# Thirty Days Had September

## by

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The sign in the window said: **SCHOOLTEACHER FOR SALE, DIRT CHEAP**; and, in small letters: CAN COOK, SEW, AND IS HANDY AROUND THE HOUSE.

She made Danby think of desks and erasers and autumn leaves; of books and dreams and laughter. The proprietor of the little second-hand store had adorned her with a gay-colored dress and had slipped little red sandals on her feet, and she stood in her upright case in the window like a life-size doll waiting for someone to bring her to life.

Danby tried to move on down the spring street to the parking lot where he kept his Baby Buick. Laura probably had his supper all dialed and waiting on the table for him and she would be furious if he was late. But he went right on standing where he was, tall and thin, his youth not quite behind him, still lingering in his brown, wistful eyes, showing faintly in the softness of his cheeks.

His inertia annoyed him. He'd passed the store a thousand times on his way from the parking lot to his office and on his way from his office to the parking lot, but this was the first time he'd ever stopped and looked in the window.

But wasn't this the first time the window had ever contained something that he wanted?

Danby tried to face the question. Did he *want* a schoolteacher? Well, hardly. But Laura certainly needed someone to help her with the housework, and they couldn't afford an automatic maid, and Billy certainly could stand some extra-TV tutoring, with the boxtop tests coming up, and—

And—and her hair made him think of September sunlight, her face, of a September day. A September mist settled around him, and all of a sudden his inertia left him and he began to walk—but not in the direction he had intended to go …

"How much is the schoolteacher in the window?" he asked.

Antiques of every description were scattered about the interior of the store. The proprietor was a little old man with bushy white hair and gingerbread eyes. He looked like an antique himself.

He beamed at Danby's question. "You like her, sir? She's very lovely."

Danby's face felt warm. "How much?" he repeated.

"Forty-nine ninety-five, plus five dollars for the case."

Danby could hardly believe it. With schoolteachers so rare, you'd think the price would go up, not down. And yet, less than a year ago, when he'd been thinking of buying a rebuilt third-grade teacher to help Billy with his TV-schoolwork, the lowest-priced one he could find had run well over a hundred dollars. He would have bought her even at that, though, if Laura hadn't talked him out of it. Laura had never gone to realschool and didn't understand.

But forty-nine ninety-five! And she could cook and sew, too! Surely Laura wouldn't try to talk him out of buying this one—

She definitely wouldn't if he didn't give her the chance.

"Is—is she in good condition?"

The proprietor's face grew pained. "She's been completely overhauled, sir. Brand new batteries, brand new motors. Her tapes are good for another ten years yet, and her memory banks will probably last forever. Here, I'll bring her in and show you."

The case was mounted on castors, but it was awkward to handle. Danby helped the old man push it out of the window and into the store. They stood it by the door where the light was brightest.

The old man stepped back admiringly. "Maybe I'm old-fashioned," he said, "but I still say that teleteachers will never compare to the real thing. You went to realschool, didn't you, sir?"

Danby nodded.

"I thought so. Funny the way you can always tell."

"Turn her on, please," Danby said.

The activator was a tiny button, hidden behind the left ear lobe. The proprietor fumbled for a moment before he found it; then there was a little *click!*, followed by a soft, almost inaudible, purring sound. Presently, color crept into the cheeks, the breast began to rise and fall; blue eyes opened—

Danby's fingernails were digging into the palms of his hands. "Make her say something."

"She responds to almost everything, sir," the old man said. "Words, scenes, situations … If you decide to take her and aren't satisfied, bring her back and I'll be glad to refund your money." He faced the case "What is your name?" he asked.

"Miss Jones." Her voice was a September wind.

"Your occupation?"

"Specifically, I'm a fourth-grade teacher, sir, but I can substitute for first, second, third, fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth grades, and I'm well-grounded in the humanities. Also, I'm proficient in household chores, am a qualified cook, and can perform simple tasks, such as sewing on buttons, darning socks, and repairing rips

and tears in clothing."

"They put a lot of extras in the later models," the old man said in an aside to Danby. "When they finally realized that teleducation was here to stay, they started doing everything they could to beat the cereal companies. But it didn't do any good." Then: "Step outside your case, Miss Jones. Show us how nice you walk."

She walked once around the drab room, her little red sandals twinkling over the dusty floor, her dress a gay little rainfall of color. Then she returned and stood waiting by the door.

Danby found it difficult to talk. "All right," he said finally. "Put her back in her case. I'll take her."

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"Something for me, Dad?" Billy shouted. "Something for me?"

"Sure thing," Danby said, trundling the case up the walk and lifting it onto the diminutive front porch. "For your mother, too."

"Whatever it is, it better be good," Laura said, arms folded in the doorway. "Supper's stone cold."

"You can warm it up," Danby said. "Watch out, Billy!"

He lifted the case over the threshold, breathing a little hard, and shoved it down the short hall and into the living room. The living room was preempted by a pink-coated pitchman who had invited himself in via the 120" screen and who was loudly proclaiming the superiority of the new 2061 Lincolnette convertible.

"Be careful of the rug!" Laura said.

"Don't get excited, I'm not going to hurt your rug," Danby said. "And will somebody please turn off TV so we can hear ourselves think!"

"I'll turn it off, Dad." Billy made nine-year-old strides across the room and killed the pitchman, pink coat and all.

Danby fumbled with the cover of the case, aware of Laura's breath on the back of his neck. "A schoolteacher!" she gasped, when it finally came open. "Of all the things for a grown man to bring home to his wife! A schoolteacher."

"She's not an ordinary schoolteacher," Danby said. "She can cook, she can sew, she—she can do just about anything. You're always saying you need a maid. Well, now you've got one. And Billy's got someone to help him with his TV-lessons."

"How much?" For the first time Danby realized what a narrow face his wife had.

"Forty-nine ninety-five."

"Forty-nine ninety-five! George, are you crazy? Here I've been saving our money so we could turn in our Baby B. for a new Cadillette, and you go throwing it away on an old broken-down schoolteacher. What does *she* know about teleducation? Why, she's fifty years behind the times!"

"She's not going to help *me* with *my* TV-lessons!" Billy said, glowering at the case. "My TV-teacher said those old android teachers weren't good for anything. They—they used to *hit* kids!"

"They did not!" Danby said. "And I should know, because I went to realschool all the way to the eighth grade." He turned to Laura. "And she's not broken down, either, and she's not fifty years behind the times, and she knows more about *real* education than your teleteachers ever will! And like I said, she can sew, she can cook—"

"Well, tell her to warm up our supper then!"

"I will!"

He reached into the case, depressed the little activator button, and, when the blue eyes opened, said: "Come with me, Miss Jones," and led her into the kitchen.

He was delighted at the way she responded to his instructions as to which buttons to push, which levers to raise and lower, which indicators to point at which numerals— Supper was off the table in a jiffy and back on again in the wink of an eye, all warm and steaming and delectable.

Even Laura was mollified. "Well …," she said.

"Well, I guess!" Danby said. "I said she could cook, didn't I? Now you won't have to complain any more about jammed buttons and broken fingernails and—"

"All right, George. Don't rub it in."

Her face was back to normal again, still a little on the thin side, of course, but that was part of its attractiveness under ordinary circumstances; that, and her dark, kindling eyes and exquisitely made-up mouth. She'd just had her breasts built up again and she really looked terrific in her new gold and scarlet loungerie. Danby decided he could have done far worse. He put his finger under her chin and kissed her. "Come on, let's eat," he said.

For some reason, he'd forgotten about Billy. Glancing up from the table, he saw his son standing in the doorway, staring balefully at Miss Jones, who was busy with the coffee.

"She's not going to hit me!" Billy said, answering Danby's glance.

Danby laughed. He felt better, now that half the battle was won. The other half could be taken care of later. "Of course she's not going to hit you," he said. "Now come over and eat your supper like a good boy."

"Yes," Laura said, "and hurry up. *Romeo and Juliet* is on the Western Hour, and I don't want to miss a minute of it."

Billy relented. "Oh, all right!" he said. But he gave Miss Jones a wide berth as he

walked into the kitchen and took his place at the table.

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Romeo Montague twisted a cigarette with deft fingers, put it between sombrero-shadowed lips and lit it with a kitchen match. Then he guided his sleek palomino down the moonlit hillside to the Capulet ranch house.

"Guess I better be a mite keerful," he soliloquized. "These hyar Capulets, being sheepherders an' hereditary enemies o' my fambly, who are noble cattlemen, would gun me down afore I knowed what happened if'n they got the chance. But this gal I met at the wrassle tonight is worth a mite o' danger."

Danby frowned. He had nothing against rewriting the classics, but it seemed to him that the rewrite men were overdoing the cattlemen-sheepmen deal. Laura and Billy didn't seem to mind, however. They were hunched forward in their viewchairs, gazing raptly at the 120" screen. So maybe the rewrite men knew what they were doing at that.

Even Miss Jones seemed interested … but that was impossible, Danby quickly reminded himself. She *couldn't* be interested. No matter how intelligently her blue eyes might be focused on the screen, all she was doing, really, was sitting there wasting her batteries. He should have taken Laura's advice and turned her off—

But somehow he just hadn't had the heart. There was an element of cruelty in depriving her of life, even temporarily.

Now *there* was a ridiculous notion, if ever a man had one. Danby shifted irritably in his viewchair, and his irritation intensified when he realized that he'd lost the thread of the play. By the time he regained it, Romeo had scaled the wall of the Capulet rancho, had crept through the orchard, and was standing in a gaudy garden beneath a low balcony.

Juliet Capulet stepped onto the balcony via a pair of anachronistic french doors. She was wearing a white cowgirl—or sheepgirl—suit with a thigh-length skirt, and a wide-brimmed sombrero crowned her bleached blond tresses. She leaned over the balcony railing, peered down into the garden. "Where y'all at, Rome?" she drawled.

"Why, this is ridiculous!" Miss Jones said abruptly. "The words, the costumes, the action, the place— Everything's wrong!"

Danby stared at her. He remembered suddenly what the proprietor of the secondhand store had said about her responding to scenes and situations as well as words. He'd assumed, of course, that the old man had meant scenes and situations directly connected with her duties as a teacher, not *all* scenes and situations.

An annoying little premonition skipped through Danby's mind. Both Laura and

Billy, he noticed, had turned from their visual repast and were regarding Miss Jones with disbelieving eyes. The moment was a critical one.

He cleared his throat. "The play isn't really 'wrong,' Miss Jones," he said. "It's just been rewritten. You see, nobody would watch it in the original, and if no one watched it, what would be the sense of anyone sponsoring it?"

"But did they have to make it a *Western?*"

Danby glanced apprehensively at his wife. The disbelief in her eyes had been replaced by furious resentment. Hastily he returned his attention to Miss Jones.

"Westerns are the rage now, Miss Jones," he explained. "It's sort of a revival of the early TV period. People like them, so naturally sponsors sponsor them and writers go way out of their way to find new material for them."

"But Juliet in a cowgirl suit! It's beneath the standards of even the lowest medium of entertainment."

"All right, George, that's enough." Laura's voice was cold. "I told you she was fifty years behind the times. Either turn her off or I'm going to bed!"

Danby sighed, stood up. He felt ashamed somehow as he walked over to where Miss Jones was sitting and felt for the little button behind her left ear. She regarded him calmly, her hands resting motionless on her lap, her breathing coming and going rhythmically through her synthetic nostrils.

It was like committing murder. Danby shuddered as he returned to his viewchair. "You and your schoolteachers!" Laura said.

"Shut up," Danby said.

He looked at the screen, tried to become interested in the play. It left him cold. The next program featured another play—a whodunit entitled *Macbeth.* That one left him cold, too. He kept glancing surreptitiously at Miss Jones. Her breast was still now, her eyes closed. The room seemed horribly empty.

Finally he couldn't stand it any longer. He stood up. "I'm going for a little ride," he told Laura, and walked out.

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He backed the Baby B. out of the drivette and drove down the suburban street to the boulevard, asking himself over and over why an antique schoolteacher should affect him so. He knew it wasn't merely nostalgia, though nostalgia was part of it—nostalgia for September and realschool and walking into the classroom September mornings and seeing the teacher step out of her little closet by the blackboard the minute the bell rang and hearing her say, "Good morning, class. Isn't

it a beautiful day for studying our lessons?"

But he'd never liked school any more than the other kids had, and he knew that September stood for something else besides books and autumn dreams. It stood for something he had lost somewhere along the line, something indefinable, something intangible; something he desperately needed now—

Danby wheeled the Baby B. down the boulevard, twisting in and around the scurrying automobilettes. When he turned down the side street that led to Friendly Fred's, he saw that there was a new stand going up on the corner. A big sign said: **KING-SIZE CHARCOAL HOTS—**HAVE A REAL HOT DOG GRILLED OVER A REAL FIRE! OPEN SOON!

He drove past, pulled into the parking lot beside Friendly Fred's, stepped out into the spring-starred night, and let himself in by the side door. The place was crowded, but he managed to find an empty stall. Inside, he slipped a quarter into the dispenser and dialed a beer.

He sipped it moodily when it emerged in its sweated paper cup. The stall was stuffy and smelt of its last occupant—a wino, Danby decided. He wondered briefly how it must have been in the old days when bar-room privacy was unheard of and you had to stand elbow to elbow with the other patrons and everybody knew how much everybody else drank and how drunk everybody else got. Then his mind reverted to Miss Jones.

There was a small telescreen above the drink-dispenser, and beneath it were the words: GOT TROUBLE? TUNE IN FRIENDLY FRED, THE BARTENDER-HE'LL LISTEN TO YOUR WOES *(only 25¢ for 3 minutes)*. Danby slipped a quarter in the coin slot. There was a little click and the quarter rattled in the coin return cup and Friendly Fred's recorded voice said, "Busy right now, pal. Be with you in a minute."

After a minute and another beer, Danby tried again. This time the two-way screen lit up and Friendly Fred's pink-jowled, cheerful face shimmered into focus. "Hi, George. How's it goin'?"

"Not too bad, Fred. Not *too* bad."

"But it could be better, eh?"

Danby nodded. "You guessed it, Fred. You guessed it." He looked down at the little bar where his beer sat all alone. "I … I bought a schoolteacher, Fred," he said.

"A *schoolteacher!*"

"Well, I admit it's a kind of odd thing to buy, but I thought maybe the kid might need a little help with his TV-lessons—boxtop tests are coming up pretty soon, and you know how kids feel when they don't send in the right answers and can't win a prize. And then I thought she—this is a special schoolteacher, you understand, Fred-I thought she could help Laura around the house. Things like that …"

His voice trailed away as he raised his eyes to the screen. Friendly Fred was shaking his friendly face solemnly. His pink jowls waggled. Presently: "George, you listen to me. You get rid of that teacher. Y'hear me, George? Get rid of her. Those

android teachers are just as bad as the real old-fashioned kind—the kind that really breathed, I mean. You know what, George? You won't believe this, but I know. They usta hit kids. That's right. Hit them—" There was a buzzing noise, and the screen started to flicker. "Time's up, George. Want another quarter's worth?"

"No thanks," Danby said. He finished his beer and left.

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Did *everybody* hate schoolteachers? And, if so, why didn't everybody hate teleteachers, too?

Danby pondered the paradox all next day at work. Fifty years ago it had looked as though android teachers were going to solve the educational problem as effectively as reducing the size and price of the prestige-cars at the turn of the century had solved the economic problem. But while android teachers had certainly obviated the teacher shortage, they'd only pointed up the other aspect of the problem—the school shortage. What good did it do to have enough teachers when there weren't enough classrooms for them to teach in? And how could you appropriate enough money to build new schools when the country was in constant need of newer and better superhighways?

It was silly to say that the building of public schools should have priority over the building of public roads, because if you neglected the country's highways you automatically weakened the average citizen's penchant to buy new cars, thereby weakening the economy, precipitating a depression, and making the building of new schools more impracticable than it had been in the first place.

When you came right down to it, you had to take your hat off to the cereal companies. In introducing teleteachers and teleducation, they had saved the day. One teacher standing in one room, with a blackboard on one side of her and a movie screen on the other, could hold classes for fifty million pupils, and if any of those pupils didn't like the way she taught, all he had to do was switch channels to one of the other teleducational programs sponsored by one of the other cereal companies. (It was up to each pupil's parents, of course, to see that he didn't skip classes, or tune in on the next grade before he passed the previous grade's boxtop tests.)

But the best part of the whole ingenious system was the happy fact that the cereal companies paid for everything, thereby absolving the taxpayer of one of his most onerous obligations and leaving his pocketbook more amenable to sales tax, gas tax, tolls, and car payments. And all the cereal companies asked in return for their fine public service was that the pupils—and preferably the parents, too—eat their cereal.

So the paradox wasn't a paradox after all. A schoolteacher was an anathema because she symbolized expense; a teleteacher was a respected public servant

because she symbolized the large economy-size package. But the difference, Danby knew, went much deeper.

While schoolteacher-hatred was partly atavistic, it was largely the result of the propaganda campaign the cereal companies had launched when first putting their idea into action. They were responsible for the widespread myth that android schoolteachers hit their pupils, and they still revived that myth occasionally just in case there was anybody left who still doubted it.

The trouble was, most people were teleducated and therefore didn't know the truth. Danby was an exception. He'd been born in a small town, the mountainous location of which had made TV reception impossible, and before his family migrated to the city he'd attended realschool. So he *knew* that schoolteachers didn't hit their pupils.

Unless Androids, Inc. had distributed one or two deficient models by mistake. And that wasn't likely. Androids, Inc. was a pretty efficient corporation. Look at what excellent service station attendants they made. Look at what fine stenographers, waitresses, and maids they put on the market.

Of course, neither the average man starting out in business nor the average householder could afford them. But—Danby's thoughts did an intricate hop, skip, and a jump—wasn't that all the more reason why Laura should be satisfied with a makeshift maid?

But she wasn't satisfied. All he had to do was take one look at her face when he came home that night, and he knew beyond the shadow of a doubt that she wasn't satisfied.

He had never seen her cheeks so pinched, her lips so thin. "Where's Miss Jones?" he asked.

"She's in her case," Laura said. "And tomorrow morning you're going to take her back to whoever you bought her from and get our forty-nine ninety-five refunded!"

"She's not going to hit *me* again!" Billy said from his Indian squat in front of the TV screen.

Danby whitened. "*Did* she hit him?"

"Well, not exactly," Laura said.

"Either she did or she didn't," Danby said.

"Tell him what she said about my TV-teacher!" Billy shouted.

"She said Billy's teacher wasn't qualified to teach horses."

"And tell him what she said about Hector and Achilles!"

Laura sniffed. "She said it was a shame to make a cowboy-and-Indian melodrama out of a classic like the *Iliad* and call it education."

The story came out gradually. Miss Jones apparently had gone on an intellectual rampage from the moment Laura had turned her on in the morning to the moment

Laura had turned her off. According to Miss Jones, everything in the Danby household was wrong, from the teleducation programs Billy watched on the little red TV set in his room and the morning and afternoon programs Laura watched on the big TV set in the living room, to the pattern of the wallpaper in the hallway (little red Cadillettes rollicking along interlaced ribbons of highways), the windshield picture window in the kitchen, and the dearth of books.

"Can you imagine?" Laura said. "She actually thinks books are still being published!"

"All I want to know," Danby said, "is did she hit him?"

"I'm coming to that—"

About three o' clock, Miss Jones had been dusting in Billy's room. Billy was watching his lessons dutifully, sitting at his little desk as nice and quiet as you please, absorbed in the efforts of the cowboys to take the Indian village of Troy, when all of a sudden Miss Jones swept across the room like a mad woman, uttered her sacrilegious remark about the alteration of the *Iliad,* and turned off the set right in the middle of the lesson. That was when Billy had begun to scream and when Laura had burst into the room and found Miss Jones gripping his arm with one hand and raising her other hand to deliver the blow.

"I got there in the nick of time," Laura said. "There's no telling what she might have done. Why, she might have killed him!"

"I doubt it," Danby said. "What happened after that?"

"I grabbed Billy away from her and told her to go back to her case. Then I shut her off and closed the cover. And believe me, George Danby, it's going to stay closed! And like I said, tomorrow morning you're going to take her back—if you want Billy and me to go on living in this house!"

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Danby felt sick all evening. He picked at his supper, languished through part of the Western Hour, glancing every now and then, when he was sure Laura wasn't looking, at the case standing mutely by the door. The heroine of the Western Hour was a dance hall girl—a 32-24-38 blonde named Antigone. Seemed that her two brothers had killed each other in a gunfight, and the local sheriff—a character named Creon—had permitted only one of them a decent burial on Boot Hill, illogically insisting that the other be left out on the desert for the buzzards to pick at. Antigone couldn't see it that way at all, and she told her sister Ismene that if one brother rated a respectable grave, so did the other, and that she, Antigone, was going to see that he got one, and would Ismene please lend her a hand? But Ismene was chicken, so

Antigone said, All right, she'd take care of the matter herself; then an old prospector named Teiresias rode into town and—

Danby got up quietly, slipped into the kitchen, and let himself out the back door. He got behind the wheel and drove down to the boulevard, then up the boulevard, with all the windows open and the warm wind washing around him.

The hot-dog stand on the corner was nearing completion. He glanced at it idly as he turned into the side street. There were a number of empty stalls at Friendly Fred's, and he chose one at random. He had quite a few beers, standing there at the lonely little bar, and he did a lot of thinking. When he was sure his wife and son were in bed, he drove home, opened Miss Jones' case, and turned her on.

"Were you going to hit Billy this afternoon?" he asked.

The blue eyes regarded him unwaveringly, the lashes fluttering at rhythmic intervals, the pupils gradually adjusting themselves to the living-room lamp Laura had left burning. Presently: "I am incapable of striking a human, sir. I believe the clause is in my guarantee."

"I'm afraid your guarantee ran out some time ago, Miss Jones," Danby said. His voice felt thick and his words kept running together. "Not that it matters. You did grab his arm though, didn't you?"

"I had to, sir."

Danby frowned. He swayed a little, weaved back into the living room on rubbery legs. "Come over and sit down and tell me about it, Mish—Miss Jones," he said.

He watched her step out of her case and walk across the room. There was something odd about the way she walked. Her step was no longer light, but heavy; her body no longer delicately balanced, but awry. With a start, he realized that she was limping.

She sat down on the couch and he sat down beside her. "He kicked you, didn't he?" he said.

"Yes, sir. I had to hold him back or he'd have kicked me again."

There was a dull redness filling the room, coalescing before his eyes. Then, subtly, the redness dissipated before the dawning realization that here in his hand lay the very weapon he had needed: the psychological bludgeon with which he could quell all further objection to Miss Jones.

But a little of the redness still remained and it was permeated with regret. "I'm terribly sorry, Miss Jones. Billy's too aggressive, I'm afraid."

"He could hardly help being so, sir. I was quite astonished today when I learned that those horrid programs that he watches constitute his entire educational fare. His teleteacher is little more than a semicivilized M.C. whose primary concern is selling his company's particular brand of cornflakes. I can understand now why your writers have to revert to the classics for ideas. Their creativity is snuffed out by clichés while still in its embryo stage."

Danby was enchanted. He had never heard anyone talk that way before. It wasn't her words so much. It was the way she said them, the conviction that her voice carried despite the fact that her "voice" was no more than a deftly-built speaker geared to tapes that were in turn geared to unimaginably intricate memory banks.

But sitting there beside her, watching her lips move, seeing her lashes descend every so often over her blue, blue eyes, it was as though September had come and sat in the room. Suddenly a feeling of utter peace engulfed him. The rich, mellow days of September filed one by one past his eyes and he saw why they were different from other days. They were different because they had depth and beauty and quietness; because their blue skies held promises of richer, mellower days to come—

They were different because they had meaning …

The moment was so poignantly sweet that Danby never wanted it to end. The very thought of its passing racked him with unbearable agony and instinctively he did the only physical thing he could do to sustain it.

He put his arm around Miss Jones' shoulder.

She did not move. She sat there quietly, her breast rising and falling at even intervals, her long lashes drifting down now and again like dark, gentle birds winging over blue limpid waters—

"The play we watched last night," Danby said. "*Romeo and Juliet*—why didn't you like it?"

"It was rather horrible, sir. It was a burlesque, really—tawdry, cheap, the beauty of the lines corrupted and obscured."

"Do you know the lines?"

"Some of them."

"Say them. Please."

"Yes, sir. At the close of the balcony scene, when the two lovers are parting, Juliet says, *'Good night, good night! Parting is such sweet sorrow, that I shall say good night till it be morrow.'* And Romeo answers: *'Sleep dwell upon thine eyes, peace in thy breast! Would I were sleep and peace, so sweet to rest!'* Why did they leave that out, sir? Why?"

"Because we're living in a cheap world," Danby said, surprised at his sudden insight, "and in a cheap world, precious things are worthless. Shay—say the lines again, please, Miss Jones."

"*'Good night, good night! Parting is such sweet sorrow, that I shall say good night till it be morrow—'*"

"Let me finish." Danby concentrated. "*'Sleep dwell upon thine eyes, peace—'*"

"*'—in thy breast—'*"

"*'Would I were sleep and peace, so—'*"

"'*—sweet—*'"

"'*—so sweet to rest!*'"

Abruptly, Miss Jones stood up. "Good evening, madam," she said.

Danby didn't bother to get up. It wouldn't have done any good. He could see Laura well enough, anyway, from where he was sitting. Laura standing in the living-room doorway in her new Cadillette pajamas and her bare feet that had made no sound in their surreptitious descent of the stairs. The two-dimensional cars that comprised the pajama pattern stood out in vermilion vividness and it was as though she was lying down and letting them run rampant over her body, letting them defile her breasts and her belly and her legs …

He saw her narrow face and her cold pitiless eyes, and he knew it would be useless to try to explain, that she wouldn't—couldn't—understand. And he realized with sudden shocking clarity that in the world in which he lived September had been dead for decades, and he saw himself in the morning, loading the case into the Baby B. and driving down the glittering city streets to the little secondhand store and asking the proprietor for his money back, and he saw himself afterwards, but he had to look away, and when he looked away he saw Miss Jones standing incongruously in the gaudy living room and heard her saying, over and over like a broken, bewildered record, "Is something wrong, madam? Is something wrong?"

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It was several weeks before Danby felt whole enough to go down to Friendly Fred's for a beer. Laura had begun speaking to him by then, and the world, while not quite the same as it had once been, had at least taken on some of the aspects of its former self. He backed the Baby B. out of the drivette and drove down the street and into the multicolored boulevard traffic. It was a clear June night and the stars were crystal pinpoints high above the fluorescent fire of the city. The hot dog stand on the corner was finished now, and open for business. Several customers were standing at the gleaming chrome counter and a waitress was turning sizzling wieners over a chrome charcoal brazier. There was something familiar about her gay rainfall of a dress, about the way she moved; about the way the gentle sunrise of her hair framed her gentle face— Her new owner was leaning on the counter some distance away, chatting with a customer.

There was a tightness in Danby's chest as he parked the Baby B. and got out and walked across the concrete apron to the counter-a tightness in his chest and a steady throbbing in his temples. There were some things you couldn't permit to happen without at least trying to stop them, no matter what the price for trying to stop them involved.

He had reached the section of the counter where the owner was standing, and he was about to lean across the polished chrome and slap the smug fat face, when he saw the little cardboard sign propped against the chrome mustard jar, the sign that said, MAN WANTED …

A hot-dog stand was a long way from being a September classroom, and a schoolteacher dispensing hot-dogs could never quite compare to a schoolteacher dispensing dreams; but if you wanted something badly enough, you took whatever you could get of it, and were thankful for even that …

"I could only work nights," Danby said to the owner. "Say from six to twelve—"

"Why, that would be fine," the owner said. "I'm afraid I won't be able to pay you much at first, though. You see, I'm just starting out and—"

"Never mind that," Danby said. "When do I start?"

"Why, the sooner the better."

Danby walked around to where a section of the counter raised up on hidden hinges and he stepped into the stand proper and took off his coat. If Laura didn't like the idea, she could go to hell, but he knew it would be all right because the additional money he'd be making would make *her* dream—the Cadillette one—come true.

He donned the apron the owner handed him and joined Miss Jones in front of the charcoal brazier. "Good evening, Miss Jones," he said. She turned her head and the blue eyes seemed to light up and her hair was like the sun coming up on a hazy September morning. "Good evening, sir," she said, and a September wind sprang up in the June night and blew through the stand and it was like going back to school again after an endless empty summer.

## Author Biography and Bibliography

Robert F. Young (l9l5-l985) lived his entire life in New York State, except for the three and a half years he served in the Pacific during World War II. He and his wife owned a house on Lake Erie. His career spanned more than thirty years, and he was writing fiction even on the day he died. According to the *Locus* obituary, Young was a high-school janitor in the Buffalo system for decades.

He published about one hundred short stories in a wide variety of magazines, including *The Saturday Evening Post,* but he was best known as a frequent contributor to *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction,* where he was most identified with a series of stories about giantesses and their hapless male devotees. His best-remembered novel was *The Last Yggdrasill,* published by Ballantine in the early l980's; it was optioned by Disney for a considerable amount of upfront money, but no film was made. After his death, Electric Story published a collection of his short work, *Memories of the Future.*

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