

Fade to White

Fight the Communist Threat in Your Own Backyard!

ZOOM IN on a bright-eyed Betty in a crisp green dress, maybe pick up the shade of the spinach in the lower left frame. [Note to Art Dept: Good morning, Stone! Try to stay awake through the next meeting, please. I think we can get more patriotic with the dress. Star-Spangled Sweetheart, steamset hair the color of good American corn, that sort of thing. Stick to a red, white, and blue palette.] She's holding up a resplendent head of cabbage the size of a pre-war watermelon. Her bicep bulges as she balances the weight of this New Vegetable, grown in a Victory Brand Capsule Garden. [Note to Art Dept: is cabbage the most healthful vegetable? Carrots really pop, and root vegetables emphasize the safety of Synthasoil generated by Victory Brand Capsules.]

Betty looks INTO THE CAMERA and says: Just because the war is over doesn't mean your Victory Garden has to be! The vigilant wife knows that every garden planted is a munitions plant in the War Fight Struggle Against Communism. Just one Victory Brand Capsule and a

dash of fresh Hi-Uranium Mighty Water a can provide an average yard's worth of safe, rich, synthetic soil—and the seeds are included! STOCK FOOTAGE of scientists: beakers, white coats, etc. Our boys in the lab have developed a wide range of hardy, modern seeds from pre-war heirloom collections to produce the Vegetables of the Future. [Note to Copy: Do not mention pre-war seedstock.] Just look at this beautiful New Cabbage. Efficient, bountiful, and only three weeks from planting to table. [Note to Copy: Again with the cabbage? You know who eats a lot of cabbage, Stone? Russians. Give her a big old zucchini. Long as a man's arm. Have her hold it in her lap so the head rests on her tits.]

BACK to Betty, walking through cornstalks like pine trees. And that's not all. With a little help from your friends at Victory, you can feed your family and play an important role in the defense of the nation. Betty leans down to show us big, leafy plants growing in her Synthasoil. [Note to Casting: make sure we get a busty girl, so we see a little cleavage when she bends over. We're hawking fertility here. Hers, ours.] Here's a tip: Plant our patented Liberty Spinach at regular intervals. Let your little green helpers go to work leeching useful isotopes and residual radioactivity from rain, groundwater, just about anything! [Note to Copy: Stone, you can't be serious. Leeching? That sounds dreadful. Reaping. Don't make me do your job for you.] Turn in your

crop at Victory Depots for Harvest Dollars redeemable at a variety of participating local establishments! [Note to Project Manager: can't we get some soda fountains or something to throw us a few bucks for ad placement here? Missed opportunity! And couldn't we do a regular feature with the "tips" to move other products, make Betty into a trusted household name—but not Betty. Call her something that starts with T, Tammy? Tina? Theresa?]

Betty smiles. The camera pulls out to show her surrounded by a garden in full bloom and three [Note to Art Dept: Four minimum] kids in overalls carrying baskets of huge, shiny New Vegetables. The sun is coming up behind her. The slogan scrolls up in red, white, and blue type as she says:

A free and fertile tomorrow. Brought to you by Victory.

Fade to white.

The Hydrodynamic Front

More than anything in the world, Martin wanted to be a Husband when he grew up.

Sure, he'd had longed for other things when he was young and silly—to be a Milkman, a uranium prospector, an astronaut. But his fif-

teenth birthday was zooming up with alarming speed, and becoming an astronaut now struck him as an impossibly, almost obscenely trivial goal. Martin no longer drew pictures of the moon in his notebooks or begged his mother to order the whiz-bang home enrichment kit from the tantalizing back pages of Popular Mechanics. His neat yellow pencils still kept up near-constant flight passes over the pale blue lines of composition books, but what Martin drew now were babies. In cradles and out, girls with bows in their bonnets and boys with rattles shaped like rockets, newborns and toddlers. He drew pictures of little kids running through clean, tall grass, reading books with straw in their mouths, hanging out of trees like rosy-cheeked fruit. He sketched during history, math, civics: twin girls sitting at a table gazing up with big eyes at their Father, who kept his hat on while he carved a holiday Brussels sprout the size of a dog. Triplet boys wrestling on a pristine, uncontaminated beach. In Martin's notebooks, everyone had twins and triplets.

Once, alone in his room at night, he had allowed himself to draw quadruplets. His hand quivered with the richness and wonder of those four perfect graphite faces asleep in their four identical bassinets.

Whenever Martin drew babies they were laughing and smiling. He could not bear the thought of an unhappy child. He had never been

one, he was pretty sure. His older brother Henry had. He still cried and shut himself up in Father's workshop for days, which Martin would never do because it was very rude. But then, Henry was born before the war. He probably had a lot to cry about. Still, on the rare occasion that Henry made a cameo appearance in Martin's gallery of joyful babies, he was always grinning. Always holding a son of his own. Martin considered those drawings a kind of sympathetic magic. Make Henry happy—watch his face at dinner and imagine what it would look like if he cracked a joke. Catch him off guard, snorting, which was as close as Henry ever got to laughing, at some pratfall on The Mr. Griffith Show. Make Henry happy in a notebook and he'll be happy in real life. Put a baby in his arms and he won't have to go to the Front in the fall.

Once, and only once, Martin had tried this magic on himself. With very careful strokes and the best shading he'd ever managed, he had drawn himself in a beautiful gray suit, with a professional grade shine on his shoes and a strong angle to his hat. He drew a briefcase in his own hand. He tried to imagine what his face would look like when it filled out, got square-jawed and handsome the way a man's face should be. How he would style his hair when he became a Husband. Whether he would grow a beard. Painstakingly, he drew a double Wind-

sor knot in his future tie, which Martin considered the most masculine and elite knot.

And finally, barely able to breathe with longing, he outlined the long, gorgeous arc of a baby's carriage, the graceful fall of a lace curtain so that the pencilled child wouldn't get sunburned, big wheels capable of a smoothness that bordered on the ineffable. He put the carriage-handle into his own firm hand. It took Martin two hours to turn himself into a Husband. When the spell was finished, he spritzed the drawing with some of his mother's hairspray so that it wouldn't smudge and folded it up flat and small. He kept it in his shirt pocket. Some days, he could feel the drawing move with his heart. And when Father hugged him, the paper would crinkle pleasantly between them, like a whispered promise.

Static Overpressure

The day of Sylvie's Presentation broke with a dawn beyond red, beyond blood or fire. She lay in her spotless white and narrow bed, quite awake, gazing at the colors through her Sentinel Gamma Glass window—lower rates of corneal and cellular damage than their leading competitors, guaranteed. Today, the sky could only remind Sylvie of birth.

The screaming scarlet folds of clouds, the sun's crowning head. Sylvie knew it was the hot ash that made every sunrise and sunset into a torture of magenta and violet and crimson, the superheated cloud vapor that never cooled. She winced as though red could hurt her—which of course it could. Everything could.

Sylvie had devoted a considerable amount of time to imagining how this day would go. She did not worry and she was not afraid, but it had always sat there in her future, unmovable, a mountain she could not get through or around. There would be tests, for intelligence, for loyalty, for genetic defects, for temperament, for fertility, which wasn't usually a problem for women but better safe than sorry. Better safe than assign a Husband to a woman as barren as California. There would be a medical examination so invasive it came all the way around to no big deal. When a doctor can get that far inside you, into your blood, your chromosomes, your potentiality and all your possible futures, what difference could her white gloved fingers on your cervix make?

None of that pricked up her concern. The tests were nothing. Sylvie prided herself on being realistic about her qualities. First among these was her intellect; like her mother Hannah she could cut glass with the diamond of her mind. Second was her silence. Sylvie had discovered when she was quite small that adults were discomfited by silence. It

brought them running. And when she was angry, upset, when the world offended her, Sylvie could draw down a coil of silence all around her, showing no feeling at all, until whoever had affronted her grew so uncomfortable that they would beg forgiveness just to end the ordeal. There was no third, not really. She was what her mother's friends called striking, but never pretty. Narrow frame, small breasts, short and dark. Nothing in her matched up with the fashionable Midwestern fertility goddess floor-model. And she heard what they did not say, also—that she was not pretty because there was something off in her features, a ghost in her cheekbones, her height, her straight, flat hair.

Sylvie gave up on the fantasy of sliding back into sleep. She flicked on the radio by her bed: Brylcreem Makes a Man a Husband! announced a tinny woman's voice, followed by a cheerful blare of brass and the morning's reading from the Book of Pseudo-Matthew. Sylvie preferred Luke. She opened her closet as though today's clothes had not been chosen for years, hanging in the wooden rod behind all the others, waiting for her to grow into them. She pulled out the dress and draped it over her bed. It lay there like another girl. Someone who looked just like her but had already moved through the hours of the day and come out on the other side. The red sky turned the deep neckline into a gash.

She was not ready for it yet.

Sylvie washed her body with the milled soap provided by Spotless Corp. Bright as a pearl, wrapped in white muslin and a golden ribbon. It smelled strongly of rose and mint and underneath, a blue chemical tang. The friendly folks at Spotless also supplied hair rinse, cold cream, and talcum for her special day. All the bottles and cakes smelled like that, like growing things piled on top of something biting, corrosive. The basket had arrived last month with a bow and a dainty card attached congratulating her. Until now it had loomed in her room like a Christmas tree, counting down. Now Sylvie pulled the regimented colors and fragrances out and applied them precisely, correctly, according to directions. An oyster-pink shade called *The Blossoming of the Rod* on her fingernails, which may not be cut short. A soft peach called *Penance* on her eyes, which may not be lined. Pressed powder (*The Visitation of the Dove*) should be liberally applied, but only the merest breath of blush (*Parable of the Good Harlot*) is permitted. Sylvie pressed a rosy champagne stain (*Armistice*) onto her lips with a forefinger. Hair must be natural and worn long—no steamsetting or straightening allowed. Everyone broke that rule, though. Who could tell a natural curl from a roller these days? Sylvie combed her black hair out and clipped it back with the flowers assigned to her county this year—

snowdrops for hope and consolation. Great bright thornless roses as red as the sky for love at first sight, for passion and lust.

Finally the dress. The team at Spotless Corp. encouraged foundational garments to emphasize the bust and waist-to-hip ratio. Sylvie wedged herself into a full length merry widow with built-in padded bra and rear. It crushed her, smoothed her, flattened her. Her waist disappeared. She pulled the dress over her bound-in body. Her mother would have to button her up; twenty-seven tiny, satin colored buttons ran up her back like a new spine. Its neckline plunged; its skirt flounced, showing calf and a suggestion of knee. It was miles of icy white lace, it could hardly be anything else, but the sash gleamed red. Red, red, red. All the world is red and I am red forever, Sylvie thought. She was inside the dress, inside the other girl.

The other girl was very striking.

Sylvie was fifteen years old, and by supertime she would be engaged.

Even Honest Joe Loves an Ice-Cold Brotherhood Beer!

CLOSE-UP on President McCarthy in shirtsleeves, popping the top on a distinctive green glass bottle of BB—now with improved flavor and

more potent additives! We see the moisture glisten on the glass and an honest day's sweat on the President's brow. [Note to Art Dept: I see what you're aiming at, but let's not make him look like a clammy swamp creature, shall we? He's not exactly the most photogenic gent to begin with.]

NEW SHOT: five Brothers relaxing together in the sun with a tin bucket full of ice and green bottlenecks. Labels prominently displayed. A Milkman, a TV Repairman, a couple of G-Men, and a soldier. [Note to Casting: Better make it one government jockey and two soldiers. Statistically speaking, more of them are soldiers than anything else.] They are smiling, happy, enjoying each others' company. The soldier, a nice-looking guy but not too nice-looking, we don't want to send the wrong message, says: There's nothing like a fresh swig of Brotherhood after spending a hot Nevada day eye to eye with a Russkie border guard. The secret is in the thorium-boosted hops and New Barley fresh from Alaska, crisp iodine-treated spring water and just a dash of good old fashioned patriotism. The Milkman chimes in with: And 5-Alpha! They all laugh. [Note to Copy: PLEASE use the brand name! We've had meetings about this! Chemicals sound scary. Who wants to put some freak-show in your body when you can take a nice sip of Arcadia? Plus those bastards at Standard Ales are calling their formula Kool and their sales

are up 15%. You cannot beat that number, Stone.] TV Repairman pipes up: That's right, Bob! There's no better way to get your daily dose than with the cool, refreshing taste of Brotherhood. They use only the latest formulas: smooth, mellow, and with no jitters or lethargy. G-Man pulls a bottle from the ice and takes a good swallow. 5-Alpha leaves my head clear and my spirits high. I can work all day serving our great nation without distraction, aggression, or unwanted thoughts. Second G-Man: I'm a patriot. I don't need all those obsolete hormones anymore. And Brotherhood Beer strikes a great bargain—all that and 5.6% alcohol! Our soldier stands up and salutes. He wears an expression of steely determination and rugged cheer. He says: Well, boys, I've got an appointment with Ivan to keep. Keep the Brotherhood on ice for me.

QUICK CUT back to President McCarthy. He puts down his empty bottle and picks up a file or something in the Oval Office. Slogan comes in at hip level [Note to Art Dept: how are we coming on that wheatstalk font?]:

Where There's Life, There's Brotherhood.

Fade to white.

Optimum Burst Altitude

One week out of every four, Martin's Father came home. Martin could feel the week coming all month like a slow tide. He knew the day, the hour. He sat by the window tying and untying double Windsor knots into an old silk tie Dad had let him keep years ago. The tie was emerald green with little red chevrons on it.

Cross, fold, push through. Wrap, fold, fold, over the top, fold, fold, pull down. Make it tight. Make it perfect.

When the Cadillac pulled into the drive, Martin jumped for the gin and the slippers like a golden retriever. His Father's martini was a ritual, a eucharist. Ice, gin, swirl in the shaker, just enough so that the outer layer of ice releases into the alcohol. Open the vermouth, bow in the direction of the Front, and close it again. Two olives, not three, and a glass from the freezerbox. These were the sacred objects of a Husband. Tie, Cadillac, martini. And then Dad would open the door and Faraday, the Irish Setter, would yelp with waggy happiness and so would Martin. He'd be wearing a soft grey suit. He'd put his hat on the rack. Martin's mother, Rosemary, would stand on her tiptoes to kiss him in one of her good dresses, the lavender one with daises on the hem, or if it was a holiday, her sapphire-colored velvet. Her warm blonde hair would be perfectly set, and her lips would leave a gleaming red kiss-shape on his cheek. Dad wouldn't wipe it off. He'd greet his son with a firm hand-

shake that told Martin all he needed to know: he was a man, his martini was good, his knots were strong.

Henry would slam the door to his bedroom upstairs and refuse to come down to supper. This pained Martin; the loud bang scuffed his heart. But he tried to understand his brother—after all, a Husband must possess great wells of understanding and compassion. Dad wasn't Henry's father. Pretending that he was probably scuffed something inside the elder boy, too.

The profound and comforting sameness of those Husbanded weeks overwhelmed Martin's senses like the slightly greasy swirls of gin in that lovely triangular glass. The first night, they would have a roasting chicken with crackling golden skin. Rosemary had volunteered to raise several closely observed generations of an experimental breed called Sacramento Clouds: vicious, bright orange and oversized, dosed with palladium every fortnight, their eggs covered in rough calcium deposits like lichen. For this reason they could have a whole bird once a month. The rest of the week were New Vegetables from the Capsule Garden. Carrots, tomatoes, sprouts, potatoes, kale. Corn if it was fall and there hadn't been too many high-level days when no one could go out and tend the plants. But there was always that one delicious day when Father was at home and they had chicken.

After dinner, they would retire to the living room. Mom and Dad would have sherry and Martin would have a Springs Eternal Vita-Pop if he had been very good, which he always was. He liked the lime flavor best. They would watch My Five Sons for half an hour before Rosemary's Husband retired with her to bed. Martin didn't mind that. It was what Husbands were for. He liked to listen to the sounds of their love-making through the wall between their rooms. They were reassuring and good. They put him to sleep like a lullaby about better times.

And one week out of every four, Martin would ask his Father to take him to the city.

"I want to see where you work!"

"This is where I work, son," Father would always say in his rough-soft voice. "Right here."

Martin would frown and Dad would hold him tight. Husbands were not afraid of affection. They had bags of it to share. "I'll tell you what, Marty, if your Announcement goes by without a hitch, I'll take you to the city myself. March you right into the Office and show everyone what a fine boy Rosie and I made. Might even let you puff on a cigar."

And Martin would hug his Father fiercely, and Rosemary would smile over her fiber-optic knitting, and Henry would kick something upstairs. It was regular as a clock, and the clock was always right. Martin knew

he'd be Announced, no problem. Piece of cake. Mom was super careful with the levels on their property. They planted Liberty Spinach. Martin was first under his desk every time the siren went off at school. After Henry's Announcement had gone so badly, he and Mom had installed a Friendlee Brand Geiger Unit every fifteen feet and the light-up aw-shucks faces had only turned into frowns and x-eyes a few times ever. There was no chance Martin could fail. Things were way better now. Not like when Henry was a kid. No, Martin would be Announced and he'd go to the city and smoke his cigar. He'd be ready. He'd be the best Husband anyone ever met.

Aaron Grudzinski liked to tell him it was all shit. That was, in fact, Aaron's favorite observation on nearly anything. Martin liked the way he swore, gutturally, like it really meant something. Grud was in Martin's year. He smoked Canadian cigarettes and nipping some kind of homebrewed liquor from his gray plastic thermos. He'd egged Martin into a sip once. It tasted like dirt on fire.

"Look, didn't you ever wonder why they wait til you're fifteen to do it? Obviously they can test you anytime after you pop your first boner. As soon as you're brewing your own, yeah?" And Grud would shake his flask. "But no, they make this huge deal out of going down to Matthew House and squirting in a cup. The outfit, the banquet, the music, the

filmstrips. It's all shit. Shit piled up into a pretty castle around a room where they give you a magazine full of the wholesome housewives of 1940 and tell you to do it for America. And you look down at the puddle at the bottom of the plastic tumbler they call your chalice, your chalice with milliliter measurements printed on the side, and you think: That's all I am. Two to six milliliters of warm wet nothing." Grud spat a brown tobacco glob onto the dead grass of the baseball field. He knuckled at his eye, his voice getting raw. "Don't you get it? They have to give you hope. Well, I mean, they have to give you hope. I'm a lost cause. Three strikes before I got to bat. But you? They gotta build you up, like how everyone salutes Sgt. Dickhead on leave from the glowing shithole that is the great state of Arizona. If they didn't shake his hand and kiss his feet, he might start thinking it's not worth melting his face off down by the Glass. If you didn't think you could make it, you'd just kill yourself as soon as you could read the newspaper."

"I wouldn't," Martin whispered.

"Well, I would."

"But Grud, there's so few of us left."

The school siren klaxoned. Martin bolted inside, sliding into the safe space under his desk like he was stealing home.

The Shadow Effect

Every Sunday Sylvie brought a couple of Vita-Pops out to the garage and set up her film projector in the hot dark. Her mother went to her Ladies' Auxiliary meeting from two to four o'clock. Sylvie swiped hors d'oeuvres and cookies from the official spread and waited in the shadows for Clark Baker to shake his mother and slip in the side door. The film projector had been a gift from her Father; the strips were Clark's, whose shutterbug brothers and uncles were all pulling time at the Front. Every Sunday they sat together and watched the light flicker and snap over a big white sheet nailed up over the shelves of soil-treatment equipment and Friendlee Brand gadgets stripped for parts. Every Sunday like church.

Clark was tall and shy, obsessed with cameras no less than any of his brothers. He wore striped shirts all the time, as if solid colors had never been invented. He kept reading Salinger even after the guy defected. Sometimes they held hands while they watched the movies. Mostly they didn't. It was bad enough that they were fraternizing at all. Clark already drinking Kool Koffee every morning. Sugar, no cream. Clark was a quiet, bookish black boy who would be sent to the Front within a year.

On the white sheet, they watched California melt.

It hadn't happened during the war. The Glass came after. This thing everyone did now was not called war. It was something else. Something that liquefied the earth out west and turned it into the Sea of Glass. On the sheet it looked like molten silver, rising and falling in something like waves. Turning the Grand Canyon into a soft grey whirlpool. Sylvie thought it was beautiful. Like something on the moon. In real life it had colors, and Sylvie dreamed of them. Red stone dissolving into an endless expanse of dark glass.

"There are more Japanese people in Utah than in Japan now," Clark whispered when the filmstrip rolled up into black and the filmmaker's logo. Sylvie flinched as if he'd cut her.

They didn't talk about her Presentation. It sat whitely, fatly in their future. Once Clark kissed her. Sylvie cried afterward.

"I'll write you," he said. "As long as I can write."

The growth index for their county was very healthy, and this was another reason Clark Baker should not have been holding her hand in the dark while men in ghostly astronaut suits probed the edges of the Glass on a clicking filmstrip. Every woman on the block had a new baby this year. They'd gotten a medal of achievement from President McCarthy in the spring. The Ladies' Auxiliary graciously accepted the key

to the city. She suspected her Father had a great deal to do with this. When she was little, he had come home one week in four. Now it was three days in thirty. His department kept him working hard. He'd be there for her Presentation, though. No Father missed his daughter's debut.

Sylvie thought about Clark while her mother slipped satin-covered buttons through tiny loops. Their faces doubled in the mirror. His dark brown hand on hers. The Sea of Glass turning their faces silver.

"Mom," Sylvie said. Her voice was very soft in the morning, as if she was afraid to wake herself up. "What if I don't love my Husband? Isn't that...something important?"

Hannah sighed. Her mouth took a hard angle. "You're young, darling. You don't understand. What it was like before. We had to have them here all the time, every night. Never a moment when I wasn't working my knees through for my husband. The one before your Father. The children before you. Do you think we got to choose then? It wasn't about love. For some people, they could afford that. For me, well, my parents thought he was a very nice man. He had good prospects. I needed him. I could not work. I was a woman before the war, who would hire me? And to do what? Type or teach. Not to program punchcard machines. Not to cross-breed new strains of broccoli.

Nothing that would occupy my mind. So I drowned my mind in children and in him and when the war came I was glad. He left and it was me going to work every morning, me deciding what happened to my money. So the war took them," she waved her hand in front of her eyes, "war always does that. I know you don't think so, but the program is the best part of a bad situation. A situation maybe so bad we cannot fix it. So you don't love him. Why would you look for love with a man? How could a man ever understand you? He who gets the cake cannot be friends with the girl who gets the crumbs." Sylvie's mother blushed. She whispered: "My Rita, you know, Rita who comes for tea and bridge and neptunium testing. She is good to me. Someone will be good to you. You will have your Auxiliary, your work, your children. One week in four a man will tell you what to do—but listen to me when I say they have much better manners than they used to. They say please now. They are interested in your life. They are so good with the babies." Hannah smoothed the lacy back of her daughter's Presentation gown. "Someday, my girl, either we will all die out and nothing will be left, or things will go back to the old ways and you will have men taking your body and soul apart to label the parts that belong to them. Enjoy this world. Either way, it will be brief."

Sylvie turned her painted, perfected face to her mother's. "Mom," she whispered. Sylvie had practiced. So much, so often. She ordered the words in her head like dolls, hoped they were the right ones. Hoped they could stand up straight. "Watashi wa anata o shinjite ī nā." I wish I could believe you.

Hannah's dark eyes flew wide and, without a moment's hesitation, she slapped her daughter across the cheek. It wasn't hard, not meant to wound, certainly not to leave a mark on this day of all days, but it stung. Sylvie's eyes watered.

"Nidoto," her mother pleaded. "Never, never again."

Gimbels: Your Official Father's Day Headquarters!

PANORAMA SHOT of the Gimbels flagship store with two cute kiddos front and center. [Note to Casting: get us a boy and a girl, blonde, white, under ten, make sure the boy is taller than the girl. Put them in sailor suits, everyone likes that.] The kids wave at the camera. Little Linda Sue speaks up. [Note to Copy: Nope. The boy speaks first.] It's a beautiful June here in New York City, the greatest city on earth! Jimmy throws his hands in the air and yells out: And that means FATHER'S DAY! Scene shift, kiddos are walking down a Gimbels aisle. We see toolboxes, ties, watches in a glass case, barbecue sets. Linda Sue picks

up a watch and listens to it tick. Jimmy grabs a barbecue scraper and brandishes it. He says: Come on down with your Mom and make an afternoon of it at the Brand New Gimbels Automat! Hot, pre-screened food in an instant! Gee wow! [Note to Copy: hey, Stone, this is a government sponsored ad. If Gimbels want to hawk their shitty Manhattan Meals they're going to have to actually pay for it. Have you ever tried one of those things? Tastes like a kick in the teeth.] Linda Sue: At Gimbels they have all the approved Father's Day products. (Kids alternate lines) Mr. Fix-It! Businessman! Coach! Backyard Cowboy! Mr. Gimbel appears and selects a beautiful tie from the spring Priapus line. He hands it to Linda Sue and ruffles her hair. Mr Gimbel: Now, kids, don't forget to register your gift with the Ladies' Auxiliary. We wouldn't want your Daddy to get two of the same gift! How embarrassing! That's why Gimbels carries the complete Whole Father line, right next to the registration desk so your Father's Day is a perfect one. Kids: Thanks, Mr. Gimbel!

Mr. Gimbel spreads his arms wide and type stretches out between them in this year's Father's Day colors. [Note to Art Dept: It's seashell and buttercup this year, right? Please see Marketing concerning the Color Campaign. Pink and blue are pre-war. We're working with Gimbels to establish a White for Boys, Green for Girls tradition.]

Gimbels: Your One Stop Shop for a One of a Kind Dad.

Fade to white.

Flash Blindness

Martin wore the emerald green chevroned tie to his Announcement, even if it wasn't strictly within the dress code. Everything else was right down the line: light grey suit, shaved clean if shaving was on the menu, a dab of musky Oil of Fecunditas behind each ear from your friends at Spotless Corp. Black shoes, black socks, Spotless lavender talcum, teeth brushed three times with Pure Spearmint Toothpaste (You're Sure with Spearmint!). And his Father holding his hand, beaming with pride. Looking handsome and young as he always did.

Of course, there was another boy holding his other hand.

His name was Thomas. He had broad shoulders already, chocolate-colored hair and cool slate eyes that made him look terribly romantic. Martin tried not to let it bother him. He knew how the program worked. Where the other three weeks of the month took his Father. Obviously, there were other children, other wives, other homes. Other roasting chickens, other martinis. Other evening television shows on other channels. And that's all Thomas was: another channel. When you

weren't watching a show, it just ceased to be. Clicked off. Fade to white. You couldn't be jealous of the people on those other channels. They had their own troubles and adventures, engrossing mysteries and stunning conclusions, cliffhangers and tune-in-next-weeks. It had nothing to do with Martin, or Rosemary, or Henry in his room. That was what it meant to be a Husband.

The three of them sat together in the backseat of the sleek gray Cadillac. An older lady drove them. She wore a smart cap and had wiry white hair, but her cheeks were still pink and round. Martin tried to look at her as a Husband would, even though a woman her age would never marry. After all, Husbands didn't get to choose. Martin's future wives—four to start with, that was standard, but if he did well, who knew?—wouldn't all be bombshells in pin-up bathing suits. He had to practice looking at women, really seeing them, seeing what was good and true and gorgeous in them. The chauffeur had wonderful laugh lines around her eyes. Martin could tell they were laugh lines. And her eyes, when she looked in the rear view mirror, were a nice, cool green. She radioed to the dispatcher and her voice lilted along with a faint twinge of English accent. Martin could imagine her laughing with him, picking New Kale and telling jokes about the King. He imagined her naked, laying on a soft pink bed, soft like her pink cheeks. Her body

would be the best kind of body: the kind that had borne children. Breasts that had nursed. Legs that had run after misbehaving little ones. He could love that body. The sudden hardness between his legs held no threat, only infinite love and acceptance, a Husband's love.

When I think about how good I could be, my heart stops, Martin thought as the space between his neighborhood and the city smeared by. The sun seared white through dead black trees. But somewhere deep in them there was a green wick. Martin knew it. He had a green wick, too. I will remember every date. Every wife will be so special and I will love her and our children. I will make her martinis. I will roast the chicken so she doesn't have to. When I am with one of them I will turn off all other channels in my mind. I can keep it straight and separate. I will study so hard, so that I know how to please. It will be my only vocation, to be devoted. And if they the women of Elm St or Oak Lane or Birch Drive find love with each other when I am gone, I will be happy for them because there is never enough love. I will draw them happy and they will be happy. The world will be green again. Everything will be okay.

It all seemed to happen very fast. Thomas and Martin and a dozen other boys listened to a quintet play Mendelssohn. The mayor gave a speech. They watched a recorded message from President McCarthy

which had to be pretty old because he still sported a good head of hair. Finally, a minister stood up with a lovely New Tabernacle Bible in her one good hand. The other was shriveled, boneless, a black claw in her green vestments. The pages of the Bible shone with gilt. A ribbonmark hung down and it was very red in the afternoon flares. She did not lay it on a lectern. She carried the weight in her hands and read from the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew, which Martin already knew by heart. The minister's maple-syrup contralto filled the vaults of Matthew House.

“And when Mary had come to her fourteenth year, the high priest announced to all that the virgins who were reared in the Temple and who had reached the age of their womanhood should return to their own and be given in lawful marriage. When the High Priest went in to take counsel with God, a voice came forth from the oratory for all to hear, and it said that of all of the marriageable men of the House of David who had not yet taken a wife, each should bring a rod and lay it upon the altar, that one of the rods would burst into flower and upon it the Holy Ghost would come to rest in the form of a Dove, and that he to whom this rod belonged would be the one to whom the virgin Mary should be espoused. Joseph was among the men who came, and he placed his rod upon the altar, and straightaway it burst into bloom and

a Dove came from Heaven and perched upon it, whereby it was manifest to all that Mary should become the wife of Joseph.”

Martin’s eyes filled with tears. He felt a terrible light in his chest. For a moment he was sure everyone else would see it streaming out of him. But no, the minister gave him a white silk purse and directed him to a booth with a white velvet curtain. Inside, silence. Dim, dusty light. Martin opened the purse and pulled out the chalice—a plastic cup with measurements printed on it, just like Grud said. With it lay a few old photographs—women from before the war, with so much health in their faces Martin could hardly bear to look at them. Their skin was so clear. She’s dead, he thought. Statistically speaking, that woman with the black hair and heart-shaped face and polka-dotted bikini is dead. Vaporized in Seattle or Phoenix or Los Angeles. That was where they used to make pictures, in Los Angeles. This girl is dead.

Martin couldn’t do it. This was about life. Everything, no matter how hard and strange, was toward life. He could not use a dead girl that way. Instead, he shut his eyes. He made his pictures, quick pencil lines glowing inside him. The chauffeur with her pink cheeks and white hair. The minister with kind voice and brown eyes and her shriveled hand, which was awful, but wasn’t she alive and good? Tammy, the girl from the Victory Brand Capsule Garden commercials in her star-spangled

dress. A girl with red hair who lived two blocks over and was so pretty that looking at her was like getting punched in the chest. He drew in bold, bright lines the home he was going to make, bigger than himself, bigger than the war, as big as the world.

Martin's body convulsed with the tiny, private detonation of his soul. His vision blurred into a hot colorless flash.

Blast Wind

Sylvie's mother helped her into long white gloves. They sat together in a long pearl-colored Packard and did not speak. Sylvie had nothing to say. Let her mother be uncomfortable. A visceral purple sunset colored the western sky, even at two in the afternoon. Sylvie played the test in her head like a filmstrip. When it actually started happening to her, it felt no more real than a picture on a sheet.

The mayor gave a speech. They watched a recorded message from President McCarthy's pre-war daughter Tierney, a pioneer in the program, one of the first to volunteer. Our numbers have been depleted by the Germans, the Japanese, and now the Godless Russians. Of the American men still living only 12% are fertile. But we are not Communists. We cannot become profligate, wasteful, decadent. We must main-

tain our moral way of life. As little as possible should change from the world your mothers knew—at least on the surface. And with time, what appears on the surface will penetrate to the core, and all will be restored. We will not sacrifice our way of life.

A minister with a withered arm read that Pseudo-Matthew passage Tierney had dredged up out of apocrypha to the apocrypha, about the rods and the flowers and Sylvie had never felt it was one of the Gospel's more subtle moments. The minister blessed them. They are flowers. They are waiting for the Dove.

The doctors were women. One was Mrs. Drexler, who lived on their cul-de-sac and always made rum balls for the neighborhood Christmas cookie exchange. She was kind. She warmed up her fingers before she examined Sylvie. White gloves for her, white gloves for me, Sylvie thought, and suppressed a giggle. She turned her head to one side and focused on a stained-glass lamp with kingfishers on it, piercing their frosted breasts with their beaks. She went somewhere else in her mind until it was over. Not a happy place, just a place. Somewhere precise and clean without any Spotless Corp products where Sylvie could test soil samples methodically. Rows of black vials, each labeled, dated, sealed.

They took her blood. A butterfly of panic fluttered in her—will they know? Would the test show her mother, practicing her English until her accent came out clean as acid paper? Running from a red Utah sky even though there was no one left to shoot at her? Only half, white enough to pass, curling her hair like it would save her? Sylvie shut her eyes. She said her mother's name three times in her mind. The secret, talismanic thing that only they together knew. Hidaka Hanako. Hidaka Hanako. Hidaka Hanako. Don't be silly. Japan isn't a virus they can see wiggling in your cells. Mom's documents are flawless. No alarm will go off in the centrifuge.

And none did.

She whizzed through the intelligence exams—what a joke. Calculate the drag energy of the blast wind given the following variables. Please. Other girls milled around her in their identical lace dresses. The flowers in their hair were different. Their sashes all red. Red on white, like first aid kits floating through her peripheral vision. They went from medical to placement testing to screening. They nodded shyly to each other. In five years, Sylvie would know all their names. They would be her Auxiliary. They would play bridge. They would plan block parties. They would have telephone trees. Some of them would share a Husband with her, but she would never know which. That was what let the whole

civilized fiction roll along. You never knew, you never asked. Men had a different surname every week. Only the Mrs. Drexlers of the neighborhood knew it all, the knots and snags of the vital genetics. Would she share with the frosted blonde who loved botany or the redheaded math genius who made her own cheese? Or maybe none of them. It all depended on the test. Some of these girls would score low in their academics or have some unexpressed, unpredictable trait revealed in the great forking family trees pruned by Mrs. Drexler and the rest of them. They would get Husbands in overalls, with limited allowances. They would live in houses with old paint and lead shielding instead of Gamma Glass. Some of them would knock their Presentation out of the park. They'd get Husbands in grey suits and silk ties, who went to offices in the city during the day, who gave them compression chamber diamonds for their birthdays. As little as possible should change.

Results were quick these days. Every year faster. But not so quick that they did not have luncheon provided while the experts performed their tabulations. Chicken salad sandwiches—how the skinny ones gasped at the taste of mayonnaise! Assam tea, watercress, lemon curd and biscuits. An impossible fairy feast.

“I hope I get a Businessman,” said the girl sitting next to Sylvie. Her bouffant glittered with illegal setting spray. “I couldn’t bear it if I had to live on Daisy Drive.”

“Who cares?” said Sylvie, and shoved a whole chicken salad triangle into her mouth. She shouldn’t have said anything. Her silence bent for one second and out comes nonsense that would get her noticed. Would get her remembered.

“Well, I care, you cow,” snapped Bouffant. Her friends smiled behind their hands, concealing their teeth. In primates, baring the teeth is a sign of aggression, Sylvie thought idly. She flashed them a broad, cold smile. All thirty-two, girls, drink it in.

“I think it’s clear what room you’ll be spending the evening in,” Bouffant sneered, oblivious to Sylvie’s primate signals.

But Sylvie couldn’t stop. “At best, you’ll spend 25% of your time with him. You’ll get your rations the same as everyone. You’ll get your vouchers for participating in the program and access to top make-work contracts. What difference does it make who you snag? You know this is just pretend, right? A very big, very lush, very elaborate dog breeding program.”

Bouffant narrowed her eyes. Her lips went utterly pale. “I hope you turn out to be barren as a rock. Just rotted away inside,” she hissed.

The group of them stood up in a huff and took their tea to another table. Sylvie shrugged and ate her biscuit. “Well, that’s no way to think if you want to restore America,” she said to no one at all. What was the matter with her? Shut up, Sylvie.

Mrs. Drexler put a warm hand on her shoulder, materializing out of nowhere. The doctor who loved rum balls laid a round green chip on the white tablecloth. Bouffant saw it across the room and glared hard enough to put a hole through her skull at forty yards.

Sylvie was fertile. At least, there was nothing obviously wrong with her. She turned the chip over. The other side was red. Highest marks. Blood and leaves. Red on white. The world is red and I am red forever. One of Bouffant’s friends was holding a black chip and crying, deep and horrible. Sylvie floated. Unreal. It wasn’t real. It was ridiculous. It was a filmstrip. A recording made years ago when Brussels sprouts were small and the sunset could be rosy and gentle.

FADE IN on Mrs. Drexler in a dance hall with a white on white checkerboard floor. She’s wearing a sequin torchsinger dress. Bright pink. She pumps a giant star-spangled speculum like a parade-master’s baton. Well, hello there Sylvia! It’s your big day! Should I say Hidaka Sakiko? I only want you to be comfortable, dear. Let’s see what you’ve won!

Sylvie and the other green-chip girls were directed into another room whose walls were swathed in green velvet curtains. A number of men stood lined up against the wall, chatting nervously among one another. Each had a cedar rod in one hand. They held the rods awkwardly, like old men's canes. A piano player laid down a slow foxtrot for them. Champagne was served. A tall boy with slightly burned skin, a shiny pattern of pink across his cheek, takes her hand, first in line. In Sylvie's head, the filmstrip zings along.

WIDE SHOT of Mrs. Drexler yanking on a rope-pull curtain. She announces: Behind Door Number One we have Charles Patterson, six foot one, Welsh/Danish stock, blond/blue, scoring high in both logic and empathy, average sperm count 19 million per milliliter! This hot little number has a reserved parking spot at the Office! Of course, when I say "Office," I mean the upper gentlemen's club, brandy and ferns on the 35th floor, cigars and fraternity and polished teak walls. A little clan to help each other through the challenges of life in the program—only another Husband can really understand. Our productive heartthrobs are too valuable to work! Stress has been shown to lower semen quality, Sylvie! But as little as possible should change. If you take the Office from a man, you'll take his spirit. And what's behind Door Number Two?

Sylvie shuts her eyes. The real Mrs. Drexler was biting into a sugar cookie and sipping her champagne. She opened them again—and a stocky kind-eyed boy had already cut in for the next song. He wore an apple blossom in his lapel. For everlasting love, Broome County's official flower for the year. The dancing Mrs. Drexler in her mind hooted with delight, twirling her speculum.

TIGHT SHOT of Door Number Two. Mrs Drexler snaps her fingers and cries: Why, it's Douglas Owens! Five foot ten, Irish/Italian, that's very exciting! Brown/brown, scoring aces in creative play and nurturing, average sperm count 25 million per milliliter—oh ho! Big, strapping boy! Mrs. Drexler slaps him lightly on the behind. Her eyes gleam. He's a Businessman as well, nothing but the best for our Sylvie, our prime stock Sylvie/Sakiko! He'll take his briefcase every day and go sit in his club with the other Husbands, and maybe he loves you and maybe he finds real love with them the way you'll find it with your friend Bouffant in about two years. Who can tell? It's so thrilling to speculate! It's not like men and women got along so well before, anyway. Take my wife, please! Why I oughtta! To hell with the whole mess. Give it one week a month. You do unpleasant things one week out of four and don't think twice. Who cares?

Someone handed her a glass of champagne. Sylvie wrapped her real, solid fingers around it. She felt dizzy. A new boy had taken up her hand and put his palm around her waist. The dance quickened. Still a foxtrot, but one with life in it. She looked at the wheel and spin of faces—white faces, wide, floor-model faces. Sylvie looked for Clark. Anywhere, everywhere, his kind face moving among the perfect bodies, his kind face with a silver molten earth undulating across his cheeks, flickering, shuddering. But he wasn't there. He would never be there. It would never be Clark with a cedar rod and a sugar cookie. Black boys didn't get Announced. Not Asians, not refugees, not Sylvie if anyone guessed. They got shipped out. They got a ticket to California. To Utah.

As little as possible should change.

No matter how bad it got, McCarthy and his Brothers just couldn't let a nice white girl (like Sylvie, like Sylvie, like the good floor-model part of Sylvie that fenced in the red, searing thing at the heart of her) get ruined that way. (If they knew, if they knew. Did the conservative-suit warm-glove Mrs. Drexler guess? Did it show in her dancing?) Draw the world the way you want it. Draw it and it will be.

Sylvie tried to focus on the boy she was dancing with. She was supposed to be making a decision, settling, rooting herself forever into this room, the green curtains, the sugar cookies, the foxtrot.

QUICK CUT to Mrs. Drexler. She spins around and claps her hands. She whaps her speculum on the floor three times and a thin kid with chocolate-colored hair and slate eyes sweeps aside his curtain. She crows: But wait, we haven't opened Doooooor Number Three! Hello, Thomas Walker! Six foot even, Swiss/Polish—ooh, practically Russian! How exotic! I smell a match! Brown/gray, top marks across the board, average sperm count a spectacular 29 million per milliliter! You're just showing off, young man! Allow me to shake your hand!

Sylvie jittered back and forth as the filmstrip caught. The champagne settled her stomach. A little. Thomas spun her around shyly as the music flourished. He had a romantic look to him. Lovely chocolate brown hair. He was saying something about being interested in the animal repopulation projects going on in the Plains States. His voice was sweet and a little rough and fine, fine, this one is fine, it doesn't matter, who cares, he'll never sit in a garage with me and watch the bombs fall on the sheet with the hole in the corner. Close your eyes, spin around three times, point at one of them and get it over with.

IRIS TRANSITION to Mrs. Drexler doing a backflip in her sequined dress. She lands in splits. Mr. and Mrs. Wells and Walker invite you to the occasion of their children's wedding!

Sylvie pulled the red, thornless rose and snowdrops from her hair and tied their ribbon around Thomas's rod. She remembered to smile. Thomas himself kissed her, first on the forehead and then on the mouth. A lot of couples seemed to be kissing now. The music had stopped. It's over, it's over, Sylvie thought. Maybe I can still see Clark today. It takes time to plan a wedding.

Voices buzzed and spiked behind her. Mrs. Drexler was hurrying over; her face was dark.

ZOOM on Mrs. Drexler: Wait, sorry, wait! I'm sorry we seem to have hit a snag! It appears Thomas and Sylvie here are a little too close for comfort. They should never have been paired at the same Announcement. Our fault, entirely! Sylvie's Father has been such a boon to the neighborhood! Doing his part! Unfortunately, the great nation of the United States do not condone incest, so you'll have trade Door Number Three for something a little more your speed. This sort of thing does happen! That's why we keep such excellent records! CROSS-REFERENCING! Thank you! Mrs. Drexler bows. Roses land at her feet.

Sylvie shut her eyes. The strip juddered; she was crying tracks through her Spotless Corp Pressed Powder and it was not a film, it was happening. Mrs. Drexler was wearing a conservative brown suit with a gold dove-shaped pin on the lapel and waving a long-stemmed peony

for masculine bravery. Thomas was her brother, somehow, there had been a mix-up and he was her brother and other arrangements would have to be made. The boys and girls in a ballroom with her stared and pointed, paired off safely. Sylvie looked up at Thomas. He stared back, young and sad and confused. The snowdrops and roses had fallen off his rod onto the floor. Red on white. Bouffant was practically climbing over Douglas Owens 25 million per milliliter like a tree.

In four years Sylvie will be Mrs. Charles Patterson 19 million per. It's over and they began to dance. Charles was a swell dancer. He promised to be sweet to her when he got through with training and they were married. He promised to make everything as normal as possible. As little as possible should change. The quintet struck up Mendelssohn.

Sylvie pulled her silence over her and it was good.

Fade to white.

CLOSE-UP of a nice-looking Bobby, a real lantern-jaw, straight-dealing, chiseled type. [Note to Casting: maybe we should consider VP Kroc for this spot. Hair pomade knows no demographic. Those idiots at Brylcreem want to corner the Paternal market? Fine. Let them have their little slice of the pie. Be a nice bit of PR for the re-election campaign,

too. Humanize the son of a bitch. Ray Kroc, All-American, Brother to the Common Man. Even he suffers symptomatic hair loss. Whatever—you get the idea. Talk to Copy.] Bobby's getting dressed in the morning, towel around his healthy, muscular body. [Note to Casting: if we go with Kroc here we'll have to find a body double.] Looks at himself in the mirror and strokes a 5-o'clock shadow.

FEMALE VOICE OVER: Do you wake up in the morning to a sink full of disappointment?

PAN DOWN to a clean white sink. Clumps of hair litter the porcelain. [Note to Art Dept: Come on, Stone, don't go overboard. No more than twenty strands.] Bobby rubs the top of his head. His expression is crestfallen.

VOICE OVER: Well, no more! Now with the radiation-blocking power of lead, All-New Formula Samson Brand Hair Pomade can make you an All-New Man.

Bobby squirts a generous amount of Samson Brand from his tube and rubs it on his head. A blissful smile transforms his face.

VOICE OVER: That feeling of euphoria and well-being lets you know it works! Samson Pomades and Creams have been infused with our patented mood-boosters, vitamins, and just a dash of caffeine to help you start your day out right!

PAN DOWN to the sink. Bobby turns the faucet on; the clumps of hair wash away. When we pan back up, Bobby has a full head of glossy, thick, styled hair. [Note to Art Dept: Go whole hog. When the camera comes back put the VP in a full suit, with the perfect hair—a wig, obviously—and the Senate gavel in his hand. I like to see a little more imagination from you, Stone. Not a good quarter for you.]

VOICE OVER: Like magic, Samson Brand Pomade gives you the confidence you need. [Note to Copy: not sure about 'confidence' here. What about 'peace of mind'? We're already getting shit from the FDA about dosing Brothers with caffeine and uppers. Probably don't want to make it sound like the new formula undoes Arcadia.]

He gives the camera a thumbs-up. [Note to Art Dept: Have him offer the camera a handshake. Like our boy Ray is offering America a square deal.]

Bold helvetica across mid-screen:

Samson Guards Your Strength.

Fade to white.

Ten Grays

Martin watched his brother. The handsome Thomas. The promising Thomas. The fruitful and multiplying Thomas. 29 million per mil Thomas. Their father (24 million) didn't even try to fight his joyful tears as he pinned the golden dove on his son's chest. His good son. His true son. For Thomas the Office in the city. For Thomas the planning and pleasing and roasted chickens and martinis. For Thomas the children as easy as pencil drawings.

For Martin Stone, 2 million per milliliter and most of those dead, a package. In a nice box, to be certain. Irradiated teak. It didn't matter now anyway. Martin knew without looking what lay nestled in the box. A piece of paper and a bottle. The paper was an ordnance unknown until he opened the box. It was a lottery. The only way to be fair. It was his ticket.

It might request that he present himself at his local Induction Center at 0900 at the close of the school year. To be shipped out to the Front, which by then might be in Missouri for all anyone knew. He'd suit up and boot it across the twisted, bubbled moonscape of the Sea of Glass. An astronaut. Bouncing on the pulses from Los Alamos to the Pacific. He would never draw again. By Christmas, he wouldn't have the fine motor skills.

Or it would request just as politely that he arrange for travel to Washington for a battery of civic exams and placement in government service. Fertile men couldn't think clearly, didn't you know? All that sperm. Can't be rational with all that business sloshing around in there. Husbands couldn't run things. They were needed for more important work. The most important work. Only Brothers could really view things objectively. Big picture men. And women, Sisters, those gorgeous black chip girls with 3-Alpha running cool and sweet in their veins. Martin would probably pull Department of Advertising and Information. Most people did. Other than Defense, it was the biggest sector going. The bottle would be Arcadia. For immediate dosage, and every day for the rest of his life. All sex shall be potentially reproductive. Every girl screwing a Brother is failing to screw a Husband and that just won't do. They said it tasted like burnt batteries if you didn't put it in something. The first bottle would be the pure stuff, though. Provided by Halcyon, Your Friend in the Drug Manufacturing Business. Martin would remember it, the copper sear on the roof of his mouth. After that, a whole aisle of choices. Choices, after all, make you who you are. Arcadia or Kool. Brylcreem or Samson.

Don't worry, Martin. It's a relief, really. Now you can really get to work. Accomplish something. Carve out your place. Sell the world to

the world. You could work your way into the Art Department. Keep drawing babies in carriages. Someone else's perfect quads, their four faces laughing at you forever from glossy pages.

Suddenly Martin found himself clasped tight in his Father's arms. Pulling the box out of his boy's hands, reading the news for him, putting it aside. His voice came as rough as warm gin and Martin could hardly breathe for the strength of his Father's embrace.

Thomas Walker squeezed his Brother's hand. Martin did not squeeze back.

Velocity Multiplied by Duration

Sylvie's Father was with them that week. He was proud. They bought a chicken from Mrs. Stone and killed it together, as a family. The head popped off like a cork. Sylvie stole glances at him at the table. She could see it now. The chocolate hair. The tallness. Hannah framed her Presentation Scroll and hung it over the fireplace.

Sylvie flushed her Spotless trousseaux down the toilet.

She wasn't angry. You can't get angry just because the world's so much bigger than you and you're stuck in it. That's just the face of it, cookie. A poisoned earth, a sequined dress, a speculum you can play

like the spoons. Sylvie wasn't angry. She was silent. Her life was Mrs. Patterson's life. People lived in all kinds of messes. She could make rum balls. And treat soil samples and graft cherry varieties and teach some future son or daughter Japanese three weeks a month where no one else could hear. She could look up Bouffant's friend and buy her a stiff drink. She could enjoy the brief world of solitude and science and birth like red skies dawning. Maybe. She had time.

It was all shit, like that Polish kid who used to hang around the soda fountain kept saying. It was definitely all shit.

On Sunday she went out to the garage again. Vita-Pops and shadows. Clark slipped in like light through a crack. He had a canister of old war footage under his arm. Stalingrad, Berlin, Ottawa. Yellow shirt with green stripes. Nagasaki and Tokyo, vaporizing like hearts in a vast, wet chest. The first retaliation. Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles. Clark reached out and held her hand. She didn't squeeze back. The silent detonations on the white sheet like sudden balloons, filling up and up and up. It looked like the inside of Sylvie.

"This is my last visit," Clark said. "School year's over." His voice sounded far away, muffled, like he didn't even know he was talking. "Car's coming in the morning. Me and Grud are sharing a ride to Induction. I think we get a free lunch."

Sylvie wanted to scream at him. She sucked down her pop, drowned the scream in bubbles.

“I love you,” whispered Clark Baker.

On the sheet, the Golden Gate Bridge vanished.

Sylvie rolled the reel back. They watched it over and over. A fleck of nothing dropping out of the sky and then, then the flash, a devouring, brain-boiling, half-sublime sheet of white that blossomed like a flower out of a dead rod, an infinite white everything that obliterated the screen.

Fade to black.

And over the black, a cheerful fat man giving the thumbs up to Sylvie, grinning:

Buy Freedom Brand Film! It's A-OK!