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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE WAY OF DECISION ***





History records numerous small colonies, based upon unusual ideas of the family unit and social group. Most of these have failed in practice, but usually because they were based upon idealistic notions which had little to do with the economic or social necessities of their times. But what of a new theory of the family and social unit which is designed to conform with actual conditions? And what is such a group likely to face when a new member, a person without any understanding of the actual conditions, has to be accepted as a member?

The Way Of Decision

by M. C. PEASE

TOM VORD sat on the porch of his clan's house with his feet on the railing. Across the valley, he could hear the muted roar of the commuter track that led south to New Haven; but all he could see were the sprawling rows of private houses that strung along the belt. And behind them, more isolated from each other, the larger structures of the homes of other clans. The bright greenness of spring lay over the land, and it was fresh and sparkling. A typical suburban scene in this year of 2013, Tom thought. Even the mixture of private houses and clan was symbolic of the time. And in a way, symbolic also of the problem he had.

Tom's face was brooding. His was a nature not easily satisfied, or content with half-solutions—and he took the problems of the clan seriously. Partly as a consequence of this, but also because he had the self-control to avoid crises, he was the unacknowledged leader of the clan, and its chief administrator. His age was hard to guess. He was not old; his face was unlined, and his hair both present and dark; his eyes showed an enthusiasm that indicated youth. And yet he was not young; there was a maturity in his glance, an acceptance in his attitude that made him seem older than he was. And so he sat there, relaxed, idly looking out over the countryside, even as he wondered if the present crisis was enough to disrupt the clan.

Below him Ricky Vord came toiling up the steps to the house. Ricky was the opposite of Tom. [32]

Young and intense, with a devil-may-care attitude, he was the born salesman. His enthusiasms came bubbling out, and he had the ability to carry with him anyone who might object. And if he did not have the deepness of thought fully to understand the implications of all that he said or did, he was the better salesman for it.

With a wave, Ricky entered the house. There were muffled sounds from the interior, and it was not for several minutes that the boy appeared on the porch. Then it was with two tall glasses in his hands. "I consider this Tom Collins weather," he said. "I suspect you do, too, only you're too lazy to mix your own." He handed Tom the second drink and sat down beside him.

"Possibly," Tom said with a smile. "I certainly won't refuse. What do you know?"

"A lot of things," Ricky answered. He took a long drink. "Ah, that's good," he said. "You know, I been down talking to Graves again. We got that thing in the bag if we want it." His voice was off-hand, deliberately so, Tom knew.

"We have?" Tom's voice also was careful. "Do you mean with or without the girl?"

"Well ... You can't blame Graves for wanting to see his daughter settled. He figures that if she gets into a clan, maybe she'll calm down. And he could be right. Maybe she will; who knows? After all, she does want to come in. That must mean something."

"Sure, it means something," Tom agreed, his voice slightly sardonic. "It means she wants to collect a whole clan. And as far as I am concerned, she's welcome to it—as long as it isn't the Vord one."

"Look," Ricky swung up onto the edge of his chair, turning to face Tom and leaning towards him, "you're only seeing one side of this. You think Marcia's just looking for a thrill, for something new, and different—and that that's why she wants to join us. Maybe it is; I won't deny it. I don't happen to think that's the reason, but it could be. But what if it is? Why do we have to rear back and stand on our dignity? Why can't we take her in, let her have her thrill, and then get out. If a thrill is all she's looking for, she'll get out quick enough. Unless she gets converted—that could happen, too. What do we lose?"

"And look what we lose if we do sit blindly on our dignity," he went on with a rush. "The job at Midland's running out. Times are tough. There's not many openings for a bunch of wiring-assemblers. As it stands now, the choice is between Eltron Electric and Universal. Universal we can get with no strings, except that we have to go to Detroit—and except that it doesn't pay very well.

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"Eltron, on the other hand, is Graves; and Graves doesn't like the clans. He's never had anything to do with them. A Free-Laborite from way back. Only he's got a daughter, Marcia; and Marcia, bless her sweet little soul, wants to join a clan. So the old man's willing to take another look at things; he'll give us a contract when Marcia's a Vord, and it'll be a good contract. In fact, he'll damn near let us write it. What can we lose?"

"You think we should take her in," Tom said.

"Yes I do," Ricky answered. "Otherwise, we have to pull up stakes and move, and that job out at Universal is no picnic. We won't do much more than break even on it, and maybe it'll only last a few months; it's that kind of a thing."

TOM smiled suddenly. "You are not quite consistent," he said. "You are worrying about Universal being temporary. And yet you brush aside the fact that Marcia may pull out. What would happen to us at Eltron if she did?"

"I don't know," Ricky answered, unabashed. "Maybe by that time we'd have Graves convinced. Most guys who run companies get to like the idea of contracting the clans, when they give it a try."

"They should," Tom grunted. "It's the answer to their labor problems."

"Sure," Ricky answered. "Only there are still guys like Graves around who don't see it. His pet topic of conversation is the Iltor Clan; he mentions it every time anyone suggests that the clans bring stability."

"But the Iltor clan was wrong from the first," Tom said. "The guys who put it together were unstable themselves; they tried to make the clan a small-size empire of their own—almost a bunch of slaves."

"So, eventually, they had a revolt. It had gotten to be a large outfit, since they were willing to accept anybody who would be a slave—and there are always lots of those—so the revolt was extensive and bloody. That's not typical of the clans. Not of the better ones; not of those that are really clans—and not empires. With any new idea like the clans, you are bound to get some bad results. But do you hang the good examples for the bad ones?" He sounded irritated.

"Don't argue with me," Ricky said. "I'm just telling you what Graves has in mind. Of course,

actually, there's more to it than that. The thing is, he took over Eltron Electric when it was practically on the rocks; he salvaged it, built it up, made it what it is today. All by himself. Using his own wits and his own guts. It all came out of him. Oh, sure, he had help—some pretty able guys were in with him. But they were the same type: Each of them knowing his own value, depending on himself and not on any others. They worked together because that was where their self-interest lay. A bunch of Free-Traders in the best tradition of the word. Free-Trading's been their life-blood; naturally none of them are apt to welcome the clan idea, and Graves least of all."

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"Do they really think they can hold out indefinitely?" Tom asked. "They must know they are being left behind, that they're getting out of step."

"I doubt it," Ricky said. "Graves says that the world is off on a cock-eyed binge with this clan idea, and I'm quoting his words. He figures it's going to come to its senses, eventually. At least that's what he says; what he really believes deep down in his heart, I don't know. Maybe, underneath, he's convinced; maybe if you could get him to admit the truth, he knows he has to accept us if he's going to survive. Maybe that's why he's letting Marcia twist his arm; it could be."

Tom nodded. "In any case, we're in the middle," he said. He looked sardonic. "Caught between the hammer of present reality and the stubborn anvil of Graves." He finished off his drink. "What do you propose to do?"

"I propose to let Graves pay our bills, in spite of his opinions," Ricky said. "And if that includes Marcia, why I don't really mind. One has to put up with some inconveniences; and when the inconvenience is a dish like her, I don't really mind at all." He leered in an exaggerated way.

Tom chuckled. "Yeah," he said, "I know what you mean." He became serious. "But that's my point; the girls will hardly take this point of view."

"They don't seem to object particularly," Ricky said. "Why should they? They're only six to our seven—so Marcia will just round things out, nice and even-like."

"Marcia, as you say, is a 'dish'," Tom agreed "and I can't quite see her rounding anything out to make it come out even. I think you're a damned optimist. Besides, I'm not so sure the girls don't mind. They joke about it, yes, but some of the jokes bite. I think maybe they hope they won't have to object. Afraid we'll call them jealous. After all, what would you do in their place?"

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"I don't know," Ricky said. "But if that is a factor, then I think they ought to argue their own case. Where are they?"

"Oh, Betsy and Rita have taken the kids down to the beach. Sandy is out shopping for food. She figured she'd go down to Mark's Place, so she'll be a bit late. Esther went over to see about shoes; she thinks she may get a better bargain at a place she heard of down the line. Polly and Joan went in with the boys to work; they're trying to wind up the contract with Midland by this week. Decided there's no point in stringing it out. Get it wound up and then take a vacation. I've been over at Midland finishing up the legal details. Also had to go downtown this morning to see the Income Tax people. When do you suppose they're going to get a system set up that's reasonable for the clans?" His voice betrayed a chronic irritation.

RICKY shrugged. "When the clans carry most of the votes. The whole idea of a clan is too new in society for the law to have caught up with it. If the clans had a majority, they could force things—and eventually they will. But not yet. Particularly, since the most vocal part of the non-clan majority considers us immoral. Destroyers of the family, mockers of the sacrament of marriage."

The sarcasm was heavy in his voice. "Someday, they'll see we've saved the home and the family—not destroyed it. We've brought it into line with the social facts of today, rescued it from the perennial frustrations that filled the divorce courts. Aye, and the insane asylums, too. Damn few people used to get out of marriage anything like what they ought to. Take the average Free-Trader and Monogamist: His family is just one small part of his life. Separate, distinct. It should be a solid rock on which he can build his life outside. But it isn't, except maybe in a very rare case. Mostly, it's just a thing that occupies some certain hours of his day, with no relation to the rest. He is left without an anchor. And the girl? She is boxed into a small sphere of activity, bound by her duties to an inexorable frustration of limited horizons."

He jumped up and started pacing up and down, gesturing with his arms. "Is this the great and beautiful thing they want to preserve? Or will they admit the realities? Will they admit the truths of anthropology? Realize that the idea of the family unit has had real meaning only when it has been the economic unit as well? And that in the modern world the economic unit is larger—and, therefore, the family must be, too? In the modern world, the economic unit is a team of workers; therefore, the family must be large enough to include the team. What's immoral about this? It gives the family meaning in the modern world, and it gives the individual something to live by. It gives him a reality that he could not have alone."

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"Clear, concise, and possibly illuminating if I didn't know it already," Tom smiled at the younger one's missionary instincts. "Why don't you tell Graves this? Maybe we would not have to absorb

his daughter."

"What do you think I've been telling him?" Ricky asked. He looked a trifle abashed, knowing that his enthusiasm had run away with him. "He hit the ceiling when Marcia first started talking up the clan idea, vowed that no daughter of his would ever disgrace the family name. I managed to talk him out of that, anyway. But, I'm no magician; he's still a Free-Trader of the old school. So my convincing him meant that he was willing to use his power to get his daughter what she wants. Which is us."

"In other words," Tom said, "you talked him out of thinking the clans are immoral, so he decided to *buy* one." He bit the sentence off.

"Well, yes," Ricky admitted; "that's one way of looking at it. But let's look at it another way. The rules of the clan are that a new member is provisional for a year. Any time in that year, we can always throw her out if we have to. And even afterwards—when we can no longer throw her out, and it could be we won't want to—there'll still be no reason why we should have to bow down to the old man. We can walk out on him, at least, any time. If Marcia doesn't want to come, then she can stay behind; and neither Graves nor anybody else can stop us."

"It sounds good," Tom said. "It's just that I don't believe it. The strength of the clan is its independence. We thirteen, and our children, against the world. One unit, free, and in a sense, complete. If we let anyone else decide who shall be in us and who shall not, then we are less free by that much. And by that much we are less strong. Maybe I'm a stubborn fool, Ricky, but that's the way I see it."

Ricky leaned against the porch railing. His face was thoughtful. "I wish I could convince you," he said. "The trouble is, I haven't got time. Graves has to have his answer now, to plan his production. Anyway, Marcia's getting restless; I think I'll have to tell them yes or no tomorrow."

"Tomorrow?" Tom looked startled. "What are you going to do? Caucus it tonight?"

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Ricky nodded. "I have to, Tom. It isn't that I want to bull it through you. But if we don't get a vote on it tonight, then we've given up. Graves has said he has to know, so he can plan; we can't keep it in the air any longer. And I think the clan has a right to vote on the problem." He looked apologetic.

Tom sighed. "We seem to have agreed to disagree," he said. "So maybe it's better to get the showdown over with." He got up, walked over to Ricky, and punched him lightly in the shoulder. "Let's break clean and come out fighting at the bell." And he walked back inside the house to his room.

2

IT WAS only a short time later that Tom heard the sound of tires on the drive. He went out to find that it was Sandy in the beach-wagon. The name Sandy fitted her, even if it was short for Sandra. Blonde, with something of a tendency to freckle, she had a quick alertness that was almost tomboyish. Almost, but not quite, for she was very much a woman.

"Need help?" Tom asked, giving her a quick kiss and moving to the back to start unloading the bundles. "How did you make out?"

"Not bad," she said; "In fact, it was fun. I don't know whether it was worth it or not; it's a long drive down there. Maybe I saved enough to pay for the gasoline. But they're more used to dealing with the clans. The stores around here play both sides of the fence. Much more congenial atmosphere down there."

Tom could guess what she meant. The clans, buying in semi-quantity for their groups of people, could demand and get preferential treatment of a sort. But a number of the stores that still wanted the business of private individuals—many of whom were bitterly anti-clan—did their best to balance the issue with a lack of courtesy. He looked at the girl with sympathy but she seemed cheerfully unconcerned. She was, he thought, the kind to take that kind of treatment without a murmur of complaint, and without giving any overt recognition to it. And yet she was also the kind to feel it deep inside her.

When the car was unloaded, they sat down at the kitchen table to rest a moment. Tom sat back in his chair, eyes brooding. It was not for several minutes that he noticed that Sandy was watching him, her chin on her palms, her elbows on the table. And he knew that she knew he was troubled and was waiting to see if he wanted to talk about it. "Ricky thinks we ought to decide about Marcia, tonight," he said, his voice sounding blunt even to himself.

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"You mean whether we should take her in or not?" she asked.

"Yeah," Tom answered. "He thinks we should, whether she fits or not—just so we can get the contract with Eltron Electric. Because otherwise we would have to pull up stakes and go take that thing at Universal."

"And you don't think we should?" she prompted.

"No, I don't," he said. "It seems to me like we'd be selling out if we did that. Maybe I'm being a purist about it, but damn it all...."

"But you can stop it easily," she said. "According to the charter, a vote of membership has to be unanimous. All you have to do is say no."

"Yeah—well, that's true," he said. "Only this is more than that. That rule is just about ordinary members, the idea being to keep feuds out. If somebody isn't going to be able to get along with a new member, why let's find it out at the start. And, since the old member is more important than the new one, let's block the new one."

"But this thing's different; this isn't just a case of whether she's compatible or not. I have nothing against Marcia, personally; I just don't like this way of doing business. But this ties up our whole future, economic and everything else. If I blackball her, I'm blackballing our contract with Eltron; and matters of contract, or economics, or whatall, are not supposed to be subject to veto. No ... I won't vote against her all by my lonesome. If the clan is pretty well split, maybe I will pull a technicality. But I won't just up and blackball her all by myself, just because I think I'm right."

Sandy was thoughtful. "What about this job at Eltron," she asked, finally. "Can we swing it? It's bigger than the job here at Midland, and bigger than the one at Universal. Is it too big?"

"No," Tom said. "We can handle it. Oh, we may have to hire a few private citizens, but we can do most of it ourselves. If we can average nine people a week, we'll be all right. And we can't do that if we leave two to take care of the kids, one to manage the house and cook and all, and one to fill in, taking care of other outside matters, having babies, and whatnot. But even if we can only average eight ourselves, it is still reasonable with a couple of private citizens. No, I'm not afraid of the job."

"It'll be funny working alongside of private citizens," Sandy said, musingly; "I hope we pick better ones than those guys at Sanford Radio."

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TOM laughed. "We will," he said. "The trouble there was that we didn't hire them; the company did. And the guys were good enough—they just didn't like the clans."

"That's one way of putting it," Sandy said. "They just had some preconceived ideas as to what kind of woman would join a clan. Happens they were wrong, but it took a bit of jiu-jitsu to convince them."

"Well, that won't happen here," Tom said. "We'll be hiring them ourselves, and we'll probably be able to pick up all we want from the other assembly clans. Times are rough all over, and they're not too loaded with work, either. Of course, the rest of the plant is another matter; but I don't think there'll be any open trouble. Things have gotten a little better since those early days. People know a little more about the clans, even if they don't approve."

"So there is just the question of whether we want to do it, or not," she said. He nodded but said nothing. "And you would much rather we didn't want to.... Tell me, what's she like? I've only seen her the couple of times that Ricky's brought her to lunch."

"That's about all I have," Tom answered. "Oh, I've seen her out at her old man's place a couple of times, too, but then I was working on the old man. As far as I know, she is what she seems to be. Beautiful in a way. A bit of a mantrap. Probably spoiled. I don't know. What did you think of her?"

"That's a damning sketch if I ever heard one," Sandy said. "I wonder if that's all there is to her. Is she just a spoiled brat with a well-developed body? Is that all she is? What's her background like? I mean aside from money?"

"Background?" Tom hesitated. "Well, she went through college, somewhere or other. She's traveled in Europe a bit. Generally circulated around. Cultured, I guess you'd call it."

"Certainly her old man knows what it's about. He's quite a character, you know. Very dignified, very polished. Fine oak paneling in his study. Lots of books, and he's probably read them, too. Quite a collection of classical music, and he knows his way around it too—at least he knows more about it than I do. The very picture of a cultured gentleman. And it is with a perfectly gentlemanly manner that he tears you apart into little pieces."

"Oh?" Sandy raised her eyebrow. "What happened?"

Tom smiled ruefully; "We had an argument." He shrugged. "The clans versus Free-Trading. He has a fine and delicate hand with sarcasm. No, I take that back. I don't know whether it was sarcasm or not; maybe he was just leading me out. Anyway, I came out of there feeling as if I'd been wrung dry."

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He was silent a moment, and Sandy made no move to break his thoughts. "The logical question here, of course, is to what extent this makes me think the way I do. And maybe it does, I don't know. I'm afraid of the guy; I got the feeling he knows exactly what he's doing and why. And I

think he may be too strong for us."

"You think we might end up as his puppets?" Sandy said, her voice neutral.

"Something like that," Tom admitted. "Oh, I know that's probably a foolish thought. In fact, now that I look at it, I know it is. The guy just impressed me; frankly I came out feeling somewhat awed by him. I'm not used to the feeling. I guess it's just that he comes from a background that I don't know anything about."

Sandy pursed her lips and nodded. There was a pixyish gleam to her eyes as she got up and started towards the door. As she left she asked him: "And Marcia, is she anything like her old man?" She was out the door and gone before he realized what her question meant.

He sat there, staring after her for five full minutes before he got up and started to put the food away.

3

HE HAD put the food away and prepared himself a cup of coffee, when he heard the clatter of the bus. That would be Betsy and Rita with the kids, he knew, back from the beach. By the noisy commotion, he gathered they had enjoyed themselves, with no more than the usual number of cuts and bruises and hurt feelings. Eleven kids, the oldest eight years, could not conceivably go to the beach for the afternoon without some crises; but, at least, they seemed to have gotten back in a happy condition.

Tom smiled as he thought of them, picturing the throng, but he made no move to join them. When Sue, aged four, stuck her head in the door and grinned to see him there, he just said "Hi." This she took as an invitation, and hopped on in to begin telling him in disconnected fragments, all about the day. He let her ramble for a moment until the first flush of her enthusiasm was over. Then, with a kiss on the forehead and a poke in the stomach, he sent her out, suggesting that she tell him all about it later.

When she had gone, he sat there, thinking about the girl. Sue was very much like her mother, Polly. Dark-haired with light bones, she had the quick and easy movements of a born dancer. And her eyes sparkled with dancing lights. Sue, like Polly, was a born flirt, but a flirt out of sheer interest in life. She was so much the image of her mother, both in face and build and also temperament, that he wondered who her father was. Certainly there was not much of any of the men visible in her. [41]

What would Marcia mean to the children? With a start he came back to his problem. There was nothing apparent of the maternal instinct in her. But then, neither was there in Joan, either; and Joan was a perfectly good member of the clan.

Oh, sometimes they laughed at Joan for being much too serious about her part. She was the artist and the self-acknowledged arbiter of good taste, the monitor of the proper way. She was the gracious hostess when visitors were at hand. To her the clan had conceded the job of deciding the arrangement of the rooms. To her the girls turned for advice in how to dress. And her advice was good. With some real though limited talent as an artist, she had the touch of instinct, the sense of rightness, and the drive to be unsatisfied with anything but what was right. And she, conceding that children were necessary and even desirable in their places, still deplored the havoc they could wreak. She was not a good manager of the children.

But then, he thought, why should she be? The clan had other purposes than to raise children; that was one of the important needs the clan fulfilled, but it was only one. In fact, it was one of the strengths of the clan that the different members had separate talents they could bring to it. Each with his own value, each unique. With the separateness that let them complement each other to form the whole. This was their strength.

No, Marcia was not greatly maternal, certainly—but this was not important. But he could not quite decide what was important.

HE WAS still puzzling over it when Betsy bounced into the kitchen.

"Whew," she said, giving him a light kiss, "what a day!" She pulled out a mirror from her pocket and looked into it. "I think I'm going to have a red nose. That sun was bright and hot; I hope none of the kids got too much. But they *will* keep dashing into the water, and it's hard to catch them again to get them to put their shirts on. I think Timmy's back is a little red, but I guess it won't be too much." She collapsed violently into a chair. [42]

Tom smiled at her. It was refreshing to see anyone who could be tired in such a dynamic way.

"You look as if you had a day," he said.

"We did," she said, looking happy. She heaved herself up to get a cup and saucer and to pour herself a cup of coffee. Then, sitting down, she looked at him. "And what have you been doing?" she asked him.

"Oh, buzzing around town," he told her. "And brooding."

"Brooding?" she asked. He explained to her what the situation was, telling her that they must soon decide what to do about Marcia—whether to accept her as a member of the clan or not. He told her that only by accepting the girl could they get the job at Eltron Electronics that they wanted. And he told her Ricky's thinking that the thing must be decided that night, and warned her of the coming caucus. The words boiled out of him; when he was through, he slumped down, suddenly tired.

Betsy cocked her head and studied him. There was a soft look in her eyes of the sort she usually saved for the children. "Why has it upset you?" she asked.

"Upset me?" Tom seemed surprised. "Well, yes, I suppose it has. Sue was in here, and I got to thinking of the kids. What this'll mean to them."

"The kids?" She looked surprised. "Why should this mean anything to the kids? Anything special, that is?"

"Well, if we turn her down, we got to take the Universal job," he explained. "And that means moving. Moving's always hard on kids. And if we accept her, then the kids'll have a lot to do with her."

"I assume she won't roast them live over the coals," Betsy said. "And I think the kids are tough enough to take almost anything else." She snickered. "You don't see them as much as I do. If you did you'd know they were a lot tougher than they look, the delicate little things!"

"Oh, I'm not talking about that," he said. "I don't expect her to bat them around or anything. But I just wonder how they'll take to *her*."

She shrugged. "If they don't like her, they can always come to me. Or Rita. Or Polly or Esther or Sandy. Or even Joan, providing they don't mess up the livingroom while they do it. The kids will get along, don't worry."

"As a matter of fact," she went on, "that's a funny thing. One of the chief arguments against the clans is that it doesn't single out a man and a woman as the parents of a child. This is supposed to do something to the child—make him insecure, somehow. But as far as I can see, it makes him more secure. In the first place, he's got that many more parents to choose from, and he can usually find one at least in the mood and with the time to give him what he needs at the moment. Then, too, the clan can afford to have one or two of its people completely concentrated on the children at any given time. And that job can get sort of passed around so nobody gets fed up with it.

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"Or, rather, if a person does get fed up with the kids, she doesn't have to force herself to be halfway decent to them; she doesn't have to have anything to do with them at all until she gets over her blues. So most of the time, the kids get the kind of attention they ought to get, and they get it from a person who's in the mood to give it. Personally, I think that they're a lot better off under this system, and you'd have a hard time telling me any different."

"They do look healthy and happy," he said.

"They sure do." She looked proud and satisfied. "I'd hate to be the one to try to keep up with them if they were any healthier. Or any fuller of ideas."

"That's why I hate to risk it," he told her. "Everything's going so well now.... The kids are so obviously.... But I take it you don't think there's much risk?"

"No." Her tone was incisive. "Any storms she can cook up, the kids can stand better than you and I can."

"Maybe you're right," Tom conceded. "But what about yourself? You think she is apt to make 'storms'?"

BETSY shrugged. "There's always storms when you take in a new member. You have to adjust; and, even more, the new one has to adjust. And adjustments aren't ever easy. I remember when I came in. I had some bad times—and I was brought up in a clan, too; I knew what I was getting into. But still there were times when it hurt. When I felt lost. When I didn't know what you people were like. When I felt like a stranger, not knowing your private jokes and unconscious language. When I felt out of place and alone.

"There were plenty of times when this happened, but I stuck it out. And I learned. I learned what made you people tick, and why you did some of the things you did. I grew into being a part of

you. Now I am one of the clan, legally, socially, and in my inmost self.

"That's *my* story. Marcia will have a lot harder time; she doesn't even know what a clan is. She's not only never been a part of one, but the people she has been with have sneered at them, and made no effort to understand. She hasn't even been able to get along with one husband; she's going to have a hard time learning to get along with seven. Not to mention six co-wives. Chances are she's been spoiled, made the center of things without due cause. She was an only child, wasn't she? She's going to have it awfully tough."

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"Do you think she can take it?" Tom asked.

"Not knowing the lady, that's guessing too hard," Betsy answered. "I think it's possible that she can learn. And maybe it's not entirely against her that she doesn't know anything about the clans except what's wrong. She'll soon find out she doesn't know a thing, and then she can start from scratch—learn like the kids do. Maybe that's easier than the unlearning of the 'almost-right' that people like me have to do. At least she's got no preconceived ideas that will stand more than a day or two of actual experience." She shrugged.

"The thing that I'm worried about," Tom said, "is that she may be able to split us—divide us up into factions and set us against each other. I hope she can't, but what happens if she does?"

"Then we split," Betsy answered. "But so what? I don't think she can do it; but even if she can, so what? I wouldn't want it to happen but it wouldn't be a disaster. We'd all land on our feet somewhere. I know I'd head out for the nearest clan and I'd get into that clan just as soon as I could. When I got into it, and got accepted as a real part of it, then I'd think of the rest of this as just an unhappy incident. A tragedy, but not the end of life. But as far as I'm concerned, this is too remote a possibility to worry about."

"You are quite unafraid, aren't you?" Tom said.

"Yes," she answered simply, her voice calm and cool. "I'm not afraid of Marcia—not of what she can do to the kids or to myself. I think the kids are strong enough emotionally to stand anything. And I think I am, too."

There was a quiet confidence in her voice. She reached out and patted his hand. Then, getting up, she started to get out the food for the evening meal while Tom continued to sit there, thinking. And when Tom got up and walked out, she still said nothing but looked after him with a look that had something warm and tender in it.

AS HE walked through the livingroom, he saw Rita stretched out on the couch. He looked questioningly at her wondering if the day had been too hard for her, being, as she was, six months along towards the twelfth child of the clan. But she smiled at him and shook her head. "Don't be worried," she said; "I'm just a little tired but not too much."

"Anything I can get you?" he asked.

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"No, thanks," she said, her voice cheerful. "I just need to get off my feet."

He started to say something about Marcia, but then stopped. What good would it do? he asked himself. Rita, with the instinct of birth close upon her, was too absorbed in herself and the life she carried. The problem, to her, would exist only if it threatened herself or her child. And by all the signs, she felt no threat. Her calm acceptance of the daily life, her quiet absorption in the now and here, measured a confidence in the clan that was complete.

No, to talk of Marcia could do no good. If he succeeded in impressing her with the importance of the problem, it would be because he made her realize that Marcia was a threat. It would be at the expense of her feeling of security, the security that let her wait her time out in calm acceptance and assurance. And if he did not persuade her of the problem's significance, she could not contribute to it. Under normal circumstances, she was not one to deal with abstract questions. She had an acute awareness of personalities that transcended logic. She had an instinct, a sixth sense, almost, for responding to the needs of others. But she was not a philosopher, and neither could she handle abstract problems.

And so he smiled at her and told her: "Call me if you do want anything. I'll be outside." And he passed on through and out the door.

4

AS HE walked out the door, he saw, coming in the gate, the rest of the clan returning from work. The children were rushing to meet them, whooping their greetings. The whole scene

was one of happy chaos. Out in front was Paul, his round, cherubic face beaming with delight. He bent down to whisper something in little Randy's ear which sent that boy off shrieking with delight. Behind him was Sam, Polly, and Herb.

Sam's face was dark and his eyes deepset. Generally, he looked sullen and dour. But those who knew him, could also see the twinkle in his eye and knew that he had a subtle and penetrating sense of humor. The kids liked him, and both Alice and Ken, aged five and six, were crowding around him now while he gravely asked them something.

Polly, beside him, was peering around delightedly, sparkling with the general excitement. Her eyes were darting all around looking, Tom knew, not for any one thing or person, but simply to absorb it all. [46]

On Polly's other side was Herb. The mechanic of the crowd, he had an eager interest that was somewhat boyish. His happiest moments were spent under the car or bus with his face all smeared with grease. With people, he lacked the touch that he had with machines. There was an awkwardness, almost an uncouthness, that would have been tragic, Tom thought, anywhere but in the haven of a clan.

Behind them, Joan walked with Mike. Her face was still earnest and intense, and Tom thought that she was probably expounding some theory of the art. He felt sorry for Mike, but, then, Mike was a chap that invited that sort of thing. He seemed to be chronically unable to express a disinterest in anything and, as a consequence, was the one on which most of them poured out their troubles and their ideas. But, then, perhaps he was interested. Maybe he was interested in the people even when he was not in the ideas.

Finally, there came Esther and Pete. Esther was the feminine organizer of the clan. She it was that planned the details of what should happen when, and who should do what. The others were just as glad to leave these matters to her. She had a passion for fairness that made them trust her distribution of the chores. And she had the will to get things organized, the wish to see things settled long in advance. Tom saw she was talking earnestly to Pete; he wondered what project she was working on.

Pete was the philosopher of the clan. With a somewhat pixyish mind, he was afraid of no thoughts, and took nothing at all for granted. As to whether he was a really deep thinker, or just one who liked to play with logic and semantics, Tom did not know. Perhaps it was too soon to tell. Philosophers are not made at the age of twenty-five, but only when they have lived their lives, and are ready to profit fully by its experience. At the moment, Tom saw, he was looking rather bored by Esther, and seemed to welcome the onrushing crowd of kids.

TOM looked at them all. Whom should he talk to? he wondered. Or should he talk to any of them? There was no longer in him the same drive about the problem. In some way he did not yet understand, his talks with Sandy and with Betsy had boiled off some of the urgency. And yet, the problem still was urgent. Ricky still meant to bring it up at caucus, and Tom still had to know what his own response would be. It was with something of a shock that he realized that he did not know—but the fact was that he did not. And he did not even know why he was uncertain. The problem had seemed so clear when Ricky had first mentioned it; but now, now it was not clear at all. [47]

Tom waited until they all had washed off the dust of the road and combed their hair and changed their dresses. In the meantime, he mixed them cocktails ready for their return. And when they had once more assembled, he let them trade around the items of the day's news. It was not until he saw Pete wander off to gaze out the window at the gathering sunset that he made any move.

When he saw that Pete was alone, he went over to stand beside him. "What do you know, Pete," he said.

Pete turned to face him. "Hi, Tom. You look puzzled tonight. Not your usual fatherly self. What's up?"

Tom shrugged. "It's this Marcia business that's bothering me," he said. "Ricky's going to caucus it tonight, and I been trying to figure it out."

"What's his rush?" Pete asked. "Or is Ricky just being impetuous?"

"No," Tom said. "There's a reason for it. Graves has got to make his arrangements soon, so he's been putting the pressure on for us to decide quick. If we don't decide tonight, we are apt to be left out."

"Oh?" Pete's voice was noncommittal.

"What do you think of it?" Tom asked. "Should we take her in or not?"

"Well, I don't know," Pete stalled. "The reasons why we should are pretty obvious. It will solve some of our worries if we do. What are the reasons why we shouldn't?"

"I don't know," Tom said. "It just seems wrong to me. Seems like we'd be giving up too much of our ... well, our ideals. Maybe I'm being old fashioned, but it just seems immoral to me, somehow."

Pete leaned against the window frame. "You mean it's like marrying a woman for her money? Sort of gigolo-like?"

Tom nodded. "Yes, I guess that's it," he said. "I suppose what's bothering me is that the idea of the clan is to make the family the same thing as the economic unit; but this seems like it's being too damn economic about it, too mercenary. It just doesn't seem right."

Pete said nothing for a long moment while he meditated. "Well, that's one way of looking at it," he said, finally. "But on the other hand, maybe you got to stop and think this thing through. Why is it bad to marry a woman for her money? It occurs to me that a monogamistic marriage of that sort is bad—and I think it probably *is* bad—because it inevitably leads to living a lie. You got to fool the woman, because otherwise she doesn't get anything out of the marriage. If the marriage is to mean anything, both the man and the woman have got to get out of it some sense of belonging; that's what the marriage is for. Now the man may get the belonging, the security, from the money. But the wife—she can't get anything out of it unless he can fool her. She's already got the money, so that doesn't mean anything to her; and she's got what the money can buy.

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"Unless he can fool her into thinking that he really loves her for herself alone, she doesn't get anything at all out of it. So, he's got to fool her. And the worst of it is that, if he doesn't succeed, she'll walk out on him with her money; then he'll lose what he's after, too—so he's got good reason for being afraid. The situation is necessarily unstable; it's almost bound to lead to grief of one kind or another. So, that kind of a marriage is bad."

"Why's this any different?" Tom asked.

"For one thing, because we can't live a lie," Pete said. "Living a lie of that sort requires great concentration and continuous effort. With the clan, no one person can concentrate on any one other. The lie, if it ever got started, would be a very short-lived one; and I don't think it would ever get started. Not only is it pretty obvious when a new girl is added to a clan, that we can't all be so desperately in love with her; it isn't necessary. A person joins the clan. She's getting a new way of life, and a whole new group of friends. Until she's been in the clan a while, these are not more than friends; it takes time really to integrate a person into a clan. But, at least they are friends—people who will help you to stand against the world.

"So she does get something out of the clan. She gets a sense of belonging, and it doesn't depend on any one person but on the group-structure of the clan. The clan is there to belong to, regardless of any one individual. But with a monogamistic marriage, the structure is lost when either person pulls out. So this thing means that, in the first place, the clan can't live a lie, and, in the second, that there is no need for the lie, anyway. Finally, this means that the situation is quite different from a monogamistic marriage for money. Even if, by chance, the thing is unstable, there is still no reason for fear."

"You think this thing's all right, then?" Tom asked.

"Didn't say that," Pete smiled. "I don't think it's particularly immoral, but that doesn't say it's all right; I don't know. I haven't really thought it out. But what I am saying is that you can't just take over the old ethics into the clan. We got to create a new code and we got to start from the bottom."

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"I guess you're right," Tom said. He stared thoughtfully out the window for a moment. Then he shrugged and turned away. "But it doesn't help much," he added to himself as he wandered toward the dining room.

5

IT WAS after supper, when the dishes had all been washed and the children packed off to bed, that the clan gathered in the livingroom. They had chatted for a short time, but all fell silent when Ricky got up. He went to the mantelpiece and, turning, announced: "I find that there are problems before the clan that require the mature consideration of the clan. I therefore request a caucus." The words were the ritual of the process, established through long custom, and the clan's by-laws.

Tom stood up and, with some ostentation, counted the people present. He then announced: "I find that there is present the full membership of the clan that is adult, and that has been accepted into responsibility for the clan. Also, there are no strangers present. I believe you may call a caucus." He sat down.

"We have the word of Tom," Ricky said. "Does anyone doubt that I may now call a caucus?" He looked around carefully. "Since no one seems to have a doubt, I do now declare that the clan is

assembled in caucus, and ask Sandy to operate the recorder." Sandy reached over to a box sitting on a table and flipped a switch. She spoke into a microphone, giving the date and time, and then announced that the recorder was on.

Paul bounced up out of his chair. "What is the purpose of this caucus?" This, too, was ritual.

"I have called this caucus," Ricky said, "to ask the clan to consider the application for membership of Marcia Graves. It is my opinion that this question must be decided now, since various collateral problems of some urgency will be determined by our decision on this matter. Does anyone question this, or feel that the matter should not be considered at this time for any reason?" Although this was part of the established pattern of a caucus, he looked at Tom since the latter could, if he wished, protest the matter. Tom, however, smiled and barely shook his head.

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"Since there is no objection," Ricky continued, looking slightly relieved, "I will summarize the situation as I see it.

"Marcia has requested admission to the clan. She has been instructed in what this means both legally, and—in so far as it can be described or codified—socially. I do not think it can be said that she does not know what she is doing. As regards the girl herself, all of you have met her, I think, several times. This, of course, is not sufficient to determine her fitness or compatibility. However, it is as much as can reasonably be done before decision.

"In accordance with the custom and the law, then, it is proposed that she be admitted on a conditional basis for a period of one year. During this time the clan may, by a majority vote in caucus, refuse her further membership. At the end of one year, in the absence of such a vote, she will be admitted to full membership and reciprocal obligations with the clan established. Subsequent severance of this relation can be accomplished only through the courts for due cause, and with due consideration of the equity of both parties." His voice was almost a monotone as he recited the formula.

"In the present case," he continued, his voice coming alive, "there are certain collateral problems. Marcia is the daughter of Mr. Graves, president of Eltron Electric. Mr. Graves has long been a Free-Trader, and Eltron Electric has never contracted with the clans. However, it is clear that, if his daughter becomes a clanswoman, then he can no longer maintain this aloofness towards the clan. Specifically, he has indicated he will be willing to contract the Vord clan for a desirable piece of work if we accept his daughter. It is my opinion that, if he can once be persuaded to contract a functioning clan, then he will find this the desirable way to operate, and will therefore stop opposing the clans. He has had a continued history of labor-troubles, with strikes, absenteeism, high turnover, and all the rest. Once he has tried the clans, he will find they solve his worst headaches; he may well end up our best friend, almost no matter what happens to Marcia."

RICKY continued, "It is this matter of Graves that makes this matter urgent. Graves must decide in the next day or two how to handle this piece of work. He will either give it to us, or set up his own supervisory organization in this time. So we have to decide quickly. This, however, is not the only basis on which we should decide. It is one of them, and, I think, is a legitimately important one. But it is only one; we must also consider Marcia and the clan. She is one whose background is not in this direction. Her father, as I said, is rather vigorously Free-Trading and Monogamistic. She is poorly prepared, psychologically, for clan life.

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"And yet, she is sincere in wanting to join the clan. She has tried the other life and had it fail her. She hopes, in the clan, to find what she needs; and I think it quite possible that she may. I would not advocate this unless I thought she had at least a reasonable chance of succeeding.

"As regards the clan, this, I suppose, is something each of us will have to decide for ourselves. Personally, I think she has a lot to contribute. She is intelligent, well-educated, and she has had a lot of cultural experience that none of us have had. I think she could add much to the clan, if we can only integrate her in. But that 'if' is the question. And each of you will have to decide yourself what is the answer to it.

"But I think I have talked enough, here," he said. "I've told you my own point of view. I think it is time to listen to the other side." He looked at Tom, and waved his hand as if presenting him the floor.

Tom got to his feet. He looked around at all these faces so familiar to him. What should he say? he wondered. What did he want to say? He did not know; he felt confused. And this surprised him.

He looked at Ricky, and remembered their argument that afternoon. What was Ricky really after? he wondered. Was he just asking the clan to be opportunistic? To take Marcia in, just because of what the contract could do for them?

Or did he really think Marcia could fit? That she could learn to be a real part of them? Or, again, as he remembered Ricky's comment that she was a 'dish', had Ricky gone overboard about her?

Was he so taken by her looks and all that he was forgetting the clan? Not consciously, of course; he would not, could not, do that consciously. But perhaps unknowing? Using the other arguments as rationalization?

Somehow, Tom doubted this. Ricky might not be too deep a thinker but, Tom thought, he was generally extremely level headed. No, he thought, Ricky was probably quite serious in thinking the clan should accept Marcia, that she, in one way or another, would be good for the clan. And that left only the question of whether he was right or not.

Tom's eyes swung to Sandy, and he remembered his discussion with her. And he remembered her parting shot which had asked him if he was afraid of Marcia. If, perhaps, he did not resent her for being better educated than he, and if, maybe, she might awe him. Was that it? he wondered. Did he feel awe at her? He did of her father, certainly. He remembered his talks with Mr. Graves, and remembered coming out of them feeling beaten and bedraggled—something of the way he might feel towards Marcia. [52]

Yes, he had to admit it, there was that feeling there. She was from a background he did not know and it did, in truth, somewhat scare him. How much did this influence him? He did not know.

He looked at Betsy, thinking of his talk with her. He remembered how she had brushed aside any thought that the kids might be harmed by Marcia. Was she right? Were the kids so stable emotionally that nothing Marcia could bring into their world would seriously harm them? Remembering Sue who had come to flirt with him with her four-year-old eyes, it was not hard to believe that Betsy was right.

Also there was Betsy's discussion of what might happen to Marcia. Betsy had argued, Tom remembered, that Marcia might well learn to fit, that she would find all the old rules by which she had lived outside the clan so completely inadequate that she would be forced to learn from scratch. Was that right, he wondered. After the initial period when she would be learning how little she knew, would she then be able to learn like a child, without undue prejudice, just because her background was so different? It was possible, he had to admit.

And finally he looked at Pete. Pete had argued that it was not immoral to take in Marcia for economic reasons, that it was not like marrying a girl for her money. Economics were an integral and avowed part of the clan idea; and certainly the moralities of a clan had to be different from those of a monogamist marriage. Yes, he had to admit that he thought Pete's arguments sound. There was a different ethics here. There had to be. What the true ethics would say of the case of Marcia, he did not know. But at least he could not lightly dismiss it all as simply and obviously immoral. It could not be that simple.

AS TOM looked at them and pondered what he should say, the answer suddenly came to him. It came to him like a revelation, and he felt as if something inside of him had broken, something that had hampered and restricted him, even without his knowing it. He felt free, suddenly, free and exultant.

He smiled at them and said: "When Ricky told me this afternoon, I was afraid; as I talked to several of you since that time, I continued to be afraid. And I was afraid when I came here tonight. But now, as I look at your bright faces, I am no longer. You and I are the clan, and the clan is stronger than anyone outside. Not Marcia, nor Graves, nor anyone else can break it; only we can break it—only we, by losing faith in it. I know now that I have not had the faith that I should have. The faith in you, and in us, and in our relations to each other. As I stood here looking at the faces of those I talked to, and remembering what you said, it came to me how foolish I have been. [53]

"I don't know whether this thing is right or not; I don't know what its ultimate result will be. Maybe it will be good, and maybe bad. But if it's bad, it won't be so bad as to be a disaster. The clan will survive anything that may come of it, and may even be the stronger for it. And if the results are good, why then of course everyone will be the winner for it. No, I don't know what the results will be, but now I am willing to face whatever they are without fear, and with confidence in the clan.

"My vote will be to accept Marcia." He sat down feeling quite at peace with himself for the first time in what seemed like a long, long time.

As Ricky came forward to take the floor again, and ask for further discussion, Tom looked around. Sandy, he saw, was looking at him with a smile in her eyes. She approved, he knew. And so did Betsy. She was watching him with a warm look that spoke her feelings. Pete was staring off into space, no doubt following down some logical train.

The others were each reacting in their separate ways. Paul was interested but probably had no idea of what it really was about. Rita, in her maternal self-absorption, was not really concerned. Polly was watching him with sympathy for him as a man, but not with any basic understanding. Sam, with his dead-pan face was hard to read. His penetrating eyes saw deeply, but what they saw was hard to tell. Herb was looking around him with awkward movements; he was probably

feeling very shy at the thought of a new member. Marcia, Tom thought, might well be good for him, teach him a greater social finesse.

And there was Joan, leaning forward intently, no doubt wondering how Marcia would affect the artistic balance of the group. Mike was looking interested but not concerned. And Esther was sitting back in her chair with a vague smile on her lips. Probably, Tom thought with a mental chuckle, she was already planning some suitable induction ceremony.

From here on out, Tom sensed, it was only a matter of formality. Other discussion there would be; arguments, perhaps. But in the end, Marcia would be admitted by unanimous vote. And he was content that it be so.

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