

SCIENCE FICTION

STORIES

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Demagoguery can be described as an art, rather than a science. True, some have gone about it in a more or less scientific manner, calculating their every move and knowing exactly what they were doing — and why. But a man who uses emotions without understanding them has a particular vulnerability . . .



Peace Agent

by M. C. PEASE

T HE TOWN was quiet, hushed in the warm darkness that can come to New England even as early as March fifteenth. Even the St. Patrick's Day banners for the day after next were still

and limp. But it was quieter than that, quieter than a mill-town should be at eleven o'clock at night, still with an ominous waiting.

In the darkened doorway of a bar, the man, Francis O'Keefe, stood listening to the town. The stray gleam of a street light shone across his face, throwing it into hard relief. A trick, of the light, perhaps—the stamp of toughness that was on his face—but yet not wholly so. The poster in the window alongside him showing the face of the candidate in the coming special election was not made hard by the light. It, even in this light, still seemed that of a little man.

The man in the doorway was not tall and he looked shorter than he was, for the silhouette of his shoulders was out of proportion to his height. He stood at ease, and yet in perfect balance, ready for whatever might occur. He was not tall, but he was not a little man.

In the distance there was a sound, and the man's head turned towards it. A murmuring, inarticulate, yet filled with threat; he knew it for what it was, for he had heard it before in other cities. The mob! No different in this town, or this year of 1992, than in any other town or year. The cry-of-the-beast of man, without form and without shape—with only purpose, blind unthinking purpose. He looked towards the sound and his eyes became watchful.

A man came lumbering down the street on the other side. Seeing Francis standing there, he waved his arm without slowing and shouted, "Come on!" But Francis made no move or answer, and then, after running a few more yards, the man stopped and stood a moment uncertain. Then slowly he came across the street until he stood some ten feet away. "Come on!" he said, his voice rising. "We're moving in on a clan down there; let's go."

"I figured as much," Francis answered noncommittally. His voice had a touch of the brogue in it. He made no move.

"Well, are you coming or not?" the man asked, hunching himself forward.

"And why should I be coming with you?" Francis asked, his voice matter-of-fact.

"What are you?" the man asked, his voice turning into a growl. "A clansman?" He took a step forward.

"I am Francis O'Keefe, and I am myself," he answered; "I am no clansman, but neither do I run with the mob—for I am my own man and I shall remain so." His voice was calm and steady and he rocked just a trifle forward on his toes.

"Yeah?" the other man said. "So you're Francis O'Keefe and to

hell with you. Are you for or against the clans? Speak up or I'll knock your teeth down your throat."

Frank laughed and it had a genuine ring to it. "I'm a peacable man, but if it's a fight you want, I'll be happy to oblige. I'm thinking I need a bit of a workout. But as for your question, I'll tell you this. I answer to no man when he speaks with his words in his throat. So come at me, or go run with the jackals; 'tis you will cast the die." He stood easy, but balanced lightly, ready for what might come.

The man edged forward, a growl in his throat. But as he came closer, he slowed, apparently not liking what he saw. After a moment's thought he straightened up and shrugged. "There are better things afoot than tending to the likes of you. I'll see you later." He turned and hurried off down the street.

Francis laughed aloud again, with a mocking note to it this time, but said nothing to answer the other man. Instead, he stepped back a pace so even his face was in darkness. Once more he relaxed to a watching attitude, noting grimly that he knew the basic pattern here. He could have guessed—and had so guessed—that it was the anti-clans against the clans, but now he knew it for a fact. While pleased with the thought of violence, he did not enjoy the knowledge that its cause was evil.

The voice of the mob was louder now, he noted; and there was a rising pitch to it like dogs as the scent grows stronger.

THERE WAS a sound at the end of the street, and Frank moved a step to see what it was, still keeping himself in shadow. A girl stood there, clad in the usual shorts and shirt, poised for flight, but coolly considering her route. She was a lithe young girl, with golden hair that swirled around her head as she turned to look in different directions. She was breathing hard, and her shoulders drooped from weariness. There was fear on her face that tensed the lines of a mouth that should have been soft. Deep fear, but not yet panic.

With a swift turn that was almost a shrug, she started running down the street towards Francis. She did not see him, he knew, and he wondered easily what she would do if she did. He smiled to himself, where only the night could see, for she made a pretty picture as her long legs carried her fleetly.

He could, he thought, quite simply save her from the mob that, by

the sounds, would soon reach the corner. Let her pass him by and then run out, back towards the corner from which she had come. It would be a simple thing to carry the mob in the wrong direction; simple, but much too simple.

With a sudden motion he stepped out just as she was passing and grabbed her arm. Letting her own momentum swing her around into the doorway, he held her there. She fought, silently, but hard, wrenching to free her arm, slashing at his face and kicking at his shins. In self-protection as much as anything, he grabbed her around the waist, pulling her tightly to him. "Be quiet, you fool," he whispered.

When she still struggled and tried to bite him, he slapped her hard across the mouth with his free hand. "Stop it," he grated, "or I'll clip you. You might as well trust me, for the jackals are almost here." In the dimness he could feel her sudden tremble, but she did stop struggling.

Behind him there was the sound of many running feet. "Hey bud," one of them called, "did you see a girl come by this way? A little yellow-haired babe with long legs?"

Francis swung around, carefully, so as to keep firm hold on the girl, and also to move her into the deeper shadows. "A girl?" he asked. Then he chuckled. "The girls run toward, not by, Francis O'Keefe."

The whole mob was milling around, with men running to the corners to look with wild and angry eyes and shouting curses down the streets. The women in the mob, their hair flying like snakes around their heads, were cursing the men and hunting the alleys and stoops.

Francis looked down into the shadows alongside him and said in a normal voice, "Come on, babe, this is no place for us." Without waiting for her answer, he twisted her around and pushed her through the door into the bar. Following her with a quickness that was not visible, he steered her into a booth and sat down alongside. Pulling coins out of his pocket, he reached across her to the dispenser and quickly dialed four bottles of beer. Two of them he poured down the disposal unit and with the other two, he filled two glasses, letting some slop over the table.

"You'd best be doing something with that hair," he ordered in a low voice. "It's like a flag the way it is." Numbly she nodded and quickly bunched it up, pulling pins from her belt to hold it. Critically Francis looked at her. "Okay," he finally said. "Only lose the frightened fawn look; make believe you're happy."



By the time the mob came pushing in the door, Francis was sprawled out from the seat with his arm draped carelessly across the girl's shoulder and his beer half finished. And when one voice cried out, "That looks like her," he only looked up slowly as if from curiosity. When he saw a group of tough-faced men crowding in to the edge of the booth, he raised his eyebrows.

One man, about six and a-half feet tall and built like a bull, stepped out, as if the spokesman. His face was hard with small ridges of scar tissue distorting it. "That wench looks like the one we're after," he growled; "bring her out here and let me look at her."

Francis stood up with an easy motion and stood there a moment balanced on his feet. "It's a look at the wench you want, is it?" he asked. "Well I am Francis O'Keefe. I am a peaceable man but I do not give up my girl to the wandering eye of whatever hoodlum asks for the privilege."

"Get her out here," the giant snarled, reaching forward past Francis. Francis half smiled, and, a beer bottle in his hand cracked the giant's elbow sharply. The giant jumped back. His eyes glared; he fumbled in his back pocket, and there was the gleam of a knife.

Frank let the bottle swing back. It hit the metalloid table top and shattered leaving the neck in his hand with jagged splinters of glass on it. "Is it a fight you want," he asked, "or will you learn the respect that is due to Francis O'Keefe?" There was a smile on his lips and his eyes danced and he moved about six inches out from the table.

THE GIANT hesitated, looking around to see the crowd about him. The room was still, waiting tensely. This was the moment of crisis and they all knew it. The mob has a courage of its own, but in the narrow room of the bar, the mob did not exist—only individuals. These men, bred in the gutter, living on the streets, had strength of their own. But they had been thinking as a mob, and were not at the moment ready to face a *fight* as individuals. In the next moment, they might be, but at this instant they were not.

A small, self-important chap pushed forward. A big cigar dominated his face and waved as he talked: "Now, look here, there's no need to get huffy," he said to Francis. "We're looking for a clangirl." The word, in his mouth, was a dirty one. "All we want to know is whether your girl there is her or not."

"The Babe, here, is my girl," Francis answered; "and as for what you may or may not want, that is your business, not mine."

"We'll make it your business," the giant growled.

The little guy looked unhappy. "Please gentlemen," he said. "Can't we settle this except by a barroom brawl? Somebody's liable to get hurt."

"Yeah, they sure are," the giant muttered, glaring at Frank, who smiled back.

"Who are you, anyway?" the little guy asked. "I don't know you. I mean, as far as we know, you might be a clansman yourself."

With a contemptuous shrug, Francis reached in his pocket with his left hand and pulled out a folder. Flipping it open, he leaned back against the table and held it out for them to see.

The little guy leaned forward to read it, the cigar bobbing up and down in his mouth. The big chap stared a moment longer at Francis, then moved his eyes to glance at the folder. He looked surprised and hesitated for a moment. Finally, after a last hard glare at Francis, he grunted and turned to shoulder his way out. The other men also glanced at the folder, and then silently followed him out. When they were gone, Francis sat back down in his seat and coolly drank his beer.

The girl sat staring at her hands until she finished trembling. Then she looked up and asked in a shaky voice, "Who are you, anyway? What did you show them?"

"Getting your courage back, are you?" Francis smiled at her. "Good. Me? I am Francis O'Keefe; and what I showed them was my card as Agent of the Census Bureau."

Her eyes widened and she jumped slightly. "The Census Bureau?" Years before the Census Bureau had been established to count the people. Then, as the country developed, they began to count other things—houses and television sets and all the things that industry needed to know about. And finally, they began to count opinions, serving as the one source of information that the government could count on being incorruptible and free from influence by lobby or propaganda.

Because it must remain free, its agents were carefully chosen to be the kind that thought their own thoughts and demanded their own right to see and to decide. Despising any efforts to seduce them by bribery, pressure, or sentimentality, they stood alone, watching with interest and amusement, but free of ties except to themselves and to the whole of mankind. Their reputation was that of hardbitten, lonely men, contemptuous alike of monogamistic marriage and of the clans,

watching but not interfering. Aware, no doubt, that the two philosophies of living had split the world in two; seeing the crisis that was building in the world; but taking no part on either side and only watching and reporting with cynical detachment.

The girl was not at all surprised that the mob had taken the fact that he was an agent for the Census Bureau as certain proof that she was not who they sought. She was herself astounded that he had been willing to interfere for her. "But...but, then why..." she stammered.

"Why did I cut myself in?" he asked. "Because I am myself and I make my own rules. Aye, and it would have been a good scrap, too, if that fool with the cigar had not interfered. And what, by the way, is this all about?"

"You don't...know?" she asked.

"Not me," he said. "I just got in this afternoon; been way down in Texas."

"Oh!" She thought a moment. "Nothing very unusual, I guess." Her voice was bitter. "There's this mill here that's always been a free one. Wouldn't even talk to the clans; run by a guy that swore he'd rather die first. So finally he did. His heirs thought they'd rather make money. So this afternoon they signed up the Schreib clan to take over one line, and announced they were going to try it out and hire other clans if it worked."

FRANCIS knew the pattern. In the past twenty years it had happened time and again. The clan was the logical social unit for a mass production plant, not the individual; the individual got lost. Submerged in the detail of one small operation, he lost his self respect—felt himself a pawn. His morale went down, and absenteeism, carelessness, bitterness were the symptoms; mass unions, slow-downs and strikes were the results.

But the clans were the answer. With a whole group of people united with emotional, economic and social bonds into a single structure, they were large enough to take over whole lines or operations. They were large enough and important enough to have significant identity in the largest business—and yet, small enough to give identity within the clan to the individual. Working on a contract basis, they could promise the management to get the work done on time and for a given price. The idea, now only about thirty years old, was successful, and the clans were steadily taking over.

It was a revolution but it was an often bloody one. The general people, those who were often grouped as the "lower class", resented the clans. They saw the clans taking over; they sensed that the forces of history were defeating them; they called the clans immoral and were savagely resentful.

"So the people moved against the Schreib clan, eh?" Frank asked. "It is an old pattern, except this seemed more violent than usual. It sounded like a lynching party that was after you."

"I guess it was," the girl said. "I tried to rescue the Schreib children—tricked the mob and got the kids away. Called them a few nasty names to do it, so they'd come after me. Guess I overdid it, a bit." She laughed ruefully.

"Oh, you're not a Schreib?" he asked.

"I'm sorry," she chuckled. "No, I'm in the O'Brian clan; Lucy's the name."

Francis bowed from the waist. "And pleased I am to meet you, Babe—for it is Babe that I will call you. 'Twill not remind me of your clan, but of yourself; and so I would have it. I have acted, not for the clan, but for yourself who are a very pretty girl. And I will keep it so."

This, he thought, was the hard and dangerous way to meet a girl, and he smiled to himself at the thought. He had always been one to do things the hard way. And besides, there was more than just meeting the girl. By his action, he had moved himself into the clan vs anti-clan struggle here. Was that good or bad? Would it help or hinder his purpose? He did not know, but his instinct said he had done right—and he always followed his instinct. He did not worry about it. Trouble he had bought; but that did not worry him, for trouble he enjoyed.

"Thank you, Francis O'Keefe," Lucy said and smiled. "And whatever your reason I do thank you for what you did."

"'Tis nothing," he answered. "An incident—though a pleasant one—in the life of Francis O'Keefe. And are you wanting to go home now? With me at your side, it will be safe enough I'm thinking." When she nodded, he got up to escort her out.

The street, when they reached it, was quiet and deserted. The ominous atmosphere of earlier in the night had vanished, leaving only a tired emptiness. The jackals, having run out their energy seeking the vanished rabbit, had disappeared to wait another day, another night, of hunting.

THE GLIDEWAYS were deserted except for the handlers on the freight sections. With Lucy leading, they quickly reached the outskirts and threaded their way through the surrounding parks. On the edge of one was a large house, the home of the clan O'Brian. It was a new house, Francis noted, well made and tastefully designed. The clan, he realized, must be fairly well-to-do. In answer to his question, he learned that they handled accounting and book-keeping for several shops and small businesses. Many of the clans were of this type, he knew. It was reasonable, for they could bring specialized knowledge to these businesses that their employers could not hire for themselves. In this, and other similar work, the clans had found their first footholds; only later had come their entry into direct manufacture and labor. The economic and social reasons for the clans were as strong and maybe stronger there, but the taboos and the inertia of existing organization were so much stronger. Whereas the battle had just been joined for the direct labor type of work, the clans already had control of most of the "white collar" work.

As they came in the door, a man of perhaps thirty-five looked up with a pleasant smile. "Lucy!" he said. "We were worried; thought you might have gotten mixed up with the Schreib affair."

"I did," Lucy answered and quickly briefed him in on what had happened. Francis felt cold as he heard her story of the gutting of the Schreib clan. She told it only in highlight and with a factual tone, but his imagination could easily fill in the details of fear and anger, brutality and rapine, and finally murder and arson.

When, after the main part of her tale, she came to his part and introduced him to the other man, Tom O'Brian, the latter got up and limped over to shake his hand. "Thank you Mr. O'Keefe," Tom said; "the clan owes you a real debt. Our Lucy here is a careless little baggage." He looked fondly at her. "She has no sense at all where her heart is concerned; we would be much the poorer without her."

The telephone ringing interrupted any answer Francis might have made. Tom pushed a button on the table beside the chair where he had been sitting, and said, "Hello."

"This is Dan," a voice in the room said. "Any news?"

"Yes, she's here," Tom answered. "Come on back."

"Okay," the voice answered. "Glad to hear it. Rita's here, too, so check her off with me. Be seeing you."

There was a click and silence. Tom marked some paper in a clipboard on the table and then explained that the whole clan was out hunting Lucy. Only he himself had stayed behind to man the telephone while watching the children. Having been partially crippled by a mob some years ago, he explained, he was not much use in a fight. "Good thing for us they didn't cripple your brains while they were at it," Lucy commented. Then, to Frank, she added, "He's our strategist."

AS, OVER the the next hour, the others came in, some twenty-six of them, Francis noted that they were all armed with knives, and some even with illegal guns. *This thing*, he thought grimly, *is already close to civil war*. How soon, he wondered, would the crisis come—the point at which the different peoples must finally decide whether to fight or to seek some rational compromise? How much time remained?

Where, he asked them, had the police been? They answered him with a bitter laugh.

"You're new to town," Tom told him. "But you can take it as a certain rule that when there's a clan to be sacked, the police are somewhere far away. There's a certain character in town, name's Tony Field. He runs this town. Has all the political strings. And he's built his empire by riding the anti-clan beliefs; he likes nothing better than to see the mob run wild."

He was new to the town, yes, Francis thought. *But there was nothing new to the pattern. Only the name.*

In other towns, and other cities, the names were Sam Gardiner, Luke Weston, Fred Simpson and the like; here it was Tony Field. These were the demagogues who rode to power on hatred and intolerance; who operated with a vested interest in disruption; and who, if they were not stopped, would destroy society. They were a symptom, he knew; not a cause. They used the hatred that was there; they did not create it. But because they gave it leadership and direction, because they held it together as a potent weapon of destruction, they were as dangerous as if they were the cause. It was an old pattern, an old and deadly one, and Francis knew it well.

There was one other angle to this situation, Tom told him. A special election to the City Council was scheduled for March 18, and a reform candidate named Elis Hook was trying to buck Field's machine. It had looked like he might succeed, Tom said. If he did, it

would shift the balance, and there would be a real attempt to find some compromise to the City's troubles.

"But after this Schreib affair," Tom said, "I guess he's licked. With that kind of thing, people have to be either for or against; there can't be any middle ground. If the election were more than three days off, this affair might work in our favor; the better people, even if they are anti-clan, might decide they weren't for mob rule. But three days is too short; I think Field deliberately pulled the string on the Schreib affair, and I'm afraid he timed it well."

Yes he had, Frank had to agree. Given time the people who are decent would decide they wanted no part of it; but their immediate reaction would be to deplore the action, while approving the sentiment. And, going that far, they could be easily pushed a little further and made to feel that any compromise would deny their principles. Their very guilt would force them to compound that guilt, lest they needs must admit it.

Had the luck of the O'Keefe's held true, Frank wondered? Had he arrived here just at the time of crisis and decision? It could be so; it seemed to be so.

But, if the crisis was here, what could be done to swing the balance? What was the answer to their problem?

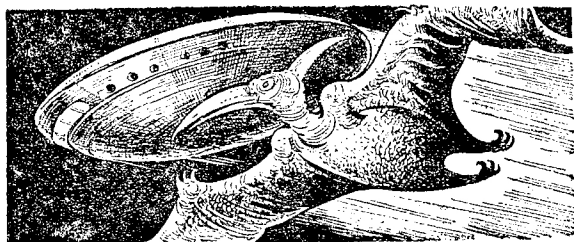
"There is a man over in the Stanley clan," Tom told him, "who thinks the thing to do is for us to get organized. Form a kind of super-clan and band together to protect ourselves. I don't know; I don't like it."

"Why not?" a chap named Bill cut in. He was an eager youngster with eyes that flashed in anger as he spoke. "As it is now, they can pick us off one at a time; we're helpless. But if we join forces, they're going to have to think once or twice before they tackle us. We'll be something to reckon on." Several others murmured agreement, and the rest seemed doubtful.

"I don't like it," Tom repeated. "Maybe we'll be forced into it but it won't be right. Once we do organize, then the battle-lines are drawn; then we're an army, and they'll know they were right to fear us. No, the only final answer is to get them to accept us—and maybe join us. And building ourselves into an army's not the way to get them to do that; all that can end in is civil war. Maybe that's the best we can hope for, but God help us if it is."

FRANCIS said, "I am a peaceable man, and I'm thinking that you are right. I'm thinking that it is Field himself who would be hap-

piest to learn you had combined; 'twould give him something to focus his demagoguery onto. 'Tis hard to keep the hate alive when there are many things to hate. You, for instance, are accountants. A man who seeks work in the mill does not really think you threaten his job. It may be true, and in fact is so, but the threat is a devious one and hard to work up a hate on. No, if it's my advice your wanting, keep the enemy divided by keeping yourselves divided."



"You haven't lived with that hate," Bill almost snarled. "We have; it is easy for you to say."

"Well, we won't decide tonight," Tom cut in. "Look, Mr. O'Keefe, I don't know what your plans are. We would be honored to have you stay here, but if you'd rather not, don't hesitate to say so."

"True, I am an agent," Frank answered. "But then I am also myself." His eyes twinkled. "The business of the Bureau can wait. It has before, and will again when there are matters of other interest to attend to. And this looks to be some fun; I shall accept your invitation, for I would see what happens here."

"Oh, good!" Lucy cried. "I was so hoping you would." And then she blushed and looked down at her toes.

Francis chuckled and looked at her. "Yes there are definitely matters of interest here. Of interest, if not to the Bureau, then at least to Francis O'Keefe."

And that, he thought, was almost true. But what was also true was that he was working for the Bureau. Not, perhaps, in ways that the Bureau might approve. But nevertheless, he was learning much of interest. As a case-study of a crisis in the clan struggle, this was almost an ideal situation, complete with all the classic elements. The

clans expanding into a new field of work—in this case mill-work. And meeting trouble, precipitating fear and mob violence. The demagogue, challenged in a special election by the moderate forces, and using the tool of panic and of guilt to meet that challenge. A classic situation, Francis thought, and the Bureau would be most interested in his report.

When Francis came down the next morning, he thought he had beaten the others up; and yet he was not really surprised, only pleased, to find Lucy in the kitchen preparing breakfast for two. "And good morning to you, Babe," he said, going over to her and lightly kissing her on the lips. "'Tis only fruit-juice and coffee I will be having."

She seemed surprised and perhaps overwhelmed at his greeting but not displeased. She gathered her robe closer around her and busied herself with the coffee pot. "What...what plans are you going to make?"

He gulped some fruit-juice down. Wiping his lips on the back of his hand, he made a wide gesture. "Plans? Why plans for building an empire or for stealing a kingdom. Plans, perhaps, for wooing a girl or for foiling a scoundrel. What plans would you have me make?"

She blushed and her hand trembled a bit as she poured his coffee. "I don't know," she said. "Only, if your plans concern us, why then we'd like to know what they are."

"And what if they just concern you?" he asked.

She seemed puzzled as she looked directly at him. "How can they?" she asked.

He raised an eyebrow at her. "But you are here and the rest of the clan is sleeping," he said. "'Tis true that I have no quarrel with this arrangement; far from it. But tell me true, are you here for the clan or for yourself?"

She leaned back against the sink. "For both, Mr. Francis O'Keefe, for both," she answered. "If you do not understand that, then you do not understand the clans, and I am sorry for you; but perhaps you will learn."

Finishing his breakfast by gulping down his coffee, Francis got up and came over to her. "I am never afraid to learn," he said. "Particularly not, for a teacher such as you who makes learning a pleasure." He kissed her hard and quick, then walked out leaving her there with a dazed expression on her face.

As he left, he wondered about her. What, in fact, was she doing?

He was used to pretty girls; he was used to having them look on him with pleasure, even when they were part of a family. But she, being part of a family, had smiled at him even while she said—and apparently meant—that she was acting in good faith with that family. And this he was not used to. Perhaps, he conceded, he still had things to learn about a clan.

He shrugged the problem aside. He had other things to learn. A crisis was at hand and he knew its general nature, there was still much detail to find out before he could decide what to do.

III

IT WAS THREE o'clock in the afternoon when Francis walked into City Hall. In the morning and the early afternoon, he had talked to many people. Those he had talked to hardly knew it; they were hardly aware that they had met anyone, for he knew his job. A casual word, an innocent question, a stray comment—not worth remembering. And yet the responses, the answers, gave him the pulse of the City.

There was fear, here, he knew—fear before all else: fear of the clans, fear of the mob, fear of itself. Panic. The certain knowledge that the past was not finished, and that the future held no hope. The people of the City were afraid—afraid of what they knew they would do, yet even more afraid of not doing it. Fear was the dominant mood and it permeated everything.

But there was no trace of fear on Francis' face as he walked into Tony Field's anteroom. The furnishings were bare and simple for Tony was a "Man of the People," the professional friend of any who had a vote. Around the edge of the room were benches well filled with those who had come to seek his favor. Some were the poor and seedy, to whom Field was the last hope; some were simply venal, not caring what they sold if only they got the price.

The door to the inner office was guarded by a girl who did her best to typify the clean and wholesome type of beauty. If her eyes were too hard, and her make-up too expert, not many people would know the difference; she was well chosen for the part.

"Field in?" Francis asked her.

"Yes, sir," she said, turning on her number two smile. "If you'll just give me your name and take a seat, I'll call you when he can see you."

"The name is Francis O'Keefe, and I'll be going right in, but I thank you just the same." He started to reach for the door.

She jumped up and moved in front of him, pushing his arm away. "Oh! no, sir, I'm afraid you can't. His Honor the Mayor is with Mr. Field right now."

"Good," Francis said. "It will be a pleasure to see them both." Lightly he grasped her around the waist. Picking her up, he kissed her lightly and set her down behind him, opened the door and walked on in. The girl rushed after him.

A man who could only be Tony Field sat behind the desk. A rather heavy-set chap with overhanging eyebrows, protruding under lip, and ponderous nose, he looked genial and easy going; but the eyes that flickered towards Francis were cold and shrewd.

The other man, who sat at the end of the desk was tall and white-haired—very dignified. His profile was clean and sharp and would look well on a campaign poster. The room still echoed with the resonant tones of his voice; but, in the startled instant as Francis entered, his eyes jumped and there was fear and uncertainty on his face until once more habit took hold and he relaxed into a cool dignity.

"Mr. Field," the secretary behind him said. "This... this gentleman forced his way in; shall I get some help?"

"No, Miss Dennison," Tony Field said, after a searching look at Francis; "perhaps the gentleman has a good reason for his haste."

FRANCIS walked leisurely towards the desk. "I'm Francis O'Keefe," he announced. "You will be Tony Field and this, if I take it right, is his Honor the Mayor." When the man behind the desk nodded non-committantly, Francis pulled another chair up to the other end of the desk and sat down, putting his elbows on the desk. "I am a stranger in town but one who is much interested in the ways of men; I would be hearing what you think of the Schreib affair."

"What I think?" Tony raised his eyebrows. "Why as every public citizen must, I deplore violence. And yet, I've got to admit they had it coming to them. And now, sir, if you will excuse us..."

"It is glad I am to hear that," Francis smiled. "I, too, am a peaceful man, seeking only to cultivate the finer things of life, and I'll knock the teeth in of any man that says different. But what I am wondering is if I cannot be useful in helping to find some compromise."

"Compromise?" The mayor lifted his head and his voice was deep and resonant. "There can be no compromise with immorality and sin. My people are honest, hard-working citizens, who seek nothing but the

right to do an honest day's work for a day's pay. They are respectable, God-fearing people; I would not insult their integrity by seeking a compromise."

"Mr. O'Keefe," Tony Field said, "leaving the speeches and all to the mayor here, I, personally, see no reason for compromise. What happened was a trifle hard on the Schreib people, to be sure; on the other hand, they were fools, and I don't waste my sympathy on fools. Now as for you—I like the looks of you. Your entrance upset Miss Dennison, but I admire its gall. And right now I'd like to know what you're after. If you're looking for a job, say so and perhaps I can find one for you; I can always use a man with guts and gall, providing he's working for me. But if you're cutting bait for the clans, or if you're playing your own game and it doesn't fit with mine, then take my advice and don't; you're in the wrong town at the wrong time."

"I cut no bait for any man," Francis answered. "Not for the clans, and not for you; and as for your advice, I fear I am not impressed. It is possible you are right, but I do not think you are. I think it is you for whom the time is wrong."

"I have travelled much over the country, and seen many towns and peoples. I tell you the day of the clan is near; the weight of history is forcing it, for it is an idea that makes much sense. In a clan, a man has something to work and to fight for. Something to belong to that is not so big that in it he cannot find himself. And as for marriage, why fools talk of respectability and morality. With a monogamistic set-up, the man spends half his waking time at work, seeing people his wife never knows, meeting problems she does not understand. She spends her time with the children and doing the household chores. Their lives are too separate. How can they build a single life? It is impossible. Unhappiness, frustration, divorce are become the norm."

"But in the clans, now, there is a different thing. For the clan is a way of life, and not just a part of a life. To the clan each contributes as he will, doing the work he's best fitted for. The chores, the unpleasant jobs that give no inspiration, these are traded off, each sharing the burden. The clan, my friend, is not immoral. It is strong, and its strength is healthy."

"What clan do you belong to?" Field asked, his voice dead.

"Me? I am in no clan nor do I want to be," Francis answered, wondering if it were the truth. "I like too well to be myself. But still I say you, who fight the clans, are blind. You do not know the future, for the future belongs to the clans. And still I suggest to you that there is work to be done. There is a new pattern of life to be devel-

oped, and there will be men who will find greatness in that developing; why don't you try that path?"

FIELD LOOKED at him with hooded eyes. Then he stirred. "You know," the boss said, "you might be right at that. The only trouble is, you're too early. Right now, these leaders you speak of may find greatness, but they don't find riches; in fact, they're apt to find a martyr's glory. And me, I'm just a common kind of a guy. I don't seem to care much about such things; I'd rather have my car and summer place. Money is much more important to me than glory, and right now the money and the power comes from the people, not from the clans. So I won't argue with your preachments; the mayor will do that for me. But neither will I take the time to listen. Unless you're willing to change your mind about my offer of a job, get out!"

Francis looked at him a moment his eyes speculative. Then he shrugged and stood up. "So be it, then," he said. "Even as I said at the start, I'm a peaceable man, so I had thought to maybe find a peaceful answer. But if there isn't any, then so be it. Good day to you gentlemen, and enjoy it while it lasts." He turned and walked out.

As he closed the door behind him he was not surprised that he had failed; he had not expected to succeed. Field had built his power by exploiting fear and generating violence; it was most unlikely that the boss could now be converted to the path of constructive compromise. Particularly not, now when Field thought he was winning. However, Francis was not sorry he had tried. It had been worth the effort and lost nothing. Besides, he now knew Field for what he was—a coldly-calculating man who knew exactly what he was doing and why. And, Francis thought, it was quite possible that Field was too calculating, too cold as he used the emotions of the crowd. Could such a man really understand those emotions that he used? Or was he too unemotional—and therefore vulnerable?

IV

FRANCIS came in to the house of the O'Brian clan late that night. He had two huge boxes in his arms that he put down without comment. Nobody asked him about them but they eyed the boxes with obvious curiosity; and gradually the whole clan drifted into the central room.

Francis leaned back in his chair. He lit a cigaret and watched the smoke curl upwards. "I have spent the day," he said in a conversa-

tional voice, "searching the town. I can find no sanity in it; I would tell you that the situation is desperate."

"Yes, I suppose it is," Tom agreed.

"I have even talked with Field and the mayor," Francis continued in an even tone. "Field offered me a job, but he would not listen to reason. He likes his power too well to dream of being a hero. And the worst of it is that he is a competent man, and can do what he says he will."

"What do you think will happen?" Tom asked. The others were silent and tense.

"Tomorrow, there will be the St. Patrick's Day parade," Francis said. "I've no doubt it will end in a riot, with some poor clan the goat. The next day there will be the election, with Field's man the certain winner; and then the program will start. I doubt me if any clan will survive in this town for more than three months from now."

There was a shocked silence in the room. Then Lucy burst out: "But it can't be that bad!"

"It can be and it is," Francis answered. His eyes followed the wisps of smoke along the ceiling. "It is likely that even Field does not quite realize this, but he is on the horse. He could do something but he won't. After the riot to come tomorrow, there will be nothing he can do. I am an agent of the Bureau; I am trained to see these things and to know what they mean. There is no doubt in my own mind."

"Then what are we waiting for?" the chap called Bill cried out. "We've got to act; we got to warn the other clans. We got to get things organized. We got to get guns. Guns for all the clans. Get food to last a possible siege. Maybe let some other clan or two move in with us, or we move in with them. Concentrate. We got to get ready."

Tom shuddered as if he were cold. "I suppose you're right," he said. "I guess there's nothing else to do."

"So you're quitting, eh?" Francis asked, still watching the smoke from his cigaret.

"Quitting?" Bill stared at him. "We're getting ready to fight; is that what you call quitting?"

"Yes," the agent said letting his eyes drop down to the younger chap. "Yes it is. You're giving up your original purpose. You're accepting what Field would like to make a fact—the final separation of clan and not-clan. To my thinking, that's quitting."

"Well what do you want us to do?" Bill demanded. "Just sit with our hands folded until some night it's our turn to get murdered?"

"No-o," Francis answered, his eyes crinkling slightly. "I want you to fight, but to fight for the thing that you want, not simply against what Field wants. To fight for humanity, clan and non-clan alike—not just to defend the clan. I'd have you take the offensive and that's a world different from this plan of yours."

"What's on your mind?" Tom asked, the words quick and his face alert.

"There's an old saying," Francis drawled, "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em! And I'm thinking it has particular point here, 'cause right now they're confused. With the clans separate, they have hard work hating them all. Particularly if they ask how a clan of accountants—or engineers or shopkeepers or whatever—can threaten their jobs in the mill. They're having a hard time but they're about ready to do it. But they'd have a lot harder time—and might not be able to manage it at all—if one or two of the clans were on their side."

Lucy looked shocked. "You want us to join them to fight the clans?" Her voice was incredulous. "You actually expect us to...to...?"

FRANCIS laughed and winked at her. "No," he said; "at that, it might make sense, but it was not what I had in mind. No, I'm thinking of the parade tomorrow. They're expecting the clans to stay holed up, trembling in fear till it be over. But O'Brian's a good Irish name; what if the clan O'Brian joins the parade?"

"That'd be asking for trouble!" Tom objected.

"Aye, 'twould be a fine brawl," Francis admitted. "But remember, y'd have the O'Keefe on your side. I'm thinking the odds would not be too bad, and it'd be carrying the thing to them in a way they'd not be expecting. I'm thinking it'd be a brawl, but neither a war or a pogrom. And it might perhaps set them back on their heels. D'you have the guts for it?"

A man in the corner jumped up. He was a big fellow with an unruly mop of hair and eyebrows that shagged out over a prominent nose and chin. Hugh was his name, Francis remembered. He laughed, and the sound of it rocked through the room. "By the beard of the witch," he said, "that would be something. Aye, we'd beat some sense into their ears; 'twould be a St. Patrick's Day to go down in history. I'm for it. What do you say?"

Francis leaned back again in his chair and listened to the argument rage. His face lit up with a slow smile as he heard them gradually take fire. One by one he heard those who argued for caution slip almost without break to the other side. And finally there came the mo-

ment when they suddenly realized there was nobody to argue against the proposition.

It was at that point that Francis opened his boxes to show one filled with green sashes labelled "Clan O'Brian" and the other with hefty-looking shillelaghs. As all the clan put on their sashes and strutted around with excited talking, he took out of the box the last remaining sash with the name "Francis O'Keefe" emblazoned along it, took up a shillelagh and hefted it with a tight smile, and drifted silently off to his room. Behind him, the clan was talking in excited voices. They would do it, he thought; they would wade in knowing it must mean danger and hurt. But they would do it because he had given them hope; he had shown them a possible way to meet their problem—a way that might force recognition by the masses of their rights as humans. Field, Francis thought, would not be expecting this; it was the unexpected response, and would catch the boss flat-footed.

Francis went to bed with the look of a man who was satisfied with one day's work and who looked forward with eagerness to the opportunities of the next.

IT WAS A quiet group that moved through the streets the next afternoon, carrying their folded sashes and shillelaghs. They talked little and what they said was in a low voice. And when they came in sight of the green where the parade was making up, they all stopped, and stood looking at it without saying anything at all. Finally Francis turned to Tom who leaned on a crutch by his side. "How think you?" he asked. "'Tis an awful lot of them there are, and some do seem to be full size. Perhaps we should think again."

"No," Tom said slowly. "I've no wish to think again. Do the rest of you?" He looked around at them. Some shook their heads. Others shrugged. No one answered. "So, let's fall in," he said. "The girls in the center; Francis and myself at the head. And God help us all."

When they were all in order and Tom was satisfied, they put on their sashes, grasped their shillelaghs a little tighter than needed, and moved forward.

The crowd in the square took no notice of them at first and they moved through it in close-packed order until they arrived at the center. There, on a box, a big hulk of a man stood shouting orders. Francis remembered his scarred face from the bar in which he and Lucy had taken refuge and he felt the fires of battle warm within him. He led the clan up to the giant and announced in a loud voice. "The Clan O'Brian and Francis O'Keefe are ready to march."

The giant looked down at them with busy eyes, nodded, and looked away. He started to bellow something to some other group but then his voice trailed off. Slowly he turned back and his face showed a growing astonishment. "The Clan O'Brian?" he asked. His voice was dull with shock. "Go away; we want no clans here."

Francis grinned. "We were not thinking you did," he said. "But we are not asking your permission; we'll march in the parade and be damned to you."

The giant's face slowly congealed. His mouth twisted into a snarl and his eyes grew small. And suddenly he jumped with his fists swinging, a bear swarming over its enemy. Francis, a barking cry on his lips, dropped his shillelagh and jumped like a cat, forward, inside the swinging fists, and his own left fist landed on the giant's stomach with a solid thump. His right reached up for the giant's chin; the giant went down, falling backwards into the crowd of startled people.

Moving with compact speed, Francis jumped back, grabbed up his shillelagh and swung to view the scene.

The crowd of men was, for a moment, curiously silent, held fast by sheer surprise. But then there was a wordless shout and the crowd rushed in. The whole scene dissolved into a bedlam of hammering fists, swinging clubs, overlaid with yelps and shrieks as damage was done.

FRANCIS darted like a cat around Tom, swinging his club when he had the chance, jabbing with it when he did not, using his left hand to grab and wrench the clubs and fists that reached for him. Dimly he was aware that Tom was swinging with his club, hopping around on his crutch and shouting with wordless cries. Dimly, too, he was aware that Lucy joined them, using both hands on her club to beat the attackers off their back and to protect Tom's vulnerable side.

How long did it last? For the life of him Francis could not have guessed. A minute or an hour, he did not know. But suddenly there was nobody in front of him. Around him was a pile of stunned bodies. One man was crawling away, his face contorted with pain as he dragged a useless leg behind him; another sat on the ground holding an arm bent where it should not be, rocking back and forth with the agony of it.

From the ring of people around them, the giant suddenly pushed out. Francis felt a glow of satisfaction as he saw that one eye was closed and there was a new cut on one cheek. Also, he was kneading

his left shoulder and flexing the arm in a way that meant it had felt the slash of a good shillelagh. Francis grinned at the sight of it.

"So you'll march in the parade, eh?" the giant asked, his face glowing.

Francis looked back at the clan. Bill, he saw, had been knocked unconscious and was just now coming to. Rita was down, holding her stomach and gasping for air. Martha was examining a wrist with care. Mark was holding a broken arm, his breath coming in gasps. Stan was curled on the street, moaning with Jennifer bending over him anxiously. The others, he saw were on their feet or on one knee, getting their breaths back for a possible renewal of the fight.

He turned back to the giant and grinned. "Aye," he said, "we'll be marching in the parade, unless you be wanting to argue it further. For O'Brian's a good Irish name, and so is O'Keefe. And what your name may be, I know not, but I doubt me if it gives you a better right than us. But if you will argue it the more, then come on; come on and be damned to you."

The big chap frowned. "You're the guy was in the bar the night before last, weren't you? And the girl—that's her, ain't it. How come an agent's mixing in like this?"

Francis shrugged, noting for the first time that his shoulder hurt; so did one eye. "It's true; I am an agent for the Census Bureau. But I'm also a human being, and there's no fun at all in remembering I'm an agent when there's a girl like Lucy, here. And as for being here, why I'm an agent, but I'm also an Irishman. And as for being here with the clan, why that's another matter.

"I talked to Tony Field, you see—him and the dummy that's got the name of the Mayor. And I did not like their threats or the way of their talk. As an Irishman, I'm myself and will not kiss the feet of any man; my name is Francis O'Keefe and I will march in the parade with the Clan O'Brian." He glared up at the big man. His left hand was on his hip and in the right the shillelagh was balanced across his knees.

The giant measured him slowly and then began to laugh. He laughed until he roared and finally had to choke it down and wipe the tears from his eyes. "Aye, 'tis an Irishman you are, by the very sound of you," he finally gasped. "You're a piddling little shrimp, but I love you."

He laughed some, with his head cocked to one side; then he gestured with his head. "Come on. Let's march. For by the glory of the Irish, I got to protect you. There be too many people who don't

know the Irishman you are." He clapped his left hand on Francis' shoulder, and they turned to join the parade.

"No, Mike!" A small self-important man came bustling up. Francis recognized him as the man who had stepped in to avoid the barroom brawl, came forward, now. A cigar was moving in his mouth, and it was obvious he had had no part of the fight. "You can't let a clan march. It would mess everything up!"

The big man, Mike, looked at him at moment, then turned to Francis. "He's one of Field's guys, kind of a kinsman; in fact, he's the guy that's running for Councilman tomorrow. You know, I don't think I like him." There was a slightly surprised half smile on his face that broadened out as he suddenly jabbed out with his right hand, smashing the little man's cigar all over his face. The little man fell backwards, and then slowly got to his feet. He looked around wild-eyed and, as people began to laugh, his mouth began to twitch. Suddenly he turned and ran and the crowd, with cheers and laughter, parted to let him through. And when one chap suddenly tripped him with a shillelagh, there was a great cheer that went up.

When the little man was gone and out of sight, Mike turned back to Francis. "Come on," he roared. "Let's march, for 'tis a great day for the Irish."

"Aye, it is that," Francis roared back. "And a great day, too, for the likes of man." And the whole crowd cheered as Mike, Tom, and Francis led off, with the Clan O'Brian limping happily after.

There was the happy feeling of people who have fought each other well, and found in each other a common pride of manhood.

V

BY EVENING the next day, there was no doubt of the election. No doubt at all; Field's man had lost. The moderates, those who would seek a working compromise to the clan vs non-clan problem, had control of the City Council. But more than that: the riot and then the march of the Clan O'Brian in the parade, battered and bruised as they obviously were, had so broken the back of the hatred and fear of the clans that Field's man had gathered but 12% of the vote so far recorded.

In the face of that debacle, even the demagogues on the City Council were seeking a new line to take. Two of them had already come onto the television and made speeches that, it was true, said nothing

actually—but nevertheless did sound more moderate even than the moderates. The victory was complete.

In the hall of the Clan O'Brian, the whole group were sitting relaxed watching the TV pictures on the wall giving the latest election statistics. Tom got up from his chair, hobbled over to the controls and turned it down. Then he turned to where Francis sat with Lucy on the floor beside him.

"Francis," Tom said, "thank God for the day you arrived. I won't try to tell you what you've done. You know it; I'll simply say that we do, too." He stopped, embarrassed but obviously sincere. There was a murmur of assent from the clan around him.

When it died out, he braced up and went on: "There's something else, too, that I want to say. Lucy, there, has been arguing that you'd be a good addition to the clan. As I said before, she's got no sense where her heart's involved, but I think she may be right. So I'd like to ask you whether you'd consider joining us. I suppose you know the set-up on this kind of thing. A prospective member joins up as a candidate for a certain period—a kind of an engagement period. He works and plays and eats with the clan, but he's not a part of it. He doesn't vote or take any of the responsibility; he's just getting acquainted with it, and the clan with him. Now the period varies but with us it's a minimum of three months; our by-laws say so. But we'd like to have you try it out. And Lucy, there, is particularly keen on it." He smiled, his eyes twinkling, at Lucy.

Francis was startled. Somehow this turn had never occurred to him. He looked down at Lucy. She was looking up at him, her face soft and gentle. "Please, Francis," she murmured. She blushed but her eyes did not waver from his.

He remembered her words of yesterday morning, when she had said she was seeking something both for herself and for the clan. With a flash of insight, he found a new understanding of the clans. He saw that they could trust their members with a faith that was hard in a monogamous relation. For if Lucy fell in love with him, or any person, she broke no faith with the clan; she need only ask that the clan accept him as one of its own. A situation that could only be tragedy with monogamy, was stimulating to the clan. In the very flexibility of its relations there was strength and peace. Lucy could truly work both for herself and for the clan.

"There's another side to this, too," he heard Tom saying. "Perhaps I should not bring it up until after we've found out whether you fit

or not; and, yet, being an agent of the Bureau you're kind of a special case. Probably you're an agent because you got a need inside of you to find some way to express yourself—Some field of action that's larger than any clan can usually offer.

"Anyway, some of us have been talking. We've been wondering if this isn't the time for the clans to get into politics. We haven't up to now; we've been outnumbered for one thing. And then, too...well maybe we haven't been sure enough of ourselves. But now maybe it's time. If it is...well, I'm not boasting when I say it's this clan that has the opportunity. It's yesterday's affair that gives it to us. The people—the general people—people like Mike and the others there—know us and like us where they don't know and maybe don't like the other clans. So we're thinking that maybe we should start thinking about politics. If we do, and if you join us...well, you've got the best chance. You know most about that kind of thing. You were the star of yesterday; you've certainly got the personality. Yes, and the guts, too. I'm not promising anything, understand; I'm just saying that I think there's a good chance.

"But the main thing, as far as we're concerned, is that we'd like to have you give us a try."

FRANCIS felt confused. This thing was too sudden. These people...they were good and kind. There was peace here, and happiness; he could feel it. There was companionship and the love of life. They were strong and he could learn to love them very much. But yet...but yet. He knew what he must do, and he felt sad.

He shook his head. "I wish I could," he said; "I really wish I could." He was looking at Lucy and his voice was low. He seemed to be talking to her alone. "I have never felt the need or the desire for such a thing as a clan, or a wife before, but I do now; and Tom is wise to suggest the chance of politics. I'm thinking he is right to call this the time and place. It is interesting to think of these possibilities. They do tempt me; you, and the clan, and the challenge of politics.

"And yet there is the larger challenge. Right now my clan is the human race, and there is work to be done and fun to be had. So I cannot accept your proposition but must pick up my feet and walk. It is sad I am to say so—aye, but proud also. Proud to have known you, Lucy, and proud to have worked with your clan. And proud, too, to know that you do not really need me, for you are strong—you, Lucy, and your clan. Nor do you need me for your politics. It is true

that it would be easier for me, but I'm thinking that Tom can learn to be a politician; aye, and a good one, too.

"So, I'll be leaving you now and may God be with you all."

Silently he bent and kissed her quickly. Then, getting up, he walked to Tom and shook his hand. And, waving his hand at the others with a crooked grin, he walked out.

A half of an hour later he was still thinking of his decision, a little sad and little exulted, too, by his thoughts. But he wondered, too, what they would think if they could look over his shoulder and read the wire he was sending to his chief. "Mission accomplished successfully. Returning for new assignment."

He doubted if they would understand it for they had not heard his chief as he told some of his top agents that the Census Bureau was going to have to take a new direction. The crisis of the clan vs non-clan struggle was too violent. It would tear—was tearing—the civilization apart. And that they would have to try to see what they could do about it, each in his own way—silently, without authority or legal right.

Thinking over the past two days, Francis grinned. He felt he had become a most effective agent provocateur for peace. But then, why not, for he was Francis O'Keefe, and a peaceable man!

