



Dice Man

By Luke Rhinehart

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Classic novel of the 70s, back in print.

The cult classic that can still change your life...Let the dice decide! This is the philosophy that changes the life of bored psychiatrist Luke Rhinehart—and in some ways changes the world as well. Because once you hand over your life to the dice, anything can happen. Entertaining, humorous, scary, shocking, subversive, *The Dice Man* is one of the cult bestsellers of our time.

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Dice Man By Luke Rhinehart Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #186010 in eBooks
- Published on: 1998-05-01
- Released on: 1998-05-01
- Format: Kindle eBook

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Editorial Review

Review

'Touching, ingenious and beautifully comic' Anthony Burgess 'Hilarious and well-written... sex always seems to be an option' Time Out 'Brilliant... very impressive' Colin Wilson

About the Author

Luke Rhinehart has written four other acclaimed novels: Matari, Long Voyage Back, Adventures of Wim and The Search for the Dice Man, sequel to the bestselling The Dice Man. He lives in the USA.

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THE
DICE
MAN

THE OVERLOOK PRESS
New York

The Overlook Press, Peter Mayer Publishers, Inc.

141 Wooster Street

New York, NY 10012

www.overlookpress.com

For bulk and special sales, please contact sales@overlookny.com

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Rhinehart, Luke.

The dice man / Luke Rhinehart.

p. cm.

I. Title.

PR3568.H5D54 1998 98-10741

818'.54—dc21 CIP

ISBN: 9781590207048

9 11 13 15 17 18 16 14 12 10

without any of whom,
no book.

There was a man sent by Chance, whose name was Luke. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of Whim, that all men through him might believe. He was not Chance, but was sent to bear witness of Chance. That was the true Accident, that randomizes every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of Chance, even to them that believe accidentally, they which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of Chance. And Chance was made flesh (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Great Fickle Father), and he dwelt among us, full of chaos and falsehood and whim.

—from The Book of the Die

PREFACE

“The style is the man,” once said Richard Nixon and devoted his life to boring his readers.

What to do if there is no single man? Should the style vary as the man writing the autobiography varies, or as the past man he writes about varied? Literary critics would declare that the style of a chapter should

correspond to the man whose life is being dramatized: a quite rational injunction, one that ought therefore to be repeatedly disobeyed. The comic life portrayed by Hamlet, everyday kitchen events being described by Churchill, the man in love described by an Einstein. Thus it will have to be. Let us have no more quibbles about style. If style and subject matter happen to congeal in any of these chapters it is a lucky accident, not, we may hope, soon to be repeated.

A cunning chaos: that is what my autobiography shall be. I shall make my order chronological, an innovation dared these days by few. But my style shall be random, with the wisdom of the Die. I shall sulk and soar, extol and sneer. I shall shift from first person to third person: I shall use first-person omniscient, a mode of narrative generally reserved for Another. When distortions and digressions occur to me in my life's history I shall embrace them, for a well-told lie is a gift of the gods. But the realities of the Dice Man's life are more entertaining than my most inspired fictions: reality will dominate—for its entertainment value.

I tell my life's story for that humble reason which has inspired every user of the form: to prove to the world I am a great man. I shall fail, of course, like the others. "To be great is to be misunderstood," Elvis Presley once said, and no one can refute him. I tell of a man's instinctive attempt to fulfill himself in a new way and I will be judged insane. So be it. Were it otherwise, I would fear I had failed.

—J. H. van den Berg

My aim is to bring about a psychic state in which my patient begins to experiment with his own nature—a state of fluidity, change and growth, in which there is no longer anything eternally fixed and hopelessly petrified.

—Carl Jung

The torch of chaos and doubt—this is what the sage steers by.

—Chuang-Tzu

I am Zarathustra the godless: I still cook every chance in my pot.

—Nietzsche

Anybody can be anybody.

—The Dice Man

1

I am a large man, with big butcher's hands, great oak thighs, rock-jawed head, and massive, thick-lens glasses. I'm six foot four and weigh close to two hundred and thirty pounds; I look a little like Clark Kent, except that when I take off my business suit I am barely faster than my wife, only slightly more powerful than men half my size, and leap buildings not at all, no matter how many leaps I'm given.

As an athlete I am exceptionally mediocre in all major sports and in several minor ones. I play daring and

disastrous poker and cautious and competent stock market. I married a pretty former cheerleader and rock-and-roll singer and have two lovely, nonneurotic and abnormal children. I am deeply religious, have written the lovely first-rate pornographic novel, *The Dance of Maya*, and am not now nor have I ever been Jewish.

I realize that it's your job as a reader to try to create a credible consistent pattern out of all this, but I'm afraid I must add that I am normally atheistic, have given away at random thousands of dollars, have been a sporadic revolutionary against the governments of the United States, New York City, the Bronx and Scarsdale, and am still a card-carrying member of the Republican Party. I am the creator, as most of you know, of those nefarious Dice Centers for experiments in human behavior which have been described by the *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* as "outrageous," "unethical," and "informative"; by *The New York Times* as "incredibly misguided and corrupt"; by *Time* magazine as "sewers"; and by the *Evergreen Review* as "brilliant and fun." I have been a devoted husband, multiple adulterer and experimental homosexual; an able, highly praised analyst, and the only one ever dismissed from both the Psychiatrists Association of New York (PANY) and from the American Medical Association (for "ill-considered activities" and "probable incompetence"). I am admired and praised by thousands of dicepeople throughout the nation but have twice been a patient in a mental institution, once been in jail, and am currently a fugitive, which I hope to remain, Die willing, at least until I have completed this 305-page autobiography.

My primary profession has been psychiatry. My passion, both as psychiatrist and as Dice Man, has been to change human personality. Mine. Others'. Everyone's. To give to men a sense of freedom, exhilaration, joy. To restore to life the same shock of experience we have when bare toes first feel the earth at dawn and we see the sun split through the mountain trees like horizontal lightning; when a girl first lifts her lips to be kissed; when an idea suddenly springs full-blown into the mind, reorganizing in an instant the experience of a lifetime.

Life is islands of ecstasy in an ocean of ennui, and after the age of thirty land is seldom seen. At best we wander from one much-worn sandbar to the next, soon familiar with each grain of sand we see.

When I raised the "problem" with my colleagues, I was assured that the withering away of joy was as natural to normal man as the decaying of his flesh and based on much the same physiological changes. The purpose of psychology, they reminded me, was to decrease misery, increase productivity, relate the individual to his society, and help him to see and accept his self. Not to alter necessarily the habits, values and interests of the self, but to see them without idealization and to accept them as they are.

It had always seemed to me a quite obvious and desirable goal for therapy but, after having been "successfully" analyzed, and after having lived in moderate happiness with moderate success with an average wife and family for seven years, I found suddenly, around my thirty-second birthday, that I wanted to kill myself. And to kill several other people too.

I took long walks over the Queensborough Bridge and brooded down at the water. I reread Camus on suicide as the logical choice in an absurd world. On subway platforms I always stood three inches from the edge, and swayed. On Monday mornings I would stare at the bottle of strychnine on my cabinet shelf. I would daydream for hours of nuclear holocausts searing the streets of Manhattan clean, of steamrollers accidentally flattening my wife, of taxis taking my rival Dr. Ecstein off into the East River, of a teenage babysitter of ours shrieking in agony as I plowed away at her virgin soil.

Now the desire to kill oneself and to assassinate, poison, obliterate or rape others is generally considered in the psychiatric profession as "unhealthy." Bad. Evil. More accurately, sin. When you have the desire to kill yourself, you are supposed to see and "accept it," but not, for Christ's sake, to kill yourself. If you desire to have carnal knowledge of helpless preteeners, you are supposed to accept your lust, and not lay a finger on

even her big toe. If you hate your father, fine—but don't slug the bastard with a bat. Understand yourself, accept yourself, but do not be yourself.

It is a conservative doctrine, guaranteed to help the patient avoid violent, passionate and unusual acts and to permit him a prolonged, respectable life of moderate misery. In fact, it is a doctrine aimed at making everyone live like psychotherapists. The thought nauseated me.

These trivial insights actually began to form in the weeks following my first unexplained plunge into depression, a depression ostensibly produced by a long writing block on my "book," but actually part of a general constipation of the soul that had been a long time building up. I remember sitting at my big oak desk after breakfast each morning before my first appointment reviewing my past accomplishments and future hopes with a feeling of scorn. I would take off my glasses and, reacting to both my thoughts and the surrealistic haze which became my visual world without my glasses, I would intone dramatically, "Blind! Blind! Blind!" and bang my boxing-glove-sized fist down on the desk with a dramatic crash.

I had been a brilliant student throughout my educational career, piling up academic honors like my son Larry collects bubble-gum baseball cards. While still in medical school I published my first article on therapy, a well-received trifle called "The Physiology of Neurotic Tension." As I sat at my desk, all articles I had ever published seemed absolutely as good as other men's articles: blah. My successes with patients seemed identical to those of my colleagues: insignificant. The most I had come to hope for was to free a patient from anxiety and conflict: to alter him from a life of tormented stagnation to one of complacent stagnation. If my patients had untapped creativity or inventiveness or drive, my methods of analysis had failed to dig them out. Psychoanalysis seemed an expensive, slow-working, unreliable tranquilizer. If LSD were really to do what Alpert and Leary claimed for it, all psychiatrists would be out of jobs overnight. The thought pleased me.

In the midst of my cynicism I would occasionally daydream of the future. My hopes? To excel in all that I had been doing in the past: to write widely acclaimed articles and books; to raise my children so they might avoid the mistakes I had made; to meet some technicolor woman with whom I would become soulmate for life. Unfortunately, the thought that these dreams might all be fulfilled plunged me into despair.

I was caught in a bind. No matter how I twisted or turned there seemed to be an anchor in my chest which held me fast, the long line leaning out against the slant of sea taut and trim, as if it were cleated fast into the rock of the earth's vast core. It held me locked, and when a storm of boredom and bitterness blew in I would plunge and leap against the line's rough-clutching knot to be away, to fly before the wind, but the knot grew tight, the anchor only dug the deeper in my chest; I stayed. The burden of my self seemed inevitable and eternal.

However, after a few months of wallowing in depression (I furtively had purchased a .38 revolver and nine cartridges), Karen Horney led me to discover D. T. Suzuki, Alan Watts and Zen, and the world of the rat race, which I had assumed to be normal and healthy for an ambitious young man, seemed suddenly like the world of a rat race.

I was stunned and converted—as only the utterly bored can be. Seeing drive, greed and intellectual aspiration as meaningless and sick in my colleagues, I was able to make the unusual generalization to myself; I too had the same symptoms of grasping after illusions. The secret, I seemed to learn, was in not caring, in accepting the limitations, conflicts and ambiguities of life with joy and satisfaction, in effortless drifting with the flow of impulse. So life was meaningless? Who cares. So my ambitions are trivial? Pursue them anyway. Life seems boring? Yawn.

I followed impulse. I drifted. I didn't care.

Unfortunately, life seemed to get more boring. Admittedly I was cheerfully, sometimes even gaily bored, where before I had been depressedly bored, but life remained essentially uninteresting. My mood of happy boredom was theoretically preferable to my desire to rape and kill, but personally speaking, not much. It was along about this stage of my somewhat sordid road to truth that I discovered the Dice Man.

2

My life before D-Day was routine, humdrum, repetitious, trivial, compulsive, disordered, irritable—the life of a typical successful married man. My new life began on a hot day in early July, 1968.

I awoke a little before seven, cuddled up to my wife Lillian, who was accordioned up into a Z in the bed beside me, and began pleasantly caressing her breasts, thighs and buttocks with my big gentle paws. I liked to begin the day this way: it set a standard by which to measure the gradual deterioration that succeeded from then on. After about four or five minutes we both rolled over and she began caressing me with her hands, and then with her lips, tongue and mouth.

“Nnn morning, sweetheart,” one of us would eventually say.

“Nnnn,” would say the other.

From that point on the day’s dialogue would all be downhill, but with warm, languid hands and lips floating over the body’s most sensitive surfaces, the world was as near perfection as it ever gets. Freud called it a state of ego-less polymorphous perversity and frowned upon it, but I have little doubt that he never had Lil’s hands gliding over him. Or his own wife’s either for that matter. Freud was a very great man, but I never get the impression that anyone ever effectively stroked his penis.

Lil and I were slowly advancing to the stage where play is replaced by passion when two, three, four thumps resounded from the hall, our bedroom door opened, and sixty pounds of boy-energy exploded onto our bed in a graceless flop.

“Time to wake up!” he shouted.

Lil had instinctively turned away from me at the sound of the thumps and, although she arched her lovely behind against me and squirmed intelligently, I knew from long experience that the game was over. I had tried to convince her that in an ideal society parents would make love in front of their children as naturally as they would eat or talk, that ideally the children would caress, fondle and make love to the parent, or both parents, but Lillian felt differently. She liked to make love under sheets, alone with her partner, uninterrupted. I pointed out that this showed unconscious shame, and she agreed and went on hiding our caresses from the kids. Kids. Our girl, a forty-five-pound variety, was by this time announcing in slightly louder tones than her older brother:

“Cock-a-doodle-do! Time to get up.”

Generally, we get up. Occasionally, when I don’t have a nine o’clock patient, we encourage Larry to fix himself and his sister some breakfast, but the curiosity aroused by the sound of shattering glassware or the lack of sound of anything from the kitchen makes our extra minutes in bed pretty unrewarding: it is difficult to enjoy sensual bliss while certain that the kitchen is on fire. This particular morning Lil arose right away, modestly keeping her front parts turned away from the children, slipped on a flimsy nightgown and slouched sleepily off to prepare breakfast.

Lil, I should note here, is a tall, essentially slender woman with sharp and pointed elbows, ears, nose, teeth and (metaphorically) tongue, but soft and rounded breasts, buttocks and thighs. All agree she is a beautiful woman, with natural wavy blond hair and statuesque dignity. However, her lovely face has a peculiarly pixyish expression which I'm tempted to describe as mousy except that then you'll picture her with beady red eyes, and they're actually beady blue. Also, mice are rarely five feet ten and willowy, and rarely attack men, as Lil does.

Although young Evie had scrambled talkatively away to follow her mother toward the kitchen, Larry still lay sprawled next to me on the large king-sized bed. It was his philosophical position that our bed was large enough for the whole family and he deeply resented Lil's obviously hypocritical argument that Mommy and Daddy were so big that they needed the entire area. His recent strategy was to plop on the bed until every last adult was out of it; only then would he triumphantly leave.

"Time to get up, Luke," he announced with the quiet dignity of a doctor announcing that he's afraid the leg will have to come off.

"It's not eight o'clock yet," I said.

"Un-nn," he said, and pointed silently at the clock on the dresser.

I squinted at the clock. "It says twenty-five before six," I said and rolled away from him. A few seconds later I felt him nudging me in the forehead with his fist.

"Here are your glasses," he said. "Now look."

I looked. "You changed the time when I wasn't looking," I said, and rolled over in the opposite direction.

Larry climbed back onto the bed and with no conscious intention, I'm sure, began bouncing and humming.

And I, with that irrational surge of fury known to every parent, suddenly shouted: "Get OUT of here!"

For about thirteen seconds after Larry had raced to the kitchen I lay in my bed with relative content. I could hear Evie's unending chatter punctuated by Lil's occasional yelling, and from the Manhattan streets below, the unending chatter of automobile horns. That thirteen-second involvement in sense experience was fine; then I began to think, and my day was shot.

I thought of my two morning patients, of lunch with Doctors Ecstein and Felloni, of the book on sadism I was supposed to be writing, of the children, of Lillian: I felt bored. For some months I had been feeling—from about ten to fifteen seconds after the cessation of polymorphous perversity until falling asleep at night—or falling into another session of polymorphous perversity—that depressed feeling of walking up a down escalator. "Whither and why," as General Eisenhower once said, "have the joys of life all flown away?"

"BREAKFAST DADDY!"

"EGGS, hon."

I arose, plunged my feet into my size-thirteen slippers, pulled my bathrobe around me like a Roman preparing for the Forum, and went to the breakfast table, with, I supposed, a superficial sunniness, but deeply brooding on Eisenhower's eternal question.

We have a six-room apartment on the slightly upper, slightly East, slightly expensive side, near Central Park,

near the blacklands, and near the fashionable upper East Side. Its location is so ambiguous that our friends are still not certain whether to envy us or pity us.

In the small kitchen Lil was standing at the stove aggressively mashing eggs in a frying pan; the two children were sitting in whining obedience on the far side of the table. Larry had been playing with the window shade behind him (we have a lovely view from our kitchen window of a kitchen window with a lovely view of ours), and Evie had been guilty of talking without a break in either time or irrelevance since getting up. Lil, since we don't believe in corporal punishment, had admonished them verbally.

As she brought the plates of scrambled eggs and bacon to the table she glanced up at me and asked:

“What time will you be back from Queensborough today?”

“Four-thirty or so. Why?” I said as I lowered my body delicately into a small kitchen chair across from the kids.

“Arlene wants another private chat this afternoon.”

“Larry took my spoon!”

“Give Evie her spoon, Larry,” I said.

Lil gave Evie back her spoon.

“I imagine she wants to talk more of her ‘I have to have a baby’ dream,” she said.

“Mmm.”

“I wish you’d talk to Jake,” Lil said as she sat down beside me.

“What can I tell him?” I said. “ ‘Say Jake, your wife desperately wants a baby: anything I can do to help?’ ”

“Are there dinosaurs in Harlem?” Evie asked.

“Yes,” Lil said. “You could say precisely that. It’s his conjugal responsibility: Arlene is almost thirty-three years old and has wanted a baby for— Evie, use your spoon.”

“Jake’s going to Philadelphia today,” I said.

“I know; that’s one reason Arlene’s coming up. But the poker is still on for tonight, isn’t it?”

“Mmm.”

“Mommy, what’s a virgin?” Larry asked quietly.

“A virgin is a young girl,” she answered.

“Very young,” I added.

“That’s funny,” he said.

“What is?” Lil asked.

“Barney Goldfield called me a stupid virgin.”

“Barney was misusing the word,” Lil said. “Why don’t we postpone the poker, Luke. It’s—”

“Why?”

“I’d rather see a play.”

“We’ve seen some lemons.”

“It’s better than playing poker with them.”

Pause.

“With lemons?”

“If you and Tim and Renata were able to talk about something besides psychology and the stock market, it would help.”

“The psychology of the stock market?”

“And the stock market! God, I wish you’d open your ears for just once.”

I forked my eggs into my mouth with dignity, and sipped with philosophical detachment my instant coffee. My initiation into the mysteries of Zen Buddhism had taught me many things, but the most important was not to argue with my wife. “Go with the flow,” the great sage Oboko said, and I’d been doing it for five months now. Lil had been getting madder and madder.

After about twenty seconds of silence, I (theoretically the way to avoid arguments is to surrender before the attack has been fully launched) said quietly:

“I’m sorry, Lil.”

“You and your damn Zen. I’m trying to tell you something. I don’t like the forms of entertainment we have. Why can’t we ever do something new or different, or, revolution of revolutions, something I want.”

“We do, honey, we do. The last three plays—”

“I had to drag you. You’re so—”

“Honey, the children.”

The children in fact looked about as affected by our argument as elephants by two squabbling mosquitoes, but the ploy always worked to silence Lil.

After we’d all finished breakfast she led the children into their room to get dressed while I went to wash and shave. Holding the lathered brush stiffly in my raised right hand like an Indian saying “How!”, I stared glumly into the mirror. I always hated to shave a two-day growth of beard; with the dark shadows around my mouth I looked—potentially at least—like Don Giovanni, Faust, Mephistopheles, Charlton Heston, or Jesus. After shaving I knew I would look like a successful, boyishly handsome public relations man. Because I was a bourgeois psychiatrist and had to wear glasses to see myself in the mirror I had resisted the impulse to grow a beard. I let my sideburns grow, though, and it made me look a little less like a successful public

relations man and a little more like an unsuccessful, out-of-work actor.

After I'd begun shaving and was concentrating particularly well on three small hairs at the tip of my chin Lil came, still wearing her modest, obscene nightgown, and leaned against the doorway.

"I'd divorce you if it wouldn't mean I'd be stuck with the kids," she said, in a tone half-ironic and half-serious.

"Nnn."

"What I don't understand is that you're a psychiatrist, a supposedly good one, and you have no more insight into me or into yourself than the elevator man."

"Ah, honey—"

"You don't! You think loving me up, apologizing before and after every argument, buying me paints, leotards, guitars, records and new book clubs must make me happy. It's driving me crazy."

"What can I do?"

"I don't know. You're the analyst. You should know. I'm bored. I'm Emma Bovary in everything except that I have no romantic hopes."

"That makes me a clod doctor, you know."

"I know. I'm glad you noticed. It's no fun attacking unless you catch my allusions. Usually you know about as much about literature as the elevator man."

"Say, just what is it between you and this elevator man—?"

"I've given up my yoga exercises—"

"How come?"

"They just make me tense."

"That's strange, they're supposed—"

"I know! But they make me tense. I can't help it."

I'd finished shaving, taken off my glasses, and was grooming my hair with what I fear may have been greasy kid stuff; Lil moved into the bathroom and sat on the wooden laundry basket. Crouching now quite a bit in order to see the top of my hair in the mirror, I noticed that my knee muscles were already aching. Moreover, without my glasses I looked old today, and in a blurred sort of way, badly dissipated. Since I didn't smoke or drink much, I wondered vaguely if excessive early morning petting were debilitating.

"Maybe I should become a hippie," Lil went on absently.

"That's what a few of our patients try. They don't seem overly pleased with the result."

"Or drugs."

"Ah Lil sweet precious—"

“Don’t touch me.”

“Ah—”

“No!”

Lil was backed up against the tub and shower curtain as if threatened by a stranger in a cheap melodrama, and I, slightly appalled by her apparent fear, backed meekly away.

“I’ve got a patient in half an hour, hon, I’ve got to go.”

“I’ll try infidelity!” Lil shouted after me. “Emma Bovary did it.”

I turned back again. She was standing with her arms folded over her chest, her two elbows pointing out sharply from her long slender body, and with a bleak, mousy, helpless look on her face; at the moment she seemed like a kind of female Don Quixote after having just been tossed in a blanket. I went to her, and took her in my arms.

“Poor little rich girl. Who would you have for adultery? The elevator man? [She sobbed.] Anyone else? Sixty-three-year-old Dr. Mann, and flashy, debonair Jake Ecstein [Jake never noticed women]. Come on, come on. We’ll go out to the farmhouse; it’ll be the break you need. Now . . .”

Her head was still nestled into my chest, but her breathing was regular. She’d had just the one sob.

“Now . . . chin up . . . bust out . . . tummy in . . .” I said. “Buttocks firm . . . and you’re ready to face life again. You can have an exciting morning: talking with Evie, discussing avant-garde art with Ma Kettle [our maid], reading Time, listening to Schubert’s Unfinished Symphony: racy, thought-provoking experiences all.”

“You . . . [she scratched her nose against my chest] . . . should mention that I could do coloring with Larry when he gets home from school.”

“Right. You’ve absolutely no end of home entertainments. Don’t forget to call in the elevator man for a quick one when Evie is having her rest time.”

My right arm around her, I walked us into our bedroom. While I finished dressing, she watched quietly, standing next to the big bed with arms folded and elbows out. She saw me to the door and after we had exchanged a farewell kiss she said quietly with a bemused, almost interested expression on her face:

“I don’t even have my yoga anymore.”

I shared my office on 57th Street with Dr. Jacob Ecstein, young (thirty-three), dynamic (two books published), intelligent (he and I usually agreed), personable (everyone liked him), unattractive (no one loved him), anal (he plays the stock market compulsively), oral (he smokes heavily), nongenital (doesn’t seem to notice women), and Jewish (he knows two Yiddish slang words). Our mutual secretary was a Miss Reingold, Mary Jane Reingold, old (thirty-six), undynamic (she worked for us), unintelligent (she prefers Ecstein to me), personable (everyone felt sorry for her), unattractive (tall, skinny, glasses, no one loved her), anal

(obsessively neat), oral (always eating), genital (trying hard), and non-Jewish (finds use of two Yiddish slang words very intellectual). Miss Reingold greeted me efficiently.

“Mr. Jenkins is waiting in your office, Dr. Rhinehart.”

“Thank you, Miss Reingold. Any calls for me yesterday?”

“Dr. Mann wanted to check about lunch this afternoon. I said ‘yes.’ ”

“Good.”

Before I moved off to my patient, Jake Ecstein came briskly out of his office, shot off a cheerful “Hi Luke baby, how’s the book?” the way most men might ask about a friend’s wife, and asked Miss Reingold for a couple of case records. I’ve described Jake’s character; his body was short, rotund, chubby; his visage was round, alert, cheerful, with horn-rimmed glasses and a piercing, I-am-able-to-see-through-you stare; his social front was used-car salesman, and he kept his shoes shined with a finish so bright that I sometimes suspected he cheated with a phosphorescent shoe polish.

“My book’s moribund,” I answered as Jake accepted a fistful of papers from a somewhat flustered Miss Reingold.

“Great,” he said. “Just got a review of my Analysis: Ends and Means from the AP Journal. They say it’s great.” He began glancing slowly through the papers, placing one of them every now and then back onto his secretary’s desk.

“I’m glad to hear it, Jake. You seem to be hitting the jackpot with this one.”

“They’ll like it . . . I may convert a few analysts.”

“Are you going to be able to make lunch today?” I asked. “When are you leaving for Philadelphia?”

“Damn right. Want to show Mann my review. Plane leaves at two. I’ll miss your poker party tonight. You read any more of my book?” Jake went on and gave me one of his piercing, squinting glances, which, had I been a patient, would have led me to repress for a decade all that was on my mind at that instant.

“No. No, I haven’t. I must still have a psychological block: professional jealousy and all that.”

“Hmmm. Yeh. In Philly I’m gonna see that anal optometrist I’ve been telling you about. Think we’re about at a breakthrough. Cured of his voyeurism, but still has visual blackouts. It’s only been three months though. I’ll bust him. Bust him right back to twenty-twenty.” He grinned and still carrying a handful of forms, exited briskly into his inner office.

It was 9:07 when I finally settled into my chair behind the outstretched form of Reginald Jenkins on my couch. Normally nothing upsets a patient more than a late analyst, but Jenkins was a masochist: I could count on his assuming that he deserved it.

“I’m sorry about being here,” he said, “but your secretary insisted I come in and lie down.”

“That’s quite all right, Mr. Jenkins. I’m sorry I’m late. Let’s both relax and you can go right ahead.”

Now the curious reader will want to know what kind of an analyst I was. It so happens that I practiced nondirective therapy. For those not familiar with it, the analyst is passive, compassionate, noninterpretive,

nondirecting. More precisely, he resembles a redundant moron. For example, a session with a patient like Jenkins might go like this on any particular morning:

JENKINS: "I feel that no matter how hard I try I'm always going to fail; that some kind of internal mechanism always acts to screw up what I'm trying to do."

[Pause]

ANALYST: "You feel that some part of you always forces you to fail."

JENKINS: "Yes. For example, that time when I had that date with that nice woman, really attractive—the librarian, you remember—and all I talked about at dinner and all evening was the New York Jets and what a great defensive secondary they have. I knew I should be talking books or asking her questions but I couldn't stop myself."

ANALYST: "You feel that some part of you consciously ruined the potential relationship with that girl."

JENKINS: "And that job with Wessen, Wessen and Woof. I could have had it. But I took a month's vacation in Jamaica when I knew they'd be wanting an interview."

"I see."

"What do you make of it all, Doctor? I suppose it's masochistic."

"You think it might be masochistic."

"I don't know. What do you think?"

"You aren't certain if it's masochistic but you do know that you often do things which are self-destructive."

"That's right. That's right. And yet I don't have any suicidal tendencies. Except in those dreams. Throwing myself under a herd of hippopotamuses. Or 'potami. Setting myself on fire in front of Wessen, Wessen and Woof. But I keep goofing up real opportunities."

"Although you never consciously think of suicide you have dreamed about it."

"Yes. But that's normal. Everybody does crazy things in dreams."

"You feel that your dreaming of self-destructive acts is normal because . . ."

The intelligent reader gets the picture. The effect of nondirective therapy is to encourage the patient to speak more and more frankly, to gain total confidence in the nonthreatening, totally accepting clod who's curing him, and eventually to diagnose and resolve his own conflicts, with old thirty-five-dollars-an-hour echoing away through it all behind the couch.

And it works. It works almost precisely as well as every other tested form of psychotherapy. It works sometimes and fails at others, and its successes and failures are identical with other analysts' successes and failures. Of course at times the dialogue resembles a comedy routine. My patient the second hour that morning was a hulking heir to a small fortune who had the build of a professional wrestler and the mentality of a professional wrestler.

Frank Osterflood was the most depressing case I'd had in five years of practice. In the first two months of

analysis he had seemed a rather nice empty socialite, worried halfheartedly about his inability to concentrate on anything. He tended to drift from job to job averaging two or three a year. He talked a great deal about his jobs and about a mousy father and two disgusting brothers with families, but all with such cocktail-party patter that I knew we must be a long way from what was really bothering him. If anything was bothering him. The only clue I had to indicate that he was anything but a vacuous muscle was his occasional spitting hissing remarks—usually of a general nature—about women. When I asked one morning about his relations with women he hesitated and then said he found them boring. When I asked him how he found fulfillment for his sexual needs, he answered neutrally, “Prostitutes.”

Two or three times in later sessions he described in detail how he liked to humiliate the call girls he hired, but he would never make any effort to analyze his behavior; he seemed to feel in his casual man-of-the-world way that humiliating women was good, normal, all-American behavior. He found it more interesting to analyze why he left his last job; the office he worked in “smelled funny.”

About halfway through the session that July day he interrupted his seemingly pleasant recollections of having single-handedly destroyed an East Side bar and sat up on the couch, looking intensely but, in my professional opinion, dumbly, at the floor. Even his face seemed bulging with muscles. He sat there in the same position for several minutes, grunting quietly to himself with a sound like a noisy refrigerator. Finally he said:

“I get so tied up inside I just have to . . . to do something or I’ll explode,” he said.

[Pause]

“Do something . . . sexually or I’ll explode.”

“You get so tense you feel you must express yourself sexually.”

“Yes.”

[Pause]

“Don’t you want to know how?” he asked.

“If you’d like to tell me.”

“Do you want to know? Don’t you need to know to help me?”

“I want you to tell me only what you feel like telling me.”

“Well, I know you’d like to know, but I’m not going to tell you. I’ve told you about the fuckin’ women I’ve fucked and how they make me want to puke with their snaky wet orgasms, but I guess I’ll keep this to myself.”

[Pause]

“You feel that although I’d like to know, you’ve already told me about your relations with women and so you won’t tell me.”

“Actually, it’s sodomy. When I get tense—it may be right after I’ve fucked some white-satin slut, I get . . . I need . . . I want to ram the Goddam insides out of some woman . . . some girl . . . young . . . the younger the better.”

“When you’re very keyed up you want to ram the insides out of some woman.”

“The Goddam insides. I want to sink my prick up that intestine into that belly through the esophagus up that throat and come right out the Goddam top of her head.”

[Pause]

“You’d like to penetrate through her whole body.”

“Yeah, but up her ass. I want her to scream, to bleed, to be horrified.”

[Pause. Long pause]

“You’d like to penetrate her anus and make her bleed, scream and be horrified.”

“Yeah, but the whores I tried it with chewed gum and picked their nose.”

[Pause]

“The whores you tried it with were neither hurt nor horrified.”

“Shit, they took their seventy-five bucks, shot their ass into the air and chewed gum or read a comic book. If I tried to get rough some guy six inches taller than me would appear in the doorway with a sledgehammer or something. [Pause] I found sodomy, per se [he smiled awkwardly], didn’t end my tenseness.”

“You were unable to release your tension by relations with prostitutes when the women seemed to experience no pain or humiliation.”

“So I knew I had to find someone who would scream.” [Pause]

[Long pause]

“You sought other alternatives to relieve your tensions.”

“Yeah. Fact is I began raping and killing young girls.” [Pause]

[Long pause]

[Longer pause]

“In an effort to relieve these tense feelings you began raping and killing young girls.”

“Yeah. You’re not allowed to tell, are you? I mean you told me professional ethics forbid your telling anything I say, right?”

“Yes.”

[Pause]

“I find the raping and killing of girls helps relieve the tension quite a bit and makes me feel better again.”

“I see.”

“My problem is that I’m beginning to get a little nervous about getting caught. I sort of hoped maybe analysis might help me find a little more normal way to reduce my tensions.”

“You’d like to find a different way to reduce tensions other than raping and killing girls.”

“Yeah. Either that or help me to stop worrying about getting caught. . . .”

The alert reader may now be feeling that this stuff is slightly too sensational for a typical day at the office, but Mr. Osterflood really exists. Or rather existed—more of that later on. The fact is that I was writing a book entitled. *The Sado-Masochistic Personality in Transition*, a work which was to describe cases in which the sadistic personality developed into a masochistic one and vice versa. For this reason my colleagues always sent me patients with a markedly strong sadistic or masochistic bent. Osterflood was admittedly the most professionally active sadist I’d treated, but the wards of mental hospitals have many like him.

What is remarkable, I suppose, is Osterflood’s walking around loose. Although after his confession I urged him to enter an institution, he refused and I couldn’t order his being committed without breaking professional confidence; moreover, no one else apparently suspected that he was an “enemy of society.” All I could do was warn my friends to keep their little girls away from Harlem playgrounds (where Osterflood obtained his victims) and try hard for a cure. Since my friends all kept their children out of Harlem playgrounds because of the danger of Negro rapists even my warnings were unnecessary.

After Osterflood left that morning I brooded a little on my helplessness with him, made a few notes, and then decided I ought to work on my book, whose flaw was small but significant: it had nothing to say. The bulk of it was to be empirical descriptions of patients who had changed from primarily sadistic behavior patterns to masochistic ones. My dream had been to discover a technique to lock the behavior of the patient at that precise point when he had passed away from sadism but had not become masochistic. If there were such a point. I had much dramatic evidence of complete crossovers; none of “frozen freedom,” a phrase describing the ideal mean state that came to me in an explosion of enlightenment one morning while echoing Mr. Jenkins.

The problem was that Jake Ecstein, car-salesman front and all, had written two of the most rational and honest books about psychoanalytic therapy that I’d ever read, and their import essentially demonstrated that none of us knew or had any likelihood of knowing what we were doing. Jake cured patients as well as the next fellow and then published clear, brilliant accounts demonstrating that the key to his success was accident, that frequently it was his failure to follow his own theoretical structure which led to a “breakthrough” and the patient’s improvement. Jake had shown again and again the significance of chance in therapeutic development, perhaps best dramatized in his famous “pencil-sharpening cure.”

A female patient he’d had under treatment for fifteen months with so little success in changing her neurotic aplomb that even Jake was bored, achieved total and complete transformation when Jake, absentmindedly confusing her with his secretary, ordered her to sharpen his pencils. The patient, a wealthy housewife, went into the outer office to obey and suddenly, when about to insert a pencil into the sharpener, began to shriek, tear her hair and defecate. Three weeks later, “Mrs. P.” (Jake’s choice of pseudonyms is only one of his unerring talents) was cured.

I, then, was coming to feel that my elaborate writing efforts were only idle, pretentious playing with words for publication.

I thus spent the hour before lunch: (a) reading the financial section of *The New York Times*; (b) writing a page-and-a-half case report of Mr. Osterflood in the form of a financial and budget report (“bearish outlook for prostitutes”; “bull market in Harlem playground girls”); and (c) drawing a picture on my book manuscript

of an elaborate Victorian house being bombed by motorcycle planes piloted by Hell's Angels.

4

I lunched that day with my three closest colleagues: Dr. Ecstein; Dr. Renata Felloni, the only female Italian-born practicing analyst in recent New York history; and Dr. Timothy Mann, the short, fat, disheveled father figure who had psychoanalyzed me four years before and been mentoring me ever since.

When Jake and I arrived, Dr. Mann was hunched over the table chewing heavily on a roll and blinking benevolently at Dr. Felloni seated opposite him. Dr. Mann was a big wheel: one of the directors at Queensborough State Hospital, where I worked twice a week; a member of the executive committee of PANY (Psychiatrists Association of New York) and the author of seventeen articles and three books, one of them the most frequently used text on existentialist therapy in existence. It had been considered an extraordinary honor to be psychoanalyzed by Dr. Mann and I had appreciated it greatly until my increasing boredom and unhappiness had deluded me into believing that analysis had done me no good. Dr. Mann was concentrating on his eating and may or may not have been listening to the dignified discourse of Dr. Felloni.

Renata Felloni resembles a spinsterish dean of women at a Presbyterian all-girls college; she has gray hair always neatly coiffured, spectacles, and a slow, dignified, Italian-cum-New England twang that makes her discussions of penises, orgasms, sodomy and fellatio seem like a discussion of credit hours and home economics. Moreover, she had, as far as anyone knew, never been married and, with less certainty, had never in the seven years we had known her given any indication of ever having known a man (biblical “know”). Her dignity acted to prevent any of us from either direct or indirect investigations into her past. All we felt free to talk with her about were weather, stocks, penises, orgasms, sodomy and fellatio.

The restaurant was noisy and expensive, and, except for Dr. Mann, who loved every trough he had ever fed in, we all hated it, and went there because every other restaurant we had tried in the convenient area was also crowded, noisy and expensive.

“Only ten percent of our subjects believe that masturbation is ‘punished by God eternally,’ ” Dr. Felloni was saying as Jake and I sat down opposite each other at the tiny table. She was apparently talking about a research project she and I were jointly directing, and she smiled formally and equally to her left at Jake and to her right at me, and continued: “Thirty-three and a third percent believe that masturbation is ‘punished by God finitely’; forty percent that it is physically unhealthy; two and one-half percent believe that there is danger of pregnancy, seventy-five per—”

“Danger of pregnancy?” Jake broke in as he turned from accepting a menu.

“We use the same multiple choices,” she explained smiling, “for masturbation, kissing, petting, premarital and postmarital heterosexual intercourse, homosexual petting, and homosexual sodomy. So far, subjects have indicated that there is danger of pregnancy only with masturbation, petting to orgasm, and heterosexual intercourse.”

I smiled at Jake, but he was squinting at Dr. Felloni.

“Well,” Jake asked her, “what’s the question you’re reeling off these percentages for?”

“We ask, ‘For what reasons, if any, do you believe that sexually exciting yourself through fantasy, reading, looking at pictures or manual excitation is bad?’ ”

“Do you give them a choice of reasons for why masturbation is good?” Dr. Mann asked, wiping his lower lip with a piece of roll.

“Certainly,” Dr. Felloni replied. “A subject can answer that he approves of masturbation for any of six options: (1) It is enjoyable; (2) it releases tension; (3) it is a natural way of expressing love; (4) it is something one should experience to be complete; (5) it procreates the race; (6) it is the social thing to do.”

Jake and I now both began laughing. When we quieted she assured Jake that only the first two choices had been chosen for masturbation, except for one person who had indicated that masturbation was valuable as a way of expressing love. She had determined in a recent interview, however, that the subject had checked that item in a cynical frame of mind.

“I don’t know why you ever got involved in this thing,” Jake said, turning to me suddenly. “Social psychologists have been turning out studies like yours for decades. You’re digging in sterile ground.”

Dr. Felloni nodded politely at Jake’s words as she did whenever someone was uttering anything which might vaguely be construed as criticism of her or her work. The more vigorous and direct the criticism the more vigorously she nodded her head. It was my hypothesis that were a prosecuting attorney ever to attack her for a full hour there would be no need for a guillotine: her neck would have melted away, and her head, still nodding, would be rolling on the floor at the prosecutor’s feet. She replied to Jake:

“Our plan to conduct in-depth interviews of every subject is, however, a genuine contribution.”

“You’ll spend a hundred and twenty hours verifying the obvious: namely, multiple-choice attitude tests are unreliable.”

“Yes, but we got a foundation grant,” I said.

“So what? Why didn’t you request it for something original, something worthwhile?”

“We wanted a foundation grant,” I answered ironically.

Jake gave me his I-see-into-your-soul squint and then laughed.

“We couldn’t think of anything original or worthwhile,” I added, laughing too, “so we decided to do this.”

Dr. Felloni managed to nod and frown, both vigorously.

“You’ll discover that sexual intercourse is more frequently approved after marriage than before,” said Jake, “that homosexuals approve of homosexuality, that—”

“Our results,” Dr. Felloni said quietly, “may not fulfill conventional expectation. We may discover from our in-depth interviews that subjects misrepresent their attitudes and experience in a way that previous experimenters did not guess.”

“She’s right, Jake. I agree the whole thing seems a mammoth bore and may lead to the verification of the obvious, but . . .”

“So why do you waste your time?” Dr. Mann said, looking up at me for the first time. His jowels were a Santa Claus pink, either from alcohol or anger, I couldn’t tell. “Renata could do the whole thing herself without your help.”

“It’s an entertaining time-filler. I often daydream of publishing embellished results to parody such experiments. You know: ‘Ninety-five percent of American youth believe that masturbation is a better way of expressing friendship and love than intercourse.’ ”

“Your experiment is a parody without embellishment,” Dr. Mann said.

There was a silence, if you can exclude the cacophony of voices, dishes and music of the surrounding hubbub.

“Our experiment,” Dr. Felloni finally said with a gallop of nods, “will offer new insight into the relations between sexual behavior, sexual tolerance and personality stability.”

“I read your letter to the Esso Foundation,” Dr. Mann said.

“I knew a teenage girl that could run intellectual rings around most of us here,” Jake said, changing the subject without blinking an eye. “She knew everything, brains coming out of her ears. I was within weeks of a major breakthrough. But she died.”

“She died?” I asked.

“Fell from the Williamsburg Bridge into the East River. I must confess I see her as one of my two or three possible failures.”

“Look, Tim,” I said, turning back to Dr. Mann. “I agree our experiment borders on nonsense, but in an absurd world, one can only go with the flow.”

“I’m not interested in your metaphysical speculations.”

“Or my scientific ones. Maybe I’d better stick to talking about the stock market.”

“Oh come off it now, you two,” Jake said. “Ever since Luke wrote his paper on ‘Taoism, Zen and Analysis,’ Tim has been acting as if he’d been converted to astrology.”

“At least with astrology,” said Dr. Mann, looking coldly at me, “one still tries to predict something important. With Zen one drifts into Nirvana without thought or effort.”

“One doesn’t drift into Nirvana,” I said helpfully. “The drifting is Nirvana.”

“A convenient theory,” Dr. Mann said.

“All good theories are.”

“Gold stocks and General Motors have risen an average of two points a week so far this month,” Dr. Felloni said, nodding.

“Yeah,” said Jake, “And you’ll notice that Waste Products, Inc., Dolly’s Duds and Nadir Technology are all rising.”

Dr. Mann and I continued to look at each other, he with warm red face and chill blue eyes, and I with what I intended to be cheerful detachment.

“My stock seems rather low these days,” I said.

“Perhaps it’s gravitating to its natural level,” he replied.

“It may yet rally.”

“Drifters don’t rally.”

“Yes they do,” I said. “You just don’t understand Zen.”

“I feel blessed,” Dr. Mann said.

“You’ve got eating; let me have my Zen and sex experiments.”

“Eating doesn’t interfere with my productivity.”

“I rather imagine it increases it.”

He flushed even more and pushed back his chair.

The waitress was at the table again and we all busied ourselves with ordering dessert, but Dr. Felloni spoke loudly to the general table:

“My own portfolio has risen fourteen percent in the last three months despite a market decline of two percent.”

“Pretty soon you’ll found your own foundation, Renata,” Dr. Mann said.

“Prudent investment,” she replied, “is like prudent experimentation: it sticks to the obvious.”

For the rest of the lunch, the conversation was all downhill.

5

After lunch I paid my ransom at the local parking lot and drove off through the rain for the hospital. I drove a Rambler American. My colleagues drive Jaguars, Mercedes, Cadillacs, Corvettes, Porsches, Thunderbirds and (occasional slummers) Mustangs; I drove a Rambler. At that time it was my most original contribution to New York City Psychoanalysis.

I went east across Manhattan, up over the Queensborough Bridge and down onto the island in the East River where the State Hospital is located. The ancient buildings appeared bleak and macabre. Some looked abandoned. Three new buildings, built of cheerful yellow brick and pleasant, shiny bars, made the hospital appear, together with the older horror houses, like a Hollywood movie set in which two movies, *My Mother Went Insane* and *Prison Riot*, are being filmed simultaneously.

I went directly to the Admissions Building, one of the old, low, blackened buildings which, it was reliably reported, was held together solely by the thirty-seven layers of pale green paint on all the interior walls and ceilings. A small office was made available to me there every Monday and Wednesday afternoon for my therapy sessions with select patients. The patients were select in two senses: one, I selected them, and two, they were actually receiving therapy. I normally handled two patients, meeting each for about an hour twice a week.

My first QSH patient was Arturo Toscanini Jones, a Negro who lived every moment as if he were a black panther isolated on a half-acre island filled with white hunters armed with Howitzers. My primary difficulty in helping him was that his way of seeing the world seemed to be an eminently realistic evaluation of his life as it had been. Our sessions were usually quiet ones: Arturo Toscanini Jones had very little to say to white hunters. Although I didn't blame him, as a nondirective therapist I was a little handicapped; I needed sounds for my echo.

Jones had been an honors student at City College of New York for three years before disturbing a meeting of the Young Conservatives Club by throwing in two hand grenades. This act would normally have earned long tenure in a penitentiary, but Jones's previous history of "mental disturbance" (marijuana and LSD user, "nervous breakdown" sophomore year—he interrupted a political science class by shouting obscenities at his professor) and the failure of the two hand grenades to maim anything more valuable than a portrait of Barry Goldwater, earned him instead an indefinite stay at QSH. He had become my patient under the questionable assumption that anyone who throws hand grenades at Young Conservatives must be sadistic. That afternoon I decided to let myself go a bit and see if I couldn't provoke a dialogue.

"Mr. Jones," I began (fifteen minutes had already passed in total silence), "what makes you think that I can't or won't help you?"

Sitting sideways to me in a straight wooden chair, he turned his eyes at me with serene disdain: "Experience," he said.

"That nineteen consecutive white men have kicked you in the balls doesn't necessarily mean the twentieth will."

"True," he said, "but the brother who came up to that next Charlie with his hands not protecting his crotch would be one big stupid bastard."

"True, but he could still talk."

"No suh! We Niggahs gotta use our hans when we talk. Yessuh! We're physical, we are."

"You didn't use your hands then when you spoke."

"I'm white, man, didn't you know that? I'm with the CIA investigating the NAACP to see if there's any secret black influence on that organization." His teeth and eyes glittered at me, in play or hatred I didn't know.

"Ah then," I said, "you can appreciate my disguise: I'm black, man, didn't you know that? I'm with—"

"You're not black, Rhinehart," he interrupted sharply. "If you were, we'd both know it and only one of us would be here."

"Still, black or white, I'd like to help you."

"Black they wouldn't let you help me; white, you can't."

"Suit yourself."

"That'll be the day."

When I lapsed into silence, he resumed his. The last fifteen minutes were spent with us both listening to the

regular rhythmic shrieks from a man someplace in the Cosmold Building.

After Mr. Jones left I stared out the gray window at the rain until a pretty little student nurse brought me the folder on my next patient and said she'd bring the family to my office. After she left, I mused for a few seconds on what is called in the medical profession the "p" phenomenon: the tendency of starched nurses' uniforms to make it seem as if all nurses were bountifully blessed in the bosom and thus shaped like the letter 'p.' It meant that doctors surveying the field could never be sure that a nurse they were flirting with was proportioned like two grapefruit on a stick or two peas on an ironing board. Some claimed it was the very essence of the mystery and allure of the medical profession.

Dr. Mann had referred to me a seventeen-year-old boy admitted for incipient divinity: he showed a tendency to be Jesus Christ. Eric Cannon's folder gave a rather detailed description of a latter-day sheep in wolf's clothing. Since the age of five the boy had shown himself to be both remarkably precocious and a little simpleminded. Although the son of a Lutheran minister, he argued with his teachers, was truant from school, disobedient to teachers and parents, and a runaway from home on six separate occasions since the age of nine, the last episode occurring only six months before, when he disappeared for eight weeks before turning up in Cuba. At the age of twelve he began a career of priest baiting, which culminated in the boy's refusal to enter a church again. He also refused to go to school. He was caught possessing marijuana. He was stopped in what appeared to be the act of trying to immolate himself in front of the Central Brooklyn Selective Services Induction Center.

Pastor Cannon, his father, seemed to be a good man—in the traditional sense of the word: a conservative, restrained defender of the way things are. But his son had kept rebelling, had refused to be treated by a private psychiatrist; refused to work, refused to live at home except when it suited him. His father had thus decided to send him to QSH, with the understanding that he would receive therapy with me.

"Dr. Rhinehart," the pretty little student nurse was saying suddenly at my elbow. "This is Pastor Cannon and Mrs. Cannon."

"How do you do," I said automatically and found myself grasping the chubby hand of a sweet-faced man with thick graying hair. He smiled fully as he shook my hand.

"Glad to meet you, Doctor. Dr. Mann has told me a lot about you."

"How do you do, Doctor," a woman's musical voice said, and I turned to Mrs. Cannon. Small and trim, she was standing behind the left shoulder of her husband and smiling horribly; her eyes kept flickering off to a line of female hags who were oozing noisily through the hallway outside our door. The patients were dressed with such indescribable ugliness they looked like character actors who had been rejected for Marat-Sade for being overdone.

Behind her was the son, Eric. He was dressed in a suit and tie, but his long hair, rimless glasses and sparkle in the eyes which was either idiotic or divine made him look anything but middle-class suburbanite.

"That's him," said Pastor Cannon with what honestly looked like a jovial smile.

I nodded politely and motioned them all toward the chairs. The pastor and his wife pushed past me to sit down, but Eric was staring out at the last of the women passing in the hall. One of them, an ugly, toothless woman with dish-mop hair, had stopped and was smiling coyly at him.

"Hi ya, cutie," she said. "Come down and see me some time."

The boy stared a second, smiled and said, "I will." Laughing, he darted a bright-eyed look at me and went to take a chair. A juvenile idiot.

I plumped my big bulk informally on the desk opposite the Cannons and tried my "gee-it's-wonderful-to-be-able-to-talk-to-you" smile. The boy was sitting near the window to my right and slightly behind his parents, looking at me with friendly anticipation.

"You understand, Pastor Cannon, I hope, in committing Eric to this hospital you are surrendering your authority over him."

"Of course, Dr. Rhinehart. I have complete confidence in Dr. Mann."

"Good. I assume also that both you and Eric know that this is no summer camp Eric is entering. This is a state mental hospital and—"

"It's a fine place, Dr. Rhinehart," said Pastor Cannon. "We in New York State have every right to be proud."

"Hmmm, yes," I said, and turned to Eric. "What do you think of it all?"

"There are groovy patterns in the soot on the windows."

"My son believes that the whole world is insane."

Eric was still looking pleasantly out the window. "A plausible theory these days, one must admit," I said to him, "but it doesn't get you out of this hospital."

"No, it gets me in," he replied. We stared at each other for the first time.

"Do you want me to try to help you?" I asked.

"How can you help anyone?"

"Somebody's paying me well for trying."

The boy's smile didn't seem to be sardonic, only friendly.

"They pay my father for spreading the Truth."

"It may be ugly here you know," I said.

"I don't think so. I think I'll feel right at home here."

"Not many people here will want to create a better world," his father said.

"Everyone wants to create a better world," Eric replied, with a hint of sharpness in his voice.

I eased myself off the desk and walked around behind it to pick up Eric's record. Peering over my glasses as if I could see without them, I said to the father:

"I'd like to talk with you about Eric before you leave. Would you prefer that we talk privately or would you like to have Eric here?"

"No difference to me," he said. "He knows what I think. He'll probably act up a bit, but I'm used to it. Let

him stay."

"Eric, do you want to remain or would you like to go to the ward now?"

"Full fathom five my father lies," he said looking out the window. His mother winced, but his father simply shook his head slowly and adjusted his glasses. Since I was interested in getting the son's live reaction to his parents, I let him stay.

"Tell me about your son, Pastor Cannon," I said, seating myself in the wooden desk chair and leaning forward with my sincere professional look. Pastor Cannon cocked his head judiciously, crossed one leg over the other and cleared his throat.

"My son is a mystery," he said. "It's incredible to me that he should exist. He's totally intolerant of others. You . . . if you've read what's in that folder you know the details. Two weeks ago though—another example. Eric [he glanced nervously at the boy, who was apparently looking out or at the window] hasn't been eating well for a month. Hasn't been reading or writing. He burned everything he'd written over two months ago. An incredible amount. He doesn't speak much to anyone anymore. I was surprised he answered you. . . . Two weeks ago, at the dinner table, Eric playing saint with a glass of water, I remarked to our guest that night, a Mr. Houston of Pace Industries, a vice-president, that I almost hoped sometimes that there would be a Third World War because I couldn't see how else the world would ever be rid of communism. It's a thought we've all had at one time or another. Eric threw the water in my face. He smashed his glass on the floor."

He was peering intently at me, waiting for a reaction. When I merely looked back he went on:

"I wouldn't mind for myself, but you can imagine how upset my wife is made by such scenes, and this is typical."

"Yes," I said. "Why do you think he did it?"

"He's an egomaniac. He doesn't see things as you and I do. He doesn't want to live as we do. He thinks that all Catholic priests, most teachers and myself are all wrong, but so do many others without always making trouble about it. And that's the crux. He takes life too seriously. He never plays, or at least never when most people want him to. He's always playing, but never when he's supposed to. He's always making war for his way of life. This is a great land of freedom but it isn't made for people who insist on insisting on their own ideas. Tolerance is our byword and Eric is above all intolerant."

"Sorry about that, Dad," Eric suddenly said, and with a friendly smile got up and took a position directly behind and between his parents with a hand resting on the back of each of their chairs. Pastor Cannon looked at me as if he were trying to read by the expression on my face exactly how much longer he had to live.

"Are you intolerant, Eric?" I asked.

"I'm intolerant of evil and stupidity," he said.

"But who gives you the right," his father said, turning partly around to confront his son, "to tell everyone what's good and evil?"

"It's the divine right of kings," Eric replied, smiling.

His father turned back to me and shrugged. "There you are," he said. "And let me give you another example. Eric, when he was thirteen years old, mind you, stands up in the middle of my church during a crowded

midmorning Communion and says aloud above the kneeling figures: 'That it should come to this,' and walks out."

We all remained as we were without speaking, as if I were the concentrating photographer and they about to have their family portrait taken.

"You don't like modern Christianity?" I finally said to Eric.

He ran his fingers through his long black hair, looked up briefly at the ceiling and screamed.

His father and mother came out of their chairs like rats off an electric grid and both stood trembling, watching their son, hands at his side, a slight smile on his face, screaming.

A white-suited Negro attendant entered the office and then another. They looked at me for instructions. I waited for Eric's second lungful of scream to end to see if he would begin another. He didn't. When he had finished, he stood quietly for a moment and then said to no one in particular: "Time to go."

"Take him to the admissions ward, to Dr. Vener for his physical. Give this prescription to Dr. Vener." I scribbled out a note for a mild sedative and watched the two attendants look warily at the boy.

"Will he come quietly?" the smaller of the two asked.

Eric stood still a moment longer and then did a rapid two-step followed by an irregular jig toward the door. He sang: "We're OFF to see the Wizard, the Wonderful Wizard of Oz. We're OFF . . ."

Exit dancing. Attendants follow, last seen each reaching to grasp one of his arms. Pastor Cannon had a comforting arm around his wife's shoulder. I had rung for a student nurse.

"I'm very sorry, Dr. Rhinehart," Pastor Cannon said. "I was afraid something like this would happen but I felt that you ought to see for yourself how he acts."

"You're absolutely right," I said.

"There's one other thing," said Pastor Cannon. "My wife and I were wondering whether it might be possible if . . . I understand it is sometimes possible for a patient to have a single room."

I came around my desk and walked up quite close to Pastor Cannon, who still had an arm around his wife.

"This is a Christian institution, Pastor," I said. "We believe firmly in the brotherhood of all men. Your son will share a bedroom with fifteen other healthy, normal American mental patients. Gives them a feeling of belonging and togetherness. If your son feels the need for a single, have him slug an attendant or two, and they'll give him his own room; the State even provides a jacket for the occasion."

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