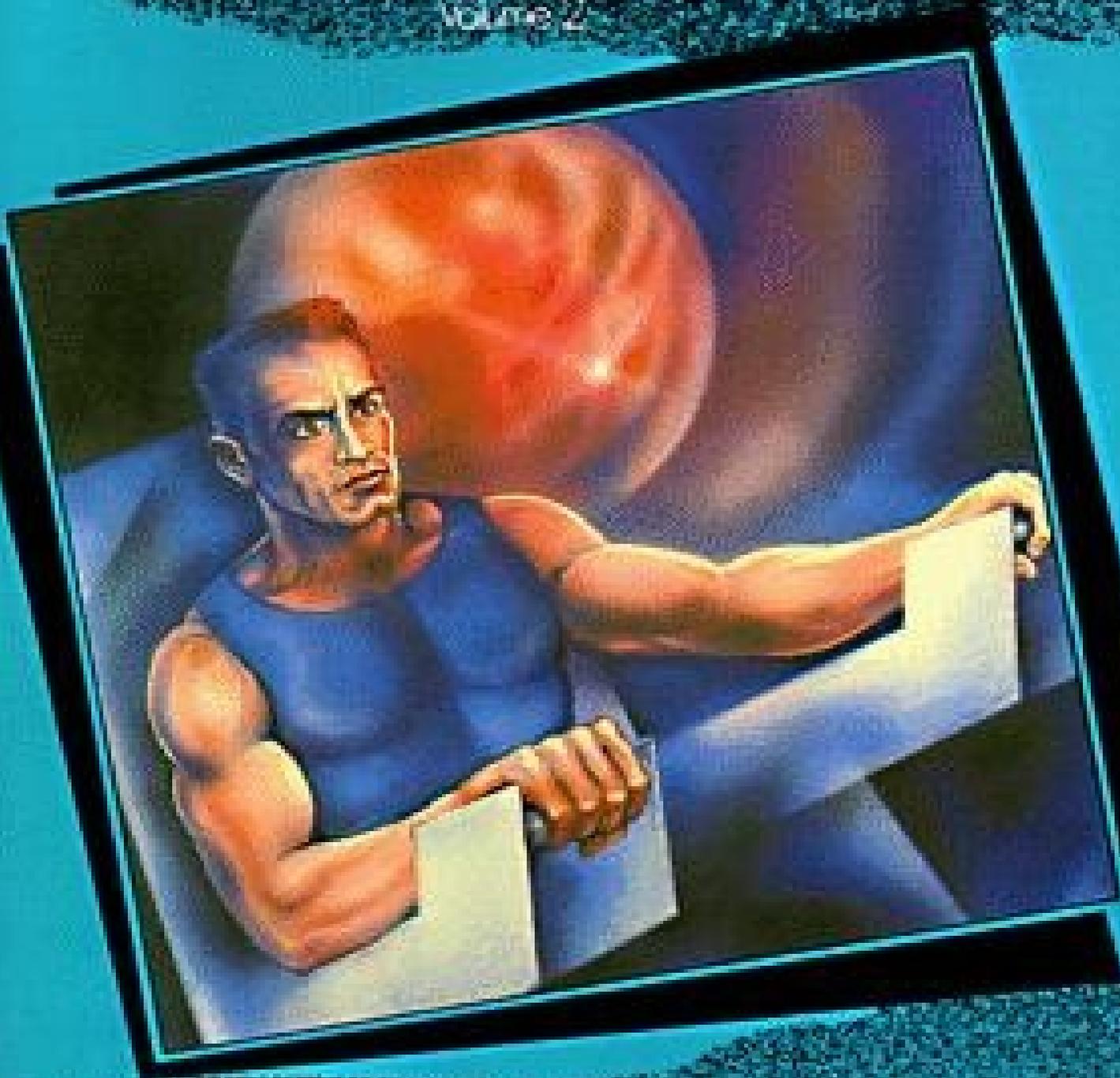


CITADEL TWILIGHT

THE COLLECTED STORIES OF PHILIP K. DICK

Volume 2



WE CAN REMEMBER IT
FOR YOU WHOLESALE

The Story That Inspired The Hit Motion Picture

TOTAL RECALL

The Collected Stories of Philip K. Dick Vol. 2

by Philip K. Dick

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Introduction

By Norman Spinrad

Philip K. Dick's debut story, *Beyond Lies the Wub*, was first published in 1952. This volume, *SECOND VARIETY*, contains 27 short stories published between 1952 and 1955, when his first novel, *SOLAR LOTTERY*, appeared. What is more, it does not include every story he published during the first four years of his career either.

That in itself is quite remarkable. Few writers could boast such prodigious publication in the first four years of their careers, even in this period, when markets for short sf were relatively abundant and editors had many slots to fill. And while it must be admitted that there are a certain number of fairly trivial gimmick stories in this book, the majority of them already show many of the unique virtues of Dick's more mature work, and even the least of them are written in his unmistakable voice.

Considering that they were written in such a brief period by a new writer in the first flush of his career, that Dick must have been churning them out rapidly to make money and a name, these 27 stories are also quite remarkable for what they are not.

There is not really an action-adventure formula story in here. No space opera. No nuts and bolts. No fully-developed alien civilizations. No intrepid stock heroes, villains, mad scientists, no real good guys versus bad guys at all. From the very outset, Dick wrote as if the commercial conventions of the sf genre did not exist. Even the one-punch gimmick stories are *Dickian* gimmicks. From the beginning, Dick was reinventing science fiction, turning it into a literary instrument for his own concerns, and yes, obsessions.

What we have here is a kind of fascinating time capsule, 27 stories published before Philip K. Dick's first novel, the compressed short fiction apprenticeship of a writer who was to go on to become one of the great novelists of the twentieth century and arguably the greatest metaphysical novelist of all time.

Dick began writing during what at least in a publishing sense was the greatest transformation that science fiction has ever seen. In the early 1950s, the magazines were still the dominant mode of sf publication, meaning that short fiction was still the dominant form. By the time he published *SOLAR LOTTERY* in 1955, the paperback book was on its way to becoming the dominant publishing mode, and the novel therefore the dominant form.

In the 1950s, with the standard advance for an sf novel being about \$1500, any writer trying to eke out a precarious living writing sf was still constrained to crank out short stories for the magazines. And what with novel slots still being limited, one was also constrained to make one's mark as a short story writer before a publisher was about to grant a novel contract at all.

Nor, in hindsight, as evidenced by this volume, was this, in literary terms at least, a bad thing, even for a writer like Dick, whose natural metier was the novel. These 27 stories, and the others published before *SOLAR LOTTERY*, were an apprenticeship in the best sense of the term.

Reading these stories one after the other in a single volume, one is indeed struck by a certain sameness, a certain repetitiveness, a certain series of recurrences, a sense of a writer staking out the territory of his future oeuvre. We would see the same thing in the short fiction of other writers of the period, and even much later, in the early short fiction, for example, of John Varley, William Gibson, Lucius Shepard, Kim Stanley Robinson.

But in this book, what we see is a uniquely Dickian sameness.

Most sf writers who stake out a territory in their early short fiction that they will later explore at greater length and depth tend to create a consistent universe like Larry Niven's "Known Space" or recurring characters like Keith Laumer's Retief or a historical template like Robert A. Heinlein's "Future History," and not infrequently all three.

In part this is a commercial strategy. A new writer naive or crazy enough to actually attempt a career as a full-time sf short story writer has to write a lot of fiction rather rapidly to stay afloat. It is much easier to reuse settings, history, and characters than to begin from zero each time out, and, as network TV has long proven, the episodic series is the fastest way to build an audience too.

That, however, is not what Philip K. Dick did. There are no real recurring characters in these stories. There is no attempt to set them all in a consistent universe. Except for some rather tenuous connections between *Second Variety*, *Jon's World*, and *James P. Crow*, there is really no attempt at a consistent future history either.

But there most certainly *are* recurrences of theme, imagery, and metaphysical concerns, and we will see them again and again in Dick's subsequent novels, expanded upon, recomplicated, deepened, made quite vast.

The Earth reduced to a nuclear ash heap. Robot weapons systems evolving towards baleful anti-empathetic pseudo-life. Human freedom ground down in the name of military security, economic prosperity, or even order for its own sake. Interpenetrating realities. Ironic time-loops and paradoxes. Ordinary people holding ordinary jobs as the heroes and heroines trying to muddle through.

These stories were written during the fever pitch of the Cold War, the height of the anti-Communist hysteria engendered by Senator Joseph McCarthy and the House Un-American Activities Committee, the nadir of the nuclear war paranoia, when school

children were taught to hide under their desks when the air raid sirens went off. And on an obvious level they reflect this quite overtly. They show that Dick was a writer of deep political concern from the very outset.

But they show something much more. At a time when there was no little danger in voicing such views, Dick spoke out loud and clear *against* the prevailing hysterias of the times -- against militarism, security obsession, xenophobia, and chauvinism.

Further, what these stories juxtapose against these large scale political evils are not equally large scale political virtues but the intimate small scale human and spiritual virtues of modest heroism, caritas, and most of all the empathy that, in the end, is finally what distinguishes the human from the machine, the spiritual from the mechanical, authentic being from even the most cunningly crafted pseudo-life.

And if we already see here what was to be the great theme and the spiritual core of Philip K. Dick's whole career, so too do we see in these stories the genesis of the characteristic literary technique which so cogently brings it down to an intimate and specific human level -- Dick's use of multiple viewpoint characters.

True, his use of multiple viewpoint techniques is not always perfect in these early stories. Sometimes he cavalierly shifts viewpoint within a scene for mere narrative convenience. Sometimes he introduces a new viewpoint character in media res just to give us a scene he cannot easily render from viewpoints he has already established. Sometimes a viewpoint character appears for only a few paragraphs and then disappears.

Dick is learning multiple viewpoint technique in these stories. Indeed, it may be more accurate to say that he is *inventing* it, for few if any writers had really used multiple viewpoint this way before Dick, and all of us who were to adopt it later owe a great debt to him, whether we consciously realize it or not.

For what the Dickian multiple viewpoint technique allows the writer to do is to tell the story from within the consciousness, the spirit, the heart, of several characters, not merely one. It allows intimacy, it grants the reader empathy, with the *multiplexity* of the human spirit within the confines of a single tale. And in the hands of a master like Philip K. Dick, it becomes a series of windows into the metaphysical multiplexity of reality itself, the perfect merger of theme and form.

These 27 stories are not perfect. It would be a disservice to the truth and to Philip K. Dick's literary reputation to contend that they represent the full flowering of the mature talent to come. But they too are a series of windows, windows into the past, into the beginnings of a great spirit's long and mighty journey, and windows too into the future, into the fully developed vision of the mature master the talented young apprentice who wrote them was one day destined to become.

Norman Spinrad

October, 1986

Paranoia, in some respects, I think, is a modern-day development of an ancient, archaic sense that animals still have -- quarry-type animals -- that they're being watched. . . I say paranoia is an atavistic sense. It's a lingering sense, that we had long ago, when we were -- our ancestors were -- very vulnerable to predators, and this sense tells them they're being watched. And they're being watched probably by something that's going to get them. . .

And often my characters have this feeling.

But what really I've done is, I have atavized their society. That although it's set in the future, in many ways they're living -- there is a retrogressive quality in their lives, you know? They're living like our ancestors did. I mean, the hardware is in the future, the scenery's in the future, but the situations are really from the past.

-- Philip K. Dick in an interview, 1974

The Cookie Lady

"Where you going, Bubber?" Ernie Mill shouted from across the street, fixing papers for his route.

"No place," Bubber Surle said.

"You going to see your lady friend?" Ernie laughed and laughed. "What do you go visit that old lady for? Let us in on it!"

Bubber went on. He turned the corner and went down Elm Street. Already, he could see the house, at the end of the street, set back a little on the lot. The front of the house was overgrown with weeds, old dry weeds that rustled and chattered in the wind. The house itself was a little gray box, shabby and unpainted, the porch steps sagging. There was an old weather-beaten rocking chair on the porch with a torn piece of cloth hanging over it.

Bubber went up the walk. As he started up the rickety steps he took a deep breath. He could smell it, the wonderful warm smell, and his mouth began to water. His heart thudding with anticipation, Bubber turned the handle of the bell. The bell grated rustily on the other side of the door. There was silence for a time, then the sounds of someone stirring.

Mrs Drew opened the door. She was old, very old, a little dried-up old lady, like the weeds that grew along the front of the house. She smiled down at Bubber, holding the door wide for him to come in.

"You're just in time," she said. "Come on inside, Bernard. You're just in time -- they're just now ready."

Bubber went to the kitchen door and looked in. He could see them, resting on a big blue plate on top of the stove. Cookies, a plate of warm, fresh cookies right out of the oven. Cookies with nuts and raisins in them.

"How do they look?" Mrs Drew said. She rustled past him, into the kitchen. "And maybe some cold milk, too. You like cold milk with them." She got the milk pitcher from the window box on the back porch. Then she poured a glass of milk for him and set some of the cookies on a small plate. "Let's go into the living room," she said.

Bubber nodded. Mrs Drew carried the milk and the cookies in and set them on the arm of the couch. Then she sat down in her own chair, watching Bubber plop himself down by the plate and begin to help himself.

Bubber ate greedily, as usual, intent on the cookies, silent except for chewing sounds. Mrs Drew waited patiently, until the boy had finished, and his already ample

sides bulged that much more. When Bubber was done with the plate he glanced toward the kitchen again, at the rest of the cookies on the stove.

"Wouldn't you like to wait until later for the rest?" Mrs Drew said.

"All right," Bubber agreed.

"How were they?"

"Fine."

"That's good." She leaned back in her chair. "Well, what did you do in school today? How did it go?"

"All right."

The little old lady watched the boy look restlessly around the room. "Bernard," she said presently, "won't you stay and talk to me for a while?" He had some books on his lap, some school books. "Why don't you read to me from your books? You know, I don't see too well any more and it's a comfort to me to be read to."

"Can I have the rest of the cookies after?"

"Of course."

Bubber moved over towards her, to the end of the couch. He opened his books, World Geography, Principles of Arithmetic, Hoyte's Speller. "Which do you want?"

She hesitated. "The geography."

Bubber opened the big blue book at random. PERU. "Peru is bounded on the north by Ecuador and Columbia, on the south by Chile, and on the east by Brazil and Bolivia. Peru is divided into three main sections. These are, first --"

The little old lady watched him read, his fat cheeks wobbling as he read, holding his finger next to the line. She was silent, watching him, studying the boy intently as he read, drinking in each frown of concentration, every motion of his arms and hands. She relaxed, letting herself sink back in her chair. He was very close to her, only a little way off. There was only the table and lamp between them. How nice it was to have him come; he had been coming for over a month, now, ever since the day she had been sitting on her porch and seen him go by and thought to call to him, pointing to the cookies by her rocker.

Why had she done it? She did not know. She had been alone so long that she found herself saying strange things and doing strange things. She saw so few people, only

when she went down to the store or the mailman came with her pension check. Or the garbage men.

The boy's voice droned on. She was comfortable, peaceful and relaxed. The little old lady closed her eyes and folded her hands in her lap. And as she sat, dozing and listening, something began to happen. The little old lady was beginning to change, her gray wrinkles and lines dimming away. As she sat in the chair she was growing younger, the thin fragile body filling out with youth again. The gray hair thickened and darkened, color coming to the wispy strands. Her arms filled, too, the mottled flesh turning a rich hue as it had been once, many years before.

Mrs Drew breathed deeply, not opening her eyes. She could feel *something* happening, but she did not know just what. *Something* was going on; she could feel it, and it was good. But what it was she did not exactly know. It had happened before, almost every time the boy came and sat by her. Especially of late, since she had moved her chair nearer to the couch. She took a deep breath. How good it felt, the warm fullness, a breath of warmth inside her cold body for the first time in years!

In her chair the little old lady had become a dark-haired matron of perhaps thirty, a woman with full cheeks and plump arms and legs. Her lips were red again, her neck even a little too fleshy, as it had been once in the long forgotten past.

Suddenly the reading stopped. Bubber put down his book and stood up. "I have to go," he said. "Can I take the rest of the cookies with me?"

She blinked, rousing herself. The boy was in the kitchen, filling his pockets with cookies. She nodded, dazed, still under the spell. The boy took the last cookies. He went across the living room to the door. Mrs Drew stood up. All at once the warmth left her. She felt tired, tired and very dry. She caught her breath, breathing quickly. She looked down at her hands. Wrinkled, thin.

"Oh!" she murmured. Tears blurred her eyes. It was gone, gone again as soon as he moved away. She tottered to the mirror above the mantel and looked at herself. Old faded eyes stared back, eyes deep-set in a withered face. Gone, all gone, as soon as the boy had left her side.

"I'll see you later," Bubber said.

"Please," she whispered. "Please come back again. Will you come back?"

"Sure," Bubber said listlessly. He pushed the door open. "Good-bye." He went down the steps. In a moment she heard his shoes against the sidewalk. He was gone.

"Bubber, you come in here!" May Surle stood angrily on the porch. "You get in here and sit down at the table."

"All right." Bubber came slowly up on to the porch, pushing inside the house.

"What's the matter with you?" She caught his arm. "Where you been? Are you sick?"

"I'm tired." Bubber rubbed his forehead.

His father came through the living room with the newspapers, in his undershirt. "What's the matter?" he said.

"Look at him," May Surle said. "All worn out. What you been doing, Bubber?"

"He's been visiting that old lady," Ralf Surle said. "Can't you tell? He's always washed out after he's been visiting her. What do you go there for, Bub? What goes on?"

"She gives him cookies," May said. "You know how he is about things to eat. He'd do anything for a plate of cookies."

"Bub," his father said, "listen to me. I don't want you hanging around that crazy old lady anymore. Do you hear me? I don't care how many cookies she gives you. You come home too tired! No more of that. You hear me?"

Bubber looked down at the floor, leaning against the door. His heart beat heavily, labored. "I told her I'd come back," he muttered.

"You can go once more," May said, going into the dining room, "but only once more. Tell her you won't be able to come back again, though. You make sure you tell her nice. Now go upstairs and get washed up."

"After dinner better have him lie down," Ralf said, looking up the stairs, watching Bubber climb slowly, his hand on the banister. He shook his head. "I don't like it," he murmured. "I don't want him going there any more. There's something strange about that old lady."

"Well, it'll be the last time," May said.

Wednesday was warm and sunny. Bubber strode along, his hands in his pockets. He stopped in front of McVane's drugstore for a minute, looking speculatively at the comic books. At the soda fountain a woman was drinking a big chocolate soda. The sight of it made Bubber's mouth water. That settled it. He turned and continued on his way, even increasing his pace a little.

A few minutes later he came up on the the gray sagging porch and rang the bell.

Below him the weeds blew and rustled with the wind. It was almost four o'clock; he could not stay too long: But then, it was the last time anyhow.

The door opened. Mrs Drew's wrinkled face broke into smiles. "Come in, Bernard. It's good to see you standing there. It makes me feel so young again to have you come visit."

He went inside, looking around.

"I'll start the cookies. I didn't know if you were coming." She padded into the kitchen. "I'll get them started right away. You sit down on the couch."

Bubber went over and sat down. He noticed that the table and lamp were gone; the chair was right up next to the couch. He was looking at the chair in perplexity when Mrs Drew came rustling back into the room.

"They're in the oven. I had the batter all ready. Now." She sat down in the chair with a sigh. "Well, how did it go today? How was school?"

"Fine."

She nodded. How plump he was, the little boy, sitting just a little distance from her, his cheeks red and full! She could touch him, he was so close. Her aged heart thumped. Ah, to be young again. Youth was so much. It was everything. What did the world mean to the old? *When all the world is old, lad. . .*

"Do you want to read to me, Bernard?" she asked presently.

"I didn't bring any books."

"Oh." She nodded. "Well, I have some books," she said quickly. "I'll get them."

She got up, crossing to the bookcase. As she opened the doors, Bubber said, "Mrs Drew, my father says I can't come here anymore. He says this is the last time. I thought I'd tell you."

She stopped, standing rigid. Everything seemed to leap around her, the room twisting furiously. She took a harsh, frightened breath. "Bernard, you're -- you're not coming back?"

"No, my father says not to."

There was silence. The old lady took a book at random and came slowly back to her chair. After a while she passed the book to him, her hands trembling. The boy took it without expression, looking at its cover.

"Please, read, Bernard. Please."

"All right." He opened the book. "Where'll I start?"

"Anywhere. Anywhere, Bernard."

He began to read. It was something by Trollope; she only half heard the words. She put her hand to her forehead, the dry skin, brittle and thin, like old paper. She trembled with anguish. The last time?

Bubber read on, slowly, monotonously. Against the window a fly buzzed. Outside the sun began to set, the air turning cool. A few clouds came up, and the wind in the trees rushed furiously.

The old lady sat, close by the boy, closer than ever, hearing him read, the sound of his voice, sensing him close by. Was this really the last time? Terror rose up in her heart and she pushed it back. The last time! She gazed at him, the boy sitting so close to her. After a time she reached out her thin, dry hand. She took a deep breath. He would never be back. There would be no more times, no more. This was the last time he would sit there.

She touched his arm.

Bubber looked up. "What is it?" he murmured.

"You don't mind if I touch your arm, do you?"

"No, I guess not." He went on reading. The old lady could feel the youngness of him, flowing between her fingers, through her arm. A pulsating vibrating youngness, so close to her. It had never been that close, where she could actually touch it. The feel of life made her dizzy, unsteady.

And presently it began to happen, as before. She closed her eyes, letting it move over her, filling her up, carried into her by the sound of the voice and the feel of the arm. The change, the flow, was coming over her, the warm, rising feeling. She was blooming again, filling with life, swelling into richness, as she had been, once, long ago.

She looked down at her arms. Rounded, they were, and the nails clear. Her hair. Black again, heavy and black against her neck. She touched her cheek. The wrinkles had gone, the skin pliant and soft.

Joy filled her, a growing bursting joy. She stared around her, at the room. She smiled, feeling her firm teeth and gums, red lips, strong white teeth. Suddenly she got

to her feet, her body secure and confident. She turned a little, lithe, quick circle.

Bubber stopped reading. "Are the cookies ready?" he said.

"I'll see." Her voice was alive, deep with a quality that had dried out many years before. Now it was there again, *her* voice, throaty and sensual. She walked quickly to the kitchen and opened the oven. She took out the cookies and put them on top of the stove.

"All ready," she called gaily. "Come and get them."

Bubber came past her, his gaze fastened on the sight of the cookies. He did not even notice the woman by the door.

Mrs Drew hurried from the kitchen. She went into the bedroom, closing the door after her. Then she turned, gazing into the full-length mirror on the door. Young -- she was young again, filled out with the sap of vigorous youth. She took a deep breath, her steady bosom swelling. Her eyes flashed, and she smiled. She spun, her skirts flying. Young and lovely. And this time it had not gone away.

She opened the door. Bubber had filled his mouth and his pockets. He was standing in the center of the living room, his face fat and dull, a dead white.

"What's the matter?" Mrs Drew said.

"I'm going."

"All right, Bernard. And thanks for coming to read to me." She laid her hand on his shoulder. "Perhaps I'll see you again some time."

"My father --"

"I know." She laughed gaily, opening the door for him. "Good-bye, Bernard. Good-bye."

She watched him go slowly down the steps, one at a time. Then she closed the door and skipped back into the bedroom. She unfastened her dress and stepped out of it, the worn gray fabric suddenly distasteful to her. For a brief second she gazed at her full, rounded body, her hands on her hips.

She laughed with excitement, turning a little, her eyes bright. What a wonderful body, bursting with life. A swelling breast -- she touched herself. The flesh was firm. There was so much, so many things to do! She gazed about her, breathing quickly. So many things! She started the water running in the bathtub and then went to tie her hair up.

The wind blew around him as he trudged home. It was late, the sun had set and the sky overhead was dark and cloudy. The wind that blew and nudged against him was cold, and it penetrated through his clothing, chilling him. The boy felt tired, his head ached, and he stopped every few minutes, rubbing his forehead and resting, his heart laboring. He left Elm Street and went up Pine Street. The wind screeched around him, pushing him from side to side. He shook his head, trying to clear it. How weary he was, how tired his arms and legs were. He felt the wind hammering at him, pushing and plucking at him.

He took a breath and went on, his head down. At the corner he stopped, holding on to a lamp-post. The sky was quite dark, the street lights were beginning to come on. At last he went on, walking as best he could.

"Where is that boy?" May Surle said, going out on the porch for the tenth time. Ralf flicked on the light and they stood together. "What an awful wind."

The wind whistled and lashed at the porch. The two of them looked up and down the dark street, but they could see nothing but a few newspapers and trash being blown along.

"Let's go inside," Ralf said. "He sure is going to get a licking when he gets home."

They sat down at the dinner table. Presently May put down her fork. "Listen! Do you hear something?"

Ralf listened.

Outside, against the front door, there was a faint sound, a tapping sound. He stood up. The wind howled outside, blowing the shades in the room upstairs. "I'll go see what it is," he said.

He went to the door and opened it. Something gray, something gray and dry was blowing up against the porch, carried by the wind. He stared at it, but he could not make it out. A bundle of weeds, weeds and rags blown by the wind, perhaps.

The bundle bounced against his legs. He watched it drift past him, against the wall of the house. Then he closed the door again slowly.

"What was it?" May called.

"Just the wind," Ralf Surle said.

Beyond the Door

That night at the dinner table he brought it out and set it down beside her plate. Doris stared at it, her hand to her mouth. "My God, what is it?" She looked up at him, bright-eyed.

"Well, open it."

Doris tore the ribbon and paper from the square package with her sharp nails, her bosom rising and falling. Larry stood watching her as she lifted the lid. He lit a cigarette and leaned against the wall.

"A cuckoo clock!" Doris cried. "A real old cuckoo clock like my mother had." She turned the clock over and over. "Just like my mother had, when Pete was still alive." Her eyes sparkled with tears.

"It's made in Germany," Larry said. After a moment he added, "Carl got it for me wholesale. He knows some guy in the clock business. Otherwise I wouldn't have --" he stopped.

Doris made a funny little sound.

"I mean, otherwise, I wouldn't have been able to afford it." He scowled. "What's the matter with you? You've got your clock, haven't you? Isn't that what you want?"

Doris sat holding onto the clock, her fingers pressed against the brown wood.

"Well," Larry said, "what's the matter?"

He watched in amazement as she leaped up and ran from the room, still clutching the clock. He shook his head. "Never satisfied. They're all that way. Never get enough."

He sat down at the table and finished his meal.

The cuckoo clock was not very large. It was hand-made, however, and there were countless frets on it, little indentations and ornaments scored in the soft wood. Doris sat on the bed drying her eyes and winding the clock. She set the hands by her wristwatch. Presently she carefully moved the hands to two minutes of ten. She carried the clock over to the dresser and propped it up.

Then she sat waiting, her hands twisted together in her lap -- waiting for the cuckoo to come out, for the hour to strike.

As she sat she thought about Larry and what he had said. And what she had said,

too, for that matter -- not that she could be blamed for any of it. After all, she couldn't keep listening to him forever without defending herself; you had to blow your own trumpet in the world.

She touched her handkerchief to her eyes suddenly. Why did he have to say that, about getting it wholesale? Why did he have to spoil it all? If he felt that way he needn't have got it in the first place. She clenched her fists. He was so mean, so damn mean.

But she was glad of the little clock sitting there ticking to itself, with its funny grilled edges and the door. Inside the door was the cuckoo, waiting to come out. Was he listening, his head cocked on one side, listening to hear the clock strike so that he would know to come out?

Did he sleep between hours? Well, she would soon see him: she could ask him. And she would show the clock to Bob. He would love it; Bob loved old things, even old stamps and buttons. Of course, it was a little *awkward*, but Larry had been staying at the office so much, and that helped. If only Larry didn't call up sometimes to --

There was a whirr. The clock shuddered and all at once the door opened. The cuckoo came out, sliding swiftly. He paused and looked around solemnly, scrutinizing her, the room, the furniture.

It was the first time he had seen her, she realized, smiling to herself in pleasure. She stood up, coming toward him shyly. "Go on," she said, "I'm waiting."

The cuckoo opened his bill. He whirred and chirped, quickly, rhythmically. Then, after a moment of contemplation, he retired. And the door snapped shut.

She was delighted. She clapped her hands and spun in a little circle. He was marvelous, perfect! And the way he had looked around, studying her, sizing her up. He liked her; she was certain of it. And she, of course, loved him at once, completely. He was just what she had hoped would come out of the little door.

Doris went to the clock. She bent over the little door, her lips close to the wood. "Do you hear me?" she whispered. "I think you're the most wonderful cuckoo in the world." She paused, embarrassed. "I hope you'll like it here."

Then she went downstairs again, slowly, her head high.

Larry and the cuckoo clock really never got along well from the start. Doris said it was because he didn't wind it right, and it didn't like being only half-wound all the time. Larry turned the job of winding over to her; the cuckoo came out every quarter hour and ran the spring down without remorse, and someone had to be ever after it, winding it up again.

Doris did her best, but she forgot a good deal of the time. Then Larry would throw his newspaper down with an elaborate weary motion and stand up. He would go into the dining-room where the clock was mounted on the wall over the fireplace. He would take the clock down and making sure that he had his thumb over the little door, he would wind it up.

"Why do you put your thumb over the door?" Doris asked once.

"You're supposed to."

She raised an eyebrow. "Are you sure? I wonder if it isn't that you don't want him to come out while you're standing so close."

"Why not?"

"Maybe you're afraid of him."

Larry laughed. He put the clock back on the wall and gingerly removed his thumb. When Doris wasn't looking he examined his thumb.

There was still a trace of the nick cut out of the soft part of it. Who -- or what -- had pecked at him?

One Saturday morning, when Larry was down at the office working over some important special accounts, Bob Chambers came to the front porch and rang the bell. Doris was taking a quick shower. She dried herself and slipped into her robe. When she opened the door Bob stepped inside, grinning.

"Hi," he said, looking around.

"It's all right. Larry's at the office."

"Fine." Bob gazed at her slim legs below the hem of the robe. "How nice you look today."

She laughed. "Be careful! Maybe I shouldn't let you in after all."

They looked at one another, half amused, half frightened. Presently Bob said, "If you want, I'll --"

"No, for God's sake." She caught hold of his sleeve. "Just get out of the doorway so I can close it. Mrs Peters across the street, you know."

She closed the door. "And I want to show you something," she said. "You haven't

seen it."

He was interested. "An antique? Or what?"

She took his arm, leading him toward the dining-room. "You'll love it, Bobby." She stopped wide-eyed. "I hope you will. You must; you must love it. It means so much to me -- *he* means so much."

"He?" Bob frowned. "Who is he?"

Doris laughed. "You're jealous! Come on." A moment later they stood before the clock, looking up at it. "He'll come out in a few minutes. Wait until you see him. I know you two will get along fine."

"What does Larry think of him?"

"They don't like each other. Sometimes when Larry's here he won't come out. Larry gets mad if he doesn't come out on time. He says --"

"Says what?"

Doris looked down. "He always says he's been robbed, even if he did get it wholesale." She brightened. "But I know he won't come out because he doesn't like Larry. When I'm here alone he comes right out for me, every fifteen minutes, even though he really only has to come out on the hour."

She gazed up at the clock. "He comes out for me because he wants to. We talk; I tell him things. Of course, I'd like to have him upstairs in my room, but it wouldn't be right."

There was a sound of footsteps on the front porch. They looked at each other, horrified.

Larry pushed the front door open, grunting. He set his briefcase down and took off his hat. Then he saw Bob for the first time.

"Chambers. I'll be damned." His eyes narrowed. "What are you doing here?" He came into the dining-room. Doris drew her robe about her helplessly, backing away.

"I --" Bob began. "That is, we --" He broke off, glancing at Doris. Suddenly the clock began to whirr. The cuckoo came rushing out, bursting into sound. Larry moved toward him.

"Shut that din off," he said. He raised his fist toward the clock. The cuckoo snapped into silence and retreated. The door closed. "That's better." Larry studied Doris and