

THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and Science Fiction

VOLUME 3, No. 1

FEBRUARY, 1952

Ransom	by H. B. FYFE	3
The Rape of the Lock: a Gavagan's Bar story	by L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP & FLETCHER PRATT	10
Ugly Sister	by JAN STRUTHER	19
Flood	by L. MAJOR REYNOLDS	26
Mrs. Poppledore's Id	by R. BRETNOR	32
Minister Without Portfolio	by MILDRED CLINGERMAN	52
The Good Life	by J. J. COUPLING	59
The 8:29	by EDWARD S. SULLIVAN	68
Jizzle	by JOHN WYNDHAM	74
The Giant Finn MacCool	by W. B. READY	84
The Pedestrian	by RAY BRADBURY	89
The Lonely Worm	by KENNETH H. CASSENS	94
Recommended Reading	by THE EDITORS	105
Worlds of If:		
Hands Off	by EDWARD EVERETT HALE	108
If Grant Had Been Drinking		
At Appomattox	by JAMES THURBER	119
The Hole in the Moon	by IDRIS SEABRIGHT	122
Cover illustration by Chesley Bonestell (<i>Exploring the moon</i>)		

The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction, Volume 3, No. 1, February, 1952. Published bimonthly by Fantasy House, Inc., at 35¢ a copy. Annual subscription, \$2.00 in U. S. and possessions; \$2.50 in all other countries. Publication office, Concord, N. H. General offices, 570 Lexington Avenue, New York 22, N. Y. Editorial office, 2643 Dana St., Berkeley 4, Calif. Entered as second class matter at the Post Office at Concord, N. H. under Act of March 3, 1879. Printed in U. S. A. Copyright, 1951, by Fantasy House, Inc. All rights, including translation into other languages, reserved. Submissions must be accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelopes: the Publisher assumes no responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts.

Laurence E. Spivak, PUBLISHER

Anthony Boucher & J. Francis McComas, EDITORS

Robert P. Mills, MANAGING EDITOR

Joseph W. Ferman, GENERAL MANAGER

Most readers know that J. J. Coupling is a first-rate writer of true science fiction; that under another name he is a prominent scientist; and that he has grand fun mixing his two identities. Once, for instance, he addressed a learned dinner under both by-lines (with and without beard); and he has let his serious scientific self indulge in the most fascinating science-fictional speculations as to the creation of language and music by pure mathematical odds and chances. Here, however, is the first published evidence that Mr. Coupling is not only a double but a triple personality: He also writes supernatural fantasy, and manages to infuse into it the rigorous detailed thinking of his science and his science fiction — plus a biting observation of the ideals of a petty personality.

The Good Life

by J. J. COUPLING

THEIR MARRIAGE was probably a belated tribute to *Arrowsmith*. In a romantic corner of Sylvia's mind there had lingered a picture of the devoted young medical scientist conquering the plague — or something. In spite of his name, Homer Haskins slipped into the mental niche immediately.

He was not a doctor but a psychologist. This seemed almost as good as being a doctor to Sylvia; it called up pictures of Freud. Homer was doing research on what he called the influence of connotation and context. He was not bad-looking. He had, it appeared, some money. Not wealth, perhaps, but in those days it was enough to support him comfortably and to enable him to carry out his work at an institution which could not (and probably would not) have financed it. Far from New York, the unattained Mecca of Sylvia's soul, here in this frowsy town whose chief glory was the college trying to be a university, he was an approach, almost, to glamor.

Homer managed the courtship slowly, despite Sylvia's sometimes almost desperate encouragement. He chose the oddest and dullest things to talk about. He was abstracted rather than distracted. But he was appreciative. There grew in Sylvia's soul a motherly feeling, a longing to care for this irresponsible scientist. It was derived from scraps of most of the books she had read. This seemed almost love to her, and it seemed entirely love to Homer. His apprehension of it jolted him into a proposal which was fol-

lowed by unhesitating acceptance. So we find Sylvia and Homer in a state of wedlock.

It is hard for the initial stages of marriage not to be happy and exciting. People have such a momentum of expectation that it carries them right past their senses. Homer had been suddenly awakened to something he had scarcely considered. Sylvia was enthralled, and especially because the honeymoon was in New York. Then disillusion came and the city was almost disappointing. This was not the New York toward which she had strained from afar. There were, of course, theaters and concerts and night clubs. The real lack was in the people. She and Homer met only a few psychologists just as fusty as those they had known. Several of these had homes in the suburbs, with wives and children. Their talk was trivial and dull and not at all like that in the books she had read. Somehow, the witty people and the exciting happenings were unavailable to strangers.

There was some little excitement, perhaps, in the prospect of visiting a real live Communist, who had been a friend of Homer's father. But even this turned out all wrong. The Communist was a short, worn, gray-haired man, and his wife was a plump, motherly person. They lived in a dingy, conventional apartment on Eighteenth Street. They were schoolteachers, Sylvia found. They talked with Homer about some small mid-western town where he had been born, and about Gus Kendrick and other unknown characters, while Sylvia examined a war map on the wall. The pins showed the lines in the Spanish Civil War, which was then drawing to a close.

"It's not up to date," Sylvia remarked, to show that she read the papers.

The conversation stopped for a moment.

"I haven't changed it the past few weeks," the gray-haired man apologized, looking still a bit more worn, and then he and Homer resumed their talk. The motherly woman gave them tea, and after a little they left.

Even though New York had been a disappointment, it came as a shock to find on their return that New York had now become unavailable. It could not be managed again on Homer's income, which was after all not wealth but only a competence, or a little less when two shared it.

It was disturbing, too, to find that Homer really was a serious young scientist, though he didn't seem young now. He had little time to discuss important things with her, even in those few moments when she herself had time after taking care of the house and entertaining dull friends of his. He never read, either, except for dull and unintelligible books about psychology, and about the physiology of the brain.

Sylvia knew that he made experiments with students, and with rats, too, but she wasn't exactly clear about what he did. Several times she tried to get out of him just what it was that he was doing. It seemed to be about achiev-

ing effects by means beyond the mere sense of the words used, or the mechanical consequences of acts, for that matter. In psychiatry and medicine, for instance —

At this, Sylvia brightened.

"Oh," she said, "like obtaining transference in psychoanalysis."

But Homer qualified.

"Well," he said, "like whatever it is that makes people get well under treatment."

"But that's all understood," Sylvia insisted. "It's a science now, I mean, since Freud —"

Homer had just looked rather foolish.

"People got well before Freud, you know," he said. "At Lourdes, for instance. And Mesmer. Even Benjamin Franklin didn't see what was going on there. African witch doctors cure people, and kill them, too. People have to want to get well, though, and to believe that they will get well in order to be cured. I'd like to find out what makes them believe."

"But psychoanalysis is science," Sylvia pointed out, "and the witch doctor isn't. Of course," she added, "I've read all about psychosomatic medicine. And as for Lourdes," she went on, "of course there must be more to life than just the material. A girl I know has a friend who saw some things in Haiti," she added. "And of course I've read William Seabrook."

But Homer seemed unconvinced.

"I want to find out," he repeated.

"Witch doctor," Sylvia taunted. "Could you cure anyone?"

Homer shook his head and looked troubled.

"I don't know," he said.

After that they talked about other things. Sylvia tried to get Homer to read important books, books about all the rest of the world and especially about New York. He politely started them, but she always found them with the marker very near the front. When she read to him from *The New Yorker* or from more serious magazines such as *The New Republic* he listened with so little expression and so much abstraction that the reading didn't entertain Sylvia herself. Homer couldn't at all understand that this was the real world, of which Sylvia was a part.

And when Sylvia had looked among Homer's books, she found nothing that meant anything, really, anything human, or that she could understand, except one small volume. It was a treatise on, of all things, witchcraft, and Homer said that he didn't know where it had come from, but he thought it had been included by mistake in a parcel of secondhand books. It had queer and entertaining illustrations, and Sylvia thought that William Seabrook would have liked it. Sometimes she felt that the book was the only

thing Homer had given to her real self, her soul, that is. In all the rest he had merely rather inadequately cared for her body.

Most of the spells in the book were quite unintelligible and called for ingredients which were unobtainable or revolting. Otherwise Sylvia would have tried them out of curiosity. Only one seemed at all practicable. It described a powder and procedure for freeing the soul. Sylvia felt that this could not be suicide, for the powder was made just out of things which were in the kitchen. She liked to think of it as dangerous, however, and perhaps she reserved this spell subconsciously as a gesture to be used in dire straits.

When Sylvia had endured a child the straits were dire indeed, and especially since Homer's income was still just what it had been when they were married, before the imminence of war had raised prices and brought scarcity. Homer had insisted on the child, and indeed it had seemed a fine thing in some ways. Before the event, Sylvia was very happy in a lazy sort of way, and Homer did a great deal to make it easy for her — always serving her body, she thought.

But caring for a child was different. It was hard and unpleasant, and it took all her time, all of that precious time which she had spent with magazines and books and in thinking thoughts of New York. Homer was delighted and still helpful. But Sylvia was in Hell.

So one particularly unbearable evening when the child was ill, Sylvia tried the spell, feeling very brave and heroic in doing so. She said the crazy verse and slipped the powder into her mouth in the kitchen, while Homer stood beside her unknowing.

The spell took effect immediately. Her body staggered. Homer caught it in alarm. Sylvia herself (her soul, that is) watched in amusement. For she had flowed right out of her body's nostrils and coalesced into an apparently invisible entity which hovered above the top of her body's head.

Much to Sylvia's surprise, her body did not fall. It apparently had skills of its own, acquired in living perhaps. It was pale but competent without a soul. Homer helped it, led it to a chair, gave it a little drink of brandy. To Sylvia's amusement, the body spoke and said in a somewhat toneless voice, "I'm better now, Homer."

But Sylvia's soul was bored. And so she tried her powers and flew through the house and then straight through the closed door and to the campus and about it. She flew to the second floor of the administration building and peered into the window of the president's office. She was disappointed to find him dictating decorously to his pretty secretary. She skirted the ridiculous spire of the chapel. All afternoon and evening she flew wonderingly around the little town and spied on the little people. There must be better than this, she reflected.

As she began to understand the extent of her powers, her soul grew dizzy at their scope. It was torn every which way — toward the books she had read and their authors, toward the movies she had seen and Hollywood, toward the important magazines she read, but above all, toward New York, and plays, and people. She paused in mid-air, trying to decide which to explore first. Her soul felt exhilarated, dizzy — and finally, panicky. Sylvia felt as if she might fly off in all directions at once. And where would her soul be then? So quickly she flew back to her body. It was late at night. The body was fed and Homer and it were asleep. She sank into the motionless figure. It stirred in a dreamy restlessness. In the morning, she woke just as she had before this incredible experience.

After that, escape was easy for Sylvia. She could leave her body whenever its routine became burdensome, and that was often. The body took care of itself and of the house and the child and Homer quite competently. Homer seemed content, even happy. The poor fool didn't know the difference between herself and what she left behind. Or perhaps — did all people have souls?

But the disembodied life of her soul had its difficulties for Sylvia. It was exasperating, and more, to be able to see, and hear, and yet not to speak. There was that terrible time (it happened much later) when she hovered all night in a dingy apartment, having followed a quarreling man and woman in from the street. The woman had flung herself on the bed and fallen asleep. All night long, for as long as Sylvia had stayed, the man had sat at a table, drinking and alternately picking up a pistol and laying it down again. Frantically, Sylvia had tried to wake the woman, shouting, waving, feeling she could some way make herself known. How was it that one passed into a body? It was so easy with her own. But here there was no way, no channel of communication. She had rushed outside, up the street and down, seeking aid without knowing how to summon it. Finally she had returned, to watch, horror-struck and fascinated, while the man wavered trying to make up his befuddled mind. Sometimes it seemed that sleep would overcome him. As morning neared he was still fumbling, weeping and drinking. But then the sense of giddiness came to Sylvia's soul, and she tore herself away fearfully and hurried back to her body. She never learned what had happened, and the incident recurred to her in times of unease, and she shuddered.

But it was not only in the inability to act that Sylvia found her disembodied wanderings unsatisfactory. It was so hard — well, to belong, when one came as an unIntroduced and invisible phantom. It was hard to understand, even. There was that first night backstage, for instance. There was so little of the glamor of the theater and so much of — confusion.

Of course, she should have gone better prepared. And she hadn't counted

on the time difference in flying east — it was between the first and second acts when she arrived. She swept right past the doorman into the midst of it all. People in small groups were standing about and talking while the stagehands worked. At first, she couldn't even identify anyone she had heard of. Obviously, she couldn't listen to them all at once. After a moment of indecision, she hovered beside two young men. One was leaning against a flat and looking a little bored while the other talked.

"Leslie's stock was doing *As You Like It* and I was playing Charles then. That afternoon Rita had told Bob Evans — he was Orlando — that she was through with him. We were at Graciano's all afternoon, and when we got on the stage for the wrestling match it was all we could do to hold each other up. Bob almost fell himself, instead of me. Well, after that, Custis —"

But at that moment, Sylvia was distracted by a hoarse shout from a short man in his shirt sleeves, who rushed down a narrow stairs calling, "Where's Lily? Tell them to play it again. You," he shouted in the direction of the two young men, "have you seen her?" And he turned away without waiting for an answer.

Neither seemed perturbed. The one leaning on the flat remarked quietly, "She's probably playing act four with Neil."

Sylvia was puzzled. The play had only three acts. Neil, as Roderick, married Lily, as Cynthia, in the last.

"Lily, and a — man?" the other young man replied, lifting his eyebrows.

But Sylvia was off already, after the bald man who was vanishing up the stairs. Just as he was about to enter a dressing-room door, illumination seemed to strike him.

"My God, why didn't I think of it before?" he shouted, and rushed back and through a door before Sylvia knew what was happening, Sylvia dashed after him, a little shocked. The closing door didn't say "Men." As she whizzed through, a luscious blonde was saying with mock indignation, "Mr. Ballin! At your age!"

But Mr. Ballin was calling, "Lily! Lily!" at the top of his voice. Then he knelt and peered under a door.

"She's here!" he shouted. "Mary, get someone," he said to the blonde.

The blonde left as Sylvia floated curiously over the door. There the renowned Lily lay, awkwardly crumpled on the floor of the compartment, under one of the oldest pieces of plumbing Sylvia had ever seen. The end of a chain was still clutched in her hand, and the heavy corroded lever which had broken free from the high tank and struck her head lay by it.

Sylvia fled to the audience, where she saw the actors as she knew them. Her soul was soon engrossed in the play, and she wept spiritual tears at the final curtain. She did not go backstage afterwards. Somehow, she did not

particularly want to. And too, that giddy feeling had come again. She felt drawn every which way, toward all she had read and dreamed about. In a little alarm, she flew home, and sank into her body, asleep.

Sylvia soon realized that her soul must have other disappointments before it triumphed over the deadly narrowness that life in her body had imposed on it. Some things seemed a little horrid in her inexperience. That evening in the gypsy restaurant, run by the coarse-featured, heavy gypsy woman with the rough voice, had started so charmingly. The two neat young men had talked so warmly and so earnestly about so many things — about Utamaro, about Sharaku, about Hokusai, and about Yoshida and the modern revival. And all about the influence on the impressionists, and of Mary Cassatt and her doll-paintings. When they went upstairs, it had seemed so ugly, somehow, although she had read *Corydon*. And when she saw the stencils later, her pleasure was spoiled by thinking of the two young men.

If there were problems of the spirit, still it must be worth overcoming them, Sylvia decided. She was so inexperienced as a disembodied spirit, though. Sometimes for a while she rested gratefully in her body. There was an earthy pleasantness in walking in the fresh air, about the little campus she understood so well. From here the spire of the chapel looked tall, and the administration building imposing. The president was the president, remote within it; the secretary, a cool acquaintance to whom she spoke. Homer's friends were graded by long experience, and some were almost likable, preoccupied with worldly affairs as they were. There was a certain comfort in knowing and understanding, even if the things known were scarcely worth the understanding.

But her baby became distracting, and Homer and his eternal work became annoying. Then her spirit grew doubly scornful of these earthbound creatures. Then she savored her power, which gave her all the world to choose from. Choose she did. All over the country, in Europe and Asia, there was something that was part of her to be seen. And if war had made Europe and Asia terrifying and ugly, why, still in New York there were authors, painters, composers, pictures, books, places, music — and a bit of each was a part of her, a part of her soul. But how puzzling the whole of them was. The talk, the music, the pictures were so hard to understand. There was the famous scientist (stochastics, wasn't it?) who had been written up in *Life*. Why, when he entered the lecture room late, did he whisper to the man next to him, as he sat down, "Has he mentioned me yet?"

Resolutely, Sylvia pursued her dreams through the trying hours of spring and summer, returning only when her spirit became so confused that it seemed about to fly apart into its component pieces. And with fall, she spent still more time in her bodiless wanderings.

For Homer was more distracted, more difficult. Apparatus was so expensive and so hard to get. Apparently the household budget had been cut for this reason. Homer appeared to think that he was on the verge of completing his work, or at least a part of it. And just then, too, Homer had been asked to teach — for a Naval training program, or some such. Homer refused because he thought that his work was more important. Because of it all, he was afraid that he would be drafted, that he would have to leave. And he stayed late at nights at the laboratory, among his smelly animals, improvising apparatus and hurrying to finish. Sylvia was indignantly surprised on rushing back to her body one evening to find it at Homer's laboratory, carrying the baby and bringing him supper. She caught the body in the middle of a sentence that she couldn't complete, and she left immediately, coming back only when the body was finally in bed and Homer still working.

With Homer's upset state of mind and with the cut in the household budget, Sylvia could hardly bear to spend time in her body. Worse, she discovered the body was pregnant again, and Homer added such a harried solicitude to his distracted behavior that Sylvia could not bear him. She came to her body chiefly when it was sleeping and she left it after the first pleasures of awakening, to return to New York and real people.

It had become pleasant to float through literary cocktail parties and to hear the dignified authors, a little high, make back-biting remarks about their publishers and their contemporaries. These at least were fairly clear, and hearing them Sylvia's spirit needed no exhilaration of alcohol. As she became more knowing, she fed her soul on the breath of scandal and on others' troubles.

When finally Homer was to be drafted, to be made to leave his precious work, Sylvia began in her soul to enjoy Homer's troubles, too. For the first time an element of humor in the situation struck her. Here was poor stupid Homer, living in frenzied haste, trying to finish his now nearly completed experiments as if his life depended on it. And it wasn't as if only she, Sylvia, had no use for it. He was doing something for which the dull and practical world, his world, after all, had no use whatsoever. In that world, sensible psychologists wore the oak leaves or eagles of the Army. Homer, clinging to his own way, was the truly superfluous man.

In her new-found amusement, Sylvia followed the last mad two weeks at the college from without, inhabiting her body during the night only, and hovering back and forth, sharing observation between it and Homer during the day. Apparently the body had been drawn into the insanity of Homer's being, for it typed and cataloged while he wrote, overexerting itself as much as he did. And late on the last night of this frenzy, long after the usual bed-

time, when Sylvia knew she should for safety be back in her body, she still hovered about the pair to observe the climax of this effort. Amused and interested in the sordid little comedy, she resisted the pull to go elsewhere — to the hundreds of interesting places where she belonged. Here the last act was being played out. The world had been too much for Homer. Time had run out and he had not finished. Homer, a grown man, stood there and talked to her body and wept.

Sylvia could see that her body was crying, too, as it embraced Homer. Apparently it was more skilled than she had thought. Or had it been — holding out on her? Or learning things? Was there, perhaps, a sort of animal spirit, a devil soul, a thing of evil? She would put a stop to this!

And then Sylvia found that she couldn't get into her body. She just couldn't. Something was keeping her out. And she knew that she must. It was time, and more than time. She was dizzy now, and exhilarated and chilled all at once. It was as if a wind were blowing through a scrapbook, tearing at the clippings and scattering them abroad.

But her body had tricked her. Her body was keeping her out. In its poor way it must have learned to want the dull life which it shared with Homer, must want it so much as to exclude even herself, her soul.

She didn't want that life. She wanted all that was good and bright and gay in all the lives in the world. She didn't want life with Homer at all. But she knew now that she must have the body or soon she would be torn away — to what? To where her soul had come from? But where was that? Confusedly, she thought of scraps of conversations and books, of bits of plays and people. There was no time to think. She must get back into her body.

But she couldn't. The body had learned. Had it perhaps been taught? Could that dull psychologist Homer have taught her body to want to share his life and to believe that it could, all without knowing that her soul was all the time far away? Or — had Homer known about her soul, even? Had gentle, simple Homer conspired against her soul?

But she must get back. She must get back into her body in order to live — to live in any way. And she struggled desperately, dully regarding the scene between Homer and the body.

Homer seemed to have forgotten his lost work now, and his lost life, and he seemed unafraid of the imminence of the new life he faced. And the body which was to lose him no longer wept, nor did he. Now they talked and comforted one another; but strain as she would, Sylvia could not catch what they were saying. They seemed very remote. But as Homer clasped the body to him its face looked directly over his shoulder. It stared right at Sylvia's struggling soul, surely seeing it. And the lips moved.

"I can get along without you," the body said.