Next came another change. Emerson vacated their offices in New York, and moved to factory in Jersey City, and there I was traipsing from Jackson Heights, through Manhat and into the north end of New Jersey. We began to look around. The word came back Inga and Fletcher Pratt had space vacant down in their weekend place in Highlands, a the Jersey shore, on a hill that overlooked the Shrewsbury. There was a place, the “old had been the first place, built about 1820, separated from the “new part” added to it af Civil War.

Living there was fine. In fact, so fine that it took all my writing down the hatch. Fo went on a commuting trip that left Highlands about 7:30, and didn’t return until about tw hours later.

And the weekends? Fletcher and Inga, with a longtime friend named St. Leger Lawrence, used to arrive late Friday night, and by noon on Saturday, their weekend gu would begin to arrive. That took care of weekends, the whole bunch would leave follow late luncheon.

Then, with space available and the summer approaching, it became expedient fo the Campbell girls to stay more than one day; when they had time, they could stay for a week. With more communication with John when they brought the girls down, and whe returned them after the visit.

The Pratt place on the shore had been known for some time as “The Ipsey Wips Institute,” for an amusing reason. It started during the war, before they owned the plac follows:

As a test—don’t ask me for what, or why—the military wanted to check-test the immediate memory of the testee. This gave them a problem; there were several variou tricks and routines that serve to heighten one’s immediate memory, and the military wa to find out the un-heightened memory. That is, to separate one with quick immediate memory from those who used some stunt.

Someone devised a routine in which the memory-filing stunts went askew becau the thing was gummed up with sense and nonsense, and adjectives that didn’t apply, a nouns that did not all make literary sense. The tester would start with the first line, and testee would repeat it. Then the tester would state the second line, but the testee had back to the beginning and run through the whole, adding that last line at the end. The n

of errors went down as the score—and I have only known one, a young fellow, who we through it without once pausing or losing his way:

“One duck.”

“Two hens.”

“Three squawking geese.”

“Four corpulent porpoises.”

“Five Limerick oysters.”

“Six pairs of Don Alphonso tweezers.”

“Seven hundred Macedonian warriors in full battle array.”

“Eight golden crowns for the ancient, sacred crypts of Egypt.”

“Nine lymphatic, asthmatic, peripatetic old men on crutches.”

“Ten revolving heliotropes from the Ipsey Wipsy Institute.”

(I may have slightly misquoted it, because it’s been twenty years. But any misquotation is honestly slight.)

Fletcher and Inga moved to the Ipsey in the spring of 1955, and that took more free time. Somehow I did manage to write a bit, especially during the winter, since one hardly go a-boating on the Shrewsbury. George Washington could stand up in a boat, pushing large ice cubes aside, but not George O. About once a month, I’d stay in New to meet Fletcher, to attend one of the dinner meetings of the “Trap Door Spiders.”

It began just after the war. Fletcher fancied himself a gourmet cook, and manage fairly well except that he had the great fear that one of his roasts might get within a sho distance toward “medium rare.” With a bunch turning up for weekend dinner, Fletcher wont to visit a butcher in New York who specialized on rarities; for example, the whole buffalo roast. These were frozen; the call for such is low so that keeping the buffalo un would have been ridiculous. Fletcher used to put it in the oven still frozen, and many th we’ve eaten buffalo roast so nicely done red and rare that there were ice crystals in the center.

In any event, the original idea of the Trap Door Spiders was to create; first, a dinner-meeting society in which each member, in taking his turn, provided a table diffe than usual, and preferably symbolic. This may be difficult to understand, but one of Wi

Ley's meetings presented the customary dinner that a German burgomeister might giv welcome a citizen to become a personal friend. Second, the Trap Door Spiders had b created to provide a masculine society. Not that we all weren't cheerfully married and enjoyed the company of women, except one who wasn't cheerfully married, and whos woman none of the rest of us enjoyed. It was to get him out of the house once in a wh where we could talk without interruption.

At this moment, Isaac Asimov's series about the "Black Widowers" that turn up i *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* are based on characters from the Trap Door Spiders. I won't tell you who's for who, but we know, don't we, Ike?

But I will tell you one incident. Part of the gimmick was to have the *oberspinnenführer* provide a guest whom we questioned by starting to ask him to "justify his existence." One fellow, after long questioning, admitted that he was the ado father of a hippopotamus. Seems that he'd given one as a gift to some zoo in the mid west. I was hailed because (aside from the boss who helped me, and who is now long dead) I claimed to be the only one who has ever had the opportunity and the chance t a standard upright piano out of a fourth-floor building onto a concrete courtyard. (The I Chord!)

This time I was off on a business trip, and arrived at the Pratt apartment just in ti see the whole bunch call it off and head for home. In the course of events, Doc Clark gone to sleep on one of the sofas. It was, say, midnight. I'd flown and taken an airplan and I wanted some conversation and a drink. Fletcher agreed that he wasn't tired eithe we went pub crawling through what Fletcher used to call the "Hitchcock Circuit."

We returned about 2:00, to find that Doc was not only still asleep, but that he'd removed his shoes and his trousers. Now, Fletcher and Inga had moved, but they wer maintaining the apartment, thus we were there without Inga, who frequently used her s when one of the fashion outfits wanted a quick study for an ad. So Fletcher and I filled Doc Clark's shoes with cooking sherry and, because Inga had taken her personal belongings down to the Ipsey, we found an oil-paint tube of vermillion, and decorated trousers.

Then we hit the sack—and locked the door with a chair under the knob, in case D should break the lock. Well, he didn't, but he sure tried.

* * * *

Over in the other alley, Fred Pohl and Lester del Rey were living in Red Bank, not very from Highlands. They were always invited to the weekend dinners, and on one of thos evenings one of the houses across the Shrewsbury (in Sea Bright) caught on fire and up in a blaze.

We watched from the Ipsey, with fire department pumpers arriving from here an there to back up the Sea Bright department. Each pumper arrived with a pumper-hose which they tossed into the river as the source of water.

Fred said to me, “George, shouldn’t you think that by now, after a couple of thou years of simply pumping water on a fire, that there ought to be a better way?”

I agree. There ought to be a better way, and if there were, it would have been invented well before now. As I pointed out to a critic who objected to some doodad in my stories because “it wouldn’t work,” that I hadn’t been inventing the doodad, for if it *would* work, I’d hardly be scribbling science fiction about it. Since there hasn’t been a better way to control a gone-off fire—oh, yes, those fire foam tankers they use at airpo work fine, but the problem isn’t just killing a strong local blaze, part of it is soaking dow neighborhood to prevent the blaze from taking off—the best I could do is to write a sto about fire-fighting in the future.

Which I sold to Fred Pohl, then editor of *If* and *Galaxy* magazines. It’s called—

Fire, 2016!
By George O. Smith

I

The scene was eerie, as ugly as fire at night in a dwelling has always been and always be. The searchlights of the fire department gave no feeling of comfort; rather, they ad the conflict between man and the element of fire. The dancing flames threw their yello flickerings on the firemen, as they raced back and forth arranging things, making observations, calculating how this fire was to be stopped.

It was not done in silence!

“Get that hose line in there!”

“Get me a three-inch wye!”

“Water ready.”

“Pumper running!”

“Steady, now. Steady! Got her set?”

“Right!”

“Okay, give her the works!”

The hose bucked as the high-pressure water hit the nozzle. It roared forth, arche toward the blaze, and crashed through a window. The color of the smoke began to cha immediately, as the dancing flames within the house fought their losing battle. No more minutes later, the stream of water was cut. The firemen went into the house with hand extinguishers to kill the few remaining sparks and to quench smouldering embers. Now there was left was the dirty clean-up job, and the task of packing the fire equipment an returning to the station.

Fire Chief Mooney looked at the rookie beside him. “Still want to be a fireman?” asked.

“More than ever,” said the rookie, whose name was Bill Lansing.

“Did this one give you enough to write your thesis?” asked the chief, pointing at t ruined home with his thumb.

“I’m not certain. Could be,” replied Bill.

“Well, if you’ve an idea, let me know. If it’s good, I can tell you to go ahead. If it is can save you the trouble of trying something foolish,” said Fire Chief Mooney.

“Chief, the process of adding something significant to the field of fire-fighting isn very easy. On the other hand, it isn’t necessary to know the answer before you can poi that a problem does exist, or that there is room for improvement.”

“This is true; of course, if you do a thesis on those lines, it will get you your appointment if it’s good enough. But it’s not the best way, nor the surest way.”

“I know. But what can be added to the field of fire fighting in the year of twenty-sixteen?”

“You’ll have to add something, or you won’t be appointed.”

“I know. I didn’t mean that nothing could possibly be added, chief. What I meant

that a rookie can't very well increase die scope of knowledge. Not when experienced, dedicated men have been working to advance the science. But I can point out one rath odd area, Chief."

"Go on."

"Chief, do you realize that here in twenty-sixteen, we're still fighting fire in the sam way that they did in the day of Julius Caesar? We pour water on it. All that's changed is more efficient ways of delivering the water."

* * * *

The fire chief smiled. "Not quite. Back in the day of Julius Caesar, they had private fire-fighting concerns, run as a business. If you were a customer of the Mooney Fire Company, and your neighbor's house caught fire, we wouldn't touch it unless he were customer, too. We'd go out all right, just to keep the fire from spreading to your house we'd let your neighbor's house burn to the ground. And if your neighbor's fire company happened to be a bitter rival of ours, we might even start a street fight."

"That's not a matter of fire-fighting," objected Bill. "It's just organization."

"Of course. But I did want you to understand that things are not exactly the same they were a couple of thousand years ago."

"Other things have changed, too," said the rookie thoughtfully. "They used to rac through the streets carrying buckets, because they hadn't invented the pump. The gizm Archimedes invented wasn't much of a pump, sir. It was more of a water lifter. I grant t mobile steam engine, with its pump, was a vast improvement over the hand pump... wh was superior to the bucket brigade. Then the gasoline engine replaced the horses, an high-pressure rotary pump was driven by the same engine when the vehicle got to the scene. But the same argument still stands, Chief. For all of our modern science, we st water on the fire."

"I can point out one other item that's changed."

"Yes?"

"The nature of the fireman, Bill."

"Yes?"

"A long time ago; in fact, it was a long, long time ago, your fireman was not of an admirable, civic-minded character. The work was rough, and largely physical, and its n was such that it attracted the kind of man who did not mind sitting on his duff playing

checkers for days on end, waiting for the alarm to ring."

"That must have been a long time ago."

"It was. Then came a breed of a better cut. These men held jobs and public offi
and instead of a man joining the fire department because the job was easy, a man was
accepted by his local fire department in about the same way that a candidate was acc
for a lodge or a freshman to a fraternity. This was the beginning. Fire-fighting operation
took a sudden upswing; the men took pride in their equipment and in their work. It was
honor, and they accepted it as such. They were not paid.

"But the standard was set, and the results were visible. And so now we have the
present system of rewarding deserving citizens by appointing them to the fire departm
and paying them an honorarium. This makes it possible for a truly talented man to be a
artist or a writer, or to study for advanced degrees, or to devote himself to civic betterm

"This much I know."

"Then you also know that the mere proclamation that you propose to be a deserv
citizen isn't going to make you a scholar."

"I do."

"And I'm also afraid that your criticism isn't going to get you very far. I doubt that
merely pointing out that we're still dousing a fire with water despite our vaunted scienc
going to do it, Bill. The criticism may be valid, but in this case, I think someone is going
pose the question, 'If, in two thousand and more years, no one has discovered anythin
more efficient, isn't it just barely possible that there isn't anything more efficient?"

"Thomas Edison had a slogan," said Bill. "There's a better way to do it—find it!"

"Edison wasn't always right," objected the chief. "And he could have made a vas
improvement on his slogan by starting it with the words, *I wonder if* there's a better way to do
it—find it!"

* * * *

II

Bill Lansing's thesis was thorough, but its scientific excellence was marred by a strong
of emotion. His theme, that the basic improvements in fire fighting were only to deliver
larger volume of water in a shorter time, concluded by suggesting that other substance

processes were ignored simply because water was so cheap and so plentiful that it ha
paid a man to rack his brains to improve upon it. It was, he said, plain laziness.

Fire Commissioner Frank T. Edwards arose at the end of Bill Lansing's treatise a
asked, "I presume that you are aware of the fundamental principle of extinguishing a fi
young man?"

"Of course."

"Not 'of course.' You haven't proved that you know it at all."

With a labored, overly patient tone of voice, Bill Lansing replied, "Water is the to
product of combustion; it can't be oxidized any further. Technically, it is the ultimate as
such, it smothers the blaze by keeping out the oxygen of the atmosphere. Second, the
specific heat of water—that is, the number of calories required to raise the temperatur
one cubic centimeter of water by one degree centigrade—is exceeded only by hydrog
The on-pour of water therefore reduces the temperature of the burning stuff until the la
below the kindling point."

"Then you will grant that insofar as its smothering and cooling properties are
concerned, there is nothing better?"

"This I concede," smiled Bill. "Since the substance with the highest specific heat
hydrogen, second-best water indeed becomes first-best."

"Then what is your point?" demanded the commissioner. "If water is the best, wh
better can you want?"

"My father," said Bill, "was a fire claim adjuster. I learned some things from him—
example, that the damage caused by water generally exceeds the damage caused by
fire, a fact for many hundreds of years."

"Your father was hardly fool enough to suggest that we avoid the water damage
letting the fire run on," snapped Commissioner Edwards. "What's your point? Do you w
someone to invent or discover some substance that will do a better job?"

"I am no chemist," said Bill. But I do know that specific heat is not the entire answ
the problem of heat absorption. There's the heat of conversion, for example. When th
degree centigrade variation in the definition of specific heat happens to span the freez
point, the amount of heat required to thaw a gram of ice into a gram of water—or boil w
into steam—is considerably higher than the specific heat—maybe a thousand times
greater."

"And you propose to use this sort of thing?"

“It’s already in use,” said Bill. “When the water hits a hot fire, the first cooling is c when the heat boils the water into steam.”

“And so we’re right back to the same argument. We use water, just as they did in Rome, because it is the best.”

Lansing shook his head. “There are many substances with a higher heat of conversion.”

“Yes,” sneered the commissioner, “and I’ll bet that when you look them up, you’l that they are corrosive as the devil, or that their fine high heat of conversion takes plac either at minus two hundred, or at plus fifteen hundred. But let’s abandon that for a mo Just why are you so all-fired interested in becoming a fireman?”

“I thought we were here to evaluate my thesis,” objected Lansing.

“Young man, you want an appointment to the Academy of Fire Fighters. You’ve received your proper degrees in the humanities and the sciences, and you’ve produce thesis of dubious worth. I—”

“Of dubious worth?” exploded Bill Lansing.

“Yes,” said the commissioner calmly. “I’d have said totally worthless if I were as of my facts as I am of my opinion. This is just a simple admission that I do not know al is to know about everything. Therefore it may be possible that your thesis has a trace merit; now drop it, and let’s examine your motives.”

“You can’t!”

“Yes, I can: I have that prerogative as fire commissioner. I said ‘examine,’ not ‘question.’ If your motives are about reproach, a strong mark will be made in your favo

“All right. Go ahead.”

“Isn’t it true that all you want is the honor and glory of having been appointed?”

“The honor exists, sure. But there’s more. I am ambitious. I believe that I can go a member of the Academy of Fire Fighters.”

“And, maybe, a little ambitious for Gloria Mooney’s favor?”

Lansing tensed, then controlled himself and said easily, “Sir, a rather staggering proportion of all male effort is undertaken to make an impression on a girl.”

“All right, I grant your argument. Ambition is by no means wrong.”

Commissioner Edwards paused, then said to the assembly, “Gentlemen, I move we do not accept this thesis, on the grounds that it offers nothing constructive. Howev his honesty in telling of his ambition instead of mouthing some platitude about service civic consciousness, I move that Bill Lansing be retained as a rookie and that he be u to attack his appointment thesis from another angle.”

* * * *

While fire fighting was still a matter of flooding the blaze with water, as it had been for several thousands of years, the city of twenty-sixteen and its component parts were qu different than the city of nineteen-sixty.

For example, the word “dwelling” was still used; but it did not define a single-fam structure situated on a plot of vacant ground. In even the least crowded areas of the megalopolis that stretched from Boston to Washington, the dwellings were low structu seldom more than three stories high. They were constructed with an economy of build materials by the clever process of using a single wall between the adjoining structures instead of the wastefulness of erecting separate walls for each building.

In the more densely populated areas, the tight cores of the original cities, dwellin were veritable cliffs. The walls of the apartment buildings rose sheer from the edge of sidewalk, and each rectangular city block carried its own. Above the city, there was a th noisy population of helicopters. And below, the only reason traffic moved at all through streets was because only essential vehicles were permitted in the dense knots.

Had the Sleeper of H. G. Wells awakened, he would have found at least two thin missing from his story. First, moving sidewalks did not hurl pedestrian traffic along a s of belts running at different speeds. There were no moving sidewalks. Below the city, subways, there were moving cars that closed tight, bumper-to-bumper, as they crawle along the station platform, then stretched out into headlong flight to the next station. It not a case of the quick or the dead, because he who lost his footing was merely thrust aside—or, if he fell, elbow, knee or anatomy was mildly abraded as he was moved to s Second, the clever little advertising gimmick of projecting names and slogans on the sidewalk couldn’t be done... because the sidewalks were elbow-to-elbow, cheek-to-jow and nose-to-spine with those people who did not take to the subways.

Within the individual dwelling units, things had not changed greatly, but enough to make a difference. Wooden furniture was still present, but mostly in the form of a solid or foundation for fabrications with a simulated wood-grain surface. Natural fabrics were plentiful, but the synthetics were so numerous that a story was told about using an alphanumeric computer to compose fetching names for them.

One thing had hardly changed at all: the people.

Oh, the faces and the figures of twenty-sixteen were not those of nineteen-sixty- by a factor of seventy-six years. But three generations isn't enough to detect a trend in evolution.

Boys, for example, still called on girls—especially when they had come to a turni point in their careers…

So Lansing said, "I failed, Gloria."

"But they kept you on as a rookie, didn't they?"

Bill Lansing looked gloomy. "Sure, but that's sort of like handing out praise by wr it in Sanskrit and sealing it in the cornerstone of a granite building."

"I still say you've got another chance."

"Gloria, how often do they have fires these days?"

"Why, I don't really know."

"I've been a rookie for two years. I've been to one fire. Things simply do not go *Whoosh!* at the touch of a spark any more."

"But doesn't that give you loads of time to study?"

"Sure," he replied gloomily. "But study doesn't solve the problem. I've read the detailed account of every fire in the entire megalopolis for the past fifteen years. It's n enough. Nothing gives you firsthand knowledge like being on the actual scene of a fire you can watch them work, see how they go about it, and observe the results. So where this leave me?"

"Well, outside of being disappointed, Bill, just where do you think it leaves you?"

"I know where it leaves me," he said. "I'm the son of a fire claim adjuster."

"Is that so bad?"

"Bad enough so that your father gave me a rough time until I made the rookie gra and was on my way toward being a real fireman. Now one false step and I'll be the son fire claim adjuster again. And believe me, Gloria, you know as well as I do that the only worse than being the son of a fire claim adjuster is to be the adjuster himself."

“Oh, now, it isn’t that bad.”

“Isn’t it? Does your father know I’m here?”

“He didn’t say anything about not seeing you, if that’s what you mean.”

“Gloria, if you want to find out the degree of my welcome as a failed-to-make-it candidate for the Academy of Fire Fighters, let’s you and I go and announce that we’re about to go dancing, or to a show, or something similar.”

“All right. Let’s,” said Gloria.

* * * *

III

They found Gloria’s father in the family recreation room watching a comedy show. Her home there was nothing to set him off as a fireman except for the traditional red suspe which were, like a uniform, the insignia of his position; the silver buckles indicated that was an official of the Academy, and the four tiny shields embossed on the buckles de his rank as fire chief.

He looked up and blinked as they entered hand in hand. A fleeting frown crosse face, but it came and went so fast that no one, not even Bill Lansing, could be certain t the frown was not caused by the change in eye-focus from the bright viewing screen t couple walking through the diminished light.

Gloria said, “Bill and I are going dancing, Dad.”

“Dancing?”

“Yes. The gang’s throwing an impromptu at the Silver Garden.”

“Oh. The gang.”

“Yes.”

“All right. You sounded as though you intended to go alone.”

Bill Lansing bristled slightly. Gloria caught it first and squeezed his hand. He subsided without saying anything, and Gloria said gently, “Why, Dad, we’re all big enou be out alone. Even after dark.”

Fire Chief Mooney looked at them and nodded slowly. “That isn’t exactly what I meant,” he said. “Jim Potter said last night that he was getting an idea for his thesis tha was going to work out in model form. And he said that if he finished it, he’d be over to it to us this evening. But if the gang is going to be at the Silver Garden, he will too. Tell I’m quite interested in his model, Gloria. Jim has a real head on his shoulders. Like fat like son, I always say.”

“Yes,” said Gloria simply.

Gloria’s father looked at Bill. “And how is your program, Bill? Got any new ideas?

“Nothing clear yet. I’ve a couple of ideas that need some study before they’re ev presentable as possible ideas.”

“Good. Come around any time you have something to offer.”

Outside, on the crowded sidewalk, they were part of the surrounded-alones that make up the population of any city. Had they stood on that same location fifty years ea they would have been truly alone, in the middle of a tract of land too rough for farming not yet needed for dwelling space. Then they could have counted the dabs of sky-glow marked the location of the larger towns hidden by the slightly rolling hills that someone dubbed the Watchung Mountains of New Jersey.

But they were not fifty years earlier. Two generations of dwelling construction ha changed the face of the Earth. The first had cleared out the thin forestation and dotted landscape with a polka-pattern of rubber-stamp houses built by the production-line pro The first crew dug for the foundation, the second crew poured it. A third removed the and installed them forward of the line, while the next crew began to put up stringers an studs. When they moved along, the sheathing came, the plumbers and the electricians installed their hardware, the flooring was laid, and the walls were plastered, and the roo slapped on. A coat of paint went next, followed by the real estate salesmen and their c

And while the foremost was still digging holes for more foundations, miles behin them the sheriff was serving foreclosure notices on those whose payments were delin

The second generation of building pushed the Watchung Mountains around until terrain was level, and then erected row upon row of the two- and three-story dwellings, out in a closed formation of rectangles. This was the low-density population of the cen megalopolis.

* * * *

Gloria and Bill were part of the surrounded-alones. When the density of population for man to breathe his neighbor’s exhalation, aloofness takes the place of privacy. It beco

studied thing to not-observe; let some outrage take place, and the people who stop to
are from a distant part of the city, while the folks next door pass by with the talent of a
who can walk through a crowded restaurant without letting anyone catch his eye or atte

And so Gloria and Bill could talk as if they were alone, and he said, “Well, that’s
about it, isn’t it?”

“Now what do you mean by that?”

“There’s no gang dance tonight. And that Potter creep isn’t going—”

“Now, don’t you go calling Jim Potter a creep. He isn’t.”

“I suppose he’s a fine fellow with grace, charm, money, an interesting mind, sex
appeal—and has the right to wear his father’s red suspenders.”

“Don’t be bitter, Bill.”

“What else can I be?” he demanded. “Jim has a real head on his shoulders. Like
father, like son, I always say. Come around when you have something to offer.”

“Now. Bill!”

“That isn’t all, Gloria. He back-watered fast after that glum ‘You sounded as if you
were going out alone’ line of his, but what is he going to say when his favorite, Jim Pot
turns up and declares there’s no impromptu dance tonight? He’s going to accuse the
us of lying so that we could go out and canoodle somewhere.”

“Don’t worry, Bill. There are ways of coping with that.”

“For example?”

“By proving that I’m not playing favorites.”

“In other words, you’re going out with Jim Potter.”

“Now you see here, Bill Lansing! I’ve got every right to go out with whom I choos
You have no more right to object to Jim Potter than he has a right to object to you, and
neither of you has a right to object to anybody else. Now, that’s not only clear, but it’s a
logical and sensible—”

Bill put out a hand and caught her elbow, just as she was about to step off the cu
cross the street.

The traffic light had flashed red, and the cross-traffic fought its way into the intersection without waiting for the last of the running traffic to clear. Bumper to bumpe curb to curb, everything came to a halt. Then came a crescendo of horns. The horns d the intersection cleared. There was a flurry in the vehicular pattern as one driver tried t his way from the middle lane to make a turn; he didn't make it, but with luck, persevera and the unlikely possibility of meeting a polite driver who would give way, he might ma turn in the next couple of blocks.

"Okay," said Bill, disconsolately replying to her argument. "But right now what do do? There's no dance at the Silver Garden."

"So we'll walk there, find that it isn't open, and then turn over on March Street and if we can get tickets to *Bitter Love."* She hugged his arm. "It isn't a big event, but a girl can paste theater tickets in her diary, can't she?"

"I guess."

"So we were disappointed about being mistaken about the dance, but it worked even better because we saw that big new hit."

"If we can get tickets."

"We'll get tickets," she promised. "They wouldn't dare refuse the daughter of Fir Chief Mooney."

* * * *

IV

There was a murmur of voices when Bill opened the door with Gloria's key. Gloria said "Maybe you'd best not come in, Bill. That father of mine—he's still up."

"The other is Jim Potter. He's still here. Look," he said hoarsely. "I'm not going to leave with Jim Potter in the house waiting to get you alone!"

The hallway door before them opened to display Fire Chief Mooney, with Jim Po in the background. Gloria's father used the voice that he'd found helpful in making him heard over the crackle of open flames, the shouts of hard-working firemen, and the ro newly arriving fire equipment. "And how was the dance at the club that's closed? Find floor crowded? So just what have you been doing, you two?"

Gloria replied, "Now father, don't take that tone—"

“I’ll take any tone I want to in my own home! What have you two been up to?”

“We got tickets to *Bitter Love,* playing at the Orpheum,” said Bill, waving the ticket stubs.

“Did you stay to watch the show, or are you using the tickets as an alibi?” deman Gloria’s father.

“Now, sir, that’s no way to talk. Don’t you trust your daughter?”

“Yes, I trust her, you young schemer. But I don’t trust you not to make a fool of h

“But I—”

“You, Lansing, might have spent your time better if you’d honestly tried to advan science of fire fighting instead of thinking of clever schemes to marry into it. Hah! you about water, and how things haven’t changed for two thousand years. Well, while you w carping about water and lack of progress, Jim Potter was *thinking.* His idea will get him appointed *cum laude,* possibly *summa,* and maybe even *magna.”*

“But, sir—”

“Lansing, I think you are a thrill-seeker. While you were complaining about lack o progress, and wailing that you couldn’t really study a fire and the methods we use with really watching one, Jim Potter did what you couldn’t do. He has made a very sensible

“Congratulations,” said Lansing in a flat tone. “And may I ask what it is?”

“I’m proud to be the one to tell you,” said Fire Chief Mooney. “Assume you are c to a fire in a dwelling, Lansing. It is yours to fight, to plan against, to lay out your campa extinguish the blaze in the shortest time with the minimum damage. Understand?”

“That is the job of the fire boss, the ranking official present.”

“Pre-cisely! Now, Lansing, suppose that you could make an instantaneous determination of the amount and placement of all flammable material in the dwelling, th chemistry and physical characteristics of these burnables, and the possible interaction between the various products of combustion.”

“That would be a help,” Lansing said thoughtfully. “It would be as great a help to it helps a general who knows the strength and deployment of the entire enemy force a him.”

“Exactly! Well, Lansing, young Jim Potter proposes that every citizen post a layo

his dwelling, and the contents, and the material of which the articles are made! This information will go into a rapid cross-access file, so that the full information will be avai as soon as the fire alarm delivers the identification of the dwelling."

* * * *

Bill Lansing shook his head slowly. "I suppose you'd want penalties for falsification of records?"

"Naturally. False information might be quite deadly."

"And sooner or later you'd issue licenses to purchase furniture and household g to make certain that your records were accurate?"

"Now that's the first good suggestion that I have ever heard you make, Lansing. he said to Potter, "I know you'll give full credit for this suggestion when you present yo thesis."

"Most certainly, sir," said Potter, scribbling. Lansing raised his hands.

"Chief Mooney, sir?"

"Now what, Lansing?"

"Before you continue along this line of reasoning, I think you had better consult a attorney for advice."

"Why?"

"Because I believe that any such requirement is a violation of the citizen's right t free of unwarranted search. At any rate, it is a violation of his privacy."

"It's for his own protection, confound it!" Mooney shook his head violently. "Wha you know about law?"

"Very little. That's why I suggested that you consult someone who does. I think y plan would require a constitutional amendment, a Supreme Court ruling, and a special department formed to enforce the requirements. It's a grand, blue-sky scheme, and to impractical."

"Lansing, have you ever heard of the N.I.H. attitude?"

"No, sir. What does N. I. H. stand for?"

“ ‘Not Invented Here.’ It refers to those people who go nit-picking and raising objections to anything they did not think of themselves. I withdraw my congratulations f excellent suggestion because, it seems, it was meant as sarcasm. But to show you tha at least, do not have the N. I. H. attitude, we’ll still use your suggestion. It’s a good one—regardless of its intent.”

“It won’t work,” said Lansing doggedly. “You’ll hear a yell about ‘police state’ go loud that no one will touch the idea.”

“Now, don’t accuse me of advocating anything antidemocratic.”

“I didn’t.”

“Yes, you did! And if you and your kind would only offer positive suggestions ins of throwing stumbling blocks in the way of progress, we would all be better off. You thi enough when you’re objecting to someone else’s idea, or when you’re scheming a plo squirrel my daughter out from under my eyes. Why don’t you bend that fine brain to something constructive?”

“Mr. Mooney, I—”

“Lansing, you’re nothing but an inept social climber who is playing in the wrong league. Why don’t you leave quietly, you son of a fire claim adjuster?”

“Now see here—”

“*You* see here, Lansing. Get out!”

“Father, Bill Lansing *was* my guest, and I—”

“You go to your room, and stay there, young missy! Bill Lansing was your guest, past tense. No progress, just water? Well, fathers have been pouring cold water over hot romances for a couple of thousand years, too. So get!”

* * * *

Bill Lansing’s return to his station was a doleful journey.

It was late at night; or, more accurately, it was very early in the morning. Cramme and jostling were the night people of the city. Some were tired, some were bored. Not were dozing in their subway seats. There were many couples engrossed with their own business, to the point where they cared little for their surroundings. But if there was on could be as unhappy and frustrated with helpless rage and utter futility as Bill Lansing, could not be known. For Lansing had no one to tell, no sympathetic ear to listen.

But if Bill Lansing thought that he had been kicked as low as any man could be kicked, he found that he had one more bitter blow awaiting him at the station. He was h just inside of the door by Fire Commissioner Edwards.

“Lansing, I have a complaint against you.”

“A complaint, sir?”

“Yes. Did you, or did you not imply that you were taking Gloria Lansing to a danc that in reality was non-existent?”

Lansing gulped. It was a loaded question. In reality, the plan had simply been to Fire Chief Mooney’s reaction to Gloria going out on a late date with her. It had been Gl spur-of-the-moment picking, not his, that chose the dance. Bill could no more tell the commissioner that they were testing Mooney’s reaction than he could permit himself t place the blame on Gloria. Neither was the act of a gentleman and a fire fighter; furthe he was at fault, anyway, because the code of the fire fighter demanded that he correct erroneous impression that Gloria might have given.

But Bill Lansing had no doubt at all that the commissioner knew the entire story a close as Mooney could repeat it. For the commissioner’s word had been “imply,” and meant that Gloria’s statement had been undersigned, or in this case, underspoken, by Lansing.

“Yes,” he said.

“This has been an unfortunate experience for all of us, Lansing. I hope it’s over. know the penalty of the Academy of Fire Fighters for permitting an implied untruth to s

“Yes.”

“While you are relieved of all duty and responsibility, you may not leave your stat until the Board of Fire Regents accepts your resignation officially.”

“And if there is a fire in the interim, sir?”

“While every hand is needed at a fire, Lansing, our code is our protection. It is cl No one who has not the full confidence of the Academy of Fire Fighters may have the of joining us in our chosen profession.”

“But, sir—”

The commissioner eyed Lansing coldly, and in a sepulchral intonation, he said, “

have been weighed in the balance, and found wanting."

It was the traditional phrase of cold dismissal from the Academy. The phrase wa
indeed, a translation of the handwriting on the wall.

* * * *

V

With absolutely nothing to do but eat, sleep, and kill the waking hours, because those
surround you will not speak nor admit they heard you, time hangs heavy indeed.

It was worse when your cell cannot be left. It is even worse than that when you, a
they, and everybody knows that the process of separating you from your tomb could b
expedited in ten minutes if anybody gave a tinkle. But the Academy of Fire Fighters wa
thoroughly finished with Mr. Bill Lansing; so completely finished with him that its memb
wouldn't lift a finger to get rid of him. To them, he had ceased to exist. To place action
before the treadmill brought his card to the top was to recognize that such a person ha
rights.

And it might have gone that way, right on out until Bill Lansing's life turned a corn
and became part of another world of activity.

But a new world was not to be for Bill Lansing. Clotho, the Fate who weaves the
of men, discovered the bowline, the knot that makes the closed loop which will not slip
this she tied into her web.

Call it fate. Call it coincidence. Call it anything you care to; but accept, even thou
reluctantly, the fire that flared up in the cellar of Fire Chief Mooney's home at one o'clo
the morning.

The alarm clangored through the station, alerting the firemen, the rookies, and th
nearly-ex-rookie Bill Lansing.

Next came the stentorian voice:

"Now hear this! The address is one seven nine, three nine six four Rushman Ave
in the Watchung area, near the metropolitan shopping area of Mountainside. The weat
clear. Temperature seventy-one, humidity fifty-three, wind from the southwest at ten. T
time is one zero seven hours."

Near him, Lansing heard someone mutter, "And the New York theater crowd will
be getting home, too!"

In answer, the fire sub-chief said, “Right, Al. Look, you and Pete are temporarily detached. Get out there right now and plant traffic stoppers. Go now; we’ll bring your f gear in the equipment wagon.”

“Right, Chief. But won’t that leave you short-handed?”

“We’ll make out.”

Lansing said, “I volunteer.”

For the first time in three weeks, Lansing got a reply. “We don’t accept outsiders was the cold response.

“Might as well use me,” said Lansing. “I’m going anyway.”

“Not in any fire wagon this station uses!”

From the roof of the station came the rising drone of a siren. It went up and up in scream, undulated between shrill and ear-splitting, and then began to slide down the s as the motor coasted to its well-balanced and near-frictionless stop. A banging scatte cold motors came next; they settled down into a muted, vibrant roar.

* * * *

Stop him from going, they could, but stop him from watching them leave, they could no followed them to the equipment, then stood on the edge of the roof, leaning into the b the big choppers of the heavy equipment. They wasted no time clawing for altitude. In they lurched forward off the roof, and arrowed straight across the city, no more than a hundred feet above the forest of television antennas that reached up for them.

It was a thrilling and a noisy spectacle, but once it was over, all that Lansing coul was to go back below and wait. This was a world which had rejected him. A world whic was not permitted to join.

He sprawled on his narrow bunk and listened to the radio. It was spilling orders a counter-orders, acknowledgements, direction data, and other information. To anyone used to the patter, it would have been a hopeless mess of gabble. But to the ex-rookie was part of his nostalgia. He had the knowledge and the skill to build a radio receiver f frequency (they could not be purchased), but once away from this station he would se ties. To maintain even the least of them would be more hurtful than not.

One thing he could not envision was the spectacle of the Mooney dwelling in flam That was a murky, flickering thing. But the approach of the sub-chiefs hopper he could without difficulty, for he knew that it would dip and circle the fire; the sub-chief would b

collecting preliminary information so that he could plan his counter-attack. Then the rad
became more orderly:

“Redman, get the pyrometer over here.”

“Right, Chief.”

“Harrington, get one of your spectrographs aimed at that picture window in front.
the second looking about ten feet above that tiled roof over on the side, and the third i
back. High, I’d say.”

“Right.”

“Now, Where’s the XXX!!!XXX! hosewagon?”

Bill Lansing grinned. The fire radio band was speech-scrambled within weeks af
had first been used. Language that would offend the delicate ear was denied to that ea
because the government realized that it was easier to conceal the bad language of me
working under danger and stress than it was to train them to use, “Oh my goodness!” a
verbal indication of dismay.

The sub-chief got his reply: “Layin’ hose, Chief!”

“From where, for XXX!!!X sake?”

“The Bound Brook Reservoir.”

“What the XX!!’s the matter with the standpipes?”

“They ain’t been used in seven years, Chief. Besides, we’ve got time to run a cle
line before swoosh-second, and it’s better that way.”

“Okay. Now—”

“Who’s in charge here?” This was a new voice.

“I am. Sub-Chief Walter Lang. From the Newark district station.”

“Where is Fire Chief Mooney?”

“We haven’t been able to contact him.”

“Commissioner Edwards?”

“Probably on his way. And who are you—sir?”

“Sub-Secretary of Public Safety, James Moriarity. You mean that neither Mooney Edwards are present?”

“No, sir. I—”

“I’m here, X#% %X## it,” came the unmistakable voice of Fire Chief Mooney. “A get me out!”

“Trapped?”

“Second floor rear.”

“How long can you hold out?”

“Not too long. It’s hot, and it stinks of blowup.”

“Do you want to take cognizance, Chief?” asked Lang.

“From within?” The sound of disbelief was unmistakable.

“Well, someone has got to give the orders.” Lang turned to Moriarity. “Shall we g and get him, sir?”

“How do you figure the fire, Mr. Lang?”

“One mo. Redman, what do the pyros say?”

“Hotspots running up to three hundred, bits and flares to five-fifty. Average is reasonable but going up.”

“Harrigan, what does spectro say?”

“The usual clutch of standard volatiles. You know. Polyesters, acrylics, acetates, eurenthanes, plus a mixture of ordinary smokes, wood distillates and monoxides.”

“How bad?”

“The mixture is deadly in concentration, you know. Right now it will give a man an awful headache if he breathes it very long—say a half-hour or more. But the temperatu recorded by Redman say that the mix isn’t to the whoosh point yet.”

“Then I can’t take the emergency chance, nor justify it,” said Moriarity. “Where’s

fire claim adjuster?”

“He hasn’t shown yet. He should have been here.”

“My God! Is there *anyone* who can work pro tem?”

“Of course not. There never is when they’re needed.”

* * * *

Mooney’s voice broke in, “Is Gloria safe?”

“Isn’t she with you?”

“No. She has her own apartment on the top floor of this building.”

“Front or rear?”

“Front.”

“And your wife?”

“With me. But about Gloria—?”

“Redman! Top floor front?”

“About the same as below, maybe a bit cooler in the hot spots. Less total variati

“Harrigan?”

“Rough, chief. The whole, standard list of hot, flammable volatiles are thick, plus traces of phosgene, hydrogen chloride and some nitrides. By comparison, Gloria’s fol breathing pure mountain air.”

“That’s an emergency, Chief! Can we go in”

“General call! Isn’t there anybody who can certify this spot as an emergency? Anybody?”

Bill Lansing could stand it no more. He got up from his bunk and snapped the press-to-talk switch on his radio. He said, “Sub-Secretary Moriarity from Bill Lansing. I an ex-rookie fireman, and therefore disqualified to talk, act, or participate on that basis However, I am also the son of James Lansing, a journeyman and fellow of the College Fire Claim Underwriters, through whom I was granted my certificate of competence in

evaluation."

"How fast can you get here?"

"A matter of minutes if I can commandeer the hopper on the roof."

Mooney's voice broke in, "Make him a #%& &#%% present of it, but get us the $
out of here!"

Lansing headed for the roof on a dead run. Meanwhile, a new voice came in, thin
wavering, on the edge of radio contact. "Am I within range yet? Do you hear me? This
Commissioner Edwards. Respond, please, over and out."

"We hear you now, Commissioner. Go ahead."

"How does it stand?"

"It apparently started below, point and cause of origin unknown. The dwelling is a
special, belonging to Fire Chief Mooney, You know the place, Commissioner."

"Yes. Well, the elder Mooney dwelling, I do. But their daughter has a separate or
third floor that I haven't been in."

"And the fire conditions?"

"Top-floor apartment, front side, isn't as separate as if the place were truly
unconnected. Therefore a lot of the volatile stuff has been seeping up through the stai
and halls. It's been collecting in Gloria's apartment."

"Any sign of the girl?"

"None. Harrigan?"

"No trace of animal charcoal nor hydrocarbon vapor. She may be suffocated, bu
isn't burned."

"Stop talking like that," yelled Mooney. "Get me out of here and I'll go up there
myself!"

"Is that an order, Chief?"

"Yes, #%& &#%% it!"

Moriarity said, "Commissioner, the only fire claim adjuster on the spot is ex-rook

Lansing. You know him?”

“Yes, I know him,” said Commissioner Edwards wearily. “Lansing? Will you auth
a breach of Mooney’s section?”

“Does Fire Chief Mooney waive his insurance?”

“Now, see here! This is no time to—”

“If you’re going to accuse me of vindictiveness, don’t. Spectro and pyro give the
Mooneys a good fifty-five minutes before the whoosh point, and threaten them with no
than a headache. I’m mindful of their lives and of their comfort, but I have the property
protect. Furthermore, the real danger is to the girl in the top floor front.”

“Shall we go in there?”

“Without seeing it, I shouldn’t grant permission. But the reports say—yes, go in.
the clear-out, grab, and re-containment process, but be fast.”

“Pyro, what’s the draft-coefficient?”

“Fairly slow. But once that roof is open, you’ll have a furnace condition in the who
place in a matter of minutes. All it takes is one tongue of flame to lick through a firebre
and—”

“Yes, yes, we know. Sky crew? Go in!”

* * * *

VI

Lansing’s hopper crossed the ring of billowing red flares that barred all surface traffic
entering the area. Then he saw the stricken dwelling. Fire apparatus hung in the sky or
helicopter blades, hovering about the scene. As for the fire itself, there was not much
to indicate how dangerous it was. Only a flicker and a flash of yellow flame showed at
windows. And, of course, the inevitable group of civilians huddled together in night clo
the dwellers on either side and to the back of the Mooney place that fronted on the nex
street.

As Lansing approached, the sky crew went into action. The first ‘copter lowered
carefully down onto the flat roof. On the bottom a six-foot, circular object began to
rotate—the well-known but seldom seen sawing circle. When the cylindrical saw-teeth
material of the roof, the crunching noise could be heard above the racket of the many
engines. It ground and it sawed, and the backlash from its effort made the pilot fight hi

to maintain hoverage.

Then, with a final crash, three things happened in so close a serial order that they appeared to have taken place at once.

A slow-motion picture would have shown first that the thrust of the sawing circle and its helicopter drove the equipment down when the final resistance ceased; second that pilot fought me thrust deftly by revving the engine and throwing the bite of the rotor blades full life; and third that when the plug of the roof was lifted free, the gout of hot volatiles belched forth to carry the helicopter high, precariously pitching in the turbulence.

“Where’s the sky hook?”

“Coming in, with hot papa in the iron claw.”

“Ready with the flush tank?”

“Ready!”

“Toss it!”

From one of the helicopters, a small, glistening object arched out. With computer accuracy it curved through the air to plunge into the newly made opening in the roof. There was no sound, but all at once the final billow of dirty smoke gushed forth, and there was no more.

“Snappy, now!”

Hot papa, in his glistening fire-reflecting suit, was lowered through the opening. The iron claw line went slack; the pilot of the helicopter hovered and fought his stick, for despite flushing the smoke out of the apartment with a tank of clear helium, the air above the scene was turbulent. Indeed, the helium did no more than to provide visibility. It was non-poisonous but just as deadly for the human lungs.

“Got baby!” came the cry. The iron claw line went taught again.

“How is she?”

“Alive and wrapped in baby’s bunting, double-folded with cold feet.”

“All right! No re-contain!”

* * * *

The sawing circle lowered again, hovered, turned, and fitted the roof-plug back in plac
Some battens were slapped over the circular cut, and then there came a rapid-fire ser
sharp detonations as anchor-fasteners were driven home with cartridge guns. The saw
circle rose, followed by the first of a thin trickle of smoke that began to seep through th

Mooney asked, “My daughter?”

Someone replied, “She’s being treated for smoke and vapor inhalation, some
poisoning, and a mild anoxia. No burns.”

“Thanks.

“Now let’s take care of the Mooneys,” said Commissioner Edwards.

“Shall we go in?”

“Lansing?” asked Edwards.

“Look,” interjected Mooney, “if pyro and spectro say we’re in no imminent dange
we’ll play it by the rules.”

“Yes, but as fire chief you should be here. Lansing?”

“Mr. Commissioner, will the Academy of Fire Fighters undertake Fire Chief
Mooney’s insurance? I can’t underwrite it and accept the additional losses just to place
in his rightful command.”

“Now I think you are being vindictive.”

“Put yourself in my shoes, Commissioner, and take a look from a long way outsi
I go in too soon, someone is going to accuse me of trying to curry favor with the very
combination of fire chief and father of the girl I love. Aren’t they?”

“You’ll find, young Mister Lansing, that no matter what you do, someone will critic

“Then the best way is to do what I think right, isn’t it?”

“Um—”

“All right! Now get off the air, Commissioner, and let your data gang go to work.”

Sub-Chief Walter Lang took over. “Data gang?”

“Pyro here,” said Redman. “General room ambient is about four-sixteen, with ho

spots to seven-fifty."

"Spectro," said Harrigan, "nothing new to report. The same crosssection of gase from burning or decomposed plastic fabrics, artificial leathers, and so forth."

"All right, plug your data directly into the computer."

The voices on the fire-radio band ceased. In their place there came a tuneless, a apparently pattemless, mixture of short pulses in many frequencies from low to high p was digital data covering the composition of the flammable gases within the confined dwelling, the temperatures found at a number of places within each room, and the rate which each factor was changing. From the computer there spilled lengths of tape, carr their own computer code in punched holes. These would be used for analysis later; th information they contained was already used and coded by the computer. From the collectable evidence, estimates and a computer-grade reconstruction were made of th conditions that existed in parts of the dwelling that could not be seen from the outside

* * * *

Within minutes, the information was complete and the counter-attack planned with con accuracy.

"Can we get the Mooneys, Lansing? Haven't you stalled long enough? What'll happen if we open that lower bedroom now?"

"The computer says it is a little early," said Bill Lansing. "And the book says that frequently better to let it burn a bit longer and tend to smother itself. We've come a lon from the day when the first act was to chop a hole in the roof to vent the explosive gas Now we can afford to wait until they get threatening before starting the inevitable fire-d through the house. But my experience," he went on, "isn't extensive enough to furnish considered opinion, other than to believe that there is a reasonable period during whic a computer could tell the difference. So I'll say go in and get them."

"Thanks," said Commissioner Edwards. "Mooney? We're coming in!"

"I hear you. We're ready."

There was a quick roar of engines as the twin rotors of the flying bridge fired up. flying bridge, parked in the street and poised for the operation, took no spare time in r to window height and plunging forward to thrust its covered outrigger through the bedr window behind which the Mooneys were waiting. Smoke burst forth around the bridge, a gout of flame followed as the hot volatiles belched forth, rose, and created an out-dr

The fire fighter in the hot papa suit aboard the flying bridge did not make it all the

to the end of the covered runway. The Mooneys, she first and he second, were alread aboard and running toward the body of the vehicle.

“Baby’s aboard,” yelled hot papa, “and cryin’ for cool air!”

The flying bridge backed, turned and dropped to the street. Fire Chief Mooney c out the exit door, steadying his wife by a hand at her elbow.

Commissioner Edwards said, “Want to take over?”

Mooney shook his head. “No. The headache they promised me is here, all right. pip. I couldn’t think straight.”

“You better get some treatment, Chief.”

“After this thing is out. Let Lang go on. He’s done a fine job so far.”

Walter Lang said, “Thanks, Chief.” Then he asked, “Lansing? When is whoosh second?”

Lansing looked at the last tape from the computer. “We’ve still a large margin of safety before it goes whoosh,” said Lansing. “But I don’t think we’ll gain much by waiti especially now that the bedroom window is gone. Hit it when you’re ready, Lang.”

Then, with the precision of computer programming, Pumper One hurled 1,750 li of water through the smashed bedroom window; Pumper Two delivered. 2,500 liters t a second-floor window; and a hose line rigged to the sawing circle dropped 500 liters through the re-opened hole in the roof.

The smoke billowed briefly through the shattered windows, then made its characteristic change from dirty brown to the steamy white that comes when water figh

There was only one re-burst. Just as the mop-up squad was about to enter with t absorbent machines, a flare was seen in the living room. Pumper Two responded with additional 500 liters, a quantity determined by human estimate and not by the compute a result, the mop-up squad found puddles on the floor when they entered ten minutes finish off the job.

* * * *

Voices died around the table as Fire Commissioner Edwards arose; there was one tin clink as one of the Board of Regents put down his coffee cup. The Regents of the Ac of Fire Fighters were present in their full red-suspendered regalia. But they were all uncomfortably aware of the stranger in their midst.

For he, too, was in full regalia. There was the shiny blue-serge suit and the hard
hat of the fire claim adjuster, and he carried the small, leather-covered attaché case w
contained the decimal computer used during on-the-spot estimates of fire, smoke, an
water damage.

Commissioner Edwards said, “I am in the very uncomfortable position of having
offer an honor upon a man who has already received what he may well believe to be a
higher one. In retrospect, I regret that Mr. Lansing did not make a material contribution
science of fire fighting. He did not invent some new process of extinguishing the blaze
eliminating the smoke, nor did he discover some fabulous new chemical that would kil
fleas without drowning the dog. In fact, Mr. Lansing did not even prove his own conten
that fire fighting was unchanged from the day when our remote ancestors discovered t
water was the master of fire, provided you poured enough of it on the blaze.”

“Indeed, gentlemen, I can only apologize for being impatient. I take the responsi
for having urged the premature action that required a second charge of water, hastily
estimated instead of carefully computed, to be hurled into the Mooney dwelling.”

“But in the act of acquiescing to our premature pleas, Mr. Bill Lansing, recently
appointed Adjuster First Class, and a member of the College of Fire Claim Adjusters,
revealed a part of his human nature seldom displayed by other members of his colleg
Humanely and humanly, Mr. Lansing understood that our natural enemy is *Fire*, to be killed
at all cost and at once.

“And to continue this understanding, and to hope that it becomes mutual, I am
conferring upon him the highest office that a non-member can hold, the unglorious,
undignified, unrewarding post of Associate Member. By appointment.”

“And I,” added Fire Chief Mooney, “find myself appointing him to the post of
son-in-law, first class. By marriage.”

To his bride-to-be, Bill Lansing whispered, “I still say there’s a better way to do it

“Than marriage?”

“No. A better way to put out a fire.”

“There is,” she chuckled. “And I’ll show you the way after the ceremony.”