

Virginia

C. M. Kornbluth

Virginia

IAMBS "BUNNY" COOLER woke on the morning of his father's funeral with a confused feeling that it was awfully crowded in his bedroom. Ohara, his valet (of the Shimanoseki Oharas, and not to be

confused with the Dublin branch of the family) was shaking his sleeve and saying: "You wake up, Missah Bunny! Ah, such important gentlemen come see you!" Bunny groped on the bedside table for the sunglasses to shelter his pink-rimmed eyes from the light. Ohara popped them onto his face and then rapidly poured a prairie oyster, a bromo and a cup of black coffee laced with brandy into him. Bunny's usual rate of morning vibration began to dampen towards zero and he peered about the room through the dark lenses.

"Morning, young Coogler," said a gruff voice. The outline was that of J. G. Barsax, senior partner of his late father's firm. A murmur of greeting came from three other elephantine figures. They were Gonfalonieri of First American, Witz of Diversified Limited, and McChesney of Southern Development Inc. If an efficient bomb had gone off in the room at that moment, it would have liquidated eighteen-billion-dollars' worth of Top Management and Ownership.

"Sony about your father," Barsax grunted. "Mind if we

sit? Not much time before the funeral. Have to brief you fast."

Bunny said, "Mr. Sankton told me what I'd have to do, Mr. Barsax. Rise after the 'Amen,' lead the procession past the casket, up the center aisle to the limousine exit—"

"No, no, no. Of course you know the funeral form. I'm talking about the financial briefing. Coogler, you're a very wealthy young man."

Bunny took off his sunglasses. "I am?" he asked uncertainly. "Surely not. There's this trust thing he was always talking about to pay me twenty thousand a year—"

"Talked," said Gonfalonieri. "That's all he did. He never got it on paper. You're the sole heir to the liquid equivalent of, say, three and a half billion dollars."

Ohara hastily refilled the cup with laced coffee and put it in Bunny's hand.

"So," little Mr. Witz said softly, "there are certain things you must know. Certain rules that have sprung up which We observe." The capitalized plural pronoun was definitely sounded. Whether it was to be

taken as royal, editorial, or theological, who can say? They proceeded to brief Bunny.

Firstly, he must never admit that he was wealthy. He might use the phrase "what little I have," accompanied by a whimsical shrug.

Secondly, he must never, under any circumstances, at any time, give anything to anybody. Whenever asked for anything he was to intimate that this one request he simply could not grant, that it was the one crushing straw atop his terrible burden of charitable contributions.

Thirdly; whenever offered anything—from a cigar to a million-dollar market tip from a climber—he must take it without thanks and complain bitterly that the gift was not hand-wmer.

Fourthly, he must look on Touching Capital as morally equivalent to coprophagia, but he must not attempt to sting himself by living on the interest of his interest; that was only for New Englanders.

Fifthly, when he married he must choose his bride from one of Us.

"You mean, one of you four gentlemen?" Bunny asked.

He thought of J.G.'s eldest daughter and repressed a shudder.

"No," said Witz. "One of Us in the larger sense. You will

come to know who is who, and eventually acquire an instinct that will enable you to distinguish between a millionaire and a person of real substance."

"And that," said Barsax, "is the sum of it We shall see you at the funeral and approach you later, Coogler." He glanced at his watch. "Come, gentlemen."

Bunny had a mechanical turn of mind; he enjoyed the Museum of Suppressed Inventions at J.G.'s Carolina estate. The quavery old curator potted after him complaining.

This, sir, is the hundred-mile-per-gallon carburetor. I was more active when it came out in '36—I was a Field Operative then. I tracked it down to a little Iowa village on a rumor from a patent attorney; it was quite a struggle to suppress that one. Quite a struggle, sir! But—the next case, please, sir—it would have been rendered obsolete within two years. Yes, sir, that's when the Gasoline Pill came out. Let me show you, sk!"

He happily popped one of the green pills into a gallon of water and lectured as it bubbled and fumed and turned the water into 100-octane gasoline.

The Eternal Match was interesting, the Two-Cent Sirloin was delicious, and the Vanishing Cream vanished a half-inch roll of fat from Bunny's belly while he watched. "But Lord bless you, sir," tittered the curator, "what would be the point of giving people something that worked? They'd just go ahead and use it, and then when they had no more need they'd stop using it, eh?"

"And this one, sir, it isn't really what you'd call suppressed. We're just working on it to build it up some; perhaps in five years we'll have it looking like it costs five thousand dollars, and then we'll be able to sell it." "It" was three-dimensional, full-color television; the heart of the system was a flashlight battery, a small C-clamp and a pinch of baking soda.

Bunny visited also the vast pest-breeding establishment in the Rockies, where flies, roaches, mice, gnats, boll-weevils, the elm-rot fungus and the tobacco-mosaic virus were patiently raised to maximum virulence and dispatched by couriers to their proper places all over the world. The taciturn Connecticut Yankee who ran the sprawling plant snapped at him, "Danged better mousetraps almost wiped out the mousetrap industry. Think people'd have better sense. DDT almost killed off pesticide—whole danged business, employing two hun-

dred thousand. They think of that? Naw! So we had to breed them DDT-resistant strains and seed 'em everywhere."

Bunny began to acquire the instinct to which Witz had referred. When he encountered an Oil Texan he could tell that the man's nervous hilarity and brag stemmed from his poverty, and he pitied him. When he encountered one day at Gonfalonieri's place in Baja California a certain quiet fellow named Briggs, he knew without being told that Briggs was one of Us. It was no surprise to learn later that Briggs held all the basic patents on water.

Briggs it was, indeed, who took him aside for an important talk. The quiet man offered him a thousand-dollar cigar (for the growing of whose tobacco Briggs had caused an artificial island to be built in the deep Central Pacific at the exactly correct point of temperature, wind and humidity) and said to him, "It's time you took a wife."

Bunny, who could not these days leaf through Vogue or the New Yorker without a tender, reminiscent smile for each of the lovely models shown in the advertisements, disagreed. "Can't see why, Briggs," he muttered. "Having jolly good time. Never used to have much luck with girls—all different now. Mean to say, with—" he gave the whimsical little shrug—"what little I have, doing awfully well and it doesn't cost me anything. Queer. When I had ten-twenty thou', when I was poor, had to buy corsages, dinners. Afl different now. They buy me things. Platinum watches. Have limply dozens. But the rules—have to take 'em. Queer."

"We've all been through it," Briggs said. "When you get bored let me know."

"Oh, promise," Bunny said. "Absolutely promise."

He spent the next six months in Hollywood where golden girls vied in plying him with coq au vin, solid indium meat grinders, and similar trifles. One charming lady who had come out to the sound stages in 1934 presented him with a genuine hand-embroidered antique scabbard said to date back to the Crusades. It was a pleasant gift and it varied the ...

... the monotony?

He sat up abruptly on the mutation-mink coverlet, causing the shapely blond head which remained on the silken pillow to emit a small sleepy snort

"Monotony," Bunny said in a tragic whisper. "Definitely." He went home to Ohara, though not neglecting to pick up as

he left his little present for the evening, a golden nutcracker set with diamonds and lined with unborn leopard pelt.

Ohara dipped into his store of Oriental wisdom in an effort to console him. He suggested, "Missah Bunny think if must be monotonized, what beautifurr way to get monoto-nizedr

It did not help.

Ohara suggested, "You try make funny, fo'get monotony. Fo' exampurr^ spend coupe mimon dorras make big reso't town, cawr same Schmir-ton, Ohio. Think how mad Missah Nickey be, he put up hoterr, have to cawr same Hoterr Hk-ton Schmir-ton! Oh, raffs!"

It would not do.

"Ohara," Bunny said tragically, "I would give—" he shrugged whimsically—"what little I have not to be bored with, ah, life."

The impassive Oriental countenance of his manservant flickered briefly in a grimace. His orders were clear, and he knew how terrible would be the consequences of disobedience.

Bunny tossed fitfully alone in his bed an hour later, and Ohara was on the phone to an unlisted New York number. "This Ohara," he whispered. "Missah Bunny talk about giving away money. Awr his money."

The responding voice was that of an Englishman. It said: "Thank you, Ohara. One hopes, of course, for your sake, that the information has arrived in time. One hopes devoutly that it will not be necessary to inflict the Death of a Thousand Cuts on you. A book could be written about Number Three Hundred and Twenty-Eight alone, and as for Number Four Hundred and One—1 Well, I won't keep you with my chattering." He hung up.

Within minutes the lonely house in a canyon was surrounded; the Fourth Plutocratic Airborne and Amphibious Assault Force was the ultimate in efficient mercenary troops. By dawn they had Bunny on his way to Barsax' Carolina estate under heavy sedation.

He woke in the guest room he knew, just off the corridor which contained the Museum of Suppressed Inventions. Little Mr. Witz and quiet Mr. Briggs were there. With granite faces they told him: "You have broken the Code, young Coogler. You said there was something you valued above money. You have got to go."

"Please," Bunny blubbered. "I didn't mean it. Ill marry

your daughter. Ill marry both your daughters! Just don't kill me."

Mr. Witz said implacably, "Our decent, money-fearing girls wouldn't have anything to do with a dirty plutophobe like you, young Coogler. If only your poor father had put through the trust fund in time—well, thank Heaven he's not alive to

•ee this day. But we won't kill you, young Coogler. It is not within our power to cause the death of a billionaire as if he were an animal or mere human being. What we can and will do is quarantine you. In Virginia."

This sounded like a rank non sequitur to Bunny until they took him to the Museum and trundled out a one-man space

•hip invented early in 1923 by a Herr Rudolf Grenzbach of Czernowitz, Upper Silesia, whose body had been found in Lower Silesia later that year.

Officers of the Fourth P.A.A.F. loaded him into the bomblike contrivance over his spirited protest and pre-set the course. Virginia, it seemed, was an asteroid rather than the neighboring state. They fired the rockets- and Bunny was on his way.

Four years later Mr. Witz and Mr. Briggs conferred again. Perhaps," said Mr. Witz, "we've put enough of a scare into him. Let's radio the lad and find out whether he's given up his wild seditious notions and is ready to be rescued."

They tuned in the asteroid Virginia on another suppressed invention. "Young Coogler," Briggs said into

the microphone. TWs is Briggs. We wish to know whether you've come to your senses and are ready to take your place in society—ours, d course."

There squawked over the loud-speaker the voice of Bunny. "I say, what was that. No, not now, not for a second please. Where did that voice come from? Can you hear me, Mr. Btiggs?"

"I hear you," said Mr. Briggs.

"Extraordinary! Another invention, eh?"

"Yes," said Briggs. "I am calling, young Coogler, to learn whether you are properly contrite and if so to arrange for jour rescue."

"Rescue?" said the voice of Bunny. "Why, no thanks. That wont be necessary. Having a fine time here. They need me, yoo know. They love me for, ah, myself alone. Not the 4Mhed money. Double-dash the money, I say!"

Mr. Briggs, white to the lips, broke the connection.

"He meant you to do that," Mr. Witz remarked.

"I know. Let him rot there."

The quavery old curator had been listening, "On Virginia?" he asked tremulously. "You don't rot on Virginia, Don't you gentlemen know how it got its name?"

"Never bothered to find out," Mr. Briggs snapped. "Since you're bursting to tell us, you might as well."

The curator beamed. "They call it Virginia because it's the planetoid of virgins. The dangdest thing.



Perpetual virgins. The Plutocratic Space Force says they've never seen anything like it, not on Mars, not on Callisto. Self-renewing—the dangdest thing!"

Mr. Briggs and Mr. Witz looked at each other. After a while Mr. Witz spoke.

"Bunny," he said reflectively. "Bunny. He was well named.