

of letters. I was interviewed and interviewed and interviewed. I was interviewed by gentlemen who doubted my experience selling advertising would help me sell plumbing fixtures, by gentlemen~~x~~ who felt that after my high life in advertising it would bore me to sell corn flakes in Bremerton.

It was a trap, a classically perfect trap. Too old for Management Training Programs, not old enough to be a Manager, too much education for manual labor, not enough specialized education for any specialized occupation, not enough guts to go back to Wonderland.

We were nearing the end. I was a blundering Shadow. My most ingenious mask failed to fool the most naive Real. There had been too much entropy. I was too dim. The mask was a masterpiece but even the witless Reals could see there was nothing behind the mask but a diffuse gaseous Shadow.

Abby and I discussed British Columbia. New England Shadows became Oregon Reals, Cockney Shadows became Australian Reals. Could a Seattle Shadow become Real in British Columbia? It is not an easy frontier, it is sometimes harsher and crueller than the Real World or Wonderland. There is no Mr. Wall, no 50,000 Watt Fullback, but there is winter, there are mosquitoes.

In addition to answering every halfway reasonable help-wanted ad I began answering the unreasonable ads offering dignity and wealth to mature young me^o with no experience or aptitude. They all turned out to be jobs selling insurance. Fire insurance, flood insurance, earthquake insurance, wind insurance, lawyer insurance, doctor insurance, mortgage insurance, job insurance, cemetery insurance, insanity insurance, insurance insurance. Even life insurance, for Chrissake. And one night I was watching a TV Documentary about Hiroshima and just as the mushroom cloud climaxed the TV switched to the commercial and damned if Hiroshima wasn't being sponsored by the Everything Insurance Company!

But with mortgage payments two months behind, power, phone and milk bills four months behind, with Abby fending off family stargation typing all day in an office, with all these insurance people begging me to become dignified and wealthy selling their crap, I wavered. British Columbia or insurance?

If it had been only me alone I'd have just diffused into a Puget Sound fog. But Abby was still visible and Sally and Katy were so real I choked up watching them at play. I flirted with insurance people, I corresponded with the Government of British Columbia, I began answering not only unreasonable help-wanted ads but insane ads.

One day while I was home babysitting and writing various distorted versions of my life the phone rang. At least the phone was still ringing. There was a fellow talking about some job. Apparently I had applied for this job. As he continued talking dimly I recalled a publisher-type ad, one of those magazine promotion frauds. But as he continued talking it became apparent the ad had been honest. This was a genuine publisher.

We met over coffee the next day. I told about Douglas Fir and Billiard Balls and the 50,000 Watt Fullback. He told about Iowa Corn and Existentialism and the Circus Acrobat who married great wealth and became a Publisher. We recognized each other.

We Shadows learn to recognize each other by secret signs not to be revealed to Reals on pain of annihilation. The Reals persecute Shadows, Reals are Anti-Shadowistic. They have no evidence but they suspect we stick together. They suspect that if a Shadow should slip by the Real Security Forces and become firmly established he would smuggle other Shadows into the garrison, a Fifth Column. The Reals have no evidence but they are right.

I flew with Friend Shadow to a place called Manhattan. ~~In an airplane, unfortunately. It was a terrifying trip. Most of one entire day we were~~

~~four miles away from earth. I would never have survived without the bottle Friend Shadow carried in his briefcase.~~

no pp [Friend Shadow introduced me to a Shadow from Texas Oil, a Shadow from Atlanta Cotton, a Shadow from Los Angeles Smog, a Shadow from New England Culture and several Shadows from New York Money. He introduced me to our commander, Captain Shadow. I even met our prince, the Acrebat who ruled all we Shadows and didn't care because he, himself, was a Shadow.

It was delirium. A fortress captured intact by Shadows! I was safe, Abby was safe, Sally and Katy were safe, for we had battled safely through the ignorant Reals on the darkling plain.

I had labored hard for my enemies, the Reals. I would labor like Hercules for my friends, the Shadows. With my Company Car and my Expense Account I flung out into the wilds of the Northwest. In Oregon I sold books amid green farms of the Willamette Valley, brown basalt of the Columbia Plateau, dry pines of the Siskiyou, surf and mist of the Pacific. In Washington I sold books in the fog of Puget Sound, the rain forest of the Olympic Peninsula, the sun and sagebrush of the Inland Empire. In Idaho I sold books amid slag heaps and up and down the Snake River. In Montana I sold books in mountains of naked rock

and over the high sky-encircled plains.

For the security and glory and fortune of the Shadow Fortress I sold and sold and sold. Perhaps not every book was a masterpiece. But the most worthless book on the list was indubitably more valuable than all the air time I had ever sold. Sell, sell, sell, that is the thing, save our Shadow Fortress, no matter what we have to sell.

I was bursting with Wonderland-type plans to sell more. I was looking forward to December in New York, to displaying my ideas to our Captain. A week before the scheduled New York Conference our Captain wired me to meet him immediately in San Francisco. The wire plunged me into despair. I had sold too much. Captain Shadow would cry, congratulations, you are promoted to the East! I would have to say, I don't like the East, I won't leave the West. Could I make him understand?

My plane arrived late in San Francisco and our Captain had only ten minutes to catch his plane to Dallas. He had just finished firing the Los Angeles Shadow and was on his way to Dallas to fire the Dallas Shadow. He had only ten minutes to fire me.

Captain Shadow felt awful about speeding up my entropy but the editors had been bringing in nothing but lousy books and expenses had to be cut and if he didn't speed up my entropy the Acrobat would speed

up his. Cried I, is there then, my Captain, no loyalty among Shadows? Said he sadly, it's every Shadow for himself.

Our Captain rushed for his plane but first he gave me a phone number. Said our Captain, eyes averted, call him, he's a rich young Shadow and he has some sort of scheme going.

I meet the rich young Shadow and his staff of Schemers. It was altogether the jolliest crew of Shadows ever assembled. It was an exciting scheme, far beyond the dull wits of Reals, worthy of shrewd Shadows. We were doing what would never occur to a Real, we were selling Shadow Books. As if pursued by devils, not even taking time to admire the scenery, I campaigned for Paperback Snobbery in Washington and Oregon and Idaho and Montana, I even invaded Canada and California. While scouting the Wasatch Front and the Tabernacle grounds I was intercepted by a telegram announcing the bankruptcy of the rich young Shadow, the diffusion of our jolly crew of Shadows. There I was, destitute in Deseret, with many a weary mile to trudge along the Oregon Trail to the Homeland.

Vilhjalmur Stefansson says the Arctic is Friendly, and he says an adventure is a sign of incompetence. Ah, Vilhjalmur, it is true! I have adventured all my life and here I am, still adventuring one slippery step

from disaster. My schoolmates, my contemporaries, they have been quiet and competent and now gaze calmly down from solid castle walls, safe from robber barons and marauding barbarians.

Some were always Real and have grown more Real with the years. But some are Shadows, and that's the puzzle. How do they escape the pogroms, how do they keep entropy under control? Why am I the Shadow that always gets caught?

Vilhjalmur said it.

A Shadow is never safe, not even in a castle, surrounded as he is by Reals. A Shadow must build a most clever mask and never ever let it slip. A Shadow must be competent and conservative. A Shadow dares not adventure.

Come to think of it some of my Shadow friends do not have castles. I had almost forgotten them. Did Art get to New York? Whatever happened to Dr. Alexander? I've heard nothing from Bob since he went to Boston. Some of us have disappeared.

Incompetent Shadows adventure. Entropy gets them. Thin gas, that's all there is left.

There is no hope. I might last a month or two with the insurance gang, no more. The winters are cold up there in British Columbia. Incompetent as I am we'll all freeze to death before Christmas.

PART EIGHT

PRAYER

I don't want to pray, I want to forget these long years of wasted prayers.

The earth turns (with a wobble) on its axis and revolves around the sun and scampers with the solar system through the galaxy and swirls with the galaxy into eternity and whirls with the universe through infinity.

This is none of my business.

If the motions will leave me alone I promise never to pray again.

I will work a little when I can. I will build trails in our woods. I will love my Abby, my Sally, my Katy. I will drink a little beer when I can, or sometimes maybe quite a bit of beer. I will walk in the mountains but not very high. I will admire alpine flowers but only the colors. I will collect rocks seeing only minerals. I will sit by rivers hearing nothing but water. I will cook on campfires that are mere oxidations. I will sleep in nights that are simple darknesses.

I will read newspapers but only the comics and sports. I will not read newspapers as history-in-making.

I won't bother anybody.

I won't pray at all if only the motions will stop, if only the stars and sky and clouds will leave me alone I promise I'll leave them alone.