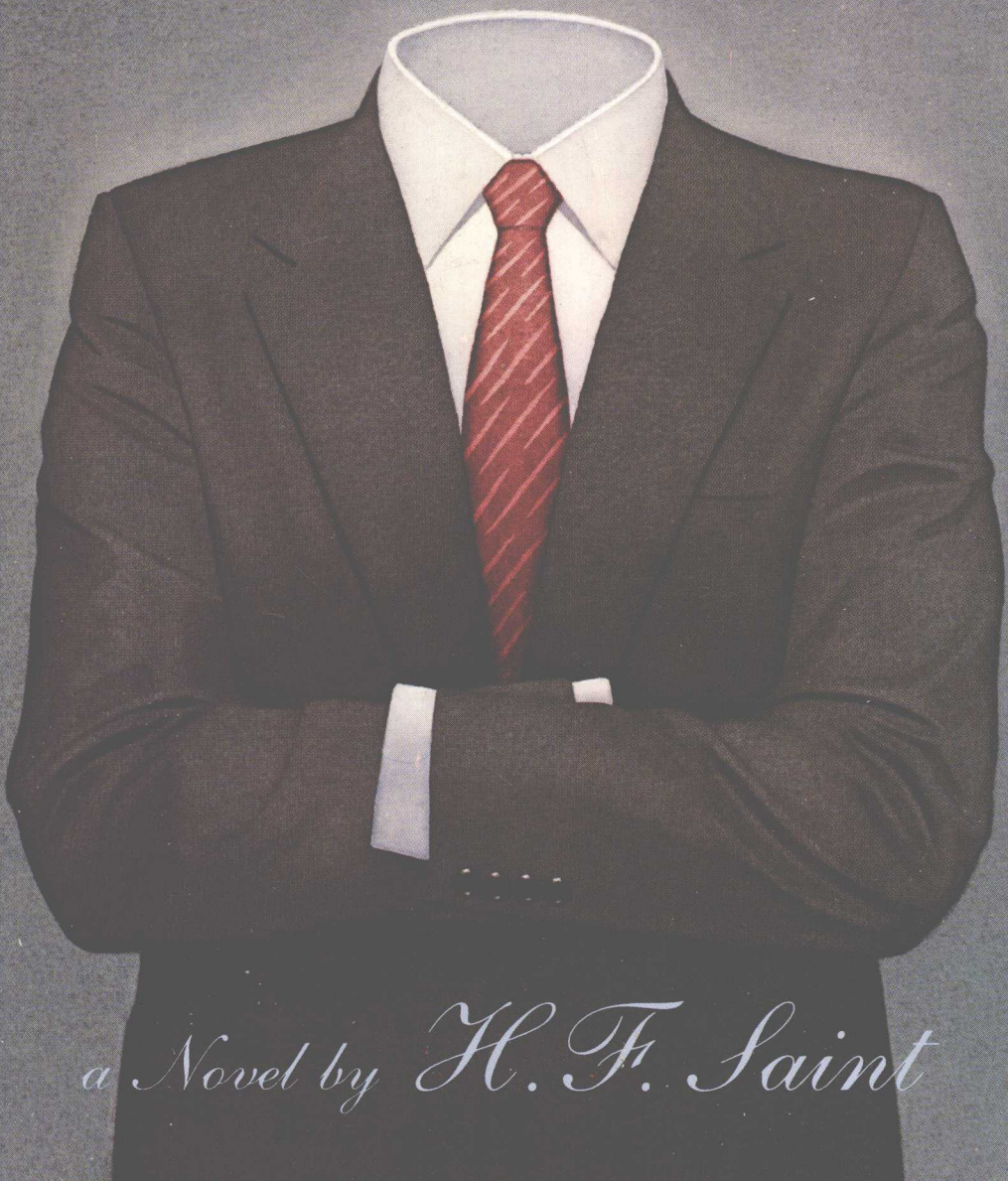
Memoirs of an
INVISIBLE MAN



a Novel by *H. F. Saint*

INVISIBLE MAN

H. F. SAINT

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MEMOIRS OF AN INVISIBLE MAN

IF ONLY YOU COULD SEE ME NOW. YOU CAN'T AND COULDN'T, BUT I'M here. And although the explanation is banal, the effect is altogether magical. If you were to walk into this room now, you would find it quite empty—an empty chair before a desk empty save for a pad of unlined paper. But above the paper you would see the pen, unheld, dancing over the surface, forming these words, pausing now and then in midair reflectively. You would be entranced, or terrified.

Unfortunately, *I* am holding the pen, and if you were quick enough and I were not, you could get a perfectly solid grip on me and satisfy yourself by sense of touch that an unseeable but otherwise unexceptional human being was in the room. Or you could pick up a chair and beat me senseless with it. I am sorry to say that this would not be an unusual course of action under the circumstances, for my condition, although perfectly anonymous, is undeniably bizarre. It provokes curiosity, and curiosity, I find, is a fairly vicious instinct. This is a trying existence. It is generally best to keep on the move.

In fact, this should probably be described as the "adventures" rather than the "memoirs" of an invisible man. Certainly I have no intention of going on about my childhood or the particular agonies of my particular adolescence, which was doubtless no more nor less interesting than your own. Nor will we need to discuss the specifics of my entirely ordinary intellectual and moral development. Nothing of this sort would contribute to my quite genuinely exciting and superficial story. Nor would it shed much light on the human condition, I am afraid. I understand that you only love me for my disease, so to speak, so that everything before its onset is irrelevant. For the first thirty-four years of my life I was exactly like everyone else, and while those years seemed compelling enough to me at the time, you would presumably not be reading a narrative entitled "Memoirs of a Securities Analyst." Anyway, right in the middle of my rather ordinary way through life, a minor but altogether

extraordinary scientific mishap rendered a small spherical chunk of New Jersey utterly invisible. As chance would have it, I was at the critical moment included in that spherical chunk. I, together with my immediate surroundings, was instantly transformed: just as in a petrified fossil the structure of the original organism is exactly reduplicated as an arrangement of mineral particles, so my body was exactly reduplicated as a living structure of minute units of energy. It functions very much as before—with, as far as I have been able to determine, only minor differences. But you cannot see it at all.

The point is that it could have been absolutely anyone. I know that each of us is utterly unique and so forth—like snowflakes or leaves. Although, as the wind scatters the proverbial generations of leaves to the ground, it can sometimes be hard to find much metaphysical comfort in one's own peculiarity. Anyway, no peculiarity of mine made it more likely that I should wind up in this condition than you. An improbable and very poor roll of the cosmic dice. God's eye was doubtless on the sparrow at the time.

Whereas I had my eye mainly on Anne Epstein and on her lovely breasts, over which her silk blouse slid wonderfully when she moved. I could see the nipples through the blue-green print, and when she turned to look out the window of the railway car, I could see the delicious white flesh where the shirt front opened between the buttons. We were on our way from New York to Princeton on what you might call the fateful morning. Looking back on it, that morning did have an appropriately ominous quality, with dark storm clouds and bright April sunshine in continual and dramatic alternation, but at the time I noticed mainly the sunshine. I had drunk too much and slept too little the night before, so that it all had a euphoric, dreamlike vividness, and although I knew from experience that this feeling would soon mature into a piercing headache and an uncontrollable desire for sleep, at that moment my mind and body felt nothing but intoxicated, aching delight in the brilliant spring morning and Anne's smooth white skin.

Because we were traveling against the tide of commuters into the city, we found ourselves alone in the decrepit railway car. It had the old seats that you could swing to face either way, and I had pushed one of them around so that we sat facing one another without enough room for our legs. I hadn't sat like this since I was a boy on one of those wonderful long train rides home that began every school vacation, and that association, together with the exhilarating knowledge that I was playing hookey from work on a wonderfully inane pretext, added an additional note of childish, illicit pleasure to the day. She had folded her left arm up over her head, pulling the silk taut over her breasts and ribs. I reached carelessly across and ran the fingers of my right hand down her side, from

beside her breast to her hip. She continued to talk but there was a flicker of annoyance and pleasure.

What was she talking about? I remember that she had the *Times* open on her lap—she worked for the *Times*—and she was explaining to me something that was of great interest and importance to her. It seems to me that it had to do with an attempt to redraw local election districts somewhere in the Midwest. There were the two usual parties, but one of the parties—or perhaps both—had factions, and one faction was offering extra patronage to one ethnic group if that ethnic group would support redrawing the district lines to defraud some other ethnic group in order to take something away from another faction even though it would help the other party. It was all meant to be particularly significant because the particular combinations of ethnic groups and parties and factions were not the usual combinations, and the whole thing might therefore portend a major shift in our nation's affairs.

To me it sounded more like a pack of thieves making a deal, but then to me no human activity is so reliably boring and shabby as politics. For Anne, on the other hand, politics seemed to be the only dimension in which human thoughts and acts could attain true meaning, and so I furrowed my brow to indicate concentration and interest; from time to time I nodded at the sound of her voice, which went skidding past me with the same dreamlike and incomprehensible vividness as the dark clouds floating across the window. When it seemed appropriate, I asked small meaningless questions in an earnest voice. As she talked she became more animated. She had extremely fine features and although they became sharper, even harder, when she talked about politics, it only made her more exquisite. Her shoulder-length brown hair and her crisp clothing always seemed to fall casually but perfectly into place: she looked more like an anchorwoman on the evening news than a newspaper reporter. She leaned forward; she unfolded one long, nearly naked leg from the cramped space beneath the newspaper on her lap and braced it against the seat next to me; as she spoke, she gestured with the index and middle fingers of her right hand held together, and when she made a particularly telling point the strong slender fingers tapped the newspaper, her mouth formed into a knowing, ironic smile, and she looked into my eyes for corroboration. And even if I could not quite manage to maintain my interest in what she was saying, my heart and mind were absolutely flooded with interest in Anne herself. She was altogether beautiful.

She also had a sense of humor—extending at times even to herself—and I had found that if I could get through to it, I could sometimes dispel these moods of political intensity. But that could be a delicate and risky operation, and I decided in this instance to try to shift the topic gradually. I asked her the most complicated question I could contrive about the way

stories were assigned in the business section. I knew that the answer would have to be more interesting to me than the day's political news and I knew also that Anne would enjoy giving it, because the only thing that was as important to her as politics was her career, and she had just recently been assigned to the business section. Before that she had worked for the sports section, where her main responsibility had been reporting on professional basketball, and before that she had spent four years at Yale, where, as far as I could determine, she had never attended a basketball game or acquired any single piece of information related in any way to business or economics.

But really, it was because of the gaps in her education and the inscrutable personnel policies of the *Times* that we were now together. Less than two weeks before, I had found myself seated next to her at dinner. We had been introduced once or twice before over the past couple of years, but she still found it necessary to ask me what I did, and—despite her striking appearance—my initial interest in her must have been unexceptional, since I remember answering her question straightforwardly. Normally you do not tell people you are a securities analyst unless you want to see their eyes begin to shift about the room in search of someone or somewhere to escape to. For social purposes it is pretty much the same thing as being a chemical engineer. But Anne had startled me with a conflagration of interest. It was probably because of her new assignment at the *Times*. Confronted with a source of useful information, and perhaps also to annoy her fiancé—the origins of love are complex and mysterious—she had put her hand on my arm, looked straight into my eyes with a stunning smile, and begun to ask questions about business and economics, one after the other. The topic of the questions may make it sound quite unromantic to you, but I remember very clearly her wonderfully attentive gaze: she had the reporter's trick of asking questions you wanted to answer and giving you the feeling that she was fascinated by your reply. And she really was altogether beautiful.

I was, of course, immediately possessed by the usual feelings and desires, and I do not recall thinking seriously of much else for the next week. I devoted myself to getting her to lunch with me, to drinks, to dinner, wherever I could get her. She was agonizingly elusive, somehow never able or willing to get free for more than a few hours, whether because of her work, about which she was relentlessly diligent and ambitious, or because of her personal life, in which I tried to show an earnest but not intrusive interest. There was a friend or a fiancé or "just someone I'm terribly close to"—his role seemed to shift continuously—with whom she had some sort of troubled understanding or misunderstanding, but then there was also the fact that she was simply a very difficult person—a quality which set off her extraordinary beauty nicely. It seemed that she was always standing up at the critical moment and saying goodbye—looking straight into my eyes

and leaving me crushed beneath her overwhelming smile. (No one now can look into my eyes. In an unusual moment of safety and intimacy, someone might smile uncertainly in my general direction.) On the other hand, when she was there she always gave me her full, dazzling attention. She loved to interrogate me, and the longer my answers were the better she seemed to like them. Just as she had earlier made herself terrifyingly knowledgeable about basketball, Anne was now setting out to accumulate as much fact, theory, and opinion about economics and business as she could lay her hands on.

I enjoyed her greedy questioning: everyone enjoys being asked a question to which he knows the answer. It is true that it sometimes annoyed me that the usual priorities seemed to have been somehow inverted in Anne's mind—with opinion in highest demand, theory a distant second, and fact possessing only a sort of decorative charm—but her employer would surely not have wanted it any other way. And as she was very clever and unrelievedly ambitious, she was quickly acquiring an imposing store of information. I told her so repeatedly, and the compliment always pleased her. As for me, I was enchanted by her quick acquisitive mind, her difficulty, her long limbs, her hand on my arm. I posed some questions of my own and listened to her answers with patient, aching interest. I asked about her job, her ambitions, her friends. I asked her to make love to me. From time to time I ran my fingers along her bare arm, and asked her whatever came into my mind. I watched her fine mouth and full hips move.

Now, with my right thumb and fingers I encircled the slender ankle braced against the front of the seat next to me. I ran my hand up the long calf and let it spread my thumb apart from my fingertips. I slid the hand around and over her knee and up along the outside of her thigh. The thumb was still spread so that it ran up the front of the thigh, under the newspaper, and under the linen skirt until it reached the crease of her hip.

She twisted herself in her seat away from my hand and withdrew her leg, crossing it over the other leg at an angle to me. Her mouth set itself in an exquisitely prim expression.

"About last night," she said. "It's not right."

Last night, which despite several hours sleep had not so much ended as spilled over into the morning, had been the first—and, as it would turn out, the last—night we spent together. Our week of lunches, drinks, dinners, flattery, pleading, caresses, smiles, and assurances had culminated finally in her bed overlooking the East River. But now she seemed to be saying that the delicious battle would be resumed and the same ground would have to be retaken. I contemplated this with a mixture of frustration and pleasure.

"What's not right?" I tried.

"It's not fair to Peter."

Peter was her fiancé, or friend, or whatever. I had known him slightly for years, and he had always seemed likable enough, although a bit boring. But then, probably most people found *me* a bit boring. (I believe that as things turned out she married Peter in the end.)

"To be perfectly honest, I haven't had a chance yet to work fairness to Peter into my moral calculations."

This remark seemed to anger her. She stiffened.

"Well, I have, and if you were capable of taking me or anyone else seriously—"

"You're absolutely right," I interrupted. "I don't know why I say these things. Embarrassment, probably. Shyness. It's to conceal from myself and others the feelings and passions swelling up uncontrollably in the old breast." Here I tapped my chest mildly with my forefinger. Anne looked at me oddly. "And moral scruples too. Almost ungovernable moral scruples. All hiding beneath the amiable exterior of a clown." I gave her what I thought was a winning smile.

"The exterior," she said a little nastily, "is entirely that of a banker. Which is what you are."

"Not really—" I protested.

"Securities analyst. Whatever. The point is that you wear those nerdy pinstriped suits and old-fashioned shoes, and you're always stammering and acting so earnest and pretending to strangers that you don't ever quite know what's going on. One look at you and anyone can tell you'll turn out to be wearing boxer shorts. On the outside you're fine. You seem like a perfectly pleasant, mild-mannered, ineffectual, nice person. It's on the inside that you turn out not to be so nice at all. More the *interior* of a clown." She turned and looked aggressively out the window at the dreariest landscape even New Jersey can offer.

"I wear these clothes in the hope that I'll be mistaken for an investment banker, in fact. It's considered a rather glamorous look in some sets. Actually, I've always worn these clothes. They're comfortable, last forever, and no one but you has ever taken exception."

"You should widen your circle of acquaintances. Anyway, you look more like the other kind of banker." She pursed her lips, annoyed at having forgotten. "What you were telling me yesterday . . . *commercial*. . . . You look like a commercial banker. . . . Glass-Steagall Act . . ."

"That's very good," I said, in commendation. "And the year?"

"Nineteen thirty-three. Yes, you have more the aura of a commercial banker. Or maybe of someone from a savings and loan, giving out the toasters and electric blankets to old ladies to trick them into accepting unconscionably low interest—"

"Well, to me, you, on the other hand, look unspeakably beautiful." She turned away again disdainfully, but no one has ever minded such a compliment. "Seriously," I continued in an earnest tone, "you've got to be

fair to yourself as well as to Peter." This suggestion seemed to please her, although I had no idea what it might mean.

"The real issue is not just Peter," she began discursively. "It's building a relationship on trust—"

"Absolutely," I agreed, pressing my advantage perhaps a bit too quickly. "What's Peter up to these days, anyway? Isn't he spending a lot of time with Betsy Austin or someone like that?"

"Probably. That would be just like Peter." She paused sullenly and then added, "I've known Peter half my life. I've only known you for two weeks. I don't really know you at all."

More like one week, I thought. I said: "We've known each other for two years—"

"We never had so much as a conversation until—"

"And anyway," I cut her off, "I've thought of nothing but you the entire time. I'm absolutely obsessed. Despite the fact that you are so unremittingly difficult and unreasonable."

"Besides," she said, apropos of nothing—unless in illustration of my last observation—"you're not Jewish."

"This is true," I said slowly, having been caught off balance. Anne loved to attack suddenly from unexpected directions. "But not being Jewish," I went on, "isn't such a big handicap anymore. Naturally, you have trouble getting into the best schools, but nearly all the professions are open to genuinely qualified non-Jews now. And anyway, there *is* always commercial banking, which you seem to feel I—"

"You can make a joke of it if you like, but it's important to me."

"I absolutely don't want to make a joke of it. I only want to understand why it's important. I mean, you're not a Baptist."

"Are you a Baptist?" she asked with what appeared to be genuine distress. Presumably, if she was to consort with Gentiles she wanted them to be Episcopalians.

"No, but if I were, I wouldn't care whether you were."

"Well," she said in a tone of cold moral superiority, "as it happens, I do care."

A thought struck me.

"Peter's not Jewish, is he?" I asked.

"That's not the point," she replied. The question had annoyed her. "And I don't know why you keep harping on Peter. You seem to have some sort of fixation on him."

She twisted in her seat so that her blouse pulled taut over her breasts, and she looked across at me disdainfully. I looked at her with admiration. Her versatility and total lack of principle in these discussions always dazzled me.

"I do have a fixation, but I can assure you that it's entirely on you and—"

"And another thing. It's rude to stare like that at people's breasts."

"Is it? I mean, is it that obvious that I'm staring? . . . Isn't it flattering anyway?"

"One might like to be stared at for something a little more meaningful than one's breasts. And anyhow it makes people uncomfortable." As she said this, she half yawned and stretched languidly, lifting her arms and arching her shoulders back so that her breasts were thrust forward and flattened under her blouse; the nipples stood out in agonizing relief.

"Well, it's hard to stare at your spiritual qualities, marvelous though they are. Your breasts, as a matter of fact, represent to me the exquisite visible manifestation of those qualities which—"

"Do shove it, Nick," she said more amiably. Her eyes became more alert, and she added, "Tell me about today."

"Yes, today," I said cheerfully, misunderstanding her question. "I thought today we might rent a car in Princeton, put in a quick, token appearance at MicroMagnetics, and then drive up to Basking Ridge. Some friends of mine have gone off to Europe for the year and left me the use of a beautiful place there. If the weather holds, we might hope to put together a virtually perfect spring day for ourselves. And even if it doesn't—"

"I'm looking forward to this MicroMagnetics thing. It should be more interesting than the usual."

MicroMagnetics, Inc., as far as I had been able to determine in my rather perfunctory investigations, was a small corporation outside Princeton which performed research on the magnetic containment of nuclear fusion. Its principal asset consisted in the services of its founder and president, one Professor Bernard Wachs, whose imposing reputation for original work in particle physics had enabled him to obtain many millions of dollars of government grants. The only apparent activity of MicroMagnetics to date had been the spending of this money in rather short order, and from my point of view, its first real contribution to humanity was to provide me with an occasion to entice Anne out into the countryside. For MicroMagnetics, Inc., had the week before distributed to a largely indifferent world, press releases proclaiming the discovery or invention of the "EMF," a new type of magnetic field which was to normal everyday magnetic fields as the laser was to normal everyday light waves. It was—depending on the ultimate value of the EMF—either a failing or a virtue of the press release that it lacked any information more concrete than this loose analogy or any indication of whether the EMF would be of use for fusion containment or for anything else. It was, "Scientists in Princeton, New Jersey, announced today a revolutionary advance. . . ." It was also characterized as a "major discovery" and a "watershed." Now, many if not all scientists think of their work in these terms, and I was entirely unmoved. But there was to be a press conference and a

demonstration of some sort, so I convinced Anne that it was a story she really had to cover and told my office I would be out of town the entire day.

It occurs to me that I should explain what I do. Or did. A securities analyst looks at a business and what it owns and does and what the competition does and at any peculiarities of the stocks or bonds which the business sells to raise money; from all this he tries to determine at what price people ought to buy or sell those stocks or bonds. The abstract argument in favor of this occupation is that it helps allocate resources more efficiently to produce whatever it is that individual people most want. The argument against it, as best I can make it out—Anne would be able to present it more compellingly—is that capitalism is boring and evil, and anyone who makes it function better is himself boring and evil. As a matter of fact, I often found my work a bit boring—although I never found any sign of its being evil. I won't impose upon you further by explaining the different types of jobs a securities analyst can do, but I should explain that my particular job was very slightly above average in pay and below average in glamour, had relatively reasonable hours, and required no selling. As long as I satisfied my partners, I remained virtually independent, and as much as 20 percent of the time I enjoyed my work quite a lot—which is a good average for any type of work I have ever heard of.

As it happened, I had a particular responsibility for covering the energy industry, which at the time was a good thing because there had been several years of real turmoil in energy, with great quantities of money to be made and lost, so that my work and opinion were in constant demand. As a sort of frivolous sideline I also followed what was known as "alternative energy," which was even more trendy. This used up very little time, since there was very little in the way of actual securities worth analyzing. Every few weeks someone would announce a scheme to turn water into hydrogen or float icebergs to Kansas with dirigibles or use sunlight to make water run uphill. On the rare occasions when one of these things made scientific sense, you could usually, using even the most optimistic assumptions, easily run the numbers and determine that it didn't make economic sense. As the whole thing was so fashionable at the time, I would get a lot of attention and phone calls soliciting my expert opinion. And then there was always the remote but tantalizing hope that one of these things would figure, in which case you might do very well for yourself.

Certainly I entertained no particular hopes for MicroMagnetics that day. My hopes revolved around getting Anne off as quickly as possible to some pleasant lunch with the best wine my partners could afford and after that making love to her in Basking Ridge in a room looking out on pastures

and streams. When I had first formulated this plan I was not certain that I would ever make love to Anne, but now, after last night, I thought that I might reasonably expect to enjoy the best day of this—or perhaps any—spring.

"What," I asked, genuinely puzzled, "makes you think MicroMagnetics will be so interesting?"

"Well, for one thing, you told me it would be."

"Yes, I suppose I did. And I'm sure it will be. But mainly I said that to entice you out into the countryside." She turned impassively and looked out the window, past which flowed the panorama of decaying industrial buildings that line the railroad tracks from one end of New Jersey to the other, relieved only by occasional clusters of refining equipment painted in cheerful colors. "The main thing really was to get you outdoors, to smell the spring earth, taste the Arcadian delights of New Jersey. To ravish you."

As if I had not spoken, she continued, "And anyway, it has a political dimension for once."

I was genuinely pleased for Anne that the MicroMagnetics dog and pony show might have a political dimension, but puzzled as to what it might be.

"You mean as an alternative source of energy," I tried. "Liberation from dependence on fossil fuels and so on. When you come to think about it, it probably does have political ramifications. . . . Ecological benefits and so forth . . ." I added as a vague afterthought.

"It's not alternate energy at all," she said with irritation. "It's nuclear."

"Nuclear"—as opposed to "alternate"—was bad. I knew that much about politics.

"Actually, I don't think it is 'nuclear' in the sense you mean: it wouldn't have anything to do with nuclear *fission* anyway. All the research these people have done is related to magnetic containment of *fusion*, which has none of the pollution or other nasty properties your environmental friends object to. In fact it's the ideal energy source from your point of view: for one thing, no one seems to be able to make it work. . . . Although now that you raise the issue, I don't think there was any actual mention of fusion in the press release. . . . Anyway, I assume it is just another little twist in the magnetic bottle, and you surely wouldn't have any objection to—"

"It's all nuclear," she said very definitely. "It is a crime against the earth and against future generations. If we had a government concerned with meeting the real needs of the people instead of just helping the rich grow richer, we would be generating power directly from sunlight, instead of poisoning ourselves. The technology exists today."

Her eyes narrowed, and her exquisite mouth set firmly, conveying moral

rectitude. I seemed to have annoyed her. Best to keep the discussion on a technical level.

"Although," I said, "with the technology that exists today, you would be paying somewhere between fifty cents and a dollar per kilowatt hour as opposed to six to twelve cents for conventionally generated power. Unless you're counting amorphous silicon as 'technology that exists today,' in which case you would want to see cells with a conversion efficiency of at least seven percent in actual production—"

"If these things aren't 'in actual production' with a 'conversion efficiency' that suits you," she interrupted sarcastically, "it's small wonder, with a government that does nothing but sit by and let big corporations make these decisions by default."

"Yes, I absolutely see the force of what you say," I responded agreeably, since, except for whatever immediate fun you may get out of it, it is always a waste of time to argue with anyone about politics—or about anything else, when you come right down to it. You rarely ever learn anything and you absolutely never convince the other person. "You're probably right," I went on. "Of course, the real question is whether they can get the cost of any of these things down to a competitive level. It's really just a matter of supply and demand—"

"The *real* question is whether we intend to leave ourselves at the mercy of the marketplace or whether we will take our fate in our own hands like rational, moral beings."

I was concerned that she might be getting not only deplorably rhetorical but genuinely angry. The mood, like the weather, seemed uncertain. "By the way," I said, "I meant to ask you about something in the *Journal* today. Evidently, a band of *Times* reporters has been captured with a Cuban adviser. Apparently, the *Times* has these training camps in Ethiopia, and I thought you might be able to tell me—"

"Fuck you." She said this in a matter-of-fact tone and with a pleasant smile. I have noticed—although it is important not to let them get too wound up in it—that people often actually feel better when they can rant on about politics a bit. Perhaps this is the real value of politics. "Actually," she went on, "I *do* want to know about the cost of alternate energy sources. That would be really useful to me. It really is amazing, the numbers you have." She paused momentarily as another thought struck her. "No. Show me the thing about supply and demand curves again. That's what I want."

I was delighted at the opportunity to explain anything whatever to Anne. And then it is always good to feel that one is serving humanity and one's own selfish interests at the same time: perhaps I would be responsible for giving someone at the *Times* a rudimentary notion of the concepts of supply and demand. I took a pad of unlined paper from my brief-

case and moved over to the seat beside her. Resting the pad first on my thigh and then on hers, I drew the familiar coordinates.

"Now, this axis represents the price of some good, and this represents the quantity of the good produced. Now for each—"

"Is what you're drawing here for all goods or for some particular good?"

"Well, it's an example . . . that is, it's some particular good. For any particular good, at any particular time, there would be a particular supply curve and a particular demand curve—if that's what you're asking."

"What sort of good? What exactly *is* a good, anyway? It would be better if you could be concrete."

"It could be any good. Or any service. It could be anything at all, anything that at least one person wants. And that someone can provide, I suppose. Automobiles, wheat, newspapers. Ballet lessons. Handguns. Sonnets. The point is that at any given price there will be some associated level of supply—the amount of the product or service that people are motivated to provide at that price."

"What happens at the ends?"

What does happen at the ends? I tried to reason it out quickly. "Different things, none of them important." I ran my hand along the upper surface of her thigh, feeling it move under the blue linen skirt. She ignored my hand and peered intently at the drawing lying next to it on her lap.

"Try to pay attention and not ask difficult questions," I went on. I drew a pair of coordinates and another curve under the first. "The demand curve—I'm drawing it separately to begin with—is the same idea, but it slopes the other way."

"Always?"

I seemed to recall that you could contrive cases where it sloped the wrong way, but I couldn't remember whether you could always explain them away or whether you just ignored them. I should, I thought, quickly read through some elementary economics text and review some of these things.

"For all practical purposes, always. I don't want to make this explanation unnecessarily complicated."

I slid my left hand under her skirt, and ran my fingers several inches along the inside of her thigh. Her legs spread apart a fraction of an inch to welcome my hand. Then she reached out with her hand and held it firmly to keep it from straying further.

"Actually," I said, "with the demand curve this axis represents the amount that will be purchased at a given price."

Still holding the pencil, I reached up with my right hand and brushed the hair away from her neck. I leaned over and kissed her behind her ear. She continued to study the paper on her lap, but she shuddered.

"What I want to understand," she said—a little absently, I thought, "is how you combine the curves. And why."