

Fools Breathe . . .

by Nancy Rodgers

"Conrad has always been such a quiet boy," said his mother, her vague blue eyes showing complacency. "He's never caused me any trouble."
 "For my part, I think boys aren't boys unless they show a little spirit!" The neighbor lady, with her great, stuffed bosom and her malicious monkey face, sensed possible insult; her oldest son was in jail, her daughter had married unhappily; and her third child, only twelve, was already lying and stealing.
 It was rumored that he did much worse; although no one heard official reports, mothers herded their children inside when they saw him coming.
 "Yes, sometimes I do worry about Conrad." It was absurd to think that Mrs. Stuart could be insulted; she credited everyone with her own kind nature, clucking a little at war news or rape in a far-off city, never realizing that events were perpetrated by human beings like herself.
 It was fortunate that she had always lived in small towns; the crimes presented on her doorstep came from those whom she knew so well that it was all a horrible mistake. "It's about time for him to be coming home from school, and Esmeralda, too."
 "Why, it is almost four o'clock. My boy will be hungry and yelling his head off if I'm not there to give him a snack." The neighbor lady put her hands flat on the sofa preparatory to rising, but folded them in her lap again as the front door opened.
 When the tall, thin girl who had entered saw her mother's guest, she banged the door shut with such violence that its frosted pane of glass shivered.
 "Why, Esmeralda! That's no way to shut a door."
 "I know, Mother. I'm sorry." She was lifting the curtain to leave the room when Mrs. Stuart halted her: "Aren't you going to greet our neighbor?"
 "Hello, Mrs. Schwartz." The girl's brevity was discourteous, intentionally so. She did not like the woman, or her family, or the school, or the town in which she lived.
 She lived entirely for the future; she was, however, as much of a realist as an arrogant intellectual can ever be. She thought that the future would cease to be when she left Arcadia (what optimists the founding fathers of her hamlet had been!), and life would begin.
 As the living future came closer, for she was a senior in high school, the sharp past receded, and the lacunae of the present became almost bearable. Thus she could add, somewhat pleasantly, "How are you?"
 "Oh, I'm just fine, dear, but where's your little brother?"
 "He'll be a little late." Esmeralda debated; then she realized that Mrs. Schwartz would learn of the incident anyway. "He's being kept after school for fighting with your son."
 "Conrad—fighting!" Mrs. Stuart was confounded. Her consternation almost transformed the neighbor's indignation into joy.
 "Now, Mother, it wasn't Conrad's fault, I'm sure. He won't say anything about it, but you know that Gary is older and bigger."
 "Well, really, my boy's a good boy!" And Mrs. Schwartz got up and lumbered out.
 The mother, always uncertain when confronted with an emergency, let her go, but remarked after a few seconds, "Conrad will have to apologize."
 "Mother, he will not!" In her anger, the daughter, with her dark hair and eyes, looked like a mahogany statue.
 "How can you use that tone of voice when speaking to your mother?" Mrs. Stuart's mouth began to tremble; the familiar light-green lines formed around her mouth and nose.
 "I'm sorry; I didn't mean to say that, but he shouldn't have to."
 "Well, we'll see." She reached for the box of Kleenex.
 It was five-thirty, a cold-pink chill dusk, before Conrad came

home. He set his books on the parlor table, stood for a moment in the quiet and then went through the curtain to the dining room.
 "Hello, Mother." She was spreading the plastic tablecloth that he hated; its flowers looked like dry, slimy tentacles.
 "I didn't hear you come in, Conrad. You're always so quiet." And then she remembered that the unprecedented had happened; he had been a bad boy. "Esmeralda told me that you had a fight with Gary."
 "Yes, I did." The boy was pale and handsome; his body seemed compacted all of one piece, with no protruding joints or bones. It was not that he was fat; rather, he somehow seemed a perfect man in miniature as he stood there, waiting for his mother to speak again.
 "Did you apologize?" Mrs. Stuart's kindness followed social rules; it knew no larger ethical or moral boundaries.
 Conrad knew this; therefore he lied deliberately. "Yes, Mother, I did."
 "Why did you fight?" She would not have asked this question ordinarily; she was not concerned with causes. The event must have upset her.
 "No particular reason. It won't happen again, Mother."
 "All right, dear, but I will have to tell your father."
 This was the moment for which Conrad had carefully prepared. "Oh, please don't—you will just worry him. You know he has to work hard, and I do promise not to do it again. Please, Mother."
 Mrs. Stuart hesitated; her blunt, garden-grimed hands smoothed the tablecloth. She was afraid of her husband, not because he was unkind, but because he was remote. It was rash to precipitate him into domestic reality, because then he would notice the disordered state of the house and the fact that she had planted a garden again this year, strictly against the doctor's orders.
 She felt her way through life like a blind animal; only when a cause and effect had been repeated many times could she be sure of her role.
 Her role in this case, she decided without consciously thinking about it, would be to preserve her. "Well, we won't mention it this time. Now go wash your hands and set the table."
 From the bathroom he called, "Where's Mary?" He hated the name of Esmeralda almost as much as did the daughter herself; the doll for which she was named, Mrs. Stuart's childhood playmate, sat on the dining-room buffet and leered eternally.
 Many years ago Esmeralda had, in a fit of childish spite, painted the doll's mouth and nails with red polish, an offense for which she had received her only spanking; the desecration of the fetish, for the polish could not be removed without damaging the doll, could still move Mrs. Stuart to tears.
 "She's taken the dogs for a walk. They had been cooped up all day."
 "Has Coyote delivered yet?"
 Conrad was so matter-of-fact that his mother blushed; when Coyote had begun to swell, she had told Esmeralda to inform her brother of the facts of life. This was the first indication that he had been told.
 "No, she's not ready."
 "What are we going to do with the pups?"
 "We'll have to sell them; we can't keep too many dogs or the neighbors will complain." She might have explained further but just then Mr. Stuart came in through the back door.
 He always entered through the kitchen to dump the groceries which his wife ordered and he carried home.
 "What are we having for supper tonight?" was his perfunctory greeting which never need be answered. He sat down in an easy chair in the parlor to read until dinner was served; this, too, was

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As Is Fitting . . .

by F. X. Ross

A bemused smile on his face, Dodg-37492 turned to lean his elbows on the marble parapet edging the roof-garden that he might look out over The City. His admiring eyes sought the busy street, far below him, where the Robocars whistled along bumper to bumper and the traveling sidewalks were packed with sleek, graceful Robots, powerful of body and of mind. Dodg-37492 felt a glow of warm satisfaction and kinship that made him smile softly.
 An empty Martini glass, just removed from the Master's study, twirled idly in his flexible fingers, the last of the strange ingredients just borne to his delicate senses on the warm, summer air. "Dry, vaddy dry," he thought, and almost felt the thrill of the laughter he had known before his last Service Modification.
 The peculiar affectations of others, even of the Masters, still intrigued and delighted him, however, though he could not, now, laugh aloud as when he was last owned. This Master did not think laughter tasteful in Dodg's kind—and Dodg, thinking about it now, realized that probably it was not seemly in him to imitate the Builders of The City.
 The tiny bulb of his wrist call-signal glowed faintly and Dodg turned quickly. He sat the empty

glass on the table beside him and hurried inside, to the library. The Master didn't like to be kept waiting, and Dodg wanted always to serve him so well that he should never have cause to reprimand him.
 The Builders of The City, thought Dodg, and he glowed. The creators of the New World where, as the Master had once told him, life was now "vaddy, vaddy good." There was something very right in his serving such great ones! He hurried into the library.
 "Yes, Master," he offered, letting his adoring eyes fleetingly glimpse the Beautiful One as he bowed with a timid eagerness.
 "Another Martini, Dodge," said the Master, without looking up from his scroll-reader. "As always, Dodg . . . dry, vaddy dry."
 Dodge bowed assent and backed from the room. But outside, and his stupefying awe somewhat diminished, the smile again found its way to his lips. "Martinis," he thought, and "vaddy, vaddy dry!"
 But his amusement was altogether sympathetic and not, he hoped, impudent—for his sleek, graceful Master, powerful of body and of mind, was a Robot . . . one of the Builders of The City and of the New World . . . and it was only fitting that Man should serve and know his place.

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... And a time to look

Spring is really the time of the Cuckoo.
 I say that with little resignation (only—
 who's what is the Cuckoo?
 If he is that goofy little bird who
 pops from a slatted window
 on the wall
 Singing:
 Cuckoo—Cuckoo . . .
 Then—
 I sit up in my slatted window
 (it's really a brick house, though)
 —tee hee—
 And watch the funny little men and women
 rocking and rolling and picnicking
 And breathing
 Freshened Pinkish Spring AIR
 And I
 (with a silly expression)
 Sing:
 Cuckoo—Cuckoo . . .
 Optimistic Richard

A CERTIFICATE WAITS FOR ME

(With Apologies to Walt Whitman and E. B. White, plus a Democratic Visa out of Teachers College)
 A certificate waits for me, it contains nothing, all is lacking,
 Yet nothing were lacking if wisdom were not lacking, or if the endorsement of the right college were not lacking,
 O teaching, and the pleasures of unemployment,
 O libraries for sheer emptiness unrival'd.
 Fern Hubbard Orme my eidolon
 I, freely enslaved, cordially welcomed to leave,
 My arm around John Dewey and the President of Columbia Teachers College,
 My taste in books guarded by the spirit of the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice
 (From your memories, sad brothers, from the fitful risings and callings I heard)
 I to teaching devoted, brother of garage mechanics, soda jerks, farmers, football players
 (It is not necessary to have an education to graduate from high school)
 I connoisseur of activities, friend of connoisseurs of activities everywhere
 I, not obligated to teach anything not in the text, free to reject Emerson, Milton, Shakespeare, Gide, Aristophanes, Newman,
 I, in perfect health except for a slight twitch, press'd for time, having too many more years to live
 Now celebrate this opportunity.
 Come, I will make the profession indissoluble,
 I will teach the most expurgated books the sun ever shone upon,
 I will start divine magnetic groups
 With the love of students
 With the life-long love of distinguished censors.
 I strike out all the Old Books.

THE MAZE

Manhood approaches and I stop,
 I revolve upon the essence of life past
 And that which is to come,
 I view humanity.
 Each human being as a minute white sphere
 Appears before me and is transformed into black,
 Then cast blindly onto a vast maze of callings,
 Such is life.
 And each dark spot moves unknowingly on,
 Charmed by a magnetism not of men,
 Carried by a force no living thing can see,
 And so is man's pattern made.
 One slip left—ten thousand different courses take
 Our dot. Down wide green slots, through
 Carefree channels and into precious straits.
 Hush! (A man is being made.)
 And when our product is evolved it pauses, dries, hardens.
 A man emerges. Over his body he spreads
 A coating to protect him from the storm of insults
 Of his fellow men.
 Wait! Do not cross him, now that he is made,
 Or he grows angry.
 Or he grows angry.
 Yet one slip right on life's labyrinth,
 We might have found our ruler—
 Begging bread.
 —John Noble

Kathleen Walton . . .

Vernal Equinoxical Fever...

A serious, debilitating and contagious illness has pervaded the campus of the University of Nebraska in the past weeks. The alarm aroused by this virus led to consultation with local and national experts who found it to be nationwide in scope.
 The symptoms are many and comparatively easy to recognize. Unfortunately, mere recognition of this disease, now classified as vernal equinoxical fever, is not enough. There apparently is no cure for VEF, as it is popularly called, except time and the natural health of the youths who so readily fall victim to it.
 Doctors frantically searching for an effective remedy are operating on a recent grant for this purpose set up by a former university professor, Doctor J. Snarl Snarf.
 Doctor Snarf, since his retirement two years ago, has maintained an active interest in the welfare of the students through his work with the State Liquor Commission.
 Although no cure has as yet been discovered, the scientists have been able to prove that VEF is closely allied to another widespread malady, senioritis. Research on VEF has been published by the Penitentiary and University News, with an article by the director of the Research Institute, Dr. J. B. Corn.
 Scientists everywhere were saddened by the sudden illness of Dr. Corn soon after the publication of his article. He was apparently infected while studying several cases brought in to the Institute's Observatory. Dr. Corn's illness was first detected by his co-workers after he had suffered several apparent seizures.
 After unobtrusive observation by other staff members, he was found to be in the advanced stages of the disease. He now is recuperating at Icele International Hospital, Bluebanks, Alaska, where he is rapidly regaining health.
 The Research Institute has published a list of symptoms in connection with combating vernal equinoxical fever, treatments found to be most effective in curbing the effects of the disease once a

Devil's Jackpot . . .

A blustery February gale thrust icicles into my back. The filthy concrete upon which I trod seemed to fuse into the dirty sky above.
 The one crushed down upon my aching head; the other jarred me to no end as I thrust my plodding feet over its unnamable countenance. I was tired fatigued beyond reason, and lost—heoplessly—in a strange city.
 The Devil fed another slug into his favorite slot machine. Strange lights glowed and began to play inside the polished case—as if they lived.
 What force directed my blundering way to that dingy shop I cannot say. The door was suddenly before me—and I opened it. The room which I found was tiny and littered with tattered locks of hair.
 A barber's chair sprawled sedately in the middle of the floor scarcely noticed. My eyes were immediately fixed on the other man, the ungainly framework of a grim barber's cloak who stood over the chair.
 You see I hated that man! I hated his protruding blood-shot eyes. I hated his flaring nose and heavy lips and yellow, broken teeth.
 I hated his large, long-fingered hands and the driftness with which he piled the razor over the face of the man in the chair. I hated him beyond reason.
 More and more the evil lights spun and beamed within the haunted case Satan smiled.
 We were alone in the tiny cubicle, I and the man whom I hated. He was clipping great globes of hair from the unruly mass upon my head.
 His delicate fingers moved rapidly over my skull—trimming here, straightening there, and all the time—oh horror!—touching me.
 The Devil was chuckling deep in his throat. He played on, his hands now steady and sure.
 I was trembling terribly and my breaths came raggedly. I could not wrest my gaze from the razor

PLAYTIME

The little girls watch in delighted fascination as the brilliant pin-point lights flared and flickered about on the surface of the blue-green sphere, throwing up tiny, tiny spurts of mushrooming dust on the side toward the light and winking over the darkened portion of the globe like a summer-borne swarm of tiny fireflies.
 There was a final flurry of activity which brought squeals of delight from the children, then larger, isolated flashes which spread and joined until a pale-violet glow diffused the entire surface of the sphere, turning it first brown, then grey. Finally there were no more changes . . .
 "Oh, they've stopped!" cried the youngest. "Make them do it some more, Gella!"
 "I can't. They're probably all dead."
 "Oh, no . . ." wailed the youngest.
 "Don't carry on, Vinna," admonished her next elder sister. "Gella can easily make another."
 "But maybe the next one won't do it!" the child protested.
 "Oh, yes, it will. It will."
 "Why . . . ?"
 "I don't know why, honey. They just all do, that's all."
 "Yes," Gella assured them, "they all do—eventually." The child demanded.
 "Oh, yes! Make us another, Gella!" cried all the children.
 And so, to please her younger sisters, Gella pushed the dead toy aside and deftly fashioned another of the heavy, blue-green globes, which she placed, spinning slowly, at just the right distance from the light. Then they sat back to wait—the youngest holding her breath in excited anticipation.
 And from the seas of this new sphere life rose.
 And studied physics.
 And, in time, did it again.

Dirge

Yes, weep!
 Wash her cold and haunting smile away
 With gentle April mourning.
 Say
 That she is gone, asleep.
 The breath
 Of lilac mocks us and the white
 Still lovely face derides this rite
 Of dead who mourn the dead.
 Niobe sigh!
 For us who are the dead here—
 after
 Bereft of Emily's sparkling laughter
 Beguiling, dancing eye
 Jane Hill
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Look to the Side

Your tanks clank over the cobbled paths;
 Your cannonade hurls its sleek metal shells
 Through the smog, striking a panicked village.
 In splintered trees, weary of their feasting,
 vultures and crows rest, an ear to your boasting.
 They must now rest, made gluttons by your pillage.
 The sound of your comrades' victory cry,
 lynching mob,
 ings clear and sure against a fiery sky.
 As your battalion stamps through the sticky streets of this day,
 o man Legions strode victoriously down the Applan Way.
 If you will, for one minute, stop your ears
 To the triumphant shouting,
 Cease the swelling pride from the valor shown,
 And climb through the rubble,
 Strewn by the way,
 You will see a child's tear-streaked face
 Close to his mother's cold, still breast.
 This will be his first night alone.
 Jan Dawson