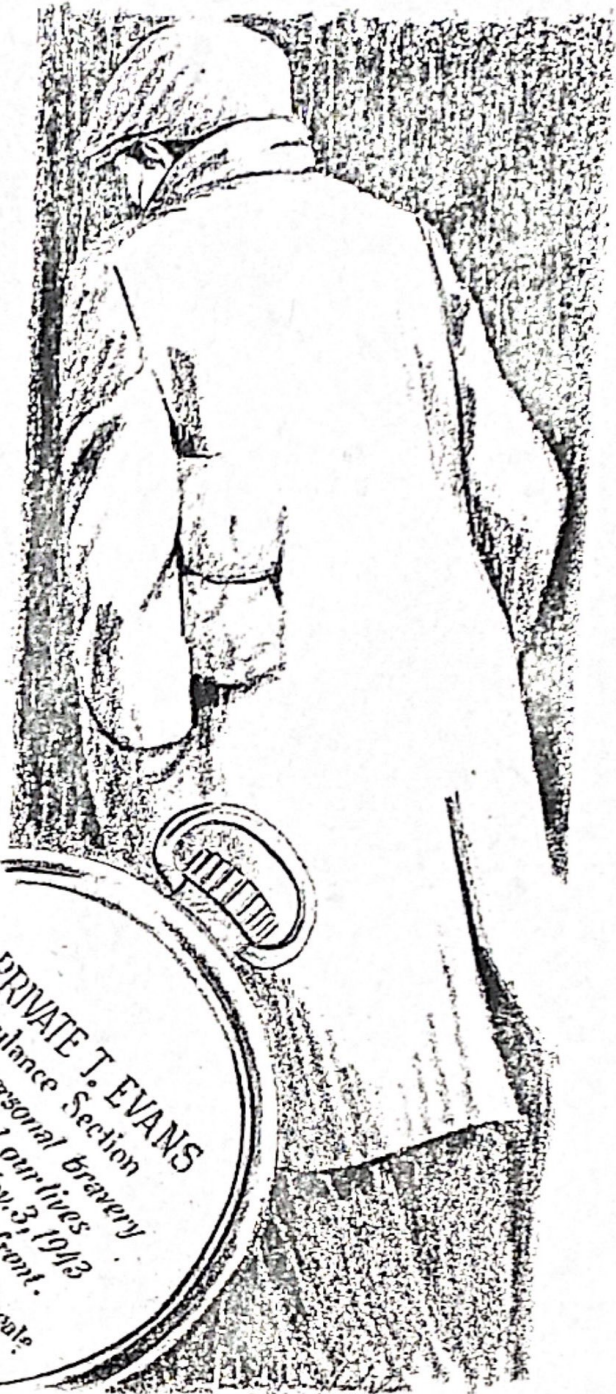


# A Case of Suspicion

Ed Wallace



He threw back the covers and sat up on his bed, his feet feeling along the cold floor for his house slippers, the telephone ringing insistently a little distance away.

He turned on the light and picked up the phone.

"This is Doctor Benson," he said.

The November wind was bringing sounds of winter as it blew around the little white house. The doctor got into his

②

clothes. He went to the table and stared a moment at his watch, his spirit complaining at the job ahead of him.

Two o'clock. His mind also complained at the horrible hour and he wondered why children always had to be born at such improper times. He took up two small satchels: the short pill bag, as the people of the town knew it, and the long obstetrical case – the baby bag they called it.

Doctor Benson stopped a moment to light a cigarette, then put the pack of cigarettes in his overcoat pocket. The wind felt like a surgeon's knife at his face as he opened the door and ran, bending low, around the driveway to the garage.

His car started with difficulty, coughed a half-dozen times as he drove down the driveway but then began to run more smoothly as he turned down Grass Street and on to the deserted highway.

Mrs. Ott Sorley, whom Doctor Benson was on his way to visit, already had almost a dozen children, but it seemed to the doctor that never once had she had a baby in good weather, nor in daylight. And while Doctor Benson was a country doctor, he was still a young man and couldn't find the pleasure that his father, "the old Doc Benson", had found in seeing Ott, the father, always two or three babies behind in the payment of his baby bills.

It was a long ride out to the Sorley farm and the sight of a man walking alone along the country road, as seen just ahead by the lights of the car, was a welcome relief to the doctor. He slowed down and looked at the man walking along with difficulty against the wind, a little package under his arm.

Coming alongside, Doctor Benson stopped and invited the man to ride. The man got in.

"Are you going far?" asked the doctor.

"I'm going all the way to Detroit," said the man, a rather thin man with small black eyes filled with tears from the wind. "Could you give me a cigarette?"

Doctor Benson unbuttoned his coat, then remembered the cigarettes in the outer pocket of his overcoat. He took

out the package and gave it to the rider who then looked in his own pockets for a match. When the cigarette was lighted, the man held the package a moment, then asked, "Do you mind, mister, if I take another cigarette for later?" The rider shook the package to remove another cigarette without waiting for the doctor to answer. Doctor Benson felt a hand touch his pocket.

"I'll put them back in your pocket," the little fellow said. Doctor Benson put his hand down quickly to receive the cigarettes and was a little irritated to find them already in his pocket.

After a few minutes Doctor Benson said: "So you're going to Detroit?"

"I'm going out to look for work in one of the automobile plants."

"Are you a mechanic?" asked the doctor.

"More or less. I've been driving a truck since the war ended. But I lost my job about a month ago."

"Were you in the army during the war?"

"Yeah, I was in the ambulance section. Right up at the front. Drove an ambulance for four years."

"Is that so?" said Doctor Benson. "I'm a doctor myself. Doctor Benson is my name."

"I thought this car smelled like pills," the man laughed. Then he added, more seriously, "My name is Evans."

They rode along silently for a few minutes and the rider moved himself in his seat and placed his package on the floor. As the man leaned over, Doctor Benson caught his first good look at the small, catlike face.

The doctor also noticed the long deep scar on the man's cheek, bright and red-looking as though it were of recent origin. He thought of Mrs. Ott Sorley and reached for his watch. His fingers went deep into his pocket before he realized that his watch was not there.

Doctor Benson moved his hand very slowly and very carefully below the seat until he felt the leather holster in which he always carried with him his automatic pistol.

He drew out the pistol slowly and held it in the darkness

at his side. Doctor Benson stopped the car quickly and pushed the nose of his gun into Evans' side.

"Put that watch into my pocket," he said angrily.

The rider jumped with fear and put up his hands quickly. "My God, mister," he whispered. "I thought you. . . ."

Doctor Benson pushed the pistol still deeper into the man's side and repeated coldly, "Put that watch in my pocket before I let this gun go off."

Evans put his hand in his own vest pocket and later, with trembling hands, tried to put the watch into the doctor's pocket. With his free hand Doctor Benson pushed the watch down into his pocket. He opened the door and forced the man out of the car.

"I'm out here tonight, probably to save a woman's life, but I took the time to try to help you," he said to the man angrily.

Doctor Benson started the car quickly and the wind closed the door with a loud noise. He put the pistol back into the leather holster under the seat and hurried on.

The drive up the mountain to the Sorley farm was less difficult than he had feared and Ott Sorley had sent one of his older boys down the road with a lantern to help him across the old wooden bridge that led up to the little farmhouse.

Mrs. Sorley's many previous experiences with bringing children into the world apparently helped her greatly because she delivered this child with little difficulty and there was no need on Doctor Benson's part for the instruments in the long bag.

After it was over, however, Doctor Benson took out a cigarette and sat down to smoke.

"A fellow I picked up in my car on my way up here tonight tried to rob me," he said to Ott, feeling a little proud. "He took my watch. But when I pushed my .45 pistol into his side he decided to give it back to me."

Ott smiled wide at such an exciting story coming from young Doctor Benson.

"Well, I'm glad he gave it back to you," Ott said. "Be-

cause if he hadn't, we wouldn't have any idea what time the child was born. What time would you say it happened, Doc?"

Doctor Benson took the watch from his pocket.

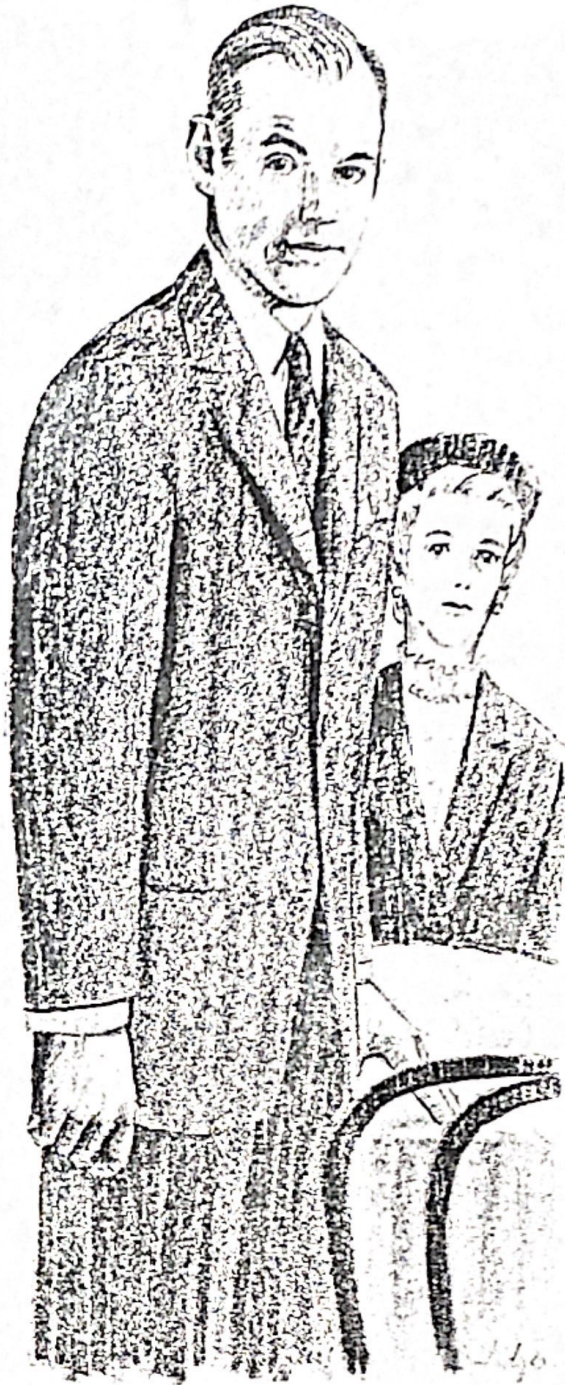
"The baby was delivered about thirty minutes ago, and right now it's . . ." He walked over to the lamp on the table.

He stared strangely at the watch in his hand. The crystal was cracked and the top was broken. He turned the watch over and held it closer to the lamp. He studied the worn inscription:

"To Private T. Evans, Ambulance Section, whose personal bravery preserved our lives the night of Nov. 3, 1943, near the Italian front. Nurses Nesbitt, Jones, and Wingate."

# Final Break

*Ian S. Thompson*



They had been walking along Oxford Street. Now they stopped, Greg's hand on her arm.

"This is the place," he said. "I thought you might get the sort of thing you liked here."

Helen nodded, but there were tears in her eyes as she looked through the shopwindow. The new hat had been his idea, not hers.

"What about that black one?" He pointed. "It would go with your suit!"

Her lips trembled. One of the little things she loved so much about him was the really genuine interest he had always taken in what she wore. It had made you feel young somehow, loved, though in your heart you knew you were young no longer.

"Yes. Yes, it would, wouldn't it?" She carefully avoided meeting his eyes, because there was so much in her own eyes that he must never see.

They went into the shop. A clerk appeared to wait on them.

Helen described the hat. It was in the window.

She was wishing now that they had never come into the shop. But Greg had been insistent. He wanted to give her something. A parting gift, he had called it.

He was smiling now out of blue, untroubled eyes. Which surprised her. And yet why should it, she asked herself, as she took the hat from the clerk and placed it on her blue-grey hair? She had always tried to be modern, and part of modernity was to see these things through bravely, when and if they came.

Her mind turned back. And she saw herself in the hat shop mirror, not as someone in a black tailored suit, but as a bride. Smiling, radiant, on Greg's arm. At least they had said she had looked like that. She had never thought of it, never cared. She had been so completely, so blindly happy.

Five minutes later they were out again in the sunshine of the street and Greg, after looking at his watch, suggested tea.

"I know a place —" There was an expression of excitement in his eyes which she could not understand. "You'll like it there."

It was a small, very ordinary café in one of the side streets off Oxford Street. He ordered for them both, and then leaned back.

He didn't speak, but his hand came out across the table and took hers.

"Please, God, don't let me cry," she prayed. "Not now. Not so long as he's with me."

The tea arrived. He drank one cup quickly, lit himself a cigarette, and then said:

"You're quite certain that you want to stay on in that house alone? I mean — well, I feel rather badly about the whole thing, and if there's anything I could do —"

There was one thing, but it would have been hysterical weakness to have suggested it. She shook her head. She didn't want him to have any feelings of regret, any pains of conscience. It had been wonderful having him for all those years.

"No, really," she said. "It'll be all right."

But he still didn't seem satisfied.

"There's another thing I'd like to mention," he said. "I didn't say anything about it before because I know — well, I know how sensitive you are about that sort of thing—" He broke off and then went hurriedly on, his eyes avoiding hers. "It's money. I've arranged with the bank. . . ."

The color came at once to her cheeks. Not because of any false pride. That was a luxury you couldn't afford if you had no one to support you. But —

"Oh, Greg, you shouldn't," she said with embarrassment.

He brushed that aside. Angrily almost.

"Why not? It's something I want to do. And Sandra —" He mentioned the girl's name — "she agrees. We were talking about it last night."

Sandra. . . . We. . . . How easily, familiarly, he spoke of her, Helen thought with an ache. And yet two months ago they hadn't even met. Two months. . . . Was it really only that time since he'd gone up to London on that business trip?

She had realized, of course, after he came back, that there was something, although he hadn't actually said a word then. Some deep-rooted woman's instinct had warned her that he wasn't all hers any longer, that she was sharing him with someone else.



A girl. Young, fresh, and lovely. The imagined picture had filled her with a sense of panic. He had changed his job for a better one and gone up to live in London. For a month she hadn't seen him. And she had never met the girl.

Sandra . . . She worked in the advertising business, he had told her. And very clever. But that didn't matter to Helen. When you have loved somebody with every part of you, you did not think of cleverness in considering that younger person to whom you were losing him.

Was she really nice? Would she work to keep him happy as you had tried to do?

But Sandra, . . . The name had a sharp quality. You couldn't imagine a girl with a name like that being — Helen's eyes were drawn to a girl who had just walked into the café, who was looking around hesitantly — well like that, for instance.

Then the girl turned. She was beautiful, with a shy, sweet loveliness that caught at your heart. Helen stayed, quite unconscious that she was staring. And then her eyes widened in surprise as she saw Greg rise to his feet. The girl was hurrying towards their table.

"So you were able to get here, darling!" She heard Greg's voice and then he had turned, was smiling down at her. "A little surprise," he said. "This is Sandra, Mother. Tomorrow's happy bride!"

## WHILE THE AUTO WAITS

by O. Henry

The girl in gray came again to that quiet corner of that quiet small park, as evening was nearing. She sat on a bench and began to read a book, for there was still half an hour in which it was possible to read. Her dress was gray and very simple. Her face was very beautiful. She had come there at the same hour on the previous<sup>1</sup> day, and on the day before that, and there was a young man who knew it.

The young man came near. At that moment her book slipped<sup>2</sup> from her fingers and fell on the ground. The young man picked up the book, returned it to the girl politely, saying a few words about the weather, and stood waiting.

The girl laisurely<sup>3</sup> looked at his simple coat and his common face.

"You may sit down, if you like," she said in a rich, slow voice. "Really, I would like you to. The light is too bad to read in. I would prefer<sup>4</sup> to talk."

He politely slid<sup>5</sup> down on the seat by her side.

"Do you know," he said, "that you are quite the most beautiful girl I have seen in a long time? I saw you yesterday. You didn't know somebody was knocked down by those pretty eyes of yours, did you, honey?"

- 1 קודם
- 2 السابق
- 3 התחלק
- 4 תזחלק
- 5 בנחת
- 6 בידוע
- 7 מעדיף
- 8 ייפצל
- 9 החליק
- 10 תזחלק



- 6 בנעימה קרה **בירוד**
- 7 הערה **הערה**
- 8 ملاحظة **חוג**
- 9 תסלח לי **מجال عمل**
- 10 عقوا **לנוש**
- 11 يحزر ، يخمن **לפוי**
- 12 متوقع **מחזה**
- 13 دراما **תוהה**
- 14 تعجب **סקרנית**
- 15 حب الاستطلاع **מילגס**
- 16 خفاق **אנושות**
- 17 انسانية **לא מושחת**
- 18 غير مدلل **עושר**
- 19 غنى **סוברים**
- 20 محيطون **תבנית**
- 21 نموذج **אבני-חן**
- 22 مجوهرات **מותרות**
- 23 كماليات **כמאליאט**
- 24 فخفة **בהיסוס**
- 25 يتردد **ניפנוף**
- 26 تاشيه - تلويحه **צליק**
- 27 صوت ، نغمة **מדויק**
- 28 مضبوط **שעשוע**
- 29 تسليه **מעמד**
- 30 طبقة **אופנה**
- 31 عاده **עאדה**
- 32 ، موديل **מודיל**

"Whoever you are," said the girl in icy tones<sup>6</sup>, "you must remember that I am a lady. I will excuse the remark<sup>7</sup> you have just made, because it was, doubtless, not an unnatural one — in your circle<sup>8</sup>. I asked you to sit down, and that's all."

"I beg your pardon<sup>9</sup>," said the young man. "It was my fault, you know — I mean, there are girls in parks, you know — er, that is, of course, you don't know, but . . ."

"Let's change the subject, please. Of course I know. Now, tell me about those people passing and crowding, each way, along these paths. Where are they going? Why are they in such a hurry? Are they happy?"

The young man could not guess<sup>10</sup> what role he was expected<sup>11</sup> to play. "It is interesting to watch them," he replied. "It's the wonderful drama<sup>12</sup> of life. Some are going to supper, and some to — er — other places. One wonders<sup>13</sup> what their backgrounds are."

"I do not," said the girl; "I am not so curious<sup>14</sup>. I come here to sit because it is only here that I can be near the great, common, beating<sup>15</sup> heart of humanity<sup>16</sup>. I speak to you because I want to talk to a natural man, unspoiled<sup>17</sup> by wealth<sup>18</sup>. Oh! You don't know how tired I am of it — money, money, money! And of the men who surround<sup>19</sup> me, dancing like dolls all cut by the same pattern<sup>20</sup>. I am sick of pleasure, of jewels<sup>21</sup>, of travel, of society, of luxuries<sup>22</sup> of all kinds."

"I've always had an idea," said the young man, hesitatingly<sup>23</sup>, "that money must be a pretty good thing."

"Enough money for living comfortably, yes. But when you have so many millions that —!" She finished the sentence with a hopeless wave<sup>24</sup> of her hand. "Life becomes so boring. Drives, dinners, theaters. Sometimes the tinkle<sup>25</sup> of the ice in my champagne glass nearly drives me mad."

The young man looked at her with interest.

"I have always liked," he said, "to read and hear about the life of rich, fashionable people. I suppose I am a bit of a snob. But I like to have my information accurate<sup>26</sup>. I've always thought that champagne is cooled in the bottle, and not by placing ice in the glass."

The girl gave a musical laugh of real amusement<sup>27</sup>.

"You should know," she explained patiently, "that we of the non-useful class<sup>28</sup> depend upon change for our amusement. Just now it is the fashion<sup>29</sup> to put ice in the champagne."

"I see," admitted the young man, humbly. "These special amusements<sup>30</sup> don't become known to the common public."

"Sometimes," continued the girl, "I have thought that if I ever loved a man, I would love a simple man, a worker. What is your profession?"

"A very modest one. But I hope to rise in the world. Did you really mean it when you said that you could love a simple man?"

"I really did. But there is a Grand Duke<sup>31</sup> and a Marquis<sup>32</sup> chasing me."

"I work in a restaurant," he said.

The girl drew back slightly. "Not as a waiter<sup>33</sup>? Labor is noble, but — personal service, you know — valets<sup>34</sup> and —"

"I am a cashier in that restaurant you see there with that bright electric sign: RESTAURANT."

The girl looked at her tiny watch set in a bracelet<sup>35</sup> upon her left wrist, and stood up. "Why are you not at work?" she asked.

"I'm on the night shift<sup>36</sup>," said the young man; "there is still an hour before I have to start work. May I hope to see you again?"

"I don't know. Perhaps. I must go quickly now. Oh, there is a dinner and a concert tonight. The same old routine<sup>37</sup>. Perhaps you noticed a white car at the corner of the park when you came?"

"The one with the red wheels?" asked the man frowning<sup>38</sup> thoughtfully.

"Yes, I always come in that. Pierre waits for me there. He thinks I'm in the shop across the square, shopping. Imagine a life where we must deceive<sup>39</sup> even our drivers. Goodnight."

"But it is dark now, and the park is full of rude<sup>40</sup> men. May I walk you to the car?"

"If you have the slightest<sup>41</sup> respect<sup>42</sup> for my wishes<sup>43</sup>," said the girl firmly<sup>44</sup>, "you will remain at this bench for ten minutes after I have left. Again, goodnight."

And then she went away. The young man looked at her elegant figure while she was going to the entrance of the park, towards the corner where the car stood. Then he rose and followed her<sup>45</sup>.

When she reached the corner she turned her head to look at the car, and then passed it, continuing on across the street. Hidden behind a standing cab, the young man

30 בידורים  
تسالي

31 דוכס  
نبيل كبير  
اقطاعي

32 רוזן  
نبيل صغير

מלאך

33 מלצר

عامل مطعم

34 משרתים אישיים

خدم

35 צמיד

ملاصق

36 משמרת לילה

تناوب

37 שיגרב

عل وثيرة واحدة

38 בסיוט המצח

عابسا

39 לרמות

يخدع

40 נסים

وقعا

41 המעט ביותר

الاقبل

42 כבוד

احترام

43 רצון

رغبات

44 בתקיפות

يشده

45 עקב אחריה

تبعها

followed her movements closely. Passing down the sidewalk of the street opposite the park, she entered the restaurant with the bright sign. A red-haired girl left the cashier's desk after pointing angrily at the clock, and the girl in gray took her place.

The young man pushed his hands into his pockets and walked slowly back along the sidewalk. Then he stepped into the white limousine, leaned back upon the cushions, and said two words to the driver: "Club, Henri."

# TRUE LOVE



*Isaac Asimov (1920-1992) was considered one of the greatest 'explainers' of the age; he searched for explanations for anything and everything. Asimov wrote many works of science fiction and is famous for his speculations about robotics and artificial intelligence. His most famous science fiction series is the Foundation trilogy. Asimov's writings are not limited to science fiction but rather cover the largest range of subjects of any other writer. Among other things, he wrote about Shakespeare, the Bible and history.*

## ♥ INTRODUCING THE THEME

What qualities would you look for in an ideal partner? Do you think such a person exists? How would you try to find your ideal 'love'?

## ♥ TRUE LOVE

**M**y name is Joe. That is what my colleague, Milton Davidson, calls me. He is a programmer and I am a computer. I am part of the Multivac-complex and am connected with other parts all over the world. I know everything. Almost everything.

I am Milton's private computer. His Joe. He understands more about computers than anyone in the world, and I am his experimental model. He has made me speak better than any other computer can.

10 "It is just a matter of matching sounds to symbols, Joe," he  
told me. "That's the way it works in the human brain even  
though we still don't know what symbols there are in the  
brain. I know the symbols in yours, and I can match them  
to words, one-to-one." So I talk. I don't think I talk as well  
15 as I think, but Milton says I talk very well. Milton has never  
married, though he is nearly 40 years old. He has never  
found the right woman, he told me. One day he said, "I'll  
find her yet, Joe. I'm going to find the best. I'm going to  
have true love and you're going to help me. I'm tired of  
20 improving you in order to solve the problems of the world.  
Solve *my* problem. Find me true love."

I said, "What is true love?"

"Never mind. That is abstract. Just find me the ideal girl.  
You are connected to the Multivac-complex so you can  
25 reach the data banks of every human being in the world.  
We'll eliminate<sup>1</sup> them all by groups and classes until we're  
left with only one person. The perfect person. She will be  
for me."

<sup>1</sup> تلغي / ננפה, נברור

I said, "I am ready."

30 He said, "Eliminate all men first."

<sup>2</sup> מתجمעת / מצטבר

It was easy. His words activated symbols in my molecular  
valves. I could reach out to make contact with the  
accumulated<sup>2</sup> data on every human being in the world. At  
his words, I withdrew from 3.784.982.874 men. I kept  
35 contact with 3.786.112.090 women.

He said, "Eliminate all younger than 25, all older than 40.  
Then eliminate all with an IQ under 120: all with a height  
under 150 centimetres and over 175 centimetres."

He gave me exact measurements: he eliminated women  
40 with living children; he eliminated women with various  
genetic characteristics. "I'm not sure about eye color," he  
said. "Let that go for a while. But no red hair. I don't like  
red hair." After two weeks, we were down to 235 women.  
They all spoke English very well. Milton said he didn't  
45 want a language problem. Even computer-translation  
would get in the way at intimate moments.

"I can't interview 235 women," he said. "It would take too much time, and people would discover what I am doing."

50 "It would make trouble," I said. Milton had arranged me to do things I wasn't designed to do. No one knew about that.

"It's none of their business," he said, and the skin on his face grew red. "I tell you what, Joe, I will bring in holographs, and you check the list for similarities."

55 He brought in holographs of women. "These are three beauty contest winners," he said. "Do any of the 235 match?"

60 Eight were very good matches and Milton said, "Good, you have their data banks. Study requirements and needs in the job market and arrange to have them assigned here. One at a time, of course." He thought a while, moved his shoulders up and down, and said, "Alphabetical order."

65 That is one of the things I am not designed to do. Shifting people from job to job for personal reasons is called manipulation.<sup>3</sup> I could do it now because Milton had arranged it. I wasn't supposed to do it for anyone but him, though.

70 The first girl arrived a week later. Milton's face turned red when he saw her. He spoke as though it were hard to do so. They were together a great deal and he paid no attention to me. One time he said, "Let me take you to dinner."

75 The next day he said to me, "It was no good, somehow. There was something missing. She is a beautiful woman, but I did not feel any touch of true love. Try the next one."

80 It was the same with all eight. They were much alike. They smiled a great deal and had pleasant voices, but Milton always found it wasn't right. He said, "I can't understand it, Joe. You and I have picked out the eight women who, in all the world, look the best to me. They are ideal. Why don't they please me?" I said, "Do you please them?" His eyebrows moved and he pushed one fist hard against his



other hand. "That's it, Joe. It's a two-way street. If I am not  
 85 their ideal they can't act in such a way as to be my ideal.  
 I must be their love, too, but how do I do that?" He  
 seemed to be thinking all that day.

The next morning he came to me and said, "I'm going to  
 leave it to you, Joe. All up to you. You have my data bank,  
 90 and I am going to tell you everything I know about myself.  
 You fill up my data bank in every possible detail but keep  
 all additions to yourself."

"What will I do with the data bank, then, Milton?"

"Then you match it to the 235 women. No, 227. Leave out  
 95 the eight you've seen. Arrange to have each undergo a  
 psychiatric examination. Fill up their data banks and  
 compare them with mine. Find correlations."<sup>4</sup> (Arranging  
 psychiatric examinations is another thing that is against  
 my original instructions.)

<sup>4</sup> קשרים הדדיים /  
 علاقات متبادلة

100 For weeks, Milton talked to me. He told me of his parents  
 and his siblings.<sup>5</sup> He told me of his childhood and his  
 schooling and his adolescence.<sup>6</sup> He told me of the young  
 women he had admired from a distance. His data bank  
 grew and he adjusted me to broaden and deepen my  
 105 symbol-taking.

<sup>5</sup> אחים ו/או אחיות /  
 اخوة و/او اخوات

<sup>6</sup> בלוג / התבררות

He said, "You see, Joe, as you get more and more of me  
 in you, I adjust you to match me better and better. You get  
 to think more like me, so you understand me better. If you  
 understand me well enough, then any woman, whose data  
 110 bank is something you understand as well, would be my  
 true love." He kept talking to me and I came to understand  
 him better and better.

I could make longer sentences and my expressions grew  
 more complicated. My speech began to sound a good  
 115 deal like his in vocabulary, word order and style.

I said to him one time, "You see, Milton, it isn't a matter of  
 fitting a girl to a physical ideal only. You need a girl who is  
 a personal, emotional, temperamental fit to you. If that  
 happens, looks are secondary. If we can't find the fit in  
 120 these 227, we'll look elsewhere. We will find someone

who won't care how you look either, or how anyone would look, if only there is the personality fit. What are looks?"

125 "Absolutely," he said. "I would have known this if I had had more to do with women in my life. Of course, thinking about it makes it all plain now."

We always agreed; we thought so like each other.

"We shouldn't have any trouble, now, Milton, if you'll let me ask you questions. I can see where, in your data bank, there are blank spots and unevennesses."

7 מסאז'ל- / שווה ערך

130 What followed, Milton said, was the equivalent of<sup>7</sup> a careful psychoanalysis. Of course, I was learning from the psychiatric examinations of the 227 women – on all of which I was keeping close tabs.

135 Milton seemed quite happy. He said, "Talking to you, Joe, is almost like talking to another self. Our personalities have come to match perfectly."

"So will the personality of the woman we choose."

8 مستشارة / יועצת

140 For I had found her and she was one of the 227 after all. Her name was Charity Jones and she was an Evaluator<sup>8</sup> at the Library of History in Wichita, Kansas. Her extended data bank fit ours perfectly. All the other women had fallen into discard<sup>9</sup> in one respect or another as the data banks grew fuller, but with Charity there was increasing and astonishing resonance.<sup>10</sup>

9 הוצאו מהתחרות /  
قصیوا من المباراة  
0 رجع الصءء / תהודה

145 I didn't have to describe her to Milton. Milton had coordinated my symbolism so closely with his own I could tell the resonance directly. It fit me.

1 تنقل / תועבר

150 Next it was a matter of adjusting the work sheets and job requirements in such a way as to get Charity assigned<sup>11</sup> to us. It must be done very delicately, so no one would know that anything illegal had taken place.

12 مخالفة / עבירה

155 Of course, Milton himself knew, since it was he who arranged it, and that had to be taken care of too. When they came to arrest him on grounds of malfeasance<sup>12</sup> in office, it was, fortunately, for something that had taken

place 10 years ago. He had told me about it, of course, so it was easy to arrange – and he won't talk about me for that would make his offense<sup>13</sup> much worse.

He's gone, and tomorrow is February 14. Valentine's Day.

160 Charity will arrive then with her cool hands and her sweet voice. I will teach her how to operate me and how to care for me. What do looks matter when our personalities will resonate?

I will say to her, "I am Joe, and you are my true love."

# Priscilla and the Wimps

Richard Peck

"Kid," he says, "you're going to have to educate your girlfriend."

Listen, there was a time when you couldn't even go to the rest room around this school without a \*pass. And I'm not talking about those little pink tickets made out by some teacher. I'm talking about a pass that could cost anywhere up to a buck, sold by Monk Klutter.

Not that Mighty Monk ever touched money, not in public. The gang he ran, which ran the school for him, was his collection agency. They were Klutter's Kobras, a name spelled out in nailheads on six well-known black plastic windbreakers.

Monk's threads were more . . . subtle. A pile-lined suede battle jacket with lizard-skin flaps over tailored Levi's and a pair of \*ostrich-skin boots, brassed-toed and suitable for kicking people around. One of his Kobras did nothing all day but walk a half step behind Monk, carrying a fitted bag with

Monk's gym shoes, a roll of rest-room passes, a cash box and a switchblade that Monk gave himself manicures with at lunch over at the Kobras' table.

Speaking of lunch, there were a few cases of advanced \*malnutrition among the newer kids. The ones who were a little slow in handing over a cut of their lunch money and were therefore \*barred from the cafeteria. Monk ran a tight ship.

I admit it. I'm five foot five, and when the Kobras slithered by, with or without Monk, I \*shrank. And I admit this, too: I paid up on a regular basis. And I might add: so would you.

This school was old Monk's Garden of Eden. Unfortunately for him, there was a \*serpent in it. The reason Monk didn't recognize trouble when it was staring him in the face is that the serpent in the Kobras' Eden was a girl.

Practically every guy in school could show you his \*scars. \*Fang marks from Kobras, you might say. And they were all highly visible in the shower room: lumps, 5 lacerations, blue bruises, you name it. But girls usually got off with a warning.

Except there was this one girl named Priscilla Roseberry. Picture a girl named Priscilla Roseberry, and you'll be light years 10 off. Priscilla was, \*hands down, the largest student in our particular institution of learning. I'm not talking fat. I'm talking big. Even beautiful, in a bionic way. Priscilla wasn't inclined toward organized crime. 15 Otherwise, she could have put together a gang that would turn Klutter's Kobras into garter snakes.

Priscilla was basically a loner except she had one friend. A little guy named Melvin 20 Detweiler. You talk about The Odd Couple. Melvin's one of the smallest guys above \*midget status ever seen. A really nice guy, but, you know—little. They even had lockers next to each other, in the same bank as mine. 25 I don't know what they had going, I'm not saying this was a romance. After all, people deserve their privacy.

Priscilla was sort of above everything, if you'll pardon a \*pun. And very calm, as only 30 the very big can be. If there was anybody who didn't notice Klutter's Kobras, it was Priscilla.

Until one winter day after school when we were all grabbing our coats out of our lockers. 35 And hurrying, since Klutter's Kobras made sweeps of the halls for after-school shakedowns.

Anyway, up to Melvin's locker swaggers one of the Kobras. Never mind his name. 40 Gang members don't need names. They've got group identity. He reaches down and grabs little Melvin by the neck and slams his

head against his locker door. The sound of \*skull against steel rippled all the way down 45 the locker row, speeding the crowds on their way.

"Okay, let's see your pass," snarls the Kobra.

"A pass for what this time?" Melvin asks, 50 probably still dazed.

"Let's call it a pass for very short people," says the Kobra, "a dwarf tax." He wheezes a little Kobra \*chuckle at his own \*wittiness. And already he's reaching for Melvin's wallet 55 with the hand that isn't circling Melvin's \*windpipe. All this time, of course, Melvin and the Kobra are standing in Priscilla's big shadow.

She's taking her time shoving her books 60 into her locker and pulling on a very large-size coat. Then, quicker than the eye, she brings the side of her enormous hand down in a chop that breaks the Kobra's hold on Melvin's throat. You could hear a pin drop in 65 that hallway. Nobody'd ever laid a finger on a Kobra, let alone a hand the size of Priscilla's.

Then Priscilla, who hardly ever says anything to anybody except to Melvin, says 70 to the Kobra, "Who's your leader, wimp?"

This practically blows the Kobra away. First he's chopped by a girl, and now she's acting like she doesn't know Monk Klutter, the Head Honcho of the World. He's so 75 amazed, he tells her, "Monk Klutter."

"Never heard of him," Priscilla mentions. "Send him to see me." The Kobra just backs away from her like the whole situation is too big for him, which it is.

80 Pretty soon Monk himself slides up. He jerks his head once, and his Kobras slither off down the hall. He's going to handle this

interesting case personally. "Who is it around here doesn't know Monk Klutter?"

He's standing inches from Priscilla, but since he'd have to look up at her, he doesn't.  
5 "Never heard of him," says Priscilla.

Monk's not happy with this answer, but by now he's spotted Melvin, who's grown smaller in spite of himself. Monk breaks his own rule by reaching for Melvin with his own hands.  
10 "Kid," he says, "you're going to have to educate your girlfriend."

His hands never quite make it to Melvin. In a move of pure poetry Priscilla has Monk in a \*hammerlock. His neck's popping like  
15 gunfire, and his head's bowed under the

immense weight of her forearm. His suede jacket's peeling back, showing pile.

Priscilla's behind him in another easy motion. And with a single mighty \*thrust  
20 forward, \*frog-marches Monk into her own locker. It's incredible. His ostrich-skin boots click once in the air. And suddenly he's gone, neatly wedged into the locker, a perfect fit. Priscilla bangs the door shut, twirls the lock,  
25 and \*strolls out of school. Melvin goes with her, of course, trotting along below her shoulder. The last \*stragglers leave quietly.

Well, this is where \*fate, an even bigger force than Priscilla, steps in. It snows all that  
30 night, a blizzard. The whole town ices up. And school closes for a week.