

The Teddy-Bears' Picnic

“I simply don't believe it”, Edwin said.
“Grown-up people?”

“Well, grown-up now, darling. We weren't always grown up.”

“But *teddy-bears*, Deborah?”

“I'm sure I've told you dozens of times before.”

Edwin shook his head, frowning and staring at his wife. They'd been married six months: he was twenty-nine, swiftly making his way in a stockbroker's office, Deborah was twenty-six and intended to continue being Mr Harridance's secretary until a family began to come along. They lived in Wimbledon, in a block of flats called The Zodiac. 23 The Zodiac their address was and friends thought the title amusing and lively, making jokes about Gemini and Taurus and Capricorn when they came to drinks. A Dane had designed The Zodiac in 1968.

“I'll absolutely tell you this”, Edwin said, “I'm not attending this thing.”

“But darling—”

“Oh, don't be bloody silly, Deborah.”

Edwin's mother had called Deborah “a pretty little thing”, implying for those who cared to be perceptive a certain reservation. She'd been more direct with Edwin himself, in a private conversation they'd had after Edwin had said he and Deborah wanted to get married. “Remember, dear”, was how Mrs Chalm had put it then, “she's not always going to be a pretty little thing. This really isn't a very sensible marriage, Edwin.” Mrs Chalm was known to be a woman who didn't go in for cant when dealing with the lives of the children she had borne and brought up; she made no bones about it and often said so. Her husband, on the other hand, kept out of things.

Yet in the end Edwin and Deborah had married, one Tuesday afternoon in December,

and Mrs Chalm resolved to make the best of it. She advised Deborah about this and that, she gave her potted plants for 23 The Zodiac, and in fact was kind. If Deborah had known about her mother-in-law's doubts she'd have been surprised.

“But we've always done it, Edwin. All of us.”

“All of who, for heaven's sake?”

“Well, Angela for one. And Holly and Jeremy of course.”

“Jeremy? My God!”

“And Peter. And Enid and Charlotte and Harriett.”

“You've never told me a word about this, Deborah.”

“I'm really sure I have.”

The sitting-room where this argument took place had a single huge window with a distant view of Wimbledon Common. The walls were covered with rust-coloured hessian, the floor with a rust-coloured carpet. The Chalmers were still acquiring furniture: what there was, reflecting the style of The Zodiac's architecture, was in bent steel and glass. There was a single picture, of a field of thistles, revealed to be a photograph on closer examination. Bottles of alcohol stood on a glass-topped table, their colourful labels cheering that corner up. Had the Chalmers lived in a Victorian flat, or a cottage in a mews, their sitting-room would have been different, fussier and more ornate, dictated by the architectural environment. Their choice of decor and furniture was the choice of newly-weds who hadn't yet discovered a confidence of their own.

“You mean you all sit round with your teddies”, Edwin said, “having a picnic? And you'll still be doing it at eighty?”

“What d'you mean, eighty?”

“When you’re eighty years of age, for God’s sake. You’re trying to tell me you’ll still be going to this garden when you’re stumbling about and hard of hearing, a gang of O.A.P.’s squatting out on the grass with teddy-bears?”

“I didn’t say anything about when we’re old.”

“You said it’s a tradition, for God’s sake.”

He poured some whisky into a glass and added a squirt of soda from a Sparklets syphon. Normally he would have poured a gin and dry vermouth for his wife, but this evening he felt too cross to bother. He hadn’t had the easiest of days. There’d been an error in the office about the B.A.T. shares a client had wished to buy, and he hadn’t managed to have any lunch because as soon as the B.A.T. thing was sorted out a crisis had blown up over sugar speculation. It was almost eight o’clock when he’d got back to The Zodiac and instead of preparing a meal for him Deborah had been on the telephone to her friend Angela, talking about teddy-bears.

Edwin was an agile young man with shortish fair hair and a face that had a very slight look of a greyhound about it. He was vigorous and athletic, sound on the tennis court, fond of squash and recently of golf. His mother had once stated that Edwin could not bear to lose and would go to ruthless lengths to ensure that he never did. She had even remarked to her husband that she hoped this quality would not one day cause trouble, but her husband replied it was probably just what a stockbroker needed. Mrs Chalm had been thinking more of personal relationships, where losing couldn’t be avoided. It was that she’d had on her mind when she’d had doubts about the marriage, for the doubts were not there simply because Deborah was a pretty little thing: it was the conjunction Mrs Chalm was alarmed about.

“I didn’t happen to get any lunch”, Edwin snappishly said now. “I’ve had a long unpleasant day and when I get back here—”

“I’m sorry, dear.”

DEBORAH IMMEDIATELY ROSE from among the rust-coloured cushions of the sofa and went to the kitchen, where she took two pork chops from a Marks and Spencer’s carrier-bag and placed them under the grill of

the electric cooker. She took a packet of frozen broccoli spears from the carrier-bag as well, and two Marks and Spencer’s trifles. While typing letters that afternoon she’d planned to have fried noodles with the chops and the broccoli spears, just for a change. A week ago they’d had fried noodles in the new Mexican place they’d found and Edwin said they were lovely. Deborah had kicked off her shoes as soon as she’d come into the flat and hadn’t put them on since. She was wearing a dress with scarlet petunias on it. Dark-haired, with a heart-shaped face and blue eyes that occasionally acquired a bewildered look, she seemed several years younger than twenty-six, more like eighteen.

She put on water to boil for the broccoli spears even though the chops would not be ready for some time. She prepared a saucepan of oil for the noodles, hoping that this was the way to go about frying them. She couldn’t understand why Edwin was making such a fuss just because Angela had telephoned, and put it down to his not having managed to get any lunch.

In the sitting-room Edwin stood by the huge window, surveying the tops of the trees and, in the distance, Wimbledon Common. She must have been on the phone to Angela for an hour and a half, probably longer. He’d tried to ring himself to say he’d be late but each time the line had been engaged. He searched his mind carefully, going back through the three years he’d known Deborah, but no reference to a teddy-bears’ picnic came to him. He’d said very positively that she had never mentioned it, but he’d said that in anger, just to make his point: reviewing their many conversations now he saw he had been right, and felt triumphant. Of course he’d have remembered such a thing, any man would.

Far down below, a car turned into the wide courtyard of The Zodiac, a Rover it looked like, a discreet shade of green. It wouldn’t be all that long before they had a Rover themselves, even allowing for the fact that the children they hoped for would be coming along any time now. Edwin had not objected to Deborah continuing her work after their marriage, but their family life would naturally be much tidier when she no longer could, when the children were born. Eventually they’d have to move into a house with a garden because it was natural that Deborah would want that,

and he had no intention of disagreeing with her.

"Another thing is", he said, moving from the window to the open doorway of the kitchen, "how come you haven't had a reunion all the years I've known you? If it's an annual thing—"

"It isn't an annual thing, Edwin. We haven't had a picnic since 1975 and before that 1971. It's just when someone feels like it, I suppose. It's just a bit of fun, darling."

"You call sitting down with teddy-bears a bit of fun? Grown-up people?"

"I wish you wouldn't keep on about grown-ups. I know we're grown-ups. That's the whole point. When we were little we all vowed—"

"Jesus Christ!"

He turned and went to pour himself another drink. She'd never mentioned it because she knew it was silly. She was ashamed of it, which was something she would discover when she grew up a bit.

"You know I've got Binky", she said, following him to where the drinks were and pouring herself some gin. "I've told you hundreds of times how I took him everywhere. If you don't like him in the bedroom I'll put him away. I didn't know you didn't like him."

"I didn't say that, Deborah. It's completely different, what you're saying. It's private for a start. I mean, it's your teddy-bear and you've told me how fond you were of it. That's completely different from sitting down with a crowd of idiots—"

"They're not idiots, Edwin, actually."

"Well, they certainly don't sound like anything else. D'you mean Jeremy and Peter are going to arrive clutching teddy-bears and then sit down on the grass pretending to feed them biscuit crumbs? For God's sake, Jeremy's a medical *doctor!*"

"Actually, nobody'll sit on the grass because the grass will probably be damp. Everyone brought rugs the last time. It's really because of the garden, you know. It's probably the nicest garden in South Bucks, and then there're the Ainley-Foxletons. I mean, they do so love it all."

H E'D ACTUALLY BEEN in the garden, and he'd once actually met the Ainley-Foxletons. One Saturday afternoon during his engagement to Deborah there had been tea on

a raised lawn. Laburnum and broom were out, a mass of yellow everywhere. Quite pleasant old sticks the Ainley-Foxletons had been, but neither of them had mentioned a teddy-bears' picnic.

"I think she did as matter of fact", Deborah mildly insisted. "I remember because I said it hadn't really been so long since the last one. Eighteen months ago would it be when I took you to see them? Well, 1975 wasn't all that long before that, and she said it seemed like aeons. I remember her saying that, I remember 'aeons' and thinking it just like her to come out with a word people don't use any more."

"And you never thought to point out the famous picnic site? For hours we walked round and round that garden and yet it never occurred to you—"

"We didn't walk round and round. I'm sorry you were bored, Edwin."

"I didn't say I was bored."

"I know the Ainley-Foxletons can't hear properly and it's a strain, but you said you wanted to meet them."

"I didn't say anything of the kind. You kept telling me about these people and their house and garden, but I can assure you I wasn't crying out to meet them in any way whatsoever. In fact, I rather wanted to play tennis that afternoon."

"You didn't say so at the time."

"Of course I didn't say so."

"Well then."

"What I'm trying to get through to you is that we walked round and round that garden even though it had begun to rain. And not once did you say: 'That's where we used to have our famous teddy-bears' picnic.'"

"As a matter of fact I think I did. And it isn't famous. I wish you wouldn't keep on about it being famous."

Deborah poured herself more gin and added the same amount of dry vermouth to the glass. She considered it rude of Edwin to stalk about the room just because he'd had a bad day, drinking himself and not bothering about her. If he hadn't liked the poor old Ainley-Foxletons he should have said so. If he'd wanted to play tennis that afternoon he should have said so too.

"Well, be all that as it may", he was saying now, rather pompously in Deborah's opinion, "I do not intend to take part in any of this nonsense."

"But everybody's husband will, and the wives too. It's only fun, darling."

"Oh, do stop saying it's fun. You sound like a half-wit. And something's smelling in the kitchen."

"I don't think that's very nice, Edwin. I don't see why you should call me a half-wit."

"Listen, I've had an extremely unpleasant day."

"Oh, do stop about your stupid old day."

She carried her glass to the kitchen with her and removed the chops from beneath the grill. They were fairly black, and serve him right for upsetting her. Why on earth did he have to make such a fuss, why couldn't he be like everyone else? It was something to giggle over, not take so seriously, a single Sunday afternoon when they wouldn't be doing anything anyway. She dropped a handful of noodles into the hot oil, and then a second handful.

IN THE SITTING-ROOM the telephone rang just as Edwin was squirting soda into another drink. "Yes?" he said, and Angela's voice came lilting over the line, saying she didn't want to bother Debbie but the date had just been fixed: June 17th. "Honestly, you'll split your sides, Edwin."

"Yes, all right, I'll tell her", he said as coldly as he could. He replaced the receiver without saying goodbye. He'd never cared for Angela, patronising kind of creature.

Deborah knew it had been Angela on the telephone and she knew she would have given Edwin the date she had arranged with Charlotte and Peter, who'd been the doubtful ones about the first date, suggested by Jeremy. Angela had said she was going to ring back with this information, but when the Chalmers sat down to their chops and broccoli spears and noodles Edwin hadn't yet passed the information on.

"Christ, what are these?" he said, poking at a brown noodle with his fork and then poking at the burnt chop.

"The little things are fried noodles, which you enjoyed so much the other night. The larger thing is a pork chop, which wouldn't have got overcooked if you hadn't started an argument."

"Oh, for God's sake!"

He pushed his chair back and stood up. He returned to the sitting-room and Deborah

heard the squirting of the soda syphon. She stood up herself, followed him to the sitting-room and poured herself another gin and vermouth. Neither of them spoke. Deborah returned to the kitchen and ate her share of the broccoli spears. The sound of television came from the sitting-room. "Listen, buster, you give this bread to the hit or don't you?" a voice demanded. "O.K., I give the bread", a second voice replied.

They'd had quarrels before. They'd quarrelled on their honeymoon in Greece for no reason whatsoever. They'd quarrelled because she'd once left the ignition of the car turned on, causing a flat battery. They'd quarrelled because of Enid's boring party just before Christmas. The present quarrel was just the same kind of thing, Deborah knew: Edwin would sit and sulk, she'd wash the dishes up feeling miserable, and he'd probably eat the chop and the broccoli when they were cold. She couldn't blame him for not wanting the noodles because she didn't seem to have cooked them correctly. Then she thought: what if he doesn't come to the picnic, what if he just goes on being stubborn, which he could be when he wanted to? Everyone would know. "Where's Edwin?" they would ask, and she'd tell some lie and everyone would know it was a lie, and everyone would know they weren't getting on. Only six months had passed, everyone would say, and he wouldn't join in a bit of fun.

But to Deborah's relief that didn't happen. Later that night Edwin ate the cold pork chop, eating it from his fingers because he couldn't manage to stick a fork into it. He ate the cold broccoli spears as well, but he left the noodles. She made him tea and gave him a Danish pastry and in the morning he said he was sorry.

"SO IF WE COULD it would be lovely", Deborah said on her office telephone. She'd told her mother there was to be another teddy-bears' picnic, Angela and Jeremy had arranged it mainly, and the Ainley-Foxletons would love it of course, possibly the last they'd see.

"My dear, you're always welcome, as you know." The voice of Deborah's mother came all the way from South Bucks, from the village where the Ainley-Foxletons' house and garden

were, where Deborah and Angela, Jeremy, Charlotte, Harriet, Enid, Peter and Holly had been children together. The plan was that Edwin and Deborah should spend the weekend of June 17 with Deborah's parents, and Deborah's mother had even promised to lay on some tennis for Edwin on the Saturday. Deborah herself wasn't much good at tennis.

"Thanks, Mummy", Deborah managed to say just as Mr Harridance returned from lunch.

"No, spending the whole weekend actually", Edwin informed his mother. "There's this teddy-bear thing Deborah has to go to."

"What teddy-bear thing?"

Edwin went into details, explaining how the children who'd been friends in a South Bucks village nearly twenty years ago met, from time to time to have a teddy-bears' picnic because that was what they'd done then.

"But they're adults surely now", Mrs Chalm pointed out.

"Yes, I know."

"Well, I hope you have a lovely time, dear."

"Delightful, I'm sure."

"It's odd when they're adults, I'd have thought."

Between themselves, Edwin and Deborah did not again discuss the subject of the teddy-bears' picnic. During the quarrel Edwin had felt bewildered, never quite knowing how to proceed, and he hoped that on some future occasion he would be better able to cope. It made him angry when he wasn't able to cope, and the anger still hung about him. On the other hand six months wasn't long in a marriage which he hoped would go on for ever: the marriage hadn't had a chance to settle into the shape that suited it, any more than he and Deborah had had time to develop their own taste in furniture and decoration. It was only to be expected that there should be problems and uncertainty.

As for Deborah, she knew nothing about marriages settling into shape: she wasn't aware that rules and tacit understandings, arrangements of give and take, were what made marriage possible when the first gloss had worn off. Marriage for Deborah was the continuation of a love affair, and as yet she had few complaints. She knew that of course they had to have quarrels.

They had met at a party. Edwin had left a group of people he was listening to and had

crossed to the corner where she was being bored by a man in computers. "Hullo", Edwin just said. All three of them were eating plates of paella.

Finding a consideration of the past pleasanter than speculation about the future, Deborah often recalled that moment: Edwin's sharp face smiling at her, the computer man discomfited, a sour taste in the paella. "You're not Fiona's sister?" Edwin said, and when ages afterwards she'd asked him who Fiona was he confessed he'd made her up. "I shouldn't eat much more of this stuff", he said, taking the paella away from her. Deborah had been impressed by that: she and the computer man had been fiddling at the paella with their forks, both of them too polite to say that there was something the matter with it. "What do you do?" Edwin said a few minutes later, which was more than the computer man had asked.

IN THE WEEKS THAT FOLLOWED they told one another all about themselves, about their parents and the houses they'd lived in as children, the schools they'd gone to, the friends they'd made. Edwin was a daring person, he was successful, he liked to be in charge of things. Without in any way sounding boastful, he told her of episodes in his childhood, of risks taken at school. Once he'd dismantled the elderly music master's bed, causing it to collapse when the music master later lay down on it. He'd removed the carburettor from some other master's car, he'd stolen an egg-beater from an ironmonger's shop. All of them were dares, and by the end of his schooldays he had acquired the reputation of being fearless: there was nothing, people said, he wouldn't do.

It was easy for Deborah to love him, and everything he told her, self-deprecatingly couched, was clearly the truth. But Deborah in love naturally didn't wonder how this side of Edwin would seem in marriage, or how it might develop as Edwin moved into middle age. She couldn't think of anything nicer than having him there every day, and in no way did she feel let down on her honeymoon in Greece or by the couple of false starts they made with flats before they eventually ended up in 23 The Zodiac. Edwin went to his office every day and Deborah went to hers. That he told her more about share prices than she told him about the

letters she typed for Mr Harridance was because share prices were more important. It was true that she would often have liked to pass on details of this or that, for instance of the correspondence with Flitts, Hay and Co concerning nearly eighteen thousand defective chair castors. The correspondence was interesting because it had continued for two years and had become vituperative. But when she mentioned it Edwin just agreeably nodded. There was also the business about Miss Royal's scratches, which everyone in the office had been conjecturing about: how on earth had a woman like Miss Royal acquired four long scratches on her face and neck between five-thirty one Monday evening and nine-thirty the following morning? "Oh yes?" Edwin had said, and gone on to talk about the Mercantile Investment Trust.

Deborah did not recognise these telltale signs. She did not remember that when first she and Edwin exchanged information about one another's childhoods Edwin had sometimes just smiled, as if his mind had drifted away. It was only a slight disappointment that he didn't wish to hear about Flitts, Hay and Co, and Miss Royal's scratches: no one could possibly get into a state about things like that. Deborah saw little significance in the silly quarrel they'd had about the teddy-bears' picnic, which was silly itself of course. She didn't see that it had had to do with friends who were hers and not Edwin's; nor did it occur to her that when they really began to think about the decoration of 23 The Zodiac it would be Edwin who would make the decisions. They shared things, Deborah would have said: after all, in spite of the quarrel they were going to go to the teddy-bears' picnic. Edwin loved her and was kind and really rather marvellous. It was purely for her sake that he'd agreed to give up a whole weekend.

So on a warm Friday afternoon, as they drove from London in their Saab, Deborah was feeling happy. She listened while Edwin talked about a killing a man called Dupree had made by selling out his International Asphalt holding. "James James Morrison Morrison Weatherby George Dupree," she said.

"What on earth's that?"

"It's by A. A. Milne, the man who wrote Pooh Bear. Poor Pooh!"

Edwin didn't say anything.

"Jeremy's is called Pooh."

"I see."

In the back of the car, propped up in a corner, was the blue teddy-bear called Binky which Deborah had had since she was one.

THE RHODODENDRONS were in bloom in the Ainley-Foxletons' garden, late that year because of the bad winter. So was the laburnum Edwin remembered, and the broom, and some yellow azaleas. "My dear, we're so awfully glad", old Mrs Ainley-Foxleton said, kissing him because she imagined he must be one of the children in her past. Her husband, tottering about on the raised lawn which Edwin also remembered from his previous visit, had developed the shakes. "Darlings, Mrs Bright has ironed our tablecloth for us!" Mrs Ainley-Foxleton announced with a flourish.

She imparted this fact because Mrs Bright, the Ainley-Foxletons' charwoman, was emerging at that moment from the house, with the ironed tablecloth over one arm. She carried a tray on which there were glass jugs of orange squash and lemon squash, a jug of milk, mugs with Beatrice Potter characters on them, and two plates of sandwiches that weren't much larger than postage stamps. She made her way down stone steps from the raised lawn, crossed a more extensive lawn and disappeared into a shrubbery. While everyone remained chatting to the Ainley-Foxletons—nobody helping to lay the picnic out because that had never been part of the proceedings—Mrs Bright reappeared from the shrubbery, returned to the house and then made a second journey, her tray laden this time with cakes and biscuits.

Before lunch Edwin had sat for a long time with Deborah's father in the summerhouse, drinking. This was something Deborah's father enjoyed on Sunday mornings, permitting himself a degree of dozy inebriation which only became noticeable when two bottles of claret were consumed at lunch. Today Edwin had followed his example, twice getting to his feet to refill their glasses and during the course of lunch managing to slip out to the summerhouse for a fairly heavy tot of whisky, which mixed nicely with the claret. He could think of no other condition in which to present himself—with a teddy-bear Deborah's mother had pressed upon him—in the Ainley-Foxletons' garden. "Rather you than me, old

chap", Deborah's father had said after lunch, subsiding into an armchair with a gurgle. At the last moment Edwin had quickly returned to the summerhouse and had helped himself to a further intake of whisky, drinking from the cap of the Teacher's bottle because the glasses had been collected up. He reckoned that when Mrs Ainley-Foxleton had kissed him he must have smelt like a distillery, and he was glad of that.

"WELL, HERE WE ARE", Jeremy said in the glade where the picnic had first taken place in 1957. He sat at the head of the tablecloth, cross-legged on a tartan rug. He had glasses and was stout. Peter at the other end of the tablecloth didn't seem to have grown much in the intervening years, but Angela had shot up like a hollyhock and in fact resembled one. Enid was dumpy, Charlotte almost beautiful, Harriet had protruding teeth, Holly was bouncy. Jeremy's wife and Peter's wife, and Charlotte's husband—a man in Shell—all entered into the spirit of the occasion. So did Angela's husband, who came from Czechoslovakia and must have found the proceedings peculiar, everyone sitting there with a teddy-bear that had a name. Angela put a record on Mrs Ainley-Foxleton's old wind-up gramophone. "Oh, don't go down to the woods today", a voice screeched, "without consulting me." Mr and Mrs Ainley-Foxleton were due to arrive at the scene later, as was the tradition. They came with chocolates apparently, and bunches of buttercups for the teddy-bears.

"Thank you, Edwin", Deborah whispered while the music and the song continued. She wanted him to remember the quarrel they'd had about the picnic; she wanted him to know that she now truly forgave him, and appreciated that in the end he'd seen the fun of it all.

"Listen, I have to go to the lav", Edwin said. "Excuse me for a minute." Nobody except Deborah seemed to notice when he ambled off because everyone was talking so, exchanging news.

THE ANGER which had hung about Edwin after the quarrel had never evaporated. It was in anger that he had telephoned his

mother, and further anger had smacked at him when she'd said she hoped he would have a lovely time. What she had meant was that she'd told him so: marry a pretty little thing and before you can blink you're sitting down to tea with teddy-bears. You're a fool to put up with rubbish like this was what Deborah's father had meant when he'd said rather you than me.

Edwin did not lack brains and he had always been aware of it. It was his cleverness that was still offended by what he considered to be an embarrassment, a kind of gooey awfulness in an elderly couple's garden. At school he had always hated anything to do with dressing up, he'd even felt awkward when he'd had to read poetry aloud. What Edwin admired was solidity: he liked Westminster and the City, he liked trains moving smoothly, suits and clean shirts. When he'd married Deborah he'd known—without having to be told by his mother—that she was not a clever person, but in Edwin's view a clever wife was far from necessary. He had seen a future in which children were born and educated; in which Deborah developed various cooking and housekeeping skills, in which together they gave nice dinner parties. Yet instead of that, after only six months, there was this grotesque absurdity. Getting drunk wasn't a regular occurrence with Edwin: he drank when he was angry, as he had on the night of the quarrel.

Mr Ainley-Foxleton was pottering about with his stick on the raised lawn, but Edwin took no notice of him. The old man appeared to be looking for something, his head poked forward on his scrawny neck, bespectacled eyes examining the grass. Edwin passed into the house. From behind the closed door he could hear the voices of Mrs Ainley-Foxleton and Mrs Bright, talking about buttercups. He opened another door and entered the Ainley-Foxletons' dining-room. On the sideboard there was a row of decanters.

EDWIN DISCOVERED that it wasn't easy to drink from a decanter, but he managed it none the less. Anger spurted in him all over again. It seemed incredible that he had married a girl who hadn't properly grown up. None of them had grown up, none of them desired to belong in the adult world, not even the husbands and wives who hadn't been involved in the first

place. If Deborah had told him about all this on that Saturday afternoon when they'd visited this house he even wondered if he would have married her.

Yet replacing the stopper of the decanter between mouthfuls in case anyone came in, Edwin found it impossible to admit that he had made a mistake in marrying Deborah: he loved her, he had never loved anyone else, and he doubted if he would ever love anyone else in the future. Often in an idle moment, between selling and buying in the office, he thought of her, seeing her in her different clothes and sometimes without any clothes at all. When he returned to 23 The Zodiac he sometimes put his arms around her and would not let her go until he had laid her gently down on their bed. Deborah thought the world of him, which was something she often said.

In spite of all that, it was extremely annoying that the quarrel had caused him to feel out of his depth. He should have been able to sort out such nonsense within a few minutes, he deserved his mother's jibe and his father-in-law's as well. Even though they'd only been married six months, it was absurd that since Deborah loved him so he hadn't been able to make her see how foolish she was being. It was absurd to be standing here drunk.

THE AINLEY-FOXLETONS' dining room, full of silver and polished furniture and dim oil paintings, shifted out of focus. The row of decanters became two rows and then one again. The heavily carpeted floor tilted beneath him, falling away to the left and then to the right. Deborah had let him down. She had brought him here so that he could be displayed in front of Angela and Jeremy and Charlotte, Harriet, Holly, Enid, Peter, and the husbands and the wives. She was making the point that she had only to lift her little finger, that his cleverness was nothing compared with his love for her. The anger hammered at him now, hurting him almost. He wanted to walk away, to drive the Saab back to London and when Deborah followed him to state quite categorically that if she intended to be a fool there would have to be a divorce. But some part of Edwin's anger insisted that such a course of action would be an admission of failure and defeat. It was absurd that the marriage he had chosen to make should end before it had properly begun, due to silliness.

EDWIN TOOK A LAST MOUTHFUL of whisky and replaced the glass stopper. He remembered another social occasion, years ago, and he was struck by certain similarities with the present one. People had given a garden party in aid of some charity or other which his mother liked to support, to which Edwin and his brother and sister, and his father, had been dragged along. It had been an excruciatingly boring afternoon, in the middle of a heatwave. He'd had to wear his floppy cotton hat, which he hated, and an awful tan-coloured summer suit, made of cotton also. There had been hours and hours of just standing while his mother talked to people, sometimes slowly giving them recipes, which they wrote down. Edwin's brother and sister didn't seem to mind that; his father did as he was told. So Edwin had wandered off, into a house that was larger and more handsome than the Ainley-Foxletons'. He had poked about in the downstairs rooms, eaten some jam he found in the kitchen, and then gone upstairs to the bedrooms. He'd rooted around for a while, opening drawers and wardrobes, and then he'd climbed a flight of uncarpeted stairs to a loft. From here he'd made his way out on to the roof. Edwin had almost forgotten this incident and certainly never dwelt on it, but with a vividness that surprised him it now returned.

He left the dining-room. In the hall he could still hear the voices of Mrs Ainley-Foxleton and Mrs Bright. Nobody had bothered with him that day; his mother, whose favourite he had always been, was even impatient when he said he had a toothache. Nobody had noticed when he'd slipped away. But from the parapet of the roof everything was different. The faces of the people were pale similar dots, all gazing up at him. The colours of the women's dresses were confused among the flowers. Arms waved frantically at him; someone shouted, ordering him to come down.

On the raised lawn the old man was still examining the grass, his head still poked down towards it, his stick prodding at it. From the glade where the picnic was taking place came a brief burst of applause, as if someone had just made a speech. "... today's the day the teddy-bears have their picnic", sang the screeching voice, faintly.

A breeze had cooled Edwin's sunburnt arms as he crept along the parapet. He'd sensed his mother's first realisation that it was he, his

brother's and his sister's weeping. He saw his father summoned from the car where he'd been dozing. Edwin had stretched his arms out, balancing like a tightrope performer. All the boredom, the tiresome heat, the cotton hat and suit, were easily made up for. Within minutes it had become his day.

"Well, it's certainly the weather for it", Edwin said to the old man.

"Eh?"

"The weather's nice", he shouted. "It's a fine day."

"There's fungus in this lawn, you know. Eaten up with it." Mr Ainley-Foxleton investigated small black patches with his stick. "Never knew there was fungus here", he said.

They were close to the edge of the lawn. Below them there was a rockery full of veronica and sea-pinks and saponaria. The rockery was arranged in a semi-circle, around a sundial.

"Looks like fungus there too", Edwin said, pointing at the larger lawn that stretched away beyond this rockery.

"Eh?" The old man peered over the edge, not knowing what he was looking for because he hadn't properly heard. "Eh?" he said again, and Edwin nudged him with his elbow. The stick went flying off at an angle, the old man's head struck the edge of the sundial with a sharp, clean crack. "Oh, don't go down to the woods today", the voice began again, drifting through the sunshine over the scented garden. Edwin glanced quickly towards the windows of the house in case there should be a face at one of them. Not that it would matter: at that distance no one could see such a slight movement of an elbow.

THEY ATE BANANA SANDWICHES and egg sandwiches, and biscuits with icing on them, chocolate cake and coffee cake. The teddy-bears' snouts were pressed over the Beatrice Potter mugs, each teddy-bear addressed by name. Edwin's was called Tomkin.

"Remember the day of the thunderstorm?" Enid said, screwing up her features in a way she had, like a twitch really, Edwin considered. The day he had walked along the parapet

might even have been the day of the thunderstorm, and he smiled because somehow that was amusing. Angela was smiling too, and so were Jeremy and Enid, Charlotte, Harriet and Holly, Peter and the husbands and the wives. Deborah in particular was smiling. When Edwin glanced from face to face he was reminded of the faces that had gazed at him from so far below, except that there'd been panic instead of smiles.

"Remember the syrup?" Angela said. "Poor Algernon had to be given a horrid bath."

"Wasn't it Horatio, surely?" Deborah said.

"Yes, it was Horatio", Enid confirmed, amusingly balancing Horatio on her shoulder.

"Today's the day the teddy-bears have their picnic", suddenly sang everyone, taking a lead from the voice on the gramophone. Edwin smiled and even began to sing himself. When they returned to Deborah's parents' house the atmosphere would be sombre. "Poor old chap was overlooked", he'd probably be the one to explain, "due to all that fuss." And in 23 The Zodiac the atmosphere would be sombre also. "I'm afraid you should get rid of it", he'd suggest, arguing that the blue teddy-bear would be for ever a reminder. Grown up a bit because of what had happened. Deborah would of course agree. Like everything else, marriage had to settle into shape.

Charlotte told a story of an adventure her Mikey had had when she'd taken him back to boarding-school, how a repulsive girl called Agnes Thorpe had stuck a skewer in him. Holly told of how she'd had to rescue her Percival from drowning when he'd toppled out of a motor-boat. Jeremy wound up the gramophone and the chatter jollily continued, the husbands and wives appearing to be as delighted as anyone. Harriet said how she'd only wanted to marry Peter and Peter how he'd determined to marry Deborah. "Oh, don't go down to the woods today", the voice began again, and then came Mrs Ainley-Foxleton's scream.

Everyone rushed, leaving the teddy-bears just anywhere and the gramophone still playing. Edwin was the first to bend over the splayed figure of the old man. He declared that Mr Ainley-Foxleton was dead, and then took charge of the proceedings.

What's Wrong with the Brandt Report?

"None of us, of course, can pretend that our understanding of the complexities of the poverty problem is complete. We are all still learning. . . ."

ROBERT S. MCNAMARA

*President of the World Bank
in Washington D.C. (30 September 1980)*

Economics Askew

By P. D. Henderson



THE BRANDT REPORT offers not only a programme but a vision, a comprehensive view of the world. In much of the public reaction to the Report it is precisely this aspect of it, the general analysis as distinct from the specific recommendations, which has been singled out for praise. A good British instance of this is the leading article which appeared in *The Times* of London (13 February 1980) when the Report was published. Here it was stated that

"As a description of the problems that face us, and a warning of what could happen if we fail to respond, the report can hardly be faulted. It

ought to become one of the basic documents of the decade."

In my view this is a total misjudgment. The Brandt Report is very far from providing an authoritative treatment of the problems of international society, and its vision of events and relationships is seriously flawed.

Within this vision there are three distinct elements: a warning; a diagnosis; and a strategy or broad prescription. While the warning is stark and emphatic, the diagnosis and strategy are in general reassuring. Together they convey a message of hope.

As to the warning, the Report pictures a world in crisis, where the very survival of the human race is threatened—by war and violence, by the deterioration of the biological environment, and by the present malfunctioning of the world economy. It tells us that "the 1980s could witness even greater catastrophes than the 1930s", and that "major international initiatives are needed if mankind is going to survive. . . ."

What form should these initiatives take? This follows from the diagnosis, which is put forward with great assurance. The Report maintains that at the heart of the present crisis lie the interconnected issues of economic development, international justice, and the relations between North and South. Hence it is in this sphere of international affairs that a new approach is called for. If this were adopted, and if as a result the problems of poverty and international inequality became progressively less serious, then the various threats to mankind would recede. In this respect the tone of the Report is optimistic. Though the risks are perceived as grave, at least their principal cause can be identified, and with it the directions in which progress has

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