

THE MAKING OF SIMON KING

FOREWORD

I wrote this between 1972 and 1974 when I was 16-18. It's a mixture of autobiography, wishful thinking and pure fantasy. I typed it on my mum's old Olympia SM3 (green model). Rather than OCR the whole thing and correct it, it appears in the original, but I have optimised it for clearer reading.

THE MAKING OF SIMON KING

Simon King was sixteen and a half. He went around with the 'in' people at school, you know. He would look at the lesser people in the school as if to say "Look at me, I'm with the real hip people in the class; I bet you wish you were like me". But for all his arrogance he would always feel uneasy with his crowd. They would appear to be with him, yet at the first opportunity they would take the shit out of him and there he would be, feeling as if everyone was laughing at him behind his back. So he'd shrug it off and go into non-existence for half-an-hour or so until he could think of some topical subject which he could talk about to be sure of a reasonable answer from the others. Trouble was that he hated the guts of the crowd; he was only with them as a passport to the outside world, all the fun places. He felt really sorry for himself all the time, and secretly hoped that they would all take interest in him and find out what a good guy he REALLY was. Trouble was that it wasn't very often he felt he was that special, and all it amounted to was a sort of inferiority complex, all of which he conferred to his best friend, Dave.

Now Dave was one of those easy going guys who took things in in one ear and let them pass out the other with answers like "Yeah, I know what you mean", and "Really?". But they got on quite well on the whole. Simon would be obsessed by his complexes and paranoia and related subjects while Dave would drift through life in a kind of coma, now and then shouting "Hi!" to a friend, while Simon would tell him that he wasn't LISTENING, and what he was saying was REAL important. Trouble was that he wasn't sure that what he was saying WAS real important, and then he'd stop and ask himself 'what the hell?' and go all introversive again.

Meanwhile the rest of the world was having fun, and HE wasn't. He'd kick himself and go all moody. It just wasn't FAIR. Anyhow, school was one hell of a drag, and boy did he know it. He despised all the masters and claimed they were all after him.

One thing Simon could not stand was staying at home, and that was a good thing because he only succeeded in infuriating his sister and his parents when he did. So, grabbing a few L.P.'s, or a handful of money, he would split down to Dave's house, or just anywhere to escape television or the general run of things at home.

Dave would not always be glad to see him, as he was one for busying himself in several projects but, luckily for Simon, he was always prepared to listen to all his problems, and his LP.'s. Now LP's was Simon's 'thing', as it were, and of those he was always talking, because only then could he create interest around himself, and this he enjoyed tremendously.

"Look, Dave," he said one day, "I've got Explosion's latest album".

"Great!" said Dave, wondering who the hell they were.

Simon leaped over to the record player, slung off a copy of Dave's best LP; (Dave didn't look up - he never took much care of his albums, even his Stockhausen) and put on his latest groove. Simon waited until ten seconds of the record had passed and asked Dave what he thought of it.

"What?" said Dave, not realising it had started.

"Good, isn't it?" said Simon. "Now listen to this bit; it's really incredible. Listen..... Wow, now isn't that incredible?"

Dave nodded vaguely.

Simon, all uptight from his revelations, realised he was standing dangerously over Dave's electronic junk, and decided to squat in a corner and dream to the music that he was really into a screw.

"Coffee?" Receiving no answer, Dave assumed 'yes' and went into the kitchen to make some. Simon looked up on hearing the door, guessed, and went back to dreams. It began to rain.

Five miles away a girl named Anne James sat all alone in a big house watching television because her parents were out.

Simon watched as the five players took up their positions and then crashed into supersonic sound. It was the big moment of the big day. He was ACTUALLY watching Green Castle LIVE on stage, and what's more, he was sitting right in among the cool guys who really freaked over the Castle. And they WERE good, no doubt. The lead guitarist was giving an electrifying performance of screaming and stamping; the guy on the moog seemed to be totally worked up and was flinging himself at all the various controls; the drummer was beating the hell out of his skins, sweating, and discarding items of clothing every minute. But the bassist was the really cool member of the group, and it was him they REALLY dug, despite the spectacular performances of the others. He would just stand upright playing his instrument and gaze aimlessly into the audience. He was the accepted leader of the group, and he was a brilliant bass guitarist.

If anyone, Simon watched the leader more than the others; he was really into that guy. He wished he was cool like him, and all the females who REALLY knew where it was at went after him like they went after this guy. Shit, he thought, I'm not going to enjoy this if I start brooding about females, and he looked to see what the others were doing. They were standing up, screaming, shaking their hands about, and generally so far into the thing that he couldn't really join in. So he just tried to appreciate the guy on the moog.

When the set had finished, well past eleven, he decided to skip taking the bus and walk home, which meant cutting across the park, and it was pretty dark. Anyway, he offered his parting remarks and headed for the park with a few stifled "Cheers" and "See you"'s behind him.

His journey took him past the exclusive district of the town, which he questioned. What do I think of this? he thought. These houses, they're very big, what do I think of them? Why should they live in big houses and not me? What makes them so special?

While he was trying to puzzle out all these questions in his mind, a light went on at the top of one of the houses just ahead of him. In the window appeared a girl who happened to see him and watched as he approached. She puzzled too.

Simon noticed the light as a bird flew across his vision to break his reverie. Then he saw the girl, but only for a few seconds because as he looked up, she turned away and left the window. He waited to see if she would return, but she did not, so he continued walking. He concluded that she looked extremely nice and she lived at 86 Dresden Avenue. He glanced back just once and felt he had left something behind him. Then he started questioning himself again. This time, all his thoughts were centred around her. Why was she there? What had she been doing all evening? Did she go to school - Where was it - Who were her friends, if she had any - Did she know any guys - What was she like - Why the hell couldn't he speak to her - Where does she go - Why does he get all the shit luck????

Next thing he knew, he was in the park and it was dark and did he know the way back? Yes. Suddenly he realised just how dark it really was, and was afraid that he'd get eaten up or forgotten or something, and that he's never get the chance of screwing her. But then he thought aloud "Shit, I don't want to screw her, I'm not like THEM, I'd just like to be with a female".

As he walked off, he felt a lot stronger and unafraid for saying that. Simon King didn't sleep that night for he felt he had found himself that evening, and from now on it would be a new scene as far as he was concerned.

III

Something was different about Simon next day because Dave noticed. Dave is the sort of person who can go through life in a coma, as long as things remained roughly the same, but whenever something had changed he would be the first to notice it.

"What's wrong Simon?" asked Dave.

"Wrong? Nothing. Why should it be - I feel fine".

Dave was quite astonished. No troubles, no moans, nothing.

"But you haven't spoken all day" said Dave, rather worried. "Are you feeling ill or something? Do you want those LP's back you left behind last time you dropped in?"

Simon seemed hardly to notice the question, but he answered it.

"Oh, er, don't matter, don't matter. I'll pick them up sometime if you like; listen to them if you want".

Dave was amazed. Now he KNEW something was up with Simon. LP's were his weak point, and he barely batted an eyelid.

"Now come on Simon" said Dave. For once he was really interested in someone else's affairs. But Simon looked adamant in his silence. Suddenly, Dave had an idea.

"Um, I'm afraid I scratched your Explosion LP".

Simon looked up, stared straight at Dave, who found it hard to look back.

"What?" he said.

"I scratched your LP. What's her name?"

"I don't kn-- I mean, who's name?"

It was a very weak defence, and Dave smiled.

"So it's a female is it" beamed Dave.

"Yes. I suppose you didn't really scratch my LP, did you?"

"No, of course not".

"You bastard!" They both began to roar with laughter.

The bell went. Lunch was over and they had a gloomy afternoon of Chemistry History to face, but they were both in very good spirits. Dave, though, had realised that just a little more than a female had affected Simon, because he had never been like this before. So Dave didn't really concentrate on the afternoon's lessons (not that he ever did anyway), most of the time he was studying Simon - and it was easy to notice that Simon seemed much more at ease, his reactions were less erratic and self-conscious, and what's more, he actually was listening to what was being said by the master.

Dave questioned this manner, and then wondered if he was missing out on something - if he had not realised some ultra-important point. So he decided to listen as well, but now and then he would glance towards Simon to see if he was still watching.

"Now - er - yes King, what happens if I put this liquid into this test tube?" said Mr. Loader, not expecting anything like an answer.

"They bubble, sir" said Simon "and give out a gas, which, from our previous experiments. is very likely to be carbon dioxide, although we could, of course, verify that by applying a lighted splint to the mouth of the test tube. Well, that is naturally when you have performed the experiment."

Mr. Loader was quite stunned. "Y-yes King, quite

right, quite right." "He wiped his brow shakily. "Goodness me!"

Simon smiled to himself and continued studying the somewhat shaken master. Dave was also quite surprised, because Simon never used to be any good at chemistry. Still, now he didn't know where he was with Simon at all, but it didn't really worry him. He really was very excited at the prospect of finding Simon all over again.

The rest of the day seemed a bit of a drag for Dave - he was still trying to get things together, more so he was trying to get himself together. For Simon, things were going great guns, and he felt like he was a whole new world.

I V

The final bell went. Final because it was Friday. Final because it was Easter, and for Simon things were really going to happen because he would make them happen.

He found himself outside the school amid a crowd of people who were the 'in' people, and they were all around him, and listening to what he was saying. He was talking about why he liked really nice girls because he was not sex mad like the others - and saying it in an 'I'm better than you' manner because he could see how really petty they all were to listen to him now, just because he had gained a lot of status. But he didn't reject them as long as they knew who was boss, anyway he felt good being at the top for a change.

When he had finished and was saying that he had to split, they all told him how cool he was, and that they would see him at the clubs and places, okay? and off they went, and he watched them going, hearing their claims "what a guy, eh?" "Simon - who'd have thought it?" "Christ, he sure knows where it's at". He laughed, noting that when one guy starts to get interested, they all dive in, claiming that they know more about it than the first guy, and so on - 'I'm really into that guy, you know'. It was actually so funny because he was exactly the same Simon King who sat in the same desk yesterday. But he intended to treat them like shit, for a while at least, because they had to him before, and he still bore a grudge, though he wouldn't let them know that.

Simon turned round to head home, then noticed that some distance away Dave was waiting for him. It didn't ~~look~~ like the normal Dave though; this one was unhappy and introversive, and Simon didn't feel very much at ease with him.

"You seem to be getting on well with your new friends" said Dave.

Simon didn't like the way he emphasised 'new'.

"Why didn't you go with them?" Dave was obviously sulking.

"Shit, Dave. I don't like them, you know".

Dave didn't look up.

"Christ, snap out of it will you; the only reason I made them crawl like that was because they have been real bastards to me".

"So where do I come in all this?" said Dave, stopping. Simon stopped too, and felt bad for not speaking since lunch time.

"Keep walking".

Reluctantly, Dave walked on.

"Look, Dave, are we or are we not the best of friends? Right. Then let's see you smile, and forget all about it".

"Yeah, fair enough, but you're not the same person I knew yesterday. I don't feel right with you any more, I feel small, on a different level. I think I must have missed out on something somewhere along the line".

Simon had really been expecting this, but he didn't want it to come because he hadn't got an answer.

"I still feel the same about you" he replied sincerely.

"That still doesn't help me, and you haven't explained anything". Dave was by now quite worked up; in fact, Simon had never known Dave like this ever before, and it was difficult to know how to deal with the situation. It seemed that his new image had left a trail of shattered identity behind it. And the big thing behind the whole lot was that he knew exactly where everyone was at at this particular moment of time (or at least he thought he did, but no-one knows everything about anyone ever. Anyway, he had a good idea) but he couldn't deal with it. That was something his new person had to learn about - there was a long way to go yet. Meanwhile, he had a certain problem by the name of Dave, and he feared that he was in danger of losing a friend if he didn't do something within the next few minutes.

He could feel the tension and anxiety that was building up between them, and he felt that was how it should be in a situation like this - it only went to confirm to himself how really close their friendship was.

They turned a corner in the road and a stiff breeze attacked them, which made Simon's hair blow right across his face which looked very funny, and Dave had to laugh (he had short hair - he said it got in the way of his work and he didn't see the point of it anyway). Simon didn't find it in the least funny, but he laughed to make Dave feel better.

"I guess I don't figure right, do I?" said Dave.

"Jesus, it's all my fault. But you've got to see that I can't remain stagnant, and you might send me back to where I was before if I'm not careful."

"Yeah, I s'pose so. Hey, Simon..."

"What?"

"We're still on the same scene, aren't we?"

"Surely we are, what do you think. I'd be the hell of a bastard if I split with you after all the times we've had together, even if I do try and aim high".

"What, you reckon I don't aim high enough do you, is that it?"

"No, that's just your thing, that's all. We're all different, aren't we".

"So were you yesterday, and don't treat me like a kid".

They didn't speak for a while. Then they both noticed two nice girls walking towards them, but on the other side of the road. They both looked over, and Simon and Dave both looked back.

"Let's pull them" said Simon. "My house is empty tonight".

This sort of thing would have surprised Dave the day before, but he reminded himself who Simon was today, and it seemed quite a normal thing for him to say. But anyway, he wasn't too keen on the idea, and he was in school uniform, which he hated because he thought it made him look bad.

"Come on, Dave, they'll have gone past in a minute".

"I don't want to Simon, not now" said Dave, embarrassed.

"Well it's too late now, really I think you must expect it on a plate you know". Simon was cross.

"I wasn't stopping you. Don't worry about me. You don't need me".

"For Chrissake Dave stop feeling the hell so sorry for yourself and quit moaning. I really can't stick it from you."

"Well, I can't stick you either, all you ever did was to bug me with your moaning and chronic LP's, and now you think that just because you can act cool all the time that I've got to".

"That's a load of shit, and you know it too; the only reason you went around with me was because you had to, because nobody else would, nobody else would put up with your nowhere scene - you just didn't exist, and you still don't".

Dave just couldn't believe it was Simon waying all this, and he felt utterly alone and sorry. People were looking as well and Dave hated that, and he hated them, and he hated everyone. His best friend had turned against him and he had no resistance.

"Oh just fuck off willyou Simon" he said. But Simon had already gone, and it was going to be a long holiday for Dave.

V

Well, it was one of those weeks where things really happened, wasn't it? And whose fault was it? Yes, it was all her fault. And who is she? Yes, it was Anne James. But of course she didn't know it was all her fault; in fact, she didn't know very much about it at all. Don't get it wrong, she had got it all together in her own mind; she thought she was O.K., and she was, sort of. Her friends were always telling her that she was missing out on it all, and that she was all mixed up somewhere. Now they thought that, but she thought she had a good scene going by herself, follow? She was into Indian dressmaking and spiritualism, which she didn't tell about because it would appear like she was trying to win friends by appearing hip, like everyone else tried to do, and she just couldn't care less. Anyway, she had a lot of nice friends who appreciated where she was at without trying to do it themselves.

So Anne's scene is getting more complex and at the same time more together; in fact, she was just an incredibly nice sort of girl of 15, if you like that sort of girl, that is. And she had reasonably well-off parents at the same time. She did almost everything that was asked of her without complaint, and whenever she wanted something, all she had to do was ask, and almost always the answer would be yes. But it wasn't often she asked for anything because she did have pride, which isn't a bad thing, and anyway she wasn't all that keen on her parents.

Not that they didn't do all they could for her welfare, but they were rather snobby, and her friends told her so. She never agreed with them, of course, but she knew what they meant, so she just never said anything. She didn't speak much on the whole, come to that, though whenever she did speak, she would always stare at you with her beautiful twinkling eyes, and say something really composed or subtle, which was the main reason why her friends respected her so much, and would gather round if she had anything at all to say. It was a different story at school. It was all the people with the big mouths and the big reputations who got the following, which is where Simon went wrong.

Simon thought he could get all he wanted by shooting off his mouth to all the big people, so after a while he realised he was getting extremely uptight about the whole thing. In fact, the people who once seemed so important to him were now getting under his feet, and they seemed incredibly small. He began to realise that he had lost everything that was really important, namely the friendship of Dave, a girl by the name of Anne (though he didn't know her name), and, most of all, he had lost a certain thing that made him tick like he was feeling right.

Meanwhile the world was going round just like it had always done and always would do until somebody invents plastic time. And that was the whole trouble. Here were lots of different people, just living a nowhere scene with their lives wasting away every little second all the time. And nobody could do anything about it, so it was up to somebody to make the first move, God knows what would happen next, and even he must have been getting bored with the whole bit.

VI

Simon decided to quit the whole scene and go back to square one. He had tried going in at the deep end and had found that it wasn't so deep after all; in fact, it was just a load of mixed up balls, and no-one dug it who mattered any more. So that was a dead end alley out of the way, and it was up to him to take the next turning off unless he was so pissed off with the whole thing that he couldn't be bothered, in which case he was likely to end up as a nowhere person for the rest of his life, and he knew it.

By coincidence, some distance away a young girl was having the very same kind of shake-up, and for the first time in her life she was looking round herself and asking herself whether this was really her thing, in the same way as she had questioned Simon the first time she had seen him. Then she wondered about her friends and what they really wanted out of her, whether they really had nothing else to do, better to do.

At this rate, everyone was going to be under study at some time or other, and nobody deserved all of it at all. So people were trying to get themselves together by putting down other people which really just wasn't the way to go about things. It was a society of some people trying to be top and other people feeling bad about it and going into themselves.

Meanwhile poor old Dave was sitting at home feeling fucked off with the whole thing, and he was the one who really needed help, but who knew that?

VII

Simon had taken to going for long walks in the hope of getting himself together. He went for these walks over to the park which always made him feel at ease. He enjoyed looking at the blue sky and the long stretches of green grass. There was an abundance of trees in the area which not only meant that the air was fresh and clean, but it also meant that he could not see the road, and that meant a lot to him.

On his way to and from the park he would always make sure he'd pass the house of the nice girl. But nearly every time he did there were no lights on in the house, and he just knew that she was not in anyway. He imagined that she was out enjoying herself evenings, with a lot of admiring guys who she could take the pick of. Of course, in this assumption Simon couldn't have been more wrong; in fact, she was doing the very same thing that he was, and for some reason they had never met while walking there.

So all this was going on, until one evening, when Simon was crossing over a large part of the park, he saw in the shadows ahead a figure sitting on a bench. At first he was frightened by it. I mean, who would possibly want to sit out in the cold on a park bench at ten o'clock. Must be a weird

person, he thought, then he remembered that that is exactly where he had been sitting at the same time yesterday, and he laughed at his own logic.

Having reasoned this out, he was much less apprehensive toward the person, and decided to pass him by near to on his way out; who knows, it could be a person of his age with the very same problems, and that's just the sort of friend he needed so they could find themselves together and helping each other because they both understood.

He was about five yards away when he realised that it was a girl, but he could not see her face because her head was bowed down and her long black hair was dangling over it. She was either in such a trance that she didn't notice him, or she was just pretending not to notice him. He concluded that it was the latter, and then realised that he had completely stopped moving. He began to think what a real groove it would be to get things together with this girl, especially as they appeared to have similar problems. In any case, he looked a bit funny just standing there, and she must have known by then that he was looking at her. So he sat down on the bench as well, of course making sure he was as far from her as possible. This lad was discreet!

Well, there they were anyway. Simon couldn't for the life of him think of a suitable way to introduce himself in such a situation, and she was wishing that he'd go away and leave her on her own with the scenery.

"Hello! I'm Simon" he said, and then mentally kicked himself for saying such a blank thing. Anyway, he waited for a reply.

"Hello!" she said, not moving at all. Then she sighed.

Simon thought shit, but he thought she sighed beautifully and then felt really sorry for her, imagining that compared to his situation she must be in dire peril. She wasn't, of course, in anything of the kind, but it made him even more determined.

She was thinking she ought at least to look at the person because he was clearly trying to pull her, although she hadn't got together whether she wanted that yet. She glanced at him for just a second. That was enough. It was the guy who

walked past her house that day. She had recognised his coat.

Meanwhile, Simon was wondering how to redeem himself. The weather immediately sprung to mind, but that would have been another pretty negative thing to say.

"I'm Anne" she said, looking straight at him this time.

Simon was stunned when he realised who it was, also at the fact that she was the one to speak.

"Should you really be out here alone in the park? I mean, for all you know, I could be Jack the Ripper or somebody".

"But you're not, are you" she said nicely, smiling for the first time.

Simon kind of felt a warm glow pass through him, although it was cold, as her smile penetrated him. He thought she was incredibly beautiful, as indeed she was.

"No, I'm not", he said.

It was a kind of mutual happening at that moment in time, for they both reached over and touched hands. It was hard to know what to say then for a different reason than the first time, so they just stayed as they were feeling the warmth running up their arms, but they were in rather awkward positions, so Simon moved closer to her.

"Why are you sitting here alone until I came?" he asked.

"Because...."

"Because what?"

"Well, because I want to. Anyway you are".

Simon thought he had better not pursue that, otherwise he would have a very short relationship with Anne.

"Is your house empty?" he asked.

"Yes, but my parents will be back at eleven".

"Can we go there though, just for a while, anyway?"

"All right, as long as they don't see you".

As they got up, Simon wondered just why they couldn't see him, but he thought he better not ask about it.

"You're beautiful" he said.

"Oh shucks, I've gone all red now. Thanks anyway. You're good looking too".

He really liked this girl. Everything she said seemed to be perfect, all her actions were good to watch. Other girls he had known had these odd annoying habits that he detested -

maybe he was too fussy? Still, he couldn't have been more happy than he was for then, so that's all that mattered.

She didn't really know what to think about it all. For her, the transition from what she used to do to what she was doing now was a big step. It was different for Simon because he had had a lot of difficult changes and was prepared to face new ones.

So most of Anne's thoughts were centered around the whole aspect of the thing more than Simon himself. He, of course, was hoping that she was thinking the same things that he was, but it wasn't that she was not keen on him or anything, but she hadn't got herself together for this sort of thing. On the whole nothing much was said on the way to her house, so when they got there it was more a case of 'fancy meeting you here'.

"Well, here we are" she said. That was rather a stupid thing to say, wasn't it? Still, Simon understood, and was led up to the front door. It seemed very big as he looked up at it, and imagined that her parents must be big and rich as well - maybe an ex-millionaire? or a Japanese mud-wrestler?! Simon burst out laughing.

"What's funny" she said.

"Japanese mu- oh, it doesn't matter, I'm sorry."

She grinningly frowned at him and pushed him inside.

"Take a seat in the lounge" she said. "I won't be long. I'll make some coffee."

"Oh no, please don't bother".

"Don't be so stupid, you're cold. Now go and sit down".

He was touched by her thoughtfulness, and he spread himself out on the luxurious couch.

"I think you've got a beautiful house" he shouted.

"I'm afraid I don't" she answered. "And it's not my house, but thanks anyway".

He noticed a rather quaint piece of antique porcelain on a table, and clambered over to examine it.

"What's this?" he asked, as she entered with a tray.

"What's that?" she said, putting the tray down and then turning her attention over to his discovery. "Oh, that. It's early sixteenth century Japanese, actually. It's mine".

Simon thought - gosh, she's into antiques and that. Really it was so exciting finding out all these things about her.

"Do you know a lot about antiques then?"

" Well, I suppose so, but I'd never really thought about how much I know. No-one's ever asked me before".

"But what about your friends, surely they dig your scene and want to know all about it."

"Yes, but they know that if I want them to know anything I'll tell them about it. Otherwise they let me be".

This was the first thing about Anne he found hard to understand, though he knew that several of his points she would find hard to understand, but even so, this was very unexpected. He figured she must be really cool.

She sat down beside him and he put his arm round her and felt really nice.

"I think we're on the same scene" said Simon after a while. "I hope we get on together for a long time, and get ourselves together as well."

"I like you too" said Anne, and kissed him. "Your coffee's getting cold."

This girl had really sent Simon, and he was in a kind of daze as he drank his coffee. Suddenly there was the sound of a key turning in a latch, and Simon found his bewildered self being hustled out of the back door. The last he saw of Anne that night was a disappearing shadow into the house saying something about seeing him same place same time tomorrow.

When he got home his mum almost killed herself laughing when she saw the lipstick on his face and his bemused expression. Simon didn't notice her.

So an incredible day for Simon had just finished, and as he lay in his bed devoid of sleep, he wondered whether it had really all happened at all. It all seemed so incredible. Like a dream. A chance meeting - an incredibly nice girl - a large house.... Lipstick on his face..... Simon fell asleep and dreamed.....

VIII

Although Simon hadn't slept much the night before, he felt really great the next day because he was turned on. In fact he was actually nice to his sister - she must have been very surprised. He wasn't at all hungry either, not that he ever ate much anyway. He spent all day at a friend's house, and was very proud of the fact that he didn't mention his accomplishment

of the night before. If that had happened a month ago it would have been all round the school in no time. It was the fact that Simon realised he didn't need people's admiration of his accomplishments, he wanted them to take him for what he was. Of course, that is only logic, because he thought he was a better person and didn't need to back himself up with proof.

Well, anyway, this friend's name was Pete, and he was a real good bloke to know. He had long hair over his shoulders and was crazed on sitar muzak. He knew all these freaks who were invariably stoned and would drift into his pad and have their trips to his Ravi Shankar LP's. This particular day there were two people squatting in his pad - a male and a female. The girl was obviously going bad places, and the guy was doing his best to help her. Simon thought they were going about it the wrong way. I mean she kept taking more of this other stuff to make her feel okay, but all these did were to make her worse. In any case, they were all involved with themselves, so they were hardly noticed unless she started shouting or claiming they were all against her, or unless he asked desperately for a towel.

Pete would ignore them for the most part, not that he was a drag or anything because he was one of the most arresting personalities you could know, but he was always writing things down, especially when sitar music was playing, which was all the time at his pad. Funny thing was that nobody complained about his sitar music because, as it was on all the time, it had become a part of the place, like if you left it and a while later you heard some sitar music, you were certain to think of that pad. Of course, you enter the pad for the first time and after a while you might say what a drag the music was becoming, but you'd get used to it.

The reason Simon was there was because he liked reading the paranoid stuff this guy turned out, and he liked talking with him as well because he was interesting and he knew all about what was happening everywhere - sometimes all of a sudden he would break out into a fascinating story about a speed freak or something. Also he knew all these groovy people who'd drop in for half an hour now and then, or he'd drop in on them. Simon liked sitar music as well, but when you actually tried hard to listen to it, it did become somewhat of a drag,

so then he'd divert his attention to the other interesting things in the room, or he'd wait until Pete split to a friend for a while, and slip on a non-sitar album (of which there were very few).

Round about five O'clock Simon became very bored and was dying to see Anne again. Seeing as how the couple had left a while ago and Pete was visiting, Simon decided to split himself and did.

Outside the weather was bad, in fact it felt ominously like there was going to be a right piss down. This in itself didn't bother Simon, but he was afraid he wouldn't meet Anne in the park. Then he wondered again why he couldn't meet her parents; I mean, dammit, all he had to do was to go up and ring the front doorbell. Still, as she had told him he better not, he decided to disregard his better judgement and hope for the best she was in the park.

He grabbed a bite to eat at home and said vaguely he was going to a friend's house on his way out. By now, the clouds had really opened, but at least the worst was over, and the rain wasn't quite so bad as it had been. He was still worried though and had decided that if she wasn't there he'd risk his neck and go straight up to her front door.

Anyway, it turned out that that wasn't necessary, for after about half an hour of squelching around the place, he eventually saw her coming towards him under an umbrella. He felt very glad to see her coming, but the rain was rather depressing.

"Christ I'm glad to see you" he said as she was in hearing range. "I was afraid you might not come".

"Why? I like the rain" she said.

"Oh well, that's all right then. What have you been doing all day?"

"I've been at... a friend's".

"Oh fuck, that's where I've been all day. Why didn't you say where you'd be yesterday? We could have been together all day. I hardly know you at all yet".

"I'm sorry Simon. I'm not used to this sort of thing, that's all."

Then, quite unexpectedly, her eyes began watering and she fell towards him. Simon was totally unexpected this,

and only just managed to hold her before she fell to the ground. She tried to focus on him, but her vision was all haywire. It was altogether a rather awkward pose, and when she finally seemed to have recovered from whatever it was, Simon's arms were really aching. But naturally he wasn't worried about his arms when Anne could be suffering from some serious complaint.

"You should have told me you weren't well; this rain can't be doing you any good".

"No no please. I'm all right; it's nothing to do with that. I'm fine now, honestly".

"God, I hate to see you like this. I like you an awful lot, you know".

This made Anne smile again, and she clung tightly on to him. Simon didn't know whether this meant she liked him a lot as well, or whether she was afraid. But why should she be afraid? The thought of drugs came into his mind, but he knew that she couldn't possibly know how to get hold of any. So he convinced himself that it was because she liked him a lot, and that made him feel better, so he held on to her more tightly as well.

"Where are we going?" asked Anne.

"Well, where do you want to go? My place is empty, but it's not much. What about your house?"

"I told you, it's not my house and I don't want to go there anyway. Your place is fine".

She was very touchy about her house, which was a drag because Simon felt inhibited at his place. At least it was somewhere they could talk and get to know each other better, and anywhere was better than out in this crap. So off they went to the Kings' house. They didn't speak much because the rain was making too much noise.

"Nearly there" said Simon, but he didn't say anything else because he saw she wasn't listening. She was just staring straight ahead and still didn't look very well.

The evening turned out to be the hell of a let-down for Simon. Anne was very unresponsive all evening, both to his talking and his advances. So he just sat there wondering what to do next, while the music confused all his thoughts.

And then disaster. While he was having a slash she

split the place, leaving a scrawled message which read:

Dear Simon,

I had to go, I was being a drag. I'd better tell you that I've spent all day with this guy and we were both high. Goodbye. I doubt if you'll want to see me again.

Anne.

Simon understandably was stunned, and he reeled back into a chair when he had read it. But, of course, it all susses out now, he thought, she must have been spacing all evening. Oh shit, not drugs - and another guy as well.

By the time he had got it all together, it was too late to go after her and he kicked himself for not thinking of it sooner. He just had to see her again, but when? In any case, he wasn't going to grab much sleep that night.

I X

Simon woke up early the next day, and couldn't get back to sleep, so he got fed up with that bit, and got up and dressed. He still didn't know what to do. The fact was that he was sure he knew Anne, surely enough to realise she was not the sort of a girl who'd willingly take drugs - but what about the guy - where did he come into it?

Luckily all these mixed up thoughts sent Simon to sleep, and the next time he awoke was for dinner.

"Dinner!" someone said very loudly.

He came to with a start, and all of a sudden he remembered the fix and it stabbed him.

Anyway, he had to see her again, that was certain, but how the hell could he? Everything was just shit and he wished he could chuck the whole thing and start again. But he felt he was too far involved to ease out now.

Afternoon. He took some sandwiches down to the park. A sort of vigil, he mused. Still, it was something?

Christ, all this wasn't his scene, and he could see he was just going the same way as his shit scene of a month ago. Trying to put all his thoughts in cold storage, he split to the park with a book on Russian Sociology. Well, why not?

It was reasonably nice out, so at least it was comfortable. There were some nice chicks about, but he wasn't in the mood, so he just noted them and went back to his book. He wasn't all that much into it, but it kind of gave him a front so he could get it together about what he was going to do about Anne.

Come six, his grub gone, he was hungry and bored stiff and pretty cold. So he jumped about a bit when no one was looking and contracted himself to do a lap of the place, and if she wasn't anywhere to be seen, he'd go right up to her front door, so there! Satisfied with himself, he bounced off having a reasonably together mind.

But after three-quarters of a lap of her not being there, he was worried again and thought maybe he was being a bit hasty in all of it, I mean it was only half six.

No, he'd prove himself to be good to his word and off he went, no messing. By the way, Simon believed in destiny, which was about to take its course as he noticed a crowd of hip looking guys freaking down the road. He smiled over to them because they were cool looking, not the destructive crowd.

Dave was with them. Simon checked himself. Dave was with them. This in itself was not incredibly surprising (at least Simon tried to convince himself it wasn't), he'd obviously gone from one extreme to the other (and that wasn't so unusual either), but it was the fact that under his arm was this incredibly freaky looking chick, and they were both stoned and having fun. Shit, why him? I could be with them, why him? How did he get into that crowd anyway, Dave was oblivious to the whole real world and didn't notice Simon who very nearly walked in front of a bus in his stupor.

Finds himself at Anne's front door, thinks, waits, looks. Here we go, he thought. Rings bell, waits. Rings bell again, waits again. Just going, hears door, turns back.

"Yes?" A figure just about resembling Anne came to the door. She's looking very ill indeed and was clutching her head, shielding her eyes from the light.

"Christ - Simon!" she said, pallidly trying to focus on him. "I'm not in". She attempted to close the door, and was prevented. He grabbed her wrists and talked to her straight.

In fact, he was rather too harsh - sort of spur of the moment.

"What the hell do you mean by just splitting on me like that? Okay, so you thought you were a drag - but all you had to do was say so, apart from this drug bit. And how the hell did you get into those? I thought you were sensible, girl. And who's this guy?"

She was doing her best to take in all he was saying, although she knew it all had to come, but she had hoped never to see him again, but here he was.

"Sit in there, please. You're hurting me".

He didn't realise he was gripping her so hard, and detracted quickly leaving two marks on her wrists.

"Please".

"Yes, of course".

He felt bad for treating her rough, and tried very hard to make her see that it was unintentional, but she seemed strangely unresponsive to most things.

"I suppose I've got a lot to explain. You may have noticed I have not been the same in the past couple of days. You see, before I had met you in the park yesterday, I had been round this guy's house. Please don't get me wrong, I didn't really want to go at all - in fact I'd have liked to have been with you, but it was my friends you see, they told me what a great person this guy was, and that I'd like to meet him, and so I was persuaded to go. How was I to know this 'great guy' was a pusher? Anyway, before I knew it he had slipped me some speed, and when it had taken me they all said how brilliant it was wasn't it? And I was crazy with hating the bitches, and I screamed at them. Not only that but the drugs were doing bad things for me, and suddenly this freak seemed like the most disgusting person in the whole world and I fled the place in terror, almost breaking my neck on the way out. After that I just wandered about keeping clear of everyone because they were all out to get me I swear it, and I was thinking all these frightening things, and I had to keep away from all the shadows because of what might have been lurking in them, and even the light had the menace of showing up the shadows even more. I had no bearings, all my sense of direction was hay-wire. I must have wandered about for hours, and it was only by luck that I found you, thank God. But I felt different then, and like I was double crossing you at the time. You see my

thoughts were all mixed up, and I thought I'd done some really evil things with this pusher guy who really I hated. So you see that's why I wrote the note. Since then I felt a real come-down, and somehow in my coat I found another joint that they must have slipped me before I turned bad, and honest Simon I just had to take it. And now I'm coming down from that, and I need some more".

Anne looked half dead, and she fell back into one of the large chairs. This was Simon's week for strain, and her story left him wondering whether to feel sorry for her, feel sorry for himself, hate her, love her, kill that pusher, kill her friends, or kill himself. Well, killing himself would have been a bit drastic and pointless - not that he had the nerve anyway.

"Can I get you anything?"

"Shit?"

"No, what I meant was, would you like some coffee?"

"Coffee? COFFEE? How can you talk about coffee when I tell you things you'd never have dreamed happening. Trouble with you is that you're just too cool about the whole thing."

Christ, she had it all wrong.

"Look, I ought to walk out of here right now if it wasn't for the fact I think you're the most incredible girl I've ever met".

"Oh Jesus, please come over here and hold me Simon".

Simon just kept back tears as he went over, and just didn't want to move when he started making love all over her. She felt so good, she just didn't move and things were really happening between them. It had begun.

Meanwhile the world was oblivious and it went on going round and round.....

X

The rest of the holidays were just as cool as a fresh breeze for Simon and Anne, and they spent every minute they could together, each moment finding out more and more about each other, each moment liking each other more and more. Simon soon got her off thinking about drugs and that, and in no time they only laughed when they remembered about that time she had the experience with the drugs. So everything was beautiful, and nobody else seemed to matter any more though everyone was beautiful. And most of all they were both sleeping nights for the first time in ages.

At the same time they were sorting out each others own personal hangups, which often turned out to be the same ones anyway. They found they could talk freely on many more different subjects the more they got to know each other, and eventually they had all their own little private jokes and meanings, that people would sometimes frown at but they'd just laugh about it all. In fact they laughed at life as a whole, and enjoyed it all tremendously. But don't you see? The more you laugh along life, the more you treasure it, and they treasured life an awful lot. So much so that they decided to do a sort of joint venture by searching all over for religion, and this was the first really solid thing that sent them on a whole new scene of their own, and come the end of the holiday they were just different people. In fact, life as a whole had a completely different meaning for them, as their friends were to find out.

X I

First days of new terms are always the same. People were wandering about shaking hands and saying how are you, and where have you been, and slapping backs. Others were the centre of attraction, name dropping and relating unique experiences out of trivial holiday happenings. It was a sort of excitement before the storm, because in seven weeks it was 'O' levels, and that meant work, especially as the mock results were not all that encouraging.

Simon wasn't too involved in all this, but he watched it all contentedly, and now and then would acknowledge the people who said "Hi!" to him, and engage in the odd conversation, usually about other people's hangups. They all found Simon was very receptive to their problems, and he was strangely fascinating to them. Another new scene, they sussed.

Dave was really completely different now. He hung about with a cool sixth form group, and treated all his old friends like they were total strangers. Simon watched Dave quite closely, and whenever Dave met his gaze he turned away abruptly, which pleased Simon a lot, although he was envious of him in a way. He also noticed that a lot of people who used to be quiet and unassuming were a lot more out of their respective shells, and it was quite interesting to suss them out. In fact,

all in all, Simon revelled in all the people around him.

When the bell went, everyone was slow to go in, because they were not used to being told what to do, and felt rebellious - as was their wont. It was the hell of a racket in the classroom, you'd think some of them were infants the noise they were making. So it was obvious that while some of them had realised that they are becoming responsible young men, others were still under the same influences they had been two years before. It just took a friend to spark off another's reactions and they would both be acting extremely childishly. Simon, as had many others, had realised that this happened for them not so long ago, and they had overcome it by virtually ignoring the childish sector of both theirs and other people's character. That's life - some people never grow up.

Their form master entered the form with his usual 'here we go again' face. He gave them an 'if you think this term is going to be plain sailing you've got another think coming' speech, and told them to shut up and get on with something educational while he worked out homework timetables and other red tape crap. So everyone pulled out their music magazines, polos, cards, perverted books, and other miscellaneous illegalities. They also continued their frightful row. The master looked up and sighed. It was too much to expect they would further their education, they had to be prodded awake all the time. He was sure they were doing it all to annoy him. The boys weren't the only people in the school with persecution complexes.

Simon, on the other hand, had lost most of his interest in modern music and the like. Perverted books were only for people who were without themselves, or needed to learn more facts. Polos he liked, and any contributions were gratefully received. But he in fact was reading a book on the early fourth century in Japanese art in order to engage in an intelligent conversation with Anne on the subject. She didn't know about this, and he was looking forward to seeing her face when he told her. It really was the best thing in the world when she smiled, and during even the worst days of the following term, all he had to do was think of the smile, and it would carry him through his day no trouble. This fact worried people at times and they wondered whether he was all right. In time he developed the

nickname of 'Smiling Simon'.

Lunchtimes Simon would spend either with Tony Martin or Rick Loader. They were both quite similar in many ways. They both had extremely smart bikes; both had an affinity for the opposite sex which they were famous for; both had connections in the music world, being in groups themselves - Tony was a bass guitarist, Rick a vocalist and saxophonist. So Simon felt he was pretty lucky to go around with a couple of such cool guys as these, and they could talk for ages on mutual subjects such as females. Simon preferred to talk generally, and hardly ever mentioned Anne in conversation. He didn't, not because they weren't good friends, but he felt a lot of things were private between him and Anne, and should be left as such.

Meanwhile, Anne was having much of a similar time at her school, although the girls were much more conscious of how old they outwardly appeared, and they would act very grown up even if they were still just kids at heart. This was quite amusing to watch because it was usually extremely easy to suss out how old they really were. So it was a sort of rat race at her school, but different groups of much a similar type would stick together, just the same as the boys. Anne went with a fairly large group of maturer girls, and wasn't too fussy on who she liked most.

But, as girls tend to do, she would be thinking about Simon a lot more than he was thinking about her - not that he didn't like her as much, in fact he probably liked her more, but girls attach a lot more importance to having a steady boy friend than vice versa. It was much more of a status symbol at a girls school. She wouldn't boast about Simon, she wasn't the type to, and anyway she felt the same way as he did about their mutual secrets - but it was the fact that all the other girls would boast a lot and visually be seen to be thinking about it that made her think about it as well. So for her the days did seem to drag on just a bit, and when the welcome bell rang at the end of the day she'd heave a sigh of relief.

When homework allowed, Simon would see as much of Anne as possible. They could often help in each other's work anyway, and sometimes Anne would ask for advice from Simon ending up that he'd be doing the work himself and she'd be trying not to laugh watching his face being all technical and

knowledgable. Then he'd turn to her and say "you're not listening, are you" and they'd both laugh and roll over on the floor and start kissing with books scattering in all directions on the floor. It was lucky they both had it all together in their minds, otherwise they would be getting a long way behind in their school work. But then again, only two people who were as reasonably intelligent as they were could have such a relationship as theirs. Most at their point of age and experience would have split up by now, so they really must have had a pretty good thing going for them.

XII

Now everything was seemingly going fine all round, except for one factor - Simon had yet to meet Anne's parents, and whenever he asked her about them she would very cleverly find a way round it or change the subject. Most of their time was either spent at Simon's house or out somewhere, and whenever they were at her house, her parents were always out. This, to say the least, mystified Simon. He had quite a good idea of what they were like from the odd points he was able to extract from Anne. They were a conservative middle class couple, both working for an extremely distinguished firm of stock brokers. He was a director of some capacity, she an agent who did background work on various companies. That in fact was how they had met, except of course they didn't have quite such respectable jobs when they first met. Most evenings they would spend at social gatherings and cocktail parties, or going to the playhouse to watch Shakespeare, the opera or ballet. In fact, more or less the typical well to do Agenda.

Apparently though, her father was the one who she disliked. He was certainly not as young as she would have liked, and he was the sort of father who had definite ideas on certain subjects concerning his daughter 'little Annie' as he called her. She detested this nickname as much as she detested his whole attitude towards her 'welfare' as he put it. She had stopped being 'little Annie' some time ago, and felt that he was now trying to get at her by using it as he did. Her mother would take her side against him sometimes, but he would always win over them both.

But, as in most relationships, there were times when they would all get along fine with each other, and remembering

these times was what in the final analysis kept them together as a family.

The thing was that Simon readily understood all this, there were a lot of cases like it - the only child in a well-to-do family being kept away from 'bad influences', only to prevent a social scandal for the parents if things went a bit out of step for the child. So why couldn't he meet them? I mean, she couldn't cover him up indefinitely - they had to face facts sometime. Still, Simon wasn't going to push the matter too much, and just had to let things happen as they would for the time being. He was happy enough as he was anyway, and after all he did know a fair amount about them. Anne tried not to bring them up at all if she could help it, so they hardly existed most of the time.

Simon's parents were very attached to Anne, despite the fact that they came from a different background - and there always existed a very small amount of class jealousy, but it was easy to see that Anne was like any other nice girl. It would tend to annoy Simon when occasionally Anne would venture into discussions with his parents, and he'd just stand about doing nothing but get more frustrated each minute. He'd eye his parents when they were talking, and naturally they didn't understand why he did this because it was often her who'd start it. What they didn't realise was that Simon didn't care whether they approved of her or not, and was convinced that the generation gap was much bigger than it really was. Anyway, they could be alone more often than not, so who could complain?

XIII

So time went on as it tends to have the habit of doing. All of a sudden it was a week to the 'O' levels at both Simon's school and Anne's. Neither of them had revised, so it would be a whole week without each other, which wasn't at all easy. By this time they had become extremely involved, and Simon was concerned about the exams because of their future together, although he hadn't told Anne.

The fact that they were apart that week caused something that Simon had said would never happen to him. He started smoking. Hadn't he always preached against it? Now his nerves were put to the test, and unfortunately they had failed. He intended to give up when the exams were over, and nobody knew about

his smoking at all. It did help him concentrate a little better, but work just didn't seem to come. He'd stare at a page of blue ink, but he just wouldn't see it. It was a mental block. It was Anne. It took him hours just to hammer a few simple facts into his head. It was torture, his nails were all chewed down, he was tired, white as a sheet, his eyes were hurting him, he'd fall asleep at school. Time was running out. He almost gave up.

Examination halls are big and lonely. Examinations seem to go on for days at a time. Hand gets cramp. Lots of sheets of white paper that had to be filled. Daren't breathe in case big man says you're cheating. Long printed sheets with confusing instructions. Lucky questions, unlucky questions. Blind answers. 'He seems to be writing tons of stuff, and I don't know how to start and the clock is ticking away every second'. Finished already and there's an hour left. Read through, can't concentrate - must be all right, surely? Where do I look? Sit it out. Think about something, sing to myself. Got to keep quiet, mustn't make any noise. How's Tony doing, he was worried about this one? Anyway I didn't expect to get this one. Hope I did though. Wonder how Anne is, I hope she's doing well. Let's see, what can I think about her - right. She's got brown eyes, or are they blue - no brown 'cos I remember telling her what beautiful brown eyes she'd got, then I said some stupid simile that I've forgotten. Now - lovely long black hair, yes - that day we first spoke and she had it all over her face. Yes, I must have spoken to her black hair even before I'd spoken to her face. Classy nose, well classy everything I suppose, but that's only a figure of speech. God her mouth is real beautiful, it screams out at you to kiss it, and it's such a clear and beautiful shape.....

Simon didn't know it, but he was making weird shapes with his mouth and getting funny looks from the masters.... and her teeth are so well shaped, and they look so real because they are not perfect but just enough to have character. I'd recognise those teeth anywhere! Mmmm her neck is not too long, but it has grace and is fun to get right into. Very slender lines I'd say, yes a veritable swan in fact except not white. Her shoulders are smooth and well curved. She's not exceptionally well built though, but I think they're just right say 32½" -

just what I like. Waist isn't too thin, nice to get round. Hips a bit small for me though. Brilliant legs, and I love black stockings too. Very cool.

Oh, I suppose he wants my paper without asking because it makes a noise. I wonder how long he's been standing there. Still, I'll be in the sixth form next year, and they can't get you in the sixth form you know. It's because you're as good as they are then, and maybe they're afraid of you. I don't dislike them anyway, but it's nice to think of all the things you could do to all the nasty ones. Yeah, I'd make old Robinson go into Tuesday detention forever until he admitted all the evil things he'd done to me in the past like the time he made me stand out in front of assembly just because someone was talking to me. And it wasn't even me either, just 'cos he couldn't see who it was he picked on me because he hates me. I'm bad at history.

Sigh. Quarter of an hour left. I wonder if it's possible to watch the second hand go round for quarter of an hour.

No. Thirteen minutes to go. I think everyone's finished. Must stick to the good old rules though. Got to wait until time's up or they'll come and get you won't they masters? Oh yes. Hello, it's going to rain. Of course, always rains when school's over. Just to spite, I'm going to enjoy the rain - it'll have to stop then and I'll have won. God, what a nowhere thought competition. Can't help it, though. General insanity caused by revision. All over in six minutes. Gosh summer holidays! Never thought about it. Christ, that's brilliant. Tsch, I could have thought about them. Still, nearly over.

Bell rings. Pretty shattering when you're waiting for it like he was. Best thing he'd ever heard, so he forgot about having a headache.

General exchange of views on exam, various 'see you's and then out into the really cool fresh rain. Just stand and get wet. A great weight was behind him. Like a black mark washed away by the rain.

Simon suddenly remembered and felt into his pocket, withdrawing a small box. He stood silently and considered.

A packet of cigarettes flew through the air, landed in

a puddle and travelled along the kerb and down a drain. Simon smiled and walked off along the shiny pavement towards Anne's house.

Summer was going to be just out of this world and there he was, his adrenalin was in full flow, thinking about it with Anne. It was all too good to be true - the exams were over and the weather was slowly turning nice. One week of rioting school left and there would be no stopping them.

They both knew what was likely to happen before the holiday was out, and they didn't even need to say anything because they both knew.

"Hey, Anne."

"Mm?"

"You won't ever find somebody else will you?"

"That's not the sort of question you're supposed to ask."

"Yeah, I know. But if, just if you did, we'd always be best friends wouldn't we?"

"Christ Simon, why are you saying this?"

"Well, I just like you too much to ever lose you to anyone else, that's all."

"Works both ways love."

"Jesus, I'm glad you said that. I wasn't sure - it's just that, well I love you you know."

Simple, blunt, but it was the first time he had said it and Anne just freaked out. It was ecstasy really. Two is all it takes. They'd have gone straight in there and then, but they both felt it was not right, yet.

"I love you too Simon. Funny how little things mean so much. Nothing much left to say after that, is there? Shall we go outside and look at the stars?"

They took hands and went down the stairs of Simon's house to the bright clear evening. Cold, but not too cold.

"Shall we go over to the park - you can see better there and it's not too far home for you then."

"Yes, but don't forget we agreed that we're independant and it's just co-incidence that I live near the park. Thanks anyway."

Simon smiled and off they went, the epitamy of hapiness. People would smile at them, the world was beautiful.

"S'funny" said Simon when they were in the park. "I sometimes wonder whether all this can actually be happening to me, I mean think of all the people who aren't as happy as I am. Is it fair that I should be so lucky?"

Anne always replied with her eyes, and Simon always knew what she meant. Actions speak louder than words, and she was there to prove it.

They walked on a bit further, enjoying the quiet, enjoying the stars, enjoying each other. Then, dramatically Simon turned to Anne.

"Look, I've got an idea."

"Fire away."

"Well, it's coming on summer - right?" And I've got some money saved up."

"And?"

"Let's go away somewhere, just you and me."

Anne thought crikey, that means I'd sleep with him probably. And we'd be stuck for things if we ran out of money.

She looked worse than she meant to look after he had said this, but it's not the sort of thing you expect to hear every day of the week.

"What's wrong?" said Simon. "I wasn't being presumptuous was I?"

"No, please don't think that. You don't mean that anyway. You mean you're not advancing too far."

"Yes, I suppose I do. But I didn't say it just because I want to sleep with you, you know that. I said it because it would be so beautiful - just you and I and the sky."

"I knew what you meant and I'm sorry. It's my parents really, they wouldn't let me go."

"Tell them you're going with friends."

"Yes, but they'd want to be sure."

"Couldn't you arrange with some friends to fix it all, I mean your friends would respect the fact you didn't want anyone to know about it."

"Yes, but they'd still know, and if we did go I'd want it to be just between you and me - no-one else. I'm like that."

"I am too, it was just a thought but ask your parents anyway - just in case."

"All right. I would sleep with you though, if we did. I'm not against it, don't think that. Just so sudden, that's all - I've never slept with anyone before. Well, I just wouldn't sleep with anyone except you because I know how you feel, you're not the kind of person who'd take advantage for the sake of it."

"Thanks love, you meant that."

"I mean everything I say."

By now it was ten o'clock. Downstair lights begin to pop off as people trudge up to bed. Upstair lights flick on and curtains are drawn across the rude shape of the dressing table.

Simon and Anne came to the point just before her house where they always said goodbye so her parents could not see them.

"It doesn't seem right we should leave each other just when it's so beautiful. It's like we live together and for some reason never see each other at night."

"Goodnight love. I'll be the same tomorrow - remember that."

"That's one way of putting it I suppose. Goodnight Anne."

They kissed for a while and then parted.

II

Nothing much happening at school really. Simon was not too involved in all the end of term gaiety and niceties. But the others enjoyed it in their own way. Some would get some money together for the popular masters, some would bring or wear outrageous things to stretch relationships because there could be no recriminations, some would be busy arranging plans for the big escape, others would sit and say nothing as usual.

The masters were all being very nice and witty for a change. You could tell what they were looking forward to - the younger ones had nice wives and sunny holidays to look forward to, the older ones had golf and social life to look forward to. The others were either looking for eligible birds if they were young enough, or groaning at the prospect of a long grind in the heat with nothing to do.

Simon could be seen watching everyone else with a psychological interest in each one of them. A sort of nothing-else-to-do hobby you could call it. The only thing to do as far as he was concerned - it was always the same characters, same opinions, same reactions. He wasn't blaming them, he was just the same.

He thought what a good idea it would be to get away from them all by leaving them with his good wishes, so he made a point of saying all the best to everone.

When it came to Dave, he was naturally hesitant. They hadn't spoken directly since they split some time ago, and there were still hard feelings between them.

"Dave."

"Huh?"

"Look, I know we've kinda split paths, gone different ways and your scene is different to mine now, but as it's holidays and I probably won't see you I had to say no hard feelings, how about it?"

"Okay. Things do happen I suppose. Cheers and all that. No sweat et cetera. Keep taking the tablets, hang loose."

"Boy, you have changed haven't you? I thought worn out cliches were out."

"Yeah, they are - that's why I use them. I didn't mean it sarcastically though. Maybe I would have, but I've got a real good scene together, so I don't blame you at all."

"Well if you're as happy as I am then I'm very happy for your happiness. That is, well, all the best."

"Likewise. See you around huh, maybe."

Simon shook hands with him. He had a clean sheet.

III

'Twas Friday night to be sure, and where could they go this fine evening? Well, nothing much on at the pictures - usual sex, violence and Walt Disney; disco's - hmm, best ones full of skins; stay in? No, miss out on it all then.

"I know" said Anne. "There's this cute little cafe off Farne Road - I used to go there when my friends went. There's this guy playing an accoustic sometimes."

"Sounds great, at least it's original."

"I'll get my coat."

Evening planned, they could always go to the youth club if this place wasn't much cop. No reason why it shouldn't be if she'd been there before anyway. On the way there, Simon brought up the holidays.

"Have you asked your parents yet, about the trip I mean?"

"Well - yes, and as I said they want to see the friends I'm going with."

"Wouldn't just one friend do, I mean I know thi..."

"No that's no good, it's got to be someone they know."

"Well, how many is that?"

"Only about six - properly."

"Oh, it wouldn't hurt just to tell one of them. I'm sure that one would do, one you can trust."

"I could ask Carol."

"Is she OK?"

"I can trust her."

"That's it then, we're on our way."

"No, it's not as easy as all that."

"Why ever not?"

"I'll tell you later, when I feel I can."

"No, now - it can't be that dynamic."

Anne told him with her eyes that she'd had enough and she would tell him later. So he waited impatiently. They didn't speak until they reached the cafe.

"This is it" said Anne.

"Oh". Simon was surprised as he had walked past it. It didn't look anything spectacular, still it might be good inside.

Unfortunately it wasn't anything to write home about inside, and there wasn't a guy with an acoustic guitar either.

"Well, what do you think? Great isn't it?"

"Er - I'm ... lost for words."

"Where shall we sit?"

"Oh, anywhere looks as good as anywhere else I suppose."

They deposited themselves on a couple of wicker chairs which were rather the worse for wear. After some time a garcon came to them, and looked at them as if he had two hours to live, holding out a pad. He was supposed to look like he was inquiring as to their orders. Simon thought he'd be more suited to doing adverts for the Bangla Desh relief fund.

"Two espresso, one black" said Simon.

The waiter grunted and padded back to the hatch muttering something in Italian. They were all much the same, though you couldn't really blame them all the same - I mean it was Friday night and people are supposed to be out enjoying themselves. Still, this lot seemed more suited to night shifts at a cemetery than a supposedly exclusive coffee bar in town. But someone's

got to do the boring jobs, haven't they? Otherwise nothing would get done.

Simon had a quick suss of the place. Red lights so no-one could see the real state of the décor. Fake candles electrically burning on the walls. Carafes of wine displayed at the bar, empties used on the tables for candle holders - neat but unoriginal. Plastered ceiling - a bad attempt at a cave effect. French and Italian posters liberally plastered about to add the 'continental touch' - just another fake. Ah well, now they were there they might as well stay until they'd finished their coffee. Anyway, he thought Anne liked it - and she wasn't in a terrific mood to argue with.

"You don't like it, do you?"

"Let's say I'm not overcome by it."

"OK, but before we go I must tell you about Carol, and we haven't had our coffee."

"Here it comes."

The athletic waiter rocketed back to them and stuck out his hand with gleaming white teeth showing - well not quite, this guy left a lot to the imagination.

"Twelve" he said.

Simon ignored Anne's usual offers to pay, and gave the guy fifteen pence so he'd go away. He gave a faint nod and went back to the hectic job of swishing down tables, which he excelled at although he was very modest about it.

"Now, please listen Simon. You see, Carol is not at her best most of the time - that is if she has a best - follow? Well the thing is that, well, she's on acid. She always relied on me to bring her out of it - that's really how I got to know her because at the time I was the sort of person who did that, unfortunately."

So you see my parents thought she wasn't well or something and they accepted her because they thought she was just ill or something. And that's it really."

"So if we did happen to find her, we'd have to bring her out of whatever she happened to be into at the time, and then get it into her what she'd have to say to them, right?" Simon didn't find this too unusual, but it did present its problems.

"Tell me, haven't you got any other friends?"

They both burst out laughing. It wasn't funny, but people are like that you know. When they came to, it was still the same brick wall they had been up against before. So they drank their coffee.

IV

Kind of a non-event Friday on the whole but it was a bit of a laugh when they were together. That's what they always said anyway so the world all went nicely.

After the fun cafe they had been to a couple of nowhere discos and then through the good old park. Somehow they always seemed to end up there, mainly because it was nice, it was the first place they had met and it was near Anne's house although she pressed home the point that that had nothing whatsoever to do with it (lucky though!)

During all this they had decided to ask another of Anne's friends to do the bit about the trip. This one was called Teresa, and she was fairly trustworthy - the happy go lucky type. They were going to dig her out the next day while they were still enthusiastic about the whole idea (that was the thing about them, they knew exactly where they were at in the fact that they knew this thing would become a bit of a drag before they had even arranged it if they were not careful).

Usual farewell crap - neither of them believed in ceremonies and such, but it's pretty hard saying goodbye to someone you love, even though you'd see them next day.

That night, Simon couldn't sleep. He was just sent on the idea of a holiday alone with Anne and life - it would be too good to be true. At least he told himself this, but sometimes these things just don't work out and you'd wish the hell you had never thought of it. I mean it'd be a long time of each other, and there's always a chance of tempers fraying over trivial things. At a time like that all it would need to be a cool bloke to take her under his wing and he'd have lost her forever.

Still, this didn't occur to him so it was all sweet dreams that night.

It was slightly different from her point of view - she was more worried that her parents would find out what really was going to happen and the chances are if they did she would be told to leave home or something like that, and she just wasn't ready for that yet - especially if it meant moving in with Simon (his parents wouldn't mind). Not that she didn't trust him, but at 16 she felt she wasn't old enough yet. Anyway there'd be rumours, and no good comes from rumours especially if the school found out - it would mean expulsion.

And that's fair enough by any standards. She had brains, but you can be a bit too careful. Life is only so long, and this trip would be quite an experience for both of them. They would also gain a lot of independence, budgeting and some cooking even.

Anne was a fair old hand at cooking even if she said so herself - this would be a good test of her improvisation. It might be hard but that's half of it really. You appreciate more what you work for yourself than if you get it with ease. She had always said this - her kind of rule of living - that's why she never accepted things from her parents unless she was really hard up for it.

So it was interesting thoughts for her. Searching all the time. She had an active mind in the real sense of the word. That was her main attribute, she had tremendous depth. And not only that, she had the looks to go with it - that's why she could talk with her eyes - so much more meaning.

Sleep on kids - tomorrow's coming and it could be your lucky day.

V

Saturday. Object: find Teresa.

"I've just phoned her" said Anne. She's coming in half an hour."

"Great!"

Forty minutes later there was a visitor at Simon's house. Anne answered the door, showed her up and introduced her to Simon. Teresa seemed to like Simon rather more than Anne liked, and they were having rather a long conversation with each other.

Anne got pretty narky after a while (which was unlike her), and said they ought to get on with the matter in hand. Teresa reluctantly terminated the matter, although she had already discovered that she liked Simon quite a lot.

They bade her to be seated, and filled her with all the relevant information - swearing her to keep bona fide. She managed to take about half of it all in, so they told her it all again over coffee just to make sure.

Simon must have known by now that she liked him, because every time Anne mentioned their relationship Teresa looked at Simon accusingly as if he was double crossing her. He sussed this, and didn't know what to feel about it, she must be crazy or something. Some mixed up people about, you know, and she must be one of them.

The main thing was that she had half-heartedly agreed to do her bit for it no questions asked.

So there it was. Simon standing in the park chewing his nails - half wondering what was happening at Anne's place and half trying to suss Teresa out. Meanwhile Teresa was convincing Anne's parents that it was just innocent fun in this trip, no complication or small print. She succeeded.

Simon saw them coming. Anne was thanking Teresa and saying that she'd do the same for her sometime et cetera.

"Well?"

"All systems go chief" said Anne, saluting. Not very amusing but great news.

"I s'pose I'll be off" said Teresa. Very penetrating gaze, that girl.

"Oh no, please don....". Simon checked. He looked at Anne who was frowning. Teresa realised she was causing friction.

"No, I must go. See you around Anne. 'bye Simon".

Teresa walked away from them. She had the perfect figure, her hips moved incredibly beautifully. Any sane man had to look, and Simon was no exception. Anne's reason failed her for once and she really spat his head off.

"For Christs sake, you're making it a bit obvious aren't you? Why don't you go and ask her to come as well, there'd be two of us then just in case one of us began to bore you".

"That's enough Anne. You don't mean any of that, and you know it. And if you think I'm going to go through our lives together without looking at other females you're mistaken".

Red eyes were facing each other, tears starting in Anne's eyes. She turned away and put her face in her hands.

"Oh God, I'm sorry Simon - that wasn't me speaking just then. I guess we're all sensitive. I just couldn't bear the thought of losing you that's all, especially with the trip coming and all".

They were holding each other again. All O.K.

"Let's walk".

One wondered how long the sun would stay out. It had lasted a fortnight now. Please another month, that's all. Rain would ruin it for them.

There was a brilliant sunset that night, and they were down the park again that evening in time to see its last tribute to the retreating day. The sun was a beautiful orange, and wisps of cloud gave it a watery look. As it went down it turned red, then all too soon was gone, leaving a mauve and navy blue sky.

The stars shone brightly especially for them. Simon remembered the words on one of his albums:

'Have you seen the stars tonight
Would you like to go up on 'A' deck and
look at them with me
Have you seen the stars tonight
Would you like to go out for a stroll
and keep me company.'

All of a sudden that was the most beautiful song he'd ever heard and it would always make him think of being alone with Anne and the stars whenever he remembered it.

That song was in her eyes already although she didn't know it.

"You're beautiful" he said for the nth time.

She smiled and kissed him. 'A' deck never had a touch on the park, he thought.

V I

Packing is never much fun - for Simon it meant his mother fussing over what he should take when he didn't want so much; for Anne it meant finding more and more things that just might be needed. Everything was going OK until the phone rang at Simon's house. His father answered it.

"Simon." It must be for him, funny? Probably Anne. Simon rushed down to the phone thinking of Anne.

"Hi Anne, how's the packing going?"

"This isn't Anne, it's Teresa. I must see you."

"Oh crikey Teresa, you know I'm going out with Anne - let me be - please."

"But don't you like me at all?"

"No, it's not that. But I hardly know you. You know I'm in love with Anne don't you?"

"Oh."

"Look, tell you what - I'll meet you at Nina's Cafe in town at 3 o'clock and we can talk if you like."

"But you're busy."

"No, no - I owe you a favour and I'd like to have coffee with you."

"All right then - thanks."

"Three o'clock. See you then. Oh, and if you don't come I'll know you've met some nice guy en route. Okay?"

"You're kind. Goodbye."

With that she blew him a kiss and put the phone down. Simon felt very embarrassed about this, but what should he have done? Anyway, what's done is done and he couldn't phone her back in any case because he didn't know her number.

Now, what was the time? Shit, two o'clock.

"Mum, how long's dinner?"

"Half an hour."

"Oh no, can't you make it earlier?"

"Two thirty - it's always two thirty and you know it."

"Yeah."

Gobble dinner, grab coat, split at lightening speed, choke down the road, grab a bus. Five minutes. Buses go so slow.

Simon reached the cafe at twenty past. Teresa was just arriving. Typical female punctuality! Well, after all, it was unusual that he was late - wasn't it?

"Hi."

"Hi."

"Well timed!"

Simon felt good for some reason. My god, let's face it, this girl was exceptionally good to look at. They drifted into the smart atmosphere with no difficulty.

"Here?"

"Fine."

They took their seats. She was smiling beautifully, Simon couldn't help smiling back and she didn't take this quite how he had meant it. It wasn't going to be as easy as he had thought to shake her off, and anyway he wasn't sure whether he wanted to now.

"What would you like to drink?"

Teresa snapped out of her dream and blinked.

"Oh, coffee please."

Drinking coffee, both happy. Simon pointing arrows at himself for ever suggesting such a ridiculous meeting. He felt he was double-crossing Anne, and he was really. He had originally intended this meeting as more of a kindness to Teresa than anything else. That was a pretty beastly thing to do in the first place. Now he was in a right tricky situation. Just play along - see how things turned out.

"I just had to see you" said Teresa. "I'll try never to bother you again now."

"God no - I'm glad, real glad I'm here."

"That's nice. Nice coffee here too."

He supposed so, but that wasn't all that important. Shit, something had to happen in a minute or he'd go crazy.

"You'd be pretty stupid if you hadn't realised by now that I like you the hell of a lot" said Teresa shyly.

"Yeah, I had. But you know the situation I'm in."

"Gosh, I'm sorry I suggested all this. I'm happy if you say we're good friends though."

"That's a stupid thing to say and you know it. Look, I do like you as well, quite a lot in fact, but please let's leave it at that otherwise I'll go crazy."

"I know how you feel, honest. I've never met anyone like you before, that's all. I know it sounds corny, bu--"

"No, it doesn't, honest."

"Well, that's just how it is with me anyway. Sorry."

"Now stop saying sorry all the time, it's nobody's fault."

"Yeah, sorry - I mean - yeah." They both giggled and Simon spilt some of his coffee. "Oh, don't move - I'll clear it up."

Teresa leaped up and tried to clean off the coffee from Simon's trousers. She was very close to him, and left all her reason behind as she kissed him. Simon wanted to respect his better judgement, but it was just so nice he encouraged it even further by putting his arm round her. Seemed like ages they were kissing. Then suddenly she grabbed hold of her senses and pulled away, took her handbag and ran away through the door to who knows where.

Simon, stunned, made a vain attempt to zoom out and see where she had gone, but bumped into some people who were coming through the door. When he finally got out there was no sign of her. He reeled against a lampost. Gone, gone like Cinderella. Now what was he going to do?

V I I

Anne turned up at Simon's at three o'clock the next day. He appeared in front of her desperately trying not to look like he had only had three hours sleep the night before, which he had.

"My you look ill, are you feeling all right?"

She put her arm round him and started fussing (it seemed to him), and he pushed her away saying he was perfectly all right. She was slightly annoyed by his action, but put it down to whatever he was suffering from (though the bags under his eyes gave her an idea).

"Are you ready to go" she asked, accepting his answer of good health.

"Yeah, let's have some coffee first though - the train's at five."

"OK."

The coffee reminded Simon of what had happened in the cafe the day before, so he was strangely silent. Eagle - eye Anne noticed this and asked him what was wrong, and he of course denied that anything was wrong with him. This did make her annoyed, and this was the first time he had seen her like it.

She didn't become an angry face, Simon thought.

Last night he was awake trying to get things together once again. He had thought this was never going to happen after he had met Anne but there you go. He was wondering what he had to worry about - he loved Anne and was off on a holiday with her, just the two of them. What could be better than that? Off on a holiday with Teresa? Why? He barely knew her. What was it about her that he liked? She was incredibly attractive - could that be the sole factor he was going on? Surely not. Did he like her more than Anne? Impossible, he loves Anne - but does he? Maybe he doesn't at all? But he couldn't be that mistaken. Perhaps it's something else. What? Exam results? No. Travel sickness? Shit no.

"It's twenty to - it'll take us a good half hour to get to the station. You'd better get ready. Simon?"

"Huh? Oh yeah. OK." Simon drew himself towards the door, just failing to crush the cat in his take off. "Oh - er, take a seat in the lounge. I won't be a few seconds."

Anne, her usual sensible self, cleared up the cups and ran them under the cold tap. Then she made a fuss of the cat who couldn't take enough of it. Then she noticed that it was going to rain outside and tried to rediscover her summer raincoat which meant digging right to the bottom of her large black travelling bag.

Simon returned ten minutes later to be confronted with a kitchenful of neatly folded garments and a familiar face triumphantly clutching a bright raincoat. This was too much. Not only was it about to rain, but they had a train to catch any minute and there was Anne looking like they had all day to repack her junk. Instantly putting all other thoughts aside, he rushed to the pile of clothes and began frantically trying to cram them into the undersized bag.

"Do you realise that we've got a fuckin' train to catch within the next hour?"

"Of course I do."

"Well for Christs sake get this stuff packed and let's go. We've got ten minutes to catch the hourly bus to the station."

Great fun. Two people were seen runnin down the road after a bus. They didn't quite make it. They both stopped

dropping the luggage, and watched as the bus trundled off.

"Trust it to be that much early. Ten seconds, that's all we needed. But oh no - has to be early for the first time in twenty years." Simon refrained from telling Anne it was her fault, he just implied it by the way he spoke to her.

He looked at his watch. Ten past. The station was five miles away. So convenient. They'd never walk it, not with all that luggage. He looked with an accusing eye at the black bag.

"Come on, we'll have to walk there" he said hopefully.

She nodded in agreement and they picked up their luggage and began to walk. Barely a word was exchanged on the way.

When at last, with aching feet, they reached the station, they discovered the inevitable - the train had gone. Simon cursed and asked when the next train would leave. He was extremely irritable. Apparently the next train to where they were going was not until the next day due to a rail dispute. Simon cursed again, this time to British Rail.

Anne, ever resilient, asked if there was a train anywhere at all near there. There was one, it would drop them thirty miles from where they wanted to go though. They would have to be quick though, it was about to leave on platform 8. Almost without thinking, Anne grabbed Simon and the luggage, and whisked them off to platform 8. Simon protested and asked where they were going, but there was no time to explain and Anne told him to shut up and she'd tell him later.

They just made it in time. She managed to explain what was going on to Simon briefly, and he gathered enough to be quite ecstatic about it.

"Thirty miles!!" he screamed. "Do you realise that barely anything exists out there apart from a battered B.R. station? It'll be impossible to thumb a lift."

"That's rubbish. Anyway it's the best we can do."

"Then we needn't have bothered."

End of conversation. Simon huddled into a depression, then began cursing the weather, which was just about to give a display of uninterrupted rain. Anne was worn out, too tired to try to work things out. They both fell asleep until eight o'clock when the train screeched to a halt at their destination.

VIII

Somehow they gathered themselves and the luggage just before the train left. When they got outside they wished they hadn't bothered. The rain was belting down on to the roof of the platform, making a deafening noise.

They followed the odd people who had disembarked at that stop until they came to the ticket office. When they'd dug about for their tickets and had handed them to the bloke, they looked for an open coffee bar. No luck. Not an incredibly large station, and after eight anyway.

It was beginning to get dark, so Anne suggested they try to get to their destination before night as they couldn't very easily afford a meal out on their low planned budget.

Hitch-hiking was the only way - just luck if someone even went that way, let alone gave them a lift - assuming they weren't full in the first place.

Some time later they had trudged to the start of a small 'B' road which led to their rented place - the only road in and out of the place. An hour later they were still there.

God, how bad could things get? Here they were, soaked to the skin in the middle of God knows where waiting for transport that's very unlikely to come, and carrying three hefty cases of waterlogged garments. Not the sort of thing one is very accustomed to doing, particularly in the middle of summer.

Simon laughed. It was just so ridiculous. Not only that but it was a complete waste of good holiday time. Somebody else was laughing too, he was sure. Someone who'd purposely put him into all this trouble, somebody who was watching every damn move he made and laughing his head off. O.K. then, play it your way and laugh as well. Ha! Gotcha!

A car sprayed past, straight past. Simon watched it pass, open mouthed.

"Anne, what the hell are you doing. That was a car, and it's gone straight past. You didn't even move. How can you expect it to see us if you don't move?"

"Well, I didn't exactly see you jump up in the air".

"Oh Christ, you could see my mind was wandering. Are you too proud to be seen thumbing a lift?"

That was it as far as Anne was concerned. Up till now she had done what she thought best, when he was just moping about. She hit him round the face, picked up her bags, and made her way back the way they had come. Simon really felt that, although it wasn't terribly fierce. But he hated her for doing it, and didn't think of running after her and apologising, not that he would have done in the first place. He just stood there fuming and becoming very red in the face for several reasons. He certainly was not going to rub his face, it would be like admitting defeat or something.

He glanced down the road to see if Anne was coming back to apologise. Oh Christ, she was getting into a car on the station road. He didn't mean it, he was just tired and het up, that's all, no need to really go.

No good. Stupid trying to bring her back from such a distance. Gone. Simon felt as if half of himself had gone. Would he ever get her back? Would it ever be the same again if they did? Hell, he was back to square one - except this time a lot further away.

What now? Go back or press on? Not much point in going there now really. Back then. Great, she'd left the case that they were sharing between them. He bent over to pick them up. Wet hair flopped over his eyes, and water from the crease in his raincoat collar went down his neck. His jeans were thoroughly drenched, and as a result, every time he took a step there was a horrible squelch of rainwater and blue dye in his tennis shoes. Not only that, there was a cold wind wafting down the road which seemed to freeze all the water on him - which made him even more cold and uncomfortable.

His attempts to thumb a lift to the station were unsuccessful. I mean, who wants a reject from the aqua show in his back seat? So he had to walk it, and it seemed an awful lot longer back than it had there, even though they were wet then. The only thing that kept him from stopping and crying about the whole thing was that he was too damn proud. It would probably have been better if he had, because he just carried on feeling more and more sorry for himself as he went on. Serve himself right if he got double pneumonia, or lockjaw maybe, or perhaps his brain would get waterlogged and he'd go mad, or even

the water would seep through his whole body and make his skin peel off ever so slowly, so that when he dried out he.....

"Hey man!"

Simon heard this faint voice which broke his self-pity and made him look up.

"Hey man, over here."

The voice was coming from some way back where this heap of junk was making funny noises in the middle of the road. There was a column of steam rising from it. Simon didn't know much about cars, but this one obviously was in some kind of trouble - so he'd better go and help then maybe he'd get a lift.

He paddled up to the window of the car and peered inside where there was this cool looking guy - pretty thin, very long black bouncy hair, and gold rimmed glasses which had a blue tint - making him give the appearance of a very sick person, white faced.

"Could you like oblige with a push man" it said.

Simon nodded, put his bags down with a nasty squelch, tried to locate the rear of the vehicle and started pushing. Fifty feet later it started rattling, which apparently meant it had started, because there was a scream of "Contact! Jump in!"

The exhausted Simon raced back for his bags, then back. He clambered in, slung his bags in the back, then slammed the door. The car stopped rattling.

"Er, hey man - it's stopped."

Simon groaned and climbed out again. Another fifty feet and it was going again. This time it was straight in and hang on to yourself.

"Should be there soon" said the guy.

Simon wondered how he knew where he was headed. Anyway, he thought he'd better introduce himself.

"I'm Simon. Thanks for the lift".

"Always help a brother, man. I don't know you. No, no Simons figure. Anyway, I'll get to know you better when we get there".

Get where? Surely a station wasn't a place to get to know someone better. Perhaps this guy thought Simon was going sameplace he was. Better not say anything then, wait until they get there - wherever it was. He was too tired to bother asking questions, anyway this guy was a good remedy for whatever he was suffering from. Maybe there were some more where he was going. That would be brilliant.

I X

The car took a sharp turning left a while later. Well, that at least established the fact that the station was not where they were headed. The question was, did the driver know where they were going? He seemed to, he was keeping a keen eye on the road ahead through his cigarette smoke.

Eventually they came to a fairly large house cut in the trees on the far side of the road. The car jerked round into the gravel car park alongside some other rusting heaps already there. There were various changing coloured lights coming from the windows, and a lot of hairy freaks were milling about the doorway. There was an abundance of noise coming from inside - music, screams, people hitting things (not each other, hoped Simon), and smoke gave the air a mystic look.

"You'd better slip into some cool gear before you join the fun, man. See you later, okay?"

"Thanks a lot."

Simon was flabberghasted. How did that guy ever pass him off as one of them. I mean, they were really cool people, no doubt. Whose party was it anyway? Who'd live out here, in the middle of nowhere? Just think, he'd thought of coming out here of his own accord - what a cool idea that was. Who'd have thought this was where groovy people like these hung out?

He looked around him. The guy who'd brought him had joined a group who were just going in. Each one looked brilliant in their varying clothes. Most of them were carrying a crate of bottles with them, and the odd pile of records.

Then Simon found a cuddly looking girl in front of him. She was about nineteen or twenty, and looked very helpful.

"Wow, you look wet. Why don't you grab a towel and get sorted out upstairs."

"Thanks. Is this your party?"

"Yes, mine and Sam's. Didn't you know? - no I s'pose not. I don't know you, do I?"

"Well no, I guess not - I'm Simon. You're -"

"Maud."

She was very nice - he envied Sam, whoever he was.

"Look, I'll show you up and you can take a bath. Won't take long - party only started a few hours ago, and I can dig out some fresh gear for you. O.K.?"

"You're very kind, are you sure it's ..."

"Come on then."

Simon bewilderedly followed her into the house. She had to fight her way through the people - they all seemed to know her - most of who were guys wanting a kiss or whatever, so it was quite a battle.

She located the bathroom for him and said she'd be along with a towel in a minute and to put his wet stuff into 'the box in the corner'. Simon managed to gather himself enough to realise that it was all very exciting, but how long would it last? Still, make the best of it.

Unfortunately, the bathroom didn't have a lock, so he was forced to take precautions. They obviously didn't believe in privacy out here, and why not? Anyway, he found a lipstick and wrote 'KEEP OUT' on the door in block letters and hoped for the best. He wondered how she intended passing his clothes to him, so now he knew. Jesus, it was brilliant getting out of those sodden garments, and the water was beautifully warm too. Like heaven after what he'd been through the past day. And what a day it had been too. Thoughts quickly flashed through his mind - Teresa, Anne, scattered clothes, back of bus, sore feet, no train, arguments, rain, walking, more rain, more arguments, sore cheek, no Anne, yet more rain, blue dye, more walking, desperation, cranky car, freaky guy, no station, now here. Everything else seemed so far away, as if it was all a bad dream. Then what did that make this? Reality?

Suddenly a guy rolled in and took down his trousers. Simon rapidly went red. The man looked at him with hazy eyes, focussed and then pulled his trousers up again.

"Hey, sorry man - where the hell can you have a crap round here? Jesus!"

Simon told him to try the lavatory, and please close the door. A spontaneous reply, rather a product of extreme embarrassment than anything else. Simon waited, expecting some other desperate person - but no-one came so he settled back to enjoy the warmth. He decided to wash his hair as well, just so he'd feel on top and enjoy himself all the more.

Five minutes later the door opened again, which made him jump, but then a reassuring voice calmed him.

"Only me" it said. "Here's the clothes - they should fit, I'm used to fitting clothes and I sussed you were a thirty."

She had sussed right. She was real nice though, she could see what he was like and hadn't entered at all. A pile of clothes flew in and landed conveniently, purposely, on a chair.

"I hope the water's OK, it wasn't working last week."

"Fine thanks. Look, you've been terribly kind to me - can I do anything to help at all?"

"No love, I know you'd do the same for anyone else - we're all one happy family out here. But there is maybe one thing you could do - but I'll tell you later."

With that she descended the stairs, and was followed by a whole group of people.

Simon felt really happy and humble that he was in this place with a lot of nice people and gay happenings. It was a happy family, and he'd like to feel part of it. He'd appreciate a task to get on with, because then he'd feel part of it all, and it would also save him just aimlessly sussing the place out - wondering where to put his hands.

He decided to get out of the bath and put on the clothes that had been put in there. They were very smart and just the right size too - a pair of tight flared patched velvet trousers, a striped rugby shirt with silk tassels down the seams and an odd pair of socks which seemed to have a peculiar affinity. The assembled gear made him feel a little more like the others, and he made an attempt to fuzz his damp hair. So, feeling reasonably together, he unleashed himself on the throng - with very little effect.

When he reached the bottom of the stairs and was wondering what next, a guy grabbed his arm.

"Hey man, you Simon?"

"Yes, that's right - man." The guy must have recognised him by his anonymity - he wasn't quite yet one of the family.

"Well I'm Jek, and Maud told me to ask you if you could take over the music department."

"Yeah, love to. Thanks Jek."

This was great - not only could he suss the scene out much better from the record deck, but he could also play what sounds he liked and find some interesting new music.

When he finally located the noise, he slung on the nearest record (which happened to be 'Blues Obituary' by The Groundhogs) and sorted through what was there. It was a mixed heap of LP's which ranged from Egg to Sibelius. He had never seen most of them, let alone heard them. Still, he had all evening.

He stared round the room. Blue and ultra violet lighting gave the room a very ethereal effect, people seemed plastic and sometimes grotesque. Some of them were obviously stoned, a million miles away. Others were just happy, dancing to music in their heads, doing somersaults, telling crude jokes. Others were having serious conversations, feeling for inner meaning and the such. Lots of couples already - really getting involved in full view of everyone, but nobody noticed because it was everywhere and the thing to do. But as the evening was relatively young a lot of people were still single and going from person to person until slotting into a groove with someone. So there was still hope for Simon although he felt they were all at least a year or two older than he was. Still, who knows?

Maybe it was the sudden wafting in of cooking smells, but suddenly Simon felt incredibly hungry - in fact just then he realised that he hadn't eaten for more than ten hours. The trail of events had made him forget his stomach, but now it was telling him that he was due for a refill. So he followed his nose and found himself in what was presumably the kitchen, though it looked more like a garage - not exactly the most up to date utensils ever - he noticed a couple of warming pans and a heavy black oven.

Maud was in there, cooking something in a pan. She didn't look up when he came in, but said "I thought you might like this, you can't have eaten in ages the way you look. I hope you like eggs - it's all we've got I'm afraid."

Every time she spoke Simon was amazed by her perceptiveness and kindness. She must enjoy all this, how nice to meet people who could manage under such conditions - and still be able to hold brilliant parties like this one.

"You're just too kind to be true."

"Nonsense, you're helping us with sound anyway. Tell me, how did you find out about the party?"

Simon explained that he hadn't known where he was

going, and then related most of the events that had led up to his being there while she fiddled about with his nourishment. She was most-interested and sympathetic to his troubles, which made him feel really great - she was the first person who properly understood what he was about, and you could be sure she really meant what she was saying - whatever she happened to be doing at the time.

She finished preparing his food, and they both went over to the sound so he could eat it and talk to her at the same time. By now Simon was feeling he could face almost anything, and he welcomed it when Maud called across some people (who included Sam) to listen to him. He went over what had happened again, except this time in more detail and more calmly. They were all into his story, which surprised him because he thought that more interesting things happened each day for them. They were very interested when he came to the bit about the house he had rented and said that they knew it well and offered any services they could to fix the place up. Simon was most pleased about this, but he told them that he would have to go home first to get things together there as it was all very complicated. They of course didn't see it quite the way he did, but they believed in him.

"Look man, we could get the place together by the time you come back again. I know this guy who'll let us have materials no questions asked."

"That's right Simon, we'd all do our bit and it would take no time to put the place back on its feet."

He now felt part of the family, and told them that he'd accept their offer, as long as they'd come to an opening up party as soon as he came back. So they all shook hands and started opening bottles and laughing and freaking to the music.

Simon really enjoyed himself and before he knew it it was the next day. The party was still officially on, but he had to get back and sort things out, so he thanked Maud again and left with a slight headache in a car with a few happy people. They dropped him off at the station saying they'd see him at his party in the house that would be kitted out in a few days.

So there he was with a couple of cases at the station, so he piled onto the first train and fell asleep.

X

Parents not surprised to see him back - Anne had told them what had happened on the phone. She had also sent him a letter which he would receive the next day.

Simon was conscious that everything around him was dull and uninteresting. People seemed boring, and his parents were a real drag all of a sudden. He never got on too well with them at the best of times, but now it was much worse. Food didn't interest him that day - he just wanted to get back to those real people, and he wanted to take someone he liked with him.

He had to get out, so he did. Went to say hallo to the town centre. After a while even this bored him, so he decided to go back through the park and sort things out one way or the other with Anne. Now, the park did funny things for this lad. By now it was getting fairly dark, and he came to a place which made him look up into the sky for the stars. But there were no stars that night, just bleakness. His sky was grey too. He remembered the song he always thought of here. No, it didn't fit, it just wasn't the same at all. It also made him remember the good times he had had with Anne, when they both swore that nothing would come between them. How foolish that seemed now. How could he face her? He couldn't bear to leave her, and that was a fact. But he knew her so well - once she had made her mind up about something, nothing could change it however hard it was for her. Should he go now, or wait until he gets the letter and she's calmed down a bit? Hang on though, maybe the letter finishes it - then he would be too late the next day. No, now it had to be.

He rang the bell. No answer. Rang again. Nope. Hell! Too late for her to be back soon - probably out all night. She must have known he'd come for her as soon as he got back. She obviously thinks it's all over. How damn feminine - just one bad day after all the time they had had together before. She wasn't being fair.

Laughing. Coming from round the corner. Sounded like Anne. Two voices. A sixth sense told Simon to hide quickly. He respected this and ran over the road behind a large tree. No, he hadn't been seen. Yes, there were two of them - he could recognise Anne's silhouette anywhere, but the other was quite a mystery

mystery. It must have been someone she knew quite well because they seemed to be enjoying themselves. Ah, they were coming up to a lamp-post.

It was a bloke. Shit no, it couldn't be. It was. What a bastard, taking her when she was down. Or was it her idea? Simon felt really angry. He watched scornfully as they stopped outside her house. Then he held her and was about to kiss her. Simon couldn't stand it. She had knocked him off balance, it was so unfair. He ran as fast as he could down the road. They both looked up, startled. Anne couldn't see anyone when she had turned round, and he said it was just some kid or other.

Far from being a kid, it was a scared young man who was learning things the hard way. A man at almost seventeen - running like he can remember doing so many times as a child, being chased by unseen nasty things and big bad men with beards. Shadows would seem to hold dark secrets then, they did now. Running from a painful reality this time. Very painful. First time always worst, had to learn - couldn't go through this again though. Nowhere to go, nobody left to turn to.

Simon stopped dead. He was panting and his face was red and streaming. He was crying. Who cares? But it was just beautiful - what he should have done a long time before. In his tears ran the weight which was crushing his mind into oblivion. His anger, fear, resentment, suspiciousness, hate, conscience fell into a puddle on the ground. He looked at it and it was barely noticeable - but he could feel that its weight had been transferred from him to the ground. All that was left to him was faith and trust. Destiny was once again with him.

Inevitably, coffee sprang to his mind. Ah yes, there was a coffee bar just down the road. Great! He had enough for one too. With a bit of luck, he might even see someone he knew down there as well.

X I

"Is that really you?"

A voice entered Simon's ear as he sipped his coffee. He looked up and there was this attractive girl standing there. He didn't for the life of him think he knew her, so he assumed

her words were for somebody else.

"Simon - remember me? The kid with pigtails and the large doll?"

She was talking to him. Pigtails? Doll? Oh no, it couldn't be the little menace that went to junior school with him.

"It's not Laura Mason is it?"

"That's right - you do remember. It's been so long. I hope you didn't mind me calling you like that, but I was so surprised to see you - here of all places."

"Oh, I'm sorry - please sit down. I can't say I'd have recognised you unless you drew my attention like that. How are you?"

"Fine, and you?"

"Oh never mind all the crap. Where do you hang out most of your spare time?"

"At Wink's Disco mostly - it's over the other side of town, I expect you know it."

Simon didn't know it, but he didn't say anything. He made a snap decision to save getting thoughts together all over again.

"Hey Laura, I know this is a bit sudden, but we could get on well I think, and I've got this house out in the country with some great people living around that I want some people to fill with me. How about you?"

Laura had to blink and try to piece together what he was asking (she was always being asked to do things by blokes, and usually accepted without thinking but this was slightly different).

"Well, sounds great but I'd have to ask Laurie."

"Who's Laurie?" A complication.

"Oh, my boy friend."

This was a complication - he had jumped in just a bit too quickly, hadn't done enough background work beforehand. Still, the house could hold a fair amount of people, so he supposed that there would be room for those two and the person he'd ask.

"I'm sure he'd want to though."

"Yeah, I'm sure he would too." Simon had formed a low opinion of Laurie in his mind already. He imagined a guy with cutting black sideburns, black suede jacket and a BSA 500.

"It's just that he does tend to get hay fever when the

weather turns nasty, and then he can't play tennis."

Hay fever? Tennis? Simon had obviously been too quick in his assumptions about this guy. He'd better slow down before his predictions got him into trouble. But tennis, I mean I ask you, tennis. Hardly the talking point of the day. Anyway, at least it meant that he had some sort of a chance with Laura while they were on holiday - unless she was stupid and preferred this poofy sounding bloke in which case she was not worth the trouble. Yeah, stick to plan A - get someone else as well.

"Well, tell you what, give me your phone number and I'll give you a ring sometime tomorrow to see if it's all OK, right?"

"Fine, it's 776843."

"Right - well I must go now, but we can talk over old times next time we meet. Phone you tomorrow anyway."

"Okay, thanks for the offer, see you."

Simon left as if he had a million things to do and the rest of the world was holding him up. In actual fact, he was trying to show Laura he had grown up a lot more than he thought she had. Really he was going straight home to bed. She seemed reasonably indifferent about him, apart from the fact it was very interesting to meet people you haven't seen for five years.

Anyway, that was two people Simon was fairly sure of taking with him on round two of his country excursions. Now all that remained was for him to find someone for himself to go with, and that he would do the next day.

X I I

That night Simon had a few pangs of regret about what had happened the day before. But he did his best to always think of the future, not of the past. At present his mind was still fairly confused, but his aims were clear.

The next day came like a breath of fresh air. The sky had cleared and the sun was beginning to get back to work. The birds were once again drifting in the sky, telling everyone to come out and enjoy themselves. One of those people would be Simon. He greeted the bright day with a smile, and got straight out of bed and opened the windows. He smelt the air - yes, despite the pollution he could swear to detecting the fresh air. Mmm, nice wash this morning.

Breakfast and out! Really so beautiful to walk under the sky when it's being nice to you. Where was he going though? That's a point. Hey, I wonder how you'd find out where Teresa lives? That is a point. Phone book? Oh hell, what was her surname? Teresa - ah! Mitchell! Phone booth? One round the corner.

Simon disappeared into a phone booth. It was on the corner of the road, and so it was very hot and claustrophobic inside. Now, Mitchell Mitchell Mitchell ah here! Now what address was it? Oh yeah, 83 Utah Park - here, 429110. He dialled the number and looked out of the window of the booth while he waited for the pips to start. While he was waiting, this incredible blonde walked past. She had a superb figure and a short tight summer dress. Simon felt so helpless, stuck in that cramped box. Pip pip pip pip ... tuppence in ... click ..

"Hello - 429110."

"Hello, is that Teresa speaking?"

"No, I'll get her - who's this calling please?"

"Um - Simon, Simon King."

"Simon King. All right, hold on a minute please ..."

There was a click and then silence. Simon strained to see if he could still see that bird, but she was out of sight by now. Well, she was outtasight all the time, but never mind.

"Hello, Simon?"

"Hi Teresa, how are you?"

"Fine - but what are you phoning me for, I thought you and Anne were in that place in the country you rented?"

"Yeah, well we're not - and the fact is we've split. You know how these things can happen, tempers fray and before you know it, it's all over."

"Oh, I'm sorry" - but was she? "Then you sound in good spirits - you used to be very fond of her."

"I was, but that was in the past and I'd rather forget all about it. Anyway, I didn't put in two pence to pour my troubles out to you. Look, this place is still there for the taking and I was wondering if you'd like to come - there's two other people coming as well."

"Me? Crikey that's great. Who are the other two?"

"Oh, just an old school friend and her boy friend. But that doesn't matter, the point is can you come?"

"Well yes I suppose so, how much will it cost though?"

"Is fifteen pounds all right? - I daresay we could get by for three weeks on that - and anyway I've got some friends up there who'll help out if things get rough. My idea is we could maybe get some work on a farm or something. - you know, in exchange for eggs and such."

"Yes, I've got some money in the post office, and anyway my parents would give me most of it."

"That's fine. Well I must ring off now, I've got a lot of things to sort out."

"OK? but before you go just answer me one thing."

"Fire away."

"Why did you pick me to come?"

"Because you're pretty and I like you and we can have some fun together. OK? Ring you back tonight, bye."

"Er - bye ..."

Simon rang off, very pleased with himself. Now, where was that piece of paper with Laura's adress on it? Simon rummaged about in his pocket. Hell, where was it? He was getting very hot and het up as he struggled in the tiny space for the piece of screwed up paper. Not being able to stand the humidity any longer he piled out of the box into the sweet smelling air, almost losing his balance in the process. Ah! He found the elusive item, and so he'd hold his breath and dive in again. But while he had been struggling for the number a rotund woman had bounced in there when he wasn't looking, damn her. She'd obviously be nattering for hours in there, so it wasn't worth waiting. Just find another phone booth, that's all. Oh yeah, there was one in the post office in the high street. Not far, brought him near the common anyway - might be someone he knew there.

To get there involved descending a fairly steep hill, so by the time he hit the busy local shopping area he was quite hot and thirsty. Luckily there was a fish and chip shop next to the post office, so he bought himself a refreshing coke. Now he was topped up he could face another stuffy phone booth. In actual fact the post office was a very cold place inside, and even worse inside the booth because the metal took all the heat out of his browning arms if he leaned against it. 776843. He dialled. Another wait. More pips. Another two pence.

"Hello, is that Simon?"

"Yyyes." Simon was surprised that the person knew who it was, because it was not Laura's voice - sounded much more mature, probably her mother.

"Yes, she was expecting your call but I'm afraid she's not in. She told me to tell you that she'd be round your house this afternoon."

"OK, thanks anyway."

"Goodbye."

"Bye." He crossly replaced the receiver. Typical! Anyway, it probably meant she was coming otherwise she'd have left a message to the contrary. Simon left the booth and walked into the bright sunshine and crossed the road over to the common. There was a row of trees along the side of the road just before the large area of grass began, and Simon lodged under the shade of one of these while he looked around to see if there was anyone he knew about.

There were plenty of cretins sweating themselves to death on the soccer pitches that he knew only because they went to the same school - that was all. It made him think though, some of those kids would probably get better qualifications than him - it was all wrong somewhere, but it didn't really bother him too much. He was just glad he wasn't like them. He changed his sights, and noticed that there were a few groups loing about. They were either casually strutting about or fanning themselves and chewing gum in the shade of tall trees. They didn't concern Simon either because they were mostly comprehensive and mixed school kids, not that he felt he was better than them or anything - he just couldn't get on with that type of people, that's all.

His attention was diverted when two girls paraded past him. They weren't all that old, so when they started making eyes and indications he turned away, and they stuck their fingers up at him. So much for them! Probably mixed school.

Nobody much else about - oh no, hang about. There were some people sunbathing over the far side, their long hair glistening on the ground behind them. Maybe he knew them - might as well go over anyway, lots of time to kill until lunch. As he walked over he noticed how bored everyone seemed to be, and he wished he could take them all with him just to show them that life was worth living as long as you know how to enjoy it.

it. He certainly enjoyed life, it was very precious to him and not nearly long enough.

As he came nearer to the bathers he thought he vaguely recognised them. Yes, it was Pete. Strange to see him out in the air for a change - and who was that with him? It was Dave.

"Hi" said Simon, casting a shadow over the two of them.

"Hey man" said Pete. "You're like standing in my sun, you know?"

"Oh sorry." Simon squatted down behind them. It was rather uncomfortable with his shirt on under the hot sun, but he didn't want to join them in case it seemed too presumptuous of him (though he felt that he knew Pete better than Dave did).

"I didn't know you knew Pete" he said to Dave.

"Yeah, of course I do - we share the same digs."

Simon was half surprised, half expecting that.

"How come, Pete? There was a time when you used to say you'd never share your pad."

"Well man" said Pete, not batting an eyelid. "I've like had this vision which told me my direction was all wrong. So I ditched the drug scene and stopped writing - that's why I need a flat mate to share the overheads."

"But what about this sunbathing bit?"

"Yeah, well that's part of it all man. It's kind of a substitute for the sitar bit, and there's no electrics cost either. Really it's to be in contact with the earth, like it's all spontaneous now."

"But what happens when it gets cold and there's no sun, or it rains or even when winter comes?"

"Well, like I hibernate or go live somewhere else. I mean, if it's good enough for nature it's good enough for me - that's where the vision was at, man."

"Where do you come in all this, Dave?"

"Oh, I just tag along and meet some of Pete's friends and make some of my own as well."

"That's cool. Well I'll leave you guys to soak up mother nature for a while. See you around."

"Yeah, see you Simon."

"Likewise man."

Funny how you can meet the people you least expect in the most peculiar circumstances. Fancy Dave going around with Pete though! He must be getting in with a cool lot of people with Pete. Simon was slightly envious and hoped he wasn't missing much.

X I I I

After lunch, Simon was forced to sit about and wait for the arrival of Laura which was a bit of a bind on such a nice day. Still, the sooner he got all this sorted out the sooner he'd be on his way with Teresa to the little country paradise. He busied himself with little jobs that always needed doing around the house. While he was rummaging about, he came across the clothes that had been in the bag he shared with Anne that day. He quickly decided not to take them round personally, but make a parcel out of them there. The neat way in which she had packed her belongings made him think of her and the times they had had again, but luckily a ring at the door stopped him from becoming melancholy. He looked at the clock and tutted at Laura's punctuality. Anyway he went to answer it.

"Hello Simon." It was Teresa. "I thought I'd come and talk about this thing instead of over the phone."

Simon was very glad to see her and put Laura to the back of his mind completely. He was a bit of a sight though, and wondered if this was the right time to make a definite move for her - I mean it was the first time they had met face to face since that day in the coffee bar (still vivid recollections of each other from that) and he had just broken up with Anne, which she knew.

"Come in, take a seat - I'll get us a couple of iced drinks."

She certainly wouldn't say no to an iced drink, so she did what he said. She noticed the pile of clothing on the floor and wondered whose they were. It was obvious that Simon had just been doing something with them. He saw her puzzling over them as he came in with the moist glasses.

"They're Anne's."

"Oh- what are you doing with them?"

"I'm going to wrap them and send them back to her."

"Why, don't you want to give them to her yourself?"

"Well, not really."

"No, I s'pose not. I'll take them for you if you like."

"Would you? Thanks, it'll save me some hefty postage."

They both sipped their drinks. Simon wondered what to say next. Teresa was waiting for him to say something.

"It's a bit silly us just sitting here" said Simon eventually, and it was really.

"Mmm" said Teresa, laughing slightly in her glass.

"Oh, say something."

Teresa took his hand.

"It's pretty damn obvious why I asked you to come."

"Yes, it is." Teresa looked so nice then. Maybe she was preparing herself for something. He was just about to lean over and kiss her, when there was the sound of a noisy car parking just outside.

Shit, thought Simon. It must be Laura, but whose car was it? He grudgingly dragged out into the passage and opened the front door with a sudden blaze of light. Outside was a huge car which looked like it had come almost straight out of a twenty's gangster movie. It had all the trimmings - small back window, running board, large gleaming headlamps, long bonnet and tank with bumpers. The only things which made it more feasible were that it was bright green and there was a guy with long straggly hair driving it.

Laura walked up to Simon looking pleased with herself. Teresa came up behind Simon and put her arm round him.

"Hi!" said Laura. "Look what I've got hold of." She pointed at the car. Simon was wondering what to say. "That's Riley" she said, indicating the guy who was leaning on the bonnet. Simon nodded to the bloke who acknowledged him. "I hope you don't mind him coming with us, but he has got a car and he's the sort of person I think you want."

Simon was slightly annoyed with her for inviting him into the thing without asking him first, but he didn't say anything because she was right, and they were in need of more help - especially help with transport.

"Fine. When do you want to go? Tomorrow?"

"Well actually, Riley's all ready to go now."

"Now! Christ, who's in charge of this thing?"

"Well, you are but we're ready to go speaking for ourselves."

"What about Laurie?"

"Yes, him as well. He's ready as soon as we can pick him up."

Simon looked at Teresa and she faintly nodded.

"Tell you what" he said after a moment's deliberation in his mind. "You pick up Laurie and come back here by which time I should be ready. And then we can go for Teresa. Can

you drop her off first though?"

Laura nodded eagerly, and whisked Teresa off to the car. Teresa managed to snatch a kiss before she temporarily left Simon.

"'Bout three quarters of an hour" called Simon.

The car lurched off towards Teresa's house. Simon watched it disappear, then prepared to pack his things again and write a note to his parents. He noticed Anne's things again and decided that if they were that important to her she'd be round for them in any case.

Some time later the car arrived for him, and he slung all his gear into the large boot and dived into the hot car. They picked up Teresa and her stuff and off they went, Laura and Laurie saying and doing nothing much in the back, Simon and Teresa discovering each other in the front and Riley saying virtually nothing and driving the car.