enjoy each other, and appreciate the beautiful day. When they arrived at Chalmers Park, they roamed almost without direction, but ended up at the entrance to the zoo.

"Shall we?" asked Greg.

"Certainly," answered Glenna.

Greg paid the small entrance fee, and they entered the gate. Glenna led the way to show Greg her favorite exhibits. The animals were housed in enclosures which were as natural as possible, separated from the people by inconspicuous barriers. They wandered around the grounds enjoying each other as much as enjoying the unusual animals. When they came to an isolated exhibit on a side path, they sat on the grass to rest, and talk.

"What did you and Tom (she often called her aunt and uncle by their first names) find to agree on?" she inquired. "That was all I heard when I came in."

"Nothing too consequential," was Greg's response, "We just agreed God rested on the seventh day, at least that's what the bible says. He had asked

us to come to church with them, but I told him, I felt being out in nature was reverence enough after a hard week.”

“Yes, that idea appeals to me, also. There is something profound in even the simplest natural events. Just the sprouting of a seed is amazing,” continued Glenna.

“If there is a god, I believe it can be found in the world around us.” Greg paused. “Even in that,” he indicated towards the nearby enclosure in which two small animals were copulating, “Maybe especially in that.”

Glenna followed his glance, and they both watched for a moment. In an impishly serious tone she asked, “Do you think they really love each other?”

Greg grinned and replied, “Of course they do. But don't you see, she's getting embarrassed. I can almost hear her say, ‘Ralph, I think we should stop. See those people over there. They are watching us. I think they are making fun of us.’”

Glenna almost could not suppress her merriment, but then added, “Yes, and he is saying just like a male would, ‘No, no, Goldie, it's all right. They don't notice. Now just hold still. It'll be all right. It'll be all right. Wait a minute. Just hold still.’” Then they both could not repress laughing. It was well that no one else was around, or they would have tagged the two of them as being a little loony.

Having rested sufficiently, they continued on to a building housing some educational exhibits. The exhibits concerned mostly the various animals in the zoo, and presented basic facts about them. One exhibit was prominently displayed, and attracted Greg's attention. This particular exhibit concerned the role this zoo and all the zoos throughout the countries of the world, played in preserving species from becoming extinct.

Each zoo adopted several species, and made a special effort to breed them, even to the point of reintroducing them into nature where that was practical. Several zoos often concentrated on the same species, and exchanged individual animals to increase the number of cross mating. This kept the variety of the available genetic material of that group of animals as broad as possible, and enlarged the range of characteristics of the species to the greatest extent. The gene pool of that type of animal was thus best preserved.

Greg had not realized before now, that zoos performed such useful functions in addition to educating the public on wildlife in general. “They never taught me this in engineering school.” he remarked facetiously to Glenna.

“And they didn't teach me engineering in nurses training, either,” Glenna offered. “I'm glad there are so many interesting ideas to study and learn, so many places to see, so much to do. It should keep us busy for a lifetime, or two. Hey, I'm a poet,” laughed Glenna.

Greg studied the exhibit further. There were many pictures of the successful programs, showing species of animals which had succeeded in becoming stabilized in population. They were the lucky ones which had been given a chance to survive and grow in numbers. He was impressed that so

many people spent so much time and effort to preserve and protect the wildlife and to improve the habitat for wildlife. He was aware that in the last century many destructive practices had been stopped, and much healing of the environment had been accomplished. That was general knowledge. But this was the first time he was really aware of the magnitude of this part of the effort, or the number of persons involved. He came away feeling thankful for good people. They were certainly as important, or perhaps, more so, than helpful gods, or even benign ones.

They continued wandering through the zoo, and observing the animals. “Maybe it's the animals that are observing us,” Glenna suggested. “After all, they live here. They're here all the time, and we come only occasionally. I'll bet the animals think they are put here just to study human beings, so they can take the information back to their friends to enlighten them. I wonder whether they have to write reports.”

Greg enjoyed Glenna's nonsense, but could not come up with an appropriate response. He had been thinking ahead to the coming week, and he said a little more soberly, “Glenna, I meant to tell you. Hap and I are going to Salem for two or three days next week to work together with the controls people. We have several meetings scheduled. I won't even be seeing you at lunch. May we plan next weekend now, just in case I don't have an opportunity to talk to you? Would you be willing to spend another Sunday with me?”

Glenna looked pleased as she answered, “Not only would I be willing to, I might even admit to liking it a little. What do you have in mind to do?”

“Well you're the local expert on entertainment available,” he replied, “What do you suggest?”

“We could do something a little different, and go to Lake Park. They rent canoes there, and we could go canoeing around the lake.”

“Sounds good to me. Let's make it a date. I'll pick you up again at nine Sunday morning.”

With that settled, they roamed further, till they found a little food kiosk in the zoo which provided the simple lunch of a sandwich and a salad that satisfied their needs. The afternoon was absorbed in completing their tour of the zoo, and exchanging small talk. They were each becoming more comfortable with the other's style and personality, as they compared many aspects of their lives.

Glenna found Greg to be very sensitive to her feelings about experiences from childhood. Because her parents had died when she was quite young, she barely remembered them which caused her often to feel they had deserted her, and she would alternate between hating them, and wanting them desperately. After a long time, she was able to partially accept her Aunt Emma and Uncle Tom as substitute parents, but still had mixed feelings about them.

Glenna had had some close girl friends in school, but was devastated when one of them disappeared from her life because it was almost like losing her parents again. She had always had the necessities of life, but living with her aunt and uncle was a little austere, and there had been enough, but never a surplus. She was glad she had been able to become a nurse, since she was now mostly self supporting, and it felt good to her not to be completely

dependent on others for everything, but she awaited the time when she could really leave home and have her own apartment.

Both Greg and Glenna were the only children in their families, which was not unusual for these modern times. The program of encouraging only one child per family was making significant progress towards reducing and eventually stabilizing the population. Greg had grown up in completely different circumstances than Glenna. He had always felt close to his parents. Growing up in a small town, it seemed almost everyone knew him, and he had a comfortable feeling of belonging to a community. His parents ran a small business. They raised plants and flowers for wholesale distribution. They had been genuinely pleased and proud with each step of Greg's advancement through school and the university. They had worked hard also, and had made a success of their business. Greg had always had whatever he needed, and was able to enroll at Northern State, when he was accepted there.

At the end of the day, the ride home was quiet. They both were absorbed in thought, and enjoyed the silence as they walked from the station to Glenna's house. When they reached her door, Greg stood close to her and whispered, "Thanks for a lovely day. I'll see you next Sunday, if I don't see you at work." With that he kissed her. She didn't resist. She co-operated, but after several seconds broke away and turned to go in, replying, "Thanks for everything, Greg. Bye, bye. Take care of yourself."

CHAPTER NINE

Monday morning came before Greg was ready for it. It seemed he started out running, and never stopped. First he had to talk to Paula and Harvey to be sure they had enough to keep them busy while he was away. Then there was a quick meeting with Bill and Hap to review the status of Maxie. They also reviewed the details to be discussed with the Controls group. By 10 o'clock Greg and Hap were on their way to the Interurban Station to catch a train to Salem.

The interurban trains were fast, but not as fast as the VAC trains. Unfortunately, Salem was not on a VAC train route. Even so, the trip to Salem took only about an hour. The views of the countryside were a refreshing change from the city surroundings. Greg and Hap traveled mostly in silence. Each was absorbed by his own thoughts. Greg was anticipating seeing the Salem plant, and wondering what his counterpart handling the development of the controls for Maxie would be like.

After a while, Hap seemed ready for some conversation. As an opener, he turned to Greg and asked, "What do your folks think about your working for PC Industries."

Greg thought a moment, and answered, "I think they are very pleased. I write to them every week to let them know what I'm doing, and they usually write to me once a week, also. They ask questions about my work, and seem to take a real interest in it." Greg then took the opportunity to tell Hap not only about his parents, but also about his home town, and how he happened to go to Northern State. When he was through, he added, "I've got a question for you also. Why does everyone call you 'Hap'. Does it have any significance?"

Hap smiled a gentle smile, and said, “Well those are my initials. H. A. P. as in H. A. Porter.”

“But the H. A stands for something. What is it?”

“Ah, that I will never tell,” Hap replied. “Let's just stick with Hap.”

Greg grinned, “I detect a couple of names you are less than happy with. What are they? Horatio Aloysius?”

Hap laughed, “That I will not say, no matter how much you ask. You're stuck with Hap just as everyone else is.”

“OK,” conceded Greg, “But I might come up with a guess now and then anyway.”

They returned to their reveries. Hap found himself being amused silently inside. He realized he felt more comfortable with this green new engineer for many reasons. Actually, Greg was doing a very good job, and progressing nicely with the design. He smiled as he realized Greg was feeling comfortable enough to be a bit impertinent with him, and tease him about his name. Hap had seen many engineers over the years, and the best ones were usually interesting, sociable people, in addition to being bright engineers. Greg came across as one of those.

When they arrived in Salem, they took an Electricab directly to the plant. Carole had made hotel reservations for them, but they would be able to get to the hotel easily after work. Hap led the way to the engineering office, as he had been here many times before. The engineering group was on the second floor of a large building. The windows extended from the floor to the ceiling, and looked out over the city of Salem and to the hills beyond. There were no partitions in the office, and one could follow the panorama almost 360 degrees. Greg wondered how it was possible to concentrate on work in such beautiful surroundings. As they walked in, a middle aged gentleman with glasses and sandy hair greeted them as he rolled up his shirt sleeves. “Hello Hap, how are you? And you must be Greg,” he began cordially, “I've hear about you from Bill. I'm Dick.” He extended his hand. “Dick Walters.”

Greg shook his hand, and mentally made note of his firm handshake, his pleasant appearance, and his seeming poise and direct manner. Centuries of sun on his forebears had given Dick a permanently tanned appearance.

Greg decided immediately that he liked Dick. “Hi,” returned Greg, “I've been looking forward to meeting you and seeing your place here. I like all your windows, but isn't it distracting?”

Dick chuckled, “No, I get some of my best ideas while gazing at the mountains, and no one can tell whether I'm working or just enjoying myself. Actually, the mountains remind me of the area in which I grew up near Guadalajara. I find it ideal.”

They sat down at a large table, and spread out plans and specifications. Dick was very interested in Greg's design as it appeared at this stage of development, but he was most interested in the design parameters of the electric motors Greg had decided were necessary. They would figure prominently in the design of the controls. The three men became involved with their work, and kept going right through lunch. They had been so absorbed with the project, it was mid-afternoon when they suddenly realized they were hungry. "I have an idea," volunteered Dick, "Let's go out to eat. There is an interesting little restaurant not far from here, and the walk will be a welcome change from sitting. Besides, they have the best burritos within a hundred miles. What do you say?"

Hap and Greg found that very acceptable. Greg particularly wanted to see more of the town, and this was one way to do it. Salem was substantially smaller than Springhill, but there were still many stores and businesses. The main street bustled with activity while maintaining a small town atmosphere. Dick led them to a small restaurant next to a city park. The restaurant had the unimaginative name of Parkview Cafe, but the food was good, and the surroundings pleasant. As they ate, the three men discussed their common interest in project Maxie for a while, until Dick remarked, "There is not much more we can do today without Carol. She will be here first thing in the morning however, and we can really settle down to business then." The Carol he referred to was Carol Burns, the VAC Corporation engineer who was the contact person for the whole project.

Realizing there would be no particular work requirement after they returned from lunch, Greg asked, "I wonder whether I can get in touch with Dr. Morgan when we return to the plant?"

"Certainly." replied Dick, "You can call him from my office. Are you not feeling well?"

Greg explained, "No, nothing like that. I just promised a friend that I would see Dr. Morgan, if I had the opportunity, and we seem to have some free time for the rest of the day."

Back at Dick's office, they spent a few minutes organizing their work for the following day, then Greg called Dr. Morgan. It happened that Dr. Morgan was not busy, and had been aware from Dr. Thomas that Greg would be arranging to see him. He invited Greg to come to his office as soon as he could. Dick gave Greg directions to the Infirmary, and Greg asked Hap to take his luggage to the hotel where they could meet later. As a parting shot, Dick called after Greg, "Don't let that old quack give you a hard time. Tell him you're under my protection."

Greg nodded at Dick's lighthearted remark, then turned, and was on his way out of the building. The grounds of the Salem plant were smaller than Springhill, but obviously had been carefully planned. It was like a small park, and beautifully maintained, just as well as the Springhill plant was. He headed for the Infirmary building.

CHAPTER TEN

Greg quickly found his way to the Infirmary, and shortly was entering Dr. Morgan's office. Dr. Stanislov Morgan was not tall. On seeing him, Greg realized immediately that some of his short stature was due to deformities in his body. He wore glasses which slid to the end of his nose, and seemed on the brink of falling off at any moment. However, he had a pleasant face, and greeted Greg cheerfully. "Mister Adamski, I am pleased you found the time to drop in. Doctor Thomas has told me about you, and it is my pleasure to meet you at last."

Greg felt immediately at ease with him as they exchanged small talk. The doctor wanted to know about Greg's work and how he was adjusting to working for P. C. Industries. After a few minutes of getting to know each other, Greg asked, "What is this program of yours that Doctor Thomas told me about? How does it affect me, and why should I be interested in it?"

Doctor Morgan looked at him for a moment before answering, "Ah yes, my little project to save the world." He paused again, then continued, "Would you like to participate in what is, perhaps, the most essential activity of the Twenty Second Century?" Doctor Morgan was wearing an engaging smile, but it seemed to be covering up a more serious meaning.

Greg answered cautiously, "Well, I'm all in favor of saving the world, and am willing to do my part, but I was not aware it was in dire need of more saving. Haven't we made good progress on the environmental threats? It seems I hear something everyday about resources and conservation. I thought we were saving the world fairly well these days."

"Yes, you are quite right Mister Adamski. As far as the natural world is concerned we are doing many things, and certainly we are in much better condition than we were fifty years ago. Maybe it would be better for me to say that I am interested in the human race even more than in the environment." He stopped, and stared into space for a minute absorbed with his own thoughts.

Greg interrupted his reverie by asking, "So what is it you want me to do?"

Coming back to the present, the doctor continued, "Yes, yes, first I must give you some background. If you will bear with me, let me try to describe the problem, then we can discuss the solution. You can see I am of the medical profession. Now, the medical profession has done a lot of good since it came into existence many centuries ago. But it has done a lot of evil, also. Back in medieval times not much was truly known about the human body, and 'Doctoring' was as much an art as a science. am sure you have studied your history though. I do not really have to tell you about all the medical advances that have come along over the years. Today we can cure many diseases and correct a multitude of physical conditions. We have the best that science can offer to promote life, and to correct physical dysfunctions. Therein lies the problem."

Greg looked at Dr. Morgan a little confused, "I don't understand. What's wrong with being able to do all the wonderful things you can do?"

"Come here," Dr. Morgan began again, "Look out this window." They moved closer to the window to view the outside scene. "In the tree over there. Do you see the blue jay? I believe that is the best possible blue jay there is, for doing what blue jays do. Do you not agree?"

Greg nodded, but didn't grasp his point. "How do you suppose the blue jay got that way?" Dr. Morgan continued.

"Well, that is a matter of evolution. The blue jays which are best adapted to being blue jays have survived and reproduced over many generations. They have preserved those traits which are most conducive to surviving in their environment." Greg felt pleased with his answer. Surely Dr. Morgan could not dispute what he had said.

"Precisely," grinned Dr. Morgan. "And how many doctors have assisted the blue jay in his endeavor to be the best possible blue jay?"

"None," returned Greg.

"Now we are getting to the problem," continued the doctor. "The blue jay has survived without doctors, and he is the best possible blue jay he can be in his world. That is because the most adaptable blue jays have survived and passed their survival traits on to their offspring. Mankind on the other hand has survived with the aid of doctors. The most adaptable men and women have survived, but less well adapted men and women have also survived, and the less well adaptive traits have also been passed along to their offspring. Do you see what this means?"

Without waiting for an answer, Dr. Morgan went on. "It means that over the years we have been gradually making mankind less able to survive, unless doctors intervene. We are weakening the human gene pool, and I believe we are headed for disaster, unless we do something about it."

Greg was silent as he considered all the doctor had said. He thought about what he had learned recently at the zoo. Many animals were preserved, and their gene pool maintained as large as possible by planned intermixing of the specimens. "Are you proposing that humans should be handled like zoo animals, and controlled breeding be practiced?" he asked.

"No," was the thoughtful, but somehow wistfully sad reply, "that is impractical, but we do have to start thinking about how to handle the problem. Fortunately, a lot of programs are already under way, however more things need to be done."

"What has been done so far?" asked Greg. "What is happening, and what more needs doing?"

"Oh, much is going on, but not nearly enough to suit an old worrier like me. Not enough people are taking the problem seriously. We are doing things like genetic counseling in cases where it is obviously needed. We are trying to educate people about the hazards of our present course. We are encouraging young women to practice natural childbirth. We have also established sperm banks for those who are enlightened enough to use them. But it is not enough."

Greg looked at Dr. Morgan intently, and pondered all he had said. After a minute of silence, he responded, "It sounds to me as though you would like

to have greater control of who had children, and with whom they had them. Is that what you are getting at?”

Doctor Morgan laughed, “No, not even I am so avid in my beliefs, or so ignorant of human behavior to expect that we could manipulate people like that. Although, I will admit, controlling reproduction as you suggest may certainly solve the problem. No, I would not go that far, but there are other options we should be pursuing.”

“Which are---?” inquired Greg.

“Which are, encouraging young people to take an interest in their own genetic make up, generating interest in finding a mate on the basis of genetic make up, expanding the sperm banks to make good genes available to anyone who wants them. I would even like to see a regulation, that people intending to get married be required to have their genetic profiles determined and be required to have genetic counseling as a normal part of the premarital exams and requirements.”

“That begins to sound like a certain historic European state, which embarked on a ‘Super Race’ program in the Twentieth Century. History says they didn't do very well.”

“Ah, Mister Adamski, I see you do indeed know your history, and you are absolutely correct. There is a difference in what I propose, however. This would be only an advisory service. Persons would not be constrained, only advised. Also the recommendations would be based on scientific knowledge, which we have now, and they did not have then. In addition, it would be used only as that knowledge applies to hereditary diseases, and weaknesses. Racial differences would not enter into the evaluations. I admit, it sounds a little ominous, but I am convinced we need to do something soon to head off certain disaster to the human race. What do you think?”

“Frankly, I have very mixed feelings about it,” Greg replied honestly. “I guess I'm not convinced the situation is as serious as you have described it. Won't weaknesses gradually evolve out anyway? Mankind has survived for thousands of years so far. Can things change so rapidly now?”

“The answer to your questions are maybe, and yes. If there were no interference, weaknesses would evolve out by the non-survival of those with the weakness. That is true at least of weaknesses which manifest themselves before the child rearing years. Old age problems are another story. But yes, when there is a change in the environment, genetic changes can become pervasive in only a few generations. We have had approximately a few hundred years in which medicine has been smart enough to affect survival and longevity. Both of these directly affect the kinds of genes passed on to the next generation, and the quantity of offspring.”

Greg returned, “Even so, even if all you say is true, where does that leave me? I return to my initial question. How does it affect me, and why should I be interested in it?”

“Ah yes, now we return to why I wanted to see you in the first place. Doctor Thomas was kind enough to send me your medical record because you have been so very healthy. He knew you would interest me. You have had no serious diseases, your physical profile is excellent, and I see you very rarely have colds or similar problems.”

“Yes,” Greg conceded, “that is true. I have been lucky to have good health.”

“More than luck, Mister Adamski, more than luck. I know it must be because of excellent heredity. That is why I am interested in you. I would like to convince you to become involved with my projects. Would you let us do a genetic profile of you? Would you donate to our sperm bank? Would you be willing to meet some young ladies we might find to be the best genetic matches for you? Would you also help us in getting some legislation passed? Would you--”

“Whoa,” interrupted Greg, “Slow down. As I said before, I'm not altogether sold on your ideas. I'm not sure how involved I want to become. Maybe I don't want to do any of this. As a matter of fact, there is already someone I am interested in, so your young ladies may not appeal to me.”

“I am sorry, Mister Adamski, I apologize for my fervor. It is only that I am sure you would be a great addition to our effort. Will you at least let us do a genetic profile of you?”

Greg was a little relieved that the requests had dwindled to one. “What does that involve?” he asked, tentatively.

“Oh, very little,” was the reply, “All we need is a little sample of blood.”

“Well, I certainly would be willing to give a little blood, but I don't guarantee I'll want to do any more than that.” Greg warned.

“That is fine,” continued Doctor Morgan, “but let me suggest, as long as you are going to give a little blood, it would be simple and convenient to donate sperm at the same time. Then if you have a good profile, we would have samples for use, in case someone would want them.”

“How likely are they to be used?” asked Greg.

“That depends on the profile, and whether anyone will be interested or compatible with your profile,” continued the doctor. “Let me assure you though, complete anonymity is preserved as far as the recipient is concerned. No one ever knows from whom a sperm sample is obtained. All they learn is the genetic qualities of the sample, and usually clients accept their geneticist's recommendation as to which sample to use.”

“Is this done often?” inquired Greg. “Is there high likelihood my sperm would be used?” He was considering the implications of becoming a father by proxy, and whether that was acceptable to him.

“It is being done more and more often, I am glad to say,” responded the doctor. “From my vantage point it is a good sign that more people are recognizing that others may contribute better physical qualities to the children they are going to rear, and opt to use donor sperm. Of course, perhaps no one will ever choose to use your sperm either. There is no way to predict that.”

Greg was silent. He was faced with a problem. He remained silent for several minutes, because he didn't know quite how to proceed. He realized he had not had time to clearly evaluate his feelings about all Doctor Morgan had been explaining. On one hand, he was feeling uncomfortable with what the good doctor was asking of him. On the other hand, Doctor Morgan's requests were rational and made a certain amount of sense to Greg. He did not want to offend the doctor, but he also did not want to become deeply involved with some projects for which he had neither time nor inclination.

After pondering these things, Greg decided it was best to compromise, and to do some of what the doctor wanted for the purpose of remaining in his good graces. It would be easier to beg off from being more involved in the other activities, if he had helped in some way. He could also plead he did not have time due to his work and other interests. But what to do? Certainly a little blood for a genetic profile was no big deal. He could easily afford that, and besides, the results might be interesting. It might even be useful, who knows? But the rest of it, meeting "acceptable" girls did not interest him. His thoughts were too full of Glenna to pursue that at this time.

The sperm bank? Greg smiled. He planned to be a father someday, but had never considered this. What would his parents think? What would they advise? Thinking it over, he realized they would react as they had to most ideas he had ever discussed with them. He could almost hear his father saying, “Well Greg, you'll just have to follow your best judgment. We aren't going to live your life for you. This is your decision, but from what you have told us, it sounds as though a sperm bank donation would not be used unless it improved the quality of life for someone. And if it didn't do that, it wouldn't be used. There doesn't seem to be much on the loss side of the equation. The question is more likely ‘Can you accept the possibility of being a father, and not even knowing about it?’”

Yes, that sounds like his father all right, sorting things out clearly, but not being directive. The situation looked more clear to him as he thought about it. Maybe it was his responsibility to donate sperm, if that would help someone. That is, assuming his sperm meets whatever qualifications the, (What would you call them? Bankers?), used to evaluate it. Greg was suddenly aware that Doctor Morgan had spoken to him.

“Well Mister Adamski, what do you think? What is your decision? Will you help me?”

How would it be if I agreed to the genetic profile and the sperm bank donation?” Greg began, “But I really feel I don't have time, nor perhaps even the desire to go further than that. I am very involved with my project at work, and don't want to detract from that just now.”

“That sounds like a very rational response, Mister Adamski,” smiled the doctor. “It is what I predicted to myself you would do. So you have not disappointed me. Let me call the Clinic, and make an appointment for you. Is there any reason you could not go right now?”

“No,” Greg replied, “Now is as good a time as any, but where is the Clinic?”

“Oh, very convenient. It is directly across the park from the front gate of our plant.” Doctor Morgan picked up the telephone, and spoke briefly to someone on the other end. After hanging up, he continued, “They are expecting you. Thank you very much and goodbye. I hope you will drop in to see me again sometime though. I will always be pleased to see you.”

Greg had a feeling of being dismissed, and as he got up to leave, he shook hands with the slightly deformed man whose eyes burned brightly with the gleam of a missionary. “Thank you too, Doctor Morgan. It has been interesting talking with you. I do wish you well in all your endeavors. They sound very worthwhile, and perhaps more important than I understand. Goodbye for now.”

CHAPTER ELEVEN

As Greg came out of the building, the crowds on the walkways were thinning out after the rush of people leaving work. He made his way across the park until he spotted the Clinic. The clinic building was a modern low profile brick structure. It was unobtrusive with bronze letters over the door reading “Genetic Research Clinic.” Greg entered, and the receptionist looked up with a smile.

“Mister Adamski?”

“Yes.”

She continued, “Please fill out this form, and someone will be with you in a moment.”

It was a very simple consent form, asking only for name, current address, and identification number. There was also imprinted in large characters another number consisting of two letters and four digits. As soon as he finished, an inner door opened, and he was requested to enter by a nurse. After he was seated by her desk, she began explaining, “Your card will be kept on file here separately from the medical file which we generate on you. Your medical file will be identified only by this six character number for all our internal purposes. While in here, we will not even use names. You are now only a six character number,” she smiled and added, “Please memorize your number.”

Greg looked at the number, and quickly formed a mnemonic association. The number was WR1941. Greg recalled the historic second world war began in the year 1941. That made it very easy to remember.

“Now,” continued the nurse, “I will show you the way to the laboratory, and after you have collected your sample, return here so we may get a little

blood also.” She led the way down a hall and pointed to a room. “Please go in there, and wait.”

Greg did as she directed, and entered the room. It was a small room, and sparsely furnished. There was a small writing table, a chair, a taller adjustable stool, and what appeared to be a physicians examining table. A small wash stand in a corner completed the furnishings. There were no windows in the room, but it was brightly lighted by a suffused light from the ceiling. After several minutes, the door opened again, and a dark haired nurse entered. She was on the petite side, but had a very lovely face, and a svelte figure. She set her box of papers and bottles on the table, turned back and locked the door, then turned towards Greg.

“Number WR1941?” she asked.

“Yes,” he replied.

She began in a soft but authoritative tone, “I am sure you are wondering how we are going to proceed.” She looked at Greg in a businesslike manner and continued. “Let me explain a little bit about this process. We, of course, want to collect a sample of your sperm. In many laboratories like ours you would simply be put into a room with a bottle, and some erotic material, and asked to perform your act as you saw fit. Here we have a different philosophy. We have found we get better quantity and quality of sample, and stand less chance of losing any, plus the ability to process a sample more rapidly, if we use a method of assistance.

“Persons like myself have been specially selected and trained to help you in collecting the sample. I have been through a thorough psychological screening, in addition to learning the most complete details of the male processes in producing sperm. I am completely professional, and I am interested only in helping you perform the best you can. Do you understand what I mean?”

Greg was nonplused. “Do you mean you are going to help me masturbate?” he asked, incredulously.

“Yes, precisely so,” was the response. She continued with no pause for Greg to reflect on that.

“Please remove your trousers, and lay down on your side on the table, if you will.”

Greg did as she asked, mechanically, and with some embarrassment.

“Don't think about anything, except what we are trying to accomplish here,” she continued in a somewhat softer voice. “Just lay back and let me do the work, and look at me.” With that she unzipped her uniform to display the fact she was completely nude beneath it.

Greg gasped, and felt himself become very aroused as she began her ministrations on his body. She smiled warmly at him.

“Look at me all that you want to. You may touch me lightly also, if that will help you.”

Greg restrained himself from that. All this was happening so quickly, he had not had time to think about it. All he knew was this beautiful woman was doing marvelous things to him, and encouraging him to look at her. It was having the desired effect, but Greg restrained himself from touching her. It didn't seem quite right. It felt like he would be taking advantage of her, and that ran counter to his nature. In the end, he could restrain himself no longer, and reached up to touch her breast. It caused an immediate response in him.

She busily collected his sample in the bottle she had been holding ready. As she milked the last drop from him, her manner again changed to become very businesslike. As she zipped up her uniform, she said, “Thank you WR1941. You may rest here as long as you wish, then go two doors down the hall where the nurse will draw some blood.” With that she was gone, and Greg was left feeling as though he had never quite caught up with what was going on.

After a few minutes, he regained his composure, dressed, and sat down to rest a while. He reflected on what had happened, and wondered whether he had made a good decision. Too late for second thoughts though. He had done it. Time would tell whether it was a good or bad choice. Leaving the room, he returned to the second door as instructed. He had to wait ten or fifteen minutes until a nurse arrived. This was a different, older nurse, who was very obliging, and who skillfully extracted a blood sample from his arm. He was not sure, but he felt he detected a slightly unprofessional giggle somewhere in the back of her eyes. This must be a very interesting place for nurses to work.

The receptionist gave him an identification card as he left, with his clinic number on it. “You may return whenever you wish to learn about your profile, or you may have your doctor request it using this number, if you ever want to do that.”

Greg left the clinic to find the hotel and check into his room. Dusk was falling as he started across the park in the direction of the plant and the rest of the town. As he walked along he tried to collect his thoughts concerning all that had happened today. He was distracted halfway across the park as he began overtaking a small person struggling with a bicycle. It seemed something was wrong with the wheels causing it not to roll properly. When he caught up with the pedestrian, would-be-cyclist, he asked, “May I help in any way?”

“No, no,” was the response, “It'll be all right.”

But it was not all right. As Greg watched, the person struggled to make it go, however the front wheel was badly bent, and trying to lift the bike and roll it on the back wheel was more than the person could do. Greg's natural sense of helpfulness would not let him be turned away. “Here,” he said, “let me roll it for you.” As he grasped the frame of the bike, and began to roll it forward, the person looked up at him at last. It was a pretty face. It was a frightened and distressed face. It was the face of the nurse who a half hour previously had shared an intimate moment with him.

Greg stopped short, startled by the recognition. “I’m sorry,” she said, nervously, “I shouldn’t be talking to you.” She, also, had realized who he was. “We are not supposed to meet with clients on a personal basis. It’s against the rules.” She looked down again, as if in embarrassment.

They stood in the gathering gloom of night as though suspended in time. They both wondered how to proceed, but no immediate course of action was obvious. Greg broke the silence at last, “Look, you need some help, and I am certainly able to provide it. May we just pretend we are strangers, and do what we need to do to solve your problem?”

The girl smiled, as a look of relief swept over her face, “That would be most kind of you. I want to get it to a shop I know just a couple of blocks from here. If you would help me do that, I would be most appreciative.” They began their trek in silence. The girl directing the way, and Greg maneuvering the bicycle.

After a block or so, Greg became curious, “How did this happen anyway? What caused your bike to be so bent up?”

“Oh,” and she turned down her head as though blushing, “It was dumb. I wasn’t watching where I was going, and ran into a post by the side of the path. I was careless. I guess I deserve my trouble.”

“No,” Greg responded, “I don’t believe anyone deserves trouble, especially a pretty girl like you.” He immediately wished he had not added that. He realized that it must recall to her mind their recent encounter, because that’s what it did for him. When he turned to look at her, she was staring at the ground, and pretending she had not heard it.

“Were you hurt?” he asked, trying to change his thoughts by changing the topic.

“No, I was lucky. There is no major damage.” They turned a corner, and in front of them appeared Jerry’s Bike Shop. Greg wheeled the bicycle in, and the girl began talking with Jerry. In a few minutes she had arranged to leave the bicycle for repair, and turned back towards Greg. “Thank you very much for your help. I’m very sorry to have inconvenienced you. You probably have things to do also.”

Greg smiled, “You are very welcome. As a matter of fact, I have very little to do. I was just on my way to the hotel and dinner, but there is nowhere I am planning on going this evening. I was wondering about you though. What will you do without your bicycle? You must have been using it because you need it.”

“Well, I do have a long walk home,” she admitted, “but I have done it many times before. I can probably do it again.”

Greg looked at her and felt a little protective after having traveled with her this far. “It’s night time now though. Maybe I should walk with you to be

sure nothing else happens to you on the way home.”

“Oh, I'll be all right,” she replied, but it did not sound convincing to Greg.

“Look,” he continued, “I've been sitting most of the day. A walk would do me good. It would even encourage my appetite for supper. I wouldn't mind walking you home. In fact, I insist on it,” he added with emphasis.”

“But it will be late when you get back. Can you wait that long to eat?”

“It's no problem at all, but I had better call my friend at the hotel to let him know I'll be late.”

“I can't let you trouble with me further. I'll be all right. You've done enough already.”

“No, I insist,” replied Greg. “Wait just a moment.” Greg returned to Jerry's and used the telephone. to call the hotel. In a minute he was talking with Hap.

He quickly explained he would be delayed. Hap was very understanding. He had registered Greg, so he could get to the hotel whenever he wished. Hap and Dick were planning to go to dinner together with Greg, but Greg told Hap to go ahead without him. “I'll see you both in the morning. You two probably have a lot to talk about anyway.”

Hap chuckled, “Well, I have known Dick a long time. We usually find something interesting to argue about. Take care. We'll see you tomorrow.”

The girl was waiting patiently as Greg returned. “All set. Let's go.” he said with a smile. They returned to silence as they began heading west out of the main part of town.

After two blocks, she stopped. Looking earnestly into his eyes, she began, “You've been so helpful to me, I wish there were something I could do for you. Would you consider having dinner with my parents and me? I'm sure it would be all right. They're very accommodating, and would be glad to have you. Also you wouldn't have to wait till you got back to town to eat. I would like it, if you would be willing to.”

She continued peering at him intently. Greg had not been thinking ahead, and from her manner and apparent sincerity, he was inclined to agree. “Sure, why not,” he replied. “I've got all evening with nothing to do. I appreciate being asked.”

They returned to walking, but after a short distance, she stopped again. “We've got another problem. I don't know your name, and we'll have to make one up so I can introduce you to my parents. But more importantly, you'll learn my name, and I'm not supposed to know you. It's against Clinic

rules. They'll--"

"Oh, the Clinic be damned," he responded, amused. "They won't ever know, because I won't tell them, and I'm sure you won't either. Besides, as far as I'm concerned, we met in the park accidentally. There's nothing wrong with that." Greg watched as her face gradually relaxed and she began to smile.

"I guess you're right. Maybe I worry too much. I do want to follow the rules though."

"Now, my name, my real name, is Greg Adamski. What's yours?"

She smiled shyly, "It's Kathy; Kathy Smith." She released a big sigh. "I guess I've been a little up tight. I can relax now that you know who I am. I suppose it doesn't really make any difference anyway." They turned, and continued walking along the pathway. Silently they passed through the residential areas, each absorbed in their own thoughts.

CHAPTER TWELVE

With the exchange of names, Kathy began to feel more at ease. There would be no need to lie. She could be more honest with her parents. She started to think more about Greg. "Greg Adamski," she mused to herself, "I wonder who he is and what he does. He's evidently a visitor, since he is staying at the hotel." She broke the silence by asking, "Tell me a little about yourself. Now that we know each other's names, we may as well learn more."

"Well," Greg explained, "I'm an engineer with P.C. Industries in Springhill. I'm here because I have to consult with some people at this plant about the compressor I'm working on. They are working on the controls for it. That's me in a nutshell. Now tell me about you. How long have you been with the Clinic?"

Kathy wasn't prepared to start talking about herself so soon. She was busy digesting the information Greg had given her, and trying to think how she felt about it. "Oh," she started, "I've been there about a year. After I graduated as a nurse, I took an evaluation exam, and they decided I would be well suited to do--to do---" Greg could sense her blushing as she stammered. "to do what I do." She hurried on, "Let me explain though. Even after being accepted to do this job and completing the training, we are allowed to do it for only six months. Then we go on to other nursing positions. The Clinic feels six months is long enough for any person to do----That. Afterwards, there is a counseling program for each individual for as long as is necessary to put the experience into perspective. As a matter of fact, today was my last day. Tomorrow, I begin another position there, and next week I go into my counseling."

"Do you mean I was your last---client?" inquired
Greg.

“Yes,” she replied, almost in a whisper

“So how do you feel about the experience?” he pursued.

“I'm not sure. Ask me again in six months or so.” she replied quietly. “Can we talk about something else now?”

Greg realized it was too sensitive a subject for her, and started telling her more about himself, his schooling, how he got the job, his big compressor project, and why he was here today. By then they were approaching a small house on a side street in a quiet suburb. As they entered, Kathy called to her mother, “Mom, Where are you? There is someone here I want you to meet.”

A prematurely gray woman came from the direction of the kitchen, wiping her hands on an apron as she entered. She was small, fifty-ish, but otherwise still a beautiful slim woman.

“Mom, I want you to meet Greg Adamski. He was very helpful to me after I wrecked my bike, and I invited him to dinner. Is that OK?”

“Certainly, that’s fine, dear. Hello Greg. My goodness, you wrecked your bike? Were you hurt? How did it happen?”

A few minutes of confusion followed as Kathy explained the whole incident, then went through the introduction and complete explanation again, when her father entered from the back patio where he had been reading the evening paper. Greg stood by smiling, as he watched the interaction of the little family. When they had completed dealing with that situation, Mr. Smith turned towards Greg. “Well, young man, thank you for helping Kathy. She is usually quite resourceful, but it sounds like you were there exactly when you were needed. Do you live nearby?”

“No, I'm a visitor to your town. In fact, this is the first time I have been here.” Greg then proceeded to tell The Smiths all about his job with PC Industries, and why he happened to be in town.

“My goodness Greg,” responded Mrs. Smith, “it sounds as though you have a very responsible position. That must be a tremendous project, but I'm sure you are quite capable. Some day we will probably ride on your train, then we can think about this time when we met you. How exciting.”

“Well, it's not really my ‘train.’ I'm only working on the compressor, and I have a lot of help.” Greg had the feeling Mrs. Smith would never completely understand, and it would always be “his train.”

He did not try to clarify it further for her. Dinner was ready, and they ate in a small but pleasantly furnished dining room. Mr. Smith had put some classical music on an old CD player, and the soft background music added to the charm of the little house. Dinner was what Mrs. Smith called “an old

fashioned English pot pie”. Greg found it more than adequate, and felt very comfortable with the surroundings and the small talk that accompanied the meal.

When they finished, Greg volunteered to help with the dishes, but Mrs. Smith “wouldn't hear of it”. Greg found himself alone with Kathy in the living room, and realized he had best be returning to town and the hotel.

“Thank you very much for the dinner, Kathy. Your folks are charming people. I enjoyed the evening, and the music, and the conversation. It was certainly much better than the restaurant meal I would have had otherwise.”

Kathy smiled up at him, “Well, Sir Galahad, it was nothing more than you deserved. I thank you, too.”

On impulse Greg put his arms around her and kissed her. She did not resist. “Goodnight, Kathy. Thank you again.” In a moment, he was out the door, and returning to town. It was late when he finally picked up his key, and went to his room. His bag was there waiting for him due to the kindness of Hap. It took Greg only a few minutes to prepare for the night. He fell asleep as soon as he crawled into bed, with the strains of classical music echoing in his brain.

He awoke to the ringing of the phone. When he answered, Hap's voice came intruding on his mind, “Good morning. I'm glad to know you have returned. How was your night on the town? You must have been late, I tried calling before I went to bed. Do you think you'll be coming to work this morning, or do you have other plans?”

Greg smiled as he heard the tease in Hap's words. “Yes, I certainly plan on working today. What time is it?”

Hap replied, “Ten minutes before breakfast. Shall I wait for you, or meet you downstairs?”

“I'll meet you in the dining room in a few minutes. Thanks for calling me.”

“Sure.” said Hap, “You young fellows need a little looking after.” Greg had a quick shower to wash the cobwebs from his brain, then dressed and hurried down to meet Hap. He was at a table in the corner of the dining room. Greg sat down, and the waiter promptly took his order. Hap looked at him quizzically and began, “Now tell me about last night. Anyone I know?”

“I'll tell you as soon as you tell me what H. A. is for; Harold Arnold?:

Hap replied jovially, “I'll not say, and you'll never guess. Now come clean, what was the big emergency that kept you from enjoying the company of Dick and me?”

Greg explained to Hap in abbreviated form the incidents of last evening, while he waited for his breakfast. He discretely eliminated some details such as his sperm donation, and that he had met Kathy prior to meeting her in the park. Mostly he kept to the truth. It was easier than making up a story.

With breakfast out of the way, Hap and Greg headed for PCI and Dick's office. As they entered, Dick was busy talking to an attractive middle aged woman. "Hi fellows," he greeted them, "I'd like you to meet Carol Burns. Carol is a Senior Engineer with the VAC corporation, and is coordinator of the total new train development at VAC."

Greg noticed the sharp features of her face were dominated by her cold ice blue eyes. She was dressed in a fashionable business suit, but that did not hide an aura of a no-nonsense approach to the practical aspects of the business at hand. She and Dick had been looking over the drawings and plans of the compressor and controls. Greg had a moment of apprehension, as he realized this person had tremendous power over the work he had done. Would she like it? She extended her hand by way of greeting. Greg found himself shaking it, and mumbling, "Pleased to meet you."

Hap also took her hand, but seemed much more in command of himself. Hap smiled as he spoke, "We're very pleased to have this opportunity Carol. You have a very interesting project here, and we hope we can help make it go smoothly for you."

She smiled at that, and replied, "Well, if it is like most projects, it will have it's smooth parts, and it's rough spots. But I'm sure you understand that, Hap. We'll just have to work them out together. Let's start at the top, and go through the drawings one by one."

The four of them sat around a large table, and started discussing the plans. Greg was amazed how quickly she grasped the points he made as they went along. Her manner was precise as to detail but allowed all the time necessary for explanation. As they continued, Greg found he became relaxed and at ease with her. It was especially gratifying that she seemed genuinely pleased with what they had done so far, and approved their overall design.

He hardly noticed when she interjected some suggestions. They seemed so natural, and when considered, so obvious, they were easy to incorporate into the design. The morning passed rapidly, but Dick kept a close eye on the clock. At the appropriate time, he suggested they break for lunch. Greg was glad Dick was in charge here, and was an experienced manager. Dick had arranged luncheon for the four of them at a local restaurant called King's Row. As they exited the building, an Electricab was waiting to take them there, and Greg could feel the atmosphere of careful handling of an important customer.

Greg realized Dick had done this many times before. Lunch was quiet, refined, and the food was excellent. Greg was flattered that Carol spent a lot of time talking with him. She was especially interested in Northern State, and Greg's impressions of the school. She then admitted, "I graduated from there also, but it was a few years ago, and I'm sure things have changed a lot."

Greg realized Carol had been very deliberate in talking with him, and drawing him out about Northern State, but he tried to hide his reaction. "Yes,"

he volunteered, "One of the reasons I decided to go there was that they were always updating equipment, and trying to stay in the forefront of technology. That, at least, hasn't changed since you were a student."

Carol smiled, and agreed, "You're probably right. I'm sure it's still an excellent school, judging by the graduates." The talk turned to more trivial topics, but Greg felt he had passed some sort of test. He was holding his own in a fairly high powered group, and his confidence grew.

The afternoon was spent in finishing the review of the plans. They completed their work just in time for Carol to leave for her train. After she left, Dick suggested, "Let's quit for the day. My fellows are making a few changes we can go over before you leave in the morning. Besides, I have to get home early. My son is in a school play, and parental attendance is mandatory." His pleased expression belied his words, and showed that he would not miss the play for practically anything.

Greg turned to Hap, "I guess that leaves us on our own for tonight then."

"Well, that depends," replied Hap. "I've been invited for dinner and the evening to the home of an old college friend, who lives in town. I'm sure it would be all right if you came too. That is, if you can stand two old fogies reminiscing all evening."

Greg laughed, "Thanks for the warning. Actually, I'd like to get to bed early. I was up late last night, so a simple supper, then early to bed sounds best for me. Thanks anyway, but I'll shift for myself."

"Suit yourself." replied Hap, "I don't mean to cut you out, and I know you would be welcome."

They walked together to the hotel, but parted company at their rooms. "See you tomorrow, Hap. I'll try to get to breakfast on time in the morning," said Greg as he entered his room. Greg showered, then sat in his room resting till an appropriate dinner time. It was early, and this was the first opportunity he had found to think about all that had happened in the last two days. He was soon mulling over the events with the Maxie compressor project.

"That seems to be going well," he thought to himself. Then he thought of Dr. Morgan and the strange interview he had with him. That led him to thinking of Kathy. Kathy; now there was a strange girl. No, not really strange, just different. She had parents who were easy to talk with, and relaxed. She was pretty, and interesting to talk with, also. Greg felt he had only scratched the surface of her personality. He found himself coming back again and again to his two meetings with her, and how different they had been. The first was strictly business, but what unusual business. At the second meeting, she seemed worse than helpless, but very beguiling. Then her parents and her home, very comfortable, easy going, down to earth people, and pleasant surroundings.

Greg decided to have an early supper, and wandered down to the dining room. There were only a few people there, and he was seated immediately.

After ordering a light supper, he then fell back into his reverie while waiting to be served. Again Kathy came to his mind. She seemed mysterious and intriguing to him. But why was he thinking of her? Why was he not thinking of Glenna and their scheduled canoeing date on Sunday? He realized he felt mixed emotions, and wondered what was going on with himself. The waiter bringing his food interrupted his line of thought, and he applied himself to his meal. Greg ate slowly, and by the time he finished, he found himself absorbed with thoughts of Kathy again.

On the way back to his room, he decided he had to talk with Kathy. It was easy to find her phone number in the telephone book, and he dialed it without pausing. It rang twice, then a soft voice answered, “Hello.”

“Hello, Kathy? This is Greg. I just had to check up on you. Did you get your bike fixed all right? How did you get to work today?”

“Oh! Greg!” was the astonished reply, “Why- Why yes, Jerry's Shop fixed the bike fine, but they had to put a whole new wheel on it. I stopped after work and paid for it, but I couldn't bring it home. I had ridden my mother's bike today, and I couldn't bring them both back.”

“I see,” responded Greg, “That's too bad. How will you get to work tomorrow then?”

“Well, I plan to walk tomorrow, so I can ride home. I'll just have to start earlier.”

“That's a shame you have to walk,” answered Greg. There followed a moment of silence. Then Greg added, spontaneously, “Say do you suppose I could get the bike from Jerry, and ride it out there. Then you wouldn't have to walk in the morning, and I'd get my daily exercise.”

“Oh! Greg!” replied the soft voice, “I couldn't let you do that. It's not your problem. You've helped me lots already.”

“But I'd like to do it. I've been deserted this evening. I've had dinner, and I'm positively bored. Tell you what. You call Jerry, and tell him I'll pick up the bike in a little bit, and I'll see you later”

“Greg, that would be very nice. I would really appreciate it, too.”

“Good, then call Jerry, and I'll see you soon. Bye bye.” Greg hung up the phone, and headed out the door.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

It took Greg only a few minutes to reach Jerry's Bike Shop, but in that time Kathy had called Jerry, and he was expecting Greg. He had the bicycle at his front door, ready to go. Greg thanked him, and straddled the bike. It took only a few feet for Greg to feel comfortable on the bicycle. He had ridden many types of bicycles in his life, but this was an especially nice one. It rolled easily, had multiple gears, was solidly built, and had all the necessary lights powered by a compact battery. Greg headed the easy handling bike out of town along the road he remembered to Kathy's house. It seemed in no time at all he was coming to a stop by her front door. As he rolled into her front yard, Kathy stepped out of the house, and greeted him with a smile, "Well, Sir Galahad, you just can't resist doing nice things for helpless people."

Greg heard the pleasure in her voice, and replied lightheartedly, "It's the duty of us chosen few to hold the world together. What gallant knight could ever pass by a damsel in distress and not help her?"

"Well, gallant knight," she continued, "this is only a poor, ill prepared, damsel, but may I offer you some iced tea? Guaranteed freshly made."

"That would be very nice," Greg responded, "As a matter of fact, I am a little dry and out of breath."

Greg followed her into the house, and down a hall to the kitchen where a pitcher and two glasses stood on the counter.

"Have a seat, and relax. Maybe you haven't thought ahead, but you'll need your strength for the walk back to town." Greg sat in one of the small kitchen chairs, and watched as Kathy poured the iced tea. "I forgot to ask when you called, but evidently you remembered the way here with no trouble."

Greg smiled. "Yes, I remembered it. I'm fairly good at directions, and it was straight forward." They sat silently a minute and sipped their tea.

Kathy lowered her eyes, and said quietly, "I really do appreciate your bringing my bike back. It will make things simpler for me in the morning. I wish I could do more for you, but Mom and Dad are out playing cards at a neighbor's house, and I'm not very adept at fixing food."

Greg advised, "A pretty girl like you doesn't have to be able to cook, but can't you even do popcorn?" He looked at her teasingly, and she laughed.

"No, I'd probably burn it. Or is that what one does to popcorn? At least I know where it is. You are welcome to try your luck with it if you want to." So saying, she opened a cabinet, and took out a small bag of corn kernels.

"I'll make some, if you promise to help eat it, Greg offered.

"How can I refuse?"

Greg set to work, and Kathy produced the items needed as Greg called for them. Soon a pot was heating on the range, shortly followed by vigorous popping sounds, and the pleasing smell of hot oil and popped corn. In a few more minutes, they were carrying their hot popcorn and cold iced tea out to the patio to enjoy the cool night air. The patio overlooked a small community lake which the backyard faced. They talked quietly as they ate.

Kathy wanted to know more about the compressor and "Train" Greg was working on. He related the events of the day and Kathy listened intently.

"The King's Row restaurant is a high class place," she said. "I've never been in it. Is it nice?"

"Well, it's about the fanciest place I've ever experienced," replied Greg. "You can be sure I was on my best behavior. I think I even used the correct forks."

They laughed together. The time passed quickly, and Greg realized he should be returning to the hotel, and getting to bed. He stood up and started back toward the front door as he said, "I'm leaving tomorrow morning, Kathy. I have to return to Springhill and continue pushing this project. I've enjoyed meeting you and spending time with you. I don't know when I'll be back, but maybe I'll see you sometime in the future. I hope you do well in your nursing work, and don't wreck your bike again."

"I'll try not to." She laughed, then looked at Greg soberly, "Thank you for everything Greg. You've been very good to me."

They had reached the living room, and stood by the front door. Greg turned and gently slipped his arms around Kathy. She pressed close to him, and held very still, like a frightened bird. He held her tightly for a minute, then kissed her firmly and thoroughly on the mouth.

"Bye, bye, Kathy."

"Bye, bye, Greg."

Greg walked quickly through the cool night. His mind was in a turmoil as he headed back to the hotel. What in goodness name was he doing? What was this Kathy thing with him? What about his relationship with Glenna? What did he want from them both? Why had he pursued Kathy? How did he really feel about Glenna? What about---? There were too many questions, and no answers.

By the time he reached the hotel his head was buzzing and he was far from being ready to sleep. As he entered the door of the lobby, he heard music coming from the lounge. On an impulse, he turned and entered the dark atmosphere, and found a stool at the bar. Greg rarely drank, but now he asked for a beer, and the bartender brought a tall cold glass of amber liquid. It tasted nut sweet, and Greg sipped it as he continued to stew about his "girls". He became more confused than ever, but the effect of the beer gradually made him sleepy. When he finished, he wandered up to his room, undressed, and fell into bed.

The next thing he knew, his alarm clock was gonging. As he slowly came into the conscious world, remnants of his dream became wisps and faded away. Vaguely he recalled racing on bicycles with Glenna and Kathy. Sometimes he was winning, sometimes one of them was ahead. But there was no end. The race went on and on, and even the direction was unclear. He often made the wrong turn, and fell behind. The course was interminable.

It was a relief to be awake at last. He turned off the alarm, and debated calling Hap. No, he'd just show up at breakfast, and start right off with business talk. Maybe Hap wouldn't ask about last evening. After a quick shower, he needed only a few minutes to pack, and was ready to leave when their work would be finished.

When he reached the dining room, Hap was nowhere to be seen. Greg ordered his breakfast, and while he was waiting, began to wonder whether he should have indeed given Hap a call this morning. He was about to go to the phone to call Hap's room, when the Senior Engineer came ambling in with his usual slow gait.

“Good morning, sir.” Greg greeted him. “I trust you were well fed last evening, and slept well last night. All set for a busy day?”

Hap grinned, and replied, “Yeh. It was my night out on the town last night. They kept me up late, but we enjoyed our reminiscing just as I knew we would. How about you? Did you find anything to keep you out of trouble?”

“Certainly, I had a quiet supper, watched the news, and went to bed early. I'm all set for whatever comes along.”

“Good,” said Hap. “You can handle the business today. I'll just sleep.” That was followed by a wide yawn, and a laugh as Hap was amused at himself. The rest of breakfast and leaving the hotel were uneventful. When they arrived at Dick's office, Dick was already going over some drawings, and talking with one of his employees. Dick invited them into his office, where they sat and chatted a few minutes. The proud father elaborated on the school play of the previous evening, and described in detail how well his child had performed. Hap related the events of his meeting with his old friend, and the good time they had together. Neither thought to ask Greg about his evening, and he did not volunteer any information. After a while the conversation drifted to the Maxie controls, and they looked over the newest drawings.

They considered the changes that had been made, and agreed on the next series of tasks to be done. Hap and Greg collected their papers, and Dick called an Electricab for them.

“So long,” said Hap as he shook hands with Dick. “Perhaps we'll see you again in two or three weeks.”

“Fine,” replied Dick, “Anytime you have something new, I'll be glad to see you, and we'll keep in contact on the phone. Goodbye, Greg, it's been nice getting acquainted with you. I think you have a fine design for the compressor, also. I believe we are going to do very well on this project.”

“Thanks, Dick. Thanks for everything. Goodbye for now.”

The trip back to Springhill was uneventful. Hap slept most of the way, but Greg was too charged up to relax. He took out his notes of changes to the design, and thought through them over and over, until he had exactly in mind what he wanted to change, and how to change it.

As they entered their building to return to work, it seemed to Greg they had been gone for weeks, but he realized it had been less than three days. However, as he thought of all that had transpired, it seemed impossible to have squeezed all of it into that brief period of time. There was a pile of mail and notes on his desk. His first action was to go searching for Paula and Harvey. They needed to be apprised of the decisions made in Salem, and he had to deliver the latest information and control drawings to them. After that, he gradually dealt with the piles on his desk, and eventually cleared them up. By then he realized it was well into lunch time. As he entered the lunch room, he met Glenna coming out. “Hi, there,” was her greeting, “Looking forward to Sunday?”

Greg realized he had not given a thought to Sunday with Glenna, since last Sunday. He had been so busy, and so much had happened, the thought had never crossed his mind. “Why a - a, sure,” he recovered, “I’m planning on a quiet day in the park with you.”

“Remember, you promised to take me canoeing,” reminded Glenna.

Suddenly all the details popped back into Greg’s mind. He returned to the world of Springhill and Glenna. “Certainly,” he answered, “I’ve been anticipating it. I’ve even been practicing my paddling technique in the evenings, have you?” he teased.

“Oh no,” she replied swiftly, “I’m expert enough that I don’t need practice.” Greg’s expression showed his amusement, and Glenna continued, “I have to get back to the office, but I’ll see you Sunday.”

“Right; Sunday, I’ll see you then. Bye, bye,”

The rest of the week sped by. Late Friday afternoon Greg caught Bill in his office, and spent a little time reviewing the project, and outlining the planned work for the next several weeks. “And how is your personal life going, Greg?. You are very dedicated to work, I can see. How about Greg? Are you having any fun?”

Greg felt self-conscious, but was pleased that Bill was interested in his personal well-being, too. He explained a little about Glenna, and their week-end dates.

She’s a very nice person, and I enjoy being with her,” he admitted, “but, you know, I accidentally met another girl while in Salem, and she’s

intriguing, also. I feel a little confused.”

Bill chuckled, “You young fellows have all the luck. There are lots of pretty little girls around, if you just look for them. A handsome guy like you should have many girl friends. Why worry about it?”

Greg responded soberly, “I suppose you're right, but I don't want to mislead anyone. My folks brought me up to be honest about everything, including my emotions.”

Bill answered thoughtfully, “I think that's fine, actually. I have confidence you'll work it out though. I've noticed you can get situations into fairly good perspective, and this is no different.”

The rest of Friday afternoon disappeared in a flurry of activity with Paula in the drafting room. She had some new drawings ready, and Greg reviewed them with her. “We're going to be ready to start making some parts soon,” he beamed. The project was proceeding smoothly.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Saturday was a drizzly, cloudy day, but Sunday dawned bright and clear. Greg had become settled in his routines again, and Salem now seemed to be in another country. Greg had been too busy to think about Kathy, nor did he do so this morning, either. After arising and breakfasting, he was ready for a day with Glenna.

When Greg presented himself at her door, she was ready to leave, and prepared for a day of fun. Her aunt and uncle were not home, since they had gone to church early. As they walked to the station, Greg was aware of a need for him to re-establish rapport with Glenna. They had not had more than a moment together for a week. He began by describing his visit to the plant in Salem, including details he thought she would enjoy, but judiciously leaving out any mention of his time with Kathy.

“What was the King's Row restaurant like?” she asked. “I've never been to Salem, but I've heard other people mention it. My impression is that it's very ritzy.”

“Well, it was quite fancy. Dick wanted to treat the VAC engineer especially elegantly, and that was the right place for it. The service was excellent, and the food was very good. It certainly was the best eating I've ever experienced.”

The train ride to Lake Park was a little longer than the trip to Chalmers Park. By the time they arrived at the park station. Glenna had related to Greg all that had happened with her during the week. She made even the routine and prosaic atmosphere of a doctor's office sound interesting. Obviously,

she was becoming very well adjusted to her nurse-receptionist job with Dr. Thomas.

It was a short walk from the station to the lake and the canoe rental office. Part of the way they passed between rows of attractively maintained rose bushes. Their fragrance filled the air, and enhanced the peaceful sylvan setting. They walked silently, as Greg thought to himself, “How can I explain to Glenna about Dr. Morgan, and his ‘mission’. Should I even tell her about it?” He was unsure of what to say, because he had mixed emotions about the experience himself.

They reached the rental office and negotiated the use of a canoe for the day. With a normal amount of confusion, they at last arranged themselves in the canoe with paddles and flotation jackets, and set off. The lake was a man made lake with many little inlets and backwaters. A small stream had been dammed up to form the lake, and all the natural terrain determined the shoreline. As they paddled, they passed patches of water lilies, and went through deep spots and shallow spots. There were a few other boats and canoes on the water, but it was not crowded nor was it noisy.

They proceeded for a long time disconcerting lethargic frogs who leaped from their lily pads with sudden energy. Many varieties of shore birds waded in the water looking for fish. Most of them flew off as the canoe approached and interrupted their search. Some stared at Greg and Glenna with a guarded mistrust, and watched them intently until they had safely passed by. The quiet smooth motion of the canoe was relaxing, and their actions reflected that, also. There was less conversation, and they spoke in softer voices. As they rounded a corner, a wide sand beach appeared on the opposite shore. They paddled toward it, and beached the canoe in the shallow water. Glenna was the first to remove her sandals and wade into the clear cool water. Greg followed her example, and they splashed through the shallow water looking for fish, or stones, or whatever could be found. When they tired of that, they found a shady spot on the edge of the beach and sat to enjoy the surroundings.

After a minute of silence, Greg offered, “I did something a little different while I was in Salem.”

“Oh? What was that?” Glenna responded with interest.

“Well, when I saw Dr. Thomas a couple of weeks ago, he suggested I see Dr. Morgan in Salem, if I ever had the opportunity. As it turns out, I had a little free time, and did go in to visit him.”

“I've heard Dr. Thomas mention him. He sounds a little odd. What was it about?” Greg proceeded to tell Glenna about Dr. Morgan's concern for the weakening of the human genetic heritage. He elaborated a little on the good doctor's plans to deal with the situation. Glenna thought a minute, then commented, “It makes a certain amount of sense to me, but why did he want to see you about it?”

“I guess from my medical history, and general health, Dr. Thomas and Dr. Morgan thought I would have excellent genes. Dr. Morgan wanted me to have a genetic profile made.” Greg found himself looking down somewhat sheepishly.

Glenna replied impishly, “Well, I've noticed some things about you along those lines myself. How did you turn out?”

“I don't know. I gave them my blood, but it takes a while to run all the tests. I can find out later, if I want to, or if my doctor requests it.”

Glenna was silent as she mulled this information over in her mind. “I don't think I'd like to do that. If I have a genetic defect, I guess I'd just as soon not know about it. It would just worry me.”

“Gee, I don't see any defects. You look okay to me.”

Glenna returned a warm look as she lay back on the sand, then asked, “Are you going to go back to learn how good or bad you are?”

“I suppose so, but I'm not sure.” He paused, then added, “There was something else he wanted me to do, also.”

“Don't keep me in suspense.” replied Glenna, “What was it?”

Greg sighed, then said, “He wanted me to make a sperm donation, too. If I do have good genes, he wanted to be able to pass them on to anyone who might want them or need them.”

“A sperm donation!” exploded Glenna sitting up instantly and giggling, “Did you do it?”

“Well, yeah I did,” he answered self-consciously, and Glenna burst out in a full throated laugh.

“You mean you might become a father, and not be aware of it?” She continued in a paroxysm of amusement. Then seeing Greg's discomfiture, stopped and reached out to take his hand. “I'm sorry, I didn't mean to laugh, but you took me by surprise. I guess I'm a little embarrassed, too, or I wouldn't react this way.” A moment of silence followed. Then she added, “I believe, if you decided it was a proper thing to do, that it's fine. I'm certainly in no position to pass judgment on your actions. Will you forgive me for laughing at you?”

Greg looked at her impishly, “Only if you let me kiss you in the sand.”

“Which part is that?”

Greg turned toward her and, forcing her down, kissed her firmly on the mouth. They held the kiss several seconds, then Glenna pulled away, and said teasingly, “I think we had better go back to paddling.”

They continued canoeing down the lake. After another half hour they came upon a little inlet with a boat dock. Just off the dock a small eating establishment offered shelter and sustenance. As they beached the canoe, food smells from the little eatery reminded them they were hungry from their exertions. Though the menu was short, it was adequate, and they sat on a patio to enjoy their lunch.

The restaurant was tucked away on an inlet halfway along the lake, but it was a busy little establishment. Several hiking trails evidently converged here, and boats from all parts of the lake made it a stopping place. Greg and Glenna watched the people and traffic come and go from their vantage point on the patio. There were hikers of all ages. Couples and families strolled by, some with babies in carrying pouches. Greg found himself thinking about Dr. Morgan, and his concerns. He wondered how many people passing by have now or had in the past, genetically related physical problems. How many would not be here, except for the intervention of doctors. What would the next generation be like? -and the next? -and the next? Would humankind gradually become more and more dependent on medical assistance just to survive? What kind of world would that be anyway? Can anything really be done to influence this trend?

It seemed in Greg's mind to be an insidious threat brought about by the very success of the medical profession. Humankind has learned to depend on modern medical magic in the form of drugs and surgical skills to survive. Medical skills have become a crutch, and more and more people depend on science to correct every flaw which occurs. Nature is bent to the will of the scientists, but not always with the desired results. Without these scientific achievements and help, would modern man continue to inhabit the earth? What would happen if these aids suddenly were not available? In the event of devastating worldwide earthquakes, or a meteor strike, or perhaps an unstoppable epidemic, what would happen? With living conditions retrograded to a primitive state again, would humankind be able to cope or be equipped to survive?

Suddenly, he became aware Glenna was speaking to him and he floated out of his reverie. "Hello there, Mr. Adamski, where have you been? I've spoken to you twice, and you haven't replied."

"Sorry," returned Greg, "I guess I became lost in thought. Maybe it's hereditary." He looked at her thoughtfully a moment, then continued in a lighter tone, "Are you ready to go back to the rigors of the bounding main?"

"Lead on, my captain," she answered, "Your loyal crew awaits your command."

They continued exploring the lake. Other canoeists and boaters waved as they passed them. The wildlife was fascinating in its abundance and diversity. It had obviously prospered in the protected confines of the park. Greg and Glenna would paddle rapidly, then slowly, then stop altogether. They floated and paddled around most of the lake. By late afternoon they arrived back at their starting point, and, tired but happy, they relinquished the care of the canoe back to the dock attendant.

The return trip to town was uneventful. They discussed some of the trivia which surrounded their lives at PCI Their conversation was pleasant and easy going. After many outings, and spending time together, they were quite comfortable with each other, and small talk came easily. On the walk back to

Glenna's house, Greg asked, “What new and different activity would you like to do next week?”

“How about going back to Chalmers Park, and hiking up one of the hill trails? Do you have hiking shoes and a backpack, or something to carry a lunch? Let me put it this way. I'll make a lunch, your job is to carry it.”

“Madam, you are talking to the most completely outfitted hiker this side of the Rockies. I'll wear hiking shoes, and bring the necessary equipment. What's on the menu.”

“Aha! I'll worry about that. Let's say it will be a meal worth climbing for. Do you like pigs knuckles?”

“I love pig knuckles, but, of course, you realize they are eminently unsuited as a repast after an arduous climb. I'm sure you can do better than that.”

Glenna laughed. It pleased her how quickly Greg picked up on her joking moods, and played along with them.

Her times with Greg had become most important to her. He was a shining star in her life that made the rest livable. She felt she might even be getting on better with her aunt and uncle because of her happier attitude. It had been only a few weeks, but he was rapidly becoming very essential to her. Was that good? She would have to think about that somewhat - sometime - when she had the time to do it. Now she replied to his comment, “Yes sir, I'll re-think the menu, but you had better be prepared to carry.”

“Done deal,” was Greg's response. They had reached Glenna's door, and Greg automatically reached out and embraced her. They kissed several seconds, but then Glenna giggled, and broke away.

“See you at work.” she said.

“See you,” he replied.

On the walk back to his apartment, Greg mentally made plans. “Tuesday evening, I'll have time to go shopping for shoes and a knapsack, or whatever I can find. Wonder whether I should get a canteen, also. No, Glenna will probably have the drinks in something portable. Flashlight? Knife? Compass? Yes, at least a compass. Maybe a knife.” It would be a busy week.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Monday morning Greg quickly reverted to thinking about his job and the progress of the Maxie compressor. With Bill and Hap, he reviewed the plans as they stood, and the decision was made to begin making parts for the prototypes. Greg spent a lot of time with the shop foreman planning the sequence of parts so they would be available when needed for assembly. Harvey had tested most of the materials, and supplies had been ordered. As material arrived, the foreman would schedule the manufacture of the limited numbers of parts needed for the first two compressors.

Greg was excited to see the results of his work coming to fruition, even though construction and testing were still a long way off. He was busy all day, and felt tired in the evenings, but he managed to shop Tuesday as planned. He bought some very comfortable hiking boots, a small backpack, a compact compass, and a beautifully made hunter's knife with a leather holder for attaching to his belt. He was pleased with the results of his shopping spree, and hoped Glenna would be impressed with his equipment.

He did not see her until Thursday, because of his irregular schedule and frequent visits to the machine shop. Thursday, however, he was at his desk all morning, and headed for lunch at the normal time. To his good fortune, he met Glenna just entering the lunch room.

“Hello hiker,” he greeted her. “May I join you today?”

“Certainly, just follow me through the cafeteria line.” They exchanged small talk while picking up their food, then found an empty table near the windows to sit down. “Have you been polishing up your hiking equipment?” asked Glenna.

“I've polished most of it so well, it looks just like new.” replied Greg. “You'll be impressed I'm sure. One thing I was uncertain about. Will we need a canteen?”

“No, I have a container that will do very well. Just have room enough for it in your pack.”

“I'll have you know my pack has been handed down from generation to generation. It has carried everything from gold nuggets and pick axes to wedding dresses and pate' de foie gras. I guess it'll hold your drink container right well, ma'am.”

Glenna grinned in spite of Greg's outrageous humor. “This I'll have to see to believe. I hope you have decent shoes at least.”

“Oh, yes'm, they been handed down from generation to---”

“Enough,” laughed Glenna, “I'll take your word for it.”

Their conversation returned to the mundane topics of work, but they enjoyed each other's company while they ate. Too soon it was time to return to work. "See you Sunday," was Greg's parting comment.

"Yes, Sunday," answered Glenna.

The rest of the week passed swiftly. Saturday, Greg was busy with his usual errands and activity, and went to bed with high anticipation of the following day. Sunday dawned dark and windy. As Greg fixed his breakfast, the rain began. He tuned in a weather report, and learned the awful truth. Rain had moved in, and was expected to stay most of the day. So much for their hiking expedition. It would have to wait. Sadly, he called Glenna on the telephone, "How are you in wet weather hiking?" he asked when she answered the phone.

"Not very good," she admitted, "What am I going to do with all this picnic I have ready?"

"We could go catch a weather man, and jam it down his throat," was the immediate reply.

"Yes," she answered, "That's the only rational thing to do, I'm sure. Where will we find him?"

"Wait, wait, I'm getting another idea. Why don't I put on my raincoat, get my umbrella, and come there?"

"No good, Auntie and Uncle Tom will be home."

"Let me finish. I'll come there, and we'll carry the picnic here, and eat on my floor, which is cleaner than any campsite within a hundred miles. In addition, we can stop on the way and rent a video disc to run for entertainment. I guarantee it's not raining in my apartment."

"Well," There was a pause while Glenna considered the offer. "Well, I don't know. It's awfully risky for innocent young girls to dash off to young men's apartments these days. Who knows what fiendish plans and evil diversions you have in mind."

"Aha, you'll never know unless you come and see. I'll let you pick out the videos," enticed Greg.

"Sold, I'll look for you soon. Bring your backpack." In a few minutes, Greg was going out the door in a raincoat, and carrying his pack and umbrella. About an hour later, the door burst open again, and a wet Greg and Glenna came tumbling in. Greg was carrying the bulging backpack in his arms, because it wouldn't fit over his raincoat, or under it either. They were laughing and unloading raingear and packages on every available surface. After a few minutes things became more settled.

Greg hung the raincoats in the shower in the bathroom, and Glenna unloaded the pack in the kitchen As they dried their faces,

Greg complained, "I can't believe the videos you picked out. They're positively ancient. Who was Fred Astaire anyway?"

"Don't criticize till you see them. For your information, he was one of the most wonderful dancers in the world."

"But that was ages ago."

"Some things never change," replied Glenna with a teasing snippiness in her voice.

Glenna put the food in the refrigerator to keep until they were hungry, while Greg fussed with setting the video disc ready to play. "I like your apartment. It seems to have all the necessary equipment."

"Thanks, I was lucky to find such a nice place. There's a great view also, but not on a rainy day. Usually, I can see the mountains. That's the nice part about having a place on an upper floor." In a few minutes they had settled down on cushions on the floor, and began watching their video. The plot of the story was thin and mainly supported many opportunities for the actors to dance. They watched quietly. Greg reached over to hold Glenna's hand as he observed how intently she followed the action. There was very little conversation for an hour as the story unfolded. Then, at a change of scene, Greg jumped up and stopped the recording. "Time for refreshments. How about something to drink?"

"All I have to offer is the finest iced tea in the world. Will that do?" asked Glenna.

"Oh! you're lucky. That's exactly what I had in mind."

Greg produced two glasses, and Glenna poured them both full. As they sat down to drink, Glenna asked, "Well, what do you think of Fred Astaire?"

"I will reluctantly agree, he was the best dancer of his time."

"No, you're wrong," answered Glenna, surprising Greg, "He was the best male dancer. Ginger Rogers was the best dancer, because she could do everything he could do, but do it in high heels and backwards."

Greg laughed, "I stand corrected. Did women really wear such funny shoes back then? It seems strange they would torture themselves that way."

Glenna smiled, "My research tells me that women used to worry a great deal about attracting men, and we still do, but now we have much better methods than just making ourselves pretty, or supposedly pretty as they did then. Back then, women painted themselves, tried to appear bigger, and wore

fancy clothes, because they thought that would interest a man.” Then she added in a playful snooty tone, “Now we have much more sophisticated methods.”

“Oh, and what did you use on me?”

“I’ll never tell.” she responded. Greg moved to her, and kissed her. Then she ducked and giggled, “We had better go back to the video.”

As the action began, they became absorbed in the story again. Almost an hour later, they arrived at the happy conclusion. As Greg stopped the video, Glenna commented, “I’ve seen your backpack which was handed down from generation to generation. Where is the rest of this marvelous equipment you talked about?”

Greg brought out the things he had acquired. “Look at this compass. Isn’t it neat? Compact, but very functional. And my boots, I think they’re the most comfortable I’ve ever had. But look at this woodsman’s knife. Isn’t it a beauty?”

Glenna was properly impressed with Greg’s possessions. “Too bad we couldn’t use them today.”

“Yes, but what about next week? We can try again then, and it will be my turn to bring the food.”

“That sounds good to me. Speaking of eating, isn’t it time for lunch. Where do we spread out our picnic?”

“Right here,” said Greg, indicating the middle of his living space. “Here we’ll be far enough away from the birds and insects, and they won’t bother us.”

“I’d prefer to be bothered a little bit, but I’ll settle for this.”

The lunch Glenna had fixed found a very appreciative Greg. Smoked salmon sandwiches, crisp carrot and celery sticks, pickles, cookies and fruit, combined with more iced tea, left them satiated, and pleasantly relaxed. They stretched out on the floor with pillows under their heads, and rested. They were silent for several minutes, then Greg complained, “I can’t sleep, the birds are singing too loudly. Won’t you do something about them?”

“You think you have problems? The ants are crawling all over me,” said Glenna. “Why don’t you do something about that?”

“All right, let’s get the birds to eat the ants. That will keep them from singing, too.”

“Good plan. You do it. I’ll watch.”

More silence followed.

“You fed me too well. I can't move. I can't even put on the other video.”

“We're in real trouble. We'll just lie here till we die, and not even have any entertainment.”

Silence again.

Glenna continued, “In two weeks they will discover our stiff cold bodies. Victims of classic overeating.”

Sounds of fake snoring came from Greg. Glenna rolled over to him, and started shaking him as hard as she could. Greg started laughing, and rolled her away, pinning her down and planting an exuberant kiss on her lips. They laughed together, then Glenna insisted, “Time for the next video, if you can stand it.”

“I can stand anything, even your awful choice of videos.” Greg took out the other disc, and read the title. “‘Highlights of Twentieth Century History.’ What is this thing of yours with ancient history. Don't you like modern times?”

“I'm only trying to expose you to important parts of our heritage. It's for your own good.” The sparkle in her eye belied her serious tone.

“All right here we go. Back to the twentieth century.” Greg started the disc, and they settled down to watching. The video was a documentary which used actual scenes recorded from the times depicted. It covered the inventions, the wars, the cataclysms, the accomplishments, and the development of social awareness all woven together in a fascinating recounting of the mile posts of the century, the first and second World Wars, the advent of airplanes, rockets, lasers, atomic and nuclear power.

Greg and Glenna were interested in seeing the actual persons and actual events as they happened. They became so absorbed with the picture, they watched it all the way through with no break. When it was over, they felt suddenly exhausted from experiencing the events so intensively.

“Wow,” exclaimed Greg, “Did all that really happen? How could people be so smart and so stupid at the same time?”

“Yes, I guess it really happened. It's much more forceful seeing the events than reading about them, isn't it? It makes some of what happened more understandable.”

“Some of it I will never understand. How could they have let the environment become so deteriorated before doing anything to save it?” Greg's voice

reflected his consternation.

“One of my history teachers used to say, ‘Apathy is a powerful force which is easily exerted,’ and I think he was right. It's easy to do nothing, but it can have potent consequences,” explained Glenna. She continued, “We can be thankful the environment is in better shape now than it was then. Still today, it takes everyone's effort to keep improving our world.”

“Speaking of everyone's effort, would you like to help pick up the picnic stuff.”

“What picnic stuff? You ate all the stuff.”

“I mean the plates and glasses and things, you dolt,” teased Greg.

“If I'm a dolt, I don't know how to do it. Besides, I brought it, you clean it,” was Glenna's cavalier answer.

“All right, just wait till next week then, when I bring the food. I can play the same game,” threatened Greg. They had used so little, it took him all of two minutes to collect everything, clean it off, and stow it away. He came back to sit beside her on the floor. The afternoon was rapidly slipping away. The rain had stopped, and a slight glimmer of sunlight shone in the window. “Look, you can begin to see my view.” They went to the window, and Greg started pointing out the landmarks. “See the hills over there. I think that is where Chalmers Park is. Next week we'll be climbing around there, if the weather cooperates.”

Greg stood behind Glenna as they gazed out the window. He slipped his hands around her waist, and she leaned back against him. They stood that way for several minutes until Greg asked, “Wouldn't you like to stay all night? Think of the long walk back to your place. You're closer to work from here.”

Glenna was silent for a moment, then answered, “I'd like to stay, but you know I can't. Auntie and Uncle Tom would have fits over it. They weren't even too thrilled about my coming just for the afternoon, actually.”

Greg held her a little closer and tighter, as they continued looking into the distance. After a minute more, Glenna turned around to face Greg, and they embraced in a long kiss. “I have to go now,” she said softly.

“I know; until next week,” Greg whispered back, reluctantly.

They collected Glenna's picnic containers, and put on their raincoats again. As they went out the door, Glenna turned, and said sadly, “Goodbye little apartment. I'll be back again one day.”

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

The following week was as busy as the previous ones. Greg oversaw the making of the first parts of the compressors. Harvey checked parts to see that they were correct. Paula refined drawings, and made changes as Greg decided they were necessary. Bill and Greg reviewed the progress of the project without Hap, who was very busy with another of his projects. Greg would leave work late, and arrive home tired. He made simple meals, and found he needed to retire earlier than he usually did, so that he would be refreshed by morning.

Wednesday evening he realized he had not seen Glenna at work, nor had he planned the picnic menu for Sunday. After his supper, he sat down to plan the food, but could not seem to settle down to thinking about it. His thoughts revolved around Glenna, and then drifted to Kathy. Mentally he tried to compare them. Glenna seemed so much more vivacious, liked doing lots of things, and was witty and fun. But Kathy was fun also, in a different way. She had a nice family, who were relaxed and seemed to enjoy more sophisticated social activities. They enjoyed classical music. But Kathy remained an enigma.

Of course, he had not had the opportunity to talk as much with Kathy as with Glenna. Perhaps his perceptions were not accurate. He realized Kathy intrigued him, and he wanted to know more about her. Greg tired of his stewing, and decided to do the grocery shopping he needed to do.

He walked to the shopping center where many of the stores stayed open late to accommodate working people. It was always invigorating for him to be out among other people, and see the activity. The little grocery store had a wide enough variety of foodstuffs to satisfy Greg, and he collected several items for the week end, including a can of tuna and some pickle relish. After paying for his purchases, he walked slowly back to his apartment enjoying the night air, following well lighted pathways, and passing others who were out on errands or just relaxing having fun. While stowing his purchases away when he arrived home, he finished planning the week end picnic. Relieved of that concern, he fell into bed, and was asleep in only a few minutes.

Thursday followed the pattern of the usual day with one exception. In the afternoon, Greg was in the machine shop checking on some parts, when he decided to look at the processing of the Maxie compressor blades. He wandered over to a large programmable shaper which was providing the final correct curves and angles to each blade. As he watched the process of a blade being formed, the machine operator turned and spoke to him. "Hi Greg, how are you doing?"

Greg looked up, and to his astonishment saw Jack Clark. He recalled him immediately as his traveling companion on the VAC train when they arrived in town. He was the young fellow with all the maps who was coming to see his cousins. "Jack!" he said in surprise, "What are you doing here? I thought you were only going to be visiting. How do you happen to be working at PCI?"

Jack smiled, "It's not a long story. I was in town only a week when I applied for a job here. It happened that my machine shop training in high school was exactly what they wanted. I took a short apprenticeship program, and was assigned to this machine. That is, I'm on this one for a while. I

guess I'll be moved around so I learn all of them eventually.”

“That's great,” Greg replied with enthusiasm, “I'm pleased for you. That means you've decided to stay in Springhill then?”

“Yes, I like it a lot. It sure is different from home, but I'm having a good time. My cousins have been a big help. They're part of the reason I'm staying also.”

“Well, I'll be glad to know you're here. I'll be putting my share of work in here to keep you busy.”

“Yes,” answered Jack, “I saw your name on the drawings, and figured I'd see you eventually. I guess this is a pretty fancy new gadget you're working on.”

“Yes, it is. It's a completely new design.” Then he asked, “Has anyone told you about it?”

“No.”

“Then maybe you would like to know. It's for the new VAC trains which they will be building on some of the longer new routes. These compressors will mean a lot of business for us, and will be the standard in years to come. I'm very excited to be working on this particular compressor, and be involved with the whole project.”

“Well, you can be sure the blades will be right. I'm watching my machine very closely.”

“I appreciate that very much. These first models are to be used for testing, and are very important.”

“I'll be even more careful, now that I know what I'm working on. Thanks, Greg.” Greg returned to his desk which continually accumulated paper work. As he sorted through the pile, he came across a note from Dick Walters. It was a request for him to visit again on Monday to review the current status of Maxie, and recheck the parameters for the controls he was working on.

Greg went to Hap's desk, and found him absorbed in a problem on another of his projects. When he broached the subject of a trip to Salem, Hap hesitated a moment, then said, “Why don't you go alone? I'm sure you can handle it, and I'm a little involved for the next few days. Check with Bill, but I think he will agree.”

Greg wandered into Bill's office, and found it was one of the few times Bill was there, and not busy. When he explained that Dick wanted a current review, but Hap couldn't go, Bill did not hesitate. “Certainly, you go right ahead. It's important to maintain good communication. Have Carole make

arrangements for you. Just be sure to report back afterwards on any changes or problems.”

The next step was to talk to Carole. Carole took quick trips in stride. She had been making reservations and getting tickets, for many years in the engineering group, and it came as second nature to her. Although she would not admit it, Carole had a maternal feeling towards the people in “her” department, and did all she could to make the office run smoothly. It was her way of participating in the wonderful developments which were produced there. She was pleased to see persons such as Greg come along, and watch them grow professionally. Carole enjoyed her work, and had refused moving to other jobs many times.

When Greg arrived back at his desk, Harvey was there waiting for him. “What's up, Harvey?” was Greg's greeting.

“I just wanted you to know we are getting enough parts, that we could begin some construction next week. At the rate we're going, we may be into some testing within the month.”

“That's great,” replied Greg, “but keep in mind the most important aspect is accuracy not speed. Just be sure all the parts are right before we try to put them together.”

“So far they have all been very good, and I'll be sure they stay that way, but I think we had better start reserving some test chamber time to be sure of space when we need it.”

“I agree,” answered Greg. “In fact, I have space on a test chamber beginning in two weeks, so we can build the compressor in place on the chamber, and the lab supervisor will let us keep the facility as long as we need it. While you're here, I want to tell you I'll be gone Monday. That shouldn't be any problem for you though. I'm sure you can handle anything that might come up, plus Hap will be around, if you really need help.” Harvey and Greg talked a while longer, and when they finished it was quitting time.

On Friday, Greg spent some time preparing for his Monday trip. He had decided to leave directly from home, and get to Salem early. He went over some drawings with Paula, and the rest of the day got lost in trivia. Suddenly it was Friday afternoon, and he had not seen Glenna all week. He dialed the now familiar number, and shortly a soft voice answered. “Hi,” Greg greeted her, “I just wanted to be sure you knew I was still alive, and looking forward to Sunday.”

“Ah, at last,” came the falsely relieved response, “I was afraid you had forgotten all about me.”

“Hardly likely,” replied Greg, “It's just that I've devoted the week to my first love, the Maxie compressor. You'll have to accept that, but now comes the week end, and I have time to think of other interests.”

“What other interests are there? Is there something I should know?” Greg hesitated a moment. Glenna's question had surprised him, and he thought about Kathy. It was only a brief pause, then Greg continued, “The important interest is, do you have any special request for the picnic Sunday? It is mostly planned, but you still might influence the menu a little.”

“Oh, the only thing I would like special is Baked Alaska. Can that be arranged?”

“It had been considered, but the equipment would be too cumbersome, and I eliminated it. Sorry.”

“Well then, I'll go along with whatever is provided. Do you want me to come to your place first? That would save backtracking from my house to the train station, and save some carrying also.”

Greg welcomed the idea. It was certainly more efficient, and would save him some trouble. “Yes, that would be very nice. I appreciate the suggestion. Will you be at my apartment about nine then?”

“Sure!”

“Great. See you Sunday.”

The rest of the afternoon was spent in tidying up loose ends in preparation for his Monday trip. As he did so he thought, “I forgot to tell Glenna about going to Salem Monday. I'll have to remember to tell her.” At last he had everything he needed stuffed into a briefcase, and was ready to leave work for the week end just as everyone else was leaving. For once, he didn't work late.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

As Greg did his errands Saturday, he kept an eye on the weather. It was cloudy, but rain was not predicted. However, he realized there was no control over the weather, and it might change at any time. Saturday evening still looked good, and he hoped for the best. Sunday he arose early, and was pleased to see the sun rising into a clear sky. He finished packing the picnic items, and collected his equipment in preparation for the outing of the day.

Promptly at 9AM, there was a knock on the door. Glenna was dressed in slacks, and had on a light jacket. She was also wearing a sturdy pair of shoes, which Greg had not seen before.

“Hi, all set?” was her greeting.

“Hi,” returned Greg, “You look very much the hiker. I expect I will see yet another side of your personality today.”

“Perhaps you will. I have to reveal my true self slowly, or you might be overwhelmed. You're looking rugged yourself. Maybe we'll end up being overdressed, the hills aren't that steep.”

“Well, as pa used to say, ‘Better safe than sorry.’ Let me get into this backpack, and we can go.” The trip to the station and then to the park was becoming routine. They talked of inconsequential topics, but enjoyed the ride, and were pleased to see the weather continued to be sunny and clear. When they entered Chalmers Park, they headed immediately for the far end, away from the rest of the activity areas. There were several trails off the main path, and they selected a trail which looked less traveled than the others. Only one other couple had been heading to the area, but they had gone up the main trail. After only a few minutes of hiking, they felt isolated, and had the feeling of being the only people in a wilderness area. The trail lead them slowly upwards towards the top of what was actually a small mountain.

Twenty minutes of hiking with not much talking brought them to a small clearing. By then, they were both ready to take a rest. As they sat in the grass, Greg asked, “What do you think? Are we about a third of the way up?”

“No, I'd say only about a quarter, if I remember correctly from the last time I was here.”

“Do you come here often?”

“Not too often,” replied Glenna, “I had no one to come with, and Uncle Tom didn't like me to come alone. I did anyway sometimes, just to be rebellious.”

“Didn't you have friends from school who were interested in walking with you?”

“Aunt Emma and Uncle Tom didn't approve of most of the kids I knew, and the kids didn't like to come to our house because of that. It limited my acquaintances.”

“That's too bad. I didn't have that problem. My folks seemed to like most of my friends.”

Feeling rested, they resumed their climb. The trail had become a bit steeper, and they traveled more slowly. They continued steadily for almost three quarters of an hour, when they arrived at an open area surrounding a small pond. “Hey,” exclaimed Greg, “This would be a great place for lunch.”

“No you don't,” replied Glenna, “It's too early to eat yet. You need to build up more of an appetite.”

“Well, I have a suggestion. Why don't we leave the pack here, and just take some water with us to the top. That will make the climbing easier, and we can leave the pack in the shade where it will keep cool.”

“That sounds like a reasonable plan. Let me help you get it off.”

They sat to rest a while before continuing, and Greg got out a small container of water to take with them. The sun shone brightly on the pond which was mirror smooth. No breezes penetrated the little glen to disturb the perfect beauty of the reflections in the water. “How much further to the top?” asked Greg.

“Oh, half or three quarters of an hour, depending on how fast we go.”

“Okay, let's go.” Greg set off again leading along the trail which now was only wide enough to walk single file. They advanced silently, although they disturbed the birds as they progressed up the hill. The birds would stop singing, and fly away as the hikers passed by their trees. Still, Greg and Glenna had glimpses of many different song birds as they walked along. It seemed like no more than a half an hour, when they came out into a bare spot, and climbed only a little farther to the top. With a sigh of relief, they both sat down on the edge of a large rock, and surveyed the view. In the distance they could see some of the city of Springhill, although most of the scene was simply trees. Looking straight down the hill, they could see part of the little pond where they had left the lunch pack several hundred feet below. They sat silently a long time recovering their breath, and absorbing the feeling of nature around them.

Greg spoke first. “Congratulations, we made it.”

Glenna smiled. “It feels great though, doesn't it? Here we are on top of the mountain, and we can survey all our domain.”

“Yes, though it's too bad the domain doesn't recognize our ownership.”

They reclined in the sun, and enjoyed the slight breeze which caressed them and kept them cool. Faint sounds drifted up to them from below, but they were essentially alone, and far away from the rest of the world in time, and distance, and shielded from its intrusion by thousands of trees. Time passed, but they floated lightly in their own existence, free from worries or everyday concerns. It was as though they had separated from the world, and they moved in a different realm completely independent of the rest of the universe. They sensed the essence of their being, which was totally isolated from the physical world, and detached from their bodies. It was a pleasant, relaxing feeling which had a rejuvenating quality. It felt as though they were batteries, and were on the highest charging rate. Each was reluctant to break the spell, but eventually it was necessary. Greg spoke first. “I just realized, it's lunch time. I'm hungry, and lunch is at least a half an hour below us.”

“Whose idea was it to leave it down there?”

Greg chuckled, “Who encouraged me to do it?”

Glenna turned toward Greg, “I don't want to go down. Can't we stay here forever?”

“If we stay here very long, we'll starve, and then it will be forever. Here, I'll split the water with you. Then we can last a little longer.” They shared the water container, then Glenna stood up, and scanned the horizon. There were several other small mountains nearby of equal height, or perhaps a little higher.

“Look at all the other hills that need to be conquered. We have a lot to do. I guess we'll just have to go down so we can conquer another hill another day.”

“Good thinking,” replied Greg. “Let's go.” The trip down was easier, and seemed to take only a few minutes. They were soon digging into the backpack, and setting out Greg's picnic. He enumerated the items as he produced them from the inside of the pack. Tuna sandwiches, Waldorf salad, sliced cucumber, apples, cookies, salted nuts, and, of course, the world's second best iced tea, whereupon he produced an insulated container and two cups.

“Well,” exclaimed Glenna, “I think I've been outdone. It sounds and looks wonderful.”

Conversation came to a halt as they enjoyed the food under the shade of a large tree. They enjoyed all the good picnic, and washed it down with more iced tea. After satisfying their hunger, they lay back in the grass, and again surrendered themselves to the bosom of the good earth. After several minutes Glenna asked,

“How did you make the sandwiches. They were excellent.”

Greg felt pleased to be asked his gourmet tricks, “Nothing unusual, I just added a little pickle relish to the tuna. I made them this morning, so the lettuce didn't have very long to wilt. But I'm not going to tell you all my secrets. A fellow has to keep a few things to himself.”

The conversation shifted to work, then back to themselves, and childhood experiences. They sat in the secluded glen next to the pond, and talked of many things. Most were inconsequential, but all of them were of mutual interest. They became absorbed with each other, and the time passed rapidly. The afternoon sun slipped lower, but hotter in the sky. Glenna looked at Greg, and sighed,

“I'm hot. That water looks so inviting, I wish I had my swim suit.”

“I agree,” he responded, “Next time we'll have to think to bring them.”

After a few moments of silence, she stood up, and exclaimed, “I don't want to wait till next time, I'm going now.”

To Greg's amazement, in less than a minute she was out of her clothes, and walking to the water. It took Greg a minute more to strip and follow her into the pond. They swam across and back several times, then just sat low in the water to enjoy its freshness for a while. Glenna started floating on her back, and pushed herself along slowly with her hands. Greg could not avoid enjoying her beauty. After several minutes Glenna shook the water from her hair, and started to get out. Greg followed along.

On shore they wiped their bodies with their hands in an attempt to dry off. As Greg did so, he became acutely aware he was beginning to have an erection. “Glenna.” Glenna turned to look at him as he stood fully exposed. Greg said quietly, “I - I want you.”

Glenna replied softly, “Oh Greg, I'm just not ready to do that yet.” A moment of silence followed, as Greg felt himself become more and more aroused. “I know what we can do though,” she continued. And she did. Greg had never felt himself so completely loved, or so marvelously manipulated. Glenna's fingers were soft, smooth, gentle, and very exciting. She was deft and considerate in providing the release Greg needed, and concentrated completely on satisfying that need. For a few intense minutes, she was all that burned in his mind. When he was through, Glenna held him close as he rested. Then she rolled onto her back next to him, put his hand on her stomach, and with an impish smile whispered, “Now it's my turn.” Greg was amazed at how warmly and eagerly she accepted his caressing. Her obvious enjoyment exhilarated him also. He was pleased at the way she gave herself to the thrills his hands offered.

At the end she sighed, “Oh, Greg,” and hugged him very tightly. Then they both relaxed, and lay still. They were both dry by the time they started to dress. The sun now was getting very low in the sky, and they would have to hurry down the hill, and head for home. It was dusk when they arrived back at the interurban station and caught the train back to the city.

While walking from the station to Glenna's home, Greg had an opportunity to ask, “Where did you learn about little boys and masturbation?”

Glenna grinned, “I'm a nurse, remember?” then after a moment added, “No, there is more. My aunt and uncle always made me go to church and do the activities the church had for the kids. Once when I was about thirteen my best friend and I were on a Sunday school picnic in the country. There were these two boys, who were sort of the teacher's pets, and could get away with anything. They led my friend and me away from the group, while the group was busy with a game. We went behind an old ramshackle shed. There in the deep grass they had us kneel down and they knelt opposite us. Without any warning, they pulled down their pants to show us themselves, then started masturbating. I was embarrassed, but my friend was fascinated. I started to leave, but the boys threatened to yell, and then tell the others that we made them do it.

“I didn't know what to do, I was frightened and confused, so I stayed. When they were through, they wanted us to ‘do something too.’ That's when

we both ran back to the group. I never told anyone about it until now.”

Greg was silent a moment, then replied gently, “That must have been very upsetting for you. What happened after that?”

“That's when I started not going to church as much, and finally quit altogether. I didn't understand how kids who were supposed to be so good, and religious, and claim to be committed to God or Jesus or something like that, could do such a weird thing to my friend and me. Three years later my friend got pregnant, and dropped out of school. To this day, I have never seen her again.”

By now, Glenna had soft tears streaming down her face. Greg stopped and embraced her for a few moments. They stood in the cool of the evening in a dark section of the walkway. Greg was uncommonly aware of the warmth of her body, and the life forces of her seemed to pulse under his embrace. Slowly Glenna regained her composure, and dried her eyes.

They continued on in silence, until they had almost reached Glenna's house. Then Greg spoke softly, “I'm sorry you had such an upsetting experience. I didn't mean to dig up anything so uncomfortable for you, but I appreciate your telling me. I feel a lot closer to you now, because of what you did for me --- for what we did for each other by the pond, and for what you have told me.” Without a further word he kissed her goodnight softly, and turned to go.

“Greg,” He stopped. “I would never have told anyone else, but I'm glad I told you about what happened. I feel better for letting you know. Bye, bye.”

Greg smiled. "Thanks Glenna, Goodnight," he replied.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Monday morning seemed to arrive earlier than usual. After arising, washing, and a quick breakfast, Greg was off to the station for the train to Salem. He carried his brief case, and a small overnight satchel. His plans were to return again by night, but he decided it was best to be prepared, if it became necessary to stay over until Tuesday. As the train hurried along, his thoughts wandered from work to Glenna to Kathy, and back to work again. He felt very comfortable going off alone to represent his department and the Maxie project. He felt less comfortable when he thought about Glenna and Kathy.

He was not sure of his feelings toward each of them, or which interested him the most. It was a question which would not be easily answered. He was soon in Salem, and found his way to Dick's office. As he entered, he saw Dick standing by one of the big windows looking into the distance. He seemed to be deep in thought, and Greg waited a moment before disturbing him. Dick was so absorbed, Greg had to speak to attract his attention, “My heart's in the highland. My heart is not here. My heart's in the highland a-chasing the deer.”

Dick spun around with a grin on his face. “You've caught me red handed, or should I say red faced? I never tire of the view. It always provides a brief respite from work, and yes, I'd rather be out there, but not necessarily chasing deer.”

“Has Monday morning gone so badly already?”

“Not really, but I do have a problem. I've learned the motor we want to use on Maxie won't be produced for at least a year, and our second choice doesn't give us much leeway in capacity. What should we do?”

Without hesitating, Greg replied, “Why not design the housing to adapt to them both. Then we can use whichever is available. How does that affect your control unit?”

“The control is easily modified, but will Bill put up with the added expense of a more complicated housing?”

“Maybe it won't have to be more expensive. Let's look.”

The two were soon deeply involved with drawings and specifications. They dealt with the motor problem and several other minor problems as the morning passed by. Before lunch time, they had resolved all the current issues, and Greg had advised Dick on the status of production of the prototypes and when testing might begin.

Finding themselves with a little extra time, Greg asked, “Could you tell me more of the details of the control system and how it functions. So far, all I know are the motor characteristics you feed into it.”

“Sure, I'm always proud to show off and explain our product. Here,” he said, picking up a gray metal box from his desk, “it all fits in a cabinet about this size. That is, the brain is about this size. There are larger panels for switches and relays to control the various functions. One of these installations is located at the end of each block of the tunnel where your compressor, the tunnel doors, and the bleed valves are located. As you know, there are pressure sensors at various points along the tunnel. There are also sensors to detect the train speed and location. The control then decides when to open tunnel doors in front of the advancing train, when to start each compressor to evacuate its section of the tunnel, when to shut the compressor down, and when and how much to open the bleed valves behind the train to control the speed. These controls are all connected to each other and to a regional central office which controls all the sections of the tunnel in that area.”

“That's fascinating,” commented Greg, “but isn't it a problem when one of the controls fails?”

“Good question, but they don't fail very often. They are regularly tested and replaced. However, it's a completely redundant system. Early designs like

this had problems such that if one unit failed, the whole system shut down. We have designed this however, so when a single control fails, it automatically takes itself out of the system and the next control takes over. In the unlikely event that more than one control fails, the next one in line can handle the whole job. And in a catastrophic situation where they all fail, the system automatically opens all doors and bleed valves, and the train coasts to a stop at normal atmospheric pressure.”

“That's a mighty smart little box," said Greg, admiringly.

“Yes, but that is only part of the wonder of the train. The vehicles themselves are amazing devices. People riding them don't realize all the magnificent features built into the cars of the train.”

“Well, I've always been impressed with how smooth the ride is. The running gear must be well designed and well built.”

“Yes, it is,” added Dick, “but of course, that is in use only during the normal pressure operation of the train outside the tunnel, running on the electric motors.”

Greg looked at him questioningly.

“The train runs completely on the rails only when it is outside the tunnel with nothing else to support it. When the train is in the tunnel, it is partly floating on the air bleeding by it, and not resting entirely on the running gear. There is reduced load on the wheels, and they make contact with the rails mostly to keep the car oriented vertically.”

As soon as Dick described the way the train operated, it was obvious to Greg. He had not thought about it previously, but it certainly made sense.

“That is why the smooth ride has more to do with the design and quality of the seals of the train to the tunnel, than with the running gear of the cars,” continued Dick.

“That's interesting. The VAC Company must have a lot of smart engineers working on their system,” remarked Greg. “But getting back to your gray box, how can you adapt the control to accommodate two different motors?”

“It's simple enough. I put in an extra program to measure some distinctive characteristic of each motor, then it tells itself which motor it is working with, and adjusts the operation accordingly.”

“That sounds simple. I'm sure it gets complicated though.”

“Yes, we do have our problems, but we can handle them.” Dick looked at his watch, and asked, “How about some lunch? We've done all we can here for now.”

“Sounds good to me,” replied Greg, “Can we go to your good little cafe again?”

“Certainly,” was the reply. The two set off towards the restaurant, engaging in small talk as they walked. Lunch was uneventful, and they used the opportunity to learn more about each other. Dick had spent his entire career with PCI, and extolled the virtues of the company to Greg. Then he asked, “I meant to inquire before, but there didn't seem to be an appropriate time. How did your meeting with Dr. Morgan go the last time you were here? How did you get along with the old quack?”

Greg chuckled. “I got along well, as long as I did what he wanted.”

“Which was?”

“He's into genetics, and he wanted me to have a genetic profile made.” Greg avoided going into detail about all that had transpired. “As a matter of fact, if we have nothing else to do the rest of the day, I might like to see him again, and learn how I turned out.”

“There's no problem with that. We've covered everything we need to for now, so you're free to see him or start back to Springhill, whatever is your pleasure.”

“I think I'll try to spend a little time with him. There are several trains later in the day, so there is no difficulty in returning when I want to.”

“I've heard a little about what old Doc Morgan is up to. Doesn't he have the idea we're in deep trouble because we're encouraging weaknesses in people?”

“Yes, it's something along that line. I'm not sure I buy all that he says though.”

“I don't buy any of it,” continued Dick. “I think the medical profession has done a marvelous job of keeping us alive, and eliminating illnesses. I don't understand how he can say we're in trouble. They seem to be able to handle all sorts of diseases these days. Each generation is different anyway. People are constantly changing, and you can't control that. For my money, I'm happy with what doctors are doing, and we should just stand back and let them do it.”

Greg recognized Dick seemed to have a very definite position. He wondered exactly how much Dick understood of what Dr. Morgan was trying to accomplish. He almost felt as though he should defend the doctor, but then reconsidered. He probably wouldn't be able to change Dick's thinking, and

may just alienate him.

“I do agree, the doctors do wonderful things these days,” answered Greg, “but I'm interested in what Dr. Morgan says, too. I believe in considering all aspects of a situation.”

“Well, I'll let you young fellows consider it.” Dick smiled. “I have a lot of other interests to occupy my efforts.”

When they returned to the office, a short phone call confirmed that Dr. Morgan was available. Greg collected his papers, and arranged with Dick to return in about three weeks for another review.

“Now don't let the old doctor confuse you,” was Dick's parting remark.

“I'll be careful,” replied Greg. “See you in three weeks.” He made his way to the infirmary, and within a few minutes was entering Dr. Morgan's office.

“Ah, Mister Adamski, I am so glad to see you. Please have a seat.” The doctor peered at Greg through his glasses perched precariously on his nose. “I will not ask how you are, because I know you are very well. You see? I have your records here. I took the liberty of acquiring a copy after the clinic completed their tests.”

Greg found himself again mildly amused at the doctor's mannerisms. “So how did I turn out? Do I qualify to have children?”

“Ah, most assuredly. Your genetic profile is everything I had hoped it would be. But we must be careful to see you find an equally qualified partner.”

“Whoa, there!” was Greg's immediate response, “I have some ideas of my own along those lines. I'm already interested in two potential ‘partners,’ and I don't think I can handle any more.”

“Ah yes, I keep forgetting. You young people believe you must control your own destiny. How sad. It would be better if you would take a broader view, and be willing to accept some guidance. However, I may, perhaps, still be of some help. Who are these young ladies?”

“As a matter of fact, one of them lives here in Salem, the other is in Springhill.”

“But what are their names?” insisted Dr. Morgan. Greg obliged the doctor by telling about Glenna and Kathy, and providing a little background on each of them.

“But I'm sure your wouldn't have any information on Glenna. I don't think she has ever had any interest in this sort of thing.”

Dr. Morgan turned to a file, and fingered through it, peering down through his glasses intently. This absorbed him for several minutes.

“Yes, I see you are right, Mr. Adamski. I have nothing about that young lady, but we do have a file on a Kathy Smith. In fact, I see she works at the Genetic Research Clinic. Did you by chance meet her there?” Greg had prepared himself for this question, and found it easy to answer. “Well, I met her by chance, but it was not there. I didn't learn that she worked there until later. I happened to come along when she had some bicycle problems, and was able to help her. That is how we became acquainted.”

Dr. Morgan fell silent, and leafed through the file in his hands. For several minutes he read from it, then turned and read from Greg's file. He went from one to the other as he was evidently comparing them. This continued until Greg became restless, but Dr. Morgan continued his study of the two files. After what seemed to Greg to be an extremely long time, the doctor looked up with an obvious smile on his face. “I am so pleased you ‘happened’ to meet this particular young lady. Judging from your genetics, I believe I would be most impressed by your offspring. Do you think this one, ah, Kathy Smith, will be the lucky person in your quest for a partner?”

Greg laughed, “Well, who knows? I'm having too much fun looking just now, to want to make that decision. I really don't know much about her, and I have no idea whether she would even be interested in me. In any case, I'm in no hurry. I'm curious about how you decided that we would be compatible, however. You seem to have a lot of information there, but how can you tell just from your files that we would be so well suited?”

“Ah, I see your education does indeed have some inadequacies after all. Yes, I must tell you. Late in the Twentieth Century an extensive project was pursued to identify all the components of the human chromosomes. All the genes were to be identified, and their functions determined. This cataloging was called the Genome project, and took many years. Because of the careful hard work of many dedicated persons, we in the medical profession now have a tool and a guide to heredity traits in humans. I have made a study of this in great detail, and by comparing genetic profiles can predict any problems with inherited diseases, and even form a general idea of the kinds of offspring that may occur between two persons. Naturally, this is very useful in helping persons who are interested in the propagation of the best possible future generations, such as yourself.”

Greg smiled inwardly. Dr. Morgan's blatant attempt to involve him further in the efforts of improving the genetic make-up of the human race amused him. “So what would my children look like?” asked Greg. He was somewhat intrigued, and wanted to show a polite interest in the efforts of Dr. Morgan.

“No, I cannot tell you exactly. All I can say is they would be healthy, free of any serious inherited diseases, and would on a probability basis look mostly like you. There could be many exceptions, of course.”

Greg sat and quietly pondered the good doctor's comments. “So Kathy would make a good ‘partner’. But would she be as much fun as Glenna? What about personality? What about common interests?” It occurred to Greg, there was obviously more to this than just genes. He knew Glenna fairly

well. Perhaps it would be worthwhile learning more about Kathy, and how he might feel about her. If he wanted to become serious about girls, he owed it to himself to make the best possible choice. To do that, he needed the greatest possible amount of information.

“You are deep in thought, Mr. Adamski. Does something trouble you?” Doctor Morgan was looking at him intently.

“No, it doesn't trouble me, but I certainly am interested in everything you have told me. I will decide for myself though, at any time I need to make a decision about ‘partners’.”

Doctor Morgan smiled, “Yes, I understand. You are a very independent person That is good for you. It is less good for this old doctor, who would like to control your life. May I ask you however, when you do have a decision about a young lady, would you bring her in for a genetic profile and counseling for both of you? It would make me so happy.”

Greg could not refuse. “I'll certainly try to bring her, whoever she may be, for your evaluation. I can't promise though. She may be as independent as I am.”

As Greg left, Doctor Morgan's final comment made a deep impression. It was something he would remember a long time. “Independence is one quality we may be required to relinquish sometime in the future in one way or another. Goodbye Mr. Adamski. I wish you all luck and success.”

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Greg left Doctor Morgan's office only minutes before the plant closed for the day, and he became caught up in the crowd of hurrying people. He was undecided what to do, but feeling some hunger pangs turned into a small restaurant on the main street of Salem. After ordering a light supper, he sat considering his options. There was a train back to Springhill in about an hour, or there was one more, late in the evening. He thought about all Doctor Morgan had discussed. Then he thought about Glenna and Kathy. What should he do? What did he want to do? He was confused. He needed more information. Would it be possible to see Kathy again? “Sure! why not,” he said to himself. There's plenty of time. He ate quickly, and after leaving the restaurant, hurried to a public telephone booth he had noticed in the train station. In only a minute he had the number, and dialed it.

He heard the phone ring, and a familiar voice answered, “Hello”

“Hello, Kathy? This is Greg Adamski. I'm in town for business, but I'm all done for the day, and wondered whether I might come out to talk with you a while.”

There was a pause at the other end of the line. Then, “Well, I don't know. My folks are out, and I had sort of a long day. I'm tired.”

“I've been wondering about you, and how you are doing in your new job. Have you had any more trouble with the bicycle?”

“Oh, things are all right.”

Greg thought she did not sound convincing. “I need some relaxation, and I'd like to just go for a walk with you and talk some. Wouldn't that be okay?” he continued.

“Well, I guess so,” she answered, “but I don't want to stay up late.”

“I can't stay late. I have to catch the evening train back to Springhill. I'll be there in a few minutes.”

Normally, Greg would have walked to Kathy's house, but he felt a little constrained by the clock, and wanted to spend the most time possible with her. He elected to hail an Electricab standing at the station cab stand. In a few minutes he was ringing Kathy's doorbell. When the door opened, Greg was immediately impressed that Kathy looked a lot different than he remembered her. She looked sad and downcast. She greeted him very quietly, and almost without interest.

“Shall we walk around the lake,” she asked, “It's really not far, and there is a good path all the way around.” Greg agreed, and they set out. The first few minutes were passed in silence. Kathy did not seem inclined to talk, and Greg hesitated to begin prying into her thoughts. After they reached the edge of the small lake, and started around, Greg felt compelled to say something.

“You seem so sad, Kathy. Is any thing wrong? Can I help you in any way?”

“You are always wanting to help me. You've helped me enough. I don't know what you could do anyway. Things are sort of a mess.”

“Well, I'd be glad to do what I can. What sort of a mess do you have.”

Kathy sighed. “Well” she started, then sighed again. That was followed by silence for several minutes. Then she began again, “Well, I quit my job today.” Suddenly she burst out in tears, and Greg put his arms around her to comfort her as she sobbed on his shoulder. He was surprised by the unexpected emotional reaction, but held her softly as she cried. She felt small and very vulnerable in his arms. She leaned against him as though looking for protection. After a while, she slowly subsided and was quiet again.

“I'm sorry, Kathy,” Greg sympathized, “What caused you to do that?”

“Oh, it's a mess. I'm a mess,” She stopped. “I shouldn't even be talking to you, but I guess it doesn't matter now.”

“Do you mean because I was one of your clients?” he asked.

“Yes, but that's just a little part of it. There's a lot more to it than that. I suppose I should tell you everything. I've got to tell someone, or I'll explode.”

“Haven't you told your parents?”

“No, not yet. I couldn't find the opportunity after work, and then they went out.” They began walking again, and Kathy started to explain. “You remember I said I was going to start a new job the day after - after I met you, and I would be starting counseling to put my previous - - job - sort of in perspective. Well I did that, but I started finding out things about myself in counseling, and learned that maybe I was doing things for all the wrong reasons. Suddenly, I couldn't stand nursing anymore. I wanted to quit, but I didn't know what else I could do, so I stayed on working. I came to realize I needed a lot of help, a lot of counseling, and I didn't really want to be a nurse at all. Finally, today, I just had to do something, so I quit. I wanted to talk to Mom about it, but there hasn't been time yet. Oh Greg,” she looked up pleadingly, “What can I do? What will I do?”

She started crying again and Greg held her close. He rocked her gently in his arms until she regained her composure. “I don't know what you'll do, Kathy. I can't tell you what to do, but I know eventually things will work out. You'll be able to decide on what is best for you, and there will be opportunities for you.”

He tried to sound reassuring, although there was no way he could be sure himself that ‘things’ would ‘work out’ someday for her. She sighed, and they turned to continue walking. She reached out and took his hand as they continued along. There was a pleasant cool breeze from the lake, and as they walked it seemed to make Kathy feel better. Her spirits became more buoyant, and she even asked about Greg's project. He explained how far it had progressed, and that they would soon be doing some testing. She seemed to take a real interest in his explanations, and reflected a little of his enthusiasm. Soon however, they came back to their starting point, and turned to return to Kathy's house.

“I promised not to keep you up late, so I had better start back,” offered Greg. “Besides, I have a train to catch, and I'll be arriving home late myself.”

As they approached her door, Kathy stopped, and looked at Greg with almost a smile on her face. “Thank you for coming and forcing yourself on me mister Adamski. I think you did me a lot of good. I'm surprised you were willing to put up with me. I must have looked like a real drag when you first arrived. I apologize.”

Greg smiled back at her. “No apology necessary. I'm glad if you are feeling better. I do enjoy your company, and I'll be checking up on you again. Would you consider dinner with me the next time I'm here?”

“I think I would be open to that, but who knows what will happen, or what I'll be doing by then. I know I'll have some plan of action though. You have really have made me feel a lot better. How did you do that?”

“I'll not tell. It's a professional secret.”

“Oh, Greg,” replied Kathy, “I just happened to think. After you left last time, Dad wondered whether you knew his sister, my Aunt Sylvia, who works at the PCI plant in Springhill. She's in administration or something. I told him it was unlikely, since it is such a big place, but he wanted to know.”

Greg felt pleased as he explained, “As a matter of fact, she was one of the first persons I met there. She welcomed me to the company, and helped me fill in a lot of forms. I enjoyed meeting her. She seems like a very nice person.”

“Really? I'm amazed, but I'm glad you met her. She's my favorite Aunt.” adding impishly, “And my only one.”

The street lights were beginning to come on, and Greg checked his watch. “I need to get back to the station. May I call a cab on your phone?”

“Certainly, come on in.”

As they waited for the cab, Kathy again tried to express her thanks to Greg. “I was feeling so down when you called, and feel so much better now, I'm in your debt even more than before. Someday I'll have to do something to get even. Don't you ever have troubles?”

“Oh, sometimes. At least, now I'll know where to turn when my world comes crashing down. How are you at correcting engineering mistakes?”

Kathy laughed, “I don't know. I never tried, but I think you would be in serious trouble, if I ever did try to help.”

Greg noticed the Electricab stop in front of the house, but before leaving, he put his arms around Kathy. She did not resist as he held her close, and gently laid a kiss on her lips. “Goodbye, Kathy”

“Bye, bye, Greg. Have a good trip.”

He arrived back at the station in plenty of time to catch the train, and on boarding, settled himself into a seat by a window. There was little to see except lights flashing by, but he wanted to think rather than watch scenery. It had been a full day. Since starting from home this morning, he had solved some problems on the Maxie project, had been further educated on the operation of the VAC trains, had an interesting interview with doctor Morgan, and last but not least, had seen Kathy and become better acquainted with her. Dr. Morgan seemed to think she would be a good “partner” for him. He wished he had more experience with her to be able to judge for himself. He knew Glenna much better than Kathy. What would Doctor Morgan think of Glenna,

presuming she would be willing to submit to an evaluation? These thoughts chased each other through his mind the whole trip home. He was relieved to see the lights of Springhill come into view, and anticipated arriving home and going to bed.

CHAPTER TWENTY

Tuesday morning arrived bright and clear. It was certainly much clearer than Greg's brain after his late homecoming and short night, but he managed to dress, eat, and arrive at work on time. He had a busy schedule beginning with reviewing his trip with Bill and Hap, and getting Bill's approval of the changes Greg and Dick had considered necessary. Then it was off to the drafting room to show the changes to Paula, and on to the shop to find Harvey and review the progress of the prototypes. By noon he felt he was back in control of his work, and would have time for some calculations he wanted to do. As he walked into the lunch room, he noticed Glenna on the far side. Their Sunday experience immediately popped into his mind. Would that now forever be the case when he saw her? Would he in his mind again be by a mountain pond any time he was with her, and be reliving their intimacy?

After picking up a sandwich and a drink, he headed for her table. "Hi hiker," he greeted her.

She smiled up at him, and replied, "Hi yourself. How was your trip?"

"Everything I expected it to be, and a few things I didn't," he quipped back at her, "How was a whole day of work without me?"

"Entirely bearable, but now that you're back --"

Greg smiled. He liked the easy way they fell into a lighthearted exchange with each other. That had to count for something in a relationship. They engaged in small talk and local news as they ate. When they were finished, and leaving the cafeteria, Greg asked, "What about Sunday? Would you like to go biking again?"

"Sure! biking, walking, - swimming?" Glenna answered with an impish expression, "Shall I meet you at your place?"

Greg could not restrain a grin. "That would be fine. About nine?"

"I'll be there, bye, bye."

The rest of the week sped by. Greg kept busy following the accumulation of parts for the Maxie prototypes. The big event was the completion of the

compressor housing, which was then mounted on the test chamber. The rest of the assembly could now begin. Greg began to see the results of his labor, and anticipated having the unit complete and ready for test.

As Greg sat talking with Hap reviewing the progress of Maxie, Greg asked, “Is there anything special I should be doing with respect to the testing? It looks as though we will be ready soon, and I believe I have planned it all, but I want to be sure.”

One of the characteristics Hap liked about Greg was his willingness to ask for guidance when he felt he needed it. This request exemplified that trait, which Hap felt was the trademark of an excellent engineer. He smiled as he began, “Well, have you done the theoretical calculations of the performance, so you can compare the actual results with them? Are you planning full instrumentation of the test set-up? I always feel it is better to have more test points than necessary. Sometimes interesting results turn up. Also, some of the sensors may fail, and it is best to have extra ones to rely on.”

They continued talking at length about the project. Hap was impressed that Greg seemed to have thought of all aspects of the test, but was willing to accept a few minor improvements. As they completed their talk, Greg grinned and added, “Now I know what H. A. is for.” He stopped a moment to note the surprised look on Hap's face, then continued, “It's Helpful Associate.” They both laughed.

Hap replied, as Greg left to return to his work, “You never give up, do you?”

At nine AM Sunday there was a knock on Greg's door. As she entered, Greg noticed Glenna carried a small satchel. “I brought my swim suit, just in case we decide on swimming. I'd also like to add that last week was unusual, and you'd better not expect that sort of thing as a general rule.”

Greg twinkling eyes expressed his feelings as he replied, “I didn't even expect it then, but you do unexpected things. I guess I'll just wait to see what happens, and expect anything and everything or nothing. Shall I bring my swim suit too?”

“Well, there's a marvelous pool at Chalmers we haven't explored yet. Maybe we could bike first, then swim to cool off.”

“Sounds like an excellent plan to me. Give me two minutes to find my suit, and I'll be ready.”

They followed what was becoming a routine. The walk to the station, the ride to the park, then the pursuit of their activity in the park were becoming comfortably automatic. Today was no exception. They arrived at the bike rental and switched from walking to biking with hardly a hesitation. Glenna lead the way to areas they had not explored previously, and they both kept up a constant chatter which seemed to facilitate their progress. In due time they finished their ride, and went searching for lunch. By now Greg knew the paths and layout of the park almost as well as Glenna, and he led her to a small lunch counter near the pool which they had passed many times. The decision to go swimming was a foregone conclusion. As they exited the lunch room they headed for the pool.

The water was refreshing and invigorating. Greg swam the length of the pool several times, then sat to watch Glenna. He thought to himself as he observed her in a scanty tight-fitting swim suit, that he really preferred the way they swam together last week. She was very pretty in the suit, but she was most beautiful without it. His line of thinking began to have unwanted effects, and he turned it off by going back to swimming. The afternoon passed rapidly, and they eventually found themselves meeting outside the bath house, dried and dressed, but not quite ready for the trip home.

“Let’s walk a while.” suggested Greg.

“Are there other options?” returned Glenna. They exchanged smiles, but began slowly following one of the paths. The weather was pleasantly warm, and flowering bushes bordered their walkway. They came to an isolated bench, and sat in silence to enjoy the park surroundings. After several minutes Greg broke the spell,

“What will we do when the weather turns cold. Hiking and swimming aren't on my winter sports list.”

“Well there are always videos, or snowball fights, or even as a last resort, church.” She had a mischievous look that belied her final suggestion.

Greg laughed, knowing her aversion to church going, and the people who go to church. “Those are all good suggestions,” he replied. “As a matter of fact, I know a church you might even like. The atmosphere is very low key, and they don't force anything on you. Actually, they insist one must derive one's own beliefs.”

“Hah! A likely story. I'll bet they tell you what to believe just as everyone else does. People need other persons to agree with them. It makes them feel secure.”

“It's a bet. Are you game to try?”

Glenna felt cornered. “Where is this great place? What is it's name?”

“It's called The Unitarian Universalist Church. There are two of them in town. One on the east side and one on the west. The west side one is closest to us. Shall we try it next Sunday before our outing?”

Glenna appeared very hesitant, “I don't know whether I want to. You know what I think about church people. What makes this different?”

“All the U-U churches I've attended have always been friendly, and accepting. No one tries to tell you what is right or wrong for you, and I've met some interesting people there, also.”

“Aren't I interesting enough?”

Greg was taken aback, “Certainly, but I'm willing to share you with others on the chance we'll meet some more persons we both like and enjoy. It might expand our circle of friends.”

“I'll try it once,” Glenna conceded a little reluctantly, “but if it's not as you say, your name will be mud.”

They arranged their schedule for the following Sunday as they returned to the city. Glenna remained skeptical, and kept asking Greg more of the details of the U-U church. Greg was pleased to tell her all that he knew, and was intrigued that he had piqued her interest.

The week passed in it's usual hectic fashion. More and more parts of Maxie were available, and the sample motors arrived. They were getting closer and closer to being able to run the first tests.

Sunday brought Glenna to Greg's door on time as usual, and they set out for church. “Uncle Tom could hardly believe me, when I said I was going to church today. It seemed to improve his whole personality. He was even pleasant at breakfast. This is practically worth it already.” Glenna seemed to be in an especially happy mood, and it made the day seem brighter and more pleasant to Greg, also. It took only a few minutes to walk to the church, and soon they were entering the building.

They were greeted and handed programs. As they entered the meeting room, some soft music was playing. Finding two seats on the side, they sat and examined their surroundings. The room was not elegant, but was nicely decorated. The seats were comfortable, spaciouly arranged. In a few minutes the service began. The songs were strange to Glenna, but the words were interesting. There was a short, thoughtful talk by the minister about preserving one's identity while still following what the mass of people were doing.

Everyone was invited to stay for coffee and discussion afterward, and Greg and Glenna joined in. As they stood in a corner sipping coffee and noticing several groups in the small crowd carrying on animated discussions, a voice next to them made them turn.

“Hi, Greg. Nice to see you here.”

Greg and Glenna turned to see who was talking. Greg recognized him immediately. “Jack! Jack Clark. Hi.”

Jack continued, “I haven't noticed you here before. Is this your first time to come to church?”

“Yes, it is, but I never expected to see anyone I knew. Do you come here often?”

“Oh I come fairly regularly. I've been a backsliding Unitarian for as long as I remember. I grew up being a U-U.” He turned to his companion who was a very attractive young lady. “Cynthia this is Greg Adamski. I met him on the train when I first came to town, and he is the engineer in charge of the compressor I've been working on. Greg, this is Cynthia Brown, my cousin.”

Greg remembered Jack was coming to town to visit cousins. This one was certainly a good choice. Her face seemed to reflect gentleness and friendliness. “I'm pleased to meet you, Cynthia, and this is my friend, Glenna Johnson who works at PCI, also.”

“I think I remember seeing you when I was hired. Aren't you in the infirmary somewhere?” asked Jack.

“Yes,” replied Glenna, “I'm Doctor Thomas's nurse and receptionist.” The young persons were soon in the midst of their own animated discussion, learning more about each other, and enjoying the interest of other people in themselves. Greg found out that Jack and Cynthia were extremely remote cousins. They went back several generations to common relatives, but the families had lived in the same town for many years and had remained in contact until some of them moved to Springhill. Actually, Greg got the impression Jack and Cynthia were more of a couple than they were cousins.

When Jack and Cynthia learned Greg and Glenna were going canoeing after church, they appeared interested, and Greg invited them to join him and Glenna at Lake Park. “We can get two canoes, and surround the ducks.”

The foursome set off for an afternoon of fun together. They were a convivial group at lunch, and laughed their way over the lake waters. By the end of the afternoon they felt as comfortable as old friends, and parted company with promises to get together again for another outing someday.

Walking home, Greg asked, “Well?”

“Well, what?” returned Glenna.

“Did anyone tell you what to believe today?”

“No,” then silence. After a moment, Glenna turned with a smile, “I guess your name is not mud. Actually, I was very interested in the talk, and I certainly enjoyed the afternoon. How did you know about all this?”

“When I was small my folks took me to a U-U church occasionally. We weren't great church goers, because they were often busy on Sundays. But during the years at school I went once in a while. As I said, it's low key, and no one forces anything on you. You are free to believe as you wish. Do you want to go again sometime?”

“Maybe. Ask me again later.”

The next two weeks went rapidly. During the week, it was Maxie, and concentrate on work. On the weekends, it was Glenna, and concentrate on fun. On a Sunday afternoon Greg reminded Glenna, "I'm going to Salem again tomorrow. This will be the final check with Dick before we begin testing."

"I'll manage without you somehow," Glenna answered lightly, then, looking more serious, "I will miss you, though."

"Yes, I'll miss you, too." As they walked on in silence to Glenna's house, Greg reflected on their relationship. It was getting to be a serious thing, almost excluding all other activity. Glenna was more fun than anyone he had ever known, but was this what he wanted?

After saying goodnight, he pondered his relationships further on the way home. His thoughts turned to Kathy, and the fun he had with her. He found himself comparing the two women, and wondering which would be the best for him. Which would wear the best, and be fun even years from now. It was all very confusing. Why was life so complicated?

CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

The trip to Salem was becoming very familiar. Greg found it easy to spend more time in introspection than in watching scenery. He had many things to occupy his mind. There were numerous details with the Maxie project, but at least he knew what to do about them. What concerned him most was Glenna. Was she the "right" person for him? Was he ready for a full relationship with her? What about Kathy? Why did she intrigue him so much? What was she doing now without a job, and no plan of how to proceed?

As he considered all of these questions, and before he could answer any of them, the train pulled into the Salem station. Indeed, he did not know whether there were answers to some of the questions. Dick was waiting for him when Greg arrived in the Controls office. There was a large pile of papers on Dick's desk, and Greg laughed when he saw them. "Are we going through all of those today? Maybe I should stay all week."

"It's not as bad as it looks," reassured Dick. "I think we can handle them all right." They started immediately, and by lunch time had reduced the pile to half size. "Let's grab a quick lunch here in the cafeteria. I'll owe you a dinner out next time." Greg readily agreed. He would be glad to get through the work as soon as possible, too. He wanted some time to see Kathy, but he wouldn't use that reason with Dick. The afternoon was equally productive, and they finished their work just before a normal quitting time.

"Are you coming down to witness our first tests?" asked Greg.

"No, I'm sure I'd just be in the way. I'm more interested in the tests on the actual tunnel when we get to that. Then we'll see how well my little gray box will do. I'll be interested in hearing from you on the results though."

Greg took his leave, announcing his intention of taking the early train back to Springhill. Once he was out of the plant he headed straight for the station, and the public telephone. He waited while the phone rang, expecting to hear Kathy's voice. When the phone was picked up however, it was Mrs. Smith on the line.

“Hello, Mrs. Smith. This is Greg Adamski. Is Kathy there?”

“Oh! Greg. How is your train coming along? I can't wait to see one work or to go for a ride on it.”

“It's coming along fine. I'm sure someday you'll be able to travel on it. Is Kathy there?” he repeated.

“She usually is home by now. Let me see. Yes, she's just coming in the back door now. Wait a minute, Greg.”

There were sounds in the background, then Greg heard the phone being picked up. “Hi, Greg. How are you?” It was Kathy's voice, and it sounded much better than the last time Greg had talked with her.

“I'm fine, but I was concerned about you. How are you feeling? What are you doing now? What has happened since you left your job?”

Kathy laughed, “You certainly have a lot of questions. Let's see, since I talked with you, I've had a lot more counseling. I didn't realize how messed up I was, but I am working on those problems now. I've decided to go into computer programming, and I have started taking classes at the community college. That's where I just came from.”

“Would you have a little time this evening for another walk and some talk? I have lots of time until the late train.”

“No, Greg, I don't think I should, and I do have a lot of homework to do.”

“How about just a few minutes to say, Hi. I'd really like to see you again,” he pressed.

“No Greg, I know you would like to see me, but I don't want to see you just now. I need to get my life straightened out, and I don't want to get involved. I think you are very nice, and I really appreciate all you did for me, but I know I'm not ready to be more than just an acquaintance at the present time. I believe you have other thoughts, and I can't handle that. I have to say goodbye. Please don't make it harder for me. Goodbye Greg.”

Greg felt suddenly empty. “I'm sorry you feel that way, Kathy. I wish you would reconsider.”

“No, Greg, I won't. Goodbye and good luck.”

“I'm sorry, Kathy. Goodbye, and I hope everything works out well for you.” After he hung up the telephone receiver, Greg could hardly believe the conversation. No one had ever cut him off like that before. It was a new, and unpleasant experience. He had been rebuffed so unexpectedly. He sat a few minutes replaying the strange conversation he had just completed with Kathy. It didn't play well. Why wouldn't she just talk with him? Was there something wrong with him? He really wanted to help her. He was sure he could make her feel better. He sat fussing mentally, and not understanding Kathy's attitude. It was difficult to accept that he was neither wanted nor needed in her life. A sadness settled on him as he sat staring vacantly into the distance. A door had closed on him, and he had had no control over it's closing. Morosely, he realized the decision to pursue or not to pursue Kathy had been wrested from him. His position was pre-empted by her decision. There was nothing more he could do.

Suddenly, he realized he could still catch the early train back to Springhill. There was no reason not to return as early as possible now. He had no further business in Salem. He collected his bags, and went to wait to board the train as soon as it was available. His thoughts while returning on the train were completely different from his thoughts of the morning. He felt depressed, and it seemed his whole world had taken a turn for the worse. The time passed, the train hurried along, and eventually the lights of Springhill came into view.

As soon as he reached home, he mechanically fixed himself a small meal. He ate in silence, pondering all the events of the day, but especially Kathy's remarks on the phone. He felt lonely, and the world seemed to be a bigger, colder place. On impulse, he dialed Glenna's number. A woman's voice answered, and Greg realized it was Glenna's aunt. “Hello, Mrs. Roberts? Is Glenna there?”

“Yes,” was the flat response.

In a moment, Glenna answered. “Hello.”

“Hi, Glenna, it's Greg. I'm back early from Salem.”

“Oh, Hi Greg. How was the trip? Did you accomplish anything?”

“Yes, we have most of the final details of Maxie worked out. I feel we have reached a significant milestone, and the future direction is determined.” It occurred to him that the last remark applied equally to Maxie, and to his relationship to Kathy. He couldn't talk to Glenna about that, and he carefully buried it within himself. “I missed you, and just wanted to say, Hi. How was work today?”

“Oh fine, we were fairly busy. There have been a lot of new people hired in the factory recently, and Dr. Thomas has been busy with examinations. Someone must be expecting a lot of new work coming along.” There was a little tease in her voice, as she knew the anticipation of the Maxie compressor was part of the reason for new employees.

“I can't understand that,” he replied, trying to play along. It was flat. He just didn't feel very flippant tonight. “I wish the weekend were closer. I feel as though I need some reviving already, and it's only Monday.”

“I know what you need,” answered Glenna. “You need some kindhearted person to come along, and buy you an ice cream cone. Do you know any kindhearted persons?”

The somber expression on Greg's face relaxed a little as he responded, “There are only two or three in the whole world. I think they are a vanishing breed.”

“I predict you will see one within a half an hour. Call it fate or woman's intuition, I know it will happen. Have faith. But I have to go now. Bye, bye.”

Hanging up the phone, Greg was left with a wan smile on his face. He busied himself with reorganizing his work papers for the following day, then sat, and slipped into a daydream. He was running as fast as he could, but Kathy was disappearing in the distance, when there was a knock on his door. As he opened it, he feigned surprise as he saw Glenna standing there.

“Hello,” she began, “I'm a kindhearted person come to take you out and buy you an ice cream cone. You have been working too hard recently, and we of the ordinary world wish to show our appreciation. Will you come willingly or will I have to drag you?”

“Oh, I guess I'll go for the dragging. Are you an experienced dragger?”

Glenna lost her play-acting composure, and burst into laughing. Greg could not resist either, and they started out in good spirits. “Now you must remember, this is my treat,” admonished Glenna.

“Lead on, kindhearted person,” replied Greg, “I'm in your power.”

It was still early, although it was dark. The streets were busy with shoppers, strollers, and a few standing-and-watchers. Glenna led Greg to a small ice cream parlor not far from his apartment.

“Now,” directed Glenna, “All you have to do is select a flavor. I'll do the rest.” Greg ordered something he had not had for years, peppermint stick, and Glenna equally recklessly selected pistachio. Holding and attacking their prizes as they walked, they promenaded on the brightly lit street to a small park. There on a park bench, they ate till they finished their cones, and exchanged comments on the passing scene. At last they ran out of things to say, and Greg put his arm around her shoulders, and gazed at Glenna for a minute.

“Thank you dear lady. You certainly are a kind hearted person. You have really made me feel better. I believe I was beginning to get bogged down in work. You know, the next few weeks are going to be very important. We'll soon be testing Maxie, and I admit to some apprehension. This is much more serious than school work, and although I'm sure everything will be okay, I can't help but worry a little.” Glenna snuggled a little closer, and they sat quietly as the rest of the world drifted by, ignoring them..

Time passed, and the evening had to come to an end. As Greg left Glenna at her door, he held her close, and Glenna clung to him in a long kiss. “Goodnight Glenna. Sweet dreams. Thank you for a lovely evening.”

“Goodnight Greg. I'll see you at work. It was my pleasure.”

Greg did not see Glenna again until Friday noon The week was hectic from morning till after quitting time. More parts were ready everyday, the construction of the Maxie prototype was time consuming, and many details plagued Greg throughout the day. But there was good progress, and he was beginning to see that soon testing could start. On Friday Greg made a point of being at the lunch room on time. He spotted Glenna near the windows, and went to join her. “Hello, kindhearted person. What are your plans for the week end?” was his greeting.

“Hi,” she replied, “I intend to spend as much time as possible with another deserving, kindhearted person. How about you?”

“I suggest we spend it together.”

They slipped into casual, friendly chatter, and left the lunch room after making their weekend plans. The next two weeks were very much the same, as Maxie became more and more an actuality, huge and imposing, mounted on a test chamber, surrounded by instruments of all kinds, and woven into a spider web structure with wires and cables radiating from the compressor. By the end of the second week, Greg had everything prepared, and scheduled the first test of Maxie for Monday.

Sunday was rainy. Greg and Glenna watched videos in Greg's apartment, and cooked a dinner together. Their relationship was becoming very close, and Greg seldom even thought of Kathy anymore. After their meal, they lay on their cushions again to finish watching their video. They snuggled close, and after several kisses, Greg whispered,

“Will you make love with me now?”

Glenna looked almost longingly at him, but answered, “No, not yet. I don't want to yet.” However, she held him closer and tighter, and the kisses continued. Monday dawned bright and clear. As he walked to work, Greg wondered how the day would go. It was certainly the most important day since he joined PCI. His heart beat faster, and he felt excitement as he anticipated the activities of the day. He let himself enjoy the excitement, although he tried to keep himself under control, and maintain a clear, level head.

Bill and Hap came to the test lab, and were there as Maxie first roared into life. The sound alone was imposing, and the rush of air and pulsing of power from the compressor were nothing less than awe inspiring. Greg supervised the progress of the test according to a program he had pre-arranged. Many different conditions were imposed, and many different operating situations were simulated.

During the day, Greg collected the data, and stopped only briefly for lunch. By late afternoon the tests were complete, and Greg took all the data to feed them into the computer. He was only half done at quitting time, but he stayed on. Bill stopped by to encourage him to go home and finish tomorrow, but Greg could not stop, and he continued alone in the large empty office. Early in the evening, he began getting printed out results. He studied them all as they came out of the printer. He looked at them again and again. He could not believe them. Overall they were five percent below the calculated values. An amount completely unacceptable.

CHAPTER TWENTY TWO

Greg could not sleep. What had gone wrong? Why were the performance results low? What were Bill and Hap going to say, when he gave them the bad news? Did he make some mistake somewhere? He went over the design in his mind again and again, but everything he could imagine was right. What caused the low results?

He was grateful when morning arrived, and he prepared for work. Although he dreaded the day, he knew the only proper course was to present his results, and solicit suggestions from those who knew more than he did. As soon as he arrived at work, he went to Bill's office. Bill was usually in early, and today was no exception. He turned as Greg entered.

Without hesitating, Greg announced, "The results are bad. We don't make the design objective. We're about five percent low."

Bill looked at him for a minute with out responding, then asked, "Any ideas? Where do you think the trouble is?"

Greg was impressed with the equanimity with which Bill accepted this problem. That must come with years of experience. He began, "I don't know. I've been reviewing everything in my mind, and it's unexplainable. Theory says it should work. All the parts are right, and they are put together properly. There is no explanation."

"I don't buy that. There is a reason somewhere. We just need to find it. Before you panic, go back and check everything, and ask Hap for suggestions." As Greg turned to go, Bill added, "Oh, and Greg, try to smile. A worried mind is not thinking clearly, and you probably need all the clear thinking you can generate, to crack this. I am confident you will."

Greg left Bill's office feeling somehow greatly relieved, and yet he was terribly troubled by the perplexing situation. Bill's calm attitude seemed to put it into a different frame. It were as though Greg could now step back, and look at it as just a problem. He realized he was feeling so personally involved previously, he could not operate rationally. He felt much better as he went looking for Hap, although he carried bad news.

Hap and Greg divided up the parts of the design. Each reviewed the individual steps, and repeated the calculations. Harvey and Paula checked parts and drawings. For the better part of two days, they investigated everything possible. No errors turned up. In a Wednesday afternoon meeting with Bill they reported no progress in determining where the trouble lay.

As silence settled on their discussion, Greg reasoned the answer was somewhere they had not looked. He thought aloud, "We have found no errors in procedures, parts or calculating procedures. Everything we have looked at checks out. Therefore the problem is somewhere else. The only items we have not checked are the computer programs themselves. Logic tells me the trouble is there."

The silence became more ominous. After a moment, Hap spoke, "Those programs have been used for years, and have always given good results. Most of them I wrote myself. I don't believe they are in error." Greg detected a strained tone in Hap's voice he had never heard before, and realized he was treading on sacred ground.

"I just can't imagine where else the problem lies, but I'm open to all suggestions." continued Greg. None were forthcoming.

"I suggest we sleep on this, and start fresh tomorrow," advised Bill. "Maybe we'll solve it in our sleep." Hap left without a further word, and Harvey and Paula followed. Greg was left alone with Bill. "I think I stepped on someone's toes," said Greg after the others had left.

"Yes, you did, but I have no trouble with your logic. Maybe it is time for you to look at the programs. Do me a favor though. If you find anything, bring it to me first."

Greg wandered back to his desk, and contemplated how best to proceed. First he made a list of the calculation programs used in the design. Then he obtained a file copy of the original equations. Next he took a set of conditions, and set to work with the computer, and a hand calculator. It was mid-night when he finally went home.

Greg overslept. For the first time since he had been hired, he came in late. The office was buzzing with the usual daily activity as he came to his desk, and picked up some papers. From there he went directly to Bill's office, and waited for a moment as Bill finished talking with another engineer in the group. Then Greg entered with papers in hand. "I came in late today, but I stayed here till mid-night yesterday. Does that balance out?" he asked facetiously.

"Certainly," replied Bill, "If you think it does, it does as far as I'm concerned. What do you have?" Bill had noticed the papers Greg was carrying, and

knew he wouldn't be there unless he had some new information.

“I think I've found our problem. It's not a monster though, it's just a gremlin.” Greg showed the papers to Bill and went through some explanations.

As Greg finished, Bill beamed, “I was sure you would solve it. You are very logical, and it was simply a logic problem. Shall we tell the others?”

“I thought, since it involves Hap's work, you would want to handle it.”

“No, I just wanted to know first,” answered Bill. “Considering the outcome, I think you should explain it to the rest. Why don't we have a meeting after lunch, here in my office, and you can describe how you found the answer yourself.”

Greg stopped at Carole's desk, and asked her to inform the team about a meeting in Bill's office at one o'clock. Then he went back to his desk and arranged his results so they could be clearly presented. When he was finished, it was lunch time, and he took himself off to the lunch room. As he passed through the cafeteria line, he noticed Glenna sitting at her favorite table, and took a direct path to her with his tray. “Hi, Glenna. How's my favorite nurse?”

“Well, you seem to be in fine fettle today. haven't seen you all week, and I've heard there were problems with your project. What do you have to be happy about?”

“I have much to be happy about, including the impending solution of my problems,” returned Greg. “In fact I feel so good, I require some celebrating. Are you available for some celebrating this evening? Would you consider letting me cook dinner for you?”

“My goodness, what is a girl to say? How often does a famous chef volunteer a free meal? But first, I must go home and dress properly for this occasion.”

“No, your dress is fine now. Why don't we meet after work, and I'll let you help me shop, then on to my place to cook?”

Glenna's natural spontaneity decided her answer, “Whatever you say, Milord. I'll look for you after work.”

Greg happily returned to his desk, picked up his papers, and headed for the meeting. Everyone else was already there, when he arrived at Bill's office. Greg began with no preliminaries. “We have checked everything on Maxie, and have found no errors. Theory is correct, parts conform to drawings, and the drawings are right. Yet we are five percent below our performance objective, when theory says we should be somewhat above our objective. You recall, yesterday I said logic then demands that the problem is in the computer programs, however unlikely that is.” Greg noticed that Hap was looking very somber, but he continued, “I spent considerable time yesterday going through a set of calculations with the original equations and a hand calculator,

and compared them with the computer generated results. Everything was fine, except for the calculation of the twist in the compressor blades.” Greg could see that Hap's face remained very strained and unusually grim. He continued, “Then I took the computer program apart step by step, and I found our problem.”

“Do you mean the program is wrong?” asked Hap, almost belligerently.

“No,” replied Greg, turning to Hap, “The program as you wrote it is absolutely correct, but the program in the computer is wrong. When the program was entered into the computer by a typist or whomever, a small error was made. The third and forth digits in a constant value were transposed. Instead of 68 it was 86, and that caused us our problem.”

“But then, why hasn't it been a problem until now?” pressed Hap.

“That bothered me, too,” Greg went on, “and I checked some previous history on the use of the program. This is the first time it has been used at these higher pressures and greater volumes we are dealing with on Maxie. There were slight errors before, but they didn't matter, now with extreme conditions required by Maxie, they are big enough that they do matter.”

As Greg finished speaking, a silence settled on the meeting as everyone absorbed what he had described. After a minute, Hap broke the silence, and Greg noted his expression had changed completely. “That is an impressive piece of sleuthing, Greg. My congratulations. Now we know how to go about correcting Maxie. Good work.”

The previous tension in the room completely disappeared as they discussed the action to take. A new set of compressor blades were planned as soon as new calculations were completed and drawings changed. The meeting broke up in a congenial fashion, as everyone went their respective ways to do their jobs. Greg spent the rest of the day on calculations and giving instructions to Paula for the drawings. Quitting time came, and Greg set aside the work knowing he had earned his rest. He headed to find Glenna.

She was waiting on the sidewalk in front of the building as Greg came out. Together they headed for the grocery, chattering as they went. “Would you like Guinea Hen under glass, or Hamburgers Adamski?”

“How about Hotdogs a la Johnson?” asked Glenna. They completed their purchases, and headed for the apartment. Glenna made a salad and steamed some vegetables, as Greg sauteed chicken and made rice. They were soon sitting down to a satisfying meal. Greg related the events of the past few days to Glenna, and ended by saying. “In two or three weeks, when we have the new parts, I'm sure the test will be all right, so you see why we're celebrating.”

“You're amazing Mister Adamski. I'm pleased to know such a smart engineer.”

“And I’m pleased to know such an appreciative nurse. Did you get your good traits from your parents, or your aunt and uncle?”

“I wish I knew. I remember very little about my mother, and nothing about my father.”

“I wish I could have known your parents. Has your aunt ever told you anything about them?”

“No, only that my father died in an accident, and my mother died suddenly from some illness.”

They ate in silence for a few minutes. Greg considered how differently he and Glenna had grown up, and yet they seemed to be compatible and enjoy each other in many shared activities. Even cooking with her was a pleasant experience. He wondered about her mother, and what sort of problem had caused her death. Was this something Glenna should be aware of? Should she try to find out more about it? Greg remembered Doctor Morgan wanting to know about any “young lady” that Greg began considering as a “partner.” Should he ask Glenna to see Doctor Morgan? He remembered when Glenna heard about his gene profile exam, she expressed the idea that she would rather not know about any problem she may have. Might she change her mind? He would have to find out.

“I know you said you would rather avoid knowing of hereditary conditions, but considering you know very little about your mother, don't you think having a gene profile made would be useful, and maybe alleviate some worry?”

Glenna looked at Greg thoughtfully. She liked him very much, and realized she would do many things to please him. Is this really something she would be comfortable doing though? How important was it to him? Perhaps she could compromise. “I'm not sure I want to do that. How would it be if I talk to Doctor Thomas about it first?”

“That sounds reasonable to me. He is certainly someone I trust.”

The conversation continued in a lighter vein, as they cleared the table and did the dishes together. Afterwards, as Glenna prepared to go home, Greg reached out to embrace her, and they held each other closely.

“This would be a good night to stay here,” he whispered, “I have plenty of room.”

“You also have naughty thoughts,” she teased. “I'm not sure I could keep you in line.”

“You mean, you're not sure you want me to stay in line,” he responded roguishly. They continued to embrace and kiss until, after a few moments, Glenna broke away. “I really must go.”

“I know,” replied Greg, as he opened the door. They left together for the walk to Glenna's house.

CHAPTER TWENTY THREE

On Friday, the work load was light, and Glenna remembered her conversation with Greg. As she sat in the office, she began to wonder more about her mother and father. Should she know more about her heritage? Did she really want to know? Doctor Thomas was not busy at the moment, and on the spur of the moment, she wandered into his office.

“May I talk with you a few minutes, Doctor?”

“Certainly Glenna. What's on your mind?”

“Well, perhaps you know, I've been seeing a lot of Greg Adamski.”

Doctor Thomas smiled, “There's been some rumors of that, yes.”

Glenna felt herself blush a little, but continued, “My mother died when I was quite young from some ailment which has never been known to me. Greg suggested that I get a gene profile to learn whether there is anything serious I should know about. I am very reluctant to do that, but maybe I should. What do you think?”

Doctor Thomas sat back in his chair for a few seconds without replying, and regarded the pretty young lady who was his nurse-receptionist, as she sat waiting expectantly and unsure of herself. She was looking for guidance, but he sensed that she was also seeking a way to avoid something she feared. He had to give her the truth, as he saw it.

“I believe a gene profile can be a very useful and helpful item in marriage planning. You remember, it was I that sent Greg to Dr. Morgan initially. However, it is just one tool, and it does have shortcomings also. In general, I would recommend it, but I don't put as much faith in it as Doctor Morgan does. Although I certainly support his work, I am not the fanatic he is.”

“You think I should have the profile made, then?” she asked.

“Yes, but only if you really want it. I recognize the position that some people are more comfortable not knowing about certain situations, while others want to know as much as possible. You have to decide which you are.”

“I can't decide which I am. I want to please Greg.”

“That's not a good response. You must consider what is right for you, not what is right for someone else, no matter who it is.”

Glenna sat quietly for a minute, deep in thought. Doctor Thomas felt her indecision, and wanted to help her further. He continued, “I understand Doctor Morgan's concerns, but he may be wrong, too. The living world is constantly changing and those changes sometimes make it more adaptable to the current situations. By this method it has usually adapted to the changes imposed on it. The most adaptable individuals have survived. That is why we are where we are today. Perhaps the interference of doctors in the survival of the human species is just another condition nature will have to adapt to. Certainly, with what we know now and with currently accepted human mores; if a person wants to live, and if we can give that individual a reasonably comfortable, useful life, we do not allow anyone to die until it is unavoidable. It would require a major readjustment of our values to give nature a greater role in survival than she now has.”

Glenna continued to be silent. She had listened intently to Doctor Thomas, whom she respected and trusted very much. But she understood the decision was hers, personally. No one could or should tell her what to do. She rose to leave, and as she reached the door said, “Thank you doctor.” Doctor Thomas knew the thanks were genuine, but understood he had not answered Glenna's question. No one but Glenna could do that.

The following week, Greg was busy with the new blades for Maxie. When they were ready for shaping, he found Jack Clark working on them again. He had talked with Jack many times over the last few weeks, when Greg was in the shop following parts which were being made. Jack was concentrating on his machine intently as Greg approached.

“Hi, Jack, how's it going?”

“Fine, I think, but that's what I thought before, and they were wrong.”

“But that wasn't your fault.”

“Oh? What was the problem?”

“Didn't your foreman tell you? The calculations were wrong because of a computer error, so the drawings were wrong,” Greg explained. “The blades you made were entirely right according to the drawing, but you had the wrong information.”

“I'm relieved to hear that. I thought I had messed them up.”

“No! Not at all. I would have told you, but I figured your boss would inform you. We've got to have a better way for you fellows in the shop to learn how your work is used and the results. I think it's only fair to let you know when projects are successful, as well as when they are not. I'm glad you're working on them though, Jack. I have confidence they'll be done right.” Greg left Jack in a happier frame of mind as he continued the shaping of the blades on his machine.

On Friday a week later, Greg announced to Glenna at lunch, “Maxie is all set for testing again on Monday. Can we have another celebration dinner tonight?”

Greg always seemed to put Glenna in a pleasant mood. She did not hesitate in replying, “Of course, I'll celebrate anything, any time.”

“Good, let's meet after work.”

Glenna was feeling very much at home in Greg's apartment. After shopping together in the grocery, they shared the work in preparing the meal. As they ate, they watched news on the television and talked about happenings at PCI. Their time together required less planning, as they always seemed to find something interesting to do. After washing the dishes, they went for a walk in the little shopping center, and ended up eating ice cream sitting on a park bench. The evening passed too soon for them, and they found themselves once more at Glenna's door saying goodnight.

“Any ideas for Sunday?” asked Glenna.

‘How about church again? Then canoeing once more before it gets too cool for being on the water.’

“Sounds good to me. I'll see you Sunday morning.”

Sunday was clear, but cooler than it had been. They walked briskly to the U-U church, and arrived just as the service was beginning. Glenna was impressed again by the pleasant, but not ornate chapel. The program was interesting, and the atmosphere was free and open. Glenna felt a sense of acceptance and caring. Greg had spotted Jack and Cynthia across the room, and the couples met over coffee to talk afterward.

“I have some great news,” began Jack, “Cynthia and I are going to be married.”

“Congratulations,” replied Greg with some astonishment, “When is the happy day?”

“In about four weeks. It won't be a big wedding, but we'd like you both to come.”

“I'd certainly like to. How about you, Glenna?”

“I don't know. I'm afraid I might cry.”

“That's okay,” said Jack. “You'll be in good company. Lots of people cry at weddings. But you can laugh too, if you want to.”

“We'll put it on our calendar.” replied Greg. They talked further about their plans, and where they were planning to live. Cynthia was excited, and talked with Glenna about the details.

“By the way, Jack,” said Greg, “we'll be testing Maxie tomorrow. If you have some free time, come over to the test lab and see it run. You might enjoy seeing the product of your work operate.”

“I don't have much free time, but I'll try to get away, if I can. Thanks for letting me know.”

Then Greg asked, “Do you want to go canoeing today? We're off for one more ride before it gets too cold.”

“No, I don't think so. We've got a lot of planning to do, and are busy this afternoon, but we'll do something together another time. Thanks for asking though.”

Greg and Glenna had an afternoon of fun canoeing, but Greg's mood was a little subdued. He was concerned about the test scheduled for Monday. Although everything seemed right, he was haunted by the previous failure.

Monday morning started out busy, and stayed that way all day. Greg followed the tests closely, but was pleased to take a little time out when Jack showed up to see Maxie run. Jack was impressed by the imposing size and powerful roar of Maxie, but Greg was pleased to be able to show him some of the test apparatus and explain what was happening. Jack left with a new appreciation for the project he had worked on. By the end of the day, Greg had much data to analyze. It was long after quitting time when he finally packed up his work and went home.

CHAPTER TWENTY FOUR

When Greg arrived at work in the morning, he spent a few minutes at his desk collecting and arranging papers. Then he headed for Bill's office hoping to catch him before other business took his attention. As he entered Bill's office, he saw Hap was there, but to his greater surprise he found another, unexpected person there, also. It was Carol Burns, the VAC Corporation engineer.

“Hello Carol,” was his astonished greeting, “I didn't know you would be here”

“I decided to come on an impulse of the moment. When I talked with Bill on the phone yesterday and heard you were running tests on our compressor, I decided it was time to give it a look. How did they go?”

“Yes,” chimed in Bill. “Don't keep us in suspense. What are the results” Suddenly, Greg was on the spot, but he kept his composure. “Well, I have just rough charts, not a finished report, but all of the tests at all of the conditions show we make at least 104% of the design objective consistently.” Greg beamed. His pleasure and satisfaction were quite evident.

“Lay them out on the table here,” suggested Hap. “Then we can all see them.” The next few minutes were absorbed with passing the charts around and everyone checking the curves and numbers, and exclaiming over the good results.

After Carol had looked at all the data, she looked up at Greg, and said, “Well young man, you seem to have quite a machine. Would you care to show me this monster of yours?”

Greg was again impressed with Carol as he showed the compressor and its various features to her. She grasped ideas quickly, and did not hesitate to climb over and around the machine to see all its parts. She didn't seem to mind getting her hands dirty in spite of her crisp, business suit appearance.

When they had thoroughly explored Maxie, she turned to Greg and said, appreciatively, “You've done a fine job, Greg. I'm sure this is going to work out very well. There will be a test section of the new tunnel completed in five or six months, and we'll have a new car to run in it also. Your compressor is certainly approved, and as soon as PCI can supply enough units for that section we will have a trial run. I hope you'll be able to come out and be there for the first series of tests.”

“I'd love to be there. That will certainly be exciting.”

They went back to talk with Bill about details, then Carol left to head for Salem to talk with Dick about his little gray box. The rest of the day floated by rather unproductively. Greg felt a great deal of relief that the test had gone well, and Carol seemed to like the compressor and the results. He wandered over to the machine shop to let Jack know the good news. Jack was busy on a new computer controlled machine in the shop. Greg had noticed that Jack was getting experience on all aspects of the shop work, and realized someone must respect his abilities. As Jack worked, Greg asked, “How did you and Cynthia happen to decide on marriage?”

“Well,” answered Jack shyly, “It was in the back of my mind all along. We grew up together until her family moved away, but I never seemed to forget her. It was mostly a matter of my getting established somehow, before I felt I could ask her. To my relief, she didn't hesitate at all in saying yes. I guess we've both thought we would end up together, some day. It was sort of pre-ordained.”

“You're lucky,” replied Greg. “I'm not sure where I'll end up in that respect. I never had a special childhood friend, and I'm still looking.”

“Oh?” Jack seemed confused. “I thought you and Glenna were sort of an item. Don't you have plans with her?”

“We're very good friends, but we don't have any commitment. I suppose I could do worse. I guess I just don't feel decided yet. I'll let you know when I make up my mind.”

With the success of the Maxie design, Greg's work changed to following the details of getting the compressor into production. More of his time was spent with factory personnel, and there were times of inactivity due to delays in the factory. One Monday morning, Greg had just arrived at his desk, when Bill approached him.

“Greg, I need your help. Hap called in ill today, but there are some important drawings on one of his projects that need to be released. I'd like you to look at them and do whatever is necessary. This has to do with a new design in our line of mine shaft ventilators, and you have the experience in large equipment to handle it.”

As it turned out, Hap was out several days, and Greg did not only his own work, but followed several of Hap's projects as they came up for decisions. The following week Hap returned, but seemed less than his normal self. Greg filled Hap in on the actions he had taken, and Hap seemed satisfied that project development time had not been lost because of his absence.

Later in the day Greg received a call to report to Bill. As he sat down in the office, Bill began, “Greg, I've decided to rearrange the work a little. Hap has too much to do. Since you picked up so well on his projects while he was not here, I wonder whether you would be willing to take those three projects on permanently? I have discussed this with Hap and he is quite willing to transfer them to you. I believe you have developed enough to be able to handle this additional work, but let me add before you ask, there will be a commensurate increase in your pay which you certainly deserve at this time, also.”

Greg was surprised by the request, but he replied with his usual enthusiasm, “I'm pleased you are willing to offer me a greater variety of work with new challenges. You know I'll try to do my best, Bill, but I don't want to take anything away from Hap.”

“No, Hap doesn't feel that way about it. I know he's relieved to step aside for someone he trusts to do a good job, too. He's looking forward to retirement one of these days, and it is better to have a slow transition of work than a sudden one.”

Greg's days were consistently busier. He enjoyed, and indeed, needed his weekend relaxation with Glenna. They had attended Jack and Cynthia's wedding, and as promised, Glenna cried. She laughed too though, and Jack and Cynthia had a good send off. They seemed to be very happy together. It caused Greg to think a little more seriously about his relationship with Glenna, though he still couldn't quite decide on what he wanted to do.

The weeks turned into months, as Maxie compressors began coming off the assembly line. Dealing with Maxie and his other projects kept Greg busier than he could have imagined a few months previously. He found that other engineers occasionally came to him for help and advice on particularly troubling problems. He always seemed to find the time to help, and to find a way to solve the problem which made work even more satisfying for him.

One Monday morning, he arrived at work to find on his desk, an invitation from Carol Burns for him to participate in the first tunnel tests of the new train the following week. Bill and Dick were also going, and they would be in St. Louis for the whole week. That Sunday, after Church, he and Glenna spent the day at his apartment watching videos as it was too cool for their outside activities. Greg couldn't concentrate on anything except his up-coming trip, however, and kept commenting on it to Glenna.

In exasperation, she exclaimed, "Goodness! Mister Adamski, you sound as though no one else has ever gone to St. Louis. I'm sure you will get lost, and I'll never see you again. Now please be quiet, or I'll take my video and go home."

"Aha! I think you're just angry that you're not going. Have you ever been to the big city? You're jealous of my good fortune, and feel left out," teased Greg.

"Me? Jealous? Never! I have never been jealous in my whole life." Glenna glared at Greg. They returned to watching the video, but an ominous silence, like a black cloud, had settled on them. It was late when the video ended, and as Greg had to get up early in the morning to catch the train, Glenna excused herself, and prepared to leave.

"Glenna, I'm sorry --"

"That's all right," returned Glenna, "I hope you have nothing but fun in St. Louis, and enjoy yourself with your lady engineer. Don't worry about me." The words were crisp, and there was anger in her voice.

"Glenna --"

"Goodbye. Maybe I'll see you next week,----if you find your way back." She was out the door and gone, before Greg could say anything else. Greg sighed. There was no time to go after her. He had to pack and get to bed. It was already going to be a very short night. Besides, she was being unreasonable. Morosely, Greg set about packing, but it was a chore.

CHAPTER TWENTY FIVE

Greg met Bill and Dick at the train station. Dick had come to Springhill on Sunday, and spent the night, as the earliest morning train from Salem would not have made connection with the VAC train to St. Louis. The three were in high spirits as they boarded and settled in for the trip. Although it was a relatively long trip of 1000 kilometers with two stops, they would be there in plenty of time for lunch with Carol.

“Well, fellows, this is it. Now we'll really see how well our gadgets work,” laughed Bill. “I'm sure about the compressor, but I have reservations about your little gray box.”

“No,” countered Dick, “the box is okay. You just hope all your machinery holds together.”

Greg said nothing, but enjoyed being part of a special group on a serious mission, and recognized the camaraderie as being an acknowledgement that they not only had to witness a successful test of their equipment, but be ready to act together, if anything unforeseen happened. He felt calm and confident though. He had lived with Maxie long enough and intimately enough to know it would do everything expected, and leave a margin for the unexpected, too.

The trip to St. Louis was no different than any other trip he had taken, just longer. The time passed easily though, with some reading, and some conversation with Bill and Dick. It was Dick who introduced the subject of Greg's involvement with the “Quack” Doctor Morgan and his concern for the future of humankind. Greg felt Dick had some kind of problem with the idea as he seemed to enjoy belittling it.

“Bill, did you know your boy here is helping our quack doctor to save the world?”

“No, what do you mean? What are you doing Greg?” asked Bill.

Greg felt a little sheepish, and wondered about Dick's intent. It was difficult to know whether Dick was just teasing, or whether he felt a stronger passion about the subject. Greg decided to treat Doctor Morgan's ideas light-heartedly, but be honest about his feelings and involvement without compromising his privacy. Bill listened with obvious interest.

“Doctor Morgan has a mission in life,” began Greg. “He is very concerned that although the medical profession is well versed and talented in preserving life, it is that very talent which preserves and transmits to following generations weaknesses which may prove to lead to the demise of the human race in the future. I can sympathize with much of what he says, but I'm not sure I agree with it all.”

“I don't agree with any of it,” broke in Dick.

“Well, don't be too hasty,” answered Bill. “I know our daughter was extremely ill as a child. Without medical science she probably would not be alive today. What does that mean for her child, when she has one? Will it be that much more susceptible to certain diseases? Will it have a lowered expectation

of surviving to old age, or even adulthood? Maybe Doctor Morgan has a point.”

“He convinced me enough that I had a gene profile made,” continued Greg, “and I'll be interested in the profile of anyone I might marry in the future, but I'm not enthused about doing more than that to help the good doctor.”

“He's a quack,” reiterated Dick.

“Speaking of future marriage, how's Glenna,” asked Bill. “I hear you two are pretty thick.”

Greg felt himself blushing slightly, “Oh, we don't have any special plans. In fact, she was mad at me yesterday. Maybe we don't have any future at all. I think she was upset about my going away for a whole week.”

“Oh,” teased Bill, “If I had known, we could have left you in Springhill.”

“No way,” laughed Greg, “I've worked too hard on this project to miss this trial run.”

They each returned to their reading or quiet introspection. Greg wondered about Glenna, and was sorry he had not resolved their little altercation before he left. There just wasn't time though, and it seemed Glenna wanted to be angry.

The rest of the trip to St. Louis was uneventful, and they arrived early for a luncheon with other suppliers invited to the trial run. Greg enjoyed meeting and talking with the technical people from a variety of companies who had a part in the new train development. They seemed to be interested in his part of the overall project also, and their interaction was mutually stimulating. After a tasty lunch, Carol Burns spoke a few minutes, and outlined the weeks activities. Tuesday and Wednesday were for testing and evaluating individual components and systems, Thursday would be the actual ride in the train car, and Friday would be evaluation and wrap-up.

Tuesday morning the three met with two of Carol's engineers, and traveled to half way along the 70 kilometer finished length of tunnel. There at the end of one of the sections, they operated the compressor, and simulated a train passing through in the tunnel. All this had been done before, but this final check was conducted to be sure the equipment operated the way the designers had intended. Several tests were made under varying conditions. Everything performed perfectly.

For the rest of the week they could relax, and enjoy the festivities. On Wednesday they went to observe some tests on the train car. Greg was impressed by the massiveness of the car. It was larger in diameter and longer than the current standard VAC train car. Overall it was about twice the size, and had many new features and innovations. This test ride was going to be an exhilarating experience to say the least. Thursday they all collected for a ceremony before the first ride. The Secretary of Transportation gave a speech which was short, to the relief of the group. Then, following the ribbon cutting

ceremony, the dignitaries and invited guests boarded the car. Greg found himself in a window seat, and anticipated seeing a little of the scenery as they sped by. The start was smoother than any he had experienced. When they reached the evacuated tunnel, the acceleration seemed the same as on any other train, but it continued longer. Even so, they were at top speed in only two or three minutes, and Greg felt exuberant.

The scenery flashed by the periodically spaced tunnel windows faster than he had ever experienced before. It was an astonishing sight. Then the deceleration began, and they shortly came to a stop at the end. Everyone cheered.

The rest of the week was anticlimactic. There were a very few problems of an insignificant nature to consider in the wrap up on Friday, and the three engineers knew the test had been an outstanding success for the PCI Corporation. As they rode the VAC train back to Springhill, they agreed it was a week well spent.

Saturday morning, Greg woke early and set about his Saturday chores and errands. It was noon before he felt somewhat returned to normal. He had been thinking of Glenna and wondered what she might be doing. It was time to talk with her again, and restore their relationship. With some trepidation he dialed the telephone. After two rings, a familiar voice answered,

“Hello,”

“Hi, Glenna. This is Greg. I'm back. How was your week?”

“Greg! I'm glad you're back. My week was lonely. How was yours?” Greg was surprised with the obvious friendly tone of Glenna's voice. There was none of the anger he had heard at their last parting. He had been fearful that Glenna might just cut him off, and he briefly recalled the strange, last telephone conversation he had with Kathy.

Greatly relieved, he continued talking. “Well, I must admit I enjoyed myself, but that is because the trial run was an outstanding success, and Maxie is really in business. I couldn't be happier, but I did miss you too. Can I see you this evening?”

“Yes, we heard that things went well. There was even a shot on the evening news of the ribbon cutting ceremony. I looked for you, but didn't see you.”

“That's probably because I was already trying to get into the train. It was a fantastic ride. Can I see you this evening to tell you about it?” he asked again.

“I'd really like to come there, but I've committed myself to helping my aunt bake some cakes and pies for their church bazaar. She asked me to help, and I actually felt like helping for a change. It will take until evening, and then I'll be bushed. But I'm available all day tomorrow.”

“Well then, what about church and a day of video tomorrow.”

“Sure, I'll be at your place at nine.”

“Great, I'll go get the video. You'll have to live with my choice.”

Glenna laughed, “I'll do my best. See you tomorrow.”

Sunday dawned cloudy, but not as cold as it had been recently. There might have been even a little hint of Spring in the air, but a brisk wind reminded everyone of the season still holding forth, and it was determined to do its worst till the end. Greg had a simple breakfast, then straightened up the apartment to be neat enough to meet his standards. At nine o'clock there was a knock on the door, and Greg opened it to Glenna standing bundled in her topcoat.

“Hi, come in.”

As Greg closed the door, Glenna began, “I'm sorry I acted so childish last week. I regretted it all week.”

Greg answered, “I shouldn't have teased you. I'm sorry, too.”

They embraced to kiss, and Glenna's coat got in the way. Greg gently loosened it and removed it as they completed the kiss.

Then Glenna, impishly, reached out and removed Greg's jacket. They kissed again. Greg looked at Glenna lovingly. She returned his gaze sanguinely and invitingly. Without asking or feeling the need to ask, Greg began unbuttoning her blouse. After it was removed, she unbuttoned his shirt. As the last item of clothing hit the floor, they were both completely ready for what was naturally to follow. They did not go to church that day.

They did not even watch a video, and almost forgot to eat. It was mid-afternoon after many little shared secrets, many exchanges of thoughts and feelings, many sighs and silences, and many hugs and kisses, that Greg realized he was hungry. They laughed and giggled as they prepared sandwiches in the nude, and ate their lunch with cookies and fruit on the floor of the apartment.

Greg suddenly had more desire than ever to know every detail of Glenna's growing up. He questioned her in great detail about her early years and her school life. Glenna was feeling talkative, and expanded on herself to Greg's delight. The afternoon dwindled away until it was time to see Glenna home. They dressed a little sadly. Greg wanted Glenna to stay the night, but they both knew that was just not possible. It was cold walking to Glenna's home, and it was not conducive to standing and talking at the door either. They kissed goodnight, but the kiss had much more meaning this time.

Monday morning started with Greg putting together a short report on the trip of the previous week. Then he took care of a few details on his other projects. Mid-morning found him sitting and staring at his desk. He had lost the inclination to do the routine jobs demanding his attention. After sitting transfixed for an inordinate time, he at last arose and headed out of the office. Letting Carole know where he would be, he exited the building, turned and headed for the Infirmary.

On entering, he turned towards Doctor Thomas's office and went in. Glenna was nowhere to be seen. He stood there several moments, undecided on what to do next. He turned and retraced his steps to the first intersecting hallway, and spotted Glenna coming from the far end. He waited for her to reach him, then said, "Hi," as he put his arms around her.

They embraced in the middle of the intersecting hallways oblivious to the hospital activity flowing around them. Greg murmured in Glenna's ear, "With all the questions yesterday afternoon, there was one I forgot to ask."

"What was that?" she whispered.

Slowly and quietly Greg posed, "Will you marry me?" By way of an answer, she hugged him tighter, and nestled closer into his arms.

CHAPTER TWENTY SIX

The next few weeks were very busy for Greg and Glenna. They wanted the wedding at the U-U Church, and there was a slight disagreement with Glenna's aunt and uncle about that. Then there was scheduling a time, and getting friends to participate. Greg asked Jack Clark to be best man, and a friend of Glenna's from work would be matron of honor. Glenna wanted a fairly traditional ceremony, but with their own variations. Greg's parents planned to be there the whole week prior to the wedding to help, to meet Glenna's aunt and uncle, and to see, at last, the city in which Greg was becoming so enmeshed.

Uncle Tom fussed, at first, about giving away the bride, but Aunt Emma convinced him it was his duty, and he resigned himself to the task. Reverend Wilson, the Unitarian Universalist minister, insisted on talking with Greg and Glenna together on two occasions to impress on them their duties and responsibilities to each other. He also encouraged them to discuss their expectations of each other; what they each expected to give and to receive in the marriage. In the process they also talked about becoming parents, and the joys and responsibilities which that entailed. At the end, they looked at each other and asked, "Do we really want to do this?"

The answer was, "Yes," They had not been dissuaded by all the serious considerations.

Blood tests were required prior to receiving a marriage license. When Greg presented himself at the municipal clinic to have his blood sampled, he engaged in light chatter with the attending physician. “You must get tired of doing the same tests day after day,” he commented to the doctor.

“No, not really. We provide an important service, and that makes it worthwhile.”

“Do you ever do gene profiles on people planning marriage?”

“No, Mister Adamski. We don't find that necessary. It doesn't make much difference these days.”

“Wouldn't it avoid problems sometimes?” Greg asked further.

“Perhaps, but medical science is so far advanced now, we can handle any kind of problem which might arise. You would be surprised at some of the sophisticated methods we use.”

“I'm sure your medicine can do a lot, but I should think a gene profile might avoid worry sometimes, or alert people to problems.”

“No need to worry, mister Adamski. Modern medical science is prepared to take care of all problems which may arise. We will always do our best to help you.”

Greg was not convinced, and began thinking about Doctor Morgan, and his concerns for the future of healthy human individuals. His concern led him to mention it to Glenna one day at lunch. He reminded her of their conversations at the time he had first seen Doctor Morgan.

“Do you think you would be willing to have a gene profile made? Just so we're sure there are no big problems, or to be prepared, if there are.”

“I'm undecided. I discussed it with Doctor Thomas once, and he seemed to think it was a good idea, but he also said I should do whatever I was comfortable with.”

“I wish you would think about it again, but I won't insist, if you don't want to do it.” In the evening Glenna started talking with her aunt, and gently introduced the subject of a gene profile. As she was explaining what it was, her uncle also came into the room and joined the conversation. When Glenna finished, he spoke up immediately. “That's nonsense. No one can tell you what will happen to you in the future. There is no use spending time and good money on that. Either you'll have good health or you won't. Whatever happens to us is God's will, and no test will change that.

“You and Greg will have to take your chances just like everyone else. You'd spend your time better going to church than going to a doctor for a silly test. Although, I'm not sure that the church you're going to will help you much either. I wish you would come back to our church, and be a good Christian like your were as a child.”

Tom's diatribe brought the conversation to a close, and left Glenna as confused as ever. The following day, she again talked with Greg. "I guess I won't go for a gene profile. I'm not sure it's necessary, it upset Tom when I mentioned it, and I guess I'm a little afraid of doing it anyway."

"Well, the decision is yours," Greg said reassuringly, "I won't mention it again."

The wedding went off without a hitch. Tom gave Glenna away, but looked terribly uncomfortable in an unaccustomed dress suit. Although Glenna cried, she laughed later while cutting the cake, and while talking with all their friends who came to share the event with them. Mostly in attendance were people they knew from work, but many were friends they had met at church helped them celebrate also. Dick Walters and his wife came down from Salem, and stayed with Hap and his wife for the weekend. Greg's parents had given the couple transportation tickets and a prepaid week at a small resort in upper New York state, and they saw them off without any complications.

It was the first real out-of-town vacation Greg had taken in a long time. Glenna and Greg were typical newly weds. They engaged in every activity available, and enjoyed doing them together. The weather co-operated, and the surroundings made it a most memorable week. It was like seven Sundays in a row.

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On a Sunday afternoon, a small figure walked slowly and alone around a little lake in a residential area of Salem. It was Kathy Smith communing with nature and herself. She seemed distracted, and mostly looked at only the ground in front of her as she proceeded, deeply engrossed in her thoughts. Her Aunt Sylvia was visiting for the weekend, and part of the news she brought with her was about the beautiful wedding she had attended the previous week in Springhill. Greg Adamski and Glenna Johnson had married, and Sylvia described the event in glowing details. It evidently had been a marvelous affair. Kathy remembered Greg and their relationship, which caused her to think about herself.

She mused about her childhood, a normal childhood, or at least, so she had always thought. Since being in therapy however, some of her perspectives had changed. Her parents had always given her everything she wanted, but they had insisted on her being perfect for them. She had always tried to please them with good grades and by excelling at her activities. She knew now that had been too much stress. She loved her parents, and got on well with them, but they had caused her problems in growing up. No, she was still growing up. It didn't suddenly end with being of age.

But where was she going? What would she do? She had learned a lot about herself in the last few months. She felt much better about life in general than she had for a long time. She had a good and interesting job now in computer accounting at PCI, but was that enough? How different life might be, if she had not decided to stop seeing Greg. She felt basically happy, but there was no one who interested her romantically. Her life with her parents was quiet, but comfortable. Maybe that was best for her. Maybe there never would be anything else. That suited her. She looked up and took in the beauty of the lake and trees around her. Her surroundings were beautiful, and her life was satisfying now. She didn't need anyone but herself. A bit more

determined and confident, she smiled and walked a little faster.

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It was difficult to settle down to work again after Greg and Glenna returned from their honeymoon. There were new routines to establish, and many of Glenna's belongings had to be moved and piled or stowed in the apartment. A lot of things were easier, although getting to work on time was not one of them. Their lives suddenly were entwined twenty four hours a day, but their love and the understanding which had developed over the last few months, aided in developing working arrangements which suited them both. Gradually, they adjusted to living together and enjoying it.

Several months passed. Greg was busier than ever as he had assumed some more of Hap's work. Glenna continued her job in Doctor Thomas's office, and shared lunch with Greg whenever possible. In discussions with Bill, Greg knew it would be only a few months before Hap would retire. On one Monday morning Bill invited Greg into his office.

“Greg,” he began, “With Hap leaving soon, we will be needing more assistance. You can't take over all of Hap's projects, and handle yours also. The other engineers are equally loaded with work, so I'm going to be hiring another engineer. The personnel department is looking now, and will soon be sending us three or four candidates. When we have them, I want you to do the interviewing, and recommend to me the best one.”

“I'd be glad to, Bill. But why me? I've never done that before. Isn't there someone better qualified to do the interviewing?”

“No. You know most everything going on here, and you're good in dealing with people, and I'd like you to have the experience.” Bill smiled as he watched Greg's reaction.

“Well, certainly, if you want me to do it, I will, and I'll do the best I can.”

“I know you will Greg. I have great confidence in you.”

Over the next two weeks, Greg interviewed four prospective engineers. When he completed each interview, he wrote out his impressions, and filed them with the engineer's resume. After completing all four interviews he sat down and to review them one at a time. Then he was ready to compile and compare his observations. The following day he caught Bill alone after lunch, and reported on his results.

“There were four applicants,” he began. “One was a nice person, but had insufficient training in the areas we need. The second would have been all right, except he has moved around a lot. I would not have held that against him, except he had no plausible reasons for so many changes. The third and

fourth were fairly even. One had a bit better school record, but the other was more communicative and seemed to understand people better. Either would do fine, but I would recommend the one who was the better communicator.”

Very good,” replied Bill, “Let's get him back for a final interview with both of us. What is his name?”

“Her name is Mary Harrison,” responded Greg. “I think you'll like her.” Within a month, Mary had been hired, and reported to work. Greg found himself in the position of introducing her to everyone, and showing her around the department. As he arranged her orientation schedule, he recalled his own first days, and how helpful Hap had been as he introduced Greg and taught him the procedures. Now it was Greg's turn to help a new employee. As they approached Hap's desk he began, “Mary this is Hap Porter. Hap, this is our newest engineer, Mary Harrison. Hap gets his name from his initials, H. A. P., but it's a state secret what H. A. stands for,” teased Greg.

“Hello, Mary, welcome to PCI, and don't mind Greg. He's been after me ever since he arrived here to try and pin me down on my name with no success.” Hap spoke good naturedly, and Mary smiled, recognizing the camaraderie between the two men.

Very shortly, Mary completed the prescribed orientation program, and Bill assigned her to work with Hap with the intention that she would take over his remaining projects when he retired, but work under Greg's guidance. When Mary was hired, Glenna teased Greg, “I understand you have a new employee. Is she intelligent, or only good looking?”

“She was hired strictly on the basis of her beauty. We thought it was beginning to look decidedly drab around the office, so we arranged to brighten things up a little.”

Glenna could think of no comeback, and settled for just sticking out her tongue at Greg. After Mary had been there two months, Hap announced his retirement. Bill arranged a catered dinner with the usual festivities. Hap had been with PCI Corporation longer than most of his co-workers remembered, and he had many friends throughout the company. The party was a huge success with much good natured teasing of the guest of honor. He received many funny presents, but some useful ones also. Hap passed this milestone as easily and graciously as he had handled the rest of his career. Greg arrived home late after the party, but Glenna was waiting up for him.

“How did the party go?”

“Great. We gave Hap a good send off. He is now officially retired.”

“Well,” continued Glenna, “He may be retired, but I'm pregnant.”

CHAPTER TWENTY SEVEN

Glenna's announcement came as a bombshell. Greg looked at her in disbelief. "You're what?"

"I'm pregnant. It happens you know. One minute you're just standing there looking beautiful, and the next minute you're pregnant."

"You goose. When did you find out?"

"Just today I had a confirming test, but I've suspected for a couple of weeks."

"You scoundrel. And you're just now letting me know? Come here." They embraced in a soulful kiss, then looked at each other intently. Greg asked, "Is it a boy or a girl?"

Glenna looked up impishly, and said, "Yes," then snuggled closer.

Greg held her and swayed gently, hugging her. "I love you, you know."

"I love you too, and our baby," she answered.

"This changes everything now."

"What do you mean?"

"This apartment won't be big enough for three of us," explained Greg. It's barely big enough for two of us. We'll have to start house hunting."

"I love this little apartment. You'll have to move without me. I'll stay here."

"That's your outstanding and most endearing quality. Your good sense. What would I do without your clear thinking?" After a moment, Greg asked, "How do you feel?"

"Fine! I feel fine, and I don't look different either. Why? Do you think there's a chance it will go away? Maybe tomorrow I'll be better."

Greg shook his head. "We've got to start making plans. There is a lot to consider."

“Yes, but let's consider it tomorrow, not just now.” She held him tighter, and he sighed resignedly.

It took three months, but they found a little bungalow on a side street near a shopping center and close to public transportation. It was still within reasonable walking distance of the plant, whenever they preferred to walk. It seemed ideal for them, and after the necessary paper work, they were ready to move in. Compared to the apartment, the house was a mansion with space for all their belongings, and a separate room for the oncoming baby.

Glenna's obstetrician was Dr. Robert Maresh, a dark haired, dark complexioned Indian, with a very precise, clipped British accent. He was a thorough doctor who took all the time necessary to properly treat his patients. With the first visit, he outlined the whole procedure. He covered the customary items, then said, “In a few weeks we'll have to consider some tests to make sure you are going to have a healthy baby. They are not complicated or difficult, but I recommend we do them. Also, have you and your husband ever had a gene profile made? That is often useful at this time.”

Glenna looked at the doctor for a while before answering. She recalled her conversations with Greg about the subject, and the old trepidation rose again in her mind. “Why is everyone always pushing this gene thing on me?” she thought to herself, “I don't want to do it! I'll be extremely happy to take what I get, which will be a perfectly wonderful combination of Greg and me. How can I explain this to the doctor? How can I keep him from insisting on things I don't want?”

Aloud she replied, “My husband has had a gene profile, but I haven't, and I don't especially want one. I can't explain it, but it somehow goes against my nature to try and know all about what will happen. I don't want to know the future, and I don't think I'm going to be interested in the tests you suggest.”

“Well,” answered Dr. Maresh, “I am only thinking of the welfare of your baby. We can do whatever you wish, but I strongly recommend them.”

“As of now, I must decline that part of your plans. It is not what I want to do.”

“May I elaborate a little for you? Perhaps I can change your mind.”

Glenna relented, “I'll be glad to listen to you, but don't count on my agreeing.”

“Let me start by saying, nothing is one hundred percent certain. There are always risks and unknowns. That is why I feel we must use all the best tools at our disposal to know what may happen and what to expect.” Dr. Maresh paused to note the effect of his initial statement.

Glenna remained silent, but thought to herself, “I'm not going to let him talk me into anything.”

The doctor continued, “There have some disturbing trends recently. Birth related problems, and congenital conditions and illnesses have been

showing a slow but steady increase in our population. This is in spite of all we have learned about the reproductive process and all the advancements in correcting defects or problems related to inherited qualities. Sometimes it seems when we learn how to correct one problem, it spawns other problems. These new problems may not even show up immediately, but only become obvious two or three generations later. Nature has a way of compensating for disruptions of her plans which has been functioning for eons, and the manner of natural response can not always be predicted. Even with our modern science, we may not know all of the results of changes we make in the human system, either the immediate ones or the delayed ones which come along to bedevil us later.”

“So why even bother with tests to try to know what a new child will be like?” responded Glenna, “It sounds like a losing proposition to me.”

“There is a growing belief that by our methods to preserve all life, we are in fact weakening the human race. Many believe that the sooner we can detect problems, the sooner we can act to eliminate them.”

Glenna thought for a moment, then cautiously asked, “Does that mean you might suggest I not have the baby if something were ‘wrong’ with it by your tests? Would you be counseling me to have an abortion then?”

“That is always a possibility,” replied Dr. Maresh, seriously, “but it is uncommon. There are also conditions with which we can take measures to avoid problems later in the pregnancy, or even later in life, if we are aware that the problem exists. We must all be concerned with the proper utilization of the earth's resources. My concern is seeing the best, most useful persons come into the world. We learned long ago the human race cannot tolerate having many individuals who through no fault of their own cannot contribute, but only drain the available human and material resources. I am trying, and I consider it my duty, to be sure you will contribute a healthy new life to our world. Is that so bad?”

“No, it's not bad, but in my case I feel it's just not necessary. I know my baby is going to be a wonderful person.”

“Well,” concluded the doctor, “Thank you for letting me have my say. You certainly may do whatever you wish in this regard.”

Glenna had her way. Dr. Maresh did not insist on the tests she did not want, and Greg realized there was no use in opposing her and thus upsetting her, either. The days and weeks passed and the pregnancy progressed normally. The next few months were filled with planning, fixing and arranging the baby's room, and general preparations for the birth. Glenna continued working until two months before the due date. Then she had some difficulties with the pregnancy, and the obstetrician recommended rest and less physical activity. That was difficult for an active person like Glenna, however she did everything required. The date finally arrived, but the labor was long and difficult. After what seemed an interminable time to Glenna and Greg, Meagan Ann Adamski made her appearance.

She was the most beautiful baby in the world, and Greg proudly showed pictures at work to prove it to whomever would look. Meagan had blonde, almost invisible hair. Her features were petite, but unmistakably mostly Glenna's. She became the absolute center of the happy parents' lives.

After a few months, Glenna went back to work. PCI Corporation had a day care center for all their employees who needed it. The location, which was in the Infirmary, could not have been more convenient for Glenna. When things were slow in Doctor Thomas's office, she could take a few minutes to go in to see Meagan.

Their lives continued in busy, but satisfying activity. They often visited Emma and Tom. Emma particularly, always enjoyed caring for Meagan and discussing her antics with Glenna. A new relationship seemed to form between aunt and niece, which was better than any previous relationship. Not to be outdone, Greg's parents practically insisted that vacations be spent with them. The grandparents enjoyed playing their roles, and Meagan benefited from their indulgence.

One day near Meagan's first birthday, Greg came home to announce that the new VAC train line had been completed from St. Louis to San Francisco, and was now operational all the way to the west coast. He had heard the news from Carol Burns, who also said the VAC Corporation would immediately begin work on the northern route out of Chicago to go to Seattle. This meant the production of the Maxie compressor would continue for years to come. A week before Meagan's second birthday, Bill asked Greg into his office, and closed the door. "Greg," he began, "What would you think, if I told you I were leaving?"

"I'd be upset. We need you here. You're a good manager, and you're always encouraging new ideas. Everyone likes you. Are you thinking of quitting?"

Bill didn't answer, but went on, "What would you say, if I told you the new person would be almost as good, and I'm sure someday, better than I am?"

"I can't believe that's true, Bill. You're a very good boss."

"Well," added Bill, "it's all true. In three weeks I'll be leaving to go to our headquarters office. They've asked me to be the Vice President of Engineering for the whole corporation, and I have decided to do it."

"Oh, my" exclaimed Greg, then added, "That's great for you. Congratulations. I'm happy you're moving up and not quitting. At least we'll still see you occasionally. But what about us? Who is the new guy coming in?"

Bill smiled, "Thanks, I appreciate your good wishes, and I'm sure I'll still see lots of you, because you're the new guy."

Greg sat a moment, not comprehending. "I'm the new guy?"

"Yes, Greg," continued Bill, "When I originally hired you, it was because I saw much more than an engineer in you, and you've responded well to

every challenge I gave you. You deal excellently with people, and I'm sure the other engineering personnel respect your ability and like you personally as much as they do me. You will be a very good manager.” He laughed and added, “I’ll see to it. I’ll still be your boss.”

“My goodness, Bill,” Greg found his voice, “I can hardly believe what you are saying. I'm to be manager. When does this happen? What about all my projects? How can we do this?”

“I guess we'll have to hire another engineer, but you know how to do that, don't you?”

Greg slumped back into his chair, “Yes, there are a lot of things we have to do, and we have only three weeks.”

“You have only three weeks,” corrected Bill, “I'm going to be traveling back and forth to headquarters very often beginning immediately, but of course, any time I'm here I'll spend with you. Congratulations.”

“Thanks, thanks a lot Bill.” Greg still sounded a little dazed, “I’ll certainly do my best.”

It was late in the day, but Greg made a few phone calls. When he and Glenna and Meagan arrived home, Emma was waiting for them at the house. “Emma, what are you doing here?” asked Glenna.

“She's here because I called her to baby sit with Meagan this evening. Put on a nice dress, you and I are going out to dinner.”

“Oh my, I haven't a thing to wear. What's the big Occasion?”

“You'll learn later. Now don't argue.”

Glenna was confused, but knew the little games Greg played were always fun, so did not resist. In a few minutes she was ready, and they set off. “At least you can tell me where we are going,” pouted Glenna.

“How about Chings Chinese. We haven't been there for a while.” They walked in silence a few minutes until they approached the restaurant. “I always like this place, because it's where we had our first date.”

“Yes, I remember,” Glenna answered, “You had big important news you wanted to share, and you picked me to share it with. Little did you know what you were getting into,” she teased. They entered, and were shown to a table. The atmosphere was subdued and intimate, and they were led to a particularly quiet corner. After ordering, Glenna asked, “Now are you going to tell me what this is all about, or do I have to beat it out of you?”

Greg couldn't help grinning expansively, "You remember the first time we were here? It was to tell you I had been made project leader of Maxie."

"Yes."

"Well, now I've been made project leader of everything."

"What do you mean?"

"Bill is moving up to Vice President of Engineering, and I'm to take his job. I'm to be Manager of Engineering of our division."

It took a few seconds for the import of Greg's words to sink in, but then Glenna began crying, "Oh Greg, I'm so proud of you. You'll be the best manager ever."

Greg moved his chair next to hers and put his arm around her. "I'm glad you're so happy. We have the best of everything. We are the luckiest people in the world."

CHAPTER TWENTY EIGHT

Greg found his new responsibilities somewhat intimidating, but none the less interesting. He quickly had to learn more about the other engineer's work, hire a new person, and begin turning projects over to others. Yet he had to keep up on the day to day details he had always followed, until he could pass them off on someone else. In addition, he had to pick up a multitude of other kinds of duties; meeting with suppliers, advising on contracts, even trips to headquarters when Bill called all the managers in. The months passed quickly, and Greg gradually brought the job under control.

Glenna and Greg devoted their free time to Meagan. They accepted their business duties with discipline, but away from work and everyday concerns, they enjoyed playing the role of parents, and reveled in the joy of seeing Meagan develop. Church activities kept them busy. Holidays were often spent with Tom and Emma, and vacation trips to Greg's parents were routine.

As Meagan approached her third birthday, the doctor expressed some concern to Glenna that the little girl was falling a little behind in her growth curve. Over the next few months they kept a close watch on her. She was constantly measured and weighed as Glenna and Greg tried to reassure themselves everything was all right. As they checked the records, their daughter continued to lose ground.

When they realized something must be wrong, they concluded with the doctor that some thorough testing should be done. The results were quick to indicate the trouble. Meagan was the victim of an unusual heart condition. Greg and Glenna followed the doctor's advice on restricting her activity, but

there was nothing to do but wait to see how the condition developed. More months passed, and the troubled parents continued doing all they could for Meagan, but sought escape from their worry by being absorbed in their work.

On a trip to Salem to meet with Dick about some controls, Greg was feeling particularly disconsolate. Dick inquired, “What's the matter, Greg? Is the job getting you down? There's a lot more to managing than just telling someone what to do, isn't there?”

“Yes,” replied Greg, “But that's not my concern. Meagan has a heart problem, and we just don't know what will happen.”

“Well, she's in good company,” continued Dick, “I had a heart transplant some years ago myself. It's no particular fun, but it works. What does the doctor say about Meagan's condition?”

Greg looked surprised. “I didn't know you had a transplant. You always looked healthy to me.”

“It's amazing what can be done these days. I guess that is partly why I don't have much use for your doom and gloom Doctor Morgan. How is the old boy? I haven't seen him in quite a while.”

“I haven't seen him either, so I don't know, but tell me more about your experience. I'm interested in knowing how you happened to have a transplant, and how is it working out?”

“I guess I just had a bad heart from the beginning, but in my twenties, it really got bad, and I went into the hospital until they found a matching heart for me. It didn't take long, and I've been fine ever since.”

“I'm encouraged to hear that. We don't know what we might have to do for Meagan. The doctor isn't sure himself yet.”

“Well, I'm telling you, trust her doctor. They do marvelous things these days. Medical science can handle all kinds of problems. I'm living proof. You know, just because something isn't ‘natural’ doesn't mean it's bad. Some things in nature are really very horrible, if you stop to think about them. We have to intervene in all kinds of situations in life, not just in the medical area, but in all aspects of life. With the knowledge we have, it wouldn't make sense to do anything else. That's the only reason the human race is where it is today. Humankind knows how to control its environment, even though it doesn't always do it the best way. That's the manner in which we are different from animals. That's the quality which I believe makes us special.”

Greg spoke thoughtfully, “Doctor Morgan made the point to me once that animals in nature evolve to the best possible condition for themselves because only the most adaptable survive. That insures the best accommodation to their environment.”

“Oh, hogwash,” answered Dick, “The animals in nature have had to change with the environment just as everything else does. Some changes occur

so rapidly, there is no time to adapt to the new situation. A lot of the animals wouldn't survive either, if the zoos didn't help. That's interference in the natural process, isn't it? There are veterinarians for animals, and that changes the animal world just as much as doctors change the human world. I'm sorry, but I don't buy all this natural stuff.”

“Well,” replied Greg, “I certainly understand your viewpoint. I only hope they can do something for Meagan.” The conversation left Greg feeling a little more hopeful, and he and Glenna felt encouraged as Greg discussed it with her. On the next visit to the doctor with Meagan, they discussed in greater detail what their options were. The doctor had a plan already in mind, and advised caution and further watchful waiting for the present. There would be plenty of time in the future, if other action were required.

More time passed, but Meagan's condition continued to deteriorate. In six months, it was apparent more drastic action was required. Meagan was placed in the hospital to have the best care, and a search was started for a heart transplant. Because of her small size, it would be more difficult than for an adult, but the doctor was optimistic. The days passed, but no heart with the proper characteristics became available. Greg and Glenna spent all their free time at the hospital with Meagan.

The days turned into weeks, and they became more discouraged as Meagan's health continued to decline. The hospital staff redoubled their efforts, but no help was forthcoming. As Glenna sat by her side on a particularly cold Winter evening, Meagan's labored breathing slowed, then quietly stopped. Her struggle was over.

Greg and Glenna found no joy in their lives now. The Winter went on interminably. They concentrated on their work, but there seemed to be no reason for living. A gloom settled on them which they found no way to overcome. Neither of them wanted to try again for a child, at least not yet. The experience had been too painful for the rewards involved. Their lives went on unvaryingly and immutably. After what seemed like an eternity, the weather started to get warmer, and signs of Spring emerged. On a warm Sunday, they decided on a whim to go for a hike. The couple set off for Chalmers Park to roam their favorite areas. They walked without direction, but seemed to automatically end up at the bottom of the path to the mountain pond. Greg asked, “Shall we climb?”

“Why not?” returned Glenna, “We're here, and the mountain is there. Let's do it.”

They climbed slowly, but steadily. Getting to the pond seemed to be an easy task, but they sat to rest before continuing. They recalled the first time they had been there which now seemed so long ago, then they grew silent and sat looking at the pond.

Glenna drifted off into her own reverie. She remembered when she had first met Greg, and what a joyful addition to her life he had been. He had been so accepting of her, and they had found so many things to do together and enjoy. Over a period of time it seemed it was inevitable that they would get married. Yes, and that was the best part. Living with Greg was always interesting and invigorating. Then Meagan. What had gone wrong? Was it her, Glenna's, fault? Was there something about her past that doomed Meagan before she was even born? Glenna grew sad again as her thoughts pursued her.

Poor Greg, perhaps he would be better off if they had never met. Maybe she should see a doctor, maybe even have a gene profile made. Greg had put such importance in it. Yet what would that prove? Maybe it would only indicate there was no doubt. They should just not have children at all.

After several minutes, Greg broke the spell, “Come on, let's go, or we'll never get to the top.” They began climbing again, and after a half an hour at a steady pace they reached the top. Sitting in the sun on a rock, they viewed the woods below, and the clear scene of the city in the distance.

Glenna drank it all in, and exclaimed, “Oh, what I wouldn't give to just stay here. Let the rest of the world tend to its business. I'll stay here away from worries, problems, messy little chores and details of living. Why does life have to be so - so difficult.”

Greg found nothing to say. He understood entirely Glenna's hurt and frustration with their life so far. He looked at her, glumly, and tried to find some reassuring words, but there were none.

“I love this place,” she continued, “I would spend the rest of my life here, if I could. It is so remote from the farce they call ‘living.’ This is living. I don't want to go back.”

They sat in silence for several minutes. The breeze carried scents and slight sounds up from the valley. The sun warmed them, and the fresh air seemed to permeate their minds, cleaning out the debris from months of Winter confinement and the wreckage of dashed dreams. It was as though this special place was their wellspring, their source of strength to continue the paths they were destined to follow. They needed renewal, and had been inexorably drawn to the source of dreams and ambitions. Gradually the aura of the mountaintop did its work.

After a long time, Greg reminded Glenna, “Lunch is a long way away, back at the lunch counter in the park. We will be very hungry when we get there.”

Reluctantly, Glenna rose, and they started retracing their steps to the bottom of the mountain. When they reached the path back to the main part of the park, Greg turned, “Wait a moment.” Embracing Glenna, and looking intently at her, he added, “Let's try starting again. Let's take a fresh look, and try to make sense of our lives again. It's time we did.”

Glenna looked at him sadly, “Yes, you're right,” She paused a moment, then continued, “I'll try, if you'll try.”

“How can we miss?” asked Greg, and kissed her.

They turned, and again headed for the restaurant.

CHAPTER TWENTY NINE

Work continued to be an escape for Greg and Glenna, but in addition, they started to pursue more social activities for greater diversion. They invited friends to their home for dinner and a social evening. They began participating in church functions, and attended plays and other performances. Jack and Cynthia shared some of their excursions with them. They took some short week end trips, and looked for new activities. To their friends, they resumed the appearance of a happy couple. Actually, they began to feel better about their lives, too. They let themselves feel good again, but they did not decide to have another child. Spring became Summer, which then turned into Autumn. The leaves were in their brightest glory one day, when Greg received a message at work from Mrs. Porter. Hap had died. Hap had been a traditional person, and he had a traditional funeral. It was well attended. Not only many local people from the plant, but many other friends from out of town were at the service. Dick Walters and his wife came from Salem and stayed with Greg and Glenna for the week end. Bill was also able to be there for the day.

At the funeral, Greg was interested in a little biography of Hap which was included in the program. It reviewed his life and achievements, and gave many facts about him. His birth date and place of birth were listed, but in all references to him, only the initials, H. A., were used. Greg smiled as he thought to himself, “Aha, Hap, now I know when and where you were born. I could probably find those records and learn your names.” He immediately resolved to do so, then, in an about face, just as quickly reversed his decision. “No, old friend, that wouldn't be fair. I would be taking advantage of you. I will let it forever be a secret. Your secret. Goodbye, I will miss you.”

Greg and Glenna continued with their new routines. Winter passed, but was much more endurable, because they could once more look forward with anticipation toward Spring. One day Glenna awoke with a bad cold, and decided to stay home from work. Greg called Doctor Thomas to explain, and the doctor volunteered some medicine for Glenna, if Greg would pick it up. By mid afternoon Greg had cleared away all the important issues of the day, and told his secretary, Carole, he was going to be in Doctor Thomas's office for a while. He hurried through the winter chill to the infirmary, and entered the doctor's office. It was strange not to see Glenna there or any receptionist to talk with. He went directly to the inner door and knocked.

“Come in,” was the response.

Greg entered, “Hi, George.” Years of association had permitted a less formal relationship between the two men.

“Hello, Greg. Here are the bottles for Glenna. How is the patient doing?”

“I'm sure she will survive. She just won't be very happy for a while.”

“Well, these things should help her. How about you. Are you taking any precautions not to get it too?”

“Oh, no, you know me. I don't get colds. Good genes and all that sort of thing.”

“Yes, I know. Doctor Morgan gives you very high marks.”

“Old Doctor Morgan. Have you seen him recently? How is he?” asked Greg.

George smiled, “He's as obstreperous as usual, and he keeps fairly well, considering his age and deformity. I see him fairly often. He has involved me more in his crusade. Actually, I have involved myself, because I believe he is right in much of what he says.

“What is your prognosis? Will the human race survive?”

“Well,” the doctor answered, “it's going to be difficult. Maintaining a strong gene pool and improving it is a major challenge. The program for gradually decreasing the population, which most everyone is committed to, is a great achievement, but it introduces another problem. The fact that couples have only one child, automatically starts restricting the variety of genes. With millions of people in this country, it is a small consideration now, but it is one that should not be forgotten or disregarded. More importantly, we have to encourage persons with good genes, or at least the fewest number of ‘bad’ genes, to have children. At the same time, people who shouldn't have children, have to be stopped somehow.”

“That's sounding dangerous to me. You're promoting actions the same as Doctor Morgan espoused. I discussed that with him once. Aren't you talking about taking away individual freedoms?” asked Greg.

“No, we're talking about educational programs to make people aware of the dangers. Most people are reasonable when they really understand the problem. Look at what we have done with the environmental issues. It would be tragic, if we ever arrived at the situation of forcing compliance with a state ordered plan. I would object to that also. Irrespective of the perceived benefits, our freedom of choice and action are paramount. There are a variety of educational programs we sponsor, and they are becoming more widely recognized every year.”

“Well, I'm sure the crusade is in good hands. What can I do to help, without doing too much, of course?” Greg grinned.

“How about helping us with a donation to the sperm bank? That shouldn't be too much of a burden on you.”

“I did that some time ago,” Greg admitted. “When I first talked with Doctor Morgan, that was one thing he wanted me to do, and I did it.”

“That was a long time ago. I'm sure they would be pleased to be helped again. I can check for you, if you wish.”

“Sure, why not?”

Doctor Thomas picked up the phone and dialed a number. “Do you remember your identification number?”

“Certainly, WR1941,” Greg answered. Doctor Thomas talked a few minutes on the telephone, then hung up, and turned back to Greg. “They would like very much for you to renew your donation, if you are so inclined.”

“Well, I'll consider it the next time I'm in Salem. Now I'd better get back to the office and see what has fallen apart while I've been gone. Thanks for the medicine, George. I'll get Glenna back to you as soon as I can.”

Greg described his discussion with Doctor Thomas to Glenna that evening. “What do you think? Should I go back to the clinic?”

Glenna was thoughtful a moment, then answered, “Yes, I think you should spread your good genes as far as they will go.” She grew silent, and did not continue. Greg embraced her and she snuggled close to him. Neither of them spoke. It was not necessary. They were both thinking of their own failure in procreating, but neither wanted to voice their feelings. It was still too painful.

About a month later, Greg found some spare time on a business trip to Salem where he was consulting with Dick on a new control. When he was through, he remembered his talk with Doctor Thomas, and turned aside to go through the park. Without advance notice, he walked into the Genetic Research Clinic. A receptionist greeted him. “I want to donate to the sperm bank,” he explained. Without hesitation, the receptionist asked, “Have you been here before?”

“Yes, I donated several years ago.”

“Do you have your identification number?”

“It's WR1941,”

“Have a seat. We'll be with you in a minute.” Greg found a seat in the lobby, which had several large plants in it, but was otherwise vacant. In a short while the inner door opened, and a technician asked him in. There at desk she handed him a package, and explained, “Our procedures have changed somewhat since the last time you were here. Take this kit to the last room on the right and open the package after you have locked the door. There are instructions inside. You will see a little compartment in the room to place the sample when you are through. Then come back out here. We need to take a little blood also.”

Greg did as he was directed. The room looked familiar to him. Everything seemed the same as before, except now there was a television set in the room also. He opened the package and found it contained a sample bottle, and a sheet of directions. It seemed the TV was for his use and there were directions on its operation. There was also a reminder to immediately place his sample in the little compartment he saw on the wall. He turned on the

television set, and to his amazement he saw on each of several channels the most erotic videos he could have imagined. He watched for a minute or two, then turned it off. It was not necessary for him, or even agreeable.

After collecting the sample he placed the bottle in the wall compartment. As he closed the little door, he heard a noise of another door on the other side opening, and he realized his sample was on its way. After a couple of minutes, he was prepared to leave, and reentered the hall. Halfway up the hallway a nurse met him, and asked him to sit in a small alcove where she would take his blood. It seemed to Greg she was the same, more mature nurse, who had drawn his blood on his previous visit. As he sat, he asked, "Have you been here a long time? I think I remember you."

She smiled at him and answered, "Yes, I've been here for quite a while. Here, give me your arm."

"Your procedures have changed since my last visit."

"Yes," she answered, and continued rather soberly, "We found that the way we took samples several years ago was not right. It was too difficult for the young nurses involved to handle emotionally, and we changed the system."

"I can certainly understand that. Although, there's probably no really good way to do this."

"You're very likely correct, but we do the best we can. There. I'm all done with you. Thank you for your help."

Greg left the little building, and started across the park. Part way along the path, he found an empty bench and sat down. He thought about his experience several years ago, and compared it with the present. He inevitably thought of Kathy, and remembered how embarrassed she was about what she did. She obviously had a lot of psychological problems to straighten out after her service there. Probably, she had been correct in not trying to pursue a relationship with him then. She had sounded very confused, but at least she was clear enough mentally to know during that period of her life was no time for commitments.

As he sat and mused, his mind drifted back to that time. He smiled as he recalled the various times he had seen Kathy, and remembered he had enjoyed them. All except that last terrible telephone conversation. He wondered now what had become of her. Wherever she was, whatever she was doing, he hoped she had found some happiness. Two young boys skating by on roller blades snapped him out of his reverie. He realized it was getting late, and he had a train to catch. He stood up and started walking to the station.

CHAPTER THIRTY

The routines of work and social life continued for Greg and Glenna through another Summer and Autumn. They took time for a vacation trip, and

stayed with Greg's folks for a few days. Greg had been training Mary Harrison to take charge of the department during the times he was away on business or pleasure. She had shown a lot of ability, and seemed to be able to guide the staff in the right direction. It was her sincere interest, and gentle way of forwarding her ideas that made people respect her.

Greg always enjoyed returning for a short visit to his childhood home. He would show Glenna scenes of youthful adventures, and have funny stories to tell her of events with friends or parents. Greg's parents still ran their little flower business, and found enjoyment in the growing of beauty and in sharing it with their customers. Their life was quiet, but satisfying. They had not had high aspirations, so had avoided great disappointments. Greg was the joy of their lives, and they were pleased that he had achieved such wonderful success. Glenna and Greg even helped with some of the chores connected with the flower business. It was a welcome relief from the kind of work they did the rest of the year, and made returning to their own home and friends something of a fresh experience.

After vacation, the routines of their lives claimed them again. The transition to work orientation was readily made, and old habits re-imposed themselves. On a sunny day in early Autumn, they were walking home from a trip to the shopping center after work, when Glenna suddenly asked, "Would you do it all again?"

"What do you mean?"

"Would you court me, and pursue me, and marry me, if you had known in advance all that has happened to us?"

Greg stopped and looked at Glenna. He was perplexed by her question, and wondered how she had happened to be thinking along that train of thought. She looked at him expectantly, and he answered with reassurance. "Of course I would. I enjoy being with you more than anyone else I have ever known. I love you. Why wouldn't I want to do it again? What brought that on anyway?"

"I don't know I guess I've been thinking about how our lives are influenced by accidents. What if you had not come to work at PCI? Or what if I had turned you down the first time you asked me to dinner for celebrating your new project? Or what if you were different and really couldn't get along with Tom and Emma?"

"What if you would stop worrying, and we would just concentrate on finding our happiness in our lives?" replied Greg.

"Oh, I am happy. I guess that's why I can tolerate thinking about not being happy."

"Well I can't stand to think about it. I want you around now, and for a long time to come. We have a lot of living to do."

"You always say the right things. I really am happy and can't imagine living with anyone else. It wouldn't be fun, or even interesting." She giggled

and hugged him.

Autumn proceeded to become more beautiful. They still enjoyed walks in the parks, and the other activities the public facilities provided. One bright day Glenna could not resist the lure of the open air. "I'm going to skip work and go to the park. Care to join me?"

"I'd love to, but I have three meetings today and two reports to finish. One of us has to be responsible and go to work. I guess it will have to be me."

"Killjoy," Glenna pouted, "I always thought you were the happy go lucky, free spirit type. I'll have all the fun," she teased.

"Well, have fun enough for me too. You can tell me about it this evening." Greg's day seemed to go slower than ordinarily. The meetings dragged on, there were problems with the reports, and people did not seem as cooperative as usual. At lunch, he sat alone and wondered about Glenna. Maybe he should have gone with her. It certainly would have been more interesting than work seemed to be today.

The afternoon was more of the same. By mid-afternoon he felt thoroughly exhausted, and just sat at his desk staring out the window. Even here, the outside was full of autumn colors. He felt a little lift from that, and reflected on the amazing changes that nature produced in regular sequence from year to year. Now the time of dormancy was approaching. It was a period of rest so next year there would be greater vitality for growth again. "Nature is a smart old gal," he thought to himself. "She seems to have figured out the best way of doing things, and insists on doing them that way." He sat silently for a long while.

As he sat meditating, his phone rang. When he answered, an unfamiliar voice asked, "Mister Adamski?"

"Yes."

"This is the emergency room of Municipal Hospital. Your wife was just brought in. She was found lying unconscious in the park. Can you come down right away?"

Greg was out of the office before the telephone receiver stopped rattling on the holder. Luckily there was an Electricab at the plant gate which he boarded and urgently directed the driver to the hospital. The cab seemed to travel at a snail's pace, and Greg leaned forward in his seat subconsciously trying to push it to go faster. Greg's mind was in turmoil. What could have happened? Why hadn't he gone with Glenna today? He tortured himself with all kinds of imaginings, as the cab threaded its way along. After what seemed to be an eternity, they arrived at the hospital.

As Greg rushed into the emergency room, he could not see Glenna anywhere. Going to the desk he gasped in dismay, "I'm Greg Adamski. Where is my wife?"

The desk clerk quickly reacted, “Just a minute Sir. I'll call the doctor. Almost as soon as she turned to search for him, a doctor came hurrying along the hall.

“Mister Adamski? I'm Doctor Wendt. Please come into my office for a minute.” Greg allowed himself to be led into a small adjoining office and sat where the doctor indicated.

“Where is my wife? How is she? What happened to her?”

“Please be calm Mister Adamski. I will tell you everything, but you must keep control of yourself. She was found in the park by a hiker. She was unconscious, lying in the path. An ambulance was dispatched as quickly as possible, but when she arrived here she was in a coma. We determined she had evidently suffered a stroke, and it had been a massive event. We started to treat her, but, sir,” he hesitated, “I'm sorry to have to tell you, she died before we could do anything.”

Greg was stunned. Died? Glenna? No! This couldn't be. He stared at the doctor in disbelief. No! This is a dream. This is a horrible dream. I must wake up. He spoke agonizingly. “Glenna is dead? No, no, no.” Then he held his head in his hands and wept openly and without restraint. For several minutes he could do nothing else. The doctor waited. Greg grew quiet, looked at the doctor, and in a hoarse voice asked, “Why did this happen? What happened?”

“I'm not sure, Mister Adamski. Has she had a history of fainting spells, or head aches?”

“No!, she's been perfectly healthy. How could this happen?” Greg still could not fully accept what the doctor had said.

“Sometimes there is no way to predict this kind of event. Has any of her family ever had a similar occurrence?”

Greg then recalled what Glenna had always said about her parents. “Her mother died suddenly when Glenna was a child, but no one ever explained the circumstances to her. Her father had died in an accident prior to that. Her aunt and uncle never told us anything more.”

“I see,” the doctor paused. “There may be some relationship to her mother's death, but it would take a lot of investigation to be sure.”

“What good is that? I just want Glenna back. Oh! Glenna!” Greg again wept and slumped in his chair, his head in his hands.

“Please stay here, Mister Adamski. I'll be back in a moment.” The doctor left, and Greg was alone with his sorrow. He felt he was floating in a void unrelated to space and time. What would he do now? How could this be? This morning she was so alive and happy. Now this! He did not know how long he sat there. After some time the doctor returned with a sedative for him. He only vaguely remembered being led to see Glenna and yet again weeping his

anguish. Mechanically, and in a daze, he called Reverend Wilson, the U-U Church minister, who immediately agreed to come to the hospital. He called Carole at work to explain his absence, and he called Cynthia Clark and several other friends. He absolutely did not know what to do next. In a little while the minister arrived, and assisted Greg home.

The next few days were like a dream. Things happened and he had no control over them. Glenna's body was cremated, which was as she had expressed her preference on several occasions in the past. A memorial service was arranged, and performed, but Greg felt he was there only as an observer, not a participant. It was unreal to him. Friends and acquaintances expressed their sorrow and condolences to him, which he numbly accepted.

On the urging of his parents, he accompanied them back to their home for a few days more of readjustment. Gradually, he came to accept the new situation of his life, but it was hollow and joyless. The world had suddenly lost its color. It was a black and white and gray place with nothing worth noticing. Work made some of the time bearable, but weekends were interminable, empty and lonely. Jack and Cynthia asked him to dinner, but the atmosphere was strained. Greg was just not good company for anyone.

Autumn turned to Winter, and Greg spent his time at home, and was unwilling to participate in his usual activities. He tried to occupy his mind with television or videos, and sometimes found momentary diversion. But in the end, there was always reality, and reality was not pretty or satisfying. Several weeks after Glenna's death, Greg began sorting through her belongings. There were a few items he believed Tom and Emma should have. They were pictures, and small personal items they had given her, or had belonged to her mother. He put together a small package, and arranged to take it to them.

Tom greeted him at the door, and seemed more subdued than normal. "Hello Greg, come in," he intoned. Greg entered the little house and austere parlor he had been in so often before. Now it was different. It felt old and disused. It seemed as though it had no more purpose, and would now begin to deteriorate and gather dust which would be undisturbed by any activity until it crumbled away. Greg sat stiffly in a familiar chair as Emma came into the room to join them.

"Here are a few things of Glenna's which I thought you should have," he said lamely as he handed her the package. "I'm sure she would want you to have them." She took the package gently from Greg's hand. As she looked through the contents, she began to cry.

"Now Emma, it's hard enough on the boy. Don't cry and make it worse. You'll have to excuse her, Greg. She's taken it pretty hard. It's just like when her sister died. It happened the same way. God's will. That's what it is, God's will. We shouldn't question it. Someday we'll know how much better off she is now. We have to go on, and just believe that it's for the best."

Greg felt sad, not only for himself, but for these two, basically good, gentle people who could understand no better than he what had happened or whether there was a purpose to it. He did not want to argue the point. He could not even recriminate them for not being more open with Glenna. Had Glenna known, would she have been able to avoid her mother's fate? The question had no answer.

Greg gave Emma a hug, and turned to go. Tom saw him to the door. “You know you're welcome here anytime, Greg,” he said in his gruff voice.

“Thank you, Tom. I'll see you again. Someday, when we all feel better, I'll be back.”

The winter weather settled in and gripped the landscape. It permeated Greg's heart and soul, and numbed his belief that warmth would ever return to the earth. Life somehow went on, but it was existence, not living. Winter dragged on, and obstinately resisted the urgings of Spring. Nature could not be permanently denied however, and gradually the weather improved.

It was an unusually warm Sunday in April that Greg rose with a determination to do now, something he had intended to do for a long while. After his breakfast, he loaded his well worn backpack with several items, and set out the door. A few minutes walk brought him to the train station, and after a short wait, he boarded the train for Chalmers Park. Deeply withdrawn inside himself, he followed his purpose intently. Traveling familiar paths, he found himself in a short while at the foot of a path which ascended one of the small mountains. With a deep breath, he started climbing. He climbed doggedly for almost three quarters of an hour. Rounding a turn in the path, he saw just ahead the small meadow and the little pond. For the first time, he stopped and sat to rest.

Memories flooded back to him. How many times had they climbed here? It had been one of Glenna's favorite spots, scene of their first intimacy, and setting for many picnics. Somehow he felt an unwinding inside, as though, in fright, something had been tightly held, but now could relax. He let the warmth of a thin Spring sun rest him, and give him strength for the rest of the climb.

After a few minutes, he set off again for the top of the mountain. Another half hour of climbing brought him out onto the barren top. He found a seat on the rock he had sat on many times before, and looked at the view. The naked trees allowed more to be seen than they did in the fullness of Summer. The basic landscape though was unchanging. This could just as easily have been the first time he was here from the appearance of the surroundings.

He was different though. The first time was a lifetime ago, and there was no going back. In a few minutes he opened his backpack. First he took out a sandwich and gazed down into the valley as he ate. The sandwich was joined by a small bottle of iced tea, and some carrot sticks.

When he was through, he packed the food containers away, and took out another object. It was a small earthen urn. It contained Glenna's ashes. He stood and slowly, solemnly inverted the urn. A slight breeze distributed the ashes on the mountain top. They fell lightly, almost capriciously among the rocks and the cracks in the rocks. “Goodbye, Glenna. Now you can enjoy your favorite place forever. I love you.” He turned to go, and through blurry eyes stumbled back down the mountain.

CHAPTER THIRTY ONE

Slowly the signs of Winter faded, and Spring burst through the winter haze. Greg took little note of the arrival of warmer weather. He still kept to himself, and avoided his friends. Sometimes he would go for long walks alone. Occasionally, he went to church, but he felt the strain of everyone looking at him with pity. He could sense that no one knew what to say or how to treat him. His whole life was dislocated, and he was not functioning as a normal person should.

The one activity he could still pursue effectively was work. He let himself be absorbed with the details of business, and the problems of the engineering department. He felt comfortable there, and his people had real problems in the real world for him to deal with. They were never left hanging in awkward moments not knowing what to say, as happened in social situations. After many weeks, he became again as effective and energetic with his job as he had been prior to Glenna's death. But his home life was still a mess. He cooked and ate erratically, and did errands only when they were absolutely essential. He evolved into a hermit at home, but fairly normal at work.

When vacation time came along, he decided on a long trip. He planned it a month in advance. Reservations and tickets were made and purchased. He began to feel some anticipation for the time off, and looked forward to his trip. When the day arrived, he was off to the VAC station early, and boarded the train to St. Louis. By noon, he was boarding the large VAC train in St. Louis for San Francisco.

His two weeks there were filled with tourist activities. The parks, museums, and water front provided entertainment as they had for generations. Greg felt stimulated by the variety of activities he found to amuse himself. He had not felt so well in months. He began to feel as though life may still hold some enjoyment, if not meaning for him.

One morning near the end of his two weeks, he went for an early morning walk, and found a comfortable seat on a park bench. It was a foggy morning, and he sat watching other walkers pass. They appeared out of the mist, they became clear in front of him, then faded away again as they continued down the path. He felt closed in and confined by the fog. It limited his view, and restricted his experience of the park. He knew there were beautiful flowers and trees within his range of vision, but they were obscured by the mist. As he sat, a slight breeze started to flow by him. As he watched, the landscape became clearer. In only a few minutes the light wind dissipated the fog, and he could now see all the beauty of the park surroundings.

The change had been dramatic. In the grayness of the mist, he had felt somber, but now, in the clear air, beauty suddenly surrounded him, and he felt lifted and happier. He smiled and asked himself quietly, "Is this an omen? Is this a sign I should come out of my fog, and rejoin the rest of the beautiful world? Wouldn't Glenna have wanted me to go on living and even enjoy life?"

He sat there in reverie a long while. Gradually he felt a change come over himself, and he remembered being happy in times past. The Sun had made him quite warm by the time he stood up and started back to his hotel. He walked rapidly. He was now eager for vacation to be over, so he could head back to Springhill. There was so much to do and enjoy.

The rest of the Summer passed rapidly, but Greg had opportunities for hiking, and even invited Jack and Cynthia on a picnic. Greg found it enjoyable. The Clark's little boy, Billie, was three now, and into everything. Greg enjoyed romping with him in the grass, but also found contentment in the quiet talk with Jack and Cynthia as Billie took a nap. Greg often saw Jack at work, since Jack was now the machine shop foreman. They reminisced, and Jack recalled how they had met on the train as they both were first arriving in town. They had a long history of friendship. It had been an important friendship for Greg.

Autumn brought other activities. Greg began going to church regularly again, and became involved with the various programs available there. The cold weather came, but Greg found the Winter very tolerable. He had things to do, and people to see. He ignored the inclement weather, and before he realized it, Spring was once more on the way.

On a late spring day, Greg was in Salem conferring with Dick on some controls. In mid-morning, they ran into a problem, and Dick called the computer department to bring him some printouts of bills of materials for the control. As they sat waiting, Dick asked,

“Where shall we eat today? Cafeteria or Park Cafe?”

“Are you buying, or am I on my own?” teased Greg.

“My treat, naturally,” laughed Dick.

“Well then, I opt for my favorite little cafe.” Just then one of Dick's staff came to the door.

“Dick, we've got a problem in the shop. Do you have a couple minutes?”

“Sure. Excuse me Greg. I'll be back as soon as possible.”

Greg was left alone in the office, and occupied himself by looking out of the window. Still the most striking features of the office, were the floor to ceiling windows and the wide view of the outside they provided. He had been sitting quietly a few minutes, when he became aware of someone in the office doorway behind him. A voice spoke as he turned, “Here are the computer sheets Mister Walters wanted. Where would you like them?”

“I'll take them,” answered Greg as he turned around. When he reached out, he looked up and found himself face to face with Kathy Smith. “Kathy!” he exclaimed, “What are you doing here?”

“Hello Greg,” she greeted him, and responded, “I've worked in the computer department here for quite a while. Ever since I completed my computer

training.”

In a flash, it all came rushing back to Greg’s mind. He remembered that last phone conversation with her many years ago. He even recalled Kathy mentioning that she had started taking some computer classes.

“Well - well, how is it going?” he stammered.

“Oh, it's fine,” she replied, but her flat tone was not convincing.

“I - I've often thought about you, and wondered what happened to you.”

“Oh, I'm all right,” Her voice seemed lifeless, nor did her words ring true. “I've heard about you sometimes,” she continued, “My Aunt Sylvia has told me you have had some difficult times.”

Greg remembered that Sylvia Smith, who had worked in Springhill and was now retired, was Kathy's aunt.

“Yes, It has not been easy. And how about you? What has happened to you?”

“Nothing much. I enjoy my work, and still live with my parents. I don't need much to keep me happy.”

This was not the same person Greg had known years ago. There was no sparkle in her eyes, or color in her voice. He felt a sadness come over him as he looked at her.

Just then, Dick returned. “Oh, Hi Kathy. You brought the computer sheets, thanks.”

“You're welcome. Goodbye Greg,” she turned and left the office.

“Goodbye, Kathy,” Greg called after her. After lunch, it did not take Dick and Greg long to straighten out their problems, and Greg found himself once again on the train back to Springhill. His thoughts kept returning to his brief encounter with Kathy. She seemed so subdued from his previous recollection of her. She must have had some difficult times herself. He relived in his memory, the times he had spent with her. Then he tried to concentrate on other things, his work, his weekend plans, but he kept coming back to thinking about Kathy.

Upon his return to Springhill, Greg was swept up in the demands of his work and his life. It was late the following Sunday after a busy week end that Greg sat a while to think of the week ahead. At that time he remembered again his encounter with Kathy, and again he felt sad. It didn't seem right

that such a nice person apparently had such a drab existence. As he retired for the night, his thoughts were full of those early times and his struggles with his feelings over Glenna and Kathy. He took a long time to fall asleep, and slept fitfully, awaking several times. In the early morning, he awoke sobbing from a particularly vivid dream. He and Glenna were climbing a mountain. He became weary, and could not continue, but she kept climbing. Above him on the path she turned and threw him a kiss, then turned again, and climbed until she disappeared in the mist of the mountain.

He awoke very upset. He dressed and made a cup of coffee for himself, but did not sleep any more that night. Greg had trouble concentrating on work that week. His mind kept taking him back to memories of Kathy. By Wednesday evening, he had to do something about his feelings. He sat in his easy chair at home, and after much pondering, lifted the phone. In a minute he had acquired the number he wanted, and was being connected. A quiet voice answered, "Hello."

"Hello, Kathy? This is Greg Adamski."

"Oh, Hello Greg. How are you?" The voice was not aggressive and almost insincere.

"I'm fine, but I've been wondering about you. I'd like to talk with you. Could I see you Saturday afternoon, just to talk? I feel I'd like to know what you have done since our last telephone conversation long ago. It would help me to wrap up loose ends, and put it in perspective. Do you understand?"

"Well - I don't know," was the reluctant response.

"I wouldn't bother you very long. I just want to talk a little."

"I suppose we could talk, but that's all I want to do."

"All right, how would it be if I came there in the early afternoon on Saturday?"

"That would be all right. I'll see you then, goodbye Greg."

"Goodbye, Kathy."

Greg returned to his musing. Maybe this would dispel the nagging thoughts and feelings which had been bothering him since he had seen her last week. The rest of the week seemed to flow much better. Greg directed his energies towards work. He felt better, and slept better. On Saturday he took the late morning train to Salem, and arrived about noon. He decided to have a small lunch to use up some time, because he did not want to arrive too early, and it fitted into the schedule well to eat before he walked to Kathy's house. On the way there, he enjoyed seeing the familiar paths and streets again. They had changed very little, and gave him a pleasant, comfortable feeling as he walked along. Spring was almost over, and the trees were fully leafed out. The

sunshine enhanced the spring smells and added warmth to the spring breeze.

When he knocked on the door, it was immediately opened by Kathy. “Hi, Greg. Shall we walk?”

“Why not? How about once around the lake?” They started in silence and walked for several minutes letting the sun and light wind refresh them. It felt to Greg like a wiping away of a used chalkboard, leaving it clean and ready for more writing. After a while, he broke the spell, “I often wondered what happened to you. I hoped you had found some happiness. You seemed very confused when I last talked to you, and it sounded as though you were having some difficult struggles.”

Kathy looked down as they walked, and after a moment replied, “Yes, back then I was pretty messed up. It was a good thing I left nursing though. That was a good decision. I've been happy with my present work ever since then. I was lucky to have available the opportunity to have therapy, too. Although I still have some resentment for what happened.”

“What do you mean? What happened?”

“Well, you remember I told you I was selected for my particular job at the Genetic Clinic. I even had a psychological evaluation. I had thought it was because I was so mentally healthy that I was picked. I learned during my therapy it was completely the reverse. They thought I had an unusual interest in sex. That, along with my good looks, made me an optimum candidate to be a sperm collector.”

Greg noted that Kathy was no longer embarrassed while talking about the job she had held. Although she was very quiet, she now impressed him as being a more confident person, perhaps a better balanced person than she had been when he first knew her. “It sounds as though the therapy helped you, but why didn't you get married? Are you really happy now?” Greg suddenly realized after he asked, that these questions might be pressing her too far.

“I don't know. I guess no one interested me. Or maybe I was too much of a dope to interest anyone else. I have a nice life, not exciting, but satisfying.” Kathy did not seem upset or disturbed by Greg's questions. It seemed she had developed a tougher exterior than she had before.

They walked farther around the lake in silence. As they approached a park bench, Kathy turned and suggested, “Let's sit here for a bit.” They sat and rested, enjoying the late spring weather. After a few minutes, Kathy spoke, “Greg, thank you for coming to see me. That is very good of you, and I don't want this opportunity to pass without making a confession.” She seemed to be struggling with her words as she talked.

“What do you mean? A confession. Of what?”

Kathy took a deep breath, and started, “Well, I'm sure you remember all the details of our first meeting, or rather our meetings.” She emphasized the plural.

Greg smiled, “Yes, vividly.”

“Well, as I told you, my perspective wasn't very good during that time. As I learned later, I was overly interested in sex. I thought when I got that job at the clinic, and learned what I would be doing, that it was going to be a great opportunity. Not just a job opportunity, but I thought I could fool them and use it as an opportunity to meet a great man. It didn't turn out that way. I met a lot of men, but they were nameless, and I had no way to meet them outside of the clinic. It seemed in no time at all that the end of the assignment arrived. Soon I would move on to other chores, and I had not met anyone. I had not succeeded in my goal. Then on my last day, you came along. You were handsome, the right age, great physique, and well equipped.”

Greg looked at her in astonishment. Suddenly it seemed she was the source of a torrent of information. It sounded to Greg as though she had been saving this up for a long time, and could finally let it go. Kathy continued, “I just was determined that you would not get away. After I left you in the sample room, I quickly went to the lab, and asked another nurse to process your sample. Then I dressed, and went out to get my bike. I got on and rode it as hard as I could into the wall and smashed the front wheel. Then I rolled it out to the path through the park, and waited. I was sure you would come along that way. When I saw you coming, I started struggling with the bike.” She paused. “You know the rest.”

Greg looked at Kathy in disbelief. She sat slumped on the bench looking down at the ground as though a great burden had been suddenly released. Her face had a sad appearance, and she was obviously upset by her recitation. He remained silent for a moment, considering all she had said. He didn't know how to reply.

“Well, you have every reason to hate me for tricking you,” she added, “but I felt I had to tell you that. It has bothered me for a long time, and when I saw you the other day, it all came back fresh in my mind again.” Tears were trickling down her cheeks.

After another moment of silence, Greg said quietly, “Kathy, I don't hate you. I was terribly hurt when you cut me off on the telephone, but I think your reasons were right. You were not ready for any major decisions then, but I certainly don't hate you. I am sorry you have had a rough time. I wish I could have helped.” In an easy, friendly motion, Greg put his arm around Kathy as they sat together on the bench. Silence settled on them, but the insistent spring sunshine and breeze gradually relaxed them, dried the tears, and restored a sense of calm between them.

After a long while, Kathy sighed, and stood up. “It's time to go. I'm going to the Symphony with my parents and Aunt Sylvia this evening, and I have to get back.”

They continued around the lake, and as they approached Kathy's house, Greg asked, “Do you think you might be willing to let me come back next week for another afternoon walk, and maybe dinner?”

“Are you sure you really want to do that?” asked Kathy. “You're not just feeling sorry for me, are you?”

Greg regarded her, and smiled, “No, I really want to do it. I understand how it is when you believe people are just pitying you. I've been through that, and it's not how I feel. I would really like to see you again.”

“Well,” she breathed a deep breath, “In that case, okay. I'd be glad to.”

“Great,” exclaimed Greg. “I'll be here about the same time next Saturday. Goodbye for now.”

“Goodbye Greg, See you then.” She turned and walked towards her house.

CHAPTER THIRTY TWO

The following Saturday, Greg was again on the noon train to Salem. He had been thinking about this trip all week. The events of the previous week gradually became absorbed, and he was fascinated by the revelations Kathy had made about her previous behavior. The more he thought about it, the more he wanted to talk with her further about it. The train was on schedule, as usual, and soon he was walking out of town to her house. The day was a little overcast, but that did not dampen his spirits. When he rang the doorbell, Kathy's mother appeared at the door.

“My goodness, Greg. How nice to see you again. It's been a long time. Come in and sit. Kathy will be here in a minute. You know what? I had a ride on that train of yours. I went to visit some old friends in Colorado, and goodness, what a wonderful ride. You must be very proud.”

Greg smiled at the outpouring from Mrs. Smith, and remembered how interested she had been in the Maxie development. “Yes, that has been a great success. They are continuing to expand the use of them, too. But, of course we build a lot of other machinery also.”

“I understand you are in charge of a whole department. How nice.”

Kathy came down the stairs, and interrupted the conversation. “Hi, Greg. Ready to go?”

“Kathy,” interjected her mother, “your father and I are going out a little later you know. We may not be here when you return so be sure to take your key.”

“I have it. Let's go Greg. Bye mom.”

“Goodbye Mrs. Smith,” said Greg as he closed the door.

“Once around the lake again?” asked Kathy.

“Once around the lake sounds reasonable to me.” The couple walked slowly, but Greg did not know how to start the conversation. They were silent a while, then Kathy asked, “Tell me about Glenna. What was she like?”

Greg was caught a little off guard by the question. He realized Kathy must have known something about him over the years. Sylvia would have known, and could tell her, but it was strange to be suddenly confronted with the need to describe Glenna. He spoke slowly, “Glenna was pretty, and lively, and loved a good tease or joke. She was easy to live with, and worked very hard for the things she wanted. We were happy, but we had a lot of sadness, too. She had a difficult childhood, but was able to become a nurse-receptionist, and enjoyed it.” He paused, then added, “Why did you ask that?”

“I guess I just wondered about you and her. You wanted to know whether I was happy, and I was curious about you, and whether you were happy with Glenna.”

“Yes, I was very happy,” They continued farther along the path, and Greg drifted into a reverie. He let himself think about Glenna, and Kathy remained silent. His mind slipped back and forth between the two women. He found himself thinking of their differences and their similarities. They were both interesting to him but in different ways. Slowly he came back to the present. “I’m sorry Kathy, I guess I was daydreaming. What do you do for activities?”

“Oh, I often go to the symphony or other such performances with my folks. On Sundays, we usually go to the Quaker meeting house. Sometimes I go for walks, or take little trips. There are some nice parks around for picnics or biking, also. I am really quite content. Mom has even encouraged me to learn to cook. I can do quite a lot. I can even make popcorn now.”

Greg turned and smiled, remembering the popcorn he made for them once. Kathy didn't seem to want to smile. It was as though it would be too much effort. No. Not too much effort, more like it wasn't worth the effort, or perhaps there would be bad results from the smiling. They continued around the lake to the bench, and sat to rest and talk. For a long time, they exchanged stories of their childhood and school years. The late spring sun was comfortably warm, and seemed to infuse them with greater understanding and eagerness to enjoy each other. As the sun slipped lower, Greg returned to the present, “I promised to take you to dinner, but the only places I know in town are the Park Cafe and Kings Row. Would either of those do? Do you have any other suggestions?. Is there a different restaurant you prefer?”

“Kings Row is too fancy for me today, but it's a nice thought. I know a little Italian place called Gino's, but it's on the other side of town. Would you want to walk that far?”

“It's fine with me, if you don't mind.”

“Then it's decided. Gino's. Shall we start?”

The walk across town was slow and comfortable. They continued their small talk. At times, as they traveled paths they had walked once before years ago, it felt to Greg as though it had been only last week since they had been there. It was a strange feeling of continuation of experiences with no gap between. His memories became displaced in time. What had been years ago, now seemed like only a few days. Being with Kathy was becoming familiar and pleasant again. Gino's had a small dining room and an intimate atmosphere.

It was not crowded, and they found a cozy table in a corner. Although the room was moderately well lit, there were candles on the tables to set the decor and enhance the ambience. They were crude candles in short old beer bottles with many layers of wax built up on the sides. Kathy seemed to enjoy being in the small restaurant, and immediately knew what she wanted to order. Greg took a minute to decide on a macaroni dish. The meal was delicious and well prepared.

Time passed more rapidly than they realized, and when they emerged from Gino's it was dark outside. Greg decided they should not walk home, and hailed an Electricab. It was a pleasant convenience, and they both appreciated riding and not having to walk any farther.

When they arrived in front of Kathy's house, there were no lights on. She fumbled with the key for a moment, but then the door swung open. “My folks are out playing cards. It's one of the things they do very often. Usually this is my time for staying home and reading.” Greg and Kathy wandered out to the patio overlooking the lake. They stood on the patio which was lit by the moon shining and reflecting from the water. Greg was standing behind Kathy, and gently put his arms around her. She cuddled into them and leaned back against him softly. They stood silently for a few moments, then Greg lovingly reached up and cupped her breasts in his hands. She wiggled slightly, and asked impishly, “Are you going to rape me?”

Greg replied deliberately, “Rape is a kind word compared to my intentions. I will strip you naked and enjoy all parts of your body. Then I will absolutely ravish you. Again and again I will have my pleasure with you. I will leave you completely spent physically, and moaning with exhaustion at the extremes of pleasurable feelings I will cause you.”

The quiet night noises were all that could be heard for several minutes. They continued to stand looking at the moon over the lake. Quietly she turned to him. “When are you going to start?” she asked, then started to giggle. It was the first time Greg had heard her even come close to laughing.

Greg could not help himself and started to chuckle, too. In a moment, silence returned. Greg continued to hold her breasts, then slowly moved his hands to caress her waist. When he moved his hand lower, Kathy pushed it away. “Touch me there, and I'll break both of your arms.” she threatened. “And I'll kick you in your crotch, bite you, pummel your chest, and scratch out your eyes.”

Greg laughed and hugged her a little tighter. “I didn't know you would think of such fun things to do.” He replied. “It sounds exciting.” He turned

her towards himself, and they looked intently at each other. Slowly their lips met in a long and thorough kiss. Kathy sighed, and relaxed against Greg. She almost slumped in his arms, and he held her closely and tightly. Then he realized she was crying. Neither of them spoke, but they continued to embrace.

After a few minutes Kathy looked up at Greg. Her face had a fearful appearance, and she spoke with trepidation, "Don't hurt me Greg. I'm afraid of getting involved. I don't handle emotional stress very well. I know I treated you badly long ago, but please don't hurt me now."

He held her gently, and replied quietly, "I don't want to hurt you in any way Kathy. I believe you are a lovely person, and I like you. You have had more difficult experiences than you deserve." He hugged her again. "I have no wish at all to hurt you."

They sat on a wicker bench, and Greg put his arm around her. For a long while they talked quietly. Greg reassured her they could be honest in expressing their feelings, and avoid hurting each other. Kathy seemed to relax and, very timidly, began to talk more freely. The moon rose higher and higher over the lake, and the night grew a little chill.

The mantle clock chimed, and Greg suddenly realized he had to leave to catch the last train. Quickly he called a cab, and was soon saying goodnight to Kathy.

"May I see you again next week?"

"Yes," she said, smiling broadly, "I think I would like that."

"Goodnight, I'll see you then." He kissed her and turned to enter the cab.

He saw her next week and the week after that. His expeditions to Salem became regular weekly events. Then he began going early Saturday, and returning late Sunday. The Smith's had an extra room for him to use, and soon it became known as Greg's room. As the Summer advanced Greg and Kathy found they could think of little else than each other. Greg saw the sparkle return to Kathy's eyes, and her whole demeanor became more alive, almost vivacious.

Some weekends Kathy went to Springhill when there was a play or other special event on. It was convenient that Greg had a house with extra rooms, also. However, the second time she visited him in Springhill, she awoke in the middle of the night and could not sleep. With a little anxiety, she crept to Greg's room, and slipped into bed next to him. He was only half awake, but he automatically reached out and cuddled her close to himself. She did not sleep in the guest room ever again.

By the time Autumn arrived, the Smiths, and Kathy and Greg were planning a small wedding to take place in late November. They each invited only the closest friends, and Greg again enlisted the help of Jack Clark to be best man. The Smiths had Greg's parents stay with them during their wedding

visit, and the four of them discovered many common interests. It seemed only natural to them that Kathy and Greg should be getting married.

During the Autumn, Greg insisted to Kathy that they should find a new home in Springhill. Although Kathy considered it unnecessary, she understood how Greg felt. It would probably be best for both of them to make a new beginning. They enjoyed several weekends looking at houses and neighborhoods, and in the end, decided on a newer house which was a little nearer to the PCI plant. It required practically no redecorating, and they began Moving into it prior to the wedding. It was an exciting experience for Kathy, and all the little events they shared, brought her even closer to Greg.

The wedding and the small reception that followed, were as gay and as bright as they deserved to be. All their friends wished them well, and many tears of joy attested to their sincerity. Greg and Kathy took a short trip to Florida for the warmth, the swimming, and the multitude of activities and diversions which the Playground State traditionally offered.

Returning home, a new home for them both, found no let down in the pace of their activity. There was much to do to settle the house, and to learn to live together in the new arrangement. Gradually, as the months passed, they developed routines. Kathy even decided to go back to work and found a job at PCI similar to the work she had done with computers in Salem. Greg found satisfaction and pleasure in spending time being a husband and home owner again. Kathy continued to be more alive and interesting than previously. The seasons passed, and by the end of Summer they blended into the scene of their social group and friends.

One blustery, cold, Autumn Sunday at church, Greg and Kathy were talking at coffee hour with Jack and Cynthia.

“What are you planning for Christmas,” asked Greg. “Would you consider spending the day with us?”

“We'd love to,” replied Cynthia, “but we have plans to go back home to see our folks and all the relatives for a few days. Billie has been looking forward to it and is excited to get started.”

“That sounds like fun,” said Kathy, then turning to Greg added, ‘We should do the same thing. Do you believe your folks could stand us for a while at Christmas?’

“I'm sure they would be happy to have us visit. They complain that we don't see them enough, so I think we have an open invitation.”

During the next week, Kathy made all the arrangements. Greg's mother had liked Kathy from the first time she met her, and on the telephone she was very excited to hear Kathy announce she and Greg would like to visit at Christmas. “Yes, dear, come as early as you can and stay as long as you can. We would love to have you, although we might put you to work, too,” she added teasingly.

In December the weather was unusually warm. Considering the southern location of Greg's home town, the Christmas season was mild and

enjoyable. He was able to show Kathy many of his boyhood haunts. Kathy noticed how Greg shed his responsibility cloak, and almost became that little boy again, as he excitedly shared little secrets with her. On one occasion though, he became quiet and seemed to slip away from her in a day dream.

“Thinking of Glenna?” she asked.

Greg looked at her sadly, “Yes, I'm afraid so.”

She embraced him and whispered, “That's all right. She's part of your life, too.”

Greg kissed her gently, “You're a wonderful lady, and I realize how lucky I am to be here and now, with you. You are very important to me, but please excuse my little lapses.”

Kathy smiled, “I wouldn't change a thing about you. I know how thoughtful and kind and good you really are, more than anyone else in the world could know. I have personal experience, and I love you.”

‘I love you, too. You gave me back a rich life.’ That evening after dinner, the weather remained balmy. At bedtime, as Greg's parents retired, Greg and Kathy were not ready to sleep. They went for a nighttime walk in the moonlight. In the still air the fragrances from the fields of flowers were as intoxicating as strong wine. They wandered among the blooms and drank in the night sounds, and experienced the quiet beauty of sleeping nature. They did not know it till several weeks later, but there, surrounded by the beauty of nature, their son was conceived that night.

CHAPTER THIRTY THREE

Greg found his life satisfying, although at times, demanding and stressful. Work entailed the handling of many responsibilities, and dealing with many diverse people. His home life was a stable element in an otherwise turbulent existence. Kathy had become the focal point of his life, and as her pregnancy progressed, she looked and acted maternal in a quietly elegant fashion.

Greg anticipated the arrival of their child with excitement tempered with a certain amount of anxiety. Years ago, Doctor Morgan had pronounced them both to be full of good genes which would produce beautiful, healthy children, but how could anyone know for certain what may happen in the development of a child.

The Summer flowed into the beginning of Autumn, and the baby's due date. Bill was visiting Greg on business, and at the end of a busy day found a few moments of free time for more personal conversation. “How has Kathy been doing with her excess baggage?”

“Actually quite well,” replied Greg. “The hot weather was a little difficult, but in general, everything has gone well, and she feels all right. I know it is tiring though.” Greg fell silent.

After a minute Bill asked, “Is anything worrying you? You look a little concerned.”

“No, nothing specific. I can't help but worry a little though. You know what happened with Meagan. can't bear to think of anything similar happening again. Kathy couldn't handle it, and I'm not sure I could either.”

“I can understand that. You've got to realize, however that most babies are normal. It would be extremely rare to have more trouble, besides you told me yourself both of you have very good heritage. I know advice doesn't help, but I'll say it anyway. Don't worry.”

Greg smiled, “Yes, you are right. I shouldn't worry. It does no good, and we'll find out eventually.”

He looked at Bill and realized how much he owed him. Bill gave him a job when he was fresh and unproven. He assigned him to an important project as his first responsibility, he trusted his judgment many times, and gave him the opportunities that led to his advancement. Bill had always been willing to take a chance on him, and so far he had not disappointed him. He had been not only a good boss, but a valued friend. He felt a sudden desire to express his thoughts to Bill.

“I really appreciate your concern, Bill. I was the luckiest person in the world to meet you, and to have you take an interest in me. You've been great in business, and you've always had concern for my private life too. I want you to know that means a lot to me, and I'll try to take your advice and not worry.”

“Well, as Hap would have said, ‘Someone has to look after you younger fellows’.” Bill grinned, and Greg returned a knowing glance.

Kathy's labor, though long, was not terribly difficult. Greg was relieved to see her holding a perfect little boy, and smiling peacefully. “So what are we going to call him?” he asked.

Calmly, Kathy looked up at him, and answered, “I want to call him Glen. That was my grandfather's name.”

They exchanged knowing looks, and Greg understood what she did not say, also. Glen was the male form of Glenna. It was a form of gift for him, for Glenna, and for herself. It was recognizing and accepting the past. It was building on past experience, and not denying it. It was moving forward to the future, what ever it may be, with love and confidence.

“That's fine,” he answered. "How about Glen Gregory Adamski?"

They both laughed and ended in a long kiss with Glen lying between them. It was a good life. Work was satisfying for Greg, and he had never been happier. Having a lovely, comfortable home gave him a sense of stability and responsibility which made him feel useful in the community. He enjoyed going to work in the morning, and he enjoyed returning in the evening to his beautiful wife and child. Kathy was absorbed with Glen, with Greg, and with her work. Their child grew strong and healthy. Greg had insisted on thorough physical exams for Glen, and the doctors all gave the baby good marks.

Glen's fifth birthday fell on a Saturday. Greg, Kathy and Glen traveled to Salem for the weekend to visit Grandma and Grandpa Smith, and celebrate the event as a family. Extravagant presents long since had ceased to be fashionable, as over-consumption became recognized as one of the evils destroying the environment. But Glen was very happy with the nice presents he received.

Sunday morning, Kathy decided to go to the Quaker meeting with her parents, and Greg and Glen opted to go for a long father-son walk. They set out over walkways familiar to Greg. He remembered walking, and riding Kathy's bicycle along them. Although it was Autumn, the weather was comfortable, and they talked as they walked slowly through the first fallen leaves. Glen was a happy, inquisitive little boy, and most of his remarks were questions.

“Where are we going, Daddy?”

“We're just walking down to the town and back. I think that will be as far as you will want to walk.”

“I want to walk all day with you, Daddy. Why are we going this way?”

“This is the way to go to get to town. I've walked along here often, sometimes with your mother.”

Greg recalled many trips along the route. The first one was the most unforgettable. He had just met Kathy; twice; and he remembered it as an awkward time. The situation then made him smile now. That seemed ages ago, and in life experiences, it was.

He was interrupted by Glen. “Look Daddy, I can walk on this. See?” Glen was walking on top of a narrow curb by the edge of the path. He kept slipping off, but insistently stepped back on and continued. “See. I can walk on it a long way.” Just then he slipped off again. “I can walk on it a long way. Really I can.”

“Yes, I see you can. That's very good. I remember I rode a bicycle along this very path once, a long time ago.”

“When was that, Daddy? I can ride a bicycle, too. When can I have a bicycle?”

“That was so long ago, it was before you were born. The path is still the same though.”

“When can I have a bicycle, Daddy,” repeated Glen. “I can ride. Really I can.”

Greg smiled at the irrepressible optimism of children. “We'll have to wait a while yet. Someday I'll get you a bike, Glen, but not now.”

They continued at a slow walk, and eventually reached the center of the small town. Most stores were closed, but a little ice cream stand on the edge of the downtown park was open. A few people were out enjoying the pleasant weather. Some were on their way to church, and some were already returning.

“Can I have an ice cream cone, Daddy?”

Greg regarded his son. Glen was healthy, and ate most everything offered to him. Greg decided there was no harm in a slight digression from his best diet, especially since this was a special occasion. “I'll buy you a small cone, if you promise not to tell Mommy, and promise to eat all your lunch when it is time.”

“I promise, Daddy. I want vanilla.”

Greg negotiated the purchase, and they continued into the park. Glen set about alternately licking his ice cream cone, and chasing the pigeons. Greg sat on a bench, and watched his son. He was so relieved Glen was a healthy child. It helped make up for his previous experiences, but there would always be a place in his heart for Glenna and Meagan. He tried to remember the happy times with them, and let the unhappiness be recognized, but also let it recede into the depths of his consciousness. As he sat contemplating the natural surroundings, he noticed another person sitting on a bench nearby. A flash of recognition struck him, and he walked over to the other bench and sat down. “Good morning Doctor Morgan. How are you today?” he greeted the man.

“Hello? Hello? Who is it speaking?” The doctor replied in surprise.

“It's Greg, Greg Adamski. I haven't seen you in a long time. How are you?”

“Ah yes, Mister Adamski. Yes, yes, I am very well. Old and useless, but very well. What brings you here today.”

Greg explained how he happened to be there, and pointed out his son, running across the park. Glen had finished his cone and was chasing pigeons full time. His boundless energy took him from one end of the park to the other, and other park bench sitters smiled at him as he passed.

“Ah, but I thought your wife and child died. Am I mistaken? I was sure I understood that.”

“Yes,” Greg answered, and went on to tell of the happenings in his life since he last saw Doctor Morgan. “I see. And this is your child with your new wife, Kathy?”

“Yes. You might remember her. Once you told me she was a perfect gene match for me.”

“Yes, I do remember now.”

Just then Glen came running up. “Can we go home now, Daddy?”

Doctor Morgan turned to Glen and asked, “Come here boy. Let me see you.” Glen came and stood in front of him. “And what is your name?”

“I’m Glen Gregory Adamski. Who are you?”

“Oh, I’m an old man who knew your father a long time ago. And what will you do when you grow up?”

“I’ll ride bicycles. I really can ride.”

“I’m sure you will, and you’ll be the world’s best rider, but I think you will do lots of other things also, won’t you?”

“Probably,” responded Glen, and danced away.

“He is a lovely child, Mister Adamski, a lovely child. You are very lucky.”

“But you told me yourself once, it isn’t luck, it’s in the genes.”

The doctor looked gently at Greg. “Yes, you are right, it is in the genes. I am so glad you and Kathy have good ones.”

“I am counting on you being right about that. You realize there probably are some other children around with my genes, also.”

“Yes, I know. And Doctor Thomas told me you helped us out again. I am sure there are some parents somewhere who appreciate that very much.”

A carillon in the municipal building chimed and sounded the hour. “We have to start back doctor, but it was very nice to see you and talk with you again. I hope you and Doctor Thomas have continued success. I think you have convinced me it’s important. Thank you, and goodbye.”

“Goodbye, Mister Adamski, goodbye.” Doctor Morgan watched the receding figures of Greg and Glen as they ambled along out of the park and disappeared. He sat musing to himself a long while. Now he was old, and could not do as much as he used to do. He still worked on his crusade though. Was he right in his efforts? Who would ever know? Was science getting too far ahead of nature? Will we use our ability and intelligence to evolve healthy individuals, and grasp control of our future? Or will the human race breed itself into a non-competitive condition? Is it the fate of the world to be ultimately the province of the insects, as they take over a world deserted by intelligent beings? It was reassuring to see people like Greg who had such a healthy son. Maybe there was reason to be optimistic. Perhaps the human race will get wiser in planning its future. Certainly it had become wiser in preserving its environment. “Yes, yes,” he sighed, “Evolution is still at work. We can only hope it works in the best possible way. Men like Mr. Adamski and the concerned scientists may be able to counteract the deleterious effects of civilization, and the future may eventually write a prosperous history.”

THE END