

# A Death For Academe

JOHN J. WELLS

outskirts  
—  
press

A Death For Academe  
All Rights Reserved.  
Copyright © 2020 John J Wells  
v2.0

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events, locales, and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

The opinions expressed in this manuscript are solely the opinions of the author and do not represent the opinions or thoughts of the publisher. The author has represented and warranted full ownership and/or legal right to publish all the materials in this book.

This book may not be reproduced, transmitted, or stored in whole or in part by any means, including graphic, electronic, or mechanical without the express written consent of the publisher except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

Outskirts Press, Inc.  
<http://www.outskirtspress.com>

ISBN: 978-1-9772-2784-3

Cover Photo © 2020 [www.gettyimages.com](http://www.gettyimages.com). All rights reserved - used with permission.

Outskirts Press and the "OP" logo are trademarks belonging to Outskirts Press, Inc.

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

*IN MEMORY OF LEO AND BEAR,  
WHO ALWAYS GAVE EVERYTHING THEY HAD*



---

## PROLOGUE

---

Fenn Harkness beamed a headmasterly smile of warm approval somewhere out over the heads of the assembled parents and friends and, leaning slightly forward over the podium, announced, “Ladies and gentlemen, I give you the class of 1996.”

The crowd rose to its feet to join him in polite applause. Far in the rear, the school band commenced something that made up for whatever it might have lacked in harmony with brassy jubilation. And the graduating seniors leaped up from their seats to toss their caps into the air and give voice to the class yell.

It wasn’t any ordinary class yell. Not one of those choreographed performances they got put up to at various events during the school year for promoting school spirit or class unity or whatever else somebody decided needed working on. That yell was from the heart, triumphant and proud, a yell for raising notice to the farthest heavens that a Very Significant Milestone had just been passed. In a word, the Class of 1996 went ballistic. And stayed like that for as long as youthful lungs could sustain the euphoric moment, maybe five or six minutes. Parents and faculty could only look on helplessly in stunned misgiving.

So nobody noticed when the academic dean slipped away from the green during all that uproar.

Not that there was anything the least bit furtive about her departure. She simply turned her back on the tumult of seniors and, brushing silently past the few faculty members in the rows behind her, crossed the lawn from the chapel steps next to which the faculty had sat for the recent ceremonies and entered the academic building. Adrienne Plum always covered ground quickly in her long,

purposeful strides. And there was nothing untoward in her manner to draw attention to herself. In any case, people were generally used to averting their more light-hearted gazes from the tight-lipped air of stern preoccupation that the dean perpetually wore.

Inside the academic building, she proceeded without so much as a glance around her across the center of the hollowly echoing main hall. If she saw the two young alums just inside the main doors there, she didn't acknowledge them with even so much as one of her stiff nods. They were before her time at the school, anyway, nobody she could have found anything to say to. She went directly up the two flights of stairs to her office.

At her office door she did pause for the briefest second while her eyes made a lightening-rapid inventory of the room to see that all was in order, an instinctive fastidiousness with her. Adrienne Plum loathed a mess, which, in her lexicon, consisted of the disarrangement of the least object from its precisely allotted spot.

Satisfied with her inspection, Adrienne sat in the chair before the gleaming expanse of her bare desk, where she opened a drawer at her side to extract a pen and a single sheet of white copier paper which she placed at a careful slant on the precisely centered blotter in front of her.

*To Fenn Harkness and the Board of Trustees* she wrote in perfectly rounded letters at the top of the page. She paused then, staring stonily at the blank wall on the other side of the desk for a moment before she bowed her head over the paper again.

*It is with the greatest regret and only after much prayer and reflection*, she wrote and then, lifting the pen two inches above the paper, stared hard at the words for a moment before she drew a single straight line through them.

*As a matter of professional and personal integrity ...* Adrienne crossed out *integrity* and wrote *self-respect* over it. A moment later, she deleted that line, too.

*When I accepted the position as academic dean at Marquette School,* she wrote then, *it was with the understanding that the academy was genuinely committed to the kind of innovative educational*

*policies* ... But that opening dissatisfied her, too, and was also deleted. She consulted the wall for a longer time, in her concentration drawing her lips back tightly against her teeth.

At last she bowed over the paper again, writing furiously, though each rounded letter received the same precise care. *I feel I have no choice at this time but to offer my resignation as academic dean at Marquette School. My situation here has become frankly untenable. Not only has the administration failed to provide me with its promised support in my endeavors, but I have found that every effort I have made to improve the quality of education we offer our students here at Marquette has been systematically ...*

Just then Adrienne heard someone behind her at the door to her office. Before she looked around to identify her visitor, she turned the sheet of paper in front of her face down and slid it forward to align it evenly against the wall at the top of the desk. Then she placed the pen on top of it, taking just a second to position the pen parallel to the wall. It was the last thing she ever arranged in her life.

The first blow landed on the side of her head with enough force to send her sprawling out of her chair. She was probably dead by the time she landed on the floor. The second blow, at almost the same spot on her head, smashed her skull open.

The police placed the time of her death at somewhere between three and four o'clock, probably twenty or thirty minutes after the conclusion of the graduation exercises. Brian Donahughe, the acting chairman of the English department, guessed that it would have taken Adrienne at least that long to complete as much as she had written of her letter. She struggled over her written work, he said. ("Particularly," he added later to Hilary and Calvin Alceste, "if the purpose was the communication of a concrete thought, instead of the usual academic persiflage.")

It wasn't until shortly before 11:00 that night that the crime was discovered, when the security guard climbed the three flights of stairs to see why a light was on up there where it hadn't been on his last round. The first thing he found was Robert Plum's body

lying flat out in the hall, bathed in the light from the open door of his wife's office. Barely thinking at all in his surprise, the guard had attention for nothing except Mr. Plum as he knelt beside him and rolled him gingerly from his side onto his back. The mumbled protest and the recognizable odor on the man's breath relieved him of his worst fears. Mr. Plum was just drunk, the guard thought. That was when he looked up into the office ahead of him. The horror he saw there sent his own senses reeling. A few minutes later he called the headmaster.

It bothered the police at first that over seven hours had gone by without anyone's expressing enough concern to go looking for Mrs. Plum. It seemed odd, they thought, that, in such a small community as Marquette School, no one had apparently even wondered at her absence for so long a time.

Her husband confessed he hadn't worried about her at all until about 10:30 that night, when he'd "felt like a walk, anyway" and "sort of thought" he might go see if she was in her office. After graduation, he said, he'd gone to the reception in the dining hall on the opposite side of the green from the area in front of the chapel where the ceremonies had been held, but he hadn't expected to see her there. Adrienne didn't like making small talk. Robert had just gone there for the luncheon himself, and when he'd satisfied his hunger, he'd gone directly home to his computer, where he'd spent the next several hours working on the revisions of his screenplay.

That was a task so absorbing, no extraneous thought for wife or school even once intruded. If somebody had asked him then, he would have said she was "busy with parents or something". She usually was. He never expected her at home "until she got there". He arched a critical eyebrow at that point. That was the way they lived at Marquette, he said. If you could call it a life. There wasn't any time you could actually call your own. Ever.

He had wondered a bit about his wife's whereabouts around dinner time, but none too anxiously. All he'd wanted was a sandwich. He'd eaten a lot at the reception. He hadn't even thought of going to the faculty party at the headmaster's. Neither of them

ever would have gone. Those affairs weren't very pleasant. He had a drink -- one drink, he certainly wasn't drunk -- and watched some television for maybe an hour or so before the idea of a walk came to him. A walk that just happened to end at the dean's office. He'd thought Adrienne might be there: she often was. When he opened the door, he'd switched on the light by the door almost by instinct -- he certainly hadn't expected she'd be sitting there in the dark. The scene that met his eyes had simply stunned him, and he'd lost consciousness. It was a nightmare he'd never be able to forget.

Actually, the police learned, some people had remembered Adrienne that afternoon. After the senior riot died down and Moms and Dads had stepped back into faces to restore a little decorum and sedate family groups made the smiling and hand-shaking rounds, saying the things the occasion expected of them. People had asked after the academic dean then.

Not with any real urgency. Some parents merely wanted to be polite and say good-bye if she was near enough at hand. Having asked, however, and learned that she wasn't available, they had more immediate concerns. There were those mountains of luggage sons and daughters somehow expected they could cram into the rear compartments of Volkswagens, and then they didn't want to linger around and wind up driving too late at night. The graduates, making the best of what, after all, had turned out to be a less than supremely moving point of demarcation in their lives, applied their various powers of concentration to the business of getting free of adults as quickly as possible and off to whichever of the senior parties they were planning to attend that night. If Mrs. Plum wasn't around, well ... so what? They didn't need anything more from her, anyway.

The headmaster, Fenn Harkness, said that her disappearance just then had been annoying, but only mildly so. Under the circumstances, when he reflected, it didn't surprise him. Once people stopped asking for her, he'd put Adrienne right out of his thoughts. Rather deliberately so, in fact.

Everyone on the faculty had known Adrienne intended to write

her letter of resignation. She hadn't exactly kept it a secret. In fact, she'd proclaimed her intention for the last time just minutes before the ceremonies when faculty were forming their line in the chapel for the procession. Her every declamatory word had rung like bell tones off the worn stone walls. And everyone agreed that, for Adrienne Plum, intent declared was fixed resolve, and procrastination mere contemptible timidity. She would have snatched at the first opportunity, they said. As a matter of fact, when her disappearance from the green so soon after graduation became generally known, people had assumed she'd gone off for precisely that purpose. Though, of course, with parents and guests about, it wouldn't have been politic or tasteful to voice that suspicion.

Nobody had been really eager enough to find her to bother climbing the three flights of stairs in the academic building to her office.

Except, of course, whoever went up there to kill her.

The weapon used, a section of lead pipe a little more than two feet in length, was left on the floor beside her body. The police later decided the pipe had come from one of the maintenance store-rooms in the basement of the academic building, where there was a whole rack of similar sections. That area was usually locked off from students, they learned, but it had apparently been left open that day through some oversight. Or, of course, unlocked by some faculty master key. The blurred smudges on the pipe suggested that the killer had worn gloves, probably taken from the same store-room, where there were several pairs of old work gloves lying about. The police never did discover the gloves actually worn by the killer that afternoon.

They thought that the murderer had been very lucky. With so many hundreds of people milling about everywhere on campus that day, he'd taken a tremendous risk of being detected in the act. Nothing else in the office had been touched. The desk drawers and the filing cabinets remained as immaculately tidy as Mrs. Plum had always kept them. Therefore, the police decided that the murder must have been some passionate, spur of the moment thing that

## A Death For Academe

threw caution to the winds, and they concentrated their investigation upon the events of the last few days and hours preceding graduation.

They couldn't have been more wrong.

Adrienne Plum's murder on that graduation day had been carefully planned, and over a very long period of time. Almost from the very beginning of the school year ....



# PART I



---

# CHAPTER 1

---

SEPTEMBER 5, 1995

Bill Williams was finding it difficult to pay attention.

It was Fenn's deadly delivery, he told himself in a flash of outraged justification.

Bill tried to focus upon the message behind the plodding cadence of the headmaster's words. But it was all just more coals to Newcastle, he thought irritably. People either had the information he was sharing already, or it was matter they neither needed nor desired to know. Certainly not in such tedious detail. Delivered in such a metronomic tone. And all compounded by that disastrous verbal tic, Fenn's stumbling, faltering "um" before every specific noun, so distracting that you found yourself holding your breath, waiting for it, finally hearing nothing else. Was Fenn unaware of it? Was he really that inarticulate? Did he think it didn't matter? Or was it just that Fenn didn't listen to himself, either? Bill's thoughts began to drift again.

He couldn't blame it all on Fenn, he knew. Bill had been finding it increasingly more difficult to focus upon all aspects of the job of late years. The details had started going stale for him, always that weary sense of *deja-vu* with each new crisis. Which meant, really, he admitted when he was honest with himself -- and he did try to be -- that he was simply growing too tired to keep up. Nothing was ever the same in boarding school life, not really, not when you were dealing with budding personalities, each with its own unique mixture of values and understandings. You always knew the wrong

call could cast the most devastating blight, and getting it right could make all the rewarding difference. That was why he'd gone into the life, the stimulating meaningfulness of it all. When it all became just a familiar chore ... well, it was time to go. One more good year, savoring all the best parts of the life and doing whatever the school wanted him to do at all those retirement dinners they'd set up to aid the capital fund drive. Then he would bow out gracefully. Before somebody had to tell him to go.

Bill shook himself back to attention. He turned in his chair at the folding table that served as an administrative podium so that he faced Fenn. Maybe that way he could force himself to pay attention. An assistant headmaster, Bill told himself, at least ought to look as if he was counting the coals cheerfully.

Bill glanced at his watch. 10:21. For nearly an hour now Fenn Harkness had been presenting his "opening remarks". Which, unfortunately, wasn't even close to any kind of record. Every opening-of-school meeting since Fenn's tenure had begun had included the same tirelessly detailed report. An annually chanted litany, dispassionately delivered, indifferently received. Somebody's idea of what should be said so that everybody felt himself part of the Big Picture, no matter how narrowly circumscribed the frame of his own particular efforts.

Why, he wondered, did headmasters always seem to feel compelled to render their faculty comatose as their first official act of each new school year? Because they'd suffered the pain of withdrawal without a captive audience for so long over the summer holidays? In order to quench high spirits into sober resolve? To remind everyone who was really in control?

They always began, as Fenn so faithfully had, with some half-hearted joke equating the end of summer to the end of any private life for the faculty, to which faculty always responded with mock grimaces and the dutiful chuckle of wry chagrin. Then, almost as if in rebuke of any levity he might have inadvertently aroused, there came just as inevitably the solemn charge from the headmaster that they devote themselves, one and all, to the most successful

of school years ahead. Equally solemn heads nodded piously in response.

Then Fenn presented the list of figures. This term the enrollment at Marquette School stood at 412, so there were no empty beds; the previous year, with the timely assistance of a generous “friend of the academy”, the school had operated well within its budget; capital giving that same year had been up 15%; the fund drive was well ahead of schedule (though, somewhat suspiciously, no numbers were mentioned here).

Later reports from the admissions director, the business manager, and the director of development, Fenn said, would all be more specific. Whereupon, to the surprise of no one there, he had nevertheless launched into an exhaustive summary of those reports anyway.

And maybe five minutes into that relentless account, Bill’s thoughts had started wandering.

When he forced his attention back, Fenn was listing the numbers that were the “demographic realities” that the admissions office had to contend with. Realities about which, Bill told himself, nobody present in that room would ever have the least occasion for considering or even recalling in the performance of his job during the coming school year. Bill wondered whether Fenn actually believed his faculty found some sort of academic piquancy in all that socio-babble.

Bill stared idly about the conference room. It was a cheerless enough place. The dull imitation-pine paneling was relieved only by the single print on one wall, slightly askew, of a watercolor of the Marquette campus from some alumna bird’s eye view. The only other spot of color in the room was the dark blue (not navy, really, more like midnight dark) of the heavy-duty, industrial carpeting, and even that was deadened under the naked glare of the fluorescent lighting. It was all a reflection of the tone of the new administration, he thought with a guilty twinge of disloyalty. Flat, pedestrian, and humorless.

Momentarily he wistfully recalled the more casual atmosphere

of earlier years, when they'd held their meetings in the central reading room in the library downstairs, where people had sprawled in easy chairs, or just wandered about for the informal consultations they had to have with each other before the work of the year began. Those had been relaxed, convivial occasions, an opportunity for renewing collegiality and the sense of common purpose and commitment. When previous headmasters hadn't needed to assert a rigidly controlled structure in a pallid, antiseptic shell.

Bill gave a mental shrug and stretched his long legs out in front of him, folding his arms across his chest. It was a good time to be bowing out. The future that Fenn Harkness sought for Marquette was going to be a cold, cheerless world, he thought. A place where he didn't want to live.

Bill looked out at the faculty lined up in their rows of uncomfortable folding metal chairs before the administrators' table. Walter Hughes, sitting in the first row directly before him, was already lost in a brown study, his bushy black brows drawn together over his dark visage in a deeper than usual scowl. Walter always looked fierce. Which was so misleading. Walter was really a quiet, calmly reflective man, unfortunately trapped inside the thick body of a coarse-looking, brutal savage. But he did look angry just then. Bill wondered if the history department chairman's scowl that morning was prompted by thoughts concerning his young wife Mary. People said ... well, people said a lot of things they should probably be ashamed of themselves for saying. Walter was a good schools person, whose private life was nobody else's business.

Bill's gaze drifted past Walter to where Brian Donahughe sat in the next row, ultra blond and tanned and looking half his age. This would be Brian's first full year as acting chairman of the English department, a position he relished, Bill knew, imagining himself thereby as somehow adopting the mantle of intellectual leadership at Marquette School. An excellent teacher, but an effective chairman? Bill had his reservations, though he didn't see what other choice the school had. Brian's bright blue eyes, he saw, positively sparkled as they watched the headmaster from under heavy lids.

Bill was glad he'd probably never hear the wickedly cutting commentary forming behind that bright glitter. Brian was a witty, clever man, but the wit could be rapier sharp and utterly without mercy sometimes.

Catherine Provost sat beside Brian, her head with its immense gray pile of hair bowed over the knitting in her hand. The chairperson of the foreign language department had an air of almost smothering motherliness about her, but Bill knew she could be hard, too. The kind of exaggerated hardness that he always considered suggested compensation for something tender and vulnerable beneath that she wanted to hide. Catherine was a dedicated teacher and devoted to her students, but sometimes he detected an element of zealotry in her, when her duties became like a mission for her. She and Brian were a formidable pair when the knives came out, too.

Looking the length of the rows at the full faculty, Bill thought everyone appeared rested from the long summer vacation, robust and looking forward enthusiastically to the long months ahead. He would miss his interaction with a lot of these people next year, he admitted to himself. But he wouldn't miss the job, not with all the politics now. It was time for him to go.

Bill looked up then as there was a commotion by the door at the back of the room. Jim Quint, senior football coach and, very incidentally, dean of students, had arrived.

"Sorry I'm late," he called out from the far end of whatever playing field he viewed the rest of them from. "Got caught up." The coach grinned at them to let everybody know that if the faculty team had had one shoulder, he would have given it a hearty punch of comeraderie. He strode quickly up to the table in front, the thick, corded muscles practically bursting out of his T-shirt and running shorts.

A light laughter greeted his appearance, the kind of uneasy chuckle that people who don't really care for dogs make when their hosts let their ill-trained puppy run free, Bill thought. Fenn Harkness, not at all put out, smiled at Jim Quint with indulgent

good humor and paused in his own delivery until Jim had joined them, taking the empty chair at the far end of the administrators' table from Bill.

Before Fenn took up his remarks again, Bill took advantage of the break and left his own chair to go to the back of the room where there was a coffee urn and two or three trays with donuts and Danish on a table in the corner.

He poured himself a cup, then turned back to the room to find the huge, six-foot-four figure of Sam Cavage, the chairman of the math department, standing beside him.

Sam's mouth gaped wide with what became a smile in his out-sized face. "You might want to taste it first," he said, giving a massive nod of his gleaming bald head toward the cup in Bill's hand. "One of the ladies in the kitchen told me this morning that it was going to be her job to keep the coffee urinal full."

Bill's smiled appreciatively at Sam over the malapropism, but then forced a solemn nod. "She shouldn't be giving away the secrets of the food service like that," he said.

Bill stayed by the table while Sam filled a cup for himself. They liked each other and worked well enough together, generally seeing eye to eye on most school issues, though certain fundamental differences in their natures prevented any particularly close relationship. It bothered Bill that so much of Sam's really genuine professionalism so often sounded mercenary.

"I always find this meeting the hardest one of the year," Sam said after he'd filled his cup and stepped away from the urn. "A slap in the face to tell you the summer's over. And then you have to go home to deal with all the goddamned checks to write for the people closing up your camp."

Bill nodded. "Next stop, winter."

Sam chuckled from deep down in his massive chest, a sound that was meant to be subdued, but carried rumblingly across the entire room. "No snows yet," he said. "Got to get in the goddamned football season first. Jim Quint's already had the team down there knocking their heads together for the past week, I see."

Bill nodded again. "If they have a bad season, it won't be for lack of enthusiasm from the coach."

"The story I hear is he got another ten thousand out of Fenn for some kind of exercise bars Quint claims they need. Do you know anything about that, Bill?"

You wonder, when they're telling us at contract time about the Spartan budget we have to live under, where the money comes from for all that stuff."

Bill smiled noncommittally and pretended to be paying attention to Fenn's remarks. He didn't know anything about any exercise bars, for one thing, and he certainly didn't want to encourage Sam Savage into launching forth with all his financial grievances.

They stood together there by the urn for a few more minutes, sharing the odd desultory remark. Then, in silent accord, they parted and returned to their seats.

As Bill resumed his place at the table, Fenn was embarking upon an elaborate description of the cleaning methods to be applied to the state-of-the-art stain-resistant carpeting that had been laid in some of the dormitories that past summer. Bill stared at him wonderingly.

Why were headmasters always so obsessed with cleanliness? Jerry Dodds, Fenn's predecessor, Bill remembered, even used to carry a plastic bag around campus with him for picking up discarded soda cans. Whatever the respective strengths or failings of the individual headmaster, they all seemed to share those constants. Like the capacity for isolating and then dwelling upon the most trivial and peripheral of details to any issue. Like the apparent joy with which they devoured whatever awfulness the food services dared to try on so that no complaints about the quality of meals ever went anywhere. Like the mania about turning out lights. Like the masterful calm with which they could face any student crisis until the merest intimation of sexual content utterly unmanned them and they flew into hysterical panic.

Bill studied the headmaster searchingly as Fenn hacked away with one hand out before him in wooden emphasis at the need to

impress the students with the importance of accepting responsibility for the cleanliness of their carpets.

Fenn had all the standard surface attributes, too, Bill conceded: the lean, high-boned face with its air simultaneously of patrician aloofness and genial tolerance, the rich, resonating baritone, and that innate sense for just the right social gesture. A charming, affable man. An athlete's man, too. Even though he was an inch or two below average height and his slight build made him look smaller than he actually was, Fenn still carried himself with that unconscious swagger that men who have known pride in their bodies never quite lose. By any external standard, Fenn Harkness was the very type of the benevolent patriarch that headmasters were supposed to be.

What he lacked was the commanding presence, that indefinable karma that stamped everything he put his hand to with his own identity. At bottom, Bill Williams had decided, Fenn Harkness failed to inspire because he really didn't stand for much of anything substantive. And Bill wondered if maybe Fenn didn't know that, too.

You saw it, when you looked, in the eyes that darted nervously, constantly in every direction, never quite directly into your own, in the unnatural tension of that stiffly erect back, the sense of something tightly wound inside, tautly quivering and jealously secretive. And you felt, too, that Fenn could be a hard and pitiless man if he felt threatened. Fenn might, as he had promised in the last alumni magazine, "choose the school's path into the future", but Bill wasn't sure the man would carry the school after him, and he worried what that failure might mean for the institution.

Abruptly, Bill became aware that Fenn was looking at him, was addressing him, and that he hadn't heard a word of it. Bill came to with a conscious start and stared back blankly at the headmaster.



Brian Donahughe bowed his head slightly toward Catherine Provost in the chair beside him. "Bill Williams coming back to us from far, far away."

Catherine didn't raise her eyes from her knitting. "Poor Bill," she said. She gave a sharp tug at a strand of yarn to free it from a ball in the bag at her feet. "I don't think he's very happy about the community."

Fenn repeated himself, his smile widening to include the faculty in his tolerant amusement. "Anything to report in your, um ... area, Bill?"

Bill sat up straighter in his chair, reaching out to pat vaguely at the stacks of folders on the table before him. "Well, there is quite a bit, actually." He looked back uncertainly at Fenn. "Do you want me to go over all this now? Most of it's just bookkeeping details. Strictures placed upon some of the returning students, duty assignments and some curriculum problems. That kind of thing. I can now, if you'd like. Usually we do all that last. Everybody just sleeps through it anyway."

There was an appreciative rumble of laughter from the faculty rows. At the table, only Jim Quint grinned briefly, then took his cue from Fenn and

Adrienne Plum, who sat between Bill and Fenn, and scowled down into his lap.

It was the wrong thing to say, Bill knew that even as he heard himself say it. Fenn Harkness looked sharply at him a moment, his eyes probing deeply, trying to decide, Bill felt, whether the remark was some veiled criticism of Fenn's management of the meeting. Bill knew that Fenn was very well aware of his disapproval of the new administration, though Bill had never allowed himself to voice that opinion. Certainly, there would be no insupportable grieving from Fenn when the assistant headmaster he'd inherited retired at the end of the coming school year.

Fenn's gaze softened then as he evidently accepted the more charitable interpretation. He smiled benignly, as one did before incipient senility.

He nodded his head with businesslike approval. "Good idea," he said. "We'll save the best till last, then. How about you, Adrienne?" he asked the woman sitting between them. "Anything from the, um ... academic dean to report?"

Adrienne Plum leaped to her feet so quickly that the headmaster started back from her and dropped into his chair with an undignified haste.

"Yes, I have quite a few things to share," she said. "A lot of exciting things to look forward to this year." She paused to beam sparkingly around the full circle of the faculty sitting in front of her. A few people, for the most part the younger faces, returned her smile in polite encouragement. The majority simply watched her with studiedly blank faces.

People just don't know where they are with her, Bill thought. Even after a year. And Fenn should see that, and know what it meant.

Undaunted by the lack of response, Adrienne rushed ahead. "In fact, I think everybody's going to find themselves very excited this year."

Brian Donahughe draped his arm across the back of Catherine Provost's chair and leaned in closer to her. "*Exciting* is not the word that pops to mind before the prospect of one more rehash of great academic innovations from yesteryear," he said. "Which, I suspect, is the prospect we're facing."

"Adrienne isn't old enough to have learned about cycles," Catherine said. "She still thinks if it's in a new book, it's a new idea."

"She reads books?"

Catherine raised her eyes to look at the dean with mildly concerned disappointment.

It was a shame, Catherine thought. It might explain much, too. Adrienne was only in her late twenties and not an unattractive woman. Not if she used her assets.

Someone should have showed her how to get herself up a long time ago. Her mother, or a sister, or somebody. How to soften the edges, utilize her femininity. She obviously had no sense for that

sort of thing herself. The kind of insensitivity that should have told the administration something about her fitness for her position when they hired her.

Catherine shook her head sadly.

That dirty-yellow dress, so much more formal than the occasion required, anyway, but all those little-girl flounces, too, and clashing so badly with her pretty red hair. The hair, too, it ought to frame her face, smooth out the more angular features, not be pulled back so tight into the bun at the back of her head that it only emphasized the paleness and the sharp-features. It made her look so dried out. And it made her nose stand out so prominently, like a predatory thing. Almost a caricature figure. Nothing at all about her to hint at anything spontaneous or whimsical that people could actually warm up to. Such a shame. She just wasn't right.

"Thank you, Fenn." Adrienne's voice was much louder than necessary, raised in her idea of cheerfulness. "And I'd like to take this time, too, to welcome everybody back. I know we're all looking forward to this year. A year of a lot of exciting developments at Marquette. I think of it as a kind of crossroads year, as Frost says, when Marquette just takes one of those paths not taken to make sure we continue to provide that excellence in education we've always been known for. We've got a lot of fun things we can do to improve the job we do here."

There was a sudden silence of wary expectancy among the faculty. An uneasy shuffling of feet. Brian Donahughe made a soft groan. "Oh, Christ. Here we go fixing the things what ain't broke again."

"Tell her that," Catherine said through barely moving lips, "and she'll be glad to see to it they get broken for you, I'm sure."

"Somebody might tell her that Frost didn't find his own untrodden path any unmitigated blessing. And his imagery was a little clearer, too. I find myself a little nonplussed over the taking-the-not-taken-path image."

Brian looked back to the table to catch Bill Williams' eye upon him, mildly reproofing but otherwise dutifully impassive. Nothing

that might seem to encourage rowdiness in the ranks, Brian knew. Brian winked at him.

“Last year, as my first year as academic dean at Marquette,” Adrienne told them, “was a kind of exploratory year, a chance for me to get to know the school and identify the places where we were strong and where we could even improve our efforts.” She cast one arm violently out at them in an awkwardly gay gesture. “Of course, you all know that Marquette is, essentially, already a very strong school. We do an excellent job here, and I think we can all be proud. The students who graduate from Marquette leave with an excellent education and with a strong feeling for the school, too. Like we were a second home for them. And I don’t think it’s any secret that that’s all due to all of you sitting here. Our faculty is our greatest asset. The people who really make Marquette the kind of place it is.”

“Is she making a case for her own redundancy?” Brian asked Catherine.

“Wait for the ‘buts,’” Catherine said.

“But ...” and Adrienne raised one hand to shake a finger at them with a strained kind of playfulness that neither the artificial smile nor the steely gaze of the green eyes supported... “I think I’ve found a few areas where maybe we could do even better. Areas we may have overlooked, or just not had time for when we’ve all been so busy. Things we all need to think about if we’re going to make Marquette stand out in independent education.”

Bill Williams watched as Adrienne paused to look around upon them all as if waiting for a ripple of friendly enthusiasm. Her audience made no sound. Only a few regarded her with polite encouragement. She took a breath to continue with undiminished passion. She doesn’t even think of trying to read silences, he thought.

“One of the most important areas I really want to work on is faculty morale,” Adrienne told them, raising the meager passion of the moment by stiffening her arm over her head to point at the ceiling. “That’s something where I think, frankly, we, the administration, have been sadly remiss. We need to let faculty know just how

important they are here, just how much all their time and effort really is appreciated. That's one of those things that can just make or break a school. Faculty need to know."

She dropped her outflung hand down abruptly toward Fenn, who acknowledged her sentiment with a paternally approving smile and a nod.

"I've been talking about this this summer with Fenn," Adrienne announced, "and he feels the same way I do." Fenn gave a decisive nod of agreement. "Ideally, of course," Adrienne went on, "we'd like to give everybody another twenty thousand dollars."

She paused for the few sparse chuckles of amused skepticism to course through the faculty. Sam Cavage sat up straighter in his chair, his eyes staring fixedly at the table in front of the room.

"But that just isn't possible."

Fenn raised his two hands up by his shoulders in mock-defensive regret.

"But talking it over," Adrienne resumed eagerly, "we thought maybe some kind of recognition, something we could give to that teacher each year whose dedication and effort goes way beyond the call. Not something material, unfortunately, though maybe one day we can persuade the trustees, but nevertheless some way we can show our appreciation of all the contributions made by the people here who do so much."

"Funny little hats we can wear with 'Superteacher' emblazoned on them," Brian whispered to Catherine.

"She said it wasn't material," Catherine reminded him.

"So Fenn and I have decided to institute an award," Adrienne continued. "The Marquette Award for the Best Teacher of the Year, to be awarded at this opening-of-school meeting each year to that teacher ... " here she lifted a piece of paper from the table before her to read ... "to that teacher who, both from the tangible results of the students in his or her classes and his or her own unstinting efforts to maintain a spirit of dedication and professionalism in students and faculty alike has won the admiration and respect of his or her peers and students and the gratitude of the school he or she has served so selflessly."

"After a sentence like that, I'd say he or she has still got his or her work cut out for him or her in the communications department," Brian whispered again to Catherine.

"They want to set out the parameters clearly, with offense toward none," Catherine said.

In the front of the room Adrienne suddenly made a broad, sweeping movement of her arms, throwing them out before her and then slowly drawing them in and down to her sides, a familiar gesture that immediately recalled to everyone in the room the students' description of it as "Mrs. Plum's underwater crawl".

"And this year," she said, raising her voice trumpetlike, "I'm proud and excited to declare our first recipient of the Marquette Teacher Award. Somebody whose work here at Marquette, both in and out of the classroom, has been outstanding for the past twenty-three years, but who, last year, had the further triumph of seeing all fifteen of his students in his Advanced Placement English class earn passing grades on the AP exam, for the first time in Marquette's history. Our English department chair, Brian Donahughe."

To hearty applause, Brian Donahughe rose to his feet. Only Catherine heard his "Oh, shit" over the surrounding noise.

Adrienne extended her arms out toward him as if she intended to embrace him.

"Brian Donahughe, Marquette's Teacher of the Year," she announced.

"Well, thank you," Brian said to the room, looking a little severe about the mouth.

Brian continued to stand there while the applause picked up again, staring down at his feet a moment as if to gather his thoughts. Bill Williams, only guessing at those thoughts, let himself smile quietly, a bit uneasily.

Brian Donahughe was popular among the faculty, but his sometimes acerbic tongue did tend to keep the thin-skinned at a nervous, if admiring distance, so that his intimates were relatively few. And, Bill suspected, Brian was a rather consummate politician, his

every act rather coolly calculated to his own advantage despite his air of lordly indifference.

Brian waited until the applause of his colleagues had died down before he looked up again, facing the academic dean only a few paces in front of him.

"I'm very grateful for the honor, of course," he said, his words measured, pleasantly self-mocking. "If nothing else, it's always a relief, I guess, to learn that you've gotten away with it and nobody really has noticed all your screwups."

There was a brief ripple of quiet laughter which turned into a nervous titter when a long minute of silence followed while Brian frowned down at the floor.

"I'm sorry. No. I apologize. I don't think that is the note I want to be sounding on this," he went on after apparently reaching some resolution. "Frankly, I feel pretty uncomfortable with it. For one thing, I don't take much credit to myself for the AP results this year. The kids who come into the Advanced Placement program are usually the best we've got, and those are the kids who always succeed, no matter who's teaching them. And it's just teaching to a formula. You just have to show them what the test wants. The fact is, any kid with a verbal score of 450 in the SAT's can pass the AP test if he applies himself."

Something seemed to stiffen in Brian just then, his back a little straighter, his jaw thrust out just a little farther, his gaze toward the table at the head of the room just a little more steady and firm. Overdone theatrics, Bill Williams thought to himself, but the silence in the room felt like a collective holding of breaths in anticipation of a storm to come.

"But I think what disturbs me most about this award," Brian went on, his ringing tone all of a piece with his pose, "is the feeling of being thrown into the spotlight as somehow better at my job than all my colleagues who are left standing way behind me back in the darkness. And it's just not true. There are a lot of people, right here in this room, who are a lot more hard-working and dedicated than I am. What about all the counseling and guidance Bill Williams

has given so many students for so many years? And what about all those cementhead history classes Walter Hughes has squeezed so many of our star players through? Those successes are a lot more hard won, and probably a lot more enduring than any advanced placement scores some great students earned."

Bill Williams saw Walter start at the mention of his name before he hunched forward to rest his elbows on his knees and scowl at the floor. An unintelligible rumbling sound of displeasure came sotly from somewhere deep in his throat. Walter disliked and mistrusted public praise, Bill knew. He didn't much care for it himself.

"I'm really not comfortable with this kind of thing," Brian went on. "And, I sorry, but I think, on the whole, I'd rather like to decline this title."

Abruptly, Brian sat down.

Adrienne Plum, no longer smiling, simply stared at him. Her eyes seemed almost to recede back into their sockets. It felt as if time had somehow stopped in the room. Many people were looking at the floor or unseeingly off into the distance.

A hand rose from one of the back rows and Adrienne turned her head to acknowledge it.

"Yes, Calvin," she said in a voice that rang loud in the hollow stillness.

Calvin Alceste rose slowly to his feet, pulling himself up by the back of the chair in front of him. He swayed slightly back and forth a moment before he spoke, as if he needed the time to harness his energy.

People turned in their chairs to look back at him as he rose and then found somewhere else to look.

"Christ. Calvin looks terrible," Sam Cavage said, leaning forward in his seat to whisper to Brian Donahughe.

"He's been on the chemotherapy since July," Brian said without shifting his gaze from Calvin.

"I knew he had," Sam told him. "But, my God. How much weight has he lost?"

"Almost thirty pounds according to Hilary. He's had a rough

time. But apparently the doctors have told him that he's passed the worst of the reaction now."

"Can he teach?"

"Hilary says it's the best thing for him, just being in the classroom. I've told him we have arrangements in place if he ever he needs his classes covered. As long as he feels up to it, that's where I want to see him, too."

"That's awful, though," sam said and shook his head sorrowfully.

When Calvin did finally begin to speak, through lips that barely parted, his voice was incongruously strong, easily filling the room and every word was clear and resonant. The faculty listened to him closely, too, Bill Williams saw, partly from the pity and fear that does come from the sight of tragedy, but from genuine affection and respect, too.

"Yes," he said. "I agree with Brian. Our job here isn't limited solely to instruction in academics. It can't be, not when we're actually living with and sharing our own lives with the students we take under our care. We have to do more. That's why these boarding schools exist, so we can deal with the whole student, developing sure and resourceful adults who can see their world clearly and value the good in it and work to change the bad."

Adrienne hastily held one hand out to him palm foremost. "I'm sure --"

"It's a communal effort, " Calvin continued as though he hadn't heard her interruption. "We're not a group of conflicting and self-interested individuals who happen to work in the same place, but a community of responsible and dedicated people working together toward the same selfless end. That's what bothers me about this Teacher of the Year thing. The minute you start singling out individual teachers for special commendation, you're just undermining the whole idea of community. And that would be a terrible thing."

Calvin paused – for dramatic effect, Bill Williams thought. Calvin was excellent at raising emotional responses. It had always been one of his strengths in the classroom.

Calvin raised his head to look directly at the headmaster. "I'm

sorry if I sound so vehement about this, but all of this does bother me a great deal.”

Abruptly he dropped back into his chair as though he'd lost the strength to continue standing.

There was a hush in the room for a moment as when people know there are angels passing nearby, and then voices began calling out, waving hands vehemently to seek recognition.

Adrienne Plum took a half step back from the tumult, her arms hanging woodenly at her sides.

She wasn't expecting opposition and now she isn't sure how to respond to it, Bill thought. He wondered how she did interpret it, if she understood that it wasn't about the award at all. The award was just a pretext. Neither Brian nor Calvin would have wasted the time or trouble over anything that insignificant. The Marquette program certainly wasn't in any way jeopardized by anything so innocuous as one more empty title. Give faculty little red hats and they'd call themselves cardinals, if that was what the administration wanted. Nobody ever assigned much significance to the sillier symbols. What Calvin and Brian were voicing was simply a general antagonism. A public notice of building disaffection, a lack of confidence in the administration. Demanding reassurance.

Bill wondered if any of them there at the table with him understood that. If it behooved him to explain. If they'd listen to him if he did.

He saw Adrienne's gaze lock almost beseechingly onto the headmaster's for a moment, and then Fenn Harkness raised a hand for silence. "Um ... I don't think we want to take this thing with too much, um ... ulterior meaning here," he said. "What we wanted was just to, um ... show some appreciation for the people here, um ... you people ... who do so much to make Marquette the, um ... kind of school it is. Some way, in house, so to speak, we could say thank you. We certainly didn't want to get anybody upset over it. But, if that's the way you feel, we can certainly just drop it right here. Maybe over the next few days, if any of you feel, um... particularly

strong about it, we can talk it over. Or come up with something else.”

Adrienne Plum began speaking almost the moment Fenn stopped.

“We wanted it to be an honor, not a divisive thing,” she declared hurriedly. “A way to recognize all everybody does. You yourself would always be one of the top candidates for the Teacher of the Year, Calvin.”

There was an uproar then. Mentally, Bill Williams winced. The woman was all blundering, spatulate thumbs, he thought.

Walter Hughes lifted his head for a growling roar at the front of the room.

“I don’t think that’s what Calvin meant at all,” he said. “Nothing like that would ever enter his head.”

He dropped his scowl back to the floor, not even waiting for any response.

There was a restless stirring, several voices seeming to second the statement, but nervously. Walter Hughes seldom spoke out in full faculty meeting, but when he did there was always a breathless sort of hesitation. People felt intimidated by Walter, even many of those who knew him well. All that thick muscle bulging under the thick pelt of black hair that covered his body and the unfortunate visage permanently creased into a deep-set ferocious scowl suggested, however misleadingly, a kind of brute savagery beneath, wild passions barely restrained. And Walter didn’t exactly work at dispelling the impression, either; it meant, Bill knew, that people left him alone with their causes and schemes.

Brenda Hutch leaped into the breach, eagerly waving her hand from the opposite side of the room to catch the dean’s attention. There was a slight murmur of irritation here and there in the group as Adrienne recognized her. An irritation Bill had to admit he shared.

Perhaps he was simply being curmudgeonly, but he thought there was a cultivated artificiality to Brenda Hutch, some statement in the sunglasses raised on her forehead, the bright red scarf knotted around her throat, and the too brief halter she wore that

he found too blatantly insincere. He wondered if the smear of ink or charcoal or whatever it was along one of her cheeks was some obscure part of the statement, or merely further evidence of her fundamental insufficiency.

“I think you are being too humble, Brian,” she said with a quick smile in his direction, but thereafter keeping her eyes locked into the academic dean’s. “And I think we’re all just looking a gift horse in the mouth. I know myself the days I get home just so tired and thinking all my effort that day hasn’t meant anything to anybody. I think it would mean a lot to me on days like that if I could think maybe somebody was noticing and maybe, one day, my efforts could be recognized in being Teacher of the Year, too. It would help to make it all worth it.

It would help to make it all worth it. I think it’s just ungrateful when the administration tries to do something like this, just to show their appreciation, and we just throw it back in their faces. I don’t think that’s right.”

It wasn’t charcoal on her cheek, Bill decided, and it was clear how it got there.

Sam Cavage rose to his feet.

“I don’t think this kind of official recognition is anything teachers need,” he proclaimed in a roar that reverberated against the walls of the conference room. “Teachers know all the professional gratification they need just in doing their job. Every time some kid comes alive in class, or we leave a room knowing we’ve taught a lesson well, or some kid writes two or three years after graduation just to tell us thanks for what we did for him. That’s where your morale comes from. That’s your real reward. Frankly, if the administration really wants to do something for faculty morale, I’d be a lot more impressed with something more in the checks. For the last three years now salary rises --”

“But money is so cold,” Brenda Hutch protested plaintively. “Sometimes it’s nice just to receive some formal recognition. When you know the school appreciates all you’re doing.”

Walter Hughes was on his feet then, along with several others. Walter simply spoke without waiting to be recognized.

“Haven’t we said enough about this now? Nobody seems to want it. Let’s just drop the subject. If we have to have some kind of award, we can talk about it later.”

Casey Markham jumped to her feet.

“Sometimes people give the students the most important things they ever receive in situations completely removed from the classroom,” she said, her voice raised boldly over any dissent. “A lot of students, particularly the students of color, sometimes they just need to know they have the love and caring of some adult for them when they find it so hard to meet everybody’s expectations. That takes a lot of time and patience. But it isn’t always something you can see. Important as it is. It’s crucially important. That kind of caring and nurturing. That’s what teaching is about, too.”

“Did I just drift into somebody else’s discussion?” Brian wondered aloud.

“It’s every agenda for itself now,” Catherine told him.

Several people were speaking simultaneously then, a number simply arguing in full voice with the neighbors sitting beside them. Bill looked questioningly toward Fenn Harkness just as the headmaster rose from his chair again and rapped on the table with his knuckles to restore order.

“Um ... I think I agree with, um ...Walter,” he said. “Perhaps we might um... get back to this later, if anybody wants. Maybe, for now, we could just tturn this over to the department chairmen, let them, um ... consult their departments before we bring it up before the whole faculty.”

Why? Bill Williams wondered. Why hang onto something to which faculty are so manifestly opposed? Was he thinking of it as a Harkness award? Did Fenn feel the need for that kind of legacy?

Fenn smiled benignly at his faculty to indicate that all recently rough passages would henceforth be made smooth.

“For now,” he announced, “I believe Adrienne has some other, um ... announcements about some of the more material improvements we’ve added to the school over the summer. Um ... Adrienne?”

Adrienne nodded eagerly at him and then turned back to the faculty with a broad smile, her head tilted archly to one side, looking very pleased with them, sharing their anticipated excitement. Whatever little contretemps there might have been over teachers of the year, she let them know, was all forgiven.

"There have been a lot of things," she said, her words coming faster in her excitement. "A lot of exciting things we're still working on, and a lot of things we've already completed to put Marquette out in front. Most important is the computer. The telephone company only finished the final installation yesterday, but we've got all the phones hooked up now, in every dormitory room on the central campus. Hopefully we'll have the common rooms and faculty homes tied into the same line by Thanksgiving."

"What phones?" somebody asked.

Adrienne stopped talking then, aware of growing commotion from the faculty rows. She looked out at the faculty with an expression of exaggerated surprise.

"The hookups in the dormitories," she said, impatiently, as though of course they should understand.

Walter Hughes was on his feet again then, his hands raised out level with his shoulders in dramatic questioning, his head inclined forward so that his bristling black mustache seemed almost to leap off his face. The lines on his broad forehead darkened, deep and red and already flushing with perspiration.

"What phones?" he asked. "Are you saying the students have hookups for phones in their rooms now?"

"Well, yes," Adrienne said, looking astonished that he should ask. "We talked about that last spring."

There was an almost universal roar from the faculty then.

Walter raised his voice over the others. "Last spring we were talking about computer hookups to get them on line. I thought that's what they were putting in last week. There's never been anything said about phones."

Adrienne's own face seemed to draw in a bit more tightly upon itself. The smile vanished.

"We had to put in the lines first, of course," she said as though she was striving very hard to be patient in explaining the obvious. "Actually, the computer hookups with the universal modem is going to be a little more expensive than we expected, so we're going to have to wait a bit on that. Hopefully by Christmas we should have all that in place. Maybe in the spring. The important thing is that now we do have the cable in, so as soon as we can arrange for the other, it shouldn't be much of a job."

"But there are telephones in student rooms now?" Walter persisted.

"Well, yes," Adrienne said. "That's what I just said."

"There wasn't anything said about telephones last spring."

"We certainly discussed it," Adrienne told him in hard metallic tone. "The faculty agreed --"

Sam Cavage stood up behind Brian Donahughe, the sudden violent shifting of his huge form making a considerable clatter that couldn't have been ignored. The room silenced beneath the immensity of the fury gathering in the gleaming red dome of the math department chairman.

"Let me get this straight," Sam said, his voice sounding hoarse in his effort to keep it lowered. "You're saying that every boarding student is going to be able to have a telephone in his room now."

"Yes. That's what we --"

"An outside line, I assume," Sam went on without waiting for her explanation, building implacably upon the indictment. "One they can use any time they wish to make a call."

"We expect them to behave responsibly, of --"

"Responsibly." Sam brushed the word aside with the wave of one long, thick arm. "Teenagers using telephones responsibly. Essentially, what you're saying is that every student now has a telephone in his room which he can use, day or night, whenever he pleases, and we have no means whatsoever of monitoring or restricting that use at all. Is that right?"

"I think that might be the most negative way of looking at it --"

"Why?" Sam's huge chest swelled as he sucked in air for the

barrage, and his words came as a roar. "It might be a negative point of view, but if we've given our students phones, that's exactly what we're going to be dealing with. Why have we done this? What need does this serve? And I'd like to know where the money came from. We had to go out begging last year just to stay within our budget. Where did we find all this money for something so absolutely unnecessary? Who made this decision?"

Adrienne's voice became even more coldly metallic, her lips pulled back over her teeth. "It was discussed last spring, and faculty voted --"

"Never. This faculty would never be so completely unprofessional as to give the slightest consideration to, never mind vote for throwing away thousands of dollars upon any project so irresponsible, unconscionable, and downright idiotic. I am appalled." Finishing with a booming gust of exploded outrage, Sam Cavage sat down again, sideways in his chair looking away from her with his jaw clenched tightly in fury.

A rather childish histrionic performance, Bill thought. But voicing a frustration that clearly he shared with others.

"I don't --" Adrienne began, but Fenn was on his feet again beside her, his gaze running quenchingly across the faculty and then remaining steady upon Sam Cavage.

"I think we all have a right to expect our colleagues will address us with ordinary civility," Fenn said.

"I apologize," Sam Cavage said without looking back at the table. "I'm sorry. I spoke without thinking because I was taken by surprise by something I was completely unprepared for."

"We discussed all this at the end of year faculty meeting last spring," Fenn told him. "When faculty agreed that the expense was warranted."

But that wasn't right, either, Bill thought. It wasn't quite like that. Fenn shouldn't put himself in that kind of position. "Excuse me, Fenn," he said, leaning forward to peer around a taut Adrienne Plum at the headmaster.

Fenn Harkness looked his question coldly in Bill's direction.

"I think last spring the discussion centered upon wiring the rooms for their computers," Bill told him. "The concern of the faculty then was that we might not have any way of regulating the times they might be on line, or knowing just what they might be connecting into. I don't think we did talk specifically about telephones."

"Well, of course we can't get them onto the net without connecting them through the phone," Adrienne said with an angry snap of her head away from him.

"I don't think faculty may have realized that," Bill told her. "It's a new technology, one that most of us aren't familiar with."

"We explained that in order to connect with the local internet service--"

"But now we don't have the computer hookup," Brian Donahughe pointed out in that bland tone of honest confusion that Bill Williams suspected was intended solely to promote mischief. "All we have are the phones."

"How are these things going to be paid for?" somebody asked. "Who's going to foot the phone bill when some kid defaults?"

"Actually," Adrienne said, her eyes glazing over so that while she looked toward the faculty, she saw no individuals. "What we've planned to do is to allow roommates to work out their monthly bill between them. Each room will have to be responsible for its own connection. We ask them to be responsible in other areas, now they'll all have to keep track of the calls they make. Bills they can't straighten out will be divided equally between them at the end of each semester."

"Suppose a kid gets at somebody else's phone without his knowledge and runs up a huge bill?" somebody called out. "How can that be sorted out?"

Casey Markham rejoined the fray then, speaking even as she wildly waved her hand about. "I worry about the kids who don't have that much money. Some of the students of color, I know for a fact, don't have anything except a very small allowance from their sponsors. How can we expect them to be able to pay for

a telephone? If we don't have some way of letting them have a phone, too, it's just discrimination."

"I just don't see how you're going to keep them off the phone during study hall," somebody said. "How will we know whether they're studying or on the phone all night?"

"People. People," Fenn called, rapping smartly against the table.

He's let the meeting get far too out of hand, Bill thought. Does he have any feeling for the frustration and anger here?

It made Bill feel unhappy. There were too many antagonisms, too many strong feelings that could shatter the equilibrium of the entire community. And that was too bad.

Bill wanted it to be a good year. His last.