More Stately Mansions

a novelet by ROBERT F YOUNG

The poor girl and the rich man's son faced an age-old problem . . . and each with a different idea of happiness

A.D. 2150-2200: *Man had at last pinned down happiness. He no longer visualized it symbolically as a bluebird that was forever flitting just be-yond his reach: he visualized it solidly as a house, and his status in his society was commensurate to the number of bricks or the number of board feet his house contained.*

Now if a society which reveres beauty respects artists and if a society which reveres ideas respects philosophers, a society which reveres buildings cannot fail to respect builders. Add to this propensity the incontrovertible fact that real estate values had been on an upward spiral for the past two hundred years plus the equally incontrovertible fact that construction unions had been growing progressively stronger for a similar length of time, and you have some con-ception of the aristocracy which flour-ished during the latter part of the twen-ty-second century.

—Nath-Ouiros,

TERRAN ARISTOCRACIES; p. 461-2.

I

It must constantly be kept in mind that there are only two kinds of edifices. One kind is built of stone, the other of ideas.

—Ibid., p. 462.

KATHY met the Thoreau one Saturday morning in May when she was picking violets in the woods. She picked violets every spring and sold them in the village. That way she was always able to buy a new dress for summer and her pupils never had to be ashamed of her when they attended her classes in the ancient twentieth century school.

The Thoreau was sitting by a small stream, reading a book. He looked up when she emerged from the underbrush on the opposite bank. "Good morning," he said.

Kathy's hair was as dark as April nights, and if you looked close you could see blue skies deep in her eyes. Her mind was prose and poetry. She had inherited her father's books as well as his vocation, and she had read them, every one.

"Good morning," she replied. "You —you frightened me for a minute."

"I'm quite harmless," the Thoreau said.

Kathy was barefoot. She waded through the stream and climbed up on the grassy bank. The Thoreau's hair was quite long, she noticed, but he was freshly shaven and he was wearing a clean white shirt. She glanced at the book he was reading. "Wordsworth?" she asked.

He nodded. " 'The Wye above Tintern.' "

"I like that one," Kathy said . . . " 'Once again I see these hedge-rows, hardly hedge-rows, little lines of sportive wood run wild—' "

"You're a school teacher, aren't you?"

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"You're a school teacher, aren't you?"

"Are you going by my familiarity with Wordsworth, or my rags?"

"Neither. Your eyes betray you. There's something about them, a hope, an aliveness, that most people's eyes lack."

"Thank you," Kathy said. "You're very kind."

"Not kind. Honest . . . Why don't you sit down?"

She hesitated a moment, then dropped

down beside him on the bank. "You're the first Thoreau I've seen for a long while." she said.

"We're a vanishing species. Waldens are rare phenomena in the twenty-second century, and besides, it's so much easier to conform . . . My name is Paul Dar-row."

"I'm Kathy Gray."

"I'm glad to know you, Kathy." He noticed the small bunch of violets in her hand and he reached over and touched them. "I know where there's a whole clearing full of them," he said. "Want me to show you?"

"Oh yes!" Kathy said. She got to her feet and he stood up beside her. A thought struck her.

"I—I sell them, you know," she said. "Does that make a difference? I mean, you needn't show me where they are if it does."

HIS gray eyes touched her thin face, her ragged dress, her bare feet. "Come on, I'll show you," he said, "I'll help you pick them."

He left the bank of the stream and entered the forest. Kathy followed. The aisles between the trees were still damp with dew and the forest floor was mottled with sunlight. The Thoreau walked with long graceful strides, the sunlight dappling his brown hair and his wide spare shoulders. He seemed acquainted with every tree, with every rise and fall of ground.

The clearing was in a marshy hollow. It was like coming outdoors after a purple rainfall and seeing the grass glistening with myriad purple drops. "Why," Kathy gasped, "they're beauti-ful!"

"I come here every day," the Thoreau said. He knelt down and began to pick, b r e a k i n g t h e stems flush with the ground. Kathy knelt beside him, her bare knees sinking into the soft wet e a r t h .

When each of them had picked five bouquets apiece, she stood up.

"That's enough," she said. "Some-one else might want to pick some."

"No one ever comes here," the Thoreau said, rising. "Except me. And now you. Perhaps you'll come again."

"Perhaps," Kathy said.

His gray eyes met hers and she saw how deep they were. There was a reassuring quality about them, a maturity that contradicted the youthfulness of his face. There was another quality about them too, a quality that eluded her at first, and then shocked her when she identified it for what it was—an almost poignant loneliness.

He pointed across the clearing to the opposite side of the hollow. "My cabin is just over the rise," he said. "Would you like to see it? There's a small lake almost at my front door—I call it 'Walden' of course—and I have a collection of books. Keats, Shelley, Byron—"

"No—not today," Kathy said. "I haven't time."

"All right." His expression did not change but she sensed his disappointment. He handed her the violets he had picked. "I hope you have luck selling them," he said. "Buy a white dress. You'll look lovely in white."

He could not have helped but guess, it had been so obvious. Yet somehow she did not feel in the least embarrassed. She did not even drop her eyes. "I'll try to get a white one," she said . . . "Goodbye."

"Goodbye, Kathy."

She ran lightly into the forest. She paused once, and looked back. He was still standing in the clearing, the sun misting his hair, tinting his face with quiet gold. She waved, and he waved

back, and then she ran on again, her heart beating in rhythm to the soft pounding of her feet.

SHE had reached the village and was walking up the sunlit street when the big floater drifted down beside her and settled to the ground. Her eyes widened when she saw the Mortarson crest on the gleaming door, then rose unbelievingly from the minuscule mortar box and tiny crossed hoes to meet the brown eyes of the young man behind the controls. A vision of the huge Mortarson mansion usurped her mind, and she remembered all the times she had walked timidly past the high brick wall, slowing her steps when she came to the gate so that she might glimpse the lofty brick façade with

its haughty colonnades, but most of all so that she might glimpse the sacrosanct Mortarsons themselves.

And now, for the first time in her life, she was within a few feet of one of them—the heir apparent himself, Anthony Mortarson VI. There was no mistaking him. She had seen his picture innumerable times in the society section of *The Constructor,* and once she had seen a close-up of him on a televised Mortarson fox hunt. But seeing him in person was quite a different experience from seeing either his animate or inanimate image.

"What beautiful violets! Are you selling them?"

Her eyes dropped from his blunt,

aristocratic face to his tailored denim jacket. She raised them diffidently to the golden insigne on his white brick-layer's helmet, as though to reassure her-self of his reality. "Yes—yes, sir," she murmured.

"I'd like to buy them." There were crisp green credit notes in his hand.

"If you like, sir."

"How much for all of them?"

"There's no fixed price, sir. What-ever you care to give." He held out three of the notes. She accepted them and gave him the violets. Their hands touched briefly and it was as though the contact had activated a reciprocal emotional circuit. Kathy for-got the suburban street. She even forgot that she was a school

teacher, and she was unaware of the curious stares of the passers by. She was cognizant of noth-ing but the o p a q u e b r o w n e y e s o f Anthony Mortarson VI. When he spoke his voice was differ-ent. It was deeper now, and his words trembled ever so slightly. "What do you do evenings?" he asked.

"Sometimes I go walking, sir."

"Where?"

"Usually on the old turnpike, west of town."

"Will you he walking there tonight?"

"If you wish, sir."

"I'll look for you . . . Around nine."

"Yes sir."

The moment ended then. The floater quivered, began to rise. Kathy watched

it ascend into the May sky, make a wide leisurely turn and dart southward toward the Mortarson mansion. . .

Her first reaction was to reject the incident entirely. Princes might court peasant girls in fairy tales, but in real life they passed disdainfully by them on white chargers, or over them in black floaters, and went calling on princesses, or plumbers' daughters. Then she remembered the credit notes in her hand. Incredulously, she counted them. There were more than enough for a new dress, and she ran as fast as she could to the Mortarsonville shopping center and bought the first white one she saw. She could hardly wait till she got home and tried it on. She lived on the outskirts in a

ramshackle five room bungalow with an anachronistic veran-dah and a leaky roof. Wind-washed maples stood in the cool front yard and there was an apple orchard in the back. Breathless, she stood in her bedroom and surveyed herself in the cracked mir-ror. The Thoreau had said that she would look lovely in white, and he had been very close to the truth. But she thought of him only fleetingly as she compared the smooth darkness of her shoulder-length hair to the dazzling cascade of the dress. Instead, she thought of Anthony Mortarson.

II

KATHY walked along the turnpike slowly, watching the violet shadows

inch down from the hills, listening to the drowsy bird calls that sounded from the forest. Green fingers of grass reached up through the cracks and fissures in the crumbling macadam, brushing her bare feet. Above her, hoary elms and maples met in rustling consultation.

The turnpike had no function in the year 2190. It was a remnant of a different era. It still wound through hills and mountains, crossed deserts and struggled through forests. It even touched a town now and then, and some-times even a city; but essentially it had been dead ever since the first mass pro-duced anti-grav floater had rolled off the assembly line and risen into the sky.

Once, Kathy knew, it had flowed with

flashing vehicles. The battered history books in the ancient school had a great deal to say concerning the automobile age. It was an age of chrome and grandeur: a fantastic age during which it was possible to buy houses over periods of less than fifty years, an incredible age that supported an aristocracy totally unversed in the building arts, an impossible age during which school teaching was a respected, well paying vocation. Sometimes Kathy didn't believe the history books. Sometimes she would have the feeling that she was reading lies. At such moments she almost believed that her vocation was just as non-essen-tial as everybody said it was, that the visio-audio techniques of trade

and technical institutions really had obviated any need of books and teachers, and that history, literature and the humanities were detrimental to a progressive tech-nological culture. But literature always restored her faith. She didn't call it "literature" out loud, of course—only to herself. Aloud, she was always careful to use the same word (though not the same tone of voice) that other people used: "readin." But underneath it was literature just the same; underneath it was still Shake-speare and Milton and Swift and Dryden—everything her father had read to her, and everything she herself had read, during the long quiet evenings after his death . . . Night had nearly fallen when

the floater descended. Its landing lights caught Kathy in their glaring focus and it drifted down beside her, hovering just above the macadam. Her heart was pounding painfully. She hadn't really thought that he would come, and now that he had she didn't know what to say. She stood there, taut and frightened, illogically ashamed. She wished suddenly that she were home, safe with her books; but when he opened the door and she saw his face, handsome and reassuring in the roseate light of the control panel, she slipped into the seat beside him.

He rose to cruising level immediately, and the earth became a vast dark mass of hills and valleys, inlaid with the jeweled

lights of villages. Kathy could hear the rushing sound of the night wind past the open vents and she could feel its damp coolness against her cheek. In the distance the city showed, an orange fire red-dening the horizon.

They flew for miles in silence. Finally: "What's your name?" he asked.

"Kathy, sir. Kathy Gray."

"Mine's Tony. I guess you knew that."

"Yes, sir."

"Not `sir.' `Tony.' "

"Yes, Tony."

He reached forward and depressed one of the innumerable lighted buttons on the control panel. Subtly, the cowling shifted from opacity to transparency. The stars leaped out, bright and stabbing

against the deep dark immensity of the sky.

"Oh, how beautiful!" Kathy gasped.

"They're real bright tonight," Tony said. "Ever been to a sky-bar?"

"No."

"We'll stop in one after awhile. I know a nice quiet one. Nice atmosphere, nice music—"

"Oh, I'm afraid I couldn't sir!"

"Why not?"

"I—I have no shoes." The night wind was cold against her hot cheek. She wished desperately that she had not come.

After a long moment, he laughed softly. "Well what do you know!" he said. "So you're the village schoolmarm!"

"I—I took it for granted that you knew. I shouldn't have. I'm sorry, sir."

"My name is still Tony."

"I'm sorry, Tony."

"Well don't be. I didn't really want to stop in a sky-bar anyway. It's nicer just flying around."

Kathy was silent. Values whirled bewilderingly in her mind. Up until a moment ago she had never seriously ques-tioned her *status quo;* there had been a serene sense of rightness about carrying on her father's work, no matter how hopeless the task seemed at times, no matter what people said behind her back. Her house was built of books, not bricks, and until now she had always measured her wealth accordingly.

But now her house was tottering.

THE orange fire of the city had become a white cold blaze of lights. Sky-bars began to appear, swimming like gaudy islands in the night sky. Skytels were floating precipices, aflame with windows, and sky-signs obscured the stars with multicolored commercials. Air traffic thickened, and Tony flew slower. Shift change was in progress and thousands of commuters were hurrying back to their mortgaged brick or clapboard castles. The city blazed bright-er and brighter, its white flames of build-ings licking the feet of the disdainful stars. When they reached the outskirts Tony put the floater into a wide U-turn and they started back. Kathy kept

glancing over her shoulder. She had never seen the city at night be-fore and she was fascinated. She did not notice at first that the floater was gain-ing altitude. When she did notice, she located the altimeter on the panel and followed its quivering indicator with her eyes. 9000, 10,000, 11,000, 12,000— The indicator hesitated, then steadied at 12,-500. Beneath the glowing numerals were two tiny words. Leaning forward, she made them out: *Parking Level*. When she leaned back she felt Tony's arm against her shoulders.

"My pretty little schoolmarm," he said.

Kathy sat very still, her hands clasped tightly on her lap. Love-making, in her

mind, was a jumble of moonlight and gardens and Tennysonian passages, and such a conception necessarily fell far short of the exigencies of the moment.

"What's the matter? You're as cold as mortar."

"Am I?"

"Look at me, Kathy."

Diffidently, she turned her head. His face was unreal in the starlight. It grew closer, blurred. Suddenly a sense of wrongness pervaded her, and at the last moment she turned her face away. His lips brushed her cheek.

She sensed his instant anger, heard it in his words: "Don't play games, teacher. I don't like to play games." His arm tightened around her shoulders and he

turned her head forcibly with one wide calloused hand. His face descended again. Kathy twisted violently. His lips brushed her cheek for the second time, and she heard the hoarse sound of his breathing: She disengaged his arm and moved as far away from him as she could on the narrow seat. "Take me home, sir!" she said.

"Just who in hell do you think you are?" His voice had tightened and grown cold.

"I'm Kathy Gray."

"You're Kathy Gray. And do you know who I am?"

"Anthony Mortarson VI, sir."

"And you still want me to take you home?"

"Yes sir."

He opened his mouth as though to say something more. Then he closed it. Abruptly he turned toward the control panel and jabbed the acceleration and altitude buttons simultaneously. The floater dropped giddily to cruising level, picking up momentum. Wind screamed past the vents and the white blaze of the city dwindled to red embers on the horizon. He did not take her home. Instead, he dropped the floater down to the section of the old turnpike where he had picked her up. He opened the door. "Get out," he said flatly. "I don't know what world you're living in, but go back to it and stay. You don't belong in this one!"

III

THERE are non-conformists in every community. The non-conformists of Mortarsonville lived on the fringes of the village and managed to subsist on small farms despite the fact that agricultural corporations made individual farming precarious. That in itself was enough to set them apart from their fellow men, for Mortarsonville, like most villages, was a suburb in disguise, freed from the city's skirts by the high speed and extreme maneuverability of the floater; and land, in the eyes of the suburbanites, was something pleasant to look at, not soil to be tilled. Farming, however, was merely a mi-nor aberration in the behavior pattern of the non-conformists of

Mortarsonville.

It was rumored, for instance, that they read books of evenings, and that one of them maintained an amateur playhouse in his barn. And it was a known fact that they did not believe that trade and technological institutions completely fulfilled the needs of education. It was this final heresy that led to the ultimate aberration that officially stamped the lot of them as outcasts. They sent their children to school.

KATHY arose early Monday morning and fixed breakfast. She wasn't very hungry and she picked disinterest-edly at her eggs and bacon. She drank her coffee while she did the dishes, then she packed a small lunch and started out.

It was a fine May morning. Grass glistened with translucent dew, and the new leaves of elms and maples quivered ecstatically in the first sweet breath of the nascent day. In the village proper the roof doors of garages were opening and commuter-floaters were rising into the blue sky, darting off to keep their rendezvous with industry. Behind stereotyped façades housewives were settling comfortably down in viewing rooms to await the first sensual, and on geo-metric lawns and amid disciplined hedges, small children were setting out in imaginary pursuit of the traditional enemies of Western Civilization: Indians, Sheepmen and Martians.

To reach the school, Kathy had to

pass through the shopping center. Ordinarily she did not mind, but this morning she was acutely aware of the averted eyes of the shop keepers, of the occasional con-temptuous glances of the early morning shoppers, and for the first time in her life she was ashamed of her bare feet.

The Constructor's Trust Building seemed even more austere than it usually did, and she walked past it quickly. She came to the lavish grounds of the local technological institute and she kept her eyes down so that she would not see the shining modern building, or the bookless students strolling along the winding con-crete walks beneath the unacademic elms. Finally she came to the unused

side street and turned down it toward the school.

The school was over two centuries old, but fortunately it had been a well-built structure. The foundation was still solid and the walls still true. Most of the win-dows were shattered of course, and the heating unit had long ago gone awry; but the building was serviceable enough during the warm months, and if you really wanted to teach, you could teach as well in spring and summer as you could in winter.

Her pupils were awaiting her—all nine of them. They had taken their seats behind the archaic little desks in the room she had set aside to conduct her classes in. It was by far the best pre-

served room in the one-story structure and its southern exposure conveniently solved the lighting problem. Two of its blackboards were in reasonably good condition, and on the mildewed wall above Kathy's desk there was a recogniz-able portrait of Charles William Eliot. Usually Kathy was proud of her pu-pils. She was proud to be their teacher and proud to receive each week the small stipend which was all their parents could afford to give. She enjoyed walking into the classroom each weekday morning and seeing their scrubbed shining faces and their bright inquisitive eyes.

But this morning she was not proud. This morning their faces left her indif-

ferent. And there was a quality about the drab room that had been absent before—a quality that chilled the warmth that pervaded her when she touched the old books, that canceled out the enthusiasm that leaped into her mind when she opened the first treasured volume.

SHE began the lessons listlessly. She was unprepared when Nora, the youngest of her pupils, cried: "There's a big floater outside, Miss Gray, and a man's coming up the walk!" Kathy managed to retain her outward composure, but it was hardly more than a flimsy veneer behind which her emotions romped like irrepressible children. She met him just outside the main entrance. He had his white helmet in his

hands and he kept twisting it around and around. There were scattered specks of gray mortar clinging to his tailored denims and tiny globules of perspiration gleamed on his wide forehead. "Good morning," he said.

"Good morning, sir."

"I know you're surprised to see me. But I've been thinking about what I said the other night and—"

"You said I didn't belong in this world," Kathy interrupted, "and you were perfectly right."

"No I wasn't! I had no business saying that at all." (With a shock she saw that his eyes were contrite, that there were faint shadows beneath them.) "You belong here as much as I do. It's just that

you think different . . . You're the first schoolteacher I ever knew."

"That's hardly surprising, sir. Our social levels aren't exactly on the same plane."

"Kathy, I'm trying to apologize. It's not easy."

"Oh," Kathy said. "I didn't know."

"I guess I took a lot for granted the other night. Too much for granted. None of the other girls I took out acted like you. I mean, most of them were so proud to be with a Mortarson, they—" He paused, his face reddening.

"It's not that I wasn't proud to be with you, sir. It's just that—"

"It's just that you're different, that's all? Can I see you again?" Kathy was

speechless. The classical poets, whose love lyrics formed the basis of her sex knowledge, had neglected the most important aspect of their subject: psychology. Consequently she was completely uninformed on the finer points of the game and failed to realize that in repulsing Anthony Mortarson and thereby disfiguring his self-image, she had done the one thing most likely to guarantee his continued interest in her.

"You *will* let me see you again, won't you, Kathy?"

"Why—why I guess so, sir," she said finally.

"Tonight?"

"If you wish, sir. But I have to be in early. I have classes tomorrow."

"Tonight then." His face was radiant. "I'll pick you up at your house. No, don't tell me where it is—I'll find it all right." He put his helmet on. "I have to get back to work now," he said. "Goodbye, Kathy."

"Goodbye, sir."

She watched till the floater was a bare-ly discernible speck in the sky, then she returned to the classroom and resumed the lessons. But she read the printed words like a stranger, and the yellowed pages were dead beneath her fingers.

IV

JU N E came. Warm winds flowed northward and soft rains fell. The green of trees and grass took on a deeper hue,

and the night skies exhibited a new wealth of diamond-bright stars. June, and then July. Cicadas began their aft-ernoon crescendoes and the evenings were cloyed with warmth. When she flew with Tony in the floater, Kathy opened the vents wide and let the cool upper air wash over her. They were fly-ing together every night by then, start-ing out with the first star and returning when Sagittarius was showing high in the south. It wasn't until early in August that she saw the Thoreau again.

IT WAS a Friday evening and she was sitting on her veranda steps, listening to the first night sounds and watching for the first star. She was wearing her white dress. The Thoreau

came up the path that wound among the maples. She did not recognize him for a moment. She had almost forgotten him.

"Good evening, Kathy," he said.

She remembered him then: his young, yet oddly-aged face; his gray, questing eyes; his tall, lean body.

"Why . . . Good evening," she said.

"I gave up hope you'd ever come back for more violets, and then I started hoping you might come to see my cabin and my lake." He smiled a smile that wasn't quite sure of itself. "Finally I stopped hoping altogether and tried to forget you. I couldn't."

"But why not?" Kathy glanced over his head at the special place in the sky where, very shortly, the first star would

appear. "I should think I'd be easy to forget." He shook his head. "Every time I sit down to write I see your eyes, and after I've written your eyes away I see your mouth. And then I see your hair, and then your face, and finally I see you running into the woods, your arms filled with the violets we picked . . ."

"But I don't understand," Kathy said: "What are you trying to write?"

"My own personal 'Walden,' I suppose."

"But why? Who will read it?"

"Probably no one." He took a step forward, then hesitated. "Do you mind if I sit down?"

"Oh, I'm sorry," Kathy said. "I should have asked you." He dropped

down on the veranda steps at her feet, sitting sideways so that he could look up into her face. "You *do* look lovely in white," he said.

"Thank you."

"I'm going to put you in my book, just the way you are now—sitting on the steps, watching for Venus to come out."

Confused, she dropped her eyes to his face. His gray eyes were guileless. "I—I'm afraid I don't belong in books," she said.

"You belong in mine."

"I still don't see why you're writing one."

"Someone has to write them, else they won't be written. I thought you'd understand, Kathy."

"But things are different now. Nobody writes books any more."

"I write them," the Thoreau said.

"Books are a part of the past. It's unrealistic to try to write them now. It's like—why it's like someone in the time of Hemingway chiseling out crude symbols on a monolithic tablet. We have different mediums of communication now, improved mediums. . . ." Her voice trailed away when she real-ized that he was staring at her. For a moment she was ashamed of her apos-tasy, and then, abruptly, she was angry.

"Yes, it's true," she went on. "We *do* have improved mediums of communication. Why should you expect anyone to read a book when he can acquire a

technical education by practical means? When he can experience a sensual at the flick of his finger? When he can live through any documentary he chooses? And we also have improved living condi-tions, available to anyone with sufficient ambition to work for them. People like you and me are contemptuous of houses not only because we lack the talent to drive nails or lay bricks but because we lack the courage to mortgage our lives to pay those who *do* have the talent to perform the task for us. And we ration-alize our incompetence and our coward-ice by clinging to outmoded values, by reading the works of misfits who couldn't accept the realities of their civilizations either;

by running off into the forest in imitation of a man who hated progress, who hated houses—"

"Who loved ideas . . . What's happened to you, Kathy?"

"Nothing's happened to me. I've just been thinking. For the first time in my life I've really been thinking."

"Thinking, or rationalizing from the other side of the fence?" She looked at him, startled.

"It's not a secret," he continued. "Everyone in the village knows that Anthony Mortarson is in love with you."

"He's not!" Kathy cried.

"I think he must be," the Thoreau said. "How could he help but be? You're the first real woman he's ever

known."

"You're being cynical."

"I'm being honest—something you're not being when you say that you've been thinking for the first time in your life. For the first time in your life you've stopped thinking. You've forced yourself to accept a perverted system of values. You're fawning at the feet of the Great God Tech with all the rest of them. And you're rejecting an eternal essential truth. Civilizations are built of ideas, Kathy; not of bricks or boards or electrical appliances." She glanced away from his face, un-able to meet his eyes. She looked up at the sky. The first star was just coming out, a timid whisper of light. She saw the descending

floater then, and she stood up hurriedly. "I have to go now," she said. The Thoreau rose beside her. "You're a schoolteacher, Kathy," he said softly. Kathy ignored the remark. The float-er had come down in the front yard and was hovering just above the grass. "I'm sorry to have to run off like this," she said.

"Ready, Kathy?" Tony Mortarson called.

"I'm coming," she said. She looked up at the Thoreau's face. "Goodbye," she said.

"Goodbye, Kathy."

She ran lightly to the floater and slipped into its reassuring depths. Just before they rose into the night she caught

a final glimpse of the Thoreau standing by the steps. He stood there quietly, his face a white blur in the intensifying dark-ness. There was a quality of aloneness about him that was almost tangible, but there was another quality that tempered it: a quality of being a part of the night, of belonging to the essence of the earth; to trees and stars and darkness; to the blue sky; to the rising sun and the dew on dawn grass; to love and hope and idealism ; to a world disdainful of the transient edifices of man, contemptuous of the brick and mortar frills of civiliza-tion.

I DIDN'T know I had a rival," Tony said.

"Don't be absurd, darling. That was

just a Thoreau."

"A *Thoreau?"*

"You know. One of those men who live in the woods."

"Kathy, I can't understand you associating with anyone like that!"

"I—I met him last spring," Kathy said. "I never saw him again till tonight. He stopped by and asked if he might sit on the steps. I—I couldn't very well say no."

"Next time you'll be able to."

"I don't understand."

"Kathy, I want to marry you."

She sat there numbly, unable, at first, to speak. The stars spread out lavishly above her and the dark earth lay below. There was no sound but the wind sound

and the wild throbbing sound of her thoughts. She found words finally, inane words that stumbled when she spoke them, that had nothing whatever to do with her heart. "But—but you can't," she said.

"Why can't I?"

"I—I'm a schoolteacher. Did you forget. And you're a Mortarson." He laughed softly. "I told my father all about you, Kathy. I even told him how I feel about you."

"Tony, you didn't! He must have been furious!"

"He *was* kind of upset. But he calmed down after a bit and finally I convinced him that the least he could do was to meet you. So Sunday morning I'm going

to take you over to the house. Once he sees you he won't be able to say no!'

"But, Tony, I can't go to your house. I haven't—"

"Oh yes you have!" He reached into the compartment beneath the control panel and produced a rectangular white box. "Open it," he said. "I got the smallest ones I could find."

They were fragile white shells, tapered to exquisite points and garnished with blue bows.

"Why, they're beautiful!" Kathy breathed.

"Try them on."

She slipped her feet into the shoes diffidently. They were soft and cool and delightful. She felt like Cinderella. She

laughed shyly to herself. *Like* Cinderella? She *was* Cinderella!

"Kathy, you will marry me, won't you?" the King's son said.

"I—I don't know what to say. I need time to think."

"I'll give you till Sunday. Will you tell me then?"

"Yes." Kathy said, "I'll tell you."

V

I *N DISCUSSING the values of the late years of the twenty-second century, an old quotation comes ironically to mind. It is accredited to an ancient king, Alfonso of Aragon, and constitutes his conception of the four best things of life: "Old wood to burn! Old wine to drink! Old friends to*

converse with! Old books to read!"

—Ibid, p. 462-3.

THE house was an architectural pot-pourri. Originally it had been a simple four-story structure, but now it was a complex affair of too many wings and ells. A plethora of chimneys gave it a Byzantine effect, and an imposing loggia running the entire length of the façade superimposed an incongruous American Colonial motif. Lawns and parks encompassed it, and behind it, half a mile distant, was a well-stocked hunting forest. Kathy felt uncomfortable the moment she stepped from the floater onto the lawn. The colonnades of the loggia rose awesomely above her, white and glaring in the morning sunlight. Tony

took her arm and helped her ascend the brick steps. He opened the door for her. "Don't be afraid," he whispered.

The great hall was cool and fore-boding. Kathy felt very small. Almost, she wished that she hadn't come. The living room was at the end of the hall. It was huge and dim, the morning sun-light filtering into it through green-tint-ed glass-brick windows. The walls were done in ornamental brick and a thick red rug with a brickwork pattern cov-ered the floor. There was a tremendous fireplace to the right of the, door. Before it, in a voluminous armchair, an old man was sitting. Piles of books were scattered all around him. Tony cleared his throat. "Good mor-ning, sir."

The old man turned his head. He was *very* old, Kathy saw. His first four wives had given him only daughters and he had had to take a fifth before obtaining a fitting heir. His face was round and his features blunt. His short arms terminated in square gnarled hands. The hands were holding a book, an old old book. Kathy almost gasped when she glimpsed the title: *The Odyssey.* He looked at Kathy. "This is the one?" he asked in a deep dissonant voice.

"Yes, sir," Tony said. "Kathy, this is my father."

"How do you do, sir," Kathy said.

"She's a pretty one all right," the old man said. He continued to look at her with small rheumy eyes. It was a warm

morning but there was a fire burning in the hearth. It was a smoky fire and gave forth a peculiar pungent odor.

Presently the old man dropped his eyes to the book in his hands. He riffled the pages absently, then, deftly, he tossed it into the fire. The yellowed pages fluttered wildly just before the flames caught them. He procured another book from the nearest pile. "When you get to be my age you need a good fire to keep you warm," he said. "Even in summer." Kathy held herself tight. Her eyes sought the title of the new book in hor rid fascination: *Complete Poems, Mil-ton.* "Yes—yes, sir," she said.

"Books are cheaper to burn than wood these days," the old man went on. "I

picked up two cord in the city yesterday." He threw Milton into the fire. Words screamed in Kathy's mind as the flames touched them:

To hear the lark begin his flight,
And singing startle the dull night,
From his watch-tower in the skies,
Till the dappled Dawn doth rise—

"Well, what do you think of her, sir?" Tony said, his voice calm and matter-of-fact as though he were completely unaware that the world was breaking up into little pieces and forming a new asteroid belt around the sun. "Isn't she everything I said she was?"

"She's kind of quiet," the old man said. He picked up another book.

"But she's not used to you yet. She'll

talk after she's been here awhile, won't you, Kathy?"

Kathy was staring at the new book, trying to make out its title. It was a thin, leather-bound volume, the gold let-tering on its spine nearly obliterated. *The Poems of Oliver Wendell Holmes*.

"Kathy, did you hear me?"

She turned toward him slowly. "Yes," she said. "Yes, I heard you." She left his side and walked over to the chair where the old man was sitting. She took the book from his hands.

"Excuse me, sir," she said, "but before you burn it there's a passage I'd like to read to you." She opened the book. Her eyes scanned the pages till they came to the deathless lines. Her

voice was rich and full and the resonant words filled the room, cheapening the tawdry brickwork with their quiet dignity:

" 'Build thee more stately mansions,
O my soul,
As the swift seasons roll!
Leave thy low-vaulted past!
Let each new temple, nobler than the
last,
Shut thee from heaven with a dome
more vast,
Till thou at length art free,
Leaving thine outgrown shell by life's
unresting sea!' "

The room had become a tomb and the old man sat like a cadaver in his chair,

surrounded by his cairns of books. Kathy laid the thin volume on his lap. "Here," she said, "you can burn it now . . . I don't want to marry your son. I could never live in a house of bricks." Tony stood like a gray guardian at the door of the tomb. Kathy paused be-fore him. She looked once more into his eyes, realizing for the first time that they were empty, that there was no sun in them, no sky; that there wasn't the faintest vestige of a dream behind them.

"Goodbye, Tony," she said.

SHE walked out of the house and into the sunlight. She removed her shoes and left them at the base of one of the tall colonnades, then she ran across the lawn, her bare feet sinking into the soft

cool grass. The guard at the gate looked at her curiously but he did not stop her, and presently she was in the forest.

It was pleasant among the trees. Beeches were colonnades in their own right, tall and blue-gray, rising sedately into the green mist of foliage. The sunlight was a golden treasure scattered prodigiously over the forest floor, and patches of blue sky peeped through interstices of leafy branches.

When she came to the little stream she waded through its limpid coolness. The clearing where the violets had been still held the memory of a purple rain-fall and a boy and a girl on their hands and knees gathering beauty. She as-cended the rise beyond it, her heart pounding.

Statuesque pines towered all around her and the ground was resilient with fallen needles. When she reached the summit the first thing she saw, twinkling between the trees, was a blue lake.

She descended the slope slowly. The pines thinned out and green grass began. She saw the cabin on the blue lip of the lake, and the garden just behind it. The Thoreau was in the garden, hoe-ing.

When she came to the edge of the garden, she paused. For a moment she was afraid. Then, when he looked up and she saw his face, she knew that it was all right, and she ran toward him lightly, seeing the loneliness fade from his eyes when she came up to him, and feeling the warmth of his smile.

A.D. 2200-2250: *The depression of 2202 coincided with the pub-lication* of Walden II *by an obscure woodland poet. While, unlike the blue-bird, man's cherished house could not fly away, he discovered that his owner-ship could, and once his ownership was gone he learned the true worth of his values. He needed new ones to supplant them, and* Walden II *supplied them.*

The back to earth movement began late in 2203, and the return to literature and the humanities followed soon after. The bluebird came into its own again, and man discovered once more that the most delightful aspect of business was its tendency to appear the moment he stopped looking for it.

—Ibid, p. 476.