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Pilgrimage	by CHAD OLIVER	5
The Better Bet (<i>verse</i>)	by ANTHONY BRODE	19
Love Me, Love My —	by ROG PHILLIPS	20
The Man Who Never Forgot	by ROBERT SILVERBERG	34
The Last Step	by ZENNA HENDERSON	47
Exchange Student	by ALLEN KIM LANG	60
I Do Not Hear You, Sir	by AVRAM DAVIDSON	76
The Last of the Deliverers	by POUL ANDERSON	85
One Sent	by MARY-CARTER ROBERTS	96
Curved Universe (<i>verse</i>)	by DORIS P. BUCK	106
Recommended Reading (<i>a department</i>)	by ANTHONY BOUCHER	107
A Summer Afternoon	by CHARLES L. FONTENAY	110
Baby	by CAROL EMSHWILLER	115
I Just Make Them Up, See! (<i>verse</i>)	by ISAAC ASIMOV	129

COVER PAINTING BY EMSH

(*illustrating "Baby"*)

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Chad Oliver's alien anthropologists, who opened this issue, held themselves aloof and investigated chiefly by remote observation. Now Allen Kim Lang (whose Ambassador's Homecoming you enjoyed last November) presents an investigator who plunges actively into his field of research with all the bustling energy of a miniature but sapient chipmunk . . . which, indeed, he is.

Exchange Student

by ALLEN KIM LANG

STUMBLING-BEAR, HIS FOREPAWS clasped behind him, sauntered over to the corner of my desk for a closeup look at the photograph that stands there. Looking up at it, he uttered the tribute of a long, low whistle. "Shorty, who's the babe?" he demanded.

"That's my Kate," I said. "That's the woman who's driving me nuts."

Stumbling-Bear strolled back to my Smith-Corona and climbed up its side. Seating himself on the cylinder, he scooted around till he'd felt out the most comfortable place to sit. "It's time you learn," he said, "that having habits that madden men is a female secondary sexual characteristic, like bad driving. Take my one-and-only, for example. She's a darling, she's a doll; but she talks all the time, elocuting like she was running for

Mayor and I was the whole electorate."

"Kate's not like that," I said, gazing at the photo of my almost-perfect Katherine. "With her, the itch is travel. I'm rooted right here in Indiana; but she's the kind who'd be happiest driving the lead wagon in a gypsy caravan, or keeping house on a Rhine river-barge. She doesn't seem to believe that any spot on earth is really there, until she's seen it."

Stumbling-Bear felt back into his cheekpouch with one forepaw, like a fat man inspecting a twinging molar. He brought forth for my inspection a photograph the size of Miss Liberty's portrait on the three-cent stamp. "Check this," he invited me, handing over the picture. One small fur-bearing animal looks pretty much like another to me, but I nodded approvingly as I

handed it back with the comment, "She's a looker"—the only thing you can say when a man flashes a photo of his girl friend.

He stashed the picture back in his right cheekpouch. "This analysis of our love-lives is pleasant enough," he said, "but it's cutting no ice with my research project. I've already wasted a week. Bureaucrats! File-cabinet scholars! Our Elsewhere Department, back home at Alpha Microscopicum, must have grabbed up an outdated guidebook when I told them I was cutting out on a field-trip to Indiana, U.S.A., Sol III. They fitted me with a Ute cover-name and sent me through five semester hours of Basic Algonquian so I'd feel at home here," he said. "I even took a Recreational Elective in bow-and-arrow. If you ever want someone to knap you out a mean flint knife, Shorty, I'm your man." He sighed. "What a waste."

"Somebody fouled up," I said.

"Telling me?" Stumbling-Bear folded his forepaws and leaned back against the typewriter's paper-supports. "After I landed—I rode down on a Procyonese cruise-ship, loaded with tourists bigger than you are (no offense, Shorty)—I wandered around for hours, looking for a wickiup or the smoke of a council-fire, asking everybody directions in Chippewa. I damn near ended up in a bottle in the Zoology Department, by the way, but I managed to bite through the net. Any-

way, I finally spent a week behind a beercase at Phi Delt House, learning to dig Modern American."

I lit a cigarette and braced my feet up on the desk, one foot on each side of the typewriter where Stumbling-Bear sat. I was smoking too much; but this was an occasion, having a foreign social-anthropologist to talk shop with. So what, Stumbling-Bear was only two inches tall and had fur? A being doesn't have to wear shoes and horn-rimmed glasses to be worthy of friendship. "Why'd you decide to visit me?" I asked. "Why not the head of the department? For that matter, why not Margaret Mead?"

"I came down here for original research, not instruction," Stumbling-Bear explained, swinging his hind paws out over the typebars. "It's this way. Nobody from Alpha Microscopicum has ever done work on the human group before; it's a virgin field, all mine. Your master's dissertation, *The Human Group as Organism*, persuaded me that you were the man to talk to. Your thesis has its weaknesses, to be sure; you bound toward conclusions with the speed of a home-ec coed leaping for an engagement ring; nevertheless I read your book with consuming interest."

I took my feet off the desk, not knowing whether to be charmed or annoyed by the modified praise of a creature the size of the common short-tailed shrew. "Couldn't

you just con us from the windows of your flying saucer?" I asked.

Stumbling-Bear ruffled his forehead fur with both front paws. "You hatch bigger nonsense from smaller eggs than anyone else I've met," he said. "Flying saucers, for corn's sake! I'm a serious social scientist, Shorty, not one of those hot-rodding Procyon tourists. It's characters like the Procyonese—all loud-mouth, black-leather-jacket, and bop-talk—who've given this corner of the Galaxy its bad name. A scientist hits on a world like earth, thinking it completely unspoiled, only to find that the tourists have hit it ahead of him; buzzing airliners for kicks, paying outrageous prices for souvenirs of Atlantic City, sponsoring entertainments among the natives, littering the planet with empty *brack* jugs—agh, tourists! I nearly shifted my studies to the Coalsack, just to avoid that bunch."

"Forgive my error," I said. "What can I do to help you?"

Stumbling-Bear, who'd been tying knots in my typewriter ribbon with his rear paws, tried to stand, feeling the urge to pace; but his feet were tangled in the ribbon. "Damn this machine!" he snarled. I got out my pocketknife and slashed him free of the ribbon, twined around his paws like a two-toned boa. It cost a buck and a quarter, and was brand new, but what the hell? It was worth a gross of typewriter ribbons to get

a fresh slant on the human group.

"Thanks," Stumbling-Bear said, swinging his feet free and standing up on the typewriter-cylinder. "I'd like to study small-group dynamics as you have, utilizing my somewhat more objective point of view. What I have in mind is a sort of lookout post, from which I can watch human work-groups in action, making notes without running the danger of ending up in a bottle."

I nodded. "Wouldn't your beer-case hideout at Phi Delta House have served your purpose?" I asked.

Stumbling-Bear shook his head. "Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin pretty well covered what those boys talk about," he said. "What I want is something like your setup in that salmon cannery, the observation post you describe in your classic study."

I couldn't suppress a smile of gratification. My department would doubtless tie in an Associate Professorship with my Ph.D. if the news of Stumbling-Bear's study ever reached the journals. After all, my *Human Group as Organism* was source material for scholars on other planets now.

I lit another cigarette, noticing how yellow my fingers had got. As soon as Kate said yes, I decided again, I'd quit smoking. I pulled my thoughts away from Katherine to consider the problem posed by my midget colleague. "Perhaps you

could take up residence on some classroom bookshelf," I suggested.

"No go," Stumbling-Bear said. "A classroom is hardly a typical human group. I'd rather go into the field."

"The Dean's Office?"

"The academic atmosphere becomes cloying after a while," Stumbling-Bear said. "I've just left classes, seminars, callings of publicly-amorous freshmen onto the carpet. This is, as I said, a field-trip. I'd like to get entirely away from the trappings of formal education." He started pacing up and down the typewriter platen like a boy on a railroad track, collecting his thoughts. When he wavered and almost fell off, I raised the paper-bail for him to use as a handrail. He thanked me with a thoughtful smile.

"This is my first visit to your kith and culture," he said. "My position here in Indiana is about what yours would be if you'd just arrived on Procyon III to investigate the wife-trading moieties at North T'Cha. Would you know how to greet your complimentary Queen for a Day? To pour your first cup of *brack* over your right shoulder when the sun was to your left? Of course not. You'd need the help of a friendly native, someone who could call these quiddities of Procyonese life to your attention."

I crushed my cigarette in the ash-tray. "You'd like me to serve as your friendly native, is that it?"

"It's kind of you to suggest that, Shorty," Stumbling-Bear said. "All I ask is to go with you through a typical day. I can look for that observation post I'll need for further research, for one thing. You can be helping me find answers to the hundred questions I have in mind already: what, for example, is the social significance of the Thank-God-It's-Friday Club? And, if I may make so bold as to inquire into your religious life, I'd like to investigate further your cult of the Great Goddess, that ideal hinted at in conversations and on calendars, celebrated in her thousand thin-veiled guises on the center-sheets of your magazines." He sighed. "I have so much to learn, so very little time!"

"Before we settle down to study, how about some lunch?" I suggested. My guest nodded. I stood and pulled on my jacket, somewhat wrinkled from having been draped over the back of my chair. "While we're in public," I told Stumbling-Bear, "best you stay out of sight, in case we meet any more collectors from the Zoology Department. I'll hide you here behind the handkerchief in my breast pocket. While you're in there, I can hear your questions easily enough and answer them, *sotto voce*. That way you'll see what I see, hear what I hear. OK?"

"Capital!" Stumbling-Bear jumped up on the platen. His right rear paw skidded, and he tumbled

down onto the typebars. I lifted him out, determining by the force of the unintelligible curses he was squeaking that he was uninjured, and brushed the `tg6byh7nu` and `TG_BYH&NU` off his fur with my handkerchief. Then I dropped him down into my jacket pocket, and ruffled the ink-stained folds of the handkerchief to conceal him.

We had lunch at the faculty cafeteria, since the prices there are always several months behind the current cost-of-living reflected in the off-campus restaurants; and, more important, because Kate would be there. She had a late class, but I delighted in waiting for her each noon, drinking black coffee and thinking eupeptic thoughts.

I picked up some shrimp *à la Marseilles* for myself—Wednesday is the cook's day for experiment here—and, relying on Stumbling-Bear's rather mouselike look, got a side of cheese for him. Seated at a corner table, after glancing around to make sure I wasn't being observed by any of the other academics in the room, I clipped a corner off the cheese and dropped it into my breast pocket, behind the handkerchief. There were chewings down there, then the nibbled-at bit of cheese came flying out. "What the hell are you trying to poison me with?" Stumbling-Bear shouted, his soprano voice carrying all over the cafeteria, like a child's embar-

rassing question. I looked around me. When the startled glances toward my table had returned to their meals, I tried a french fry on my guest. Salting it well, I lowered it into my pocket by one end, as though I were feeding an infant crocodile. I hoped I wouldn't be driven to the extreme of having to catch flies to satisfy the demands of hospitality, but no fear. Sounds of Stumbling-Bear's busy jaws came muffled through the handkerchief, and the potato was drawn steadily down as into a grinding-machine.

I divided my mealtime between eating the foreign shrimp and feeding my fellow-student. After a while the movement of picking up a fried potato and lowering it in to him became so automatic that I no longer glanced around before doing so. When I did look up, after dessert, it was to see Kate, my quintessential woman, walking toward our table, carrying her tray, a book under one arm. I sprang up to take the tray from her, help her with the chair, arrange her plates for her. "What is this ceremony?" Stumbling-Bear demanded, thrusting his head out into the open.

"I'll explain it to you later," I said, speaking from the side of my mouth, shoving him down out of sight.

"What did you say, Richard?" Kate asked.

"Nothing," I said. There was an alien stirring going on over my heart, as Stumbling-Bear fought to

join us. I clapped my hand over him and sat down across from Kate, looking the very model of sincerity with my hand thus on my heart. With my free hand I salted a french fry to distract my guest, and lowered it in to him.

Kate had brought me a second cup of coffee, as she always does when she sees I've preceded her to lunch. I sipped at it and stared at her, feeling the wonder a child would, confronted by a sudden Rock Candy Mountain.

How can I describe my lovely Katherine without sounding like a pathologist taking inventory in the Med School's bone-eye-vein-and-blood bank? Her eyes? Eye-colored: they change, like the sea, with the light; they're long-lashed and mostly dark, with a kind of animal fission going on within them to throw out sparks of laughter. Figure? The kind that's used in the ads for swim-suits. Her smile? Oh, you see what I mean. My Kate's beauty can't be anatomized like some formalined dogfish in the Biology Labs. A hammering over my heart recalled me to movement. I lowered a french fry into my pocket to keep Stumbling-Bear busy.

Kate glanced up from her shrimp. "What's wrong with you, Richard?" she asked.

"Nothing, Katherine," I said. I wondered whether I'd be wise to introduce Stumbling-Bear to Kate, and tell her that my *Human Group*

as *Organism* was being read at the ends of the galaxy. I guessed not. I wanted Kate to love me for myself, not for my contributions to sociology.

A bent french fry sailed up from my pocket and plummeted square into Kate's coffee. "Needs salt!" Stumbling-Bear piped, in the voice of an ill-bred three-year-old.

Kate thoughtfully fished the fragment of potato from her coffee with her fork. She turned those eyes on me and shook her head. "That was a cute trick, Richard; but better suited to the stage than to the table."

"Kate, I didn't—"

"What in hell's going on out there?" the same juvenile voice delinquently demanded.

"Richard," Kate said.

"I've got a surprise to show you, but not here," I began.

Stumbling-Bear, stronger than I'd have guessed, thrust his head between my restraining fingers and peered out at Kate. "Hi!" he said.

I took Kate's book and propped it open on the table, so that its opening faced away from the rest of the dining room, and took out my guest to set him between the open pages. "Kate, this is Stumbling-Bear," I said, leaving the niceties of the introduction up to him.

"A chipmunk!" Kate said. "Richard, I didn't know you were interested in biology."

"Sister, when you're around, the man not interested in biology is

meat for the morgue," Stumbling-Bear said.

Kate blushed a little at this square-edged compliment, and sipped her coffee. "Is this ventriloquism your surprise, Richard?" she asked.

"So you're the famous English teacher," Stumbling-Bear said. "Shorty told me—"

"More potatoes?" I interrupted, pushing one toward him. "You've got to forgive Stumbling-Bear's conversational crudities," I said to Kate. "He learned English in a fraternity house."

Stumbling-Bear spurned the potato. "May I call you Kate, Kate?" he asked. "You're ten times prettier than your lovely photo."

"Thank you," Kate said. "Are you really talking?"

"I sing, dance, and do imitations, too," Stumbling-Bear boasted. "And I can recite all three kinds of limericks, though mostly the third sort." He launched into a few steps of a soft-shoe dance as demonstration of his talents, then stopped. "But don't get me wrong, Kate. I'm a serious anthropologist, despite my lighter side."

Kate swallowed down a great deal of coffee very rapidly. I got up to refill our cups, and to get Stumbling-Bear a spoonful of apple jelly by way of dessert. By the time I'd got back to the table, Kate and my visitor were conversing like old friends. They stopped talking as I came within earshot, and Kate

glanced up at me and blushed, through a smile. I wondered what Stumbling-Bear had told her.

"It seems strange that you'd have chosen Richard as earth's spokesman," Kate addressed herself to Stumbling-Bear after I'd sat. "Of course, you couldn't have found a better man for keeping you a secret, if you wished it. He'd never dream of telling anyone that intelligences from across the stars were watching us; would you, Richard?"

"Don't sell your boyfriend short, Kate," Stumbling-Bear defended me. "Shorty may be no collar ad, but the boy's got brains."

"I know," Kate said, taking my hand.

"Excuse me, Stumbling-Bear," I said. "Kate, I'd like to see you this evening. We can catch a movie at the drive-in, stop somewhere for sandwiches and beer, maybe dance a little. I want to talk to you."

"If you two don't mind," Stumbling-Bear interrupted, "I'd like to come along. I've never seen one of your movies. I might get a footnote out of it."

"You want to see movies, I'll stake you to the Saturday-afternoon cowboy show," I said. I shook out a cigarette, broke it in two, and lit the shorter half: I had to cut down somehow. "You see, Stumbling-Bear, human sociologists are agreed that the optimum small group including an unmarried male and a nubile girl is the pair, not the trio."

"Interesting, if true," he said. He took a tiny pad and a sort of pencil from his left cheekpouch, where he seemed to be concealing as much gear as could be stowed in a B-4 bag. The pencil-device squirted whole ideographs each time he pressed its point to paper. "I'm learning, Shorty," he said, scribbling grimly. "You're making it difficult, but I'm learning."

"How about this evening, Kate?" I asked again.

"Of course, Richard; about seven fifteen will be fine." She turned to Stumbling-Bear. "You don't really mind our leaving you this evening, do you?" she asked him.

"Not at all, Kate," Stumbling-Bear replied. "But you watch yourself, alone with this guy."

"I'll be very careful," Kate promised, smiling at me. I picked up my guest and fitted him back into my coat pocket, feeling all of six feet tall in the glow of that smile.

Stumbling-Bear had said he wanted to see me through a typical day. So be it, I decided. I'd make no effort at giving him a survey course in *Indiana Today*. I'd simply show him the world of a stay-at-home instructor in sociology, climbing through the jungle-gym of academic publications toward my Ph.D., and maybe a full Professorship at forty.

My visitor sat behind a copy of *Wish's Society and Thought in Modern America* in my classroom, taking copious notes, while I lec-

tured thirty-seven freshmen on the American family. Studying the hungry faces of the boys, seeing the dedicated looks on the girls those boys were hungry for, I felt this lecture to be timely. Perhaps I could help these youngsters in the great adventure they were so eager to set out upon. I thought of Kate, and let my mouth follow my lecture-notes while my mind wrote the script of a great adventure starring Kate and me.

The end of the hour resurrected the freshmen, and they left in pairs. I asked Stumbling-Bear what he'd thought of my talk. He glanced down at his notes. "You slid from the east-west proportion of marriage to divorce to some motion picture that's playing in the open air tonight," he said. "I'm afraid I don't quite grasp the significance of this latter to the American family."

"The concept is abstruse," I hedged, hoping that none of my students had larded my plans for the evening into his notes. No need to worry, I decided. Springtime freshmen don't take notes.

I picked up a stack of test papers three inches thick, intending to take them home. I could get them graded by seven, if none of my undergraduates had erupted an original thought. I slipped Stumbling-Bear back into my pocket. "Where are we going?" he asked, as we went out and got into my ancient Dodge.

"We're going to the Post office for my mail," I said. "Bills settle into my box there like silt at the mouth of the Nile. I have to clear the channel daily, or mail would back up to flood the whole International Postal Union." I drove across town, parked in front of the Post Office, and put a penny in the parking meter. Stumbling-Bear scribbled a page of notes on this Indiana parking-ceremony.

Stumbling-Bear peeked from my pocket as we walked through the gallery of glowering *wanted for federal income tax evasion* fliers, past the job-descriptions dangling outside the Civil Service window like scalps, to the tier of glass-fronted post-office boxes. I stood on tiptoe to look into Box 1141, assigned to me by the Postmaster so that I might daily be reminded that he's taller than I am. Mail is something of an occasion with me, even though the letters I get are mostly requests to contribute, so when I saw that there was something in there I opened the door quickly. The something proved to be a request, printed in patriotic colors, that I use Air Parcel Post as often as I could. "Damn," I said.

"Nothing yet from the Nobel Prize Committee, eh, Shorty?" Stumbling-Bear asked.

How can you backhand a character two inches tall? He was staring at the open mailbox door, and jittering in my pocket. "Hey,

Shorty! Put me inside there, will you?"

Though I didn't yet see what Stumbling-Bear was getting at, I did as he asked. "Close the door, please," he called down. I did, leaving the key in. My guest paced back and forth on the grillwork bottom of the box, peered out through the glass window to make sure I was still with him, then went back to stare out at the postal workers sorting mail. He came up front again and tapped on the door till I'd unlocked it. "It's perfect!" he exulted. "I can sit up here and take notes ad lib, watching the workers go about their appointed rounds in the back, observing the postage-stamp purchasers up front: an endless orrery of human groups."

"It's a motion," I admitted, "but the Post Office Department might not approve. They rent me this box to get mail in, not to sub-let as an apartment."

"I won't be holding any parties here, Shorty," he argued. "Besides, I'm willing to be a little cramped for space, to suffer some for Science. Weren't you crowded in your cubbyhole at the salmon cannery? Wasn't *The Human Group as Organism* worth it? We social anthropologists don't expect our laboratories to be as spacious as those the bomb-chemists use."

"That's true enough," I said, "but there's another little problem that occurs to me. The light's

pretty good in there, but there's no indoor plumbing in a post-office box."

"True," Stumbling-Bear agreed. "But do you think I could go through eight years at the University without having the sense I need to come in out of the rain, or to find the trail to the postal-workers' powder room? No sweat, Shorty."

"OK, Stumbling-Bear," I said. "The apartment is yours. Happy hunting."

"Thanks. I've got everything here I'll need, if you could see your way to bringing me an occasional box lunch," he said. I nodded, and Stumbling-Bear brought his pad and pencil, and a tiny flask of some sort, from his cheekpouches. He leaned out to grab the door of P. O. Box 1141, preparing to slam it shut and get to work. "I'll be seeing you pretty often, I guess," he said. "I'd appreciate the opportunity to discuss my tentative findings with a fellow scientist."

"Why, sure," I agreed. I was pleased that the little guy had so taken me into his confidence. The freemasonry of science, I now saw, included not only the dedicated men of earth but scholars from Stumbling-Bear's world, and perhaps from a thousand others. "I'll see you tomorrow, and bring lunch," I said. He slammed the door, and I pulled out and pocketed my key. To say goodby, I waved through the glass. I turned to leave,

and saw that the man behind the Civil Service window was staring at me like an alienist. I cool-headedly lit half a cigarette, stared back at the civil servant, and sauntered out to my Dodge.

Truth to tell, I was glad to get Stumbling-Bear off my hands and out of my pocket for the evening. When a man's going out with the girl of his dreams, he doesn't want an impartial observer in his pocket, recording his every word for eventual publication in the scholarly journals of another planet. I noticed a grease-stain on my jacket, down below the french-fry pocket, and stopped to drop it off at the cleaner's.

Kate was wearing a pale yellow dress that looked as cool as lemon sherbet, emphasizing the smooth coffee-with-cream tan of her shoulders and arms. Fifty-eight inches of concentrated woman, I thought, smiling down at her from my five-foot-three. "You don't look much like my old English teacher this evening," I said, taking her hand to lead her out to the Dodge.

"I don't feel much like an English teacher this evening," Kate said, sliding way over in the front seat, to be close-up beside me. "I just feel like a girl."

I thought that sounded promising.

We had malts and cheeseburgers, then drove to the movie for the first show. The drive-in was featuring

one of those horizontal spectaculars, an epic filled by a million milling extras building cardboard pyramids, loaded with the message that even Egyptian slavegirls had bosoms. "I'd love to go to Egypt," Kate murmured. I took her hand and squeezed it, trying to remind her that us Hoosiers belong in Indiana. "Wouldn't you like to see Cairo, Richard?" Kate asked, not having caught my message.

"No," I said, maybe a little violently. "Kate, I saw a dozen countries in the days I was modeling that khaki war-suit; and I learned that anywhere on earth, I'm still me. Egypt wouldn't make me any more or less than me. Kiss me, Kate," I ad-libbed, trying to get her mind off Rand-McNally.

Kate complied, and warmly; but I knew she was still scheming travel. She sighed. "Wouldn't it thrill you to see *As You Like It* in Stratford-on-Avon, or hear *Hamlet* at Kronborg Castle?" she asked.

"We've got no castles here," I said, "but we've got everything else I want from life. Study and teaching; a wife and kids." From Kate's answering squeeze, I judged that this had got through; and she'd stopped musing all over the map.

After the evil Pharaoh had been deposed by de Mille, we drove out to the Constellation Club for a couple of deep-dish martinis and some dancing. Kate, primed by the technicolor travelogue, murmured

an obbligato of tourist talk in my ear as we danced. She was eager as a Moslem for Mecca, but Kate's Mecca was anywhere at all. I listened patiently enough while she spoke of foreign places with romantic names and ubiquitous flies, places where the food was probably fried in camel fat and served on leaves. I didn't comment. Even with her bug for globetrotting, I thought, Kate was the woman for me. I'd have loved her if she'd bowled.

I suppose you've noticed that when you think about anything long enough and often enough, it's bound to happen, but hardly ever in the way you expected. What with the dancing, and the sparkle of Kate's wanderlustful eyes across our martinis, and the presence in my watch pocket of the ring I'd made down-payment on two days after I'd first met her, that's the way it happened to me. I'd prepared phrases for this moment-of-truth, like a tourist going into a Mexican marketplace primed with memorized Spanish sentences, but I forgot the lot. I just out and said, "Kate, let's get married."

My lovely little teacher, the girl who dealt every day with *Sonnets from the Portuguese* and *Romeo and Juliet*, pledged her troth to me with, "Sure, Richard."

That evening, it took us longer than ever before to say goodnight.

Driving very slowly home, I thought of stopping to acquaint

the new resident of P. O. Box 1141 with my happy lot, and to invite him to our wedding. But not yet, I decided. Stumbling-Bear would likely regard my engagement to Kate as simply another phase of human culture to be set down on his note-pad, or he'd involve me in a discussion of those loose-living inhabitants of Procyon III. I'd tell him later, when the bubbles had settled down a bit in my brain.

I got through the next morning's classes by a series of lazy ploys: giving lightning-tests, assigning lengthy bibliographies, sending battalions of freshmen to the library. I had, I reminded myself from minute to minute, been chosen by Kate to be her husband. I felt the need of wires across the top of my head, to hold in my happiness like champagne.

The cold water dashed over me at noon. Kate and I met in the faculty cafeteria to discuss our coming solemnities over the corned-beef hash. Her first words, after a smile several paragraphs long, were, "Richard, where will we go?"

I closed my eyes and clenched my jaws. Here it was, the single incompatibility between us, rearing its malformed head again. Travel. As though a few miles on the map could add to our felicity! I opened my eyes. "Kate, do we have to run off somewhere?" I asked. "Can't we just find ourselves an apartment near the campus, and settle down

right off, like sensible adults? We could spend our honeymoon—part of it, anyway—hanging the curtains and getting the furniture set the way you want it."

"Richard, you're about as romantic as a plumber's friend," Kate said. "People don't act like sensible adults right after they're married; instead they run off like children on a picnic, so they can be alone together."

That part I liked.

"Another thing, Richard. I can see us staying here for our honeymoon. Picture it: your Phi Delta brothers making our evenings hideous with Rabelaisian auto-horns and coarse shouting, sending us telegrams of congratulation and baskets of tiger lilies at fifteen-minute intervals, causing the representatives of dairies and diaper services to pound on our front door from morning till night. I know that bunch, Richard. We'll have to get away from the campus, if only in self-defense."

I pondered. This was indeed a sharp-horned dilemma. I couldn't offend my bride-designate, nor could I look with unjaundiced eye toward a fortnight's schedule-wrestling, following the spoor of mislaid luggage, tipping our way through gantlets of hotel employees . . . Kate had hit on an argument of considerable force, though, when she'd mentioned the Phi Delts. Those boys, given the marriage of a brother who'd shown

the bad form of becoming a teacher, could treat him and his bride to a hazing that would make the wildest Basque shivaree seem tame as a Quaker ice-cream social. We had to escape that wolfpack.

"We could go to London," Kate said, her eyes closed to see more clearly Westminster Bridge and the companion of Big Ben. I was thinking of British cooking. "We could visit Paris, Vienna, Nice," she said. "Tourist class would be fine, Richard. We wouldn't have to spend much."

"We could stay at home, and spend even less," I pointed out; but backed down at the sight of her frown. "All right, Kate. You win, just like in the women's magazines. I'll compromise my principles, go anywhere you say: but with one provision. You'll have to make the reservations and buy the tickets and pick out the luggage and borrow the maps and take care of all the rest of the miserable prelude to travel. Fair enough?"

"Richard, that's wonderful!" Kate said. "Those are things I love to do, getting ready to travel. I've got nearly a thousand dollars saved in the bank—"

"Fine," I said. "Buy us a grand's-worth of globetrotting. I'll keep my bankroll for setting up housekeeping when we get back, and to pay the doctor bills for the sunburn and dyspepsia and exotic rashes we'll come home with." I sipped my coffee, feeling a bit more at ease. A

thousand dollars is a pretty short leash these days, barely enough to cross the state line with. We'd be spared the tour of Hong Kong, the Mediterranean cruise where the tourists are guinea pigs on whom is tested the relative oiliness of the various cuisines of South Europe. "I'll go with you anywhere we can afford," I said. "Anywhere that thousand bucks of yours will take us. But please, Kate, don't tell me anything about our trip till we're on our way. I'll get trainsick when the time comes, and avoid the anticipation."

"Just as you say, Richard," Kate said, smiling again.

Phi Delt House threw me a stag supper, as is the custom of that brotherhood. It was loud, in the tradition of such affairs; and I was given considerable to drink, together with no end of undergraduate advice on the non-sacramental side of marriage. I was presented a small keg of aspirin tablets as memento of the occasion, most of which I used the next day in medicating the monumental hangover my brethren had sponsored.

On the penultimate day of my bachelorhood, I made the final payment on the rings. Our plans were crystallized, Kate said; doubtless some travel agent was rubbing his hands now in anticipation of our fee. Nothing was left but to be wed and on our way. We'd been duly blood-tested and found pure;

we'd each obtained two weeks' leave from the University; I'd packed enough gear to spend a fortnight anywhere between the Arctic Circle and Hobart, Tasmania. I felt better, now. Two weeks away from home, I told myself, were small enough price for the privilege of living with Kate for the rest of my life.

I visited Stumbling-Bear seldom, busy as I was preparing to move from my bachelor room to our conjugal apartment; and I'd given Kate the spare key to the box. She said he was prospering there, getting plump on the daily packets of french fries she brought him. Kate told me she often found our little scholar curled up with a copy of *Time* or *Sociological Abstracts*, gleaning footnotes to his own researches. No doubt she discussed with Stumbling-Bear her plans for our nuptial flight. She had to talk travel with someone, and she'd promised not to talk it to me.

The day had come to say goodby to my colleague from Alpha Microscopicum, and to evict him from P. O. Box 1141. Two weeks' uncollected mail, I knew, would leave Stumbling-Bear with mighty little room for note-taking, and this town was too full of avid zoologists for him to consider foraging for french fries on his own. I drove to the Post Office and shook him out of *The Reporter* to give him his notice. We'd leave tomorrow, I said, right after the Justice of the Peace

had granted our union the formal blessings of the State of Indiana.

"So tomorrow's the big day," Stumbling-Bear said, grinning so wide his whiskers stuck up like antennae. "Shorty, I congratulate you! I've already nominated Kate for Miss Rheingold: that shows you how highly I regard her."

"She'll be flattered," I said. "But I've brought bad news, too. You'll have to find other accommodations, Stumbling-Bear. Kate won't be here to bring your lunches, nor to clear out the bills so you'll have room for thoughtful pacing."

Stumbling-Bear triumphantly dug out his note-pad from his cheek-pouch and displayed it to me, rifling through the pages. Covered with almost-microscopic ideographs, every sheet was filled to its margins. "I'm done," he gloated. "I've discovered dynamic processes within the human group that are mentioned nowhere else in the literature. Shorty, my Ph.D. is as good as nailed to the wall."

"Fellow-scholar," I grinned back at him, "I'm proud of you!"

"I'll send you an abstract of my dissertation," he promised modestly, replacing the note-pad in his cheek. He paused to smooth his whiskers with a front paw. "I have one final favor to ask of you," he said. "I'd like to meet your bride again, so that I may wish her every happiness. Kate and I have become good friends over those french fries, Shorty."

"I'm glad," I said. "I'll bring Kate back here after supper." I paused. "Where will you go from here, Stumbling-Bear?"

"Remember my girlfriend?" he asked, flashing her picture again to refresh my memory. "She's coming in on the Procyonese ship that's going to take us on our honeymoon."

I solemnly shook Stumbling-Bear's right front paw. "I'm glad for you," I said. "Bachelor life is sadly overrated." Then I closed the box door, so that he could be getting his gear together.

By the time Kate and I got back to the Post Office, Stumbling-Bear was all spruced up. His fur, usually so ruffled that he looked like an ill-kempt asterisk, was now brushed sleek as a dachshund's. He smelled of lilac after-shave lotion, filched, I had no doubt, from the shaving kit some postal employee had left in the men's room. His whiskers must have been waxed, the way they perked out, giving him a mustache that would do credit to any RAF Wing Commander.

"Good evening, Kate," he said, bowing from the waist as I opened the door of Box 1141. There was no one around, so I set him out on the glass top of the money-order counter. "I've already congratulated Shorty on his remarkable good fortune in hoodwinking you into matrimony," Stumbling-Bear told Kate. "It remains only for me to wish you the happiness beauty de-

serves." His brown eyes twinkled. "Or, as the little girl told her third-grade teacher on a similar occasion, I wish you a joyous and sexful marriage."

Kate set him up on the palm of her hand. "You're a little rogue," she laughed. "May I wish, once you've married that lovely little girl of yours, that the two of you will be blessed with at least a dozen brown-eyed cubs as handsome as their father?"

"You may, and thank you," Stumbling-Bear purred, stroking his mustache. "Kate, should I give Shorty the wedding gift now?"

"Wedding gift?" I asked. "Stumbling-Bear, you shouldn't have!"

He took a tiny envelope from his cheekpouch and presented it to me. "Here it is, Shorty; and may all your troubles be little ones. Maybe you'd better not open it yet."

"It might be best if he didn't," Kate agreed.

"Hey, what kind of conspiracy is this?" I demanded. "What have you two plotters hatched out together?"

"Well," Stumbling-Bear said, "me and Kate thought I should be your best man, if that's all right with you."

"Fine," I said. "But the Monroe County Justice of the Peace might not approve of a Best Man from Outer Space. They're a conservative lot, J.P.'s."

"Don't be pedestrian, Shorty,"

Stumbling-Bear said. "It's all settled: just ask Kate. You and her and me and my girl will be hitched in a double wedding, and we'll best-man for each other. OK?"

"Sure," I said, without too much conviction. "Have you applied for an Indiana marriage license?"

"Indiana-schmindianal!" Stumbling-Bear snorted. "We're going to be married first class, Shorty. I'll even see to it that the Captain wears his Dress Whites for the ceremony."

"Run that last reel over, slow-motion," I told him. "I've got the feeling something slipped by me just then."

"Richard," Kate broke in, "you said, and I quote, 'I'll go with you anywhere we can afford.' Right, Richard?"

"Unquote," I said. "So?"

"So I reserved us a suite at a hotel highly recommended by our friend Stumbling-Bear," she said. "The rates are surprisingly low."

"The place rates four stars in all the guidebooks," Stumbling-Bear murmured. "Excellent kitchen, remarkable cellars."

"How about getting there?" I asked. "Do we hitchhike, Kate?"

"No, Richard," she said. "We'll use Stumbling-Bear's wedding gift. Our reservations are at the North

T'Cha Honeymoon Hostel; and we'll get there by means of his wonderful present: two round-trip tickets to Procyon III."

I grabbed tight to the glass top of the money-order counter. "I knew you'd be delighted, Shorty," Stumbling-Bear said, twisting his mustache up at the ends till he looked like a Mephistopheles in miniature. "Our weddings will be held as soon as our ship has cleared the Asteroid Belt. That should be about midnight, tonight." He extracted a tiny velvet-covered case from his left cheekpouch and handed it up to me. "Hold tight to this," he cautioned me.

"What is it?" I asked.

"My girl's wedding ring," he said. "Give me Kate's, Shorty. Isn't that the way this best-man racket works?"

"Kate?" I asked, begging her to tell me that we were only going to New York City, or Hong Kong, even.

"Give the man the ring," she said firmly.

I knew I was licked the moment I saw my best man slip Kate's wedding ring into his cheekpouch, holding it handy for the moment the Captain nodded to me, several million miles from now.

