

John Wyndham

CHOCKY

Preface

John Wyndham is by right considered a leading British science-fiction writer of our day. Born in 1903, he tried various careers including farming, law, commercial art, and advertising, and he first started writing short stories in 1925. From 1930 to 1939 he wrote stories of various kinds under different names, published mostly in the USA. He also wrote detective novels. During the war he was in the Civil Service and afterwards in the Army. In 1946 he went back to writing stories and decided to try a modified form of what is known as science fiction. He wrote *The Day of Triffids*, translated into many languages, including Russian. It is a fantastic, frightening, but entirely plausible story of the future when the world is dominated by triffids, grotesque and dangerous plants over seven feet tall. This was followed by *The Kraken Waves*, a book telling of the awakening and rise to power of forces of cruelly terrifying consequence from beneath the surface of the sea. Next came *The Crysalds*, a thrilling and realistic account of the world beset by genetic mutations, *The seeds of Time*, a collection of short stories acknowledged by their author as 'experiments in adapting the SF motif to various styles of short story', and *The Midwich Cuckoos*, believed to be Wyndham's most disturbing story set in a quiet little English village. Then appeared *The Trouble with Lichen*.

Chocky is the last book written by J. Wyndham, who died in 1969. It was also translated into Russian a few years ago. Here the author is not concerned with the panoramic views of world destruction, like, for instance, in *The Day of the Triffids*. The stage is small, the cast are few, the setting is familiar - yet, into the most uneventful lives, the unexpected can disquietingly intrude.

Once you begin reading this book you start living with the Gores - a plain middle class English family of our days. But then the unexpected happens: a new and seemingly fantastic element appears within the Gores. Now you see adults' rear and hostility towards things not fully understood and difficult to cope with. The situation goes out of the Gores' control and a group of people intrudes whose basic motive is their own profit,

This book is intended for the students of Teachers' Training Colleges. The language is fairly simple yet idiomatic, and one will find here quite a few phrases and terms important for the future teachers of English.

Chocky has been slightly abridged and commented so as to fit the knowledge of the first-year student. In the book the reader will also find a list of names which pronunciation may present some difficulty.

It was in the spring of the year that Matthew reached twelve that I first became aware of Chocky. Late April, I think, or possibly May; anyway I am sure it was the spring because on that Saturday afternoon I was out in the garden shed unenthusiastically oiling the mower for labours to come (*) when I heard Matthew's voice outside the window. It surprised me; I had no idea he was anywhere about until I heard him say, on a note of distinct irritation, and, apparently, of nothing:

'I don't know why It's just the way things are.'

I assumed that he had brought one of his friends into the garden to play, and that the question which prompted his remark had been asked out of earshot. I listened for the reply, but there was none. Presently, after a pause, Matthew went on, rather more patiently:

'Well, the time the world takes to turn round is a day, and that's twenty-four hours, and...'

He broke off, as if at some interruption, though it was quite inaudible to me. Then he repeated:

'I don't know why. And I don't see why thirty-two hours would be more sensible. Anyway, twenty-four hours do make a day, (*) everybody knows that, and seven days make a week...' Again he appeared to be cut short. (*) Once more he protested. 'I don't see why seven is a sillier number than eight...'

Evidently there was another inaudible interruption, then he went on: 'Well who wants to divide a week into halves and quarters, anyway? What would be the point of it? A week just is seven days. and four weeks ought to make a month, only usually it's thirty days or thirty-one days...' - 'No, it's never thirty-two days...' - 'Yes, I can see that, but we don't want a week of eight days. Besides, the world goes round the sun in three hundred and sixty-five days, and nobody can do anything that will make that turn into proper halves and quarters.'

At that point the peculiarity of this one-sided conversation aroused my curiosity so much that I put my head cautiously out of the open window. The garden was sunny, and that side of the shed was sheltered and warm. Matthew was seated on an upturned seed-tray, leaning back against the brick wall of the shed just under the window, so that I was looking down on the top of his fair-haired head. He seemed to be gazing straight across the lawn and into the bushes beyond. There was no sign of a companion, nor of any place one could be hidden.

Matthew, however, went on:

'There are twelve of these months in a year, so...' He broke off again, his head a little tilted as though he were listening. I listened, too, but there was not a whisper of any other voice to be heard.

'It's not just stupid,' he objected. 'It's like that because no kind of same-sized months would fit into a year properly, even if...'

He broke off once more, but this time the source of the interruption was far from inaudible. Colin, the neighbour's boy, had shouted from the next garden. Matthew jumped up with a friendly answering whoop, and ran off across the lawn towards the gap in the dividing hedge.

I turned back to my oiling, puzzled, but reassured by the sound of normal boyish voices next door.

I put the incident out of my mind for the time being, but it recurred to me that evening when the children had both gone upstairs to bed, and I found myself vaguely troubled by it. Not so much by the conversation - for, after all, there is nothing unusual in any child talking to him, or her, self - as by the form of it: the consistency of

its assumption that a second party was involved, (*) and the improbable subject for argument. I was prompted after a time to ask:

`Darling, have you noticed anything odd - no, I don't exactly mean odd - anything unusual, about Matthew lately?'

Mary lowered her knitting, and looked at me over it.

`Oh, so you have, have you? Though I agree "odd" isn't exactly the word. Was he listening to nothing or talking to himself?'

`Talking - well, both, really,' I said. `How long has this been going on?'

She considered.

`The first time I noticed it would be - oh I suppose about two or three weeks ago. It didn't seem worth bothering about. Just another of those crazes children get you know. Like the time when he was being a car and had to steer himself round corners and change gear on hills and put on the brake whenever he stopped. Fortunately it wore off quite soon. Probably this will too.

There was more hope than conviction in her tone.

`You're not worried about him? I asked.

She smiled.

`Oh, good gracious, no. He's perfectly well. What I am worried about is us.'

`Us?'

`Well, it begins to look to me rather as if we may have got another Piff, or something like her in the family.'

I felt, and probably looked, dismayed. I shook my head.

`Oh, no! Don't say it. Not another Piff!' I protested.

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Piff was a small, or supposedly small invisible friend that Polly. Our daughter, had acquired when she was about five. And while she lasted she was a great nuisance.

When one tried to sit down upon a conveniently empty chair he would often be stopped by a cry of anguish from Polly; (*) one had, it seemed, been about to sit on Piff who would then be embraced and comforted by a lot of sympathetic mutterings about careless and brutal daddies.

Frequently, and more likely than not when the television play was really thrilling, there would come an urgent call from Polly's bedroom above; the cause had to be investigated although one could be almost sure that it would concern Piff's need of a drink of water. We would sit down at a table for four in a cafe, and Polly would ask the mystified waitress for an extra chair for Piff. I could be starting the car when a yell would inform me that Piff was not yet with us, and the car door had to be opened to let her aboard. Once I testily refused to wait for her. It was not worth it; my heartlessness had clouded our whole day.

Piff must have been with us the best part of a year - and it seemed a great deal longer - but in the end she somehow got mislaid during our summer holidays. Polly, so much taken up by several more substantial, and much more audible, new friends, dropped Piff with great callousness. Her absence came as a great relief - even, one suspected, to Polly herself. The idea that we might now have acquired another such was by no means welcome.

`A grim thought,' I said, `but, fortunately improbable, I think. A Piff can provide useful bossing material for a member of the younger

female age-groups, but an eleven-year-old boy who wants to boss seems to me more likely to take it out on other, and smaller, boys.' (*)

'I'm sure I hope you are right,' (*) Mary said, but dubiously. 'One Piff was more than enough.'

'There's quite a different quality here,' I pointed out. If you remember, Piff spent about eighty per cent of her time being scolded for something or other, and having to take it. This one appeared to be criticizing, and coming back with opinions of its own.'

Mary looked startled.

'What do you mean? I don't see how...'

I repeated, as nearly as I could recall, the one-sided conversation I had overheard.

Mary frowned as she considered it.

'I don't understand that at all,' she said.

'Oh, it's simple enough. After all the arrangement of a calendar is just a convention...'

'But that's just what it isn't - not to a child, David. To an eleven-year-old it seems like a natural law - just as much as day and night, or the seasons... A week is a week, and it has seven days - it's unquestionable, it just is so.'

'Well, that's more or less what Matthew was saying, but apparently he was being argued with - or he was arguing with himself. In either case it isn't easy to explain.'

'He must have been arguing with what someone's told him at school - one of his teachers, most likely.'

'I suppose so,' I conceded. 'All the same, it's a new one on me. I've heard of calendar reformers who want all months to have twenty-eight days, but never of anyone advocating an eight-day week - or, come to that, a thirtytwo day month.' I pondered a moment. 'Besides, then you'd need nineteen more days in a year...' I shook my head. 'Anyway,' I went on, 'I didn't mean to make heavy weather of it. It just strikes me as odd. (*) I wondered if you had noticed anything of the sort, too.'

Mary lowered her knitting again, and studied its pattern thoughtfully.

'No - well, not exactly. I have heard him muttering to himself occasionally, but nearly all children do that at times. I'm afraid I didn't pay any attention - actually I was anxious not to do anything which might encourage another Piff. But there is one thing: the questions he's been asking lately -'

'Lately!' I repeated. 'Was there ever a time when he didn't?'

'I know. But these are a bit different. I mean - well, usually his questions have been average-boy questions.'

'I hadn't noticed they'd changed.'

'Oh, the old kind of questions keep on, but there's a new kind, too - with a different sort of slant.'

'Such as ...?'

'Well, one of them was about why are there two sexes? He said he didn't see why it was necessary to have two people to produce one, so how had it got arranged that way, and why? That's a difficult one, you know, on the spur of the moment (*) - well, it's difficult anyway, isn't it?'

I frowned not knowing what to say. 'And there was another one, too, a bout "where is Earth?" Now, I ask you - where is Earth? - in relation to what? Oh, yes, he knows it goes round the sun, but where, please, is the sun? And there were some others - simply not his kind of questions.'

I saw what she meant. Matthew's questions were plentiful, and quite varied, but they usually kept a more homely orbit: things like 'Why can't we live on grass if horses can?'

'A new phase?' I suggested. 'He's reached a stage where things are beginning to widen out for him.'

Mary shook her head, giving me a look of reproach.

'That, darling, is what I've been telling you. What I want to know is why they should widen, and his interests apparently change, quite so suddenly. This doesn't seem to me like just development. It's more as if he'd switched to a different track. It's a sudden change in quality - quality and approach.' She went on frowning for the pause before she added: 'I do wish we knew a little more about his parents. That might help. In Polly I can see bits you and bits of me. It gives one a feeling of something to go on. But with Matthew there's no guide at all... There's nothing to give me any idea what to expect...'

I could see what when we lost all hopes to have a baby of our own. He was a month old when he entered our family bringing peace and consolation to Mary. A year later there had come the first signs that a new baby was on the way, and so, Matthew was about two, he had a new baby sister - little Polly. I could also see where we were heading. In about three more moves we'd be back at the old unprofitable contest: heredity versus environment. To sidestep I said:

'It looks to me as if the best thing we can do for the present is simply to listen and watch carefully - though not obviously - until we get a firmer impression. No good worrying ourselves over what may easily be an insignificant passing phase.'

And there we decided to leave it for the time being.

It was about ten days after that we about Chocky. It might well have been longer had Matthew not picked up the flu at school which caused him to run quite a temperature for a while. When it was at its height he rambled a bit, with all defences down. There times when he did not seem to know whether he was talking to his mother, or his father, or to some mysterious character he called Chocky. Moreover, this Chocky appeared to worry him, for he protested several times.

On the second evening his temperature ran high. Mary called down to me to come up. Poor Matthew looked in a sorry state. His colour was high, his brow damp, and he was very restless. He kept rolling his head from side to side on the pillow, almost as if he were trying to shake it free of something. In a tone of weary exasperation he said: 'No, no, Chocky. Not now. I can't understand. I want to go to sleep... No ... Oh, do shut up and go away... No, I can't tell you now... He rolled his head again, and pulled his arms from under the bedclothes to press his hands over his ears. 'Oh, do stop it, Chocky. Do shut up!'

Mary reached across and put her hand on his forehead. He opened his eyes and became aware of her.

'Oh, Mummy, I'm so tired. Do tell Chocky to go away. She doesn't understand. She won't leave me alone... ' (*)

Mary glanced questioningly at me. I could only shrug and shake my head. Then she rose to the occasion (*) Turning back, she addressed herself to a point slightly above Matthew's head. I recognized the technique she had sometimes used with Piff. In a kindly but firm tone she said:

'Chocky, you really must let Matthew be quiet and rest. He isn't at all well, Chocky, and he needs to go to sleep. So please go away and leave him alone now. Perhaps, if he's better tomorrow, you can come back then.'

'See?' said Matthew. 'You've got to clear out, Chocky, so that I

can get better.' He seemed to listen. 'Yes,' he said decisively.

It appeared to work. In fact, it did work.

He lay back again, and visibly relaxed.

'She's gone,' he announced.

'That's fine. Now you can settle down,' said Mary.

And he did. He wriggled into a comfortable position and lay quiet. Presently his eyes closed. In a very few minutes he was fast asleep. Mary and I looked at one another. She tucked his bedclothes closer, and put the bell-push handy. We tiptoed to the door, turned off the room light, and went downstairs.

'Well,' I said, 'what do you think of that?'

'Aren't they astonishing?' said Mary. 'Dear, oh dear, it does very much look as if this family is landed with another Piff'.

I poured us some sherry, handed Mary hers, and raised mine.

'Here's to (*) hoping it turns out to be less of a pest than the last one,' I said. I set down the glass, and looked at it. You know,' I told her, 'I can't help feeling there's something wrong about this. As I said before, Piffs aren't unusual with little girls, but I don't remember hearing of an eleven-year-old boy inventing one... It seems out of order, somehow... I must ask someone about it...'

Mary nodded agreement.

'Yes,' she said, 'but what strikes me as even odder is - did you notice? - he doesn't seem to be clear in his own mind whether his Chocky is a him or a her. Children are usually very positive about that. They feel it's important...'

'I wouldn't say the feeling of importance is entirely restricted to children,' I told her, but I see what you mean, and you're perfectly right, of course. It is odd... The whole thing's odd...'

Matthew's temperature was down the next morning. He picked up quickly. In a few days he was fully recovered. So too, apparently, was his invisible friend, undiscouraged by the temporary banishment.

Now that Chocky's existence was out of the bag (*) - and largely, I was inclined to think, because neither Mary nor I had displayed incredulity - Matthew gained enough confidence to talk a little more freely about him/her.

To begin with, at any rate, he/she seemed a considerable improvement on the original Piff. There was none of that business of hi m/her invisibly occupying one's chair, or feeling sick in teashops to which Piff had been so prone. Indeed, Chocky quite markedly lacked physical attributes. He/she appeared to be scarcely more than a presence, having perhaps something in common with Wordsworth's cuckoo, (*) but with the added limitation that his/her wandering voice was audible to Matthew alone. There were days when Matthew seemed to forget him/her altogether. Unlike Piff, he/she was not prone to appearing any - and everywhere, nor did he/she show any of Piff's talent for embarrassment such as a determined insistence on being taken to the lavatory in the middle of the sermon. On the whole, if one had to choose between the two, my preference was decidedly in favour of Chocky.

Mary was less certain.

'Are we,' she suddenly demanded one evening, staring into the loops of her knitting with a slight squint, 'are we I wonder, doing the right thing in playing up to this nonsense? I know you shouldn't crush a child's imagination, and all that, but what nobody tells you is how far is enough. There comes a stage when it begins to get a bit like conspiracy. I mean, if everyone goes around pretending to believe in things that aren't there, how on earth is a child going to learn to distinguish what really is, from what really isn't.'

'Careful, darling,' I told her. 'You're steering close to dangerous waters. (*) It chiefly depends on who, and how many, believe what isn't really is.'

She nodded. Then she went on:

'It'd be a most unfortunate thing if we found out on that we're helping to stabilize a fantasy-system that we ought to be trying to dispel. Hadn't we better consult a psychiatrist about it? He could at least tell us whether it's one of the expectable things, or not.'

'I'm rather against making too much fuss about it,' I told her. 'More inclined to leave it for a bit. After all we managed to lose Piff in the end, and no harm done.'

'I didn't mean send him to a psychiatrist. I thought just an enquiry on general lines to find out whether it is unusual, or simply nothing to bother about. I'd feel easier if we knew.'

'I'll ask around if you like,' I said. 'I don't think it is serious. It seems to me a bit like fiction - we read our kind of fiction, children often make up their own, and live it. The thing that does trouble me a bit about it is that th is Chocky seems to have entered the wrong age-group. I think we'll find it will fade away after a bit. If it doesn't we can consult someone about it.'

I wasn't, I admit, being quite honest when I said that. Some of Matthew's questions were puzzling me considerably - not only by their un-Matthew-like character but because, now that Chocky's existence was acknowledged, Matthew did not always present the questions as his own. Quite frequently he would preface them with: 'Chocky says he doesn't see how ... or 'Chocky wants to ,know ... or 'Chocky says she doesn't understand why...

One thing I felt could be cleared up.

'Look here,' I told him, 'I get all confused with this he-and-she business. On grounds of grammar alone it would be easier if I knew which Chocky is.'

Matthew quite agreed.

'Yes, it would,' he said. 'I thought so, too. So I asked. But Chocky doesn't seem to know.'

'Oh,' I said. 'That's rather unusual. I mean, it's one of those things people are generally pretty sure about.'

Matthew agreed about that, too. .

'But Chocky's sort of (*) different,' he told me earnestly.

I explained all the differences between him and hers, but she couldn't seem to get it, somehow. That's funny because he's really frightfully clever I think, but all he said was that it sounded a pretty silly arrangement, and wanted to know why it's like that.'

I recalled that Mary had encountered a question along those lines. Matthew went on:

'I couldn't tell her why. And nobody I've asked has been much help. Do you know why, ,Daddy.?'

'Well - er - not exactly why, I confessed. 'It's just - um - how it is. One of Nature's ways of managing things.'

Matthew nodded.

'That's what I tried to tell Chocky - well, sort of. But I don't think I can have been very good at it because she said that even if I had got it right, and it was as silly as it sounded, there still had to be a why behind it.' He paused reflectively, and then added, with a nice blend of pique and regret: 'Chocky keeps on finding such a lot of things, quite ordinary things, silly. It gets a bit boring.'

We talked on for a while. I was interested and showed it, but from what I learned, however, I found myself feeling a little less kindly

towards Chocky. He/she gave an impression of being quite aggressive. Afterwards when I recollected the entirely serious nature of our conversation I felt some increase in uneasiness. Going back over it I realized that not once in the course of it had Matthew even hinted by a single word, or slip, that Chocky was not just as real a person as ourselves, and I began to wonder whether Mary had not been right about consulting a psychiatrist

However, we did get one thing more or less tidied up: the him/her question. Matthew explained:

`Chocky does talk rather like a boy, but a lot of the time it's not about the sort of thing boys talk about - if you see what I mean. And sometimes there is a bit of - well, you know the sort of snooty way chaps' older sisters often get ...?'

I said I did, and after we had discussed these and a few other characteristics we decided that Chocky's balance did on the whole lean more to the F than the M, (*) and agreed that in future it would be convenient to class Chocky as feminine.

Mary gave me a thoughtful look when I reported to her that, at least, was settled. .

`The point it is gives more personification if Chocky is one or the other - not just an it,, I explained. `Puts a sort of picture in the mind which must be easier for him to cope with than just a vague, undifferentiated, disembodied something. And as Matthew feels there, is not much similarity to any of the boys he knows ...

`You decide she's feminine because you fee it will help you and Matthew to attack her, , Mary declared. She spent then a few moments in reflective silence, and emerged from it to say, a little wistfully.

`I do think being a parent must have been a lot more fun before Freud was invented. (*) As it is, if this fantasy ga me doesn't clear up in a week or two we shall feel a moral, social, and medical obligation to do something about it ... And it's such nonsense really I sometimes wonder if we aren't all of us a bit morbid about children nowadays I'm sure there are more delinquents than there used to be...'

`I'm for keeping him clear of psychiatrists and suchlike if we can, I told her. `Once you let a child get the idea he's an interesting case, you turn loose a whole new boxful of troubles.' (*)

She was silent for some seconds. Running over in her mind, I guessed, a number of the children we knew. Then she nodded.

So there we let it rest: once more waiting a bit longer to see how it would go.

In point of fact it went rather differently from anything we had in mind.

`Shut up!' I snapped suddenly. `Shut up, both of you.' Matthew regarded me with unbelieving astonishment. Polly's eyes went wide, too. Then both of them turned to look at their mother. Mary kept her expression carefully non-counmittal. Her lips tightened slightly, and she shook her head at them without speaking. Matthew silently finished the pudding still on his plate, and then got up and left the room, carrying himself stiffly, with the hurt of injustice. Polly choked on her final mouthful, and burst into tears. I was not feeling sympathetic.

`What have you to cry about?' I asked her. `You started it again, as usual.'

`Come here, darling,' said Mary. She produced a handkerchief, dabbed at the wet cheeks, and then kissed her

`There, that's better,' she said. `Darling, Daddy didn't mean to be unkind I'm sure, but he has told you lots of times not to quarrel with Matthew - particularly at meals - you know he has, don't you?' Polly replied only with a sniff. She looked down at her fingers twisting a button on her dress. Mary went on: `You really must try not to quarrel so much. Matthew doesn't want to quarrel with you, he hates it. It makes things very uncomfortable for us - and, I believe you hate it, too, really. So do try, it's so much nicer for everyone if you don't.'

Polly looked up from the button.

`But I do try, Mummy - only I can't help it. `Her tears began to rise again. Mary gave her a hug.

`Well, you'll just have to try a little harder, darling, won't you?' she said.

Polly stood passively for a moment, then she broke away across the room, and fumbled with the door-knob.

I got up, and closed the door behind her.

`I'm sorry about that,' I said as I came back. `In fact I'm ashamed of myself - but really ! I don't believe we've had a meal in the last two weeks without th is infernal quarrelling. And it's Polly who provokes it every time. She keeps on nagging and picking at him until he has to retaliate. I don't know what's come over her: they've always got on so well together ...'

`Certainly they have,' Mary agreed - `Until quite recently,' she added.'

`Another phase, I suppose, I said. `Children seem to be just one phase after another.'

`I suppose you could call this a phase - I hope it is,' Mary said thoughtfully. `But it's not one confined to children.'

Her tone caused me to look at her inquiringly. She asked: My dear, don't you see what Polly's trouble is?'

I went on looking at her blankly. She explained.

`It is just plain, ordinary jealousy - only jealousy, of course is never ordinary to the sufferer.'

`Jealousy... ?' I repeated.

`Yes, jealousy .

`But of whom, of what? I don't get it.'

`Surely that should be obvious enough. Of this Chocky, of course.

I stared at her.

`But that's absurd. Chocky is only - well, I don't know what he, she, or it is, but it' s not even real - doesn't even exist, I mean.'

`Whatever does that matter? Chocky's real enough to Matthew - and, consequently, .to Polly. Polly and Matthew have always got on very well, as you said. She admires him tremendously. She's always been his confidante, and his aide, and it's meant a lot to her But now he has a new confidante. This Chocky has displaced her. She's on the outside now . I'm not in the least surprised she's jealous.'

I felt bewildered.

`Now you're beginning to talk as if Chocky were real.'

Mary reached for a cigarette, and lit it.

`Reality is relative. Devils, evil spirits, witches and so on became real enough to the people who believed in them. Just as God is to people who believe in Him. When people live their lives by their beliefs objective reality is almost irrelevant.

`That's why I wonder if we are doing the right thing. By playing up to Matthew we are strengthening his belief, we are helping to establish

the existence of this Chocky more firmly - until now we have Polly believing in her, too - to the point of a wretched jealousy... It's somehow getting beyond a game of make-believe - and I don't like it. I think we ought to get advice on it before it goes further.'

I could see that this time she meant it seriously.

All right,' I agreed. 'Perhaps it would be -' I was beginning when I was cut off by the sound of the door bell.

I went to answer it, and opened the door to find myself facing a man I knew I should have recognized. I was just beginning to remember him - that is, I had got as far as connecting him with the Parents' Association meeting - when he introduced himself.

'Good evening, Mr Gore. I don't expect you'll remember me. Trimble's my name. I take your Matthew for maths.' (*)

I led him into the sitting-room. Mary joined us, and greeted him, by name.

'Good evening, Mr Trimble. Matthew's just upstAIRs, doinG his homework, I think. Shall I call him?'

Trimble shook his head.

'Oh, no, Mrs Gore. In fact, I'd rather you didn't. (*) It's really yourselves I wanted to see - about Matthew, of course.'

We sat him down. I produced a bottle of whisky. Trimble accepted his drink Gratefully.

'Well, now, what's the trouble?' I asked. Trimble shook his head. He said reassurinGly..

'Oh, no trouble. NothinG of that kind.' He paused, and went on: 'I do hope you don't mind my callinG on you like this. It's unofficial. To be honest, it's chiefly curiosity on my part - well, a bit more than that really. I'm puzzled.' He paused once more, and looked from me to Mary and back aGain. 'Is it you who is the mathematician of the family?' he asked.

I denied it.

'I'm just an accountant. Arithmetic, not mathematics.'

He turned to Mary.

'Then it must be you, Mrs Gore.'

She shook her head.

'Indeed not, Mr Trimble. I can't even get arithmetic right.'

Trimble looked surprised, and a little disappointed.

'That's funny,' he said. 'I was sure - perhaps you have a relative, or some friend, who is?'

We both shook our heads. Mr Trimble continued to look surprised.

'Well,' he said, 'Somebody has been helping - no perhaps that's not the riGht word - shall we say, GivinG your son ideas about his maths - not that I mind that,' he hurried to explain. 'Indeed, in a general way I'm all for anything that gets children along. But that's really the point. When a child is trying to cope simultaneously with two different methods it's more likely to confuse him than get him along...'

'I'll be frank. I won't pretend that your Matthew is one of those boys you sometimes find, with a natural quick grasp of figures. He's about average, perhaps a shade above, and he's been doing quite all right - until lately. But it has seemed to me recently that someone has been trying towell, I suppose the idea was to push him on, but the stuff he's been given isn't doing that; it's getting him mixed up.' He paused again, and added apologically: 'With a boy with a real gIfT for figures It might not fact he'd probably enjoy it. But, frankly, I think too much for your Matthew to grasp at the moment. muddling him, and that's,holding him back.'

'Well, just as frankly, I told him, 'I'm at a loss. Do you mean

that he's trying to get ahead fast - missing out some of the steps?'

Trimble shook his head.

'Oh, no, not that. It's more like - well, something like trying to think in two languages at the same time. At first I couldn't understand what had got out of gear. (*) Then I managed to get some sheets of his rough work. I'll show you.

And, with pencil and paper, he did, for an hour. As an audience we disappointed him, but I managed to understand some of it, and ceased to be surprised that Matthew appeared muddled. Trimble went off into realms quite belongs me, and when we eventually saw him off, it was with some relief. Still, we appreciated the concern that had brought him along to see us in his own time, and promised to do our best to find the source of Matthew's confusion.

'I don't know who it can be,' Mary said as we returned to the sitting-room. 'I can't think of anyone he sees often enough.'

'It must be one of the other boys at school who's a natural whizz at maths, and got him interested although it's a bit beyond him,' I said. 'It's certainly no one I can think of. Anyway I'll try to find out.'

I left it until the following Saturday afternoon. Then, when Mary had taken away the tea things, and Polly, too, Matthew and I had the verandah to ourselves. I picked up a pencil and scribbled on a newspaper margin:

YNYNNYY

'What do you reckon that means, Matthew?' I asked. He glanced at it.

'A hundred and seventy-nine,' he said.

'It seems complicated when you can just write 179,' I said. 'How does it work?'

Matthew explained the binary code (*) to me, much as Trimble had.

'But do you find that way easier.?' I asked.

'Only sometimes - and it does make division difficult,' Matthew told me.

'It seems such a long way round. Wouldn't it be simpler to stick to the ordinary way?' I suggested.

'Well, you see, that's the way I have to use with Chocky because that's the way she counts,' Matthew explained.

She doesn't understand the ordinary way, and she thinks it's silly to have to bother with ten different figures just because you've ten fingers, when all you really need is two fingers.'

I continued to look at the paper while I thought how to go on. So Chocky was in on this - I might have known...

'You mean when Chocky counts she just talks Ys and Ns,' I enquired.

'Sort of - only not actually. What I mean is, I just call them Y and N for Yes and No, because it's easier.'

I was still wondering how best to handle this new intrusion of Chocky, but apparently I looked merely baffled, for Matthew went on to explain, patiently.

'See, Daddy. A hundred is YNNYNN and because each one is double the one on its right that means, if you start from the right hand end 1 - No, 2 - No, 4 - yes, 8 - No, 16 - No, 32 - yes, 64 - yes. You just add the Yesses together, and it's a hundred. You can get any number that way. .

I nodded.

'Yes. I see, Matthew. But, tell me, where did you first come across

this way of doing it?'

'I, just told you, Daddy. It's the way Chocky always uses.

Once more I was tempted to call the Chocky bluff, but I checked myself. I said, reasonably:

'But she must have got it from somewhere. Did she find it in a book, or something?'

'I don't know. I expect somebody taught her,' Matthew told me, vaguely.

I recalled one or two other mathematical queries that Trimble had raised, and put them, as far as I understood the m. I was scarcely surprised to learn that they, too, were devices that Chocky was accustomed to use.

So there we were, at a dead end. I was just about to close the rather fruitless session when Matthew stopped me, disturbingly He emerged from silent reflection, as if he had made up his mind to something. With a somewhat troubled expression, and his eyes fixed on mine he asked:

'Daddy, you don't think I'm mad, do you?'

I was taken aback. I think I managed not to show it.

'Good heavens, no. What next? What on earth put such an idea into your head?'

'Well, it was Colin, really.'

'You haven't told him about Chocky.?' I asked, with a quickening concern.

Matthew shook his head.

'Oh, no. I haven't told anyone but you, and Mummy - and Polly , he added a little sadly.

'Good,' I approved. 'If I were you I'd keep it that way. But what about Colin?'

'I only asked him if he knew anyone who could hear someone talking inside himself. I wanted to know,' he explained seriously. 'And he said no, because hearing voices was a well known first sign of madness, and people who did hear them either got put in asylums or, burnt at the stake, like Joan of Arc. (*) So I sort of wondered...'

'Oh, that,' I said, with more conviction than I was feeling.

'That's something quite different.' I searched hurriedly and desperately for a valid-sounding difference. 'He must have been thinking of the kind of voices that prophesy, tell of disasters to come, and try to persuade people to do foolish things so that they get muddled over what's right and what's wrong, and what's sensible and what isn't. You've no need to worry about that - no need at all.'

I must have sounded more convincing than I felt. Matthew relaxed, and nodded.

'Good,' he said, with satisfaction. 'I think I'd hate to go mad. You see, I don't feel at all mad.'

When I reported on our session to Mary I suppressed any reference to the last part of it. I felt it would simply add to her anxiety without getting Us any further, so I concentrated on my enquiries into Y and N business.

'This Chocky affair seems to get more baffling,' I confessed. 'One expects children to keep on making discoveries-well, that's what's education's all about - but one also expects them to be pretty pleased with themselves for making them. There seems to me to be something psychologically unsound when all progress is attributed to a sort of friend instead of to self. It just isn't normal yet we've got to admit that his interests have widened. He's taking more notice of more things than he used to. And lately he's been gaining a - a sort of air of

responsibility. had you noticed that?...'

'Oh, that reminds me,' Mary put in, 'I had a note today from Miss Toach who takes him for geography. It's a bit confused, but I think it is meant to thank us for helping to stimulate his interest in the subject while at the same time suggesting tactfully that we shouldn't try to push him too much.'

'Oh,' I said. 'More Chocky?'

'I don't know, but I rather suspect he's been asking her the sort of awkward questions he asked me - about where Earth is, and so on.'

I thought it over for some moments.

'Suppose we were to change our strategy - hit out at Chocky a bit...?' I suggested.

'No,' she told me. 'I don't think that's the way. probably go underground - I mean, he'd lose confidence in us, and turn secretive. And that'd be worse really, wouldn't it?'

I rubbed my forehead.

'It's a very difficult. It doesn't seem wise to go on encouraging him; and it seems unwise to discourage him. So what do we do?'

4

We were still trying to make up our minds the next Tuesday.

That was the day I stopped on the way home to take the new car. It was a station-wagon (*) that I'd been dreaming of for some time. Lots of room for everyone, and for a load of baggage in the back as well. We all piled in, and took it out for a short experimental run before supper. I was pleased with the way it handled and thought I'd get to like it. The others were enthusiastic, and by the time we returned it was generally voted that the Gore family was entitled to tilt its chairs a degree or two higher. (*)

I left the car parked in front of the garage ready to take Mary and me to a friend's house later on, and went to write a letter while Mary got the supper.

About a quarter of an hour later came the sound of Matthew's raised voice. I couldn't catch what he was saying; it was a noise of half-choked, inarticulate protest. Looking out of the window I noticed that several passers-by had paused and were looking over the gate with expression of uncertain amusement. I went out to investigate. I found Matthew standing a few feet from the car, very red in the face, and shouting incoherently. I walked towards him.

'What's the trouble, Matthew?' I inquired.

He turned. There were tears of childish rage running down his flushed cheeks. He tried to speak, but choked the words, and grabbed my hand with both of his. I looked at the car which seemed to be the focus of the trouble. It did not appear damaged, nor to have anything visibly amiss with it. Then, conscious of the spectators at the gate, I led Matthew round to the other side of the house, out of their sight. There I sat down on one of the verandah chairs, and took him on my knee. I had never seen him so upset. He was shaking with anger, half-strangled by it, and still with tears heavily streaming. I put an arm round him.

'There now, old man. Take it easy. (*) Take it easy,' I told him.

Gradually the shaking and the tears began to subside. He breathed more easily. By degrees the tension in him relaxed, and he grew quieter. After a time he gave a great exhausted sigh. I handed him my handkerchief. He pried it a bit, and then he blew.

`Sorry, Daddy,' he apologized through it, still chokily.

`That's all right, old man. Just take your time.' (*)

Presently he lowered the handkerchief and plucked at it, still breathing jerkily. A few more tears, but of a different kind, overflowed. He cleaned up once more, sighed again, and began to be more like his normal self.

`Sorry, Daddy,' he said again. `All right now - I think.'

`Good,' I told him. `But dear, oh dear, what was all that about?'

Matthew hesitated, then he said.

`It was the car.'

I blinked.

`The car! For heaven's sake. It seems to be all right. What's it done to you?'

`Well, not the car, exactly,' Matthew corrected himself.

`You see, it's a jolly nice car. I think it's super, and I thought Chocky would be interested in it, so I started showing it to her, and telling her how it works, and things.'

I became aware of a slight sinking, here-we-go-again feeling. (*)

`But Chocky wasn't interested?' I inquired. Something seemed to rise in Matthew's throat, but he took himself in hand, swallowed hard and continued bravely:

`She said it was silly, and ugly, and clumsy. She - she laughed at it!'

At the recollection of this enormity his indignation swelled once more, and all but overwhelmed him. (*) He tried to fight it down.

I was beginning to feel seriously worried. That the hypothetical Chocky could provoke such a near-hysterical condition of anger and outrage was alarming. I wished I knew more about the nature and manifestations of schizophrenia. However, one thing was clear, this was not the for debunking Chocky, on the other hand it was necessary to say something. I asked:

`What does she find so a musing about it?' Matthew sniffed, paused, and sniffed again.

`Pretty nearly everything,' he told me, gloomily.

She said the engine is funny, and old-fashioned, and wasteful, and that an engine that needed gears was ridiculous anyway. And that a car that didn't use an engine to stop itself as well as make itself go was stupid. And how it was terribly funny to think of anyone making a car that to have springs because it just bumped along the ground on wheels that had to have things like sausages fastened round them.

`So I told her that's how cars are, anyway and ours is a new car, and a jolly good one. And she said that was nonsense because our car is just silly, and nobody with any brains would make anything so clumsy and dangerous, and nobody with any sense would ride in one. And then well, it's a bit muddled after that because I got angry. But, anyway, I don't care what she thinks: I like our new car.'

It was difficult. His indignation was authentic: a stranger would not have doubted for a moment that he had been engaged in a dispute which was not only genuine, but impassioned. Any doubt I may have had as to whether we really needed advice about Matthew was swept away then. However, rather than risk a wrong step now, I kept up the front. (*)

`What does she think cars ought to be like, then?' I asked.

`That's what I asked her when she started on our car,' said Matthew. `And she said that where she comes from the cars don't have wheels at all. They go along a bit above the ground, and they don't make any noise, either. She said that our kind of cars that have to keep to

roads are bound to run into one another pretty often, and that, anyway, properly made cars are made so that they can't run into one another.'

'There's quite a lot to be said for that - if you can manage it,' I admitted. 'But, tell me, where does Chocky come from?'

Matthew frowned.

'That's one of the things we can't find out,' he said. 'It's too difficult. You see, if you don't know where anything else is, how can you find out where you are?'

'You mean no reference points?' I suggested.

'I expect that's it,' Matthew said, a little vaguely. 'But I think where Chocky lives must be a very, very, long way away. Everything seems to be different there.'

'H'm,' I said. I tried another tack. 'How old is Chocky?' I asked.

'Oh, pretty old,' Matthew told me. 'Her time doesn't go like ours though. But we worked it out that if it did she'd be at least twenty. Only she says she'll go on living until she's about two hundred, so that sort of makes twenty seem less. She thinks only living until you're seventy or eighty like we do, is silly and wasteful.'

'Chocky, I suggested, 'appears to think a great many things silly.'

Matthew nodded emphatically.

'Oh, she does,' he agreed. 'Nearly everything, really, he added, in amplification.

'Rather depressing,' I commented.

'It does get a bit boring pretty often,' Matthew conceded.

Then Mary called us to supper.

I found myself at a loss to know what to do about it. Matthew had evidently had enough sense of self-protection not to tell any of his friends or school-fellows about Chocky. He had confided in Polly possibly, I thought with some idea of sharing Chocky with her, but that had certainly been a failure. Yet, quite clearly, he found it a relief to talk about her - and after the car incident I had undoubtedly provided a very sorely needed safety-valve. (*)

Mary, when I told her about the car incident that evening, was inclined to favour the straight forward line of asking our regular doctor, Dr Aycott, to recommend a consultant. I was not. Not that I had anything against old Aycott. I wouldn't deny that the old boy was an adequate enough pill-pusher, (*) but I couldn't help feeling that the Matthew problem was not in his line. (*) Moreover, I pointed out, Matthew did not like him so it was improbable that he would confide in him. It seemed much probable that he would consider we had abused his confidence by mentioning the matter to Aycott at all; in which case there was a risk that he would go silent altogether.

Mary, upon reflection, admitted the validity of that.

'But,' she said, 'It's getting to the point where we can't just go on letting it drift. We must do something... And you can't simply pick a psychiatrist out of a list with a pin. You want the right kind of psychiatrist, proper recommendations, and all the rest of it...'

'I think I may have a line on that,' (*) I told her. 'You remember Alan, a friend of mine? He was my best man at our wedding. So I was telling him about it the other day, and he mentioned a man I used to know slightly at Cambridge; a fellow called Landis - Roy Landis. Alan knew him rather better, and he's kept in touch with him. It appears that after Landis graduated he went in for mental disorders. He's got a job at a well-reputed clinic now, so he must be some good at it. Alan suggested it might be worth having a try at him - informally just to give us a lead. If he were willing to have a look at Matthew he'd be able to tell us whether we ought to consult somebody professionally, and who

would be the best man for the job. Or, possibly it might be in his,own line, and he'd take it on himself.

'Good,' Mary approved. 'You tackle him, then, and see if you can get him to come down. At least we shall feel that we're doing something...'

Time, and professional look can work wonders. I could scarcely recognize the rather untidy undergraduate I remembered in the well brushed, neatly bearded, elegantly suited Roy Landis who joined Alan and me at the club for dinner.

I started and at once stressed that our immediate need was advice upon the best steps to take, and told him something of Matthew. His professional caution relaxed as he listened, and his interest plainly grew. The episode with the new car particularly seemed to intrigue him. He asked a number of questions which I answered as best I could, beginning to feel hopeful. In the end he agreed to drive down to Hindmere the following Sunday. He also gave me some instructions on preparing the ground for the visit, so that I was able to return home to report to Mary with a feeling of relief that, at last, we had things under way. (*)

The next evening I told Matthew:

'I had dinner with an old friend of mine last night. I think you might like to meet him.'

'Oh,' said Matthew, not much interested in my old friends.

'The thing was,' I went on, 'we were talking cars, and he seems to have some of the same ideas as you told me Chocky has about them. He thinks our present cars are rather crude.'

'Oh,' said Matthew again. Then, with a steady look, he asked:

'Did you tell him about Chocky?'

'Well, I had to - a bit. You see, I could scarcely pretend that her ideas are yours, because they certainly aren't. He seemed interested, but not much surprised. Not nearly so surprised as I was when you first told me about Chocky. I rather got the idea he may have run across someone a bit like her before.'

Matthew showed signs of interest, but he was still cautious.

'Someone who talks to him the same way?' he inquired.

'No,' I admitted, 'Not to him, but to someone - or it may be more than one person - that he knows. Anyway, as I said, he didn't seem very surprised. I'm afraid we didn't go into it a great deal, but I thought you might like to know.'

That turned out to be a promising start. Matthew returned to the subject of his Own accord (*) a couple of times. Clearly, he was more than a little fascinated by the idea of someone who found Chocky unsurprising.

It was that, as well as the prospect of reassurance it held for him, I thought, that prompted him to admit he might like to have a talk with Roy Landis, someday.

During the following week I felt even more glad that Landis was coming down the next Sunday, particularly when Matthew's school report (*) arrived. While, on the whole, it was not unsatisfactory, I detected a slightly puzzled air about parts of it.

Mr Trimble acknowledged that Matthew had made progress - of a kind, but felt that he was capable of doing much better if he could confine his attention to the orthodox forms of mathematics.

Miss Toach, while she was glad to record that his interest in her subject had sharpened considerably, thought he would do better to concentrate on geography at present, and let cosmography come later.

Mr Caffer, the physics master, was not entirely pleased. He wrote: 'There has been a marked difference in his approach this term. If it showed itself less in a capacity to ask questions, and more in ability to absorb information, his work would improve.'

'What have you been doing to Mr Caffer?' I asked.

'He gets annoyed,' said Matthew. 'There was one time when I wanted to know about the pressure of light, and another time when I told him I can see what gravity does, but I don't see why it does it. I don't think he knows why, and there were some other things, too. He wanted to know where I was getting the questions from. I couldn't very well tell him they came out of things Chocky had told me. So he got a bit angry. But it's all right now. I mean, it's not much good asking him things, so I haven't any more.'

'And there's Miss Blayde, biology. She seems to be a bit snuffy, too,' I said.

'Oh, I expect that's because I asked her how people who had only one sex managed to reproduce. She said, well, everybody had only one sex, and I said what I meant was one kind of person, all alike, not different like men and women. She said that could be in some plants, but not in people. And I said not always and she said nonsense. But I said it wasn't nonsense because I happened to know someone like that. And she said what did I mean - in that kind of voice. Then I saw it had been stupid of me to ask at all, because I couldn't tell her about Chocky, so I shut up although she kept on wanting to know what I meant. And ever since then she sometimes looks at me very hard. That's really all.'

Miss Blayde was not the only one to feel baffled. A little time before, trying to get some idea what type of mental protection this Chocky was, I had asked:

'Doesn't Chocky have a home? Doesn't she even tell you about her mother and father, and where she lies - that kind of things?'

'Not much,' said Matthew. 'I can't make out what it's like. You see, such a lot of things she says don't mean anything.'

I said I was afraid I didn't quite see. Matthew had frowned in concentration.

'Well,' he said, 'suppose I was quite, quite deaf and you tried to tell me about a tune - I wouldn't be able to know what you were talking about, would I? It's a bit like that sort of - I think .. She does sometimes talk about her father, or her mother - but the hims and hers get mixed up, as if they were both the same.'

On Sunday, just before lunch, Landis's car slid into our drive. He arrived, as becomes a with-it medical man, in a large, well-groomed Jaguar. (*)

I made the introductions. Mary appeared a little reserved, but Matthew, I was glad to see, seemed to take to him easily. After lunch we all adjourned to the verandah for a quarter of an hour or so, then, by arrangement, Mary took Polly off with her, I mentioned some work I must do, and Matthew and Landis were left alone together.

Tea time came, and I looked out to find Matthew still talking hard. Landis caught my eye, and decisively frowned me away. (*)

The three of us decided not to wait, which was just as well, for it was nearly six o'clock before the other two broke up their talk and joined us. They appeared to be on excellent terms. Matthew in rather better spirits, I thought, than he had been lately; Landis inclined to be quietly reflective.

We let the children have their supper first, and get along to bed. Then, when we sat down to our meal there was a chance to talk. Mary opened up with:

'Well, you two certainly did have a session. I do hope Matthew wasn't too tedious.'

Landis regarded her for a moment, and shook his head.

'Tedious!' he repeated. 'Oh, no. I assure you he wasn't that.' He turned to me. 'You know, you didn't tell me the half of it,' he said, with a touch of reproof.

'I don't suppose I know half of it,' I replied. 'I told you most of what I do know, but to find out more I'd have had to press him for it. I thought that might be unwise - I'm not so old as to have forgotten how intrusive one's parents' interest can seem. That's why I asked you to come. Quite apart from your professional experience, I hoped he'd feel freer to talk to you. Apparently he did.'

'He did indeed,' Landis nodded. 'Yes, I think you probably were wise not to push him - though it meant that I felt a bit ill-briefed to start with. I found him more puzzled and more in need of someone to talk about it than you had led me to expect. However, he's got a lot of it off his chest (*) now, and I think he'll be feeling the better for that, at least.'

He paused a moment, and then turned to Mary

'Tell me, Mrs Gore, normally - that is to say before this Chocky business set in - would you have called him a highly imaginative boy?'

Mary considered.

'I don't think so,' she said. 'As a little boy, he was very suggestible. I mean, he was always afraid of dark rooms - but that's not quite the same thing, is it? No, I'd not say he was highly imaginative - just ordinarily.'

Landis nodded.

'An open mind is a difficult thing to keep. I must admit that from what David told me I rather suspected he might be an imaginative child who had been reading too much fantastic stuff - to a point where he was having difficulty in distinguishing it from reality. That set me on the wrong track...'

'He must have read some. They all do,' I put in, 'but his taste in fiction really runs more to simple adventure stories.'

'Yes, I got on to that fairly soon. So I changed my line of thought ... and then had to change it again.'

For quite a long pause he toyed with the cold meat on his pate until Mary became impatient.

'But what do you think it is now?' she asked.

Landis delayed another moment or two before he looked up. When he did so, he stared at the opposite wall with a curiously far away expression.

'After all,' he said, 'you are not consulting me professionally. If you were, I would say it is a complex case needing more than a short examination can reveal: I would try to escape a direct and clear answer. But I am going to be unprofessional. I am going to confess that I don't know...'

He broke off, and fiddled with his knife. Mary's eyes met mine. We said nothing.

`I don't understand it,' Landis repeated. , `I know what it looks like - but that's sheer nonsense...'

He broke off again.

`What does it look like?' I prompted, a little sharply.

He hesitated, and then drew a breath.

`More than anything I've ever come across it resembles what our unscientific ancestors used to consider a case of "possession" They would have claimed quite simply that this Chocky is a wandering spirit which has invaded Matthew.'

There was a silence. I broke it.'

`But being, as you said, nonsense...?'

`I don't know... One must be careful not to be as dogmatic in our way as our ancestors were in theirs. It's easy to over-simplify - that is just what Matthew himself is doing when he says he "talks to", or "is talked to", by this Chocky. The ancestors would say he "hears voices" but that is only a manner of speaking. Matthew only uses the word "talks" because he has no word for what he really means When he "listens" to Chocky there are no words: he is not really hearing sounds at all. When he replies he doesn't need to use words - he sometimes does, particularly when he is feeling worked up, but he does it because it is his natural way of expressing his emotions, not because it is necessary. Therefore his "hearing" a voice is a metaphorical expression - but the conversations he holds with this imagined voice are not metaphorical. They are quite real.'

Mary was frowning.

`You'll have to explain that more,' she said.

`Well, for one thing, it is quite indisputable that there is some kind of second intelligence somehow involved,' Landis said. `Just think back to some of the questions he has been asking, and the things he has said to you and David. We're satisfied he did not invent them himself; that's why I am here at all, but wasn't it characteristic of all of them that they were naively, sometimes childishly expressed?'

`After all, he's not quite twelve,' Mary pointed out.

`Exactly, and in fact he has an unusually good vocabulary, for a child of his age - but it isn't adequate to express clearly the questions he wants to ask. He knows what he wants to ask, and often understands quite well what he wants to tell His chief difficulty is in finding the words to make the ideas clear.

`Now if he were passing on questions he had heard, he wouldn't have that particular difficulty. He'd simply repeat the words, whether he had understood them, or not. or if he'd read the questions in a book he'd know the words. In either case he'd be using the words he needs instead of having this trouble with the limits of his vocabulary.

`It follows, therefore, that he did not, in the ordinary sense, hear these questions, nor read them; yet he understand what he is trying to ask. So - how did the questions get into his head without the words necessary to carry them there? - And that really is quite a problem...'

`But is it - any more than it always is?' Mary said.

Words are only names for ideas. Everybody gets ideas.

They have to come into minds from somewhere before they can be given names.'

I knew the pitch of her voice. Something - possibly, I suspected Landis's use of the word `possession' - had made her antagonistic.

Landis went on:

`Take his use of the binary code. If anyone had shown him, or if he had seen it in a book, the odds are that the symbols used would have

been ought and one, or plus and minus, or possibly x and y, and he would naturally have used the same symbols himself. But the way he got them appeared to him simply as an affirmative and negative, so he conveniently abbreviated them to Y and N.'

'But,' Mary objected, 'if, as you say, there aren't any words so that he isn't listening when he seems to be, what is going on? I mean, why this idea of this Chocky who "talks" at all?'

'Oh, Chocky exists all right. Naturally, I looked at first for some personification of his subconscious, however I was sure quite soon that it wasn't that. But where Chocky exists, and what she is, beats me completely at present - and it beats Matthew, too.'

That was not what Mary had hoped to hear. She said:

'I can understand that for him she exists. She's quite real to him: that's why we've been playing up to it, but...' Landis cut her short:

'Oh, Chocky has a much more definite existence than that. I am quite sure that whatever she is, she is more than his own invention. Consider the car incident. Now, no boy of Matthew's age would dream for a moment of calling a brand new model of a modern car old-fashioned. He thinks it's wonderful. Matthew himself was proud and anxious to show it off. But, according to your account, what happened was exactly what would have happened if another child - or anyone else, for that matter - had been scornful of it - except that no other child, nor his subconscious, would have been able to explain how it ought to be radically different.

'And here's another thing he told me this afternoon, though he couldn't quite get the concept. It was a kind of power. It seemed to him something like electricity, but he knew that it was really quite different... Anyway, with this source of energy which can be picked up from space radiations and converted to operate motors, there is no question of running out of power - but there Matthew lost the idea among ideas that were quite beyond his grasp. As he put it to me: "She kept on going on, but it didn't mean anything. It wouldn't turn into proper words". (*)

Landis paused. Then he added:

'Now, that again, I'm quite satisfied, did not come out of books. It could have done, but it didn't.'

'Why?' Mary demanded.

'Because if there had been some slips caused by misunderstandings, or by inventions of his own which did not fit with the rest, there'd still be the chance that he's reconstructed it out of things he's read. As it is, he freely admits he couldn't understand a lot of it, and it appears that for the rest he's doing an honest job of reporting.'

'Very well,' I said. 'And - what's to be done about all it?'

Landis shook his head again.

'At present I've, quite frankly, no idea. At the moment I can't see - quite unscientifically can't see - I don't know what's got into him. I wish I did. Something has.'

Mary got up from the table abruptly and decisively. We loaded the dishes on to the trolley, and she pushed it out. A few minutes later she came back with coffee. As she poured it out she said to Landis:

'So what it amounts to is that all you have to tell us is that you can't see any way of helping Matthew, is that it?'

Landis's brow furrowed.

'Helping him?' he repeated. 'I don't know. I'm not even sure that he needs help. His chief need at the moment seems to be for someone he can talk to about this Chocky. He doesn't particularly like her in fact she frequently irritates him, but she does supply him with a great deal

that interests him. In fact, it doesn't seem to be so much Chocky's existence that troubles him, as his own selfdefensive instinct to keep her existence hidden - and in that he's wise. Until now you two have been his any safety-valves. His sister might have been another, but she appears to have let him down.' (*)

Mary stirred her coffee, gazing at it with abstraction. Then, making up her mind, she said forthrightly:

'Now you're talking as if this Chocky really exists. Let's get this straight. (*) Chocky is an invention of Matthew's. It is simply a name for an imagined companion - just as Polly's Piff was, isn't it?'

Landis considered her for a moment before he replied:

'I'm afraid I have not made myself clear,' he said.

Any resemblance between Chocky and Piff is quite superficial. I would like to believe what you wish to believe - and what my training tells me I should believe - that the whole thing is subjective. That Chocky is a child's invention, like Piff - an invention of Matthew's own which has got out of hand. (*) But I can only do that by ignoring the facts to suit what I have been taught; Chocky is, in some way I don't understand, objective - she comes from outside, not from inside. On the other hand I'm not credulous enough to accept the old idea of "possession", although it fits the evidence much better, He broke off in thought for some seconds, and then shook his head:

'No. That's not so, either "possession" meant what it said: domination. This is not. It is much more like a working arrangement...'

'What on earth do you mean by that?' Mary demanded.

The sharpness of her voice told me that any confidence she may have had in Landis had disappeared entirely. Landis himself seemed not to notice it. His reply was unruffled:

'You will remember that when he was ill he told Chocky to shut up and go away - which, with your added persuasion she apparently did. She seems to have done the same after she had reduced him to speechless anger over the car. He rejected her. She does not dominate...'

'I asked him about that. He told me that when she first started to "talk" to him she would do it any time. It might be when he was in class, or doing his homework, or at mealtimes, or, quite often at night.

'So, he tells me, he simply refused to co-operate unless she would come only at times when he could give her his full attention.

'And notice, too, how practical this was. No element of fantasy at all. Simply a boy laying it down that his friend should visit him only at convenient times. And the friend apparently willing to accept the conditions he offered.'

Mary was not impressed. Indeed, I was doubtful whether she listened. She said impatiently..

'I don't understand this. When the Chocky business began David and I thought it would be unwise to try to suppress it. We assumed that it would soon pass. We were wrong: it seemed to take a firmer hold. I became uneasy. One doesn't have to be a psychologist to know the result of a fantasy gaining the same validity as reality. I agreed to David asking you to come because I thought you would suggest some course we could take which would rid Matthew of his fantasy without harming him. Instead, you seem to have spent the day encouraging him in it - and to have become infected with it yourself. I am not able to feel that this is doing much good to Matthew, or to anyone.'

Landis looked as if he were about to make a sharp answer but he checked the impulse.

'The first requirement,' he said, 'is to understand the condition. In order to do that it is necessary to gain his confidence.'

'That is quite obvious,' Mary told him, 'and I understand perfectly well that while you were with Matthew it was necessary for you to seem to accept the reality of this Chocky - we've been doing the same for weeks. What I do not understand is why you keep it up when Matthew is no longer here.'

Landis asked patiently:

'But Mrs Gore, consider the questions he has been putting and the things he has been saying. Don't they seem to you odd - intelligently odd - but quite out of his usual key?' (*)

'Of course they do,' she replied sharply. 'But boys read all kinds of things: one expects it. And it's no surprise that what they pick up makes them ask questions. What is disturbing us is the way he twists all his natural curiosity into support for this Chocky fantasy. Can't you see, I'm afraid of it becoming a permanent obsession? What I want to know is simply the best way of stopping that from happening.'

Landis attempted once more to explain why in. His view Chocky could not be considered as a simple fantasy, but Mary had now worked herself into a mood where she obstinately refused to accept any of his points. I wished very strongly that he had not made that reference to "possession". It seemed to me an error of a kind one did not expect from a psychologist - and once it had been made the damage was done.

There was nothing for me to do but sit by and watch them consolidate their opposition.

It was a relief to all of us when Landis at last decided to give it up, and leave.

6

I found the situation awkward. I could follow Landis's reasoning - though I would be hanged if I could see where it was leading him - but I also had some sympathy for Mary's impatience. Landis, however unseriously he may have intended it, had, for a psychiatrist, made a bad psychological error. It would have been better, in my opinion, for him not to have referred to ancient beliefs at all; particularly, he should not have used the word 'possession' Moreover, as much as what he said, his unhurried, detached, analytical attitude to the problem had irritated her. Her concern was immediate. There was something wrong with Matthew, and she wanted to put it right without delay She had looked to Landis for advice on how that could best be done: what she had got was a dissertation on an interesting case, the more disquieting because of his admission that it baffled him. By the time he left she had been giving an impression of regarding him as little better than a charlatan. An unfortunate, and unfruitful occasion.

When I got home the following evening she had an abstracted air. After we had cleared the table and packed the children off upstairs there was an atmosphere that I recognized. Some kind of prepared statement, a little uncertain of its reception, was on its way. Mary sat down, a little more upright than usual, and addressed herself to the empty grate rather than to me. With a slightly challenging manner she announced:

'I went to see Dr Aycott today ,

'Oh,' I said. 'Something wrong?'

'About Matthew', she added.

I looked at her.

'You didn't take Matthew to him?'

`No.' She shook her head. `I thought of doing that, but decided against it.'

`I'm glad,' I told her. `I rather think Matthew had regarded that as a breach of confidence. It might be better if he doesn't . know ,

`Yes,' she agreed, rather definitely

`As I've said before,' I remarked, `I've nothing against Aycott as a cut-stitcher and measles-spotter, but I don't fee this kind of thing is up his street.' (*)

`You're right. It certainly isn't,' Mary agreed. She went on: `Mind you, I didn't really expect that be. I did my best to tell him how things are. He not very patiently and seemed a bit piqued that brought Matthew himself along. I tried to explain to old fool that I wasn't asking for an opinion then and all I wanted was a recommendation to a suitable specialist.'

`From which I gather that what you got was an opinion?'

She nodded, with a wry expression.

`Oh, yes indeed. All Matthew needs is plenty of exercise, a cold bath in the morning, plenty of good plain seasoned food, lots of salads, and the window open at night,' she told me gloomily

`And no specialists?'

`No. No need for that. Growing is often more than we realize, but a healthy life, and Nature, the great healer, will soon correct any temporary imbalances.'

`I'm sorry, I said.

There was a pause. It was Mary who broke it:

`David we must help him somehow.'

`Darling, I know you didn't take to Landis, but he quite highly thought of, you know. He wouldn't say he's doubtful whether Matthew really needs help if he didn't mean it. We're both worried, but simply because we don't understand: we're really no reason to think that this thing is unusual it is therefore harmful. I feel quite sure that if Landis had seen cause for alarm he'd have told us so.'

`I don't suppose he felt any. Matthew isn't his boy He's just an unusual, rather puzzling case: quite interesting now, but if he became normal again he'd no longer be interesting.'

`Darling, that's a dreadful thing to imply. Besides, you knOW, Matthew isn't abnormal: he's perfectly normal, but plus something - which is quite different.'

Mary gave me the look she keeps for hair-splitting, (*) and some other forms of tiresomeness.

`But it is different,' I insisted. `There is an essential distInctIon ...'

She cut that short ruthlessly.

`I don't care about that,' she saId. `All I want Is for hIm to be normally normal, not plus or minus anything. I just want hIm to be happy.'

I decIded to leave It there, for the time being. Except for hIs occasional fIts of frustratIon - ad what child doesn't have those, one way or another? - Matthew did not seem to me to be unhappy.

The question of what was to be done remained, however. For my part, I favoured further contact with Landis: Matthew clearly felt able to confide In him, aud he was undoubtedly Interested by Matthew But, with Mary turned agaInst Landis, such a course would be in dIrect oppositIon to her wIshes - only a highly critical situation could juStify that And crisis and urgency were qualIties that the Chocky affair appeared to lack

So, for the present, as on several. We attempted to console

ourselves previous occasions we attempted to console ourselves recollections of the way in which Polly had suddenly expelled Piff from the family.

In the meantime, however, I did suggest to Matthew that as Mummy did not seem to care a lot for Chocky, it might not be a bad idea to keep her rather in the background for a bit...

We heard very little of Chocky for about a fortnight after that. Indeed, I began to have hopes that she was leaving us. But they were only slender hopes, and soon to be nipped. (*)

One evening as I was reaching for the television switch Mary stopped me. 'Just a minute,' she said. She got up and went across to her bureau. When she came back she was holding several sheets of paper, the largest about sixteen inches by twelve. She handed them to me without a word, and went back to her chair.

I looked at the papers. Some of the smaller ones were pencil sketches, the larger ones were paintings in watercolour. Rather odd paintings. The first two were landscapes, with a few figures. The scenes were undoubtedly local, and vaguely familiar, though I could not positively identify the viewpoints. The first thing that struck me was the figures, they were treated with an individuality of style that was quite constant: cows, and sheep, too, had a rectangular and lean look; human beings appeared as a half-way compromise between the real thing and stickmen, noticeably lacking in bulk and surprisingly angular. But despite that there was life and movement in them.

The drawing was firm and confident, the colouring somewhat sombre; it gave an impression of being much concerned with subtle shades of green. I know next to nothing of painting, but they gave me a feeling that the sureness of line, and the economy with which effects had been achieved showed considerable accomplishment.

The next two were still-lives: a vase of flowers, not seen as a botanist would see them, but, nevertheless, recognizably roses; and a bowl of red things, which were undoubtedly strawberries.

Following these came a view through a window. This I was able to recognize. It showed a corner of a school playground, with a number of figures there that were active, but, again, long-legged.

Then there were a couple of portraits. One of a man with a long rather severely-planed face. I - well, I cannot say I recognized it, but there was something about the hairline which seemed to imply that it was intended for myself though to my mind my eyes do not in the least resemble traffic go-lights. The other portrait was of a woman; not Mary nor anyone I could identify.

After I had studied the pictures I laid them down on my knees, and looked across at Mary. She simply nodded.

'You understand this kind of thing better than I do. Would you call them good?' I asked.

'I think so. They're odd, but there's life and movement in them, perception, a feeling of confidence...' She stopped and then added: 'It was accidental. I was clearing his room. They'd fallen behind the chest of drawers ...'

'Perhaps one of the children in his class - or his artteacher?' (*) I ventured.

Mary shook her head.

'Those aren't hers. I've seen some of Miss Soames' stuff: her style's a bit on the niggly side. (*) Besides, the last one is her - not very flattering, either.

I looked through the pictures once more, reconsidering the men. They grew on one, once the first strangeness had worn off. (*)

`You could put them back there tomorrow, and just say nothing,' I suggested.

Mary smoothed her knitting, and pulled it to get the rows straight.

`I could ... but they'd go on worrying me. I'd rather he told us about them ...'

I looked at the second landscape, and suddenly recognized the scene, knew the exact bend in the river which gave it.

`Darling,' I said. `I'm afraid you won't like it.'

`I've not liked any of it. I didn't like it even before that friend of yours started talking about ``possession" But I'd rather know than be left guessing. After all, it is just possible that someone did give them to him.'

Her expression told me that she meant what she said. I did not object further, but it was with a feeling that the whole thing was now entering upon a new phase that I agreed. I took her hand, and pressed it.

`All right,' I said. `He'll scarcely be in bed yet.' And I put my head into the hall, and called upstairs. Then I spread the pictures out on the floor.

Matthew arrived in his dressing-gown, pink, tousleheaded, and fresh from the bath. He stopped abruptly at the sight of the pictures. Then his eyes went to Mary's face, uneasily.

`I say, Matthew, I said, as chattily as I could, `Mummy happened to come across these when she was clearing your room. They'd slipped down behind the chest of drawers.'

`Oh,' said Matthew. `That's where they went.'

`They're very interesting, and we think they're rather good. Are they yours?'

Matthew hesitated, then:

`Yes,' he said, a little too defiantly.

`What I mean is,' I explained, `did you paint them?' This time his `yes' had a defensive touch.

`H'm... They aren't much like your usual style, are they? I should have thought you'd got higher marks for these than you usually do in Art,' I suggested.

Matthew shuffled a little.

`These ones aren't Art. They're private,' he told me.

I looked at one of the landscapes again.

`You seem to be seeing things in quite a different way.' I remarked.

`Yes,' Matthew agreed. Hopefully he added: `I expect it's something to do with growing up.'

His eyes pleaded with me. After all, it was I who had advised him to be discreet.

`It's quite all right, Matthew. We're only interested to know who really did them.'

Matthew hesitated. He darted an unhappy glance at Mary, hooked down at the carpet in front of him, and traced one of the patterns there with his toe.

`I did,' he told us, but then his resolution appeared to weaken. He qualified: `I mean - sort of - well, I did do them ...'

He looked so miserable and confused that I was reluctant to press him further. It was Mary who came to his rescue. She put an arm round him.

`It doesn't really matter a bit, darling. It's just, that we were so interested in them, we wanted to know. She reached down and picked up a painting. `This view. It's very clever. I think it's very good - bunt

it's rather strange. Did it really look like that to you?'

Matthew stayed dumb for some seconds, then halfblurring he told her.

'I did do them, Mummy, really I did. Why they look sort of funny is because that's how Chocky sees things.'

He turned an anxious look on her, but Mary's face showed only interest.

'Tell us about it, darling,' she encouraged him.

Matthew looked relieved. He sighed.

'It happened one day after Art,' he explained. 'I don't seem to be much good at Art,' he added, regretfully

Miss Soames said what I had done was hopeless. And Chocky thought it was pretty bad, too. So I said I did try but it never seemed to come out at all right, and Chocky said that was because I didn't look at things properly. So I said I didn't see what "properly" meant; you either see things, or you don't. And she said no, it wasn't like that because you can look at things without seeing them, if you don't do it properly. And we argued a bit about that because it didn't seem sensible,

'So in the end she said what about trying an experiment - me doing the drawing, and her doing the seeing? I didn't see how that could work, but she said she thought it was worth trying. So we did

'I couldn't do it at first because I couldn't think of nothing. The first time you try it's awfully hard to think of nothing you sort of keep on thinking of not thinking of anything, but that isn't the same at all, so it doesn't work. But that's what Chocky said: just sit and hold a pencil and think of nothing. I got pretty fed up with trying, but she kept on wanting to have another try. And, well about the fourth time we tried I half managed it for a minute or two. After that it got easier, and then when we'd practised a bit more it got quite easy. So now I've only got to sit down with the paints and - well, sort of switch-off me, and the picture comes - only the way it comes is the way Chocky sees it, not the way I do.'

I could see Mary's fingers fidgeting, but her mask of impersonal interest remained unaltered. I said:

'I think I understand what you mean, Matthew. You sort of hand over to Chocky, but I should think that feels a bit funny, doesn't it?'

'Only the first time or two. Then I felt a bit like - well, no brakes. But after that it gets more like. He paused for some moments searching with furrowed brow for a simile. His expression cleared slightly. '... it gets more like riding a bicycle, no hands.' He frowned again, and amended: 'Only not quite, because it's Chocky doing the steering, not me - sort of difficult to explain,' he added apologetically.

I could appreciate that it would be. To give Mary some reassurance I asked:

'I suppose it doesn't ever happen when you don't want it to? By accident, I mean?'

Matthew shook his head emphatically

'Oh no. I have to make it happen by thinking of nothing. Only now I don't have to keep on thinking of nothing all the time it's happening. The last few times I could watch my bands doing the pictures - so ah the real doing them is mine. It's just the seeing what to do that isn't.'

'Yes, dear,' Mary said. 'We understand that, but ...' she hesitated, searching for a gentle way to make her point, ... but do you think it is a good thing to do?'

Matthew glanced at the pictures.

`I think so, Mummy. They're much better pictures than I do when they're all mine - even if they do look a bit funny,' he admitted candidly.

`That wasn't quite what I, Mary began. Then she changed her mind, and looked at the clock.

`It's getting late,' she said, with a glance at me.

`That's right. It is,' I backed her up. `But just before you go, Matthew, have you shown these to anyone else?'

`Well, not really shown,' he said. `Miss Soames came in one day just after I'd done that one.' He pointed to the view of the play-ground through the window. `She said whose was it, which was a bit awkward because I couldn't pretend it was anyone else's, so I had to say it was mine, and she looked at me, the way people do when they don't believe you. Then she looked at the picture, and then back again at me. "All right," she said, "let's see you do a - a racing car, at speed." So then I had to explain that I couldn't do things that I couldn't see - I meant that Chocky couldn't see for me, but I couldn't tel her that. And she looked at me hard again, and said: "Very well, what about the view through the other window?"

`So I turned the easel round, and did that. She took it off the board and stared at it for a kong time, then she looked at me very queerly, and said did I mind if she kept it? I couldn't very well say I did, so I said no, and, please, could I go now? And she nodded, and went on staring at it.'

`It's funny she said nothing about it in your report,' I told him.

`Oh, it was right at the end of term; after reports,' he explained.

I felt a premonitory twinge of misgiving, but there was nothing to be done about it. Besides, it was, as Mary had said, getting late.

`Well, time you were off to bed now, (*) Matthew,' I said. `Thanks for telling us about the pictures. May we keep them down here a bit so that we can look at them again?'

`All right, but please don't lose them,' he agreed. His eye fell on the famine-victim portrait. `That isn't a bit like you, Daddy. It really isn't,' he assured me. Then he said his good-nights, and ran away upstairs.

We sat and looked at one another

Mary's eyes slowly brimmed with tears.

`Oh, David. He was such a lovely little boy ...'

Later when she was calmer she said:

`I'm afraid for him, David. This - this whatever it is, is getting more real to him. He's beginning to let it take control of him ... I'm afraid for him ...'

I shook my head.

`I'm sure you've got it wrong. It Isn't like that, you know. He was pretty emphatic that he is the one who decides when and whether it shall happen at all,' I pointed out

`Naturally he'd think that,' she said..

I looked in on him on my way to bed. He was asleep, with the light still on. A book he had been reading lay as it had dropped from his hands, face down on his chest. I read the title, then bent a little closer to make sure I had read aright. It was my copy of Lewis Mumford's Living in cities. (*) I picked it up, and in doing so woke Matthew.

`I don't wonder you fell asleep. A bit heavy for bed time reading, isn't it?'

`Pretty boring,' he acknowledged. `But Chocky thinks it's interesting - the parts of it I can understand for her.'

'Oh,' I said. 'Well ... well, time to go to sleep now. Goodnight, old man.'

'Goodnight, Daddy.'

7

For our holiday that summer we took a cottage jointly with Alan and Phyl Froome. They had married a couple of years after we did, and had two children, Emma and Paul, much of an age with our own. (*) It was an arrangement, we thought, which would give the adults opportunities to go off duty for a bit, and have some holiday themselves.

The place was Bontgoch, a village on an estuary in North Wales, where I had enjoyed several holidays in my own childhood. It was an ideal place for boating, and now it even had a painted-up shed with a bar at one end the Yacht Club.

We did not have a boat, but we still enjoyed the place. The sands are still there for children to dabble around on at low tide and catch shrimps and flat fish. So, too, on both sides of the estuary are the not-too-steep mountains on which one can climb and explore the pockings of old workings that are known to have been gold mines. It was good to be able to go off in the car for the day and leave Phyl and Alan in charge of the children - and quite good, too, to take charge when it was their turn for freedom. Everything was, in fact, a great success until the Monday of the second week ...

On that day it was Mary and I who were free. We drove almost off the map (*) by very minor roads, hefted the car, walked along a hillside and picnicked by a stream with the whole Irish Sea spread out below us. In the evening we had a good dinner at a roadside hotel and dawdled back to Bontgoch about ten o'clock. We paused a moment by the gate to admire the serenity of a superb sunset, and then went up the path.

One had only to set foot on the threshold of the cottage to know that something had gone wrong. Mary sensed it at once. She stared at Phyl.

'What is it?' she said. 'What's happened?'

'It's all right, Mary. It's quite all right,' Phyl said.

'They're perfectly safe and sound. Both upstairs in bed now. Nothing to worry about.'

'What happened?' Mary said again.

'They fell in the river. But they're quite all right.'

She and Mary went upstairs. Alan reached for a bottle and poured a couple of whiskies.

'What's been going on?' I said as he held a glass towards me.

'It's quite all right now, as Phyl said,' he assured me.

Near thing, (*) though. Shook us to our foundations, I can tell you. Not stopped sweating yet.' He pressed a handkerchief to his brow as if in evidence, said 'Cheers', * and downed half his glass.

I looked at him, and looked at the bottle. It had been untouched that morning, now it was three-quarters empty.

'But what happened?' I insisted.

He put down his glass, shook his head, and explained:

'Pure accident, old man. They were all four of them playing around on that rickety landing stage. The tide was a bit past the turn, (*) and running out fast. That hulking motor-boat of Bill Weston's was moored about fifty yards up-stream. According to old Evans who saw the whole thing its mooring line must have broken. The boat hit the landing-stage

at full speed, and the far end of the damned thing collapsed. My two happened to be standing back a bit, so they were only knocked down, but your two went straight into the water...'

He paused, exasperatingly. But for the repeated assurances (*) that they were quite all right I could have shaken him. He took another swig at his glass.

'Well, you know how fast water runs at the ebb-time. They were yards away in a few seconds. At first Evans thought they were done for then he saw Matthew strike out towards Polly. He didn't see any more because he started running off to the Yacht Club to give the alarm.

'It was Colonel Summers who went after them, but even with that fast motor-boat of his they were well over a mile downstream before he could find them. Matthew was still supporting Polly.

'The Colonel was tremendously impressed. He says that if he ever saw anything that deserved a medal, that did; and he's going to make sure Matthew gets one. (*)

'We were here when it happened. My two never thought to tell us until they had seen the Colonel's boat chase off after them. Not that we could have done anything. But lord-oh-lord, waiting for him to come back ... I hope I never have to spend an hour like that again ...'

'Anyway, it came out all right, thank God - and thanks to young Matthew. There's no doubt at all your Polly'd have been done for, but for him. Damn good show, and if the Colonel needs any backing for that medal idea, he'll certainly get mine. Matthew deserves it.'

Alan finished off his drink at a gulp, and reached for the bottle again.

I finished nine, too. I felt I needed it.

Everybody ought to be able to swim. It had worried me at times for the last year or two that Matthew could never succeed in swimming more than three consecutive strokes ...

I was shushed away from the room Polly was sharing with young Emma.

'She's fast asleep,' Mary told me. 'She's got a nasty bruise on her right shoulder. We think she must have hit the boot as she fell. Otherwise she seems only tired out. Oh, David...'

'It's all right, darling. It's over now.'

'Yes, thank God. Phyl told me all about it. But, David, how did Matthew do it ...?'

I looked in on Matthew. The light was still on. He was lying on his back staring at the lamp. I had time to catch his worried look before he turned his head and saw me.

'Hullo, Daddy,' he said.

Momentarily he looked pleased, and relieved, but the anxious expression soon came back.

'Hullo, Matthew. How are you feeling?' I asked.

'All right,' he told me. 'We got jolly cold, but Auntie Phyl made us have a hot bath.'

I nodded. He certainly looked all right now.

'I've been hearing great things about you, Matthew,' I told him.

He looked more worried now. His eyes dropped, and his fingers began twisting at the sheet.

'It's not true, Daddy,' he said, with great earnestness.

'It did rather make me wonder,' I admitted. 'A few days ago you couldn't swim.'

'I know, Daddy, but ...' Again he twisted at the sheet. ... but Chocky can ...' he finished, looking up at me uncertainly.

I tried to show nothing but sympathetic interest.

'Tell me about it,' I suggested.

Matthew looked a little relieved.

'Well, it all happened terribly quickly. I saw the boat just going to hit, and then I was in the water. tried to swim, but I was awfully frightened because I knew it would be no good, and I thought I was going to be drowned. Then Chocky told me not to be a fool, and not to panic. She was sort of fierce. She sounded rather like Mr Caffer when he gets angry in class, only more. I've never known her get like that before, and I was so surprised that I stopped panicking. Then she said: "Now think of nothing, like you do with painting." So I tried. And then I was swimming ...' He frowned. 'I don't know how, but somehow she showed my arms and legs the way to swim, just like she makes my hands go the right way to draw. So, you see, it was really her, not me, that did it, Daddy.

'I see,' I said. It was a memorable overstatement. (*) Matthew went on.

'You, and lots of other people, have shown me how to swim, Daddy, and I tried, but it kept on not happening until Chocky did it.'

'I see,' I lied again. I reflected for some moments while Matthew watched my face attentively.

'I see,' I said once more, and nodded. 'So, of course once you found you could swim, you struck out for the shore?'

Matthew's attentive look turned to an incredulous stare. (*)

'But I couldn't do that. There was Polly. She'd fallen in, too.'

I nodded again.

'Yes,' I said. 'There was Polly, too - that does rather seem to me to be the point...'

Matthew considered. I think he went back to those first frightened moments in the water, for he shuddered slightly. Then his face took a look of determination.

'But it was Chocky who did it,' he asserted, obstinately.

The next morning Alan and I sat in the sun, waiting for the call to breakfast.

'What surprises me,' Alan said presently, 'is how did he do it?' According to the Colonel he was still supporting her when the boat came up with them. Nearly a mile and a half, he reckons, in that fast ebb. Matthew was tired, he says, but not exhausted. And only a couple of days ago he was telling me, as if he were ashamed of it, too, that he couldn't swim ... I tried to teach him, but he didn't have the knack. '

'It's quite true. He couldn't,' I told him, and then, since he knew already about the Chocky problem and been responsible for bringing Landis into it, I gave him Matthew's version of the affair. He looked at me incredulously.

'But - well, and no disrespect to Matthew - but do you believe that?'

'I believe that Matthew believes it - and how else can one explain it? Besides ...' I told him about the pictures. He'd not heard of them before. 'They, somehow, make it not quite as difficult to accept, or half-accept,' I said.

Alan, became thoughtful. He lit a cigarette, and sat silently smoking it, gazing out across the estuary. At last he said:

'If this is what it seems to be-and I can see that it's difficult to explain it any other way. it opens up a whole new phase of this Chocky business.'

'That's what we thought,' I acknowledged. 'And poor Mary's not at all happy about it. She's afraid for him.'

Alan shook his head.

'I can't see that she needs to be. After all, whether Chocky exists or not, it is because Matthew believes she does that your two are alive today. Does Mary realize that? It ought to help her a bit.'

'It ought,' I agreed. 'But - oh, I don't know - why do people always find it easier to believe in evil spirits than in good ones?'

Matthew was late for lunch. I went in search of him, and found him sitting on the remains of the wrecked jetty, talking to a good-looking, fair-haired young man I did not remember seeing before. Matthew looked up as I approached.

'Hullo, Daddy - oh, is it late?'

'It is,' I told him.

The young man got up, politely.

'I'm sorry, sir. I'm afraid it's my fault f@r keeping him. I should have thought. I was just asking him about his feat: he's quite a local hero, you know, after yesterday.'

'Maybe,' I said, 'but he still has to eat. Come along now, Matthew.'

'Goodbye,' Matthew said to the young man, and we turned back to the cottage.

'Who was that?' I asked.

'Just a man,' said Matthew. 'He wanted to know how Polly is after yesterday. He said he's got a little girl just like her, so he was interested.'

It did just cross my mind that the stranger looked a little young to be a family man with ten or eleven year old child, but then you never know nowadays, and by the time lunch was finished I had forgotten about the incident.

During the next few days Matthew developed such a passion for swimming that he could scarcely be kept away from the water.

Then the holiday was over. Colonel Summers dropped in on the last evening for a drink, and to assure me that he had already written to The Royal Swimming Society commending Matthew.

'Plucky youngster of yours. Good reason to be proud of him. Could just as easily have looked after himself only: many would. Funny thing his pretending he couldn't swim; unaccountable things, boys. Never mind. Damned good show! And good luck to him.'

The following Monday evening I got home late and tired after a busy day catching up with the accumulation of work at the office. I was vaguely aware that Mary was a little distraught, but she had the tact to keep the cause to herself until I had eaten my supper. Then she produced a newspaper, much folded for post, and handed it to me.

'Came this afternoon,' she said. 'Front page.' Her expression as she watched me unfold it and read MERIONETH MERCURY across the top was disquieting.

'Further down,' she said.

I looked at the lower half of the page and saw a photograph of Matthew looking back at me. Not at all a bad photograph either. I looked at the headline to the story beside it. It said: BOY-HERO TELLS OF 'GUARDIAN ANGEL' RESCUE. (*) My heart sank a little. I read on:

'Matthew Gore (12) of Hindmere, Surrey, on holiday at Bontgoch has been nominated to receive a medal for his bravery in saving his sister Polly (10) from drowning in the estuary at Bontgoch last Monday.'

'Matthew and his sister were playing on a light wooden jetty not far from the Bontgoch Yacht Club when a motor-cruiser belonging to Mr William Weston, a local resident, was torn from its moorings by the force of the ebb tide, and crashed into the jetty, demolishing ten feet of it, and hurling both children into the swirling current.

'Matthew immediately struck out, and, seizing his sister, supported her head above water as the flood bore them away. The alarm was given by Mr Evan Evans, a familiar figure in Bontgoch, whereupon Colonel Summers, a well-known local resident, hastened to the scene and lost no time in giving chase in his motor-cruiser.

'Colonel Summers was compelled to pursue the two children nearly two miles down the treacherous waters of the estuary before he was able to manoeuvre his boat alongside them so that they could be safely grappled aboard.

'Said the Colonel: "Matthew undoubtedly saved his sister's life at the risk of his own. England could do with more boys like him." (*)

'Most astounding fact of all: Matthew did not know he could swim.

'Interviewed by our reporter he modestly denied any claims to heroism. "Polly could not swim, and when I found I could, the obvious thing was to help her," he said. Questioned about this, he told our reporter that he had taken swimming lessons, but had never been able to learn to swim. "When I was suddenly thrown into the water I was terrified," he acknowledged, "but then I heard a voice telling me to keep calm, and how to move my arms and legs. So I did as it said, and found I could swim."

'There seems to be no doubt that Matthew is telling the truth. Our reporter was unable to find anyone who had seen him swimming before that, and it was generally thought that he could not swim.

'Asked if he was not astonished to hear a voice speaking to him, he replied that he had often heard it before, and so did not find it very surprising.

'When our reporter suggested that it could be the voice of his Guardian Angel, he admitted that it might be that.'

I looked up at Mary. She shook her head slowly. I shrugged,

'Shall we ...?' I began to suggest.

Mary shook her head again.

'He'll be fast asleep by now. Besides, what's the point? It's done now.'

'It's only a local paper,' I said. 'But how on earth...?' Then I remembered the young man who had been talking to Matthew on the shore...

'They know we live in Hindmere,' Mary painted out. 'They've only got to look in the telephone directory.'

I was determined to be hopeful.

'Why should they bother? It reads like a pretty phoney sensation worked up by a local reporter, anyway.'

I don't think either of us was quite certain just then whom we meant by this 'they', but it did not take long for me to discover that I was underestimating the abilities of press-reporters.

I have fallen into the bad habit of switching on the radio when shaving - bad because untroubled shaving is itself a serious enough affair - however, that's modern life, and the next morning I turned on 'Today' (*) as usual, and Jack de Manio (*) said: 'The time is exactly twenty-five - and a half minutes past eight - no, hang it, (*) I mean past seven. Now the news from our local reporters. It has become known that young Matthew Gore while on holiday from his home at Hindmere, recently, and gallantly, saved his still younger sister from drowning, and the peculiar thing is that young Matthew had never swum before.

Dennis Clutterbuck reports:'

The quality of the transmission changed. A voice said:

'I am told that when an accident flung you and your sister into the fast-flowing river you immediately went to her rescue and supported her in the water until you were picked up more than a mile down-stream. is that so?'

'Well, yes,' said Matthew's voice. He sounded a little doubtful.

'And they also tell me you had never swum before?' 'Yes - I mean, no,' said Matthew, in some confusion. 'You hadn't ever swum before?'

'No,' said Matthew, definitely now. 'I'd tried, but it wouldn't happen ...' he added.

'But this time it did?'

'Yes,' said Matthew.

'I am told you heard a voice telling you what to do?'

Matthew hesitated. 'Well - sort of ...' he agreed. 'And you think this must have been the voice of your Guardian Angel?'

'No,' said Matthew indignantly. 'That's a lot of rot.'

'But you told the news reporter ...' Matthew interrupted him.

'I didn't. He said it, and I didn't know he was a reporter, anyway.'

'But you did hear a voice?'

Matthew hesitated again. Once more he could manage no better than:

'... Sort of.'

'And after you had heard it, you found you were able to swim?'

A grunt from Matthew.

'But now you don't think it was your Guardian Angel that told you how to do it?'

'[never said anything about Guardian Angels - it was him.' Matthew sounded exasperated. 'All that happened was that I got into panic, and Chock... ' He stopped abruptly. I could almost hear him bite his tongue. 'I just found I could swim,' he ended lamely.

The interviewer started to speak again but was cut off in the middle of the first syllable.

Jack de Manio said.

'Swimming in one easy lesson. Well, whether there was a Guardian Angel involved, or not, congratulations to Matthew on the way he put the lesson to use.'

Matthew came down to his breakfast as I was finishing mine.

'I've just been listening to you on the wireless,' I told him.

'Oh,' said Matthew. He did not seem disposed to follow that up, and attended to his cornflakes, rather apprehensively.

'When did it happen?' I inquired.

'A man rang up, when Mummy was out. He said was I Matthew, and I said I was, and he said he was BBC, and could he come round and see me. I said I supposed it be all right, because it seemed rude to say no to the BBC. So he came; and he showed me a bit about me in the paper. Then he turned on his recorder, and asked me questions. And after that he went away again.'

'And you didn't tell Mummy, or anyone else, that he'd been?'

He dabbled his cornflakes.

'Well, you see, I thought she'd be afraid that I'd told him about Chocky - though I didn't. And I didn't think it would be interesting enough to get broadcasted, anyway.'

Not very valid reason, I thought. Probably he was feeling guilty over letting the man into the house at all.

'H'm. - It can't be helped now,' I said. 'But if there are any more interviewers, I think you'd better refer them to Mummy, or me, before

you talk to them. Will you do that?'

'Okay, Daddy,' he agreed, and then added, with a frown. 'It's a bit difficult though. You see, I didn't know the man at Bontgoch was a reporter and the BBC one - well, it didn't seem like an interview exactly.'

'Perhaps the simplest way would be to treat any stranger as a suspected interpreter,' I suggested. 'You might easily make a slip, and we don't want them getting on to Chocky, do we?'

Matthew's mouth was now too full of cornflakes to let him speak, but he nodded very decisively.

8

A young man representing, as he put it, The Hindmere and District Courier turned up that afternoon. Mary dealt with him briskly. Yes, she had seen that rubbish about a guardian angel, and was surprised that a paper had printed such nonsense. Matthew had swimming lessons, but had lacked the confidence to trust himself to the water. What had happened was that in the emergency he had known that he ought to do to swim; he had made the motions he had been taught to make, and discovered that he could swim. He had been very brave in going to the rescue of his sister, and very fortunate, but there was nothing miraculous about it. No, she was sorry he couldn't see - Matthew; he was out for the day. And, in any case, she preferred not to have him troubled about it. After considerable persuasion the reporter went away, ill-satisfied.

The same day Land!s rang me up at the office. He had, he said, been thinking about Matthew, and a number of questions had occurred to him. He suggested that I should have dinner with him one evening. It crossed my mind to ask him if he had heard Matthew on 'Today' that morning, but I had no wish to get involved in a lot of explanation in the middle of a busy day, so I did not mention it. In the circumstances I could scarcely refuse his invitation, and it also occurred to me that he might have thought of a suitable consultant. We agreed to meet at his Club the following Thursday.

I got back to find Mary preparing our dinner with grim resolve and a heavy hand, as she does where she is annoyed. I inquired why.

'Matthew's been talking to reporters again,' she said, punishing the saucepan.

'But I told him...'

'I] know,' she said bitterly. 'Oh, it isn't his fault, poor boy, but it does make me so wild.'

I inquired further.

Reporters, it seemed, was a manner of speaking. There had been only one reporter. Matthew, on his way home, had encountered him at the end of the road. He had asked if he was speaking to Matthew Gore, and introduced himself as the representative of The Hindmere and District Courier. Matthew told him he must speak to his mother first. Oh, of course, agreed the young man, that was only proper, naturally he had called on Mrs Gore to ask her permission. He had been hoping to have a talk with Matthew there at the house, only he had not been at home. But it was very fortunate that they had met like this. They couldn't really talk, standing here on the corner, though. What about some tea and cakes in the cafe over there? So they had gone to the cafe.

'You must write to the editor at once. It's disgusting,' she told me.

I wrote a suitably indignant letter, without the least hope that it would be paid attention to, but it helped to reduce Mary's feelings to a mere simmer. father there risk raising the temperature again I didn't mention Landis's call.

Wednesday passed without incident, but Thursday made up for it. (*)

I was reading The Times in a full railway compartment, when my eye was caught by a photograph in the copy of The Daily Telegraph held by the man in the opposite seat. Even at a glance it had a quality which triggered my curiosity. I leant forward to take a closer look. Habitual travellers develop an instinct which warns them of such liberties. My vis-a-vis (*) immediately lowered his paper to glare at me as if I were committing trespass and probably worse, and refolded it to present a different page.

The glimpse I had had, brief though it was, disturbed me enough to send me to the Waterloo Station (*) bookstall in search of a Telegraph I could rightfully, read. They had, of course, sold out. This somehow helped to convince me that my suspicions were well founded, and on arriving in Bloomsbury Square (*) I lost no time in sending a message round the office asking for a copy of today's Telegraph. Eventually one was found, and brought to me. I unfolded it with a sense of misgiving - and I was right to feel it...

Half a page was devoted to photographs of pictures on display at an exhibition entitled 'Art and the Schoolchild'. The one that had caught my eye on the train caught it again. It was a scene from an upper window showing half a dozen boys laden with satchels jostling their way towards an open gate in a wall. The boys had an angular, spindly look; curious to some no doubt, but familiar to me. I had no need to read the print beneath the photograph, but I did:

'"Homeward" by Matthew Gore (12) of Hinton School, Hindmere, reveals a talent and power .of observation quite outstanding in one of his age.'

I was still looking at it when Tommy Percell, one of my partners came in, and glanced over me shoulder.

'Ah, yes,' he told me. 'Spotted that on the way up this morning. Congratulations. Thought it must be your youngster. Didn't know he'd a gift for that kind of thing. Very clever - but a bit queer, though, isn't it?'

'Yes,' I said, with a feeling that the thing was slipping out of my hands. 'Yes, it is a bit queer ...'

Landis drank half his sherry at a gulp.

'Seen the papers?' he inquired.

I did not pretend to misunderstand him.

'Yes, I saw today's Telegraph.' I admitted.

'But not the Standard? They've got it, too - with a paragraph about a child-artist of genius. You didn't tell me about this,' he added, with reproach.

'I didn't know about it when I last saw you.'

'Nor about the swimming?'

'It hadn't happened then.'

'Both Chocky, of course?'

'Apparently,' I said.

I told him what Matthew had told Mary and me about the pictures. It did not appear to surprise him, but he was lost in thought again...

Over the meal he inquired in detail into the swimming incident. I told him as much as could, and he clearly found it no less significant

than the painting. What astonished me most of the time, and still more on later reflection, was his lack of surprise. It was so marked that I almost had a suspicion for a time that he might be humouring me - leading me on to see how far I would go in my claims for Matthew, but I had to abandon that. I could detect no trace of scepticism; he appeared to accept the fantastic without prejudice.

After dinner, over coffee and brandy, Landis said:

'As I expect you'll have gathered, (*) I've been giving the problem considerable thought, and in my opinion Thorbe is your man. Sir William Thorbe. He's a very sound fellow with great experience - and not bigoted, which is something in our profession. He treats his cases on their merits - if he decides analysis will help, then he'll use it; if he thinks it calls for one of the new drugs, then he'll use that. He has a large number of quite remarkable successes to his credit. I don't think you could do better than to get his opinion, he's willing to take Matthew on. I'm certain that if anyone can help it's Thorbe.'

I did not greatly care for that 'if anyone', but let it pass. I said:

'I seem to remember that the last time we met you were doubtful whether Matthew needed help. '

'My dear fellow, I still am. But your wife does, you know. And you yourself could do with (*) some definite assurance, couldn't you?'

And, of course, he was right. Mary and I were a lot more worried about Matthew than Matthew was about himself. Just the knowledge that we were doing our best for him by taking competent advice would relieve our minds.

In the end I agreed that, on Mary's consent, I would be glad to have Sir William Thorbe's opinion.

And on that, we parted.

I arrived home to find Mary bursting with indignation. I gathered she had seen The Evening Standard.

'It's outrageous!' she announced. 'What right had she to send the thing in without even consulting us? The least she could have done was to ask us. To enter it like that without your even knowing! Really, the kind of people these Teachers' Training Colleges turn out these days... No manners at all... How can you expect a child to learn decent behaviour when he's taught by people who don't know how to behave...? It's quite disgraceful.'

'She was doing her job,' I cut in. 'One of her pupils produced a picture that she thought good enough to submit for this exhibition. She wanted him to have the credit for it. Naturally, she thought we'd be delighted, and so we should have been - but for this Chocky business.'

'She ought to have asked our consent...'

'So that you could explain to her about Chocky, and tell her why we didn't want it shown? And, anyway, it was right at the end of the term. She probably had just time to send it in before she went away. I wouldn't mind betting that at this very moment she's expecting to receive a letter of thanks and congratulations from is.'

Mary made an angry sound.

'All right,' I told her. 'You go ahead and write the headmaster a letter demanding an apology. And you won't get your apology. What are you going to do then, make a row? Local newspapers love rows between parents and schoolteachers. So do the national ones. If you want more publicity for the picture than they have already printed you'll certainly get it. And somebody's going to point out that the Matthew Gore who painted the picture is the same one who is the guardian angel hero. - Someone's going to do that anyway, but do we want it done on a

national scale? How long will it take before Chocky is right out of the bag?'

Mary's look of dismay made me sorry for the way I'd put it. She went on staring at me for several seconds, then her face suddenly crumpled. I picked her up and carried her over to the armchair.,.

After a time she pulled the handkerchief out of my breast-pocket. Gradually I felt her relax. One hand sought, and found, mine.

'I'm sorry to be so silly,' she said.

I hugged her.

'It's all right, darling. You're not silly, you're anxious - and I don't wonder.'

'But I was silly. I didn't see what making a row might lead to.' She paused, kneading the handkerchief in her clenched right hand.

'I'm so afraid for Matthew,' she said unsteadily. She raised herself a little, and looked into my face. 'David, tell me something honestly... They - they won't think he - he's mad, will they, David ...?'

'Of course not, darling. How could they possibly? You couldn't find a saner boy anywhere than Matthew, you know that.'

'But if they find out about Chocky? If they get to know that he thinks he hears her speaking...? I mean, hearing voices in your head... that's ...' She let it tail away.

'Darling,' I told her. 'You're being afraid of the wrong thing. Put that right away. There is nothing - nothing at all - wrong with Matthew himself. He's as sane and sensible a boy as one could wish to meet. Please, please let it into your head quite firmly that this Chocky, whatever it is, is not subjective - it is objective. It does not - come from Matthew, it is something outside that comes to him. I know it's hard to believe, because one doesn't understand how it can happen. But you must believe that.'

'I do try, but ... I don't understand. What is Chocky...? - The swimming ... the painting ... all the questions...?'

'That's what we don't know - yet. My own idea is that Matthew is - well, sort of haunted. I know that's an unfortunate word, it carries ideas of fear and malevolence, but I don't mean that at all. It's just that there isn't another word for it. What I am thinking of is a kindly sort of haunting ... It quite clearly doesn't mean Matthew any harm. It's only alarming to us because we don't understand it. After all, remember, Matthew thinks it saved both their lives... And if it didn't, we don't know what, did.'

'Whatever it is, I think we'd be wrong to regard it as a threat. It seems intrusive and inquisitive, but basically well disposed - essentially a benign kind of - er - presence.'

'Oh, I see,' said Mary. 'In fact you're trying to tell me it is a guardian angel?'

'No - er - well, I suppose I mean - er. yes, in a way...' I said.

Alan rang up in the morning and suggested lunch, so I joined him.

'Saw the photograph of Matthew's picture in the paper yesterday,' he said. 'What are you going to do about it now?'

I shrugged. 'About it what can I do except try to deal with things as they crop up? About Matthew, though, Landis has come up with a recommendation.' I told him what Landis had said.

'Thorbe, Thorbe,' Alan muttered, frowning. 'I heard something about

him just the other day - Oh, yes. I know. He's recently got an appointment as a sort of advisory industrial psychologist to one of the big groups. (*) Can't remember which, but one of the really big boy's.'

'Oh,' I said. 'Very high fees?'

Alan shook his head.

'Can't tell you about that, but he won't be cheap. I should have a word with Landis about it before you commit yourself.'

'Thanks, I will. One hears such things. I don't want to pay lots of money for months and months, if it can be helped.'

'Of course,' Alan agreed. 'After all, nobody has suggested that there's anything wrong with Matthew, nothing that needs treatment. All you really want is an explanation to set your minds at rest - and advice on the best way to cope with things, isn't it?'

'I don't know,' I told him. 'I admit that this Chocky hasn't done him any harm ...'

'And has, in fact, saved his and Polly's lives, don't forget.'

'Yes. But it's Mary I'm worried about now. She's not going to be easy in her mind until she's satisfied that Chocky has been driven right away, abolished, exorcised, or somehow finished with ... '

I arrived home to find the atmosphere a trifle gloomy, perhaps, but certainly not critical. My spirits lifted. I asked Mary about the day.

'My sister Janet has just rung up,' she told me.

'Oh, no ...!'

'Yes. She was thrilled about Matthew's success with the picture...'

'And wants to come over tomorrow to discuss it?'

'Well, actually, she said Sunday. It's Patience who rang up in the afternoon and said could she come tomorrow.'

'I hope,' I told her, without much hope, 'that you put them both off, firmly.'

She hesitated. 'Well, Janet's always so difficult and insistent...'

'Oh,' I said, and picked up the telephone.

'No, wait a minute,' she protested.

'I'm damned if we're going to sit here all the week-end listening to your sisters taking Matthew to pieces. You know just the line they'll take - gushing, inquisitive, self-congratulatory, phoney commiseration for their unfortunate sister who would have the ill-luck to have a peculiar child. To hell with it! 'I put my finger on the dial.

'No,' said Mary. 'I'd better do it.'

'All right,' I agreed. 'Tell them they can't come. That I've fixed up for us to go out with friends tomorrow and Sunday - and next week-end, too, or they'll switch it to that if you give them the chance.' (*)

She did, quite efficiently, and looked at me, as she put the phone down, with an air of relief that cheered me immensely.

'Thank you, David ...' she began. Then the phone rang. I picked it up and listened.

'No,' I said. 'He's in bed and asleep now ... No, he'll be out all day tomorrow,' and put it down again.

'Who was that?' Mary asked.

'The Sunday Dawn, wanting an interview with Matthew.' I thought it over for a moment. 'At a guess I'd say they've just tied up Matthew the life-saver with Matthew the artist. There'll probably be more of them.'

There were. The Sunday Voice followed by The Report.

'That settles it,' I told Mary. 'We'll have to go out tomorrow. And we'll have to start early, before they come camping in the front garden:

I tell you what, we'll stay away over night. Let's go and pack.'

We started upstairs, and the phone went again. I hesitated.

'Oh, leave the thing,' said Mary.

So we did - and the next time.

We managed to get away by seven o'clock, unimpeded by interviewers, and set course for the coast.

'I hope they won't break in while we're away,' said Mary. 'I feel like a refugee.'

We all began to feel like refugees a couple of hours later as we neared the sea. The roads grew thick with cars, our speed was little better than a crawl. Mysterious holdups occurred, immobilizing everything for miles.

Presently we arrived at a vast car park charging five shillings a time, collected our things and went in search of the sea. The pebbly beach near the park was crowded and we made our way further along and down the pebbles, until all that separated us from the shining summer sea was a band of oil and dirt about six feet wide.

'Oh, God,' said Mary. 'You're not going to bathe in that,' she told Matthew who was beginning to unbutton his shirt.

Matthew looked at the mess more closely; even he seemed a little dismayed.

'But I do want to swim now I can,' he protested.

'Not here,' said Mary. 'Oh, dear. It was a lovely beach only a few years ago. Now it's ...'

'Just the edge of the Cloaca Britannica?' I suggested.

'Let's go somewhere else. Come along, we're moving,'

I called to Matthew who was still staring down at the mess in a fascinated, dreamy way. I waited for him while Polly and Mary began to pick their way up the beach.

'Chocky's back, is she?' I asked as he came up.

'How did you know?' he inquired, with surprise.

'I recognized the signs. Look, do me a favour, will you? Just keep her under cover if you can. We don't want to spoil Mummy's day - at least,' I added, 'not more than this place has already.'

'Okay,' he agreed.

We went a little inland and found a village nestled in a cleft at the foot of the Downs. (*) It was peaceful. And there was an inn which gave us quite a passable lunch. I asked if we could stay the night, and found that by the good luck they had rooms to spare. Mary and I lazed on deck-chairs in the garden. Matthew disappeared, saying vaguely that he was going to look round. Polly lay on the lawn under a tree, and started reading. After, an hour or so I suggested a stroll before tea.

We found a path which followed the contour across the side of the hill and walked it in a leisurely fashion. After about half a mile we came in sight of a figure working intently on a large sketch-pad supported by his knees. I stopped. Mary said:

'It's Matthew.'

'Yes,' I agreed, and turned to go back.

'No,' she said, 'Let's go on. I'd like to see.'

Rather reluctantly I went forward with her. Matthew seemed quite unaware of us. Even when we drew close he remained utterly absorbed in his work. From a box of crayons on the grass beside him he would select what he wanted, with decision, and apply it to the paper with a deftness I could not recognize in him. Then, with a curious mixture of delicacy and firmness he smudged, blurred, and softened the line using his

fingers, or his thumb, or a part of a dirty handkerchief on which he wiped his hands before adding the next stroke.

The painting of a picture seems to me at any time a marvel, but to watch the Sussex landscape taking form on the paper from such crude materials under such an unfamiliar technique held me completely fascinated, and Mary, too. We must have stood there almost unmoving for more than half an hour before Matthew relaxed. Then he lifted his head, sighed heavily, and lifted the finished picture to study it. Presently he became aware of us standing behind him, and turned his head.

'Oh, hullo,' he said, looking at Mary a little uncertainly.

'Oh, Matthew, that's beautiful,' she exclaimed.

Matthew looked relieved. He studied the picture again.

'I think Chocky's seeing things more properly now, though it's still a bit funny,' he said judicially.

Mary asked tentatively:

'Will you give it to me. Matthew? I promise to keep it very safely, if you will.'

Matthew looked pp at her with a smile. He recognized a peace overture.

'Yes, if you like Mummy,' he said, and then added on a cautionary note. 'Only you'll have to be careful. This kind smudges if you don't spray them with something or other.'

'I'll be most careful. It's much too beautiful to spoil,' she assured him.

'Yes, it is rather beautiful,' Matthew agreed. 'Chocky thinks that, except where we've spoilt it, this is a very beautiful planet.'

We arrived home on Sunday evening feeling much the better for our week-end. (*) Mary, however, was not looking forward to Monday.

'These newspaper men are so pushing. Foot in the door and all that,' she complained.

'I doubt if they'll trouble you much - not the Sundays, (*) anyway. It'll have gone stale by next week-end. I think the best thing would be to get Matthew out of the way. It's only one day; he starts school again on Tuesday. Make him up some sandwiches and send him off with instructions to keep clear until -six o'clock. See that he has enough money to go to the pictures if he gets bored. He'll be all right.'

'It seems a bit hard on him to be turned out.'

'I know^ but I think he'd prefer that to interviewers.'

So next morning Mary shooed him out of the place - and just as well. Six callers inquired for Matthew in the course of the day. They were, our own vicar, another clergyman, a middle-aged lady who confided with some intensity that she was a spiritualist, a member of the regional Arts-Group which she was sure Matthew would want to join, another lady who considered the dream-life of children to be a disgracefully neglected field of study, and an instructor at the local baths who hoped that Matthew would give a demonstration of life-saving at the next swimming gala.

I arrived home and found Mary quite exhausted. Apart from that, however, Monday was uneventful. Matthew appeared to have enjoyed his day out. He came back with two pictures, both landscapes from the same viewpoint. One was unmistakably Chocky-directed, the other less good, but Matthew was proud of it.

'I did it all myself,' he told us. 'Chocky's been telling me how to look at things, and I'm sort of beginning to see what sh means.'

On Tuesday morning Matthew went off to school to start his new term. On Tuesday afternoon he returned home, with a black eye.

Mary regarded it with dismay.

'Oh, Matthew. You've been fighting,' she exclaimed.

'I haven't,' Matthew told her, indignantly. 'I was fought at.'

According to his account he had been simply standing in the playground during break when a slightly older boy called Simon Ledger had come up to him, accompanied by three or four henchmen, and started jeering about guardian angels. Somehow a situation had been reached in which Simon proclaimed that if Matthew's guardian angel could guard him from him, Simon's, lists he was willing to believe in guardian angels, if not it proved that Matthew was a liar. Simon had then put his postulate to a practical test by landing Matthew a punch in the face which had knocked him down. Matthew was not quite clear about the next minute or two. He admitted he might have been dazed. At] he remembered was that he was on his feet again, and instead of facing Simon and his companion he found himself looking at Mr Slatson, the headmaster.

Mr Slatson very decently took the trouble to ring up at dinner-time, and inquire about Matthew. I was able to tell him that he seemed quite himself, though he did not look pretty.

After he rang off 'I gave Mary my news of the day. Landis had phoned in the morning. He had, he told me, managed to see Sir William who seemed quite hopefully interested by his account of Matthew, Sir William's time was, of course, rather closely booked, but he had suggested that I ring up his secretary, and see if an appointment could be arranged.

So I did that. Sir William's secretary also told me that Sir William was very much booked-up, but she would see. There was a sound of rifling papers, then, on a gracious note, she informed me that I was fortunate; there had been a cancellation, two o'clock Friday afternoon if I cared to take it, otherwise it might be a matter of weeks.

Mary hesitated. She seemed, during the last two or three days, to have lost her antipathy to Chocky; also, I fancy, she had an instinctive reluctance to entrusting Matthew in other hands, as if, like the beginning of schooldays, it marked the end of a phase. But her common sense asserted itself. We arranged that Matthew should come up on Friday, and I would escort him to Sir William.

On Friday I met Matthew off the train at Waterloo. We had lunch and arrived in Sir William's office with five minutes to spare.

Sir William Thorbe turned out to be a tall, clean-shaved man with a rather high-bridged nose, fine hair just greying, and a pair of dark, perceptive eyes under thick eyebrows, In other circumstances I should have thought him a barrister rather than a medical man, his air, appearance, and carriage gave a first misleading impression of familiarity which I later ascribed to his resemblance to the Duke of Wellington. (*)

I introduced Matthew, exchanged a few words, and was then shown out to wait.

'How long?' I asked the secretary.

'Two hours is the minimum with a new patient,' she told me. 'I suggest you come back at half-past four. We'll look after your boy if he's through before that,'

I went back to the office, and returned on time. It was after five before Matthew emerged. He looked at the clock.

'Gosh,' he said. 'I thought it was only about half an hour.'

The secretary bustled up.

'Sir William asks me to make his apologies for not seeing you now. He has an urgent consultation to attend. He will be writing to you in a day or two,' she said, and we were shown out.

'What happened?' I asked Matthew when we were in the train.

'He asked me some questions. He didn't seem at all surprised about Chocky,' he said, and added: 'Then we listened to records.'

'Oh. Pop music?' I inquired.

'Not that sort of record. It was all soft and quiet - musical and of music. It just went on while he asked the questions. And then when it stopped he took another record out of a cupboard and asked me if I had ever seen one like that. I said no, because it was a funny looking record with black and white patterns all over it, So he moved a chair and said: "Sit here where you can see it," and he put it on the record-player.

'It made a queer humming noise, not real music at all, though it went up and down a bit. Then there was another humming noise, a sort of sharper one. It came in on top of the other humming, and went up and down, too. I watched the record going round, and all the pattern seemed to be running into the middle - a bit like bath-water running out of the plug-hole, only not quite because it didn't go down, it just ran into itself and disappeared to nowhere, and kept on doing it. It was funny watching it because I began to feel as if the whole room was turning round, and I was falling off the chair, Then, quite suddenly it was all right again and there was an ordinary record with ordinary music coming out of it.

'Well, then Sir William gave me an orange drink, and asked some more questions, and after a bit he said that'd be all for today, and goodbye, and I came out.'

I duly reported to Mary.

'Oh,' she said. 'Hypnosis. I don't think I like that very much.'

'No,' I agreed. 'But I suppose he'd use whatever method seemed appropriate. Matthew can be pretty cagey about Chocky. I know he opened up with Landis, but that was exceptional. If Sir William was having to fight for every answer he may well have felt that hypnosis would make it easier for both of them.'

'M'm,' said Mary, 'well, all we can do now is to wait for his report.'

The next morning, Saturday, Matthew came down to breakfast looking tired. He was low-spirited, too, and listless. He refused Polly's invitation to dispute with such gloomy distaste that Mary dropped on her heavily, and shut her up.

'Are you not feeling well?' she demanded of Matthew, who was toying uninterestedly with his cornflakes.

'I'm all right,' he said.

Mary regarded him, and tried again.

'It's not anything to do with yesterday? Did that man do something that upset you?'

'No,' Matthew shook his head. 'I'm all tight,' he repeated, and attacked his cornflakes as if in demonstration. He got them down as if every leaf were threatening to choke him.

I watched him closely, and had a strong impression was on the verge of tears.

'Look, old man. I've-got to go down to London again today. Would you like to come along?' I suggested.

He shook his head again.

'No, thank you, Daddy. I'd rather. Mummy, can T just have some sandwiches, please?'

Mary looked at me in question, I nodded.

'All right, darling. I'm cut you some after breakfast,' she said.

Matthew ate a little more, and then disappeared upstairs.

When we were alone Mary said:

'I'm sure it's something that man told him yesterday.'

'Could be,' I admitted. 'But I don't think so. He wasn't at all upset yesterday evening. Anyway, if he wants to get away by himself, I think we ought to let him.'

When I went out to get the car I found Matthew strapping a sketching-block, his paint-box, and a packet of sandwiches on to the carrier of his bicycle I hoped the sandwiches would survive it.

'Go carefully. Remember it's Saturday,' I told him. 'Yes,' he said, and rode off.

He did not come back until six o'clock, and went straight up to his room. At dinner he was still up there. I inquired.

'He says he doesn't want any,' Mary told me. 'He's just lying on his bed staring at the ceiling., I'm sure he must be sickening for something.'

I went up to see. Matthew was, as Mary had said, lying on his bed, He looked very tired.

'Feeling worn out, old man?' I asked him. 'Why don't you get right into bed? I'm bring you something on a tray.'

He shook his head.

'No thanks, Daddy. I don't want anything.'

'You ought to have something, you know.'

He shook his head again.

I looked round the room. There were four pictures I had not seen before. All landscapes. Two propped up on the mantel shelf, two on the chest of drawers.

'Did you do these today? May I look?' I asked.

I moved closer to them. One I recognized immediately, a view across Docksham Great Pond, another included a part of the pond in one corner, the third was taken from a higher po-int looking across a village to the Downs beyond, the fourth was like nothing I had ever seen.

It was a view across a plain. As a background a line of rounded, ancient-looking hills, topped here and there by domed towers, was set - against a cloudless blue sky. In the middle-ground, to the right of the centre, stood something like a very large stone structure. It had the shape, though not the regularity of a pyramid, nor were the stones fitted together; rather they seemed, as far as one could tell from the drawing, to be boulders piled up. It could scarcely have been called a building, yet it quite certainly was not a natural formation. In the foreground were rows of things precisely spaced and arranged in curving lines - I say 'things' because it was impossible to make out what they were; they could have been plants, or haystacks, or, perhaps even, huts, there-was no telling, and to make their shape more difficult to determine, each appeared to throw two shadows. From the left of the picture a wide, cleared strip ran straight as a ruler's edge to the foot of the pyramid, where it changed direction towards the mountains. It was a depressing view with the feeling of intolerable heat.

I was still looking at the thing, bewildered, when there was a gulp from the bed behind me. Matthew said, with difficulty:

'They're the last pictures, Daddy.'

I turned round. His eyes were screwed up, but tears were trickling out of them. I sat down on the bed beside him and took his hand.

'Matthew, boy, tell me. Tell me what the trouble is.' Matthew sniffed, choked, and then stammered out: 'It's Chocky, Daddy. She's going away - for ever ...'

I heard Mary's feet on the stairs, crossed swiftly to the door, and

closed it behind me.

'What is it? Is he ill?' she asked.

I took her arm and moved away from the door.

'No. He'll be all right,' I told her, leading her back to the stairs.

'But what is the matter?' she insisted.

I shook my head. When we were down in the hail, safely out of earshot of Matthew's room -T told her.

'It's Chocky. Apparently she's leaving - clearing out.' 'Well, thank goodness for that,' Mary said.

'Maybe, but don't let him see you think that.'

She looked at me uncertainly, with a puzzled frown.

'But, David, you're talking as if - I mean, Chocky isn't real.'

'To Matthew she is. And he's taking it hard.'

'All the same, I think he ought to have some food.'

'Later on, perhaps,' I said. 'But not now.'

Throughout, the meal Polly chattered constantly and boringly of ponies. When we had got rid of her Mary asked:

'I've been thinking. Do you think it's something that man did?'

'What man?'

'That Sir William Something, (*) of course,' she said, impatiently.

'After all he did hypnotize Matthew. People can be made to do all kinds of things through hypnotic suggestion. Suppose he said to Matthew, where he was in a trance: "Tomorrow your friend Chocky is going to tell you she is going away. You are going to be very sorry to say goodbye to her, but you will. Then she will leave you, and gradually you will forget all about her" - something like that. I don't know much about it, but isn't it possible that a suggestion of that kind might cure him, and clear up the whole thing?'

'"Cure him"?' I said.

'Well, I mean ...'

You mean you've gone back to thinking Chocky is an illusion?'

'Not exactly an illusion ...'

'Really, darling - after the swimming, after watching him at his painting last week-end, you can still think that ...?'

'I can still hope that. At least it's less alarming than what your friend Landis talked about - possession.'

I had to admit that she had a point (*) there. I wished I knew more about hypnosis in general, and Matthew's in particular. -I also wished very much that, if Sir William would manage to expel Chocky by hypnosis, he could have managed to do it in some way that would have caused Matthew less distress.

In fact, I found myself displeased with Sir William. It began to look as if I had taken Matthew to him for a diagnosis - which I had not yet got - and possibly been given instead a treatment, which I had not, at this stage, requested. The more I considered it, the more unsatisfactory it seemed.

On our way to bed we looked into Matthew's room in case he were feeling hungry now. There was no sound except his regular breathing, so we shut the door quietly and went away.

The next morning, Sunday, we let him sleep on. He emerged about ten o'clock looking dazed with sleep, his eyes pink about the rims, his manner distraught, but with his appetite hugely restored.

About half-past eleven a large American car with a front like a juke-box turned into the drive. Matthew came thundering down the stairs.

'It's Auntie Janet, Daddy. I'm off,' he said breathlessly, and shot down the passage to the back door.

We had a trying day. Matthew had been wise. There was a lot of discussion, mostly one-sided, on guardian angels, and on the characteristics of an artist in the family, presenting almost all of them a sun desirable, if not actually disruptive.

I do not know when Matthew returned, He just have come in and crept upstairs while we were talking. After they had gone I went up to his room. He was sitting looking out of the open window at the sinking sun.

'You'll have to face her sooner or later,' I told him. 'Bi!t I must say today was not the day. They were most disappointed not to see you.'

Matthew managed a grin.

I looked round. The four paintings were propped up again on display. I commented favourably on the view's of a pond. When I came to the last picture I hesitated, wondering whether to ignore it. I decided not to.

'Wherever is that supposed to be?' I inquired. Matthew turned his head to look at it.

'That's where Chocky lives,' he said, and paused. Then he added. 'It's a horrid place, isn't it? That's why she thinks this world is so beautiful.'

'Not at all an attractive spot,' I agreed. 'It looks terribly hot there.'

'Oh, it is in the daytime. That fuzzy bit at the back is vapour coming off a lake.'

I pointed to the stone pyramid,

'What is that thing?'

I don't know, really,' Matthew admitted. 'Sometimes she seems to mean a building, and sometimes it comes like a lot of buildings, more like a town. It's a bit difficult without words when there isn't anything the same here.'

'And these lumps?' I pointed to the rows of symmetrically spaced mounds.

'Things that grow there,' was all he could tell me.

'Where is it?' I asked.

Matthew shook his head.

'We still couldn't find out - or where our world is, either,' he said. '

I noted his use of the past tense, and looked at the picture again, The harsh monotony of the colouring, and the feeling of heat struck me once more.

'You know, if I were you I'd keep it out of sight when you're not here. I don't think Mummy would like it much.'

Matthew nodded. 'That's what I thought. So I put it away today.'

There was a pause. We looked out of the window at the red arc of sun fretted by the treetops as it set. I asked him:

'Has she gone, Matthew?'

'Yes, Daddy.'

We were silent while the last rim of the sun sank down and disappeared. Matthew sniffed. His eyes filled with tears.

'Oh, Daddy ... It', like losing part of me ...'

Matthew was subdued, and perhaps a little pale the next morning, but he went off resolutely enough to school. He came back looking tired, but as the week went by he improved daily. By the end of it he seemed more like his normal self again. We were relieved; for the same reasons, but on different grounds.

'Well, thank goodness that's over,' Mary said to me on Friday

evening. 'It looks as if Sir William thing was right after all.'

'Thorbe,' I said.

'Well, Thing or Thorbe. The point is that he told you that it was just a phase, that Matthew had built up an elaborate fantasy system, that it was nothing very unusual at his age, and there was nothing for us to worry about unless it were to become persistent. (*) the thought that unlikely. In his opinion the fantasy would break up of itself, and disperse - probably quite soon. And that's exactly what's happened.'

'Yes,' I agreed. It was the simplest way, and, after all, what did it matter now if Thorbe had been right off the beam? (*) Chocky was, in one way or another, gone.

Nevertheless when I had received his letter on the Tuesday, I had found it exceedingly hard to take. The swimming he dealt with by explaining that Matthew had in fact learned to swim some time before, but a deep-seated fear of the water had caused him to suppress the ability. This fear had persisted until the shock of the emergency caused by his sudden immersion had broken down the mental block. Naturally, his conscious mind remained ignorant of the block, and had attributed the ability to an outside influence.

Rather similarly with the pictures. Undoubtedly Matthew had in his subconscious mind a strong desire to paint. This had remained suppressed, quite possibly as a result of terror inspired in him by the sight of horrifying pictures at an early age. Only when his present fantasy had grown potent enough to affect both his conscious and his subconscious minds, forming a bridge between them, had the urge to paint become liberated and capable of expressing itself in action.

There were explanations of the far incident, and others, along roughly the same lines. And though much of what I considered worthy of attention had been ignored I had little doubt he could have explained that away, too, upon request.

It was not only one of the most disappointing letters I have ever waited for; it was insulting in the native smoothness of its explanations, and patronizing in its reassurances. I was furious that Mary could take it at face value; (*) still more furious that events appeared to justify her in doing so. I realized that I had expected a lot from Thorbe: I felt that all I had got was a brush-off, and a let-down. (*)

And yet the fellow had been right ... The Chocky-presence had dispersed, as he put it. The Chocky-trauma seemed to be mending - though I felt less sure of that ...

So I contented myself with a simple 'yes', and let Mary go on telling me in as sympathetic a way as possible how wrong I had been to perceive subtle complexities which had, after all, turned out to be just a rather more developed, and certainly more troublesome, version of Piff. It did her quite a lot of good. So, fair enough.

The parcel from the Royal Swimming Society arrived by registered post on the Monday morning addressed to Mr Matthew Gore. Unfortunately I was unable to intercept it. Mary signed for it, and when Matthew and I arrived in the dining-room together it was lying beside his plate.

Matthew glanced at the envelope, stiffened and sat quite still looking at it for some moments. Then he turned to his cornflakes. I tried to catch Mary's eye, but in vain. She leant forward.

'Aren't you going to open it?' she asked, encouragingly.

Matthew looked at it again. His eyes roved round the table, looking for an escape. They encountered his mother's expectant expression. Very reluctantly he picked up his knife and slit the envelope. A small red, leather-covered box slid out. He hesitated again. Slowly he picked it

up, and opened it. For some seconds he was motionless, gazing at the golden disc gleaming in its bed of blue velvet. Then:

'I don't want it,' he blurted.

This time I did manage to catch Mary's eye, and gave a slight shake of my head.

Matthew's lower lip came out a little. It shook slightly.

'It's not fair,' he said. 'It's Chocky's - she saved me and Polly... It's not true, Daddy ...'

He went on looking at the medal, head down. The discovery that one lived in a world which could pay honour where honour was not due, was one of the shocks of growing up...

Matthew got up, and ran blindly out of the room. The medal, gaudily shining in its case, lay on the table.

I picked it up. The Society's name in full ran round the edge, then there was a band of ornament, in the centre a boy and a girl standing hand in hand looking at half a sun which radiated vigorously presumably in the act of rising.

I turned it over. The reverse was plainer. Simply an inscription within a circular wreath of laurel leaves. Above:

AWARDED TO

then, engraved in a different type-face:

MATTHEW GORE

and, finally, the all-purpose laudation:

FOR A VALOROUS DEED

I handed it to Mary.

She examined it thoughtfully for some moments, and then put it back in its case.

'It's a shame he's taken it like that,' she said.

I picked up the case, and slipped it into my pocket.

'It's unfortunate it arrived just now,' I agreed, 'I'll keep it for him until later on,'

Mary looked as if she might object, but at that moment Polly arrived babbling, and anxious not to be late for school.

I looked upstairs before I left, but Matthew had already gone - and left his books of homework lying on the table...

He turned up again about half-past six, just after I had got home.

'Oh,' I said, 'and where have you been all day?'

'Walking,' he told me.

I shook my head.

'It won't do, Matthew, you know. You can't just cutting school (*) like that.'

'I know,' he agreed.

The rest of our conversation was unspoken. We understood one another well enough.

The rest of the week went uneventfully, until Friday. I had to work late that evening, and had dinner in London, At almost ten o'clock I

arrived home to find Mary on the telephone, She finished her call just as I came into the room, and pressed the rest without putting the receiver on it.

'Matthew's not back,' she said. 'I'm ringing the hospitals.'

She consulted a list and began to dial again. After two or three more calls she came to the end of her list, and laid the receiver in its rest. I had got out the whisky.

'Drink this. It'll do you good,' I told her.

She took it, gratefully.

'You've tried the police?'

'Yes. I called the school first. He left there at the usual time all right. So then I tried the police, and gave them particulars. They've promised to ring us if they have any news.' She took a drink of whisky. 'Oh, David. Thank goodness you're Lack. I'd got to imagining all sorts of things... I hoped everything would be all right once that Chocky business was over ... He doesn't say anything - not to me ... And then going off like he did on Monday ... You didn't think ...?'

I sat down beside her, and took her hand.

'Of course I don't. And you mustn't either.'

'He's kept everything so bottled up (*) ...'

'It did come as a shock to him. Whatever Chocky was he'd got used to having her around. Suddenly losing her upset him - knocked the bottom out of things for him. It needed some adjustment - but he's making it all right ...'

'You really think that? You're not just saying it ...?'

'Of course I do, darling. I'm perfectly certain that if he were going to do anything silly he'd have done it a fortnight ago, and he wasn't near that even then - he was distressed and pretty wretched, poor boy. But nothing of that kind ever entered his head. I'm sure of it.'

Mary sighed.

'I hope you're right - yes, I'm sure you are. But that makes me all the more mysterious. He must know how we'll feel. He's not an insensitive boy ...'

'Yes,' I agreed. 'That's what's worrying me most...'

Neither of us slept much that night.

I rang the police the next morning. They were sympathetic, doing all they could, but had no news.

The gloominess of the breakfast table subdued even Polly. We questioned her though without much hope. Matthew no longer confided in her, but there was just the chance that he might have told her something. Apparently he had not - at least nothing that Polly could remember. We relapsed into our gloomy silence. Polly, emerged from hers to say:

'I expect Matthew's been kidnapped. You'll probably get a note wanting an enormous ransom.'

'Not very likely,' I told her. 'We don't keep enormous ransom round here.'

'What about the Sunday papers? They were anxious enough to interview him before,' Mary suggested.

'You know what that means. "Child Artist Vanishes." "Guardian Angel Hero Missing", et cetera.'

'What's that matter if it helps to find him?'

'All right,' I told her. 'I'll try.'

There was no news that day.

At ten o'clock on Sunday morning the phone rang, I grabbed it.

'Mr Gore?'

'Yes.'

'My name is Bollot. You don't know me, but my boy goes to the same school as yours. We've just been reading in the paper about it. Shocking business. Very sorry to hear it. No news yet, I suppose?'

'No.'

'Well, look here, the point is my Lawrence says he saw your Matthew on Friday'. He noticed him talking to a man with a big car - a Mercedes, he thinks - a little way down the road from school. He has an idea they were arguing about something. Then your Matthew got into the car with the man, and it drove off.'

'Thanks, Mr Bollot. Thanks very much. I'll let the police know at once.'

'Oh, is that really - ? Yes, I suppose it is. Well, I hope they find him quickly for you.'

But they did not.

The Monday papers took it up. (*) The BBC included it in their local news bulletin. Telephone seemed scarcely to stop ringing. But it brought no news of Matthew ...

That was a dreadful week. What can one do in the face of utter blankness? There was no corroboration of the Bollot boy's story, but he stuck to it with unshakeable conviction. An enquiry at the school failed to discover any other boy who had accented a lift that evening. So, apparently, it had been Matthew ...

But why? What possible reason? Even threats, a demand for ransom would have been more bearable than this silent vanishing into utter nothingness. I could feel the tension in Mary growing tighter every day, and dreaded the moment when it should break ...

The week seemed endless. The week-end that followed it longer still, but then:

At about half-past eight o'clock on the following Tuesday morning a small boy paused on the pavement edge of a busy crossing in Birmingham, and watched the policeman directing the traffic. When the cars ahead of him were held up he crossed to the middle of the road, stationed himself alongside the policeman, waiting patiently to be attended to. Presently, his traffic safely on course for the moment, the policeman bent down.

'Hullo, Sonny, and what's your trouble?' he inquired.

'Please, sir,' said the boy, 'I'm afraid I'm sort of lost. And it's difficult because I haven't any money to get home with.'

The policeman shook his head.

'That's bad,' he said, sympathetically. 'And where would home be?'

'Hindmere,' the boy told him.

The policeman stiffened, and looked at him with sudden interest.

'And what's your name?' he asked, carefully.

'Matthew,' said Matthew. 'Matthew Gore.'

'Is it, by God!' said the policeman. 'Now you stand just where you are, Matthew. Don't you move an inch.'

He took a microphone out of his breast-pocket, pressed a switch, and spoke into it.

A squad car drew up beside them a couple of minutes later.

'That's service for you. Come to take you home. Hop in now,' the policeman told him.

'Thank you very much, sir,' said Matthew, with his customary respect for the police.

They brought him home about six o'clock that evening. Mary had rung me up, and I was there to greet him, so, by request, was Dr Aycott.

Matthew seemed to be, on very good terms with his escort. He

invited them in, but they spoke of duty. Matthew thanked them, we thanked them, and they drove off narrowly missing a car that was turning in. Its driver introduced himself as Dr Prost, police surgeon, and we all went inside.

We had drinks, and after ten minutes or so Dr Prost spoke quietly to Mary. She took Matthew off in spite of his protests that the police had already given him a high tea. (*)

'Well, first of all,' said Dr Prost as the door closed behind them, 'you can put your mind at rest. The boy come to no harm at all as far as we can tell. Furthermore, he has not even been frightened. It is quite the most considerate kidnapping that I have ever heard of. I see no reason at all for you to fear any ill-effects either physical, or dental. He seems to me to be in perfect condition.'

'But, having said that, there are one or two things I think [ought to mention, which is why I wanted you, Dr Aycott, to come along. In the first place, he has had a number of injections, A dozen or more, in both arms. We have no idea at all what was injected. Whatever it was, it appears to have had no after effects. He makes no complains of any abnormal condition. In fact he appears to be excellent spirits. Nevertheless, since there have been these injections we feel that it would be wise to keep a careful eye on him for any delayed reactions. We have no reason to expect them, but we thought it as well, Doctor, that you should be informed of the possibility.'

Dr Aycott nodded. Dr Prost went on:

'The second thing is rather curious. Matthew is quite convinced that he has been in a car accident, and that his leg was fractured. He says that it was in plaster, and that the people "at the hospital" gave him a new treatment which made it mend very quickly. Naturally, we X-rayed. There was no sign of a break.'

He paused, frowned into his whisky. and tossed it off. He went on:

'He seems to have been treated very well. Everybody at "the hospital" was friendly and reassuring. The whole thing has the appearance of an elaborate hoax deliberately contrived to be as unalarming to him as possibly. In fact it seems never to have occurred to him that he had been kidnapped. The only two elements that puzzled him were, first, why you and his mother did not go to see him, or answer when he wrote to you, and, second, the way he was dumped in Birmingham.'

'It looks to us very much as if somebody wanted him out of the way for ten days, or so.' He turned a penetrating look on me. 'If you know, or suspect, anybody who could have an interest in doing that, I think you'd be well advised to tell the police.'

I shook my head.

'I can't think of any conceivable reason for anyone to want to do such a thing. There's no sense in it,' I said.

He shrugged.

'Well, if you can think of any other explanation -' he said, and left it in the air, not looking entirely convinced.

He and Dr Aycott conferred briefly, and left together a few minutes later, Dr Aycott promising to look in the next day.

I found Matthew, Mary, and Polly in the kitchen. The police high tea had left him with some appetite still. I sat down and lit a cigarette.

'Well, now: suppose you tell us all about it, Matthew,' I suggested.

'Oh dear. Again?' said Matthew.

'You haven't told us yet,' I pointed out.

Matthew took a deep breath.

'Well, I was just coming home from school, and this car passed me and stopped a little way in front. And a man got out and looked up and down the road in a lost sort of way,' he began.

The man looked at Matthew, appeared to be about to speak, but hesitated, then just as Matthew was passing him he said:

'Excuse me, but I wonder if you could help us. We're looking for Densham Road, but none of the roads here seem to have any names.'

'Yes,' said Matthew. 'You turn right at the next corner, then the second on the left. That's Old Lane, only when you get over the crossroads it's called Densham Road.'

'Thank you. That's very clear,' said the man, and turned to the car. Then, on an afterthought, he turned back.

'I suppose you couldn't tell us which side of it to look for a house Mr Gore lives in?'

It was as easy as that. Of course Matthew accepted the offer of a lift home. He did not know anything else until he woke up in 'the hospital'.

'What made you think it was a hospital?' Mary asked.

'It looked like one - well, the way I think hospitals look,' said Matthew. 'I was in a white bed, and the room was all white and bare and terribly clean. And there was a nurse; she was frightfully clean, too.'

He had discovered that he couldn't move his leg. The nurse told him not to try because it had been broken, and asked him if it hurt. He told her it didn't a bit. She had said 'good', and that was because he had been injected with a new 'anti-something' drug that stopped the pain, and not to worry because they were using a wonderful new process which healed bones, particularly young ones, very quickly.

There had been two or three doctors - well, they wore white coats like doctors on television, anyway - and they were friendly and cheerful. There was rather a lot of injecting. He hadn't liked that at first, but didn't mind it much after the first two or three times. Anyway, it was worth it because the leg hadn't hurt at all.

Sometimes it had been a bit boring, but they gave him some books. They hadn't a radio to spare, they told him, but they had let him have a record-player with lots of records. The food was jolly good.

His chief disappointment was that he had not come to see him.

'Of course we'd have come if we could, but we'd no idea where you were,' Mary told him.

'They said they'd told you. And I wrote you two letters with the address at the top,' (*) Matthew protested.

'I'll be afraid nobody did tell us. And we never got your letters, either,' I said. 'What was the address?'

'Aptford House, Womersley, near Guildford,' (*) he told me promptly.

'You've told the police that?'

'Yes.'

He went on. Apparently he'd seen nothing of the place except the room he had been kept in. The view from its window had been undistinguished, a meadow in the foreground, bounded by a hedge with tall trees in it. Sometime the day before yesterday they had taken off the cast, examined his leg, told him it had mended perfectly, and would be as good as ever, and that he'd be able to go home the next day.

Actually they had started in the dark - he did not know the time because there was no clock in the room. He had said goodbye to the nurse. One of the doctors - not in a white coat this time -- had taken him downstairs to where there was a big car waiting in front of the house. When they got in the back the doctor said they'd leave the light on, but had better have the blinds down so as not to dazzle the driver.

After they'd started the doctor produced a pack of cards and did some tricks with them. Then the doctor brought out a couple of vacuum flasks, coffee in one for himself, cocoa in the other for Matthew. Shortly after that Matthew had fallen asleep.

He had woken up feeling rather cold. The car had stopped, and there was daylight outside. When he sat up he discovered that not only was he all alone, but he was in a different car which was parked in an utterly unfamiliar street. It was very bewildering. He got out of the car. There were few people walking along the street, but they looked busily on their way somewhere, and took no notice of him. At the end of the street he saw its name on the wall of the building. He didn't remember what it was, but above it he read 'City of Birmingham', which puzzled him greatly. He was now facing a bigger, busier street, with a small cafe just opposite. He became aware that he was hungry, but when he felt in his pocket he found he'd no money. After that, the only thing to do had seemed to be to find a policeman, and put his problems to him.

'A very sensible thing to do, too,' I told him.

'Yes ...' said Matthew, doubtfully. 'But they kept on asking so many questions.'

'And they brought you all the way home in a squad car, free?' Polly asked.

'Well, three cars,' Matthew told her. 'There was one to the Birmingham police station where they asked a lot of questions, then one to the Hindmere police station, where they gave me that high tea, and asked all the same questions over again. And then one here.'

'Gosh, you are lucky,' said Polly enviously. 'I have never been kidnapped in my life.'

'Kidnapped ...' Matthew repeated, 'But ...' He broke off, and became very thoughtful. He turned to me. 'Was I kidnapped, Daddy?'

'It looks very much like it.' I told him.

'But - but ... But they were kind people, nice people. They got me better. They weren't a bit like kidnappers ...' He lapsed into thought again, and emerged from it to ask: 'Do you mean it was all phoney - my leg wasn't broken at all?'

I nodded.

'I don't believe it. It had plaster on - and everything,' he protested. 'Anyway, why? Why should anybody want to kidnap me?' He checked, and then asked: 'Did you have to pay a lot of money, Daddy?'

I shook my head again.

'No. Nothing at all,' I assured him.

'Then it can't have been kidnapped,' asserted Matthew.

'You must be tired out,' Mary put in. 'Give me a kiss. Then run along upstairs, both of you. Daddy and I will come up and see you when you're in bed, Matthew.'

The door closed behind him. Mary looked at me, her eyes brimming. Then she laid her head on her arms on the table and - for the first time since Matthew had disappeared - she let herself cry ...

That was Tuesday.

On Wednesday Dr Aycott looked in as he had promised. He gave Matthew a very thorough examination with so satisfactory a result that he saw no reason why Matthew should not go to school the following day.

On Wednesday, also, Mary felt it to be her duty to ring up her

sister Janet and inform her that Matthew was now restored to us in perfect health, and then had to spend some time explaining that his health was not perhaps quite perfect enough to withstand a family invasion the next week-end.

On Thursday Matthew went to school and returned a bit above himself on discovering that he had been a figure of national interest while at the same time feeling somewhat inadequate in not having a more exciting tale to tell.

By Friday everything was back to normal.

That evening Mary, feeling tired, went upstairs to bed soon after ten. I stayed down. I had brought home some week, and thought I would clear it off to leave the weekend free.

About half-past eleven there was a tap on the door. Matthew's head appeared, and looked cautiously round.

'Has Mummy gone to bed?' he inquired.

I nodded.

'Some time ago. It's where you ought to be,' I told him.

'Good.' he said, and came in, carefully closing the door behind him. He was wearing his dressing-gown and bedroom slippers, and his hair was all on end. (*) I wondered if he had been having a nightmare.

'What's the matter?' I asked.

He glanced back at the door as if to make sure it was closed.

'It's Chocky,' he told me.

My spirits sank a little.

'I thought she'd come away - for good,' I said.

Matthew nodded.

'She did. But she's come back now. She says she wants me to tell you some things.'

I sighed. It had been a relief to think that we had finished with all that, but Matthew was looking very earnest and somewhat troubled. I took a cigarette, lit it, and leaned back.

'All right,' I said. 'I'm all attention. What things?'

But Matthew had become abstracted. He did not appear to hear. He noticed my expression though.

'Sorry, Daddy. Just a minute,' he said, and reverted to his look of abstraction. His changes of expression and the small movements of his head gave one a sensation of seeing one side of a television conversation, with the sound cut off. It ended with him nodding and saying aloud: 'Okay. I'll try,' though rather doubtfully. Looking at me again he explained:

'Chocky says it'll take an awful long time if she has to tell me and then I have to tell you because sometimes I can't think of the right words for what she means; and sometimes they don't quite mean it when I can; if you see what I mean.'

'I think I do,' I told him. 'Lots of other people have. difficulty over that at the best of times. And when it's a kind of translation, too, it must be quite hard work.'

'Yes, it is,' Matthew agreed, decidedly. 'So Chocky thinks it would be better if she talks to you herself.'

'Oh,' I said. 'Well - tell her to go ahead. What do I do?'

'No, not the way she talks to me, I don't understand why, but she says that only words with some people. It doesn't with you, so she wants to try and see if we can do it another way.'

'What other way?' I inquired.

'Well, me talking, but sort of letting her do it ... Like my hands and the painting,' he explained, not very adequately.

'Oh,' I said again, this time doubtfully, I was feeling at sea, (*)

unclear what was implied, uncertain whether it ought to be encouraged,
'I don't know. Do you think ...?'

'I don't know,' he said. 'But Chocky's pretty sure she can work it
okay, so I expect she can. She's usually right about things like that.'

I was uneasy, with a feeling that I was being forced to take part
in something suspiciously like a seance. (*) I stalled.

'Look here,' I said. 'If this is going to take some time, don't you
think it would be better if you were in bed, You'd keep warmer there.'

'All right,' agreed Matthew.

So we went up to his room. He got back to bed, and I sat down in a
chair. I still had misgivings, a feeling that I ought not to be allowing
this to go on - and a conviction that if Mary were here she would
disapprove strongly and I only hoped that once Matthew was back in bed
again he would fall asleep.

Matthew leant his head back on the pillow, and closed his eyes.

'I am going to think of nothing,' he said.

I hesitated. Then:

'Look here, Matthew. Don't you ...?' I began, and then broke off as
his eyes reopened, They were not looking at me now, nor, seemingly,, at
anything else. His lips parted, came together two or three times without
a sound, parted again, and his voice said:

'It is Chocky talking.'

There was no air of seance about it, nothing of the medium about
Matthew: no pale face, no change in his rate of breathing. Except for
the unfocussed look in his eyes he was apparently quite himself. The
voice went on:

'I want to explain some things to you. It is not easy because I can
use only Matthew's understanding, and only his' - there was a slight
pause - 'vocabulary, which is simple, and not large, and has some
meanings not clear in his mind.'

The voice was characteristically Matthew's, but the flatness of its
delivery was certainly not. There was an impression of intended
decisiveness blurred, and frustrated; an athlete condemned to take part
in a sack-race. (*) Unwillingly fascinated I said:

'Very well, I'll do my best to follow you.'

'I want to talk to you because I shall not come back again after
this. You will be glad to hear this: the other part of his parent, I
mean Matthew, I mean your wife, will be gladder because it is afraid of
me and thinks I am bad for Matthew, which is a pity because I did not
mean me, I mean you, I mean Matthew, any harm. Do you understand?'

'I think so,' I said, cautiously. 'But wouldn't it be best to tell
me first who you are, what you are, why you are here at all?'

'I am an explorer, I mean scout, I mean missionary - no, I mean
teacher. I am here to teach things.'

'Oh, are you? What sort of things?'

There was a pause, then

'Matthew hasn't words for them - he doesn't understand them.'

'Not, perhaps, a very successful teacher?'

'Not yet. Matthew is too young. He can only think in too simple
words for difficult ideas. If I think in maths, or physic, we do not
meet. Even numbers are difficult. This is a good thing, I mean, lucky.'

I have quoted the above exchanges as closely as I can remember in
order to give some idea of what I was up against, and to justify my
corrections and simplifications from now on. A word-for-word record
would be impossible. The usual words and usages came easily enough, but

less familiar words brought hold-ups.

Add to that the necessity to wade through a mess of Matthew's favourite, and not very specific, adjectives: sort-of, kind-of, and I-mean, and the conversation became so intricate that it is quite necessary for me to edit ruthlessly in order to extract and attempt to convey Chocky's intended meaning - in so far as I could grasp it, which was not always.

I could see from the beginning that it was not going to be easy. The sight of Matthew lying there, quite expressionless as he spoke, his eyes with that unfocussed stare was too disturbing for rille to give the words the full attention they needed.

I turned out the light as an aid to concentration - and in sneaking hope that without it he might fall asleep.

'All right. Go ahead,' I said into the darkness. 'You are a missionary - or a teacher - or an explorer. Where from?'

'Far away.'

'Far? How far?'

'I do not know, Many, many parsecs.' (*)

'Oh,' I said.

'I was sent here to find out what kind of a planet this is.'

'Were you indeed. Why?'

'To see, in the first place, whether it would be useful to us. You see, we are a very old people compared with you, on a very old planet compared with yours. It has long been clear to us that if we want to survive we must colonize. But that is difficult. A ship that can travel only at the speed of light takes a very long time to get anywhere. One cannot send out ships on time chance of their finding a suitable planet. There are innumerable millions of planets. It is extremely hard to find a suitable one.

'So a scout - an explorer - is sent out in this way. Because mind has no mass it takes no time to travel. The scout makes his report. If he reports that it would be a suitable planet for a colony, other scouts are sent to check. If their reports are favourable, the astronomers go to work to locate the planet. If it is found to be within practicable range they may send a ship of colonists. But this is very rare. It has happened only four times in a thousand of your years. And only two colonies have been established.'

'I see. And when are we to expect a ship here?'

'Oh, this planet is not any use to us. Your planet is exceptional, and very beautiful, but it is much too cold for us, and there is a great deal too much water. There are plenty of reasons why it is quite impossible for us. I could tell that at once.'

'Then why stay here? Why not go and find a more suitable planet?'

Chocky went on, patiently:

'We are explorers. We are at present, as far as we know, the only explorers of the universe. For a long time we thought that ours was the only planet that could support life. Then we found others that could - a few. For still longer we thought we are unique - the only intelligent form of life - utterly lonely in the horrid wastes of space... Again we discovered we were mistaken...'

'But intelligent life is rare... very rare indeed... the rarest thing in creation...'

'But the most precious...'

'For intelligent life is the only thing that gives meaning to the universe. It is a holy thing, to be fostered and treasured.'

'Therefore, the support of all intelligent forms is a sacred duty. Even the merest spark of reason must be fanned in the hope of a flame.'

Frustrated intelligence must have its bonds broken. Narrow-channelled intelligence must be given the power to widen out. High intelligence must be learned from. That is why I have stayed here.'

'And into which of these categories do you think the Intelligent life of this planet falls?' I asked.

The Chocky-Matthew voice answered that without hesitation.

'Narrow-channelled. It has recently managed to over-come some of its frustrations by its own efforts - which is hopefully good progress at your age. It is now in a groove of primitive technology.'

'But it seems to us that we are making progress pretty fast.'

'Yes. You have not done badly with electricity in a hundred years. And you did well with steam in quite a short time. But all that is so inefficient. And your oil engines are dirty, noisy, poisonous, and the cars you drive with them are barbarous, dangerous ...'

'Yes,' I interrupted. 'You mentioned that before, to Matthew. But we do have atomic power now.'

'Very crudely, yes. You are learning, slowly. But you still live in a finite, sun-based economy.'

'Sun-based?'

'Yes. Everything you are, and have, you owe to tile radiations from your sun. Direct radiations you must have to keep your bodies alive, and to grow your food, and provide fresh-water; and they could continue to support you for millions of years. But to grow and expand intelligence needs power.

'It is true you have an elementary form of atomic power which you will no doubt improve. But that is almost your only investment for your future. Most of your power is being used to build machines to consume power faster and faster, while your sources of power remain finite. There can be only one end to that.'

'You have a point there,' I agreed. 'What, in your opinion, ought we to be doing?'

'You should be employing your resources, while you still have them, to develop the use of a source of power which is not finite. Once you have an infinite supply of power you will have broken out of the closed circle of your solar-economy. You will no longer be isolated and condemned to eventual degeneration upon wasted resources. You will become a part of the larger creation, for a source of infinite power is a source of infinite possibilities.'

'I see,' I said. 'At least, I think I see - dimly. What is this source of infinite power?'

'It is radiation - throughout the cosmos. It can be tapped and used.'

I thought. Then I said:

'It is a funny thing that in a world crowded with scientists nobody has suspected the existence of this source of power.'

'It is an equally funny thing that two hundred of your years ago nobody understood, nor suspected, the potentials of electricity. But they were there to be discovered. So is xxxxx.'

'So is - what?'

'Matthew has no word for it. It is a concept he cannot grasp.'

After a pause I asked:

'So you are here to sell us a new form of power. Why?'

'I have told you that. Intelligent forms are rare. In each form they owe a duty to all other forms. Today we can help you over some obstacles; it may be you will so develop that in some future time you will be able to help us, or others, over obstacles. The employment of xxxxx is only the first thing we can teach you. It will liberate your

world from a great deal of hard work, and clear the your future development.'

'So we are, in fact, a kind of investment for you?'

'You could also say that if a teacher does not teach his pupils to overtake him there can be no advance.'

There was quite a lot more along these lines. I found it somewhat tedious. It was difficult to drag the conversation from the general to the particular, Chocky seemed to have her mission so much at heart. But I managed it at last.

Why, I wanted to know, out of millions of possible hosts, had Chocky chosen to come here and 'haunt' Matthew.

Chocky explained that 'millions' was a gross overstatement. Conditions varied with the type of intelligent life-form, of course, but here there was a number of qualifications that had to be fulfilled. First, the subject had to have the type of mind that was susceptible to her communications. This was by no means common. Second, it had to be a young mind. Third, it must be a mind with a potential of development - which, according to her, a surprising proportion have not. Fourth, its owner must inhabit a technologically advanced country where the educational opportunities are good.

These requirements narrowed the field remarkably, but eventually her search had brought her to Matthew who fulfilled all of them.

I said that I still did not see her purpose. She said, and I thought I could detect a note of sadness even through the flatness of her speech:

'I would have interested Matthew in physics. He would have taken it up, and with me to help him he would have done remarkably well. As his knowledge of physics increased we should have had the basis of a common language. He would begin to understand some of the concepts I wanted to communicate to him. Gradually, as he learned, communication would grow still better. I should convince him that xxxxx existed, and he would begin to search for it. I would still be able to communicate only in terms that he could understand. It still would be like' - there was a pause - 'something like trying to teach a steam-engineer with no knowledge of electricity how to build a radio transmitter - without names for any of the parts, or word for their functions. Difficult, but with time, patience, and intelligence, not impossible.

'If he had succeeded in demonstrating the existence of xxxxx - let us call it cosmic-power - he would have become the most famous man in your world. Greater than your Newton, or your Einstein.'

There was a pause while she let that sink in. It did. I said:

'Do you know, I don't think that would have suited Matthew very well. He hated taking the credit for saving Polly's life. He would have hated this unearned fame even more.'

'It would have been hard-earned. Very hard-earned indeed.'

'Perhaps, but all the same - Oh, well, it doesn't matter now. Tell me, why have you decided to give it up? Why are you going away?'

'Because I made mistakes. I have failed here. It is my first assignment. I was warned of the difficulties and dangers. I did not take enough notice of the warnings. The failure is my own fault.'

A scout, a missionary, she explained, should preserve detachment. She was advised not to let her sympathies become engaged, not to identify with her host, and, above all, to be discreet.

Chocky had understood this well enough in theory before she came, but once she had made contact with Matthew it had seemed that the preservation of detachment was not one of her gifts. The proper missionary temperament would not have let itself get into arguments with

Matthew; nor have made disparaging remarks about the local inhabitants. It would simply have noted that Matthew was incompetent with his paints; it would not have tried to help him do better. It would have been careful to keep its influence down to the minimum. Quite certainly it would not have permitted itself to develop an affection for Matthew that could lead to an interference with the natural course of events. It would regretfully, but quite properly, have let Matthew drown ...

'Well, thank God for your lack of discretion that time,' I said. 'But are these indiscretions as serious as all that? I can see that they have aroused a certain amount of unwelcome attention, indeed we have suffered from it ourselves, but it doesn't seem to me that even taken all together they can amount to failure.'

Chocky insisted that they did. She indeed had her first suspicion that failure might lie ahead when Matthew had talked to Landis.

'He told him too much,' she said. 'It was not until then that I realized how much I had talked to Matthew. I could only hope that Landis would be unintelligent enough to dismiss it as a child's fantasy.'

But Landis was not. On the contrary, he had found it a fascinating problem. He had mentioned it to Sir William Thorbe, who also found it fascinating.

Chocky went on:

'When Sir William hypnotized Matthew, he did not hypnotize me. I could hear what Matthew heard, I could also watch through his eyes. I saw Sir William turn on his tape-recorder and heard him ask his questions. At first he was merely interested by Matthew's answers. Then he paid closer attention. He tried several trick questions. He tempted lack of understanding in attempts to catch Matthew out. He pretended to assume that Matthew had said things which he might have said, but had not. He tempted Matthew to invent, or to lie, with misleading questions. When none of these traps worked, he stopped the tape-recorder, and looked at Matthew very thoughtfully for some minutes. I could see him becoming excited. He poured himself a drink, and his hand was shaking slightly. While he drank it he continued to stare at Matthew with half-incredulous wonderment of a man who has struck gold. (*)

'Presently, with a decisive gesture he put down his glass. He took himself in hand and became coolly methodical. He re-started the tape-recorder, tested it with care, picked up a note pad and pencil, and closed his eyes for a few moments in concentration. Then the questioning really began ...'

The Matthew-Chocky voice paused for a little.

'That was when I knew I had failed ... To attempt to go on further with Matthew would be a waste of time - and dangerous, too. I knew I would have to leave him - and would have to make the parting painful for him, too. I was sorry about that - but it was necessary for him to be utterly convinced that I was going for good - never to return. Nor shall I, after this.'

'I don't quite see ...'

'It was quite clear that Sir William, having made his discovery, had his plans for making use of it; or handing on his news to someone else - and once that happened there would be no end to it ...'

'It did happen, and very quickly. Matthew was kidnapped. He was injected with hypnotic, and other, drugs. And he talked ...'

'They wrung him dry. (*) Every detail, every word I had ever told him went into their tape-recorders ... And their recordings included his distress at my leaving him ... That was painful enough to convince them that it was true, and under drugs it could not have been otherwise ...'

'They were not bad people. They certainly wished him no harm. On

the contrary, until they learnt that I had left him, he was potentially a very valuable property indeed. They realized that he was a channel through which I could, when he should have more background knowledge, and understanding, communicate information that would change the power sources of the whole world.'

'When they had to accept the fact that I had left him, they decided the wisest course would be to let him go - and keep an eye on him. They could always pick him up again if there were any sign that I had returned; and they will go on watching for that sign ...'

'I don't know whether they have bugged this room yet, but if they haven't, they will. It doesn't much matter now whether they have, or not, because I really am going, after this.'

I broke in.

'I don't think I altogether understand this,' I said. 'From your point of view, I mean. They, whoever "they" may be, had Matthew. They could have seen to it that he should have the best possible coaching in physics and maths and whatever is necessary for him to understand you. That was what you wanted: your channel of communication - with all the help they could make available to him. If your purpose is, as you say, to tell us how to develop the use of a source of "cosmic power" you had the whole thing on a plate. (*) They want to know what you want to tell them. And yet, instead of seizing the opportunity, you withdraw ... It does not make sense ...'

There was a pause.

'I don't think you altogether understand your own world,' was Chocky's reply. 'There are power-empires: oil interests, gas interests, coal interests, electrical interests, atomic interests. How much would they be willing to pay for information of a threat to their existence? A million pounds... two million... three million... even more? Somebody would take the chance...'

'And then what would a little boy's life matter? What would a hundred lives matter, if necessary? There would be plenty of effective ways of taking action ... '

I had not thought of that ...

Chocky went on.

'I tell you this because Matthew will be watched, and you may become aware of it. It does not matter, but do not tell him unless it is necessary. It is unpleasant to know that one is watched.'

'If you are wise you will discourage him from taking up physics - or any science, then there will be nothing to feed their suspicion. He is beginning to learn how to look at things, and to have an idea of drawing. As an artist he would be safe...'

'Remember, he knows nothing of what I have been telling you through him.'

'Now is the time for me to say goodbye.'

'You are going back to your own world?' I asked.

'No. I have to do my work here. But this failure has made it much more difficult. It will take longer. I shall have to be subtle. They will be watching for me now.'

'You think you can do it in spite of that?'

'Off course. I must do it. It is my duty as one intelligent form to another. But now it will have to be done differently. A hint here, a hint there, an idea for one man, a moment of inspiration for another, more and more little pieces, until one day they will suddenly come together. The puzzle will be solved - the secret out... It will take a long time. Probably it will not happen in your lifetime. But it will come... it will come...'

'Before you go,' I put in, 'what are you, Chocky? I think I might understand better if I could imagine you as more than a blank. Suppose I gave Matthew a pencil and paper, would you have him draw a picture of you?'

There was a pause, but then it was followed by a 'No' that was quite decisive.

'No,' repeated the Matthew-Chocky voice. 'Even with my: training I sometimes find it hard to believe that forms like yours can house real minds at all, I think you would find it still harder to believe that mine could if you could see me. No, it is better not.' The voice paused again, then:

'Goodbye,' it said.

I got up, feeling stiff and somewhat chilled. There was a dim early light coming through the curtains, enough of it to show Matthew still lying in his bed, still gazing blankly into nothingness. I moved towards him. His lips parted.

'No,' they said, 'let him be. I must say goodbye to him too.'

I hesitated a moment, then:

'All right,' I said. 'Goodbye, Chocky.'

12

We let Matthew sleep the whole morning. He came down at lunch-time, tired and depressed, but, I was thankful to see, not too much. After lunch he got out his bicycle and went off by himself. We did not see him again until he came in weary, but hungry for his supper. Immediately after he had finished it he went upstairs to bed.

The next day, Sunday, he was almost his usual self again. Mary's concern diminished as she watched him eat a huge breakfast. After breakfast Matthew and I took a quiet stroll along the river bank.

'She told me she had to go,' I said.

'Yes,' agreed Matthew. He sighed. 'She explained properly this time. It was pretty horrid the way she did it before.'

I did not inquire into the explanation she had given him. He sighed again.

'It's going to be a bit dull,' he said. 'She sort of made me notice things more.'

'Can't you go on noticing things? The world's quite an interesting place. There's lots to notice.'

'Oh, I do. @ore than I did, I mean. Only it's kind of lonely, just noticing by yourself ...'

'Ii you could get what you see down on paper you'd be able to share your noticing with other people ...' I suggested.

'Yes,' Matthew admitted. 'It wouldn't be the same - but it'd be something ...'

I stopped, and my hand in my pocket.

'Matthew, I've got this I want to give you.'

I took out a small red leather-covered case, and held it out to him.

Matthew's eyes clouded. His hands did not move.

'No. Take it,' I insisted.

He took it reluctantly, and gazed at it dim-eyed. 'Open it,' I told him.

He hesitated. Slowly, and even more reluctantly he pressed the catch, and lifted the lid.

The medal glittered in the sunlight.

Matthew looked at it with an indifference that was near to distaste. Suddenly he stiffened, and bent his head forward to examine it more closely. For some seconds he did not move. Then he looked up smiling, though his eyes were overbright.

'Thank you, Daddy ... Oh, thank you ... !' he said and dropped his head to study it again.

They had made a nice job of it. It looked just as if it had always been inscribed:

AWARDED TO

CHOCKY

FOR A VALOROUS DEED

List of names

Names of Persons

1. Christian Names

Alan	Kenneth
Albert	Laurence
Chocky	Matthew
Colin	Patience
Dennis	Paul
Emma	Phyl
Janet	Simon

2. Surnames

Aycott	Newton
Blayde	Percell
Bollot	Pinkser
Caffer	Prost
Clutterbuck	Slatson
Einstein	Soames
Evans	Thorbe
Froome	Toach
Gore	Trimble
Landis	Weston

Geographical Names

Birmingham
Bontgoch
Hindmere

Comments

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for labours to come - for coming work

do make a day - do is often used to emphasize a statement or a command as in "Do shut up!" (p.115) Russ. † â^a-''âì |¥ âë!

he appeared to be cut short - it appeared (seemed) that he was interrupted

to page 110

the consistency of the assumption that a second party was involved - Matthew behaved as though he really believed that he was talking with another person

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he would often be stopped by a cry of anguish from Polly - would is used here to denote a repeated action in the past (=used to). See also the following few sentences.

to page 112

A Piff can provide ... on other, and smaller, boys. - A small child can be satisfied by an imagined creature like Piff, whom she may treat as her junior, but an eleven-year-old boy can use smaller children for these bossing purposes without inventing anyone (to boss - to exercise authority over a person).

I'm sure I hope you are right - I do hope you are right

to page 113

I didn't mean to make heavy weather on it. It just strikes me as odd. - I wasn't going to be too serious about it. It just seems strange to me.

on the spur of the moment = hastily, without preparation

to page 115

She won't leave me alone. (Russ. Ž- -'' \$ çâ® -¥ â®ç¥â ®ââ ç''âì -¥-ì ç ®^a®¥.) Modal would here shows persistence.

Then she rose to the occasion = Then she managed to grasp the situation.

Here is to ... - a usual toasting formula (Russ. ,ë⁻ì¥¬ \$...)

to page 116

Now that Chocky's existence was out of the bag = Now that Chocky's existence was no longer a secret

Wordsworth's cuckoo - an allusion to a poem by William Wordsworth (1770-1850)

...O Cuckoo! Shall I call you a bird
Or but a wandering voice?
(To the Cuckoo: O Blithe New-comer)

to page 117

You're steering close to dangerous waters. - You are touching upon dangerous subject.

sort of..., kind of... - (in Matthew's speech) practically meaningless expression, correspond to Russian çâ®¥^a a a

to page 118

Chocky's balance did on the whole lean more to the F than the M =

Chocky was more like a woman than a man (F stands for female, M for male)

to page 119

before Freud was invented - before Freud became popular. Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) - Austrian physician and psychiatrist, founder of psychoanalysis

you turn loose a whole new boxful of troubles = you may expect a lot of new troubles

to page 121

I take your Matthew for maths. = I teach your Matthew mathematics.

to page 122

I'd rather didn't. = I don't think you should do it.

to page 123

what had got out of gear = what was wrong

to page 124

the binary code - in mathematics: a system of numeration using 2 figures (not 10) as the base

to page 125

Joan of Arc (1412-1431; Fr. Jeanne d'Arc) - French national heroine; defeated the English at Orleans (1429); burned at the stake for witchcraft

to page 126

station-wagon - an automobile with a back end that opens for easy loading of luggage, etc.

to page 127

it was generally voted that the Gore family was entitled to fill its chins a degree or two higher = the general opinion was that now the Gores would have the right to feel a little more proud of themselves

There now, old man. Take it easy. = Don't worry about it, old man.

There now - an exclamation expressing sympathy.

take your time = don't be in a hurry

to page 128

a here-we-go-again feeling = (here) a feeling that we were returning to the Chocky problem again. In colloquial English a quotation group can be used as an attribute.

all but overwhelmed him = nearly overwhelmed him

to page 129

However, rather than risk a wrong step now, I keep up the front. = However, not wishing to risk a wrong step now, I continued to pretend I believed him.

to page 130

safety-value - (here) something that serves as an outlet for the release of strong emotion

the old boy was an adequate enough pill-pusher = (derogatory) the old man was a good enough physician

the Matthew problem was not in his line = the problem with Matthew

was not his speciality

to have a line on smth. = to have information about smth.

to page 131

we had things under way = (here) we were making progress

to page 132

of his own accord = on his own, voluntarily

school report - written report of a pupil's marks, behaviour, etc., sent to his parents at regular intervals

to page 133

as becomes a with-it medical man = as a fashionable medical man

Jaguar - an expensive make of a stylish sports car

to page 134

frowned me away = sent me away with a frown

to get smth. off one's chest = to unburden oneself of some trouble by talking about it

to page 138

It wouldn't turn into proper words. - Chocky could not find suitable words to express her idea.

to let smb. down = to disappoint smb.

to page 139

Let's get straight. = Let's make this thing clean.

to get out of hand = to get out of control

to page 140

out of usual key - unusual for him

to page 142

I've nothing against Aycott as a cut-stitcher and measles-spotter, but I don't feel this kind of thing is up his street. = I've nothing against Aycott as an ordinary physician, but I don't feel this kind of things is in his line.

to page 143

the look she keeps for hair-splitting = a hair-splitting, frightening look

and soon to be nipped = which soon disappeared

to page 144

art-teacher = one who teaches drawings at school. Note the difference between Art (=fine arts, i.e. painting, music, architecture, etc.) and Arts (such as literature, languages, history, etc., as opposed to Sciences). Note also: Arts faculty but the Academy of Fine Arts (or Art)

on the niggly side = with too much attention to details

to page 145

They grew on one, once the first strangeness had worn off. = You started liking them when you had got used to them.

to page 148

time you were off to bed now = now it's time for you to go to bed

to page 149

Lewis Mumford's living in Cities - Lewis Mumford (born in 1895) - American author, critic and educationalist; several of his books are devoted to the problems of big cities

much of an age with our own = almost of the same age as our own

to page 150

off the map = beyond the area covered by local maps

near thing = narrow escape, escape at the last moment

Cheers - a usual exclamation before drinking a glass of wine, beer, etc.

The tide was a bit past the turn = The tide was getting lower

to page 151

But for his repeated assurances = If he had't assured me several times

he's going to make sure Matthew gets one = he is going to do everything necessary so that Matthew would get a medal

to page 153

It was a memorable overstatement - exaggeration. The author means that in fact Matthew's words were not at all clear to him.

to page 155

Boy-hero tells of 'guardian angel' rescue. - Note the omission of the article and the peculiar style characteristic of newspaper headings.

to page 156

England could do with more boys like him. - England needs such boys.

to page 157

'Today' - a BBC daily morning program of current affairs

Jack de Manio - a popular BBC announcer and compere

hang it! - an exclamation of anger or exasperation

to page 160

Thursday made up for it - (here) on Thursday there was a lot about Matthew in the newspapers

vis-a-vis (Fr., opposite) - a person who is face to face with another (as in a railway carriage)

the Waterloo Station - a big railway station in London

Bloomsbury Square - a square in the centre of London, near the British Museum

to page 162

you'll have gathered = you must have understood

you ... could do with ... - cf. Russ. 'У;У -У ¯®çàУ®''«® ;ë...

to page 165

big groups - (here) big companies or firms (see below: big boys = big business men)

to page 167

the Downs - the treeless, hilly uplands of Kent and Sussex in southwestern England

to page 169

feeling much the better for our week-end = feeling much the better after our week-end rest
the Sundays - (here) Sunday newspapers

to page 171

the Duke of Wellington (1769-1852) - outstanding British general and statesman; defeated Napoleon at Waterloo in 1815

to page 175

Sir William Something - _Something_ stands for the surname which Mary doesn't remember. See also Sir William Thing (p.177). Cf. Russ. $\square\hat{a}\textcircled{a}$ ^a ^a ¥£® \hat{a} ¬.

She had a point = (here) she was right

to page 177

unless it were to become persistent = unless it became persistent

to page 178

Thorbe had been right off the beam = Thorbe had been absolutely wrong

take it at face value = (here) believe it

all I had got was a brush-off and a let-down = I had only been brushed off (got rid of) and let down (disappointed)

to page 180

to cut school = to stay away from school

to page 181

He's kept everything so bottled up. = He hasn't been willing to discuss his problems with anybody.

to page 182

The Monday papers took it up. = On Monday all the newspapers wrote about it.

to page 184

a high tea - a meal somewhat more substantial and served later than the usual five o'clock tea

to page 186

with the address at the top - in Great Britain and some other countries the return address is usually written on the flap of the envelope, that is, at the top of the back side

Aptford House, Wonerish, near Guildford - Guildford, a town about 20 miles South-West of London; Wonerish, a former village, now a district of Guildford. No street or number is given because in small places like Wonerish houses are usually known by names their owners give them, as Aptford House.

to page 189

his hair was all end - cf. Russ. $\textcircled{a}\textcircled{a}\textcircled{a}\textcircled{a}\textcircled{a}$ \textcircled{a} -¥£® $\textcircled{a}\textcircled{a}\textcircled{a}\textcircled{a}\textcircled{a}$ $\textcircled{a}\textcircled{a}\textcircled{a}\textcircled{a}\textcircled{a}$

to page 190

I was feeling at sea = I was uncertain, bewildered

seance (Fr.) - a meeting at which a group of spiritualists try to

communicate with the spirits of the dead through a medium, a person who is believed to be able to speak with such spirits

to page 191

a sack-race - a race in which each participant lies his legs in a sack and moves by jumping

to page 192

parsec - a unit of measure of astronomical distance, equal to 3.26 light years, or 19,200,000,000,000 miles

to page 197

a man who has struck gold = a man who has found a treasure

to page 198

They wrung him dry. = They made him tell them everything he knew.
you had the whole thing on a plate = you could easily do whatever you intended to