

Of what importance is a Soul, when considering—

THE WINNING OF GLORIA GRANDONWHEELS

ROBERT F. YOUNG

Illustrated by Steve Fabian

WHEN Bill Harding boarded the *Galactic Queen's* shuttle boat he hadn't the faintest inkling that another passenger for Weighstation—a female of the species, no less—had already preceded him, or that she and he were destined to share an adventure the like of which neither had ever dreamed.

She had frost-bitten blue eyes, midnight-nipped black hair, and Roman Empress features with *rich bitch* showing in their every line. She was built like a brick Betelgeuse VI fritzenframmerhouse.

Having seated herself comfortably on one of the two face-to-face couches, she was gazing into the floorscreen, awaiting the moment when the orbiting *Queen's* ventral hatch would open sending the shuttleboat spiraling down into the diminutive planet's atmosphere.

Bill Harding had never met her, but he had seen her once or twice on the GQ's promenade deck. The steward had told him her name: Gloria Grandonwheels.

When he sat down opposite her she accorded him a single supercilious glance, then returned her gaze to the floorscreen. A moment later, the shuttleboat pilot entered, sat down at the control panel and threw a pair of little levers. The ventral hatch opened and the shuttleboat began spiraling planetward like a steamlined Watumbi IV ruk egg.. Presently the face of Weighstation appeared in the floorscreen—a singularly gray and austere countenance, its only redeeming feature a green freckle located midway between its Equator and its Tropic of Cancer.

Bill Harding wondered why a rich bitch like Gloria Grandonwheels would want to visit such a place. Except for the green freckle, which constituted the fertile valley where the owner—Wardwalker the Psychectoinist—lived with his “spooks” and his memories, the topography was confined to stonestrewn steppes, ice flats, sluggish rivers and dead seas.

Suddenly Bill Harding gasped. Was it possible that she was visiting Weighstation for the same reason he was?

Granted, atavisms were rare, but that didn't mean two of them couldn't be going to Weighstation at the same time and on the same ship. After all, where else could an atavism go to have his soul removed?

He decided to set protocol aside for the moment. It wasn't as though Gloria Grandonwheels was a complete stranger to him; he *had* seen her before, and they *were* fellow passengers. "Are you on your way to see Wardwalker the Psychectomist too?" he asked.

"Yes," Gloria Grandonwheels answered without raising her eyes from the floorscreen.

"My name's Bill Harding," Bill Harding said. "I'm from Far Out."

She shot him a single ice-blue glance. "Humph," she said, and returned her attention to the floor-screen.

Stung, Bill Harding directed his own gaze toward the floorscreen. Seen at close range, Weighstation was even less inviting than when seen from orbit. The shuttleboat was spiraling swiftly planetward on a course that, presumably, would bring it to rest in the middle of the green valley, but presently Bill Harding realized it wasn't going to come down anywhere near the valley.

He called the matter to the pilot's attention. "You're darn right we're not going to come down

anywhere near the valley," the pilot said. "I'm not going near that crazy place! Maybe what I heard about it is true and maybe it isn't, but I'm not taking any chances. I gotta wife 'n kids to consider, and if anything happened to me, who'd take care of them, hah? Who'd pay the rent, who'd buy the groceries, who'd keep the wolf from the door? Who? I ask you—who?"

"Just forget about it, will you?" Bill Harding said. "Just forget about it."

"I'll set her down near that big rock over there. That's pretty close to where you two are going. After all, you can't expect a man with a wife 'n kids to take chances, can you? It says right in our union contract that shuttleboat pilots aren't supposed to take unnecessary risks . . . There, how's that for a smooth landing? .. It's not that I'm afraid of that nut and those spooks on my own account, you understand. Why, if it was only my own life I'd be risking I'd set you down right smack down in the middle of that little old valley, spooks or no spooks! But I gotta consider my wife 'n kids. After all, if anything happened to me, who'd—"

Bill Harding picked up his travel-bag and got out. Gloria Grandonwheels picked up hers and followed him. Miffed, the pilot slammed the lock and sent the shuttleboat spiraling back up into the atmosphere.

THE TWO ATAVISMS surveyed their surroundings: Sand . . . More sand ... Rocks, stones, pebbles . . . Sunlight shadow . . . Up ahead, a faint flush of green.

A land crab ran out from behind a rock and disappeared behind another. "Ooh!" Gloria Grandonwheels gasped. Remembering how contemptuously she had rebuffed his overture of friendship, Bill Harding ignored her and started walking toward the faint flush of green.

After a while he glanced over his shoulder to see whether she was following him. She was. Closely. So closely, in fact, that he was able to identify the type of mascara she used. It was the kind that was made by grinding up Yogenwort VI swamp-blossom roots with Goose huckleberry sepals, and it cost a fortune. As an employee of Far Out's leading Cosmetics and Perfumery concern, Bill Harding knew all about such things. Not that, to date, the knowledge had done him much good. Indeed, it was his inability to advance higher in the company ranks that was responsible for his presence on Weighstation. On the advice of the company psychiatrist he had had a psyche-probe performed, and when it had revealed he had a soul, the company had insisted that he visit a psychectomist at once, or call at the nearest electronic cashier's slot for his severance pay.

Gradually the faint flush of green turned into grass and trees—the former, timothy, the latter, finkoes, hailgoes, maples, sphergoes, wirts, and just about every other species of shade tree Weighstation soil would put up with.

Pausing on the lip of the valley, the two atavisms surveyed Wardwalker's demesne: They saw, first, a green, tree-shaded slope. Then a tree-shaded river effervescing like champagne between verdant mossy banks. Then green geometric fields pied with the brighter hues of perennial fruits and vegetables. Then a park-like forest. Then, in a clearing in the forest, a sprawling building occupying at least two acres and with a lighthouse-like tower thrusting up from its jumbled rooftops. Then more forest; then another river (or a branch of the same one); then another tree-shaded slope; and finally the gray terrain of the interrupted steppe.

They descended the nearer tree-shaded slope side by side and approached the first river. A short distance downstream an ornate footbridge spanned the champagne-like water, and Bill Harding led the way toward it. Several feet from it, he came to an abrupt standstill: stationed before the footbridge, barring the way, was a Weighstationling.

II

NO DOUBT the reader is wondering why Bill Harding didn't see the Weighstationling at the same time he saw the footbridge, why he virtually had to bump into the creature in order to become aware of its presence. The following excerpt from the new Blunt & Grimes Simplipedia should clear this little

matter up, and in the process bring to light other intriguing characteristics of these strange and little-known inhabitants of Weighstation:

WEIGHSTATIONLING (sub-order 4, gal. *undling*; fossora): A parahumanoid species native to Radhakrishnan Iv (q.v.), more commonly known as Weighstation due to its original function as a telemetric weighing station for Class B-IX ore-carriers. Weighstationlings are nearly transparent transprotoplasmic (q.v.) creatures of a high order of intelligence considering their otherwise general inferiority to man (q.v.). Referred to superstitiously by common spacemen as "spooks", these unique beings have a remarkable ability to change their shape, size, consistency and color to fit any situation. Owing to their hypersensitive natures, they are able to anticipate, when accosted, exactly the sort of person, being or thing the accoster unconsciously wishes to see, and due to their pronounced inferiority complexes they are compelled to become this person/being/thing and to supply him/her/it with appropriate words from the accoster's mind. Frequently, when a permanent relationship is established between a Weighstationling and a human (q.v.), it retains the personality it assumes until the relationship is terminated.

Senses alert for the first sign of foul play, Bill Harding approached the Weighstationling stationed before the footbridge. Behind him, her aristocratic countenance pale but her ice-blue eyes determined, walked Gloria Grandonwheels.

The weighstationling looked like a diaphanous bedsheet someone had left hanging on a nonexistent clothesline and that someone else had riddled with a charge of buckshot. It hovered about two feet above the ground and kept going hummm, hummm, hummm. Halting within half a yard of it, Bill Harding said, "This young lady, and myself have traveled many parsecs through space and time in order to visit Wardwalker the Psychectomist. So will you step aside, please, and permit us to cross this bridge?"

Instantly the Weighstationling turned into Bill Harding's mother. "Son," she said, "I don't want to butt into your affairs, but don't you think it would be wiser if you gave this matter a little more thought? If, indeed, as certainly would seem to be the case, you do have a soul, you must, of course, eventually have it removed if you are to retain your job and become a Big Success. But mightn't it be better to live with your affliction a while longer so that you may get to know and understand how Things were in the old Days when all people had souls and thought they needed them in order to live their lives to the full and attain the Hereafter? And another thing, son—this girl you're running around with. I know that Fate has forced you into her company, but just the same I'd watch myself if I were you. You never can tell about her kind, son—you never can tell!"

"I knew it!" Gloria Grandonwheels exclaimed. "I knew it! I knew it all along!"

"Knew what?" Bill Harding asked.

"That you were an Oedipal regressive psycho-dormital subliminal paranorm. I knew it, I just knew it!" And with a haughty toss of her head Gloria Grandonwheels approached to within a half a yard of the Weighstationling and said, "Well, are you going to get out of my way, or aren't you? Do you think I came all this distance for a psychectomy just to have my way barred at the very last minute by a crummy old bedsheet with moth holes in it?"

Immediately the Weighstationling changed from Bill Harding's mother into a tall spare woman with a wart on the end of her nose. She was clad in a purple nurse's uniform with horizontal cinnamon stripes, and atop her hoary head sat a nurse's helmet labeled MOTHER MACKEY: *Sex Instructress*. "Oh Gloria, Gloria," she cried, "You always *were* a headstrong girl! It grieves me deeply, after all I've taught you, to find you running around with an Oedipal regressive psycho-dormital subliminal paranormal member of the male species whom you've known for less than half an hour and whom you do not truly know at all. But I suppose your cause *is* urgent, and that consequently the ordinary precautions a girl should take under such circumstances must be dispensed with. So, reluctantly, I say, Go ahead, child, but watch yourself every single second, and guard your virginity well!"

The Weighstationling changed back into a perforated bedsheet and fluttered to one side. Face flaming like the fire-forests of Bog ix, Gloria Grandonwheels stomped across the bridge. Bill Harding

followed.

A POEM could have been written about the fields Bill Harding and Gloria Grandonwheels walked through that afternoon, about the trees they strolled under and about, the Weighstationlings they saw cultivating ever-bearing tomato plants, old-faithful grapevines and constant corn. In point of fact, Bill Harding *did* write a poem—or rather, sketched one in his mind so that at a later date he could jot it down for posterity:

green trees
 givers of nuts
 bedsheets hanging
 on
 non
 existent
 clotheslines

tomato
 grape
 corn-on-the-cob
 ...gold . . .
tree-toad threnody of pre-dusk blues
 becomingggggggg
 true
 blue

true ...

They came in due course—and without further interference from the Weighstationlings (who, while they changed tentatively to this shape and that whenever the two humans came near them, were too preoccupied with their labors to do a recognizable job)—to the park-like forest that encompassed the sprawling building they had seen from the lip of the valley. Neither had said a word since the footbridge incident, nor was this mutual silence broken till they emerged from the trees into the clearing. They stopped in their tracks then, and Gloria Grandonwheels exclaimed, "Say, he really *must* be a nut!"

Bill Harding was inclined to agree. Seeing the building from afar had been one thing: seeing it up close was another.

Had it been built from the inside out, he wondered, or from the outside in?

He decided that neither method could have been employed, because either presupposed a plan, and the building was a sprawling monument to planlessness. Obviously Wardwalker had built it as he had gone along, adding wings and ells as the need arose. No doubt, he had begun with the lighthouse-like tower, which at the moment was hidden from view by the jumbled rooftops of the rest of the structure.

Almost as incongruous *as* the building itself was the miscellany of materials it comprised: filkwood from Ottawatta XL, ebonstone from Glik, permadobe from Lone Star (Regulus XIII), and bluebrick from Rubba Dub-Dub (Dhub XVII), plus numerous other materials Bill Harding couldn't identify.

There were no windows to be seen, but opposite the spot where the two atavisms were standing was a rectangular opening that vaguely resembled a doorway. There were numerous other such openings, but this one appeared to be the most promising. Bill Harding took the lead, and presently he and Gloria Grandonwheels found themselves in a dimly lit corridor that turned first this way and then that. He could smell Gloria Crandon-wheels' perfume, so close did she keep behind him. It was the kind that was made by blending the love-sac fluid of the Grumpus XVIII bog-beaver with the purified juice of Lokas XXIII diddleberries.

At length he saw a bright light up ahead, and increased his pace. Gloria Grandonwheels increased hers too, and presently they stepped into a big puddle of late-afternoon sunlight. It was the same puddle they had stepped out of scarcely two minutes ago.

"Well I'll be darned," Bill Harding said. "We're right back where we started from!"

"It's a maze—that's why," Gloria Grandonwheels said excitedly. "A labyrinth like the one that used to exist on the island of Crete on Sol Three and that the Minotaur lived in. I—I wonder if there's a Minotaur living in this one."

Bill Harding gave her a disgusted look. "Come on, we'll try again."

III

WHEN Bill Harding entered the strange and eerie building for the second time he did so in the full knowledge that in its weird and winding corridors dangers such as he had never before encountered might very well be lurking in the gloom and that at any moment he might be forced to pit his sinews against unknown terrors such as he had never dreamed of. Cautioning his feminine companion to be quiet and instructing her to keep as close to him as she could, he peered intently ahead into the strange half-light that permeated every nook and cranny of the winding passageway and which had no visible source; then, senses attuned for the slightest movement, sound or smell, he crept fearlessly forward.

At length he came to a branching corridor that he'd apparently missed before. He turned into it, Gloria Grandonwheels right behind him. A third corridor branched out of the second. They turned into that one too. A fourth. After a while, they came to a room. It was a bathroom. They went on. Pretty soon they came to another room. It, too, was a bathroom.

Was it the same one?

Again they went on. The halflight grew dimmer. Suddenly Gloria Grandonwheels whispered, "Do—do you hear something, Bill Harding?"

"Such as what?"

"Such—such as hoofbeats."

Bill Harding halted. He was about to tell her that this was no time for wish-fulfillment fantasies and that she probably wouldn't qualify as a victim anyway, when he heard the sound himself: *Clip-clop, clip-clop, dip-clop, clip-clop, clip-clop, clip-clop. Clip-clop, clip-clop, clip-clop, clip-clop, clip-clop, clip-clop.*

They peered ahead of them into the gloom. Abruptly Gloria Grandonwheels gave a start. "Ooh!" she exclaimed.

She spun around. So did Bill Harding. There, sure enough, was the Minotaur. It was laughing. "He-he-he," it laughed. "He-he-he! The acoustics fooled you, didn't they? I knew they would."

It took off its head. Then it took off its hide and its hoofs. Bill Harding and Gloria Grandonwheels saw a smallish man with a gray, goat-like beard who was somewhere in his eighties and maybe even somewhere in his nineties. "He-he-he," he laughed again. "He-he-he!"

Gloria Grandonwheels hauled off and slapped his face. "How dare you sneak up behind me like that and—and— How dare you!"

The old man didn't seem to mind the slap. "Allow me to introduce myself," he said. "I am none other than Wardwalker the Psychectomist. Or perhaps I should say 'expsychectomist', it having been my ill fortune while still in the prime of life to have had taken from me, owing to certain psychic changes in the human race occasioned, I am sad to say, by the very profession that brought me fame and fortune, my sole means of livelihood. Difficult is it; indeed, for a man who has worked hard in his chosen field to find himself suddenly unsought after save for an occasional atavism, and what else is there left for him to do, no longer recognized by mankind for the Great Man he truly is, but to leave the walks of men behind and retire to his Retreat and write his Memoirs and build a fitting memorial to himself? Thus one day this once-great and famous man is sitting in his tower room, hard at work upon one of the many gems which he is creating for posterity, and sees approaching from afar two visitors, and as one of them happens to be a female of the species who is built like a brick Betelgeuse Six fitzenframmerhouse he decides to accord her a welcome fit for one of those beautiful virgins of Yore who the Myceneans paid as tribute to the Minoan king."

Bill Harding felt a little dizzy. "Sir," he said, "since I don't know how long it's been since an atavism last sought your services, I must ask you a somewhat impertinent question: Are you still capable of

performing a psychectomy?"

Wardwalker drew himself up to his full height. He turned a nearby dial on the wall, brightening the light, then he raised his tight hand and extended his fingers. "Do you see these fingers, young man? Do you, young lady? Do you see how delicate they are? How graceful? How sensitive? How symmetrical? How can you doubt for one moment that—"

"I didn't say I doubted," Bill Harding interrupted hastily. "I only asked. Anyway, sir, it takes more than a set of sensitive fingers to perform a psychectomy, doesn't it? Isn't there some kind of machine involved?"

"The machine is a mere incidental." Wardwalker said loftily. "But naturally I have one." He peered at Bill Harding closely. "Are *you* an atavism, by any chance?"

"I am," Bill Harding said, "and I've come all the way from Far Out to seek your services. The company psychiatrist told me you were the only psychectomist left who'd kept up his union dues, which makes you my only hope. My—my name is Bill Harding."

Wardwalker was gazing fondly at his fingers. "Why, That's wonderful—just wonderful! It's been ages since I've had a patient. Sometimes my fingers tingle in the night, as though yearning to perform their appointed task! To heal, to save, to make well again!" The Psychectomist faced Gloria Grandonwheels. "And you, young lady—are you an atavism too? Is it possible that Dame Fortune, who has treated me so shoddily in my twilight years, has allowed *two* atavisms to come to me at one and the same time?"

"My name is Gloria Grandonwheels," Gloria Grandonwheels said, "and if you'll stop emoting for a few minutes, you old goat, we'll get down to business. How much?"

It shocked Bill Harding to hear her address such a renowned man so disrespectfully, but Wardwalker didn't seem in the least offended. Probably he'd had dealings with rich bitches before. "\$10,542.98," he said equably.

"10,542.98!" Bill Harding gasped. "Why, that's more than I make in a week!"

"No doubt, young man, no doubt. But I didn't say it was going to cost *you* that much. I charge my patients in accordance to what I think they can afford to pay, and it's as plain to me, Bill Harding, that you're as poor as a churchmouse as it is that Miss Grandonwheels is as rich as a Hurshtenburg. And in her case it wouldn't need to be plain, it so happening I haven't been absent from the walks of men so long that I've forgotten the Grandonwheels name. Was it Scootch IV whiskey your grandfather cornered the market on, Miss Grandonwheels, or maraschino-flavored birth-control pills? I can't quite remember which."

"Maraschino-flavored b.c. pills," Gloria Grandonwheels said proudly. "Maraschinnies."

"Oh yes. Certainly a solid enough rock to found a family fortune on." Wardwalker turned to Bill Harding. "You strike me as being a starving chemist or biologist, or something on that order. So for you, my fee will be a flat \$1000." Wardwalker picked up his Minotaur suit and slung it over his shoulder. "We will now adjourn to my palace proper, where I will show you some of my rare objets de art and, per-adventure, recite to you some of my poetry."

"You write *poetry*?" Gloria Grandonwheels demanded incredulously. "You're a *poet*?"

Wardwalker executed a modest little bow. "Only a minor one so far, Miss Grandonwheels, but I have hopes of someday ascending to a higher plateau."

Gloria Grandonwheels groaned. "First an Oedipal regressive psychodormital subliminal paranorm and now a senile Shakespeare!" she said. "Why does everything have to happen to me?"

IV

Having passed the meridian of my life, it may seem strange to my contemporaries that I should, at such an advanced age, bend my efforts toward writing poetry, and why I did not so bend my efforts much sooner. Well, first of all, I never went to Skollege, although this might come as quite a surprise to those of my erstwhile friends and acquaintances who have heard me converse in Ancient French. Secondly, that I had a chance of becoming a Great Poet did not

immediately occur to me, and thus I set my sights on becoming a Great Psychectomist instead. But now, having been laid off, so to speak, their (sic) being no more souls for me to psychect, I have decided to impart to the world in metric form some of the wisdom which I have accumulated through study and experience, and to let Mankind know, in lyrical language, how I feel about certain aspects of human nature.

Foreword, to *The Collected Poems of Wardwalker the Psychectomist*: Courtesy of the Wardwalker Memorial Library

ALONG THE TURNING twisting corridors of the labyrinth, in Wardwalker the Psychectomist's wake, walked Bill Harding and Gloria Grandonwheels. What new trick would Fate play upon them? What new danger would leap out upon them from the grim and mysterious shadows and endeavor to make a mockery out of their attempt to find happiness in the only way left open to them in a cold, cruel galactic civilization?

Presently, after waiting for Wardwalker to cache his Minotaur suit in a secret closet, they emerged from the labyrinth into a crowded room almost as large as the Pennsylvania Planet Spaceship Station. At first Bill Harding thought it *was* the Pennsylvania Planet Spaceship Station and that the people in it were waiting for spaceships; then he saw that it was a museum of some kind and realized that the people weren't waiting but looking at objects in display cases standing along the walls and at a sarcophagus lying just below floor level in the center of the room and surrounded by a wrought-iron fence.

Some of the people were familiar to him. He recognized George Washington, Florence Nightingale, Marcus Aurelius, David Brinkley, Theodore Roosevelt, Honore de Balzac (*two* Honore de Balzacs), Joe Namath, Napoleon Bonapart Hill, Alfragar Boom, Benvenuto Cellini, Chet Huntley, Senator Thropwaite Smith-Jones III, Mary Pickford, Phillip the Arab, Clifford Irving, Nefertiti, Sigmund Freud, William Shakespeare, Muhammed Ali, Jimjemmersen and Lawrence Welk. Probably he would have recognized others, but the material with which Wardwalker had mentally supplied the various Weighstationlings in establishing permanent relationships with them was based on busts, postage stamps, daguerreotypes, photographs, portraits and artists' conceptions, and to make matters worse, his memory was spotty. To confound the picture further, the psychectomist either didn't like period-piece clothing or had forgotten that fashions change. In any event, all of the prominent personages present—men and women alike—were wearing the same garb he was: lavender semi-coveralls and calf-high electronic-engineer boots.

"You are unaware of it," said the Psychectomist, who had preceded Bill Harding and Gloria Grandonwheels into the room, "but you are standing in the newly opened Wardwalker Memorial Library. Permit me to show you some of his mementoes and collections which, as the centuries pass, will attain ever wider galactic renown as pilgrim after pilgrim visits this hallowed shrine where once he walked and talked and breathed, and assure him of a permanent place among the Great Men of All Time."

Gloria Grandonwheels said, "I came here to have a psychectomy, not to be shown around some crummy old library by a rich egomaniac with a Great Man complex. Anyway, you're not dead yet—you're only 99 and 99/100 percent dead."

Bill Harding said, "That wasn't a very nice thing to say, Gloria, considering what this man is going to do for you."

Gloria Grandonwheels said, "Considering what he already did to me and considering what he's going to charge me for doing something else, I consider it to be a nicer thing to say than he deserves."

Wardwalker said, "Over there, Bill Harding, is my collection of pipes. Numbered among them is a rare meerschaum from Ottisbaga Thirteen and a genuine Tucca Frutta briar from Hulp Twenty-two. Come with me."

Bill Harding set his travelbag down, and the two men made their way through the crowd of visitors to the case containing the pipes, leaving Gloria Grandonwheels standing by the wall near a coterie of conversationalists that included Benjamin Franklin, Fyodor Dostoevski, Ann Boleyn, Leonardo da Vinci and Walter Cronkite.

After showing Bill Harding the pipe collection, Wardwalker escorted him on a grand tour of the rest of the enormous room. There were collections of just about everything under the suns: coins, stamps, Groose III potato bugs, Bog IX butterflies, Sol III smog-moths, primitive ballpoint pens and petrified terrestrial pussy willows.

Judging from the crowd of visitors milling around it, the pussy-willow collection was the most popular of all the displays. "Superb!" one of the admirers exclaimed. "Splendid!" effervesced another. "Bone doo!" ejaculated a third, whom Bill Harding recognized as one of the two Honore de Balzacs. "Nevoire avez I voired semblabbe wondaires. Magnificue, magnificue, magnificue!"

Upon the completion of the ground-floor tour, Wardwalker led the way up a narrow staircase to a gallery that encircled the room some twenty feet below the ceiling. It was devoted exclusively to portraits he had sat for at various times during his life. There were literally thousands of them, and every single one depicted him with a beard. Even at the age of sixteen, which was when the earliest of them had been painted, he looked a little bit like a goat.

"And now," he said dramatically, halting before a doorway beyond which a slender stairway spiraled upward and out of sight, "for the piece of resistance!"

THE PSYCHECTOMIST in the lead, the two men mounted the stairs to a little round room with concave windows that overlooked the entire valley. In the center of the room stood a desk and chair, and on the desk sat an inkwell with a quill pen stuck in it. Nearby lay a stack of writing paper, and next to it reposed an aluminum-leaf edition of *The Anatomy of Poesy*, by Muhammed Ali.

Spidery handwriting covered the topmost sheet of paper. _Wardwalker picked it up. He cleared his throat: "Canto Sixteen:

"That money is the main cause
Of most crimes that are committed,
Of which we hear every day
Sans doubt will be admitted."

Bill Harding blinked.

"Of all there are in the cosmos
Of men, no matter their color,
The ones abhorred universally
Are the ones who most love the
Dollar."

"Don't you think," said Bill Harding a little nervously, "that it's time we rejoined Miss Grandonwheels?"

Wardwalker didn't seem to hear him.

"Moneylovers have no shame,
They're such a miserable bunch,
That I consider them beneath
A race called the Quirafunch . . .

Miss Grandonwheels, did you say? Who is she?"

"Why, she's the young lady who came with me—don't you remember?"

"Oh yes—*Gloria* Grandonwheels. I recall her well. Her grandfather was in b.c. pills, wasn't he? Yes, we must rejoin her at once."

Gloria Grandonwheels had moved to the middle of the big room where the sarcophagus was and was leaning on the wrought-iron fence, gazing down at a brass plate inlaid in the stone lid. Several feet to

her left stood Zane Grey. A similar distance to her right stood Dr. Spock.

Joining her and following her gaze, Bill Harding saw that there were words inscribed on the brass plate. He read them:

*Here lies Wardwalker the Great
That for all his money,
Thought often of the poor
For who the days aren't sunny.*

Gloria Grandonwheels had already read them. "The old hypocrite!" she said. "He doesn't even know what the word 'poor' means!"

"Shhh!" Bill Harding whispered. "He's right behind you."

Gloria Grandonwheels gasped when she saw how close behind her the Psychectomist really was. "Don't you dare, you old goat you!" she said.

"Dare what?" Wardwalker asked.

"*You* know. Anyway, why are *we* standing around like a bunch of dumb Weighstationlings? Why aren't you busy preparing for my psychectomy? I can't wait around all week—I've got a chartered ship coming tomorrow to pick me up."

"In due course, Miss Grandonwheels. In due course. Psychectomies aren't performed just any old time of day—they're done in the A.M. only, and you can't expect a psychectomist of my reputation to go against the fine grain of tradition, can you? I'll have Florence prepare the psychectomy room and I'll put you down as an out-patient for tomorrow morning. You, too, Bill Harding—might as well make it a simulectomy while we're at it. Meantime, I will escort both of you to balconied apartments overlooking my Pelepopolynesian Garden where you can dress for dinner, which will be served at Eight."

Gloria Grandonwheels glared at him. Then she picked up her travel-bag and accompanied him across the room to an archway on the farther side. Bill Harding got his travelbag and followed.

V

AFTER PARTAKING of a nine-course dinner replete with exotic viands and rare wines and served by such diverse and colorful Weighstationages as Diocletian, Bodenbunk Bard and Dear Abby, Gloria Grandonwheels retired to her chambers and Bill Harding retired to his.

It was his intention to get a good night's sleep so that he could confront the forthcoming ordeal with a clear mind.

But he found he couldn't sleep.

Strangely restless, he stepped out on the balcony in his sun's and looked down into the starlit Pelepopolynesian Garden. He saw toy-like rutenbugga trees with pebbled paths winding among them, and greenswards gleaming like pale ponds. He smelled the poignant fragrance of posh blossoms and eeny-weeny blooms. He heard the aphrodisiacal tinkling of a rain-tree ritual fountain. Suddenly overcome by the beauty of the scene, he shinnied down a nearby Adisa-adiba chink vine and alighted lightly on the ground.

The Pelepopolynesian Garden was located somewhere within the labyrinth—exactly where, probably even Wardwalker himself didn't know. It was completely surrounded by balconied apartments, one of which—presumably at least—was the Psychectomist's, one of the one Bill Harding had just left via the chink vine, and one Gloria Grandonwheels'. The last was right across the way from Bill Harding's—just above the tinkling rain-tree ritual fountain—and it was toward it that he presently directed his footsteps.

Why did Bill Harding direct his footsteps toward—of all places—the balconied boudoir of this rich girl who held him in no higher esteem than she did a milch bug and whom she would have no more qualms about squashing? Certainly not because he had fallen in love with her, and certainly not because he had fallen in love with the Grandonwheels' fortune either. He was neither unstable when it came to

Love, nor greedy when it came to Money. No, the real reason 'Bill Harding directed his footsteps toward Gloria Grandonwheels balconied boudoir was that he'd had a sudden irrational urge to take a dip in the rain-tree ritual fountain that stood just beneath it.

When he reached the fountain he jumped in without a moment's hesitation. It was a large one, and unique in that its contents emanated from a series of small spouts located at regular intervals along its circular rim as well as from a large spout in its center. This spout functioned as the mouth of a statue of the Pelepopolynesian rain-tree god, and since the god was polyhermaphroditic the statue had twelve breasts and six sets each of male and female reproductive organs. It was so large that it obscured most of the opposite side of the fountain.

The water came to Bill Harding's knees. He lay down in it and let it soak into his pores; then he got to his feet and waded over to the statue, intending to take a good-luck draught from the stream of water issuing from its mouth.

That was when he saw Gloria Grandonwheels.

That was when Gloria Crandon-wheels saw him.

She, too, was in the fountain, wearing nothing but a pink chemise, and she, too, had approached the statue for the purpose of imbibing a good-luck draught.

She stared at Bill Harding.

Bill Harding stared at her.

A thin veneer of civilization is a strange thing. While it is not by any means limited to the clothing a person wears nor to his or her surroundings, the fact cannot be gainsaid that a person neither looks nor feels the same standing in a rain-tree ritual fountain in his/her BVDs/chemise as he/she does standing on a metropolitan street corner wearing ordinary apparel.

Gone was the frost from Gloria Grandonwheels' eyes. Gone, the hauteur from her mien. Here was the gentle love-starved maiden so long concealed by the cruel crinolines of civilization. Here was the *real* Gloria Grandonwheels.

"Bill Harding," she whispered. "Gloria Grandonwheels," Bill Harding whispered back.

They reached hungrily for each other. In their eagerness, they slipped and fell. Laughing like two playful children, they regained their feet after a great deal of splashing about, and waded out of the fountain. Entering the rutenbugga grove, they found a greensward ...

Great was the tempest that took place in Wardwalker's Pelepopolynesian Garden on that memorial night. The stars stared down in shocked incredulity. Rutenbugga trees tingled to their very roots. Night flowers trembled in their earthy beds. Posh blossoms and eeny-weeny blooms looked on askance. Weighstation faltered momentarily on its journey around its sun.

But it was not love these two lovers knew—it was pure primeval passion, passion that left them lying limp upon the greensward, spent and enervated. Dreamily they gazed into each other's eyes. "Bill Harding," Gloria Grandonwheels murmured. "Gloria Grandonwheels," Bill Harding murmured back.

"Oh son, son, son," wailed a familiar voice, "how could you have done this terrible thing to me!" and raising his eyes, Bill Harding was astonished to see his mother standing a short distance away pointing an accusing finger at him. "After all I did for you. After all I told you about Life. *She's* not for such as you, Bill Harding! Are you so blind you cannot see so simple a truth as that? *She's* rich. *She's* arrogant. *She's* conceited. *She's* cruel. Once you've satisfied her passing passion she'll drop you like a used Kleenex and never think of you again. Oh son, son, son!"

Gloria Grandonwheels had sat up. Now she fixed Bill Harding with a baleful gaze. "So *that's* what you think of me, you Oedipal regressive psycho-dormital subliminal paranormal peasant you! After I gave you my all! After I sacrificed my maidenly purity just so your base desires could be slaked! After—"

Her voice trailed away. A second stray Weighstationling had entered the clearing and had turned into the same tall spare woman with the wart on the end of her nose that the footbridge Weighstationling had turned into that afternoon.

Gloria Grandonwheels began searching wildly for her chemise. In vain: it was nowhere to be found. "No, no, Mother Mackey!" she cried. "It's not what you think. It's—"

By this time Mother Mackey was pointing an accusing finger of her own. "Oh Gloria, Gloria, Gloria! You always were a headstrong girl! If I told your Father once, I told him a hundred times. 'Mr. Grandonwheels,' I said, 'That daughter of yours will come to no good. She's too independent, and there's a fatal trace nymphomania in her nature.' 'Well do the best you can, Mother Mackey,' he said. 'Do the best you can.' And I did. I taught you how important your virginity was and explained to you how your being an atavism and having a soul would only make it harder for you to keep it, because souls only make it hard for people to do to others as they *wouldn't* want others to do to them. And I explained to you time and time again that a maiden's virginity is a negotiable asset, and that for her to throw it away in a burst of primeval passion is tantamount to throwing away Money. And what happens? You fall victim to the first man you've ever been alone with for more than five minutes, and you the heiress of the Grandonwheels' fortune and him nothing but an Oedipal regressive psycho-dormital subliminal paranormal peasant! And now your maidenhead is no more!—oh Gloria, Gloria, Gloria!"

Bill Harding found a rock and threw it at the two stray Weighstationlings, and they turned back into transprotoplasmic bedsheets and fluttered out of the clearing. But when he looked for Gloria Grandonwheels, she was gone.

VI

Concise, dazzling in their unaffected brilliance, these little gems of purest ray serene are certain to find a place in the annals of poesy uniquely their own.

—McGeorge Cashdollar, *The New York XXIII Times*

One more dreary example of how a person renowned in one field can obtain instant recognition in another merely by waving a little plastic flag and shouting, "I am here!" Proof positive that one ounce of association is worth ten pounds of talent.

—Patrick Jose Tyentyentyenkiov, *The Rucksack I Courier*

Hooray! Hooray! Hooray! At long last a new light through yonder literary window breaks! It is the east, and Wardwalker is the sun!

—Barbrabriggs, *The Box IX Review*

The conscientious reviewer, when confronted with an horrendous package such as The Collected Poems of Wardwalker the Psychectomist (Hill & Burgundy, 1066 pages, \$98.50) can only throw up his hands in despair and holler "Help!" Every single one of these asymmetrical little atrocities has as its theme, Money, and their message is as undeviating as a Rubba Dub-Dub rain dance: People who love Money and have a lot of it are Evil; People who don't love it and haven't very much of it are Noble. It is impossible to understand how Wardwalker, who made so much of it in his day, could have arrived at such an attitude unless one postulates that of recent years he has come upon a truth that conflicts jarringly with the juridical Ethic upon which he founded his career and built his fortune (i.e., that the only Hereafter a human being can know lies in the minds of humans that follow him, and that therefore the soul is superfluous and constitutes a hindrance in a competitive society); that he turned Money into a sort of whipping boy in order to atone for his having accumulated so much of it.

—Johansen Streethawker, *The Scootch IV Sentinel*

From *The Scrapbook of Wardwalker the Psychectomist*; courtesy of the Wardwalker Memorial Library

BILL HARDING did not see Gloria Grandonwheels again until she was escorted into the psychectomy room the next morning by Florence Nightingale. He himself had already been escorted there by the same Weighstationage. The rich girl didn't even look in his direction as she entered, but the

fiery flames that shot upward from her graceful neck into her soft cheeks bore unmistakable evidence of the fact that she was only too well aware of his presence.

The psychectomy room had a rather cramped aspect, largely owing to the huge psychectomy machine that occupied three quarters of the available space. More than anything, the machine resembled a big chrome-plated filing cabinet with four drawers. Two of the "drawers" had been pulled out and stood revealed as electronic operating tables prefitted with Schlotz-Febley webwires and psychic suction tubes. At the time of Gloria Grandonwheels' entry, Bill Harding was lying on one of them clad in a pink one-piece hospital gown.

Florence Nightingale pulled a little screen down from the ceiling, took her new patient behind it and got her out of her clothes and into a similar gown. As might have been expected, Gloria Grandonwheels turned out to be an eyeful in such attire, but you couldn't prove it by Bill Harding. He accorded her a single hate-filled glance as she paraded over to the other table and lay down, which was more than she accorded him.

Wardwalker entered wearing white duck-trousers, a white smock and a white skullcap, went over to the wash basin and scrubbed for five full minutes. He then held up his arms, and Florence Nightingale pulled white rubber gloves down over his hands and forearms. "I hope the operation will be a success, doctor," she said.

"My operations are always successful, Florence. And now, if you will hand me my eight-inch crescent wrench, we will begin."

Florence Nightingale removed the instrument from a steaming surgical tray with a pair of chrome tongs and placed it in Wardwalker's extended right hand. Purposefully he walked between the two operating tables and halted in front of the "filing cabinet". For the first time in his life, Bill Harding knew naked fear, and as for Gloria Grandonwheels, her eyes were wide with it.

Bending forward, the psychectomist examined the face of the psychectomy machine. Presently he found what he was searching for—a small nut protruding *a* quarter of an inch from the otherwise featureless surface. Deftly he adjusted the precision jaws of the crescent wrench to the proper width, applied them to the nut and gave it a half-turn counterclockwise. No sooner had he done so than the Schlotz-Febley webwires and the psychic suction tubes attached themselves hungrily to Bill Harding's and Gloria Grandonwheels' psychic nerve-ends.

Bill Harding felt a pronounced tingling. He heard Gloria Grandonwheels gasp. The psychectomy machine, he saw, had taken on a reddish glow.

Wardwalker waited five seconds, then gave the nut a quarter-turn clockwise. The reddish glow diminished. Then he gave the nut another quarter-turn clockwise, bringing it back to its original position. The reddish glow faded completely and the Schlotz-Febley webwires and the psychic suction tubes detached themselves from the two patients and retracted into the two operating tables.

The psychectomist faced Florence Nightingale. Expertly she removed the wrench from his hand and peeled off his rubber gloves. "Well done, doctor," she said. "Well done, indeed."

"Thank you, Florence."

Florence Nightingale withdrew, and Wardwalker regarded his two patients. "Well how do you two feel?" he asked.

"The same as I did before," Bill Harding said, sitting up.

"So do I," Gloria Grandonwheels said, also sitting up.

Suddenly hers and Bill Harding's eyes met. Held. Bill Harding felt himself melting. An expression such as he had never seen before on a woman's face suffused Gloria Grandonwheels' countenance. He saw Yearning in her eyes. Love, Adoration, Compassion, Humility. Although he did not know it, these same emotions filled his eyes too. All he knew was that she was the most beautiful, the most desirable, the most noble woman he had ever seen. Why, he would gladly die for her. He would do *anything* for her!

"I would gladly die for you," he said. "I would do *anything* for you!"

"I would gladly die for you too," she said humbly.

Abruptly she gasped, as though she'd just remembered something, and the expression he had never seen before on a woman's face gave way to one of acute contrition. "Oh no!" she cried. "Oh no! How

could I have demeaned myself so in his eyes! How could I have behaved like a common chickle-boat tramp with *Him!* How could I have? How could I have? How could I have!" And to Bill Harding's astonishment, she jumped off the table, gathered up her clothes and ran from the room.

Wildly he gathered up his own clothes and was about to take off after her when Wardwalker grabbed his arm. "No, Bill Harding—not yet. There's something you should know first."

"I know she loves me and that love her, and that's all I need to know!" Bill Harding cried. Abruptly *he* gasped. "Why, it was your removing our souls that did it, wasn't it? They must have been imposing some kind of psychic block that prevented us from seeing each other in our true light. Let go my arm—I've got to go after her!"

"Calm down," said Wardwalker. "And get into your clothes. You can go after her later on—she's not going Very far. Meanwhile we'll take a slow walk to the Wardwalker Memorial Library and I'll acquaint you with the facts of life as I, Wardwalker the Psychectomist, lately turned Poet, have come to know them."

"Well . . . all right," Bill Harding agreed.

FOR A WHILE after leaving the psychectomy room Wardwalker was silent. Then, "In a way, a soul is a good thing to have," he said. "Morally, at least, it for the most part keeps a person on the right path, even though it keeps him from getting ahead in the World. But it has a big drawback even aside from its being a hindrance to successful thinking, because it tells a person what he ought and ought not to do *only for his own good*—not anybody else's. It doesn't make him love anybody else, and it doesn't make him love himself any less. If anything, it makes him love himself more. And if a person is inclined to think a lot of himself to begin with, he thinks even more of himself. No, a psychectomist can't feel bad about removing a malignant growth that does that to people, and I *don't* feel bad about it. What makes me feel bad is that the true use to which the science of psychectomy should have been put didn't occur to me till it was too late. If I'd thought of it in time I could have changed my patients from hypocrites into true human beings by making it possible for them to love somebody besides themselves. It would have involved a simulectomy every time I plied my profession, but it could have been done. Well anyway," Wardwalker concluded sadly, "I made a lot of money."

"I don't follow you," Bill Harding said. "What true use could the science of psychectomy have besides removing souls?"

They had reached the Library and were working their way through the crowd of Weighstationages toward the archway on the farther side of the room through which Gloria Grandonwheels had undoubtedly gone to pick up the rest of her belongings in her balconied apartment. "When you and Gloria Grandonwheels showed up for psychectomies," Wardwalker continued, "I was even more pleased than I let on; because unwittingly you were providing me with an opportunity to make up for, a little bit at least, the big mistake which was all my life had amounted to. And a little bit means a lot when a person has passed the meridian of their life like I have. I (lid more than just remove yours and Gloria Grandonwheels' souls, Bill Harding—I interchanged them, thereby making it possible for both of you to love somebody besides yourselves . . . to love each other."

Bill Harding was stunned. "You *interchanged* them! Well of all the underhanded—"

He paused. A commotion had begun in the vicinity of the archway, and its author was none 'other than Gloria Grandonwheels herself. Reattired in her travelclothing and carrying her travelbag, she had entered the room and was shoving her way through the milling Weighstationages toward the entrance to the labyrinth.

Yearning rose in Bill Harding's throat, almost choking him. "Gloria," he cried. "Gloria Grandonwheels!"

She vouchsafed him not so much as a single glance as, face flaming like the fire-forests of Bog IX, she continued on her way. Desperately he tried to run after her, but the Weighstationages were as thick as flies between them, and he made no headway. "My check will be in next week's mail," she called over her shoulder to Wardwalker, and a moment later she entered the turning, twisting corridors and vanished from view.

