

Don Bloch

## A Meeting of Minds

MIM SPANIER'S primary motive for wanting to sleep with Collings was curiosity. That's what she told herself. Not about the act, either, but about her feelings afterwards. She couldn't pretend that what she felt for the man amounted to passion, although she was reasonably sure she would enjoy herself. Collings had a reputation. More especially, what preyed on Mim's mind was whether letting a man she admired make love to her would mean any fundamental change in their relations.

When finally they got together, things did not go as she'd expected. But then did they ever? Room 311 at the Ramada Inn on Huntington Avenue had a view of the parking lot, three-quarters empty in the middle of the day. It was a blue room. The air inside was stale, the sheets stiff with detergent.

"I checked the paper. There should be Haydn." Mim fiddled for all she was worth, but still could only raise static on the console radio. "I'm sorry."

When Collings rolled on to his back and started to study the plaster ceiling, Mim's toes began to curl. She was very self-conscious about his erection. He was like a sundial.

"I want to know you better first", Collings said, looking at her at last. "Do you mind?" Tears were brimming in his eyes. Helen could reach out and touch his wheelchair beside the bed. Who was taking advantage of whom? That was the question. With the fingers of one hand she played spider with the spokes of a wheel.

"Mind, no. I am a little surprised."

The work they had brought with them lay on the plastic dressing-table against the far wall. Her briefcase side by side with his, a few papers spilling out. His mighty bunch of keys. Helen had helped Collings undress after he had first methodically, in silence, removed all her clothes. He kissed each new area of her body revealed to him. A kiss of identification, a moist labelling. There had never been such a long period without words between them. Traffic on the street, footsteps in the corridor, some late riser through the wall sneezing—all the sounds of the world were sad.

Mim sat up in bed and in prim imitation of a little girl smoothed the counterpane. Collings had a large, flaccid body, his head a miracle of bold carving. "How much better?" she was tempted to ask. Instead she decided on seduction. She reached out her hand. "Can you feel that?"

Collings took her hand away gently, kissed the fingertips. Side by side they sat, staring in front of them, Collings smoking a cigar. When he put it out, Helen began to giggle.

"What?" Collings asked, laughing. "What is it?" She tucked into him, hair scratching his cheek and neck, her lips brushing his chest, her whole graceful body curled now, shaking with laughter.

"Think what the papers would make of this", Mim gasped. "The scandal. One more argument against bussing. And it's so"—there was a sudden hard edge to Mim's voice which killed Collings's smile—"god-damn innocent."

Usually when they were together they talked about their children and the world of the future. A world they would never live to see. Better, safer, kindlier. Collings had a son and daughter by a former marriage, before his accident. They were slightly older and wilder than Mim's two boys. It was one way to keep each other at a distance really, a kind of crossing of swords. Or there was their work. Details, tactics. Now that they wished for intimacy, however, and were bumbling in that direction, there was nothing to talk about. They drifted into a near sleep, submerging in the room's blueness. Neither was confident whether pressure from a hand or cheek, a shadowy caress, was intentional or not. Then Collings sighed and shifted on to his side and trailed a large hand between her legs. She felt as if he could pick her up with one finger. Collings's eyes were closed. Hers were close to his and open.

Irving, Mim's husband, intruded into her thoughts so that her heart moved violently inside her like an empty swing. "Time to get up", she told Collings, and went to dress in the bathroom. How could Irving disapprove? "I'd hate to have that man for an enemy." The last time Collings had come to dinner, that's what Irving had said as soon as the door closed behind him. "Poor devil." Collings. Did it make sense to go to bed with a man because you admired him—and you were afraid giving your body was the only way he would believe that? Now look what had happened.

MIM SHOWERED briefly. It seemed a shame not to use any of the nice thick towels. And she wanted to be alone a while longer with her body. As the possibility of making love receded, Mim's desire increased, send-

ing her up on her toes. When she bared her teeth to the shower spray, she thought she heard the telephone. The whole time she dried herself off, and later, adjusting her clothes, shoes last of all, Mim avoided herself in the wall-size mirror above the double sink. The image—so happy—might not be familiar.

“Collings?” Mim found the crusader for black rights naked in his wheelchair, peering down through a part in the curtains into the parking lot below. His face was grim. Mim remembered with a pang how she had been so sure his face would look different in the act of love. The rock would dissolve, soften, turn childish even. Without talking, Mim handed Collings his shirt, which needed laundering. She dressed the bottom half of

Collings’s body, breathing hard from the effort. There were name-tags sewed inside his socks. They belonged to his son.

“I’m being threatened”, he said, and smoothed her hair gently with one hand. “Phone calls. My watch, please.” When Mim handed him his watch, he pulled her towards him and buried his face in her stomach. He grabbed at her breasts, cupped her buttocks and pressed. Through her skirt, her slip and pants his breath was hot and spread, liquefying her. Then his humped shoulders began to shake. He looked up and to her surprise Mim saw the buffalo was laughing.

“And it’s so goddamn innocent!” he said, and they kissed, laughing.

## The Lucubration

Rain drums our iron roof, beats  
retreat down the dark coast, night  
like black ash presses us prone  
as relics from death’s dreamworld,  
rasping dry lyrics from life . . .  
A third asleep! Ten years in  
our marriage-bed’s bas relief,

limbs flying in a fresco of  
mock youth, grey hair awry. . . You  
tense in that paleolithic world  
which made us (Lives unchanging  
as birdsong through millennial  
seasons of the boundless self.)  
waiting amongst the sleeping

tribe by the Horn Gates for truth’s  
crazy dance: prophecies of  
plague! Clues of the calculus!  
Futures in babies’ organs!  
Drought in Egypt! A round Earth!  
Asclepius, god of the sick,  
do we still owe Socrates’

cock? His daemon, not reason’s  
constraint, let him swallow  
Philosophy’s accolade:  
it haunts our footnotes to him  
unacknowledged — except for  
sceptics’ immoderation,  
claims that the rational is real

are titular talking heads  
of state; politics porcine;  
wars prime-timed, edited, glossed;  
transnationals’ interest  
screened by cartoon, sport, news with  
shots of non-consumers’ deaths . . . and  
consciousness’s intermittent. . .

estate. . . The house creaks. Sea winds  
stoop on the Peninsula. . . .  
Dissatisfied man under  
smug stars, grandfather, I fear  
for love’s trusting innocence  
in futures media-bland where  
all the world’s a stage; actors

The Angel of the Lord lights  
in the garden to explain  
the morphology of chance:  
the moon fits the eclipsed sun  
by shrinking as she climbs, coy  
maiden to her marriage-bed,  
mind dark with coincidence.

*Selwyn Pritchard*