



# C P SNOW

## *The Sleep of Reason*

A STRANGERS AND BROTHERS NOVEL

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### The Sleep of Reason

First published in 1968

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This edition published in 2011 by House of Stratus, an imprint of  
Stratus Books Ltd., Lisandra House, Fore Street, Looe,  
Cornwall, PL13 1AD, UK.

Typeset by House of Stratus.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library and the Library of Congress.

ISBN: 0755120191 EAN 9780755120192

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## About the Author



Charles Percy Snow was born in Leicester, on 15 October 1905. He was educated from age eleven at Alderman Newton's School for boys where he excelled in most subjects, enjoying a reputation for an astounding memory and also developed a lifelong love of cricket. In 1923 he became an external student in science at London University, as the local college he attended in Leicester had no science department. At the same time he read widely and gained practical experience by working as a laboratory assistant at Newton's to gain the necessary practical experience needed.

Having achieved a first class degree, followed by a Master of Science he won a studentship in 1927 which he used to research at the famous Cavendish Laboratory in Cambridge. There, he went on to become a Fellow of Christ's College, Cambridge, in 1930 where he also served as a tutor, but his position became increasingly titular as he branched into other areas of activity. In 1934, he began to publish scientific articles in *Nature*, and then *The Spectator* before becoming editor of the journal *Discovery* in 1937. However, he was also writing fiction during this period, with his first novel *Dead Under Sail* published in 1932, and in 1940 '*Strangers and Brothers*' was published. This was the first of eleven novels in the series and was later renamed '*George Passant*' when '*Strangers and Brothers*' was used to denote the series itself.

*Discovery* became a casualty of the war, closing in 1940. However, by this time Snow was already involved with the Royal Society, who had organised a group to specifically use British scientific talent operating under the auspices of the Ministry of Labour. He served as the Ministry's technical director from 1940 to 1944. After the war, he became a civil service commissioner responsible for recruiting scientists to work for the government. He also returned to writing, continuing the *Strangers and Brothers* series of novels. '*The Light and the Dark*' was published in 1947, followed by '*Time of Hope*' in 1949, and perhaps the most famous and popular of them all, '*The Masters*', in 1951. He planned to finish the cycle within five years, but the final novel '*Last Things*' wasn't published until 1970.

He married the novelist Pamela Hansford Johnson in 1950 and they had one son, Philip, in 1952. Snow was knighted in 1957 and became a life peer in 1964, taking the title Baron Snow of the City of Leicester. He also joined Harold Wilson's first government as Parliamentary Secretary to the new Minister of Technology. When the department ceased to exist in 1966 he became a vociferous backbencher in the House of Lords.

After finishing the *Strangers and Brothers* series, Snow continued writing both fiction and non-fiction. His last work of fiction was '*A Coat of Vanish*', published in 1978. His non-fiction included the short life of *Trollope* published in 1974 and another, published posthumously in 1981, '*The Physicist and a Generation that Changed the World*'. He was also inundated with lecturing requests and offers of honorary doctorates. In 1961, he became Rector of St. Andrews University and for ten years also

wrote influential weekly reviews for the *Financial Times*.

In these later years, Snow suffered from poor health although he continued to travel and lecture. He also remained active as a writer and critic until hospitalized on 1 July 1980. He died later that day of a perforated ulcer.

*'Mr Snow has established himself, on his own chosen ground, in an eminent and conspicuous position among contemporary English novelists' - New Statesman*

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## *Note*

*El sueño de la razón produce monstruos*  
The sleep of reason brings forth monsters.

This is Goya's title for one of his Caprichos, inscribed on the etching itself.



Tricks of time



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## 1: *Visit to a Grandfather*

THAT afternoon I had been walking with my son in what for me were familiar streets, streets of the town where I was born. I had taken him there only once before, when he was an infant. Now he was nearly fifteen, and we spoke the same language. I was taunting him because he had seen the “pretty England” and nothing of the rest; until that afternoon he had never seen a provincial town like this. He grinned. Whose fault was that? he said.

And yet the town was not so unpretty: shops glittered and shone, well-dressed women walked the pavements, fresh-skinned girls in their spring frocks: cars jarred and halted, bumper to stern, hood dazzling in a burst of sunshine. Once I had heard a fellow citizen called Sawbridge saying, with equal disapproval of the United States and his native town, that you could put the place down in the middle of America and no one would know the difference. It was nearly accurate, not quite. You could still, if you knew your way about, trace some of the streets of the old market town: narrow harsh streets with homely names, like Pocklington’s Walk, along which I had gone to work forty years before, craving not to be unknown, craving to get out of here. That I did not explain to my son Charles, who was discreetly puzzled as to why we were wandering through a quarter which, to any unbeglamoured eye, was sombre and quite unusually lacking in romance.

However, when we returned to one of the bright shopping streets, and someone greeted me by name, he did ask, after we had passed on: “What does that feel like?”

Probably it had not been an acquaintance from the past: this was 1963, and I had left the town for good in the late twenties: probably it was what Charles was used to, a result of photographs or the mass media. But he was perceptive, he guessed that being picked out in this place might pluck a nerve. Nevertheless, he was surprised by my reply.

“To tell you the honest truth,” I said, “it makes me want to hide.”

He glanced at me sidelong with dark searching eyes. He knew that, as a rule, I was not self-conscious and was used to the public life. He did not understand it. But if he didn’t understand it, neither did I. I couldn’t have explained what I had just said. It seemed perverse and out of character. Yet it was quite true.

Charles thought of pressing me, then decided against. The clock on the town hall said a quarter of four; it was time for us to make our way to my father’s house, or to be more exact, my father’s room. Charles had seen his grandfather only once, on his one other visit to the town, when he was three years old. To anyone outside, that must have sounded as though we had been heartless, not only without instinctive ties but without responsibility. After all, I had been lucky, my wife and family lived a privileged life. How could I bear neglecting the old man? In fact, my father had his own views. He seemed, and was, the most affable and gentle of human beings. But he just wanted to be left alone, to get on with his own mysterious concerns, whatever they were and if they existed. My brother Martin had tried to persuade him to live with them in Cambridge: I had wanted to have him in London. Not a bit of it. With simple passive resistance, he refused to move. He would not even take money. I had made more than enough, but he would not accept a penny, except for a bottle of port at Christmas. With his old age pension and the rent from his lodger, he had, he said, quite enough for his needs.

He was, I thought, the most self-sufficient man I had come across. He was amiably and genuine

uninterested in his grandchildren. Even that afternoon, I had had to force him to let Charles and me come to tea. I was having to pay visits to the town every three months or so, on a piece of minor duty. This particular visit coincided with Charles being at home on holiday. So I had brought him up for the day, and had insisted that my father invite us. After all, he was in his late eighties: I had my share of piety (from which my father seemed singularly free), and it might be Charles' last chance to talk to him.

We took the bus out to the suburbs, on what in my childhood would have been the old tram route: red brick, the jail, the gasworks, less change here than in the middle of the town. And when we got out and walked into the back streets, there was less change still: the doctor's house, the cluster of shops, the chapel, the terraced houses up the rise. Not that I was stirred by memory: I had seen it too recently for that. Instead, I looked up at the clouds, low on the south-west wind, breathed in the soft spring air, and said: "I like this Atlantic weather."

"Meteorological fiend," said my son, with a friendly gibing smile. He had developed the theory that I, the child of cities, could not resist an obsessive interest in climatic phenomena: and that this was not shared by all who heard the results, including himself. It was the kind of sarcastic banter that came easily to him. I answered in kind, pointing out that at least one person had shared my meteorological enthusiasm, and that was one of the few men whom I actively detested.

He was smiling, as we went past the two-storey terrace, front doors opening on to the pavement. There was no use preparing him for what he was going to meet: he would certainly find my father odd, possibly a strain, but that he would have to take. At the end of the row we came to a pair of large houses, joined together. I pointed to the nearer one, and told him that was where I was born. It was dilapidated, but, to judge from the television aerials on the roof, inhabited by a couple of families. On the strip of earth inside the railings – which my mother used to call the front garden – the laburnum tree had become a blackened stump.

With a concentrated gaze Charles studied the front room window, the peeling paint, the carved inscription between the houses, *Albert Villas 1860*, and said nothing at all. Then he asked: "Could we go in, do you think?"

"I don't think so, do you?"

"Perhaps they wouldn't like it."

The next house along the road had been built in the same period, but was larger and stood on its own. In my childhood it had belonged to my Aunt Milly's husband: he had been a building contractor, in a small way, and they were less poor than we were, and had often (offending my mother's pride) been obliged to support us. When my mother died, by this time nearly forty years before, my father had gone to live with Aunt Milly, who was his sister. There he had stayed. Aunt Milly's husband died then she herself. They were childless, and, though she had willed their savings to various temperance societies, the house had come to my father. He had promptly let it off, keeping one room for himself, and there he had lived for the last twenty years.

I led the way to that single room – down an entry, through a gate, into a yard paved with flagstones. The architecture of Aunt Milly's house, like that of my mother's, was bizarre, as though space didn't matter and the more levels the better, so that there was a one-storey range, with a twenty-foot-high chimney, floors at yard-level: while five steps up was a French window, opening straight into my father's room, which led into the main body of the house. Behind the French window one could see a glow on the ceiling, fluctuating, not very bright although the afternoon was dark, which must come from my father's fire.

"There he is, I expect," I said to Charles.

We went up the steps, and I rapped on the window. (There was a much quicker and more orthodox method of entry through the front door, but my father did not like being a trouble to his lodger.) Shuffle of steps. Rattle of handles. The two sides of the window opened, and in between them, facing us, my father stood.

“Well, I declare,” he said.

His first action was to peer up at Charles, making tunnels with his fingers over his spectacles as though sighting some far distant object.

“I shall want a telescope to look at him,” my father said.

I was six feet, and Charles, at fifteen, was only an inch or two shorter. My father was a little more. In my childhood he had claimed to five feet four: but now, with extreme old age, he had shrunk a foot or more. Standing there, old wide trousers flopping on his boots, his head seemed to come more than higher than our chests.

“I want a telescope, that’s what I do.” He went on clowning. He had always clowned, as far back as I could remember; he had been cheerful in his clowning then, just as he was now.

After we had sat down in the crowded little room – Charles on a chair on one side of the fireplace, my father on the other, me on the sofa where he slept at night – he was still talking about telescopes but in a different vein.

“You know, Lewis, I’ve always thought I should like one.”

I asked him why: I knew that tone by heart.

“Well, you never know what you might find out.”

He had daydreamed all his life. Just for an instant he was the supreme astronomer, discovering – at an advanced age and to his own mild surprise – new secrets of the universe. Or perhaps overturning established conceptions, an activity for which he had always had a secret fancy. All through my boyhood he had read travel books, often the same book over and over again: then he was the fearless single-handed explorer, going where no white man had ever trodden – he had a special feeling that the Amazonian jungle was the place for him. I had discovered, on my last visit, that he still borrowed travel books from the library at the corner of the road. As he sat in his chair, I could see a dozen or so books on the shelf behind him: they seemed the only books in the room, the only ones he possessed or had borrowed. How many of those were about travel? Or what other sorts of daydreams did he have?

“You never know what you might find out,” he chortled. “But I expect I should find out something wrong!”

He went on chortling with satisfaction. He hadn’t spoken out of self-pity, or at least, if he had, it was a singular kind of self-pity, which consisted of referring to himself as though he were the most ludicrous of jokes.

He was, as usual, happy. Sitting beneath the mantelpiece, on which stood a marble clock flanked by photographs, some of the choral society of which he had been secretary so long, together with one of my mother, he did not look his age. His hair was white, but he had lost none of it: his great drooping moustache still, amid the white, kept a touch of ginger: the lenses of his spectacles, which he could not manage to put on straight, had not been changed since middle age. His pop eyes remained innocently amused. By some genetic fluke, he had missed the deep blue irises which were dominant in the family: his father had had them and all the rest of us: Charles’, as he watched my father vigilant across the fireplace, in that light looked not indigo but black. My father’s had not faded, but were very light, which made him appear more innocent. Sitting down he also appeared bigger than he was, since his legs were short and his head out of proportion large.

A kettle was boiling on the hob between them. My father had so far paid no attention to Charles

except once or twice to address him, with impersonal cheerfulness, by my Christian name or my brother Martin's. Charles, on the other hand, was paying complete attention to him. Charles had met a lot of people, some formidable, many what the world called successful: but his grandfather was different from any. This was a test, not only of instinctual ties, but also of insight. At the same time Charles, I had no doubt, was listening to my father's soft Midland accent, of which Charles could hear the vestigial overtones in me.

"Well, young man," said my father, abandoning nomenclature as he spoke to Charles, "I expect you're ready for your tea, aren't you? I know I am."

Politely Charles admitted that he was.

"I'm always ready for my tea," said my father. "If I can't do anything else, then I can always get rid of my tea."

He hooted with obscure gratification, and sang a few bars of a song I didn't know, in a voice still disconcertingly strong. Efficiently, neat-fingeredly, like a man used to looking after himself he made the tea.

"One, two, three spoonfuls – and one for the pot," he chanted. He shuffled round the room, and produced the tea things. He produced also a large plate of cakes, jam tarts, custard tarts, éclair, marzipan. "I always say," my father remarked, "there's nothing like something sweet to your tea."

I did not agree, but Charles did. He might be perceptive beyond his years, but he had a healthy fifteen-year-old appetite: and so, while I drank a cup of tea and smoked a cigarette, the grandfather and grandson, with over seventy years between them, sat on opposite sides of the fireplace – in silence, except for appreciative lip noises under the moustache – eating cakes. Not just one cake each but two, three, four, half-a-dozen.

When they had finished the plateful, my father sighed with content and turned mild eyes on me.

"You made a mistake there, Lewis. They went down all right, confound me if they didn't."

Then he seemed to feel that some concession was called for.

"Still," he said, "you've got on well, I must say that."

He had, I was sure, only the haziest notion of my life. He may have realised that I had played some part in affairs: he ought to have known that I was no longer poor, for I had told him so. Certainly he had never read a word I had written. Charles, still vigilant, was wearing a surreptitious smile. Unlike my father, Charles knew a good deal about what had happened to me, the rough as well as the smooth. He knew that, since I left the official life, some attacks had followed me, one or two predictable, and one based upon a queer invention. Charles did not, as some sons would, imagine that I was invulnerable: on the contrary, he believed that this last situation he would have handled better himself.

"I often wish," my father continued, "that your mother had lived to see how you've got on."

Yes, I did too. Yes, I thought, she would have revelled in a lot of it – the title, the money, the well-known name. Yet, like Charles – though without the sophistication – she would have known it all once again, the rough as well as the smooth. Anyone who raised a voice against me, she, that fierce and passionate woman, would have wanted to claw, not as a figure of speech but in stark flesh, with her own nails.

"That's how I like to think of her, you know," my father said, pointing to the mantelpiece. "Not as she was at the end."

I got up, took the photograph down, and showed it to Charles. It was a hand-tinted photograph taken somewhere round 1912, when they were a little better off than ever after, and when I was seven years old. She was wearing a dress with leg-of-mutton sleeves: her black hair and high colouring stood out, so did her aquiline beak of a nose. She looked both handsome, which she could be, and proud.

which she always was, sometimes satanically so. As I remarked to Charles, it wasn't a bad picture.

What my father had said might have sounded sentimental, like a gentle old man lamenting the past and the only woman, the only happiness, he had ever known. On the contrary. My father was as little sentimental as a man could reasonably be. The truth was different. What he had said, was a plain statement. That was how, when he thought of her at all – he lived in the present and their marriage was a long time ago – he preferred to think of her. But it had been an ill-tuned marriage: for her, much worse than that. He had been the “wrong man”, she used to confide in me, and in my childhood I took this to mean that he was ineffectual, too amiable for the world's struggle, unable to give her the grandeur that somehow she thought should be hers by right. Later I thought, remembering what I had submerged, that there was more to it. I could recall bitter words over a maid (yes, on something like £250 a year, before the First World War, she kept a maid): I guessed, though I should never know for certain, that under his mild and beaming aspect there was a disconcerting ardour, which came as a surprise, though a pleasant one, to himself. As their marriage got worse, he had, when I was quite young, found his own consolations. Since she died, it had puzzled me that he had not married again. Yet again I guessed that in a cheerful covert fashion he had found what he wanted: and that, on a good many nights, he had returned to this little room raising his robust baritone with a satisfaction, though singing meaninglessly to himself, which as a child I did not begin to understand.

Charles was still looking at the photograph. My father made an attempt to address him by name but gave it up, but nevertheless spoke to him:

“She always used to tell me ‘Bertie, don't be such a donkey! Don't be such a donkey!’ Milly used to do the same. They always used to say I was a donkey!”

The reminiscence seemed to fill him with extreme pleasure. Charles looked up, and felt called upon to smile. But he gave me a side glance, as though for once he was somewhat at a loss.

The clock on the mantelpiece, in measured strokes, struck five.

“Solemn-toned clock,” said my father with approval. “Solemn-toned clock.” That was a ritual phrase which I must have heard hundreds, perhaps thousands, of times. When she was hopeful, and her hopes though precarious were inextinguishable, it used to make my mother smile: but in a crisis it made her break out in jangled nerves, in disappointment at all the hopes frustrated. That evening however, the sound of the clock set my father going: now he was really on his own; so far as he had any self-esteem, here it was. For the clock had been presented to him after a period of service as secretary to a male voice choir: and he had been secretary to similar choirs ever since, for nearly sixty years in all. This had been the theme of his existence, outside himself, and he proposed to talk about it. Which, with amiable, pattering persistence, he duly did. It was all still going on. Not so flourishing as in the past. What with television – he had refused to let us buy him a set, though there was a sound radio in a corner of the room – people weren't so willing to give up the time as in the old days. Still some were keen. There had been changes. Male voice choirs weren't so popular, so he had brought in women. (That I had known; it had been the one political exertion of my father's life; it took me back for an instant to my speculations of a few moments before.) He had managed to keep a group of twenty or so together. Nowadays they met for rehearsal each Sunday after service at St Mary's, one of the churches in the town.

It was a quiet little obsession, but it gave him all the enjoyment of an obsession. I didn't want to cut him short, but at last he flagged slightly. I could ask a question. Wasn't St Mary's a longish journey for him? It must be all of three miles.

“Oh,” he said, “I get a bus that takes me near enough.”

“But coming back late at night?”

“Well, one of our members, Mr Rattenbury” – (I wondered if Charles noticed that ‘Mr’ which my father had applied to each of his male acquaintances all his life) – “he usually gives me a lift.”

“But if you don’t get a lift?”

“Then I just have to toddle home on my own two pins.”

He rose from his chair, and exemplified – without complaint, in fact with hilarity – very short steps on very short legs.

“Isn’t that a bit much?” At his age, that was an understatement, but I couldn’t say any more. Even at this, his face was clouded, and I wasn’t going to spoil his pleasure.

“It’s a bit slippery in winter, you know. But I get here. I shouldn’t be here now if I didn’t, should I?”

That struck him as the most clinching of retorts. He was delighted with it. It set him off chanting loudly: Anyway – the summer – is – coming – anyway – the – spring – is – here.

Then he seemed to feel that he had certain responsibilities for Charles which he had not discharged. He had given him cakes. Was that enough? My father looked puzzled: then suddenly his face shone with preternatural worldliness.

“Young man,” he said, “I want to give you a piece of advice.”

Charles leaned gravely towards him.

“I expect,” the old man said, “your father gives you some money now and then, doesn’t he?”

Charles misunderstood, and was a shade embarrassed. “I’m quite all right for money, thank you very much, sir.”

“Of course you are! Of course you are! I’m going to give you a piece of advice that I gave your father a long time ago.” Now I myself remembered: he had the memory for detail long past that I had seen before in the very old. “I always tell people,” he said, as though he were daydreaming again, the time of himself as the successful financier, deferred to by less experienced men, “I always tell people that you never ought to go about without a few pound notes sewn in a place where you’re never going to lose it. I told your father a long time ago, and I hope he listened to me, that he ought to have five of his pound notes sewn into the seat of his trousers. Mind you, five pounds doesn’t go as far now as it did then. If I were you, I should get someone to sew fifteen or twenty pounds into the seat of your trousers. I expect you can lay your hands on twenty pound notes, can’t you? Well, you do what I tell you. You never know when they’ll come in useful. You just think of me when you find they’ve got you out of a tight corner.”

Charles, his face controlled, promised that he would.

My father exuded content. Charles and I stretched our legs, getting ready to go. When we were putting on our coats, opening the French window so that the evening air struck cold into the stuffy, odorous little room, I told my father that I would drop in during my next visit to the town.

“Oh, don’t put yourself out for me, Lewis,” he said, as though he quite liked my company but even more preferred not to be disturbed. With his beaming innocent smile he waved us out.

Charles and I didn’t speak until we had emerged from the entry back into the road. There was light, I noticed, two houses along, in what had been our old “front room”.

It had been raining, the sky was bright again. Charles gave me a curious smile.

“Life goes on,” he said.

I took him the longer way round to the bus stop, past the branch library, past the red-brick church (1900-ish, pitchpine and stained-glass windows, scene both of splendours and miseries for my mother), down the hill to the main road. From the grass in the garden patches there came a fresh, anxiety-lifting, rainwashed smell. We were each of us silent, not uncomfortably so, but still, touched by the afternoon.

After a time Charles said: "It wasn't exactly what I expected."

"You mean, he wasn't?"

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"No, I didn't mean that, quite."

I asked him another question, but he shook his head. He was preoccupied, just as I had been in the middle of the town, and this time it was he who did not want to be pressed.

On the top of the bus, on the way to the railway station, he made one reference to my father's practical advice, smiled, and that was all. We chatted on the station, waiting for his train: he was going home alone, since I had an appointment in the town next day. As we were chatting, quite casually, the station's red brick glaring at us, the sulphurous smoke swirling past, just for once that day, memory, direct memory, gave me its jab. I was standing in that station, years before, going to London, nerves tingling, full of hope.

The train was coming in. Charles' education had been different from mine, but he was no more inhibited than I was, and we hugged each other in the Russian fashion as we said goodbye.

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## 2: *A Young Woman in Love*

AFTER leaving my son, I took a taxi to the Vice-Chancellor's Residence. In my youth, there would not have been such a place or such a person: but in the 'fifties the old College of Art and Technology, where I had once attended George Passant's lectures, had been transmogrified into one of the newest crop of universities. In fact, it was for that reason that I made my periodical visits to the town. The new university had adopted – out of an obstinacy that derived entirely from its Head – something like a Scottish constitution, with a small executive Court, consisting of academics, local dignitaries, and a representative elected by the students: since I could, by a certain amount of stately chicanery, be regarded as an old member, they had elected me. I was happy to go there. For years I had been free of official business: this was no tax at all, it did not distract me from my work: occasionally, as in those days, for the next day, the termly agenda contained a point of interest. But I was happy really because I had reached a stage when the springs of my life were making their own resonances clear, which I could hear, sometimes insistently, not only with my family but with people I had known.

In the April evening, the taxi chugged along in the stream of outbound traffic, past the hedges and gardens of the prosperous suburb, the gravel drives, the comfortable bourgeois houses, the lighted windows. These were houses I had walked by as a boy: but to this day I had not often been inside. I knew much poorer houses, like my father's, where I had been an hour before: and, because of the war, things had gone, I had spent some time in recent years in grander ones. But somehow that specific sector had eluded me, and with it a slice of this comfortable, affluent town.

Was that why, as I stood outside the Residence and saw the bright drawing-room, blinds not drawn, standard light by the window, I felt a pang, as though I were an outsider? It seemed so for an instant, and yet, in cold blood, I should have known it was not true. I was still capable of walking down any street, seeing a lighted window, and feeling that same pang, which was made up of curiosity, envy and desire: in that sense, one doesn't age: one can still envy a hearth glow, even if one is returning to one's happy home: it isn't a social chance, but something a good deal deeper, that can at untameable moments, make one feel for ever youthful, and, as far as that goes, for ever in the street outside.

I went in, and became, as though a switch had been turned, at home. Vicky Shaw greeted me. Yes, my bag had been taken upstairs. Her father was, as usual, working late. I was to come and have a drink.

Sitting in an armchair in the drawing-room (which was not at all magical, soft-cushioned but with tepid pictures on the walls), I looked at her. Since her mother died, Vicky had been acting as hostess for her father, although she had just qualified as a doctor and had a job at the infirmary. She was just twenty-four, not handsome, her face a shade too equine to be pretty, and yet comely: long, slight: fair hair swept back and knotted. I was very fond of her. She did not make me feel – as on those visits – despite the time-switch on the drive outside, I sometimes did – that I was an ageing man with a public face. And also she had the special radiance, and the special vulnerability, of a young woman for the first time openly in love.

I expected to hear something of that. But she was direct and often astringent; there was business to get through first. She was a devoted daughter, but she thought that her father, as a Vice-Chancellor, was a bit of an ass. His enemies were trying to ease him out – that she knew as well as I did. He was



giving them opportunities. Tomorrow's case would be used against him, unless I could work on him. She didn't have to tell me about it: I had heard from the appellants themselves. A couple of young men had been found bedding a girl each in a room in one of the hostels. The disciplinary committee, which meant in effect Arnold Shaw himself, had next day sent all four down for good. They had appealed to the Court.

"He may get away with it there," Vicky said, "but that won't be the end of it."

Once again, both of us knew. He put people off. They said that he was a shellback, with no sympathy for the young.

"Of course," she said, "he was wrong anyway. He ought to have told them to go and do something somewhere else. But he couldn't say that, you know."

I found it impossible to keep back a vestigial grin. Arnold Shaw could bring himself to say that about as easily as John Calvin in one of his less libertarian moods.

"Why in God's name, though," she said, "didn't he play it cool?"

Did she have to ask me? I replied.

Reluctantly she smiled. She knew, better than anyone, that he was incorruptible: rigid: what he believed, he believed. If everyone else in the country were converted to sexual freedom, he would stand outside the swim: and be certain that he was right.

She put more whisky into my tumbler. She said: "And yet, you know, he was a very good father to me. Even when I was little. He was always very kind."

"I shouldn't have thought you were difficult to bring up," I told her.

She shook her head. "No. I wasn't all that disciplined." She broke off: "Anyway, do your best with him tonight."

I said she mustn't bank on anything I could do. With a frown, she replied: "He's as obstinate as a pig."

There was nothing else useful to say. So, businesslike, she cut off short, and told me who was coming to dinner. It was a small party. The Hargraves, the Gearys – yes, I had met Hargrave on the Court, I knew the Gearys well – and Leonard Getliffe. As she mentioned the last name, I glanced at her. She had the delicate skin common among her own kind of blonde, and she had flushed down to the neckline.

Leonard Getliffe was the eldest son of my friend Francis, whom I had met almost as soon as I first went to London from this town: ever since, our lives had interweaved. But their connection with the university was no credit to me, only to Arnold Shaw. Since Francis gave up being an influence in Whitehall, at the time of Quaife's failure and mine, his scientific work had gone better than in his youth, his reputation had grown. And, though probably not as a consequence, he had recently been made a life peer. So Arnold Shaw, whose academic standards were as rigorous as his moral ones (and who, incidentally, was by no means averse to titles), had schemed for him to be the second Chancellor of the University: and for once Arnold had brought something off. He had brought something else off, too, more valuable to the place: for he had persuaded Leonard, before he was thirty, to take a professorship. Leonard was, in the jargon of the day, a real flier. He was more gifted than his father, he was, so David Rubin and the others said, one of the best theoretical physicists going. All he needed was a bit of luck, they said, talking of luck exactly as people did in more precarious fields: then they would be tipping him for a Nobel prize. He might be more gifted than his father, but he was just as high-principled. He could do his theoretical work anywhere; why not try to help a new university? So when Arnold Shaw invited him, he had without fuss left Trinity and come.

Vicky was blushing. She met my glance, and her eyes were blue, candid and distressed. It might

have seemed that she was pining for him. In fact the opposite was true. He was eaten up with love for her. It had happened a year before, almost as soon as they met, perhaps on the first day. He was begging her to marry him. Her father passionately wanted the marriage: the Getliffes would have welcomed it. All their children were married by now, except Leonard, their eldest and their particular star. The only person who didn't want the marriage was Vicky herself. She couldn't respond. She was a kind girl, but she couldn't see any way to be kind. Sometimes, when she saw him, she felt – there was no repressing it – plain irritated. Often she felt guilty. People told her this was someone of a quality she would never meet again: they told her she was interfering with his work. She knew it. For a while it had been flattering, but that wore off. Once, when I had been staying in the Residence, she had broken out: "It's not fair! I look at myself in the glass. What have I got to produce this sort of passion? No, it's ridiculous."

She had little conceit. She could have done with more, I thought. She wanted to shrug the responsibility off, and couldn't. She was honest, and in some ways prosaic. But she didn't seem prosaic when she talked about the man she loved.

She had fallen in love herself – but after she had met Leonard Getliffe. The man she loved could scarcely have been more different from Leonard. I knew him, I knew him better than she did, or at least in a different fashion, for he was my nephew, Martin's son.

She wanted to tell me. Yes, she had seen Pat last week. In London. They had gone to – she brought out the name of a Soho restaurant as though it were embossed, just as she brought out the name of Pat. We had all done it, I thought: the facts, the names of love are special facts, special names: it made the air bright, even to hear. But it also made the air uneasy.

After all, I was looking at him with an uncle's eyes, not with those of an adoring young woman. I thought he was an engaging youth, but I had been astonished when she became enraptured. To begin with, he was only twenty, four years younger than she was. True, he was precocious, and she probably the reverse. Yet I had seen my brother, a steady-natured man, but also a possessive father, trying to cope with that precocity. It had taught my brother what fatherhood could mean. Pat's name wasn't even Pat. He had been christened after me, but had renamed himself when he was an adolescent. He had rebelled against his first school, and been lucky to survive a second. Martin had managed to get him a place at our Cambridge college: he had given up after a year and gone to London to paint. How he managed to get support out of Martin or anyone else, I didn't know: but I thought there weren't many means that he would consider inappropriate. Had he any talent? Here for once Vicky, in the midst of her delight, became half-lucid. "I do hope," she said, "that he's as good as he wants to be. Sometimes I worry because he might get bored with it."

Then she asked me favours: could they come and see us at our London flat? Could I bring him down to the university some time? She was innocent and shameless: yet anyone would have said that she was one of the stables of young women, and it would have been true. That was why it was a liberation to abandon herself like this. If he arrived that moment, I was thinking, she would be proud to throw her arms round his neck.

I asked for another drink. With a shake of her head, coming back to other people's earth, she poured me a small one.

"Go slow on that," she said, tapping the glass, talking to me like a brisk, affectionate and sensible daughter. "You'll get plenty tonight. Remember, you've got to stay up with him (her father) when they've all gone."

Once more she was businesslike, thinking of her duty. How could I handle him? We were talking tactics, when Arnold Shaw himself entered the room. At first sight, he didn't look a martinet, much

less a puritan. He was short, well-padded, with empurpled cheeks and a curving, malicious, mimicking mouth. He kissed his daughter, shook my hand, poured himself a lavish Scotch, and told us: "Well, that's polished off the paper for today."

He was an obsessively conscientious administrator. He was also a genuine scholar. He had started his life as an inorganic chemist, decided that he wasn't good enough, and taken up the history of chemistry, out of which he had made a name. In this university the one person who had won international recognition was young Leonard Getliffe. After him, a long way after, in a more determined fashion, carrying on with his scholarship after he had 'polished off the paper', came the Vice-Chancellor himself. It ought to have counted to him for virtue. It might have done, if he could have resisted making observations about his colleagues and his fellow Vice-Chancellors. It wasn't long since he had told me about one of the latter, with the utmost gratification: "I wouldn't mind so much that he's never written a book. But I do think it's a pity that he's never read one."

That night he moved restlessly about the drawing-room, carrying glasses, stroking his daughter's hair. The dinner was a routine piece of entertaining, part of the job which he must have gone through many times: but he was nervous. As soon as the first car drove up the drive, he became more nervous and more active. When the Gearys came in, he was pushing drinks into their hands before they could sit down. Denis Geary, who had been a small boy at my old school just before I left it, gave me a good-natured wink; he was the headmaster of a new comprehensive school, nominated to the Court by the local authority, a relaxed and competent man, not easily put out. The Hargraves followed them in not as relaxed, knowing no one there except through Court meetings and dinners such as this: both of them diffident, descendants of Quaker manufacturers who had made tidy – not excessive – fortunes in the town. Mrs Hargrave, true to her teetotal ancestry, asked timidly for a tomato juice, which with a flourish Arnold Shaw produced. Then Leonard Getliffe entered, black-haired, white-faced, handsome in a Mediterranean fashion: he couldn't help his eyes searching for Vicky as he shook hands.

Arnold Shaw was settling them all down, braced on the balls of his feet: there was a buzz of titillating enunciation. The mention of Lord Getliffe – Professor Getliffe's father, Arnold Shaw found it desirable to explain – was frequent: there was a good deal of Sir Lewis-ing. But he was not only being nervous, active and snobbish, but also peremptory. The party still had the first drinks in hand, Shaw had only just sat down himself at last, when he gave an order.

"About the Court meeting – discussion tonight forbidden," he announced.

His bright hot eyes swept round the room. Some were relieved, one could feel, but not Denis Geary.

"That's going a bit far, Vice-Chancellor," he said. He was hawk-nosed, grizzled, tough as well as harmonious, no man's pushover. He was also a figure in local progressive politics: he had come prepared to argue, not just to dine out.

"Absolutely forbidden."

"With respect—" Denis began.

"Host's privilege," said Arnold Shaw.

Denis looked over at me, gave a slight shrug.

"If you say so," he said with a good grace. He knew when not to force an issue: recently I had often thought that he could have been a good politician on a bigger scale.

"Nothing contentious tonight," said Arnold Shaw, rubbing it in. "We're going to enjoy ourselves."

That was one of the inapposite remarks, I thought, as we went in to dinner, and I sat on Vicky's right hand. For Denis Geary, at any rate, despite his good manners, the night had become pointless. For his wife also: she spoke in a soft Midland voice like my father's but was as firm as her husband. As dinner began, at my end of the table I had to exert myself to keep any sort of conversation going.

And yet the meal was superb. Arnold Shaw indulged in food and drink; in the Residence both were better than at any private house I knew, out of comparison better than at great houses such as Bassett. Dinner that night was as good as ever: borsch, whitebait, tournedos Rossini: while Arnold Shaw was jumping up and down, going round the table with decanters, buttlings. There was plenty of buttlings to be done: he loved wine, and was more knowledgeable about it than any of my old Cambridge colleagues: wine drinking of that quality didn't happen nowadays among my friends.

The food and drink ought to have acted as a social lubricant. But they didn't. To most of the party they were an embarrassment. The Hargraves were rich, but they went in for austere simple living. The Gearys weren't at all austere but didn't understand fine wine or the wine badinage that Shaw insisted on exchanging with me. I was a light eater, though out of politeness I was doing my best. Leonard was gulping down the drink, hoping to see Vicky before the night was over. As so often, Arnold Shaw could not put a foot right.

In fact, he was proceeding, I could hear down the table, to put two feet wrong. He at least was enjoying his meal, and even more his wine: he was not a heavy drinker, I had never seen him drunk, but alcohol made him combative. He was choosing the occasion to parade himself as an extreme reactionary; in particular an extreme reactionary about education. He flourished his views, vigorously and bantam-bright, in front of the Gearys, who in the terms of that period believed the exact opposite, and the Hargraves, who spent their money on benefactions. "You're all wrong about education," he was saying. "Quite wrong. Education isn't social welfare. You're quite wrong about universities. A university isn't anything like what you think. Or it oughtn't to be." He went on, with a kind of ferocious jocularly, temper not far beneath the surface, making himself clear. A university was a place of learning. No more, no less. The senior members existed to add to knowledge. If they couldn't do that, they shouldn't be there. Some of them had to teach. The students existed only to be taught. They came to learn. They weren't there for social therapy. They weren't there to be made useful to the state: that was someone else's job. Very few people could either add to knowledge, or even acquire it. If they couldn't, get rid of them. He wanted fewer university students, not more. Fewer and better. This university ought to be half its present size.

I heard Hargrave, who didn't speak often, say that he couldn't agree. I heard Denis Geary arguing patiently, and turned my head away. I met Vicky's frown, troubled and cross. I tried to distract her, but she was on edge, like someone conducting an intolerable interview, waiting to call time.

For myself, I couldn't intervene: Shaw thought that I was not stupid, but misguided, perhaps deliberately so, and that provoked him more. I let my thoughts drift, wondering why, when I was young, I hadn't known Denis Geary better. He was a good man, and his character had worn well: he had become more interesting than many who had once, for me, outshone him. But, of course, one doesn't in youth really choose one's friends: it is only later, perhaps too late, that one wishes, with something like the obverse of nostalgia, that it had been possible to choose.

The men alone, the port, more of the political testimony of Arnold Shaw. But, despite the luxurious meals, parties at the Residence had a knack of finishing early. All the guests had left, with suitable expressions of reluctance, by 10.45.

Tyres ground on the gravel, and Arnold returned to the drawing-room, lips pursed in triumph.

"I call that a good party," he proclaimed to Vicky and me, challenging us to deny it. Then he said to Vicky, affectionate, reproachful: "But I must say, you might have kept young Getliffe behind a bit—" I had to save her. I said: "Look, Arnold, I do rather want a word with you."

"About what?"

"You know about what, don't you?"

He glared at me with hot, angry eyes. He decided that there was nothing for it, and said with increasing irascibility that we had better go to his study.

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Before I had sat down, beside the reading lamp in front of the scholar's bookshelves, ladder close by, he said: "I warn you, it's no use."

"Listen to me for a minute."

"It's no use."

"I'm thinking of you," I said.

"I don't want anyone to think of me."

What I had just told him happened to be true. I was not exerting myself, and not crossing will entirely – or even mainly – for Vicky's sake. I should have been hard put to it to define my feeling for him, but it contained strata both of respect and affection. Whether he believed that or not, I did not know: he was not used to being liked: if someone did appear to like him, it affected him with something between exasperation and surprise.

He poured out whiskies for us both, but became more ugly-tempered still. It was the kind of temper that is infectious, and I had to make myself keep my own. I told him that tomorrow's meeting wasn't just a matter of form: if he pressed for the Court to confirm his verdict, then he would certainly get a majority: some would vote against, certainly Geary, probably Leonard Getliffe and two or three of the younger academics. I should, I said in a matter-of-fact tone, vote against it myself.

"Vote against anything you like," he snapped.

"I shall," I said.

He would get a clear majority. But didn't he realise that most of the people voting for him nevertheless thought he had been too severe?

"That's neither here nor there."

"It is, you know," I said.

I tried another tactic. He must admit, I said, that most of the people we knew – probably most people in the whole society – didn't really regard fornication as a serious offence. In secret they didn't regard it as an offence at all.

"So much the worse for them," he said.

How could he be so positive? I was getting rougher. Most people couldn't find any moral sanction for such an attitude. I couldn't. Where did he get his?

"That's my business."

"Not if it affects us all."

"I'm not going to talk about my moral sanctions. I'm not going to talk about fornication in general." His cheeks had gone puce. "We're talking about a university, which you seem to have forgotten. We're talking about a university which I'm in charge of. While I'm in charge of it, I'm not going to allow promiscuous fornication. I don't see that that needs explaining. It gets in the way of everything a university stands for. Once you turn a blind eye, you'd make nonsense of the place before you could look round."

Then I used my last resource. I said that I too was concerned for the university: and that he was valuable to it. He would never get any credit for that. But he had a single-minded passion for academic merit. As a Vice-Chancellor he couldn't do some things, but he could do one superlatively: that is, he was a connoisseur of academic promise with as great accuracy as he was a connoisseur of wine. It wasn't an accident that this obscure university had put in a bid for Leonard Getliffe. And Leonard Getliffe, though much the best of his collection, was not the only one. He had backed his judgment and appointed three full professors in their twenties and thirties: so that the university was both better

staffed, and more adventurously staffed, than any of its class.

~~I hadn't been flattering him. That was the fact. For the first time I had touched him. The smouldering rage dropped down for an instant, and he said: "Well, I've got hold of some good men. He said it humbly.~~

If he left the place, no one else would have the same gift, I said. And it was possible that he would have to leave. You couldn't fight all your opponents on all fronts. He was making opponents of people who needn't be: they thought that he wasn't living in the climate of his time: he gave them some excuse.

"I've no use for the climate of my time. To hell with it," he said.

All I wanted him to do – I was being patient – was to make some compromise. The slightest compromise. Even just by permitting the four students to withdraw, as though of their own free will.

"I'll compromise when I can," he said. "Not when I can't."

I told him, as straight and hard as I was able, that if ever there was an occasion to offer a token compromise, then tomorrow was the time. With an angry pout, eyes flat and fixed, he shook his head.

I had had enough, and sat back, silent. Then he said, not so much in a conciliatory manner but as though he wanted me to understand: "I'll tell you this. You say they may want to get rid of me. That's their business. They won't find it so easy as they think. But if I decide that I'm doing the place more harm than good, then I shall go next day."

He had spoken in a brisk tone, his anger quite subsided, rather as though he were stating his plan for his summer holiday. In precisely the same tone, he added: "I shall decide. And I shan't ask anyone else."

Even more briskly, he said good night, and at something like a trot went out of the room and upstairs. I noticed that the lights were still on in the drawing-room, and there I found Vicky waiting up.

"Any change?" she asked.

"None," I said.

She swore. "He's hopeless."

Then she, who usually was considerate, who noticed one's physical state, went on as though I were neither jaded nor tired. Couldn't I still do something tomorrow? I was used to this kind of business. Couldn't I find a way to smooth things over?

I'd try, of course, I said. But in real conflicts, technique never counted; when people clashed head-on it was no use being tactful. I let myself say that, discouraging her because she was nagging at me, and I needed just to go to bed.

She seemed selfishly, or even morbidly, preoccupied about her father. But it was not truly so. No, she was compensating to herself because she did not want to think of him at all. She was dutiful, she could not shrug off what a daughter ought to feel and do. It was another kind of love, however, which was possessing her. She wanted to guard her father's well-being, she wanted to get her conscience clear – so that she could forget it all and lose herself, as though on the edge of sleep, in thoughts of happiness.

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### 3: Meeting

MEETINGS. To twist an old statement, all happy meetings are like one another: every unhappy meeting is unhappy in its own fashion. But was that true? I had been to plenty of unhappy meetings my time. Whether they were trivial or secret or (by the world's standards) important, they all had a family resemblance. So had the Court meeting that Wednesday morning.

It began uncomfortably quiet, the good-mornings muted in the long room. The room was both extravagantly long and as light as though we were sitting in the open air, since one side was a window, looking southwards on to an arena-like court. The unrelieved lightness of the room – I had thought, on occasions before this one – drew people apart, not together. It was like the whole range of the university buildings, handsome, stark, functional, slapped down at prodigious expense in the fields, four miles outside the town. The Victorian buildings of the old college, where I had first listened to George Passant, had been abandoned, turned over to offices in one of the streets where my son and I had walked the previous afternoon. No dark rooms now: no makeshifts: no, the wide campus of the steel, concrete and glass, the stretches of window, at the same time bare, luxurious, unshadowed and costly.

Arnold sat at the end of the table, behind him on the wall – incongruous in the midst of the architectural sheen – a coloured plaque of the university arms. There were ten people on each side. Hargrave, who had some honorific title in the university, on the Vice-Chancellor's right, Geary two or three places down, looking at ease and interested. I sat on Arnold Shaw's left, and on my side sat Leonard Getliffe and several other academics, most of them under forty. The rest of the Court were older, hearty middle-aged local politicians and businessmen, four or five well-dressed strong-built women.

Item Number 3 on the agenda read, with the simple eloquence of official documents, *Appeal by Four Students against Decision of Disciplinary Committee*. The first two items were routine, and Arnold Shaw, who was a brisk decisive chairman, wiped them off. Then he said, in the same unexpansive fashion, not encouraging comment or setting people free to talk, that they all knew the background of the next piece of business: he had circulated a memorandum: the students had appealed to the Court, as was their constitutional right: they had now asked to appear before the Court in person. Whether they had this right as well was open to question: there was no ruling and no precedent. But Sir Lewis Eliot, as the students' representative on the Court, had presented an official request from the student body – that the four students should be given the privilege. He, Arnold Shaw, had with some dubiety granted it. As to the case itself the facts were not in dispute. There was nothing to be said about them. We had better have the students in straight away.

Better for them if they had not come, I had thought all along. I had tried to persuade them, for I had interviewed the four of them more than once. But the young man Pateman, who was the strongest character among them, was also a good deal of a sea lawyer: there were other sea lawyers among the union leaders: they were insisting on appearance before the Court as an inalienable right. I found this distinctly tiresome. So far as the four had any chance at all, they would worsen it if they came and argued: I knew the impression they would make: I knew also that one of the girls had already lost her nerve.

As Arnold Shaw had said, picking up the official phrase, the facts were not in dispute. They could hardly have been less in dispute. About 3.0 a.m. on a winter morning (actually it happened early in March) the assistant warden of one of the women's hostels had gone into a sitting-room. It was pure coincidence that she should have done so; she was having a sleepless night, and thought she remembered seeing a magazine there. She had switched on the light; on the sofa lay one naked pair, on an improvised bed another. What conversation then took place didn't seem to have been put on record. The assistant warden (who was both sensible and embarrassed) knew both girls, they were members of the hostel and had their own rooms upstairs. Presumably she found out the men's names at once: in any rate, next day she had no option but to report them. It was as simple as that.

We had better have the students in straight away, Arnold Shaw was saying. He pressed a bell, told the attendant to bring Miss Bolt.

Myra Bolt came in. She was a big girl, pretty in a heavy-featured, actressish way: at close quarters she rolled her eyes and one noticed that her skin was large-pored. She was quite self-possessed that morning. I had not yet seen her otherwise: it wasn't she whose nerve had snapped. She was hearty and loud-voiced, and her parents were much better off than those of most of the students. Her father was a stockbroker who had a country house in Sussex. It was easy to imagine her, a little younger, taking riding lessons and being eager to have a roll in the bushes with the groom. She hadn't exactly boasted or confided, but let me know that something of that kind had duly taken place. At this time, she was twenty, in her second year, academically not much good.

The table was bad for interviewing, far too long, the candidate (or, that morning, the appellants) much too far away. Arnold Shaw, though a good chairman, was a bad interviewer. He just snapped out questions, his mind channelled as though he were wearing blinkers. That morning he was not only a bad interviewer but a hostile one, and he wasn't going to pretend otherwise.

"Miss Bolt," he said. "We understand that you have representations to make to the Court. What are they?"

Myra Bolt wasn't overawed, but she wasn't specially used to formal speeches. I had told them the kind of questions to expect, but not that one, not as the first.

"Well—" she began inconclusively, like someone saying goodbye at a railway station.

I thought that I had to step in. She wasn't a favourite of mine: there was only one of the four whom I was really fond of, and it wasn't she. But it was my job to see they got a hearing. I said – "Vic Chancellor, I wonder if I can help the Court a little, and Miss Bolt? Perhaps I could take her through what the students wish to say?"

How often had I seen others start a clash like that, voices smoothed down by official use? Arnold Shaw glanced at me with aggressive eyes – but he couldn't have stopped me easily. He seemed to like having an adversary, me in particular. He nodded, and projected my name.

I began by one or two innocuous questions: how long had she been living in the hostel? How well did she know the other girl, Joyce Darby? Not all that well, said Myra: just to have coffee with, or go out with for a drink. I had two objectives: I wanted to domesticate the whole business, to make them look more acceptable, so that they might express some sort of regret (which I knew that two of them, at least, Myra among them, weren't inclined to do). Then I wanted them to make a responsible calculation about their careers: what would happen to them if they were thrown out of this university, and they couldn't get into another? The more professional it all sounded, the easier for them – and, I had hoped until the night before, the easier for Arnold Shaw.

How had they ever got into it? They didn't usually have this kind of party, did they? I was speaking casually. Myra answered: no, there'd never been anything like it before. She added: "I suppose we a



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