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I.Q.

By MACK REYNOLDS

Illustrator IVIE

In a time when teaching machines and batteries of educational tests seem to be determining the intellectual nobility of the next generation, this story has meaning for all of us.

ON the way over to the Administration offices Professor Roy Thomas McCord was stopped several times by students and colleagues offering congratulations. He tried to protest their prematureness but they brushed his objections aside. They all knew he'd come through.

He'd expected in the period it would take to stroll to Peterson's office to find time to read a few pages of the book of verse he'd brought along, but he was interrupted often enough that he gave up.

A youngster named Doolittle, an earnest chap in Physics who probably was going to flunk out this term, took off his hat and said breathlessly, "Everybody says you've made it, sir."

"Thanks," Roy said. "Every-

body seems to think so but me. Quite the most difficult tests I've ever seen. It should give the I.B.M.s quite a mechanical headache grading them. Good heavens, Doolittle, put your hat back on. Do you think I'm a lady?" He laughed in embarrassment.

Doolittle said earnestly, "Academician. Only the third one this school has produced. And you're hardly more than thirty, sir."

"Well, that's no reason to take your hat off."

"It is for me, sir."

"Oh, get along with you, Doolittle. But thanks, again."

In Peterson's anteroom, Nadine looked up from her desk and beamed at him. "It's all over that you took highest awards, Professor McCord. Or should I say, Academician McCord?"

Roy tried to keep from flush-

ing. "I haven't heard officially, Nadine. But anyway, the name is Roy, if you'll recall."

"Hardly," she grinned back at him. "We can hardly call the school's only living Academician by his first name."

His smile was a bit on the wan side. "I'm not sure I'm going to like it then." She was speaking in jest but there was all too much truth in what she said.

Nadine said, "Superintendent Peterson is waiting for you. Just go right in." She chuckled her soft Nadine laugh. "In fact, sir, I doubt if you'll ever be waiting in this office for an appointment ever, ever, again. Not even a Superintendent of Deans allows an Academician to wait on him."

"Go on with you," Roy said uncomfortably. "And don't call me sir. You make me feel old."

"Your mother called," Nadine said after him. "Said to be sure you didn't forget this afternoon."

"All right," he said over his shoulder. "Thanks, Nadine."

Adam Peterson wasn't ordinarily the type to gush, but today he was absolutely overflowing. Of course, it didn't hurt the school's reputation, nor his, to have produced a scholar of Roy Thomas McCord's aptitudes.

He shook hands drastically.

Roy said, "Well, I suppose your enthusiasm indicates it's official. All the way over here

I've been getting congratulations."

"It's official all right, all right," Peterson glowed. "Sit down, Roy. Here, this chair. Great Scott, man. I suppose I should really call you *sir*."

Roy laughed uncomfortably.

"At any rate, the examinations put you twelfth in the nation. Twelfth! And at the age of . . ."

"Thirty-two," Roy supplied.

"Such a short time!"

Roy took the heavy leathern chair. "Such a long time," he said.

Peterson had hustled over to his small, portable bar and was examining his stock. "A drink, of course. This calls for celebration!"

"Sherry would be fine," Roy said.

Peterson came back with the drinks and handed the new Academician his Spanish wine. The usually glum faced Superintendent of Deans was the one expressing the elation he evidently expected in the other. He took his own chair and beamed. "*Salud!*" he said.

Roy muttered a standard response and sipped at the wine.

Peterson said, "What do you mean, such a long time?"

Roy made a wry face, in self deprecation. "Twenty-five years," he said. And then, with seeming non-relevancy, "Youth."

The older man frowned at him.



"Great Scott, man, you've reached one of the highest points possible in the Educational Sequence."

Roy looked down into his glass of wine. "Would you believe me if I told you that I wish I'd dropped out somewhere back along the line?"

"Dropped out?" Peterson didn't understand.

The new Academician seemed to change subjects. He said, "By the way, how did I do in Creative Ability?"

Peterson scowled. "Well, you know, Roy, not even an Academician is free to check the exact result of tests. Not unless, of course, it's his task-field. It might give him an unfair advantage in further examinations."

"I know," Roy said wearily. "I just meant broadly. In relation to my other ratings."

Peterson said uncomfortably, "Actually, it was your weakest, Roy . . ."

The Academician winced.

". . . with Mathematical Aptitude strongest. Somewhat to my surprise, your M. A. was the nation's highest."

"Why surprise?" Roy said, depressed.

The older man shifted bulky shoulders. "Well, your work here while adequate, of course—always adequate, of course—has never shown the absolute genius in the field that your aptitude would indicate."

It was Roy's turn to shrug. "Well, as you know, aptitude doesn't mean that you will ever use it. Frankly, mathematics bore me."

"And me," Peterson chuckled. "But, to get on to business. I suppose we shall have to provide you with a larger suite of offices. You'll be able to take over some of the social duties of the faculty officers, Roy. In fact, there's a delegation from . . ."

Roy interrupted. "I don't suppose there's any manner in which I could drop away." His tone indicated that he didn't expect an affirmative answer.

Peterson's enthusiasm fell off in one split second. He all but gaped. "Drop away!" he blurted. "You mean leave the university? Drop away! You're considering deserting us for another school? Great Scott, Roy . . ."

Roy McCord was shaking his head. "Not just this school, Adam, education as a field. My rank entitles me to retirement at my own discretion."

"Retirement! You're not even forty years of age! Roy, the strain has been too much. You need a vacation. Retirement! Great Scott . . ." The Superintendent was on his feet again. He grabbed the sherry bottle from the bar, hurriedly refilled the other's glass. "A vacation! Perhaps to Common Europe. You'll be feted in every univer-

sity on the continent. An Academician at the age of thirty-two. The Education Sequence of Europe will be at your feet."

"That's what I'm afraid of," Roy said bitterly. "I'd never see anything except the insides of schools, never talk to anybody but a bunch of doddering old scholars."

PETERSON sank back into his chair again, aghast. "Roy! What are you saying? You sound as though you have no affection for your Sequence."

Roy McCord snorted. "Frankly, I haven't. Is that unknown?"

The Superintendent collected himself. "Not unknown, of course, but certainly rare. From your earliest youth you've been carefully tested, rated, channelled in the direction your aptitudes indicated. Had you been mechanically inclined, you would have eventually wound up in a Sequence where your abilities would have best suited you and the nation. Had you shown aptitude for medicine you would have eventually been channelled into that Sequence, finally gaining the level your competence permitted."

Roy said bitterly, "And had my Creative Ability so indicated, I might have wound up a poet."

Peterson said uncomfortably, "Actually, your Creative Ability

is high, not fantastically so, but quite high. It's just that it is so eclipsed by your other aptitudes, Roy. But, I don't understand. You've reached the heights in our Sequence, in the field of education. What would you rather do?"

"I think I would rather be a poet than the world's most celebrated scholar, Adam."

"A poet!" The other grunted sceptically. "Your aptitudes indicate that even had you gone into the artistic field, your work would hardly startle the world."

"Nor would I expect it to, or necessarily want it to. Why must the greatest painters work in oil; what is wrong with the sketch, the watercolor? Listen." He took up the book he had been carrying under his arm and read.

"Jenny kissed me when we met,

*Jumping from the chair
she sat in.*

*Fate, you thief, who loves
to get*

*Sweets into your list, put
that in.*

*Say I'm weary, say I'm sad,
Say that health and
wealth have missed me.*

*Say I'm growing old, but
add,*

Jenny kissed me."

"Very sweet," Peterson nodded. "Seems to me I recall it from my own student days, but I forget the poet."

"Leigh Hunt," Roy said. "A little poet, eclipsed by his contemporaries, Keats, Shelley, Byron. But, frankly, I prefer the little poets." He added softly, "I would prefer to be an Emily Dickinson, a Stephen Crane, a Thomas Hood."

"Look here," Adam Peterson said. "Let's face reality. All of us have hobbies, methods of relaxing from our work. Write your *little* poems in your leisure hours. Why not? But your *field* is education, and you are a phenomenon in it."

Roy McCord was shaking his head. "You can't. Or, at least, I can't. You need relaxation. Your mind free of all except your creative urge. You need to be able to spend long hours in the shade of a tree, or on a shell strewn beach, or perhaps in watching without distraction of any sort the twig of a maple, ridged inch deep in the pearl of snow. If I were to be a poet, I would have to be *all* poet. Just as today I am all scholar."

Peterson was on his feet and pacing. "See here, Academician McCord. You can't drop out of this Sequence at your age. You owe it to your fellows, to society, to continue."

Roy looked at him flatly. "I do?"

Peterson said, "I'm going to reiterate some truths which you already know, but which per-

haps need repeating. For the first time in the history of civilization, man has achieved a society in which he assumes his place according to his ability and by no other means. There is no ruling property class, no priesthood, no militaristic state to arbitrarily decide our status. It makes no difference who your parents were, nor how much treasure you might have accumulated by whatever means; you take your position in our culture according to your aptitudes."

"No test is perfect," Roy muttered.

"Of course, and that is why we continually work to improve them. Actually, they have reached a high level of competence. The tests are compiled by men but are given and evaluated by machine, and there have been no known cases of mistakes within recent memory. Roy, this system works, and it's good. In the past, a man had status in his culture based on the most fantastic of reasons. Prime among them was the possession of money, possibly the greatest status symbol of all. Also ranking high was the position in society of your parents and relatives. The extreme example of this, of course, was the feudalistic nobilities in Europe and elsewhere, but it also existed in the United States especially in New England and the South.

"Today? Today, Roy, you achieve status by your own abilities. Long ago man solved the problem of the production of abundance. There is no poverty, everyone possesses all he needs. We can no longer award our geniuses, our heroes, with wealth—since there is wealth for all. We honor them, instead, with rank. Each man contributes to society what he can and those who can contribute more, through their greater abilities, their genius, are awarded with such titles as Doctor, Supervisor, Superintendent, or, in our own Educational Sequence, Academician."

The Supervisor of Deans went on. "You have been so highly honored, Roy McCord, because our tests indicate your aptitudes as high as any. But for you now, after twenty-five years of continual studies, to drop away and not utilize your abilities would be a betrayal of the hundreds of thousands, the millions of our citizens who, because their aptitudes were less than your own, work in the mines, in the mills, and in the fields. They contribute their share to society so that persons such as you and me, in a different and possibly gentler Sequence, may eat, be clothed and sheltered."

Peterson summed it up. "You have the *right* to retire on your rank at this stage, Academician

Roy McCord. But I don't think you will be able to do so."

Roy stood up wearily. "No, I suppose you're right," he said. He looked down at the book of verse and said, irrelevantly, "I've often wondered what the Acropolis looked like by moonlight."

AS he left the Superintendent's office, Nadine said to him, "Your mother called again, Roy . . . ah, Academician McCord. She said to remind you that . . ."

"I know, I know," Roy said almost tartly. "She's having in all her friends and neighbors for a celebration."

Nadine looked up at him. "Well, I'm not surprised. How many of her friends have a son who has won your honors?"

Roy sighed. "Yes, and how she revels in it. It was bad enough with my Doctor's degree. But now!"

Nadine laughed at him. "Go and take your medicine, Hero."

He grinned ruefully in response and left.

His father met him at the door of their suburban house. Actually, as a Senior Technician Warren McCord wouldn't ordinarily have resided in this part of the city. Even in this advanced society, rank had its prerogatives; perhaps few, compared to cultures of the past, but still prerogatives. One of them was to segregate itself, and that, of course, was un-

derstandable. An artist who had reached the heights found his most compatible companionship among doctors, scientists, educators who had achieved the equivalent in their own fields.

This was a neighborhood that reeked with prestige, and the McCord family resided here as a result of Roy's fantastic progress in the Educational Sequence.

Actually, Roy McCord would have preferred to have lived in a more Bohemian quarter where he might have found time occasionally to associate with the off-trail artists who were his envy. Each culture, and each generation of that culture, has its equivalent of a Lost Generation, a *beatnik* element, or its Angry Young Men. Within himself, Roy didn't find it difficult to identify with them. Whenever he paused in his work to realize this, he had to smile in deprecation. What would Peterson think if he knew it; and, above all, what would Dora McCord, Roy's mother, think?

Warren McCord, a man of not quite sixty, looked an older version of his son. There was the same weary, rueful—perhaps wistful—expression that so easily broke into a smile for another's sake, but failed to indicate happiness within.

He grinned sourly at Roy now. "You're in for it," he said. "Every biddy your mother has

known for the past thirty years—ever since you were born—is in the garden."

"Good Lord," Roy muttered.

His father looked at him oddly. "Congratulations, son." He held out a hand to shake. "You don't seem overly pleased by your accomplishment."

Roy said irritably, "Accomplishment? What accomplishment? The only thing that's happened is that the grading computers have informed the Educational Sequence that I have one of the highest aptitudes in the field. That doesn't mean I've accomplished anything."

His father looked away, as though embarrassed. He cleared his throat and said, "No one in your family, on either side, has ever attained such an honor."

Roy felt contrition, although he didn't exactly know why. "Well," he said, "I hope that I'm able to deliver something in keeping with what those damn testing machines seem to think I'm capable of."

Warren McCord said, "You don't really have to worry about that, you know. Not really. The computers might indicate a man has great aptitude for scientific research and he might be placed in a position to utilize his abilities—but that doesn't necessarily mean he'll come up with some startling new discovery. It all works on percentages."

"I suppose so," Roy sighed. "Well, Dad, let's go face the celebrity hunters."

IN the garden, Dora McCord was beaming with a radiance that almost made up to Roy for the grind of the afternoon. Long years ago he'd explained to himself that she was a status seeker of a type that should have become extinct a century or so earlier. All her life she'd been depressed by the lack of her husband's ability to rise above the rank of Senior Technician. Actually, Roy suspected his father had gone further than his real abilities in achieving even that rank. Only by exertion far beyond the call of duty, and far beyond that of his fellows, had the elder McCord achieved to Senior Technician. He was proud of the attainment, small as it was.

But not Dora McCord. Roy's frenetic and lovable mother was a worshipper of the prestiged. She never made a mistake in calling a man by his correct title, never failed to attend local ceremonies honoring an attainment, and most of her reading was confined to contemporary biography. It had been a cruel blow to her that the man she loved was simply not cut out to reach the highest positions of the nation. A cruel blow.

Now she hustled Roy around

like a destroyer convoying a carrier. Her introduction varied little. "My son, the Academician Roy Thomas McCord," or "May I present our family's new Academician . . ." As though, Roy told himself wryly, family members of that rank were a common occurrence. Actually, of course, there weren't another half dozen men of his status, in whatever field, in this city of millions.

After an hour or two of this battering, his father got him to one side long enough for a glass of sparkling wine.

Warren McCord said, "Your mother is a remarkable woman, Roy."

Roy swallowed the wine, put the glass down and wiped his forehead with a handkerchief. "Thank heavens there's no further for me to go," he growled.

"No," his father said thoughtfully. "Academician is about it, unless you went into national administration."

"Um-m-m," Roy said. "He looked at his father and frowned. "Dad, when are you going to knock off?"

"Knock off?"

Roy said, "You're pushing sixty. You could have retired ten years ago. Could have moved to a gentler climate than this."

His father shifted his eyes, poured them both another glass of the cold, sparkling wine. "I

suppose I should. In the past, well, I think your mother would have hated not to be here as you continued your advances in your Sequence, Roy. And although I was never able to meet the grade, in your mother's eyes, I've certainly not begrudged her the glory of seeing you do it."

Roy looked at him. "You love her, don't you Dad?"

Warren McCord laughed with characteristic wryness. "Yes. She's a vain little thing, a pusher. An earlier and less kindly era would have labeled her a social climber. But, to answer your question—yes, son, as far back as I can remember, I have loved your mother."

He switched subjects. "With this new rank, what will your duties be, Roy?"

Roy McCord shrugged distastefully. "Showing off for the university, for the most part, I suppose. Attending an endless number of banquets, conferences, congresses and what not. Heavens knows, my field is one where you're not hard pushed to prove the aptitudes the grading computers rate you." He snorted. "Now you're different. As a Senior Technician, the only possible way you could attain your rank is by having it on the ball, right on the job. You can't fake there, surrounded by your fellows."

His father said uncomfortably,

"It's not a very high rank." He scowled, then added, "You don't seem very happy about this new position, Roy."

"Why should I be?" the other grunted. "Lots of prestige, which turns out to be something that doesn't particularly interest me, but little, if any, satisfaction in the work."

His father was still scowling. "But what would you rather do?"

Roy shrugged it off. "I don't know. I suppose I'd like to take a hiking tour of the wine provinces of France and Spain." He looked down into his glass. "See where this product comes from. The vineyards, the bodegas. Perhaps write about it a little."

His father was staring at him. "You know, I'm not sure we've ever really gotten to know each other very well, son. I . . . I never went very high in my Sequence, but I've always liked the work. You've climbed right to the top, but you evidently hate it. Somehow, I never really realized that."

He was obviously depressed.

Roy chuckled ruefully, "Well, there's nothing you could do about it, Dad. I have a confession to make to you. All my life I've wanted to be a writer. Not a big name, not a high prestige author of the type we've got in this neighborhood, but an easy going, you might even say lazy, poet observing the remnants of

nature that man has still left on this globe of ours and trying to get the feeling of it down on paper."

His father was staring at him, with a sadness in his eyes.

Roy laughed again, to cover. "I suppose I've had too much of this wine. At any rate, to get back to you. So you think you might retire at last? Those I.B.M. machines can do without you, Dad. Nobody is indispensable."

"Yes, I suppose you're right," his father said, something still wrong with his voice and his eyes.

Dora McCord came sweeping up with one of the neighbors in tow. "Roy, dear," she said fondly, "Mrs. Worthington, you know, her husband is Doctor Worthington, wants to congratulate you."

Roy muttered banalities in answer to those he heard.

Mrs. Worthington said smilingly, "Isn't it amazing what genetics will do? Here we have a simple mechanic and his son achieves to one of the highest ranks in the field of education."

Roy saw his father wince, and his mother bridle.

Roy said flatly, "Being a Senior Technician in charge of repair of some of the most complicated computing machines in the country is hardly the work of a simple mechanic, Mrs. Worthington.

I doubt very much whether either your husband or I could do more than make fools of ourselves were we exposed to the tasks involved in repairing such equipment."

"Please don't misunderstand," she stammered uneasily.

"We didn't misunderstand," Dora McCord said.

It was at that split second that the realization came to Roy Thomas McCord.

IN the morning he gave Nadine a ring and when her face lit up the screen he said to her, "Nadine, I don't want to talk to him myself—he probably has a dozen things for me today ranging from talks with the TV press to lectures to students and faculty on the necessity of buckling down and raising the standards of the university—but I want you to tell Superintendent Peterson I won't be in today."

"Won't be in!" Nadine wailed. "But, Academician McCord, we're already swamped. The Civil-Mayor has a luncheon . . ."

"Call me Roy," Roy said, "and look here, I'm going to phone you again later in the day and ask you one of two questions."

"One of two questions?" she said vaguely.

"Yes. It will either be, how about having dinner with me tonight? or, will you marry me?"

She blinked at him.



She said finally, "I don't think that's funny, Roy. Any woman in the country would be proud to have dinner with you—or marry you. On the face of it, I'm only a Senior Effective."

"An impressive rank, considering your youth," Roy said definitely. "I'll be calling you later." He broke the connection.

At the Bureau of Records, Academician Roy Thomas McCord was received with a flutter. The secretary of Superintendent Frol Plovdiv hastened to explain that her superior was in conference but that it wasn't important and she'd immediately inform him of the Academician's presence.

Roy said mildly that he could wait.

She wouldn't hear of it. The Superintendent would be indignant.

He was in the other's office within minutes.

Superintendent Plovdiv was a man in his early middle years and reminded Roy of Adam Peterson. Was there something in these administrative positions that called for such types? He looked like a man who would be difficult to work under but who'd be the height of cooperativeness with his equals in rank, and almost, not quite, subservient to his superiors.

He congratulated Roy with booming sincerity.

Roy came directly to the point as soon as they were both seated. He said, "I've developed an interest in the nation's aptitude tests and although I am not yet too clear in my own mind just what my possible investigations will consist of, I'd like to ask your cooperation."

"Our facilities are all yours," Plovdiv gushed. "Could I assign you an assistant? Someone to devote full time to your needs for as long as you require."

"Perhaps that would be a good idea," Roy said. "However, would you have the time, right now, for some preliminary questions I'd like to ask?"

"I'll be honored to make time, sir."

Roy continued thoughtfully. "Of course, in my field we are already acquainted with the nature of the aptitude tests. In fact, the Educational Sequence composes many of these. However, it has not been my own particular specialization and I would like to go further into the matter. Since at this time I am rather full of my own recent examinations, I think that might be a good point at which to begin."

Plovdiv pursed his lips. "Of course."

"Now I understand," Roy said, "the security involved in the Bureau of Records. Your discretion is justly famed."

Frol Plovdiv was expansive. "In your case, my dear Academician, ordinary precautions obviously won't apply, especially since you are aiming your researches in this direction."

Roy nodded his thanks. "Then I wonder if I could ask some questions about my own record?"

Plovdiv was already flicking a switch. "Ruth. A precis of Academician McCord's aptitude records. Immediately, Ruth."

The communicator said, "Immediately, Superintendent."

While they waited, Frol Plovdiv leaned back in his chair. "It's quite an honor to have an Academician in our city," he said.

Roy smiled wryly. "What is there to say to that? In the old days, to obtain the respect of his fellows, a man achieved something in whatever his field might be. Today, he periodically takes machine given tests and is acclaimed according to how some highly intricate computers grade him."

The Superintendent smiled. "The way you put it, the old system seems more reasonable."

"Of course, there are ramifications," Roy admitted. "In the old days, many a genius must have lived out his life in squalor, never to come in contact with the particular field in which his aptitudes lay." He added, musingly, "I wonder how many po-

tential poets died in the textile slums of Birmingham while *Lord Byron* and *Baron Shelley* were able to pursue their art in security and even luxury."

"That's the point," Plovdiv nodded. "In the past, you might become a monarch of an Empire as large as England's simply because your father before you held the position. You might become a general, or an admiral, because your family wielded enough influence to send you to the nation's military academy. You might become head of a great industry, because you inherited wealth. You might attend one of the world's great universities simply because your family was born into a high status group."

Ruth entered at that point with a bound file and handed it to the Superintendent. She smiled awkwardly at Roy McCord, did everything short of dropping a curtsy, and returned to her own office.

Plovdiv laughed tolerantly. "I'm afraid you're quite the highest ranking citizen Ruth has ever seen, Academician. She'll probably ask for your autograph as you leave." He looked down at the papers before him. "Now then, what did you wish to know?"

Roy pursed his lips. "For instance, my Creative Ability records."

Plovdiv flicked pages. "Possibly you know, Creative Ability is rated on one of the older systems. Average is 100; 100 to 110 is Good; 110 to 120 is Very Good; 120 to 130 is Superior; 130 to 140 is Very Superior; and above 140 is Gifted. We don't particularly like the term genius, it has been widely misused."

"Um-m-m," Roy said. "And my rating?"

Plovdiv cleared his throat. "Theoretically, of course, this information shouldn't be available to you."

"Of course."

Plovdiv said, "It's your lowest rating, Academician McCord. You have a Creative Ability aptitude of 124."

"I see," Roy said. "And, ordinarily, suppose as a youth I had decided to go into the arts? To study, say, writing? Perhaps verse."

"With that aptitude, my dear sir, you would have had no difficulty whatsoever in beginning as an Apprentice Effective in the arts." He laughed sourly. "I would say that our aptitude tests are least accurate in this field. We do what we can, but we are continually betrayed when a great composition is written by someone with supposedly little aptitude for music, or a whole new school of painting developed by someone who our machines would contend should be

putting second coats on barns."

Roy said slowly, "And my other grades?"

The Superintendent shrugged hugely. "My dear Academician, you are gifted in every other test we have devised."

"Every one?" Roy McCord was somewhat taken aback.

"You are quite a phenomenon," the other nodded.

"And how far back do the records you have there go?"

"Certainly you must know that your tests are from earliest childhood."

"And even then?"

"By your fourth year it was definitely seen that your case was quite unique and you ultimately due for the nation's highest honors."

"I see," Roy said. "Ah, I'd like to think further about this before going on. I wonder if I could take advantage of your earlier offer and have assigned to me a guide to take me about the establishment?"

"Immediately," Superintendent Plovdiv said. He flicked a switch again.

HE let the bright young Junior Supervisor give him the complete treatment. Up one corridor, down another. Through this department, through that. Down long banks of impressive, unbelievable looking machinery. Long files of punched cards, end-

less cans of tapes. Chattering automatic typers. Endless rows of Effective and Junior Effectives manually punching cards, reproducing them, interpreting them, sorting and collating them.

Roy McCord allowed himself the comments he assumed were standard. In fact, after an hour or two his guide had run the gauntlet from awe at the other's standing, to a slightly tolerant superiority. Each man to his own field, Roy thought wryly.

Finally, the new Academician said to the other, "I wonder if it would be possible for you to leave me on my own for a time?"

"On your own?" the Junior Supervisor said blankly.

Roy smiled at him. "I'd like to observe the Electives at work without them being so self-conscious. When they see you conducting me they freeze up. Obviously, I'm a—what was the old term?—VIP, being given the royal treatment."

"I see what you mean," the guide said. "Well, let's see, the Superintendent said to treat anything you request as an order from him. I'll be in the cafeteria when you need me again."

"Fine," Roy said. "And thanks."

The other went off and Roy McCord took up his wanderings again. From time to time he made an inquiry from one of the Effectives.

Finally he found him.

"Hello, Dad," Roy said.

Warren McCord looked up from his work, startled. "Why, Roy. What are you doing here?"

Roy said, "No use fencing around at this late date, Dad. I've discovered why you failed to retire almost ten years ago, when you were first eligible."

His father came to his feet, from the machine he'd been dabbling with, and cleaned his hands with a bit of waste. He looked at Roy warily.

"Oh?" he said.

Roy said, "I'm not going to ask you *how*, I assume I wouldn't understand even if you told me. I've seen enough here to realize that probably not one citizen in a thousand has even the faintest idea of the complexity of it all. But I would like to be sure I know *why*."

Warren McCord said wearily, "I suppose I could say something stupid such as I don't know what you're talking about, but as you say, it's rather late in the game to fence around."

"But *why*? I think I know, I just want to be sure."

His father said, "I suppose I could blame it all on your mother, Son. Say that I did it all for her so that she'd enjoy the prestige I wasn't ever able to bring the family." The older man hesitated. "But that's not all. It was for me too. I worked hard to get

no further than I am. But what was it Mrs. Worthington called me? A simple mechanic."

Roy said bitterly, "At least you deserve your rank, Senior Technician. It's not to be scorned. What do I really deserve, Dad?"

His father looked miserable. His eyes went to the floor. "Actually, your aptitudes are quite high, Roy. I wouldn't have dared to tinker, otherwise you would have been shown up."

Roy McCord took a deep breath and said tightly. "Just one thing. My Creative Aptitude. How do I rate there—really?"

His father scowled at him, his eyes still wary. "Actually, that's the one test I never messed with, Son. It's your highest. I figured if I made you a genius in *everything* it might look suspicious."

Roy McCord's face broke into a bloom of pleasure. "That's fine," he said, "that's just fine."

His father looked at him, astonished.

Warren McCord began to gush an incoherent apology, but his boy took him firmly by the arm. "Listen, Dad, any confessions to the authorities at this point wouldn't accomplish anything, and might do a great deal of harm to innocent people—including mother. Now listen to me.

"Tomorrow I want you to apply for retirement. What you do

then is up to you. You've really always wanted to spend your final years in the South. Possibly that's what you'll do."

"And you?" his father said anxiously.

"I'm going to drop out of the Education Sequence. Drop all my academic honors and make a new start. I'll tell you about it later." He grinned again at the old man. "Don't worry about it. I'm certainly not."

He started down the line of chattering I.B.M. machines, saying happily over his shoulder, "See you later, Dad. I've got some business."

NADINE looked up from her auto-typer and smiled her Nadine smile at him. "You were tight this morning, Academician McCord," she accused. "You didn't know what you were saying. Your mother must have had quite a celebration for you last night."

He said, "Not as big as the one you and I are going to have

tonight, and the name is Roy."

"Ah, ha," she said, keeping it light. "So that's the question you decided to ask—have dinner with you. You can hardly expect a Senior Effective to be galavanting around with an Academician. What would people say? You'd be accused of pulling your rank to overwhelm a poor . . ."

Roy said, grinning mockingly at her, "That's why I'm resigning my Educational Sequence prerogatives. Tonight, at dinner, under the proper romantic setting, I'm going to propose to you. But I'm giving you fair warning, it's going to be a step-down for you. By that time, I'll be a lowly Apprentice Effective in the Creative Arts Sequence."

She blinked at him.

His face went thoughtful. "We'll have to think about the honeymoon. What do you say the South Seas, or perhaps Greece? You know, I always wanted to see the Acropolis by moonlight."

THE END