

RICHARD MATHESON

On one day the world of science fiction was as ignorant of the name "Richard Matheson" as of the name of the owner of your corner delicatessen; on the next the name ranked in the same rarefied levels as most of the contributors to this volume. What worked the change? It was a simple-enough event; it was the publication of an issue of The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction, outwardly no different from any other issue of that very good magazine, but internally distinguished by a story called "Born of Man and Woman." That was Richard Matheson's first, and it was a scary, creepy beauty. And let no man tell you he has since lost the knack; for the proof that he has it still is—

Dance of The Dead



*I wanna RIDE!
with my Rota-Mota honey
by my SIDE!
As we whiz along the highway*

**"We will HUG and SNUGGLE and we'll have a little
STRUGGLE!"**

struggle (strüg' el), n., act of promiscuous love-play; usage evolved during W.W. III.

Double beams spread buttery lamplight on the highway. *Rotor-Motors Convertible, Model C, 1987*, rushed after it. Light spurted ahead, yellow glowing. The car pursued with a twelve-cylindered, snarling pursuit. Night blotted in behind, jet and still. The car sped on.

ST. LOUIS—10

"I wanna FLY!" they sang, "with the Rota-Mota apple
of my EYE!" they sang, "It's the only way of living . . ."

The quartet singing: Len, 23
 Bud, 24
 Barbara, 20
 Peggy, 18

Len with Barbara, Bud with Peggy. Bud at the wheel, snapping around tilted curves, roaring up black-shouldered hills, shooting the car across silent flatlands. At the top of three lungs (the fourth gentler), competing with wind that buffeted their heads, that whipped their hair to lashing threads—singing:

“You can have your walkin’ under MOONLIGHT BEAMS!

At a hundred miles an hour let me DREAM my DREAMS!”

Needle quivering at 130, two 5-M.P.H. notches from gauge’s end. *A sudden dip!* Their young frames jolted and the thrown-up laughter of three was wind-swept into night. Around a curve, darting up and down a hill, flashing across a leveled plain—an ebony bullet skimming earth.

“In my ROTORY, MOTORY, FLOATERY, drivin’ machi-i-i-i-ine!”

YOU’LL BE A FLOATER
 IN YOUR ROTOR-MOTOR

In the back seat: “Have a jab, Bab.”

“Thanks, I had one after supper.”

(Pushing away needle fixed to eye-dropper.)

In the front seat: “You meana tell me this is the first time you ever been t’Saint Loo!”

“But I just started school in September.”

“Hey, you’re a *frosh*!”

Back seat joining front seat: “Hey, *frosh*, have a mussle-tussle.”

(Needle passed forward, bulb quivering amber juice.)

“Live it, girl!”

mussle-tussle (mus’ el-tus’ el), n., slang for the result of injecting a drug into a muscle; usage evolved during W.W. III.

Peggy’s lips failed at smiling. Her fingers twitched.

"No, thanks, I'm not—"

"Come on, frosh!" Len leaning hard over the seat, white-browed under black, blowing hair. Pushing the needle at her face. "Live it, girl! Grab a li'l mussle-tussle!"

"I'd rather not," said Peggy, "If you don't—"

"What's 'at, frosh?" yelled Len and pressed his leg against the pressing leg of Barbara.

Peggy shook her head and golden hair flew across her cheeks and eyes. Underneath her yellow dress, underneath her white brassiere, underneath her young breast—a heart throbbed heavily. *Watch your step, darling, that's all we ask. Remember, you're all we have in the world now.* Mother words drumming at her; the needle making her draw back into the seat.

"Come on, frosh!"

The car groaned its shifting weight around a curve; centrifugal force pressed Peggy into Bud's lean hip. His hand dropped down and fingered at her leg. Underneath her yellow dress, underneath her sheer stocking—flesh crawled. Lips failed again; the smile was a twitch of red.

"Frosh, live it up!"

"Lay off, Len, jab your own dates."

"But we gotta teach frosh how to mussle-tussle!"

"Lay off, I said! She's my date!"

The black car roared, chasing its own light. Peggy anchored down the feeling hand with hers. The wind whistled over them and grabbed down chilly fingers at their hair. She didn't want his hand there but she felt grateful to him.

Her vaguely frightened eyes watched the road lurch beneath the wheels. In back, a silent struggle began, taut hands rubbing, parted mouths clinging. Search for the sweet elusive at 120-miles-per-hour.

"Rota-Mota honey," Len moaned the moan between salivary kisses. In the front seat a young girl's heart beat unsteadily.

ST. LOUIS—6

"No kiddin', you never been to Saint Loo?"

"No, I—"

"Then you never saw the loopy's dance?"

Throat contracting suddenly. "No, I—. Is that what—
we're going to—"

"Hey, frosh never saw the loopy's dance!" Bud yelled
back.

Lips parted, slurping; skirt was adjusted with blasé
aplomb. "No kiddin'!" Len fired up the words. "Girl, you
haven't lived!"

"Oh, she's got to see *that*," said Barbara, buttoning a
button.

"Let's go there then!" yelled Len, "Let's give frosh a
thrill!"

"Good enough," said Bud and squeezed her leg, "Good
enough up here, right, Peg?"

Peggy's throat moved in the dark and the wind clutched
harshly at her hair. She'd heard of it; she'd read of it but
never had she thought she'd—

*Choose your school friends carefully, darling. Be very
careful.*

But when no one spoke to you for two whole months?
When you were lonely and wanted to talk and laugh and
be alive? And someone spoke to you finally and asked you
to go out with them?

"I yam Popeye, the sailor man!" Bud sang.

In back, they crowed artificial delight. Bud was taking a
course in *PRE-WAR COMICS AND CARTOONS*—2. This week the class was studying Popeye. Bud had fallen
in love with the one-eyed seaman and told Len and Barbara all about him; taught them dialogue and song.

"I yam Popeye, the sailor man! I like to go swimmin'
with bow-legged women! I yam Popeye, the sailor man!"

Laughter. Peggy smiled falteringly. The hand left her leg as the car screeched around a curve and she was thrown against the door. Wind dashed blunt coldness in her eyes and forced her back, blinking—110—115—120 miles per hour.

ST. LOUIS—3

Be very careful, dear.

Popeye cocked a wicked eye.

"O, Olive Oyl, you is my sweet patootie."

Elbow nudging Peggy. "You be Olive Oyl—you." Peggy smiled nervously. "I can't." "Sure."

In the back seat, Wimpy came up for air to announce, "I will gladly pay you Tuesday for a hamburger today."

Three fierce voices and a faint fourth raged against the howl of wind. "I fights to the fi-nish 'cause I eats my spinach! I yam Popeye, the sailor man! Toot! Toot!"

"I yam what I yam," reiterated Popeye gravelly and put his hand on the yellow-skirted leg of Olive Oyl. In the back, two members of the quartet returned to feeling struggle.

ST. LOUIS—1

The black car roared through the darkened suburbs. "On with the nosies!" Bud sang out. They all took out their plasticate nose-and-mouth pieces and adjusted them.

ANCE IN YOUR PANTS WOULD BE A PITY!
WEAR YOUR NOSIES IN THE CITY!!

Ance (anse), n., slang for anti-civilian germs; usage evolved during W.W. III.

"You'll like the loopy's dance!" Bud shouted to her over the shriek of wind, "It's sensaysh!"

Peggy felt a cold that wasn't of the night or of the wind. *Remember, darling, there are terrible things in the world today. Things you must avoid.*

"Couldn't we go somewhere else?" Peggy said but her voice was inaudible. She heard Bud singing, "I like to go swimmin' with bow-legged women!" She felt his hand on her leg again while, in the back, was the silence of grinding passion without kisses.

Dance of the dead. The words trickled ice across Peggy's brain.

ST. LOUIS

The black car sped into the ruins.

It was a place of smoke and blatant joys. Air resounded

with the bleating of revelers and there was a noise of sounding brass spinning out a cloud of music—1987 music, a frenzy of twisted dissonances. Dancers, shoe-horned into the tiny square of open floor, ground pulsing bodies together. A network of bursting sounds lanced through the mass of them; dancers singing:

“Hurt me! Bruise me! Squeeze me TIGHT!

Scorch my blood with hot DELIGHT!

Please abuse me every NIGHT!

LOVER, LOVER, LOVER, be a *beast-to-me*”

Elements of explosion restrained within the dancing bounds—instead of fragmenting, quivering. “Oh, be a beast, beast, beast, *Beast, BEAST* to me!”

“How is *this*, Olive old goil?” Popeye inquired of the light of his eye as they struggled after the waiter, “Nothin’ like this in Sykesville, eh?”

Peggy smiled but her hand in Bud’s felt numb. As they passed by a murky lighted table, a hand she didn’t see clutched at her leg. She twitched and bumped against a hard knee across the narrow aisle. As she stumbled and lurched through the hot and smoky, thick-aired room, she felt a dozen eyes disrobing her, abusing her. Bud jerked her along and she felt her lips trembling.

“Hey, how about that!” Bud exulted as they sat. “Right by the stage!”

From cigarette mists, the waiter plunged and hovered, pencil-poised, beside their table.

“What’ll it be?” his questioning shout cut through cacaphony.

“Whiskey-water!” Bud and Len paralleled orders, then turned to their dates. “What’ll it be!” the waiter’s request echoed from their lips.

“*Green Swamp!*” Barbara said. “*Green Swamp* here!” Len passed it along. Gin, Invasion Blood (1987 Rum) lime juice, sugar, mint spray, splintered ice—a popular college-girl drink.

“What about you, honey?” Bud asked his date.

Peggy smiled. “Just some ginger ale,” she said, her voice a fluttering frailty in the massive clash and fog of smoke.

“What’s that, didn’t hear!” the waiter shouted.

"Ginger ale."

"What?"

"Ginger ale!"

"GINGER ALE!" Len screamed it out and the drummer, behind the raging curtain of noise that was the band's music, almost heard it. Len banged down his fist. *One—Two—Three!*

CHORUS: *Ginger Ale was only twelve years old! Went to church and was as good as gold! Till that day when—*

"Come on, Come on!" the waiter squalled, "Let's have that order, kids! I'm busy!"

"Two whiskey-waters and two green swamps!" Len sang out and the waiter was gone into the swirling maniac mist.

Peggy felt her young heart flutter helplessly. *Above all, don't drink when you're out on a date. Promise us that, darling, you must promise us that.* She tried to push away instructions etched in brain.

"How you like this place, honey? *Loopy*, ain't it?" Bud fired the question at her; a red-faced, happy-faced Bud.

loopy (loō'pī), adj., common alter. of L.U.P.

She smiled at Bud, a smile of nervous politeness. Her eyes moved around, her face inclined and she was looking up at the stage. *Loopy*. The word scalped at her mind. *Loopy, loopy*.

The stage was five yards deep at the radius of its wooden semi-circle. A waist-high rail girdled in circumference, two pale purple spotlights, unlit, hung at each rail end. Purple on white—the thought came. *Darling, isn't Sykesville Business College good enough? No! I don't want to take a business course, I want to major in art at the University!*

The drinks were brought and Peggy watched the disembodied waiter arm thud down a high, green-looking glass before her. *Presto!*—the arm was gone. She looked into the murky green swamp depths and saw chipped ice bobbing.

"A toast! Pick up your glass, Peg!" Bud clarioned.

They all clinked glasses: "To lust primordial!" Bud toasted.

"To beds inviolate!" Len added.

"To flesh insensate!" Barbara added a third link.

Their eyes zeroed in on Peggy's face, demanding. She didn't understand.

"Finish it!" Bud told her, plagued by freshman sluggishness.

"To—u-us," she faltered.

"How o-*rig*-inal," stabbed Barbara and Peggy felt heat licking up her smooth cheeks. It passed unnoticed as three Youths of America With Whom The Future Rested gurgled down their liquor thirstily. Peggy fingered at her glass, a smile printed to lips that would not smile unaided.

"Come on, *drink girl!*" Bud shouted to her across the vast distance of one foot, "Chuggalug!"

"Live it, girl," Len suggested abstractedly, fingers searching once more for soft leg. And finding, under table, soft leg waiting.

Peggy didn't want to drink, she was afraid to drink. Mother words kept pounding—*never on a date, honey, never*. She raised the glass a little.

"Uncle Buddy will help, will help!"

Uncle Buddy leaning close, vapor of whiskey haloing his head. Uncle Buddy pushing cold glass to shaking young lips. "Come on, Olive Oyl, old goil! Down the hatch!"

Choking sprayed the bosom of her dress with green swamp droplets. Flaming liquid trickled into her stomach, sending off shoots of fire into her veins.

Bangity boom crash smash POW!! The drummer applied the coup de grâce to what had been, in ancient times, a lover's waltz. Lights dropped and Peggy sat coughing and tear-eyed in the smoky cellar club.

She felt Bud's hand clamp strongly on her shoulder and, in the murk, she felt herself pulled off balance and felt Bud's hot wet mouth pressing at her lips. She jerked away and then the purple spots went on and a mottle-faced Bud drew back, gurgling, "I fights to the finish," and reaching for his drink.

"Hey, the loopies now, the loopies!" Len said eagerly, releasing exploratory hands.

Peggy's heart jolted and she thought she was going to cry out and run thrashing through the dark, smoke-filled room. But a sophomore hand anchored her to the chair and she looked up in white-faced dread at the man who came out on the stage and faced the microphone which, like a metal spider, had swung down to meet him.

"May I have your attention, ladies and gentlemen," he said, a grim-faced, sepulchral-voiced man whose eyes moved out over them like flicks of doom. Peggy's breath was labored, she felt thin lines of green swamp water filtering hotly through her chest and stomach. It made her blink dizzily. *Mother*. The word escaped cells of the mind and trembled into conscious freedom. *Mother, take me home.*

"As you know, the act you are about to see is not for the faint of heart, the weak of will." The man plodded through the words like a cow enmired. "Let me caution those of you whose nerves are not what they ought to be—*leave now*. We make no guarantees of responsibility. We can't even afford to maintain a house doctor."

No laughter appreciative: "Cut the crap and get off stage," Len grumbled to himself. Peggy felt her fingers twitching.

"As you know," the man went on, his voice gilded with learned sonority. "This is not an offering of mere sensation but an honest scientific demonstration."

"*Loophole for Loopy's!*" Bud and Len heaved up the words with the thoughtless reaction of hungry dogs salivating at a bell.

It was, in 1987, a comeback so rigidly standard it had assumed the status of a catechism answer. A crenel in the post-war law allowed the L.U.P. performance if it was orally prefaced as an exposition of science. Through this legal chink had poured so much abusing of the law that few cared any longer. A feeble government was grateful for recognition of the law at all.

When hoots and shoutings had evaporated in the smoke-clogged air, the man, his arms upraised in patient benediction, spoke again.

Peggy watched the studied movement of his lips, her

heart swollen, then contracted in slow, spasmodic beats. An iciness was creeping up her legs. She felt it rising toward the thread-like fires in her body and her fingers twitched around the chilly moisture of the glass. *I want to go, please take me home*—will-spent words were in her mind again.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” the man concluded, “brace yourselves.”

A gong sounded its hollow, shivering resonance, the man’s voice thickened and slowed.

“*The L.U.P. Phenomenon!*”

The man was gone, the microphone had risen and was gone. Music began; a moaning brassiness, all muted. A jazzman’s conception of *the palpable obscure*—mounted on a pulse of thumping drum. A dolor of saxophone, a menace of trombone, a harnessed bleating of trumpet—they raped the air with stridor.

Peggy felt a shudder plaiting down her back and her gaze dropped quickly to the murky whiteness of the table. Smoke and darkness, dissonance and heat surrounded her.

Without meaning to but driven by an impulse of nervous fear, she raised the glass and drank. The glacial trickle in her throat sent another shudder rippling through her. Then further shoots of liquored heat budded in her veins and a numbness settled in her temples. Through parted lips, she forced out a shaking breath.

Now a restless, murmuring movement started through the room, the sound of it like willows in a soughing wind. Peggy dared not lift her gaze to the purpled silence of the stage. She stared down at the shifting glimmer of her drink, feeling muscle strands draw tightly in her stomach, feeling the hollow thumping of her heart. *I’d like to leave, please let’s leave.*

The music labored toward a rasping dissonant climax, its brass components struggling, in vain, for unity.

A hand stroked once at Peggy’s leg and it was the hand of Popeye, the sailor man, who muttered roupily, “Olive Oyl, you is my goil.” She barely felt or heard, Automaton-like, she raised the cold and sweating glass again and felt the chilling in her throat and then the flaring warmth.

SWISH!!

The curtain swept open with such a rush, she almost dropped her glass. It thumped down heavily on the table, swamp water cascading up its sides and raining on her hand. The music exploded shrapnel of ear-cutting cacaphony and her body jerked. On the tablecloth, her hands twitched white on white, while claws of uncontrollable demand pulled up her frightened eyes.

The music fled, frothing behind a wake of swelling drum rolls.

The night club was a wordless crypt, all breathing checked.

Cobwebs of smoke drifted in the purple light across the stage.

No sound except the muffled, rolling drum.

Peggy's body was a petrifaction in its chair, smitten to rock around her leaping heart, while, through the wavering haze of smoke and liquored dizziness, she looked up in horror to where it stood.

It had been a woman.

Her hair was black, a framing of snarled ebony for the tallow mask that was her face. Her shadow-rimmed eyes were closed behind lids as smooth and white as ivory. Her mouth, a lipless and unmoving line, stood like a clotted sword wound beneath her nose. Her throat, her shoulders and her arms were white, were motionless. At her sides, protruding from the sleeve ends of the green transparency she wore, hung alabaster hands.

Across this marble statue, the spotlight coated purple shimmer.

Still paralyzed, Peggy stared up at its motionless features, her fingers knitted in a bloodless tangle on her lap. The pulse of drumbeats in the air seemed to fill her body, its rhythm altering her heartbeat.

In the black emptiness behind her, she heard Len muttering, "I love my wife but oh, you corpse," and heard the wheeze of helpless snickers that escaped from Bud and Barbara. The cold still rose in her, a silent tidal dread.

Somewhere in the smoke-fogged darkness, a man cleared viscid nervousness from his throat and a murmur of appreciative relief strained through the audience.

Still no motion on the stage, no sound but the sluggish cadence of the drum, thumping at the silence like someone seeking entrance at a far-off door. The thing that was a nameless victim of the plague stood palely rigid while the distillation sluiced through its blood-clogged veins.

Now the drum throbs hastened like the pulsebeat of a rising panic. Peggy felt the chill begin to swallow her. Her throat began to tighten, her breathing was a string of lip-parted gasps. The loopy's eyelid twitched.

Abrupt, black, straining silence webbed the room. Even the breath choked off in Peggy's throat when she saw the pale eyes flutter open. Something creaked in the stillness; her body pressing back unconsciously against the chair. Her eyes were wide, unblinking circles that sucked into her brain the sight of the thing that had been a woman.

Music again; a brass-throated moaning from the dark, like some animal made of welded horns mewling its derangement in a midnight alley.

Suddenly, the right arm of the loopy jerked at its side, the tendons suddenly contracted. The left arm twitched alike, snapped out, then falling back and thudding in purple-white limpness against the thigh. The right arm out, the left arm out, the right, the left-right-left-right—like marionette arms twitching from an amateur's dangling strings.

The music caught the time, drum brushes scratching out a rhythm for the convulsions of the loopy's muscles. Peggy pressed back further, her body numbed and cold, her face a livid, staring mask in the fringes of the stage light.

The loopy's right foot moved now, jerking up inflexibly as the distillation constricted muscles in its leg. A second and a third contraction caused the leg to twitch, the left leg flung out in a violent spasm and then the woman's body lurched stiffly forward, filming the transparent silk to its light and shadow.

Peggy heard the sudden hiss of breath that passed the clenching teeth of Bud and Len and a wave of nausea sprayed foaming sickness up her stomach walls. Before her eyes, the stage abruptly undulated and it seemed as if the flailing loopy were headed straight for her.

Gasping dizzily, she pressed back in horror, unable to take her eyes from its now agitated face.

She watched the mouth jerk to a gaping cavity, then a twisted scar that split into a wound again. She saw the dark nostrils twitching, saw writhing flesh beneath the ivory cheeks, saw furrows dug and undug in the purple whiteness of the forehead. She saw one lifeless eye wink monstrously and heard the gasp of startled laughter in the room.

While music blared into a fit of grating noise, while the woman's arms and legs kept jerking with convulsive cramps that threw her body around the purpled stage like a full-size rag doll given spastic life.

It was nightmare in an endless sleep. Peggy shivered in helpless terror as she watched the loopy's twisting, leaping dance. The blood in her had turned to ice, there was no life in her but the endless, pounding stagger of her heart. Her eyes were frozen spheres staring at the woman's body writhing white and flaccid underneath the clinging silk.

Then, something went wrong.

Up till then, its muscular seizures had bound the loopy to an area of several yards before the amber flat which was the background for its paroxysmal dance. Now its erratic surging drove the loopy toward the stage-encircling rail.

Peggy heard the thump and creaking strain of wood as the loopy's hip collided with the rail. She cringed into a shuddering knot, her eyes still raised fixedly to the purple-splashed face whose every feature was deformed by throes of warping convulsion.

The loopy staggered back and Peggy saw and heard its leprous hands slapping with a fitful rhythm at its silk-scaled thighs.

Again it sprang forward like a maniac marionette and the woman's stomach thudded sickeningly into the railing wood. The dark mouth gaped, clamped shut and then the loopy twisted through a jerking revolution and crashed back against the rail again, almost above the table where Peggy sat.

Peggy couldn't breathe. She sat rooted to the chair, her lips a trembling circle of stricken dread, a pounding of

blood at her temples as she watched the loopy spin again, its arms a blur of flailing white.

The lurid bleaching of its face dropped toward Peggy as the loopy crashed into the waist-high rail again and bent across its top. The mask of lavender-rained whiteness hung above her, dark eyes twitching open in a hideous stare.

Peggy felt the floor begin to move and the livid face was blurred with darkness, then reappeared in a burst of luminosity. Sound fled on brass shod feet, then plunged into her brain again—a smearing discord.

The loopy kept on jerking forward, driving itself against the rail as though it meant to scale it. With every spastic lurch, the diaphanous silk fluttered like a film about its body and every savage collision with the railing tautened the green transparency across its swollen flesh. Peggy looked up in rigid muteness at the loopy's fierce attack, her eyes unable to escape the wild distortion of the woman's face with its black frame of tangled, snapping hair.

What happened then happened in a blurring passage of seconds.

The grim-faced man came rushing across the purple-lighted stage, the thing that had been a woman went crashing, twitching, flailing at the rail, doubling over it, the spasmodic hitching flinging up its muscle-knotted legs.

A clawing fall.

Peggy lurched back in her chair and the scream that started in her throat was forced back into a strangled gag as the loopy came crashing down onto the table, its limbs a thrash of naked whiteness.

Barbara screamed, the audience gasped and Peggy saw, on the fringe of vision, Bud jumping up, his face a twist of stunned surprise.

The loopy flopped and twisted on the table like a new-caught fish. The music went grinding into silence, a rush of agitated murmur filled the room and blackness swept in brain-submerging waves across Peggy's mind.

Then the cold white hand slapped across her mouth, the dark eyes stared at her in purple light and Peggy felt the darkness flooding.

The horror-smoked room went turning on its side.

Consciousness. It flickered in her brain like gauze-veiled candlelight. A murmuring of sound, a blur of shadow before her eyes.

Breath dripped like syrup from her mouth.

"Here, Peg."

She heard Bud's voice and felt the chilly metal of a flask neck pressed against her lips. She swallowed, twisting slightly at the trickle of fire in her throat and stomach, then coughed and pushed away the flask with deadened fingers.

Behind her, a rustling movement. "Hey, she's *back*," Len said, "Ol' Olive Oyl is back."

"You feel all right?" asked Barbara.

She felt all right. Her heart was like a drum hanging from piano wire in her chest, slowly, slowly beaten. Her hands and feet were numb not with cold but with a sultry torpor. Thoughts moved with a tranquil lethargy, her brain a leisurely machine imbedded in swaths of woolly packing.

She felt all right.

Peggy looked across the night with sleepy eyes. They were on a hilltop, the convertible braked crouching on a jutting edge. Far below, the country slept, a carpet of light and shadow beneath the chalky moon.

An arm snake moved around her waist. "Where are we?" she asked him in a languid voice.

"Few miles outside school," Bud said, "How d'ya feel, honey?"

She stretched, her body a delicious strain of muscles. She sagged back, limp, against his arm.

"*Wonderful*," she murmured with a dizzy smile and scratched the tiny itching bump on her left shoulder. Warmth radiated through her flesh; the night was a sabled glow. There seemed—*somewhere*—to be a memory but it crouched in secret behind folds of thick content.

"Woman, you were *out*," laughed Bud and Barbara added and Len added, "Were you!" and "Olive Oyl went *plunko!*"

"Out?" Her casual murmur went unheard.

The flask went around and Peggy drank again, relaxing further as the liquor needled fire through her veins.

"Man, I never saw a loopy dance like that!" Len said. A momentary chill across her back, then warmth again. "Oh," said Peggy. "That's right. I forgot."

She smiled.

"That was what I calls a grande finale!" Len said, dragging back his willing date, who murmured, "Lenny boy."

"L.U.P.," Bud muttered, nuzzling at Peggy's hair, "Son of a gun." He reached out idly for the radio knob.

L.U.P. (Lifeless Undead Phenomenon)—This freak of physiological abnormality was discovered during the war when, following certain germ-gas attacks, many of the dead troops were found erect and performing the spasmodic gyrations which, later, became known as the "loopy's" (L.U.P.'s) dance. The particular germ spray responsible was later distilled and is now used in carefully controlled experiments which are conducted only under the strictest of legal license and supervision.

Music surrounded them, its melancholy fingers touching at their hearts. Peggy leaned against her date and felt no need to curb exploring hands. Somewhere, deep within the jellied layers of her mind, there was something trying to escape. It fluttered like a frantic moth imprisoned in congealing wax, struggling wildly but only growing weaker in attempt as the chrysalis hardened.

Four voices sang softly in the night.

*If the world is here tomorrow
I'll be waiting, dear, for you
If the stars are there tomorrow
I'll be wishing on them too.*

Four young voices singing, a murmur in immensity. Four bodies, two by two, slackly warm and drugged. A singing, an embracing—a wordless accepting.

*Star light, star bright
Let there be another night.*

The singing ended but the song went on.

A young girl sighed.

"Isn't it romantic?" said Olive Oyl.