CITY LOVERS

Dr. Franz-Josef von Leinsdorf is a geologist absorbed in his work—wrapped up in it, as the saying goes. Year after year, the experience of this work enfolds him, swaddling him away from the landscapes, the cities, and the people of Peru, New Zealand, the United States, or wherever else he may live. He's always been like that, his mother could confirm from their native Austria. Even as a small boy, he seemed to present only his profile to her: turned away to his bits of rock and stone. His few relaxations have not changed much since then—an occasional skiing trip, listening to music, reading poetry. Rainer Maria Rilke once stayed in his grandmother's hunting lodge in the forests of Styria, and the boy was introduced to Rilke's poems while very young.

Now he has been in Africa for almost seven years, first on the Côte d'Ivoire, and then, for the past five years, in South Africa. A shortage of skilled manpower brought about his recruitment here. He has no interest in the politics of the countries he works in. His private preoccupation, within the preoccupation of his work, has been research into underground watercourses, but the mining company that employs him in a senior capacity is interested only in mineral discovery. He is much out in the field—"the veld," here—seeking new gold, copper, platinum, and uranium deposits. When he is at home, on this particular job, he lives in a three-room flat in a suburban block with a landscaped central garden, and does his shopping at a supermarket across the street. He is not married—yet. That is how his colleagues, and the typists and secretaries at the mining company's head office, would define his situation. Both men and women would describe him as a good-looking man, in a foreign way. The lower half of his face is dark and middle-aged (his mouth is thin and curving, and no matter how closely he shaves his beard shows like fine shot embedded in the skin around his mouth and chin), and the upper half contradictorily young. He has deep-set eyes (some would say gray, some black) and thick eyelashes and brows. A tangled gaze, through which concentration and thoughtfulness perhaps appear as languor. The women in his office say that he's "not unattractive." Although the gaze seems to contain promise, he has never invited any of them to go out with him. There is a general assumption he probably has a girl who's been picked for him, back home in Europe, where he comes from—that he's bespoken by one of his own kind. It is understood that many of these well-educated Europeans have no intention of becoming permanent immigrants; colonial life doesn't appeal to them.

"Am I talking to myself?"

One advantage, at least, of living in underdeveloped or half-developed countries is that most flats are serviced—resident cleaners come in every day. All Dr. von Leinsdorf has to do for himself is buy his own supplies and cook an evening meal if he doesn't want to go to a restaurant. He simply drops in to the supermarket on his way from his car to his flat after work in the afternoon, and wheels a shopping cart down the aisles. At the cashiers' counters, there are racks of small, uncategorized items for last-minute purchase. Here, as a Colored girl cashier punches the register (he has quickly accustomed himself to South African use of "Colored" to distinguish people of mixed blood from those of pure African descent), he sometimes picks up cigarettes and perhaps a packet of salted nuts or a bar of nougat. One evening in winter, he saw that the cardboard display board was empty of the brand of razor blades he preferred, and he drew the cashier's attention to this. These young Colored girls were usually unhelpful, taking money and punching their machines in a manner that asserted, with the timeserving obstinacy of the half-literate, a limit of any responsibility toward customers, but this particular girl glanced over the selection of razor blades, explained that she was not allowed to leave her post, and said she would see that the stock was replenished "next time." A day or two later, she recognized him as he took his turn before her counter. "I ahssed them," she said gravely, "but it's out of stock. You can't get it. I did ahss about it." He said it didn't matter. "When it comes in," she said, "I can keep a few packets for you." He thanked her.

He was away with the prospectors the whole of the next week. He arrived back in town just before nightfall on Friday, and was on the way from his car to his flat, arms filled with briefcase, suitcase, and two canvas bags,

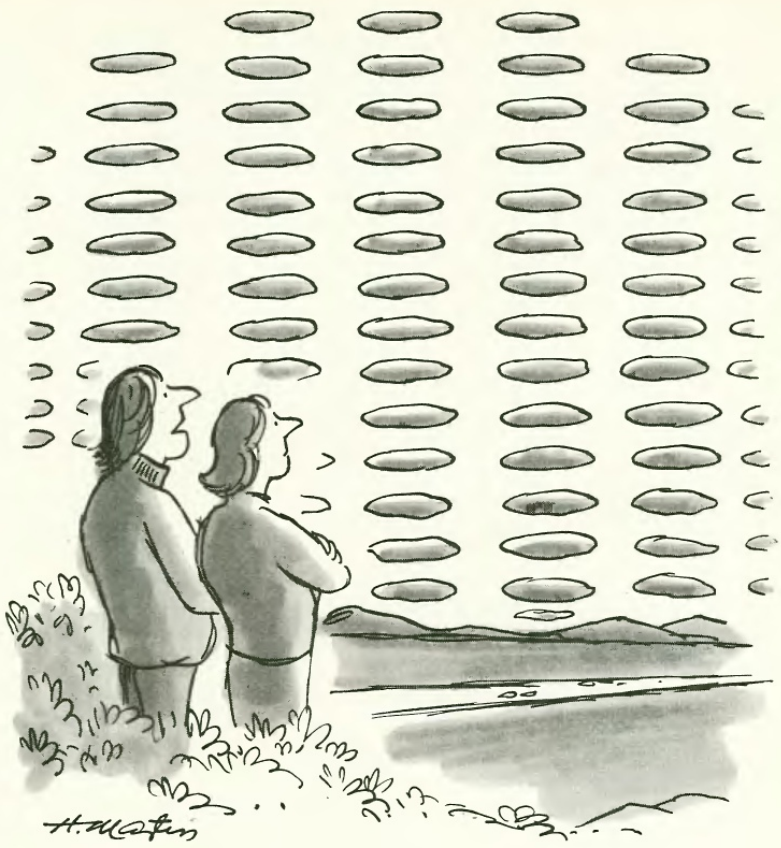
when someone stopped him by standing timidly in his path. He was about to dodge round unseeingly on the pavement, but she spoke. "We got the blades in now. I didn't see you in the shop this week, but I kept some for when you come. So . . ."

He recognized her. He had never seen her outdoors before, and she was wearing a coat. She was rather small and finely made, for one of them. The coat was skimpy, but she did not show a typical big backside. The cold brought a graining of warm color to her cheekbones, beneath which her very small face was quite delicately hollowed. Her skin was smooth, the subdued satiny color of certain yellow wood. She had crêpey hair, but it was drawn back flat into a little knot and pushed into one of the cheap wool nets that he recognized as being among the miscellany of small goods (along with the razor blades) on sale at the supermarket. He said thanks, he was in a hurry—he'd only just got back from a trip. He shifted the burdens he was carrying, to demonstrate. She said, "But if you want, I can run in and get the blades for you quickly. If you want."

He saw at once that all the girl meant was that she would go back to the supermarket, buy the blades, and bring the packet to him there where he stood, on the pavement. It was this certainty that made him say, in the kindly tone used for an obliging underling, "I live just across there. Atlantis—that flat building. Could you drop them by, for me—No. 718, seventh floor?" He gave her a one-rand note.

She had never been inside one of these big flat buildings. She lived a bus-and-train ride away, to the west of the city but this side of the black townships, in a township reserved for people her tint. In the entrance of the building called Atlantis there was a pool with real ferns, not plastic, and even a little waterfall pumping over rocks. She didn't wait for the lift marked "Goods" but took the one for whites. A white woman with one of those sausage dogs on a leash got in with her but did not pay her any attention. The corridors leading to the flats were nicely glassed in, not drafty.

He decided he should give her a twenty-cent piece for her trouble—ten cents would be right for a black—but she said, "Oh, no . . . please," standing outside his open door and awkwardly pushing back into his hand the change from the money he'd given her. She was smiling, for the first time, in the dignity of refusing a tip. It was difficult to know how to treat these people, in this country, difficult to know what they expected. In spite of her embarrassing refusal of the tip, she still stood there, unassuming, with her fists thrust down the pockets of her cheap coat. Her rather pretty thin legs were neatly aligned, knee to knee, ankle to ankle.



"As we move toward a more structured society, I suppose we'll see fewer and fewer days when clouds are scattered lazily across the afternoon sky."

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"Would you like a cup of coffee or something?" he said.

He couldn't very well take her into his living room and offer her a drink. She followed him to his kitchen, but at the sight of her pulling out the single chair there to drink her cup of coffee at the kitchen table he said, "No, bring it in here," and led the way into the big room, where, among his books and his papers, his files of scientific correspondence (and the cigar boxes of stamps from the envelopes), his racks of records, and his specimens of minerals and rocks, he lived alone.

IT was no trouble to her. She saved him the trips to the supermarket and brought him his groceries two or three times a week. All he had to do was leave a list and the key under the doormat, and she would come up in her lunch hour to collect them, returning after work to put away his supplies in the flat. Sometimes he was home and sometimes not. He bought a box of chocolates and left it, with a note, for her to find. That was acceptable, apparently, as a gratuity.

When they were there together, he saw that her eyes went over everything in the flat, although her body seemed to try to conceal its sense of being out of place by remaining as still as possible. Sitting in a chair, she was like a coat laid there until its owner takes it up to go.

"You collect?" she said one day, looking at the stones and bits of rock that took the place of the pretty ornaments she would have expected in such a setting.

"Well, these are specimens—connected with my work."

"My brother used to collect. Minia-

AUTUMN AGAIN

The flowers drying
in the garden are
the body. My wife
raises the fallen arm
and binds the forehead.
She goes on her knees
before a rose blackened
at the center, she rests
in the shadow of sunflowers.
At 8:30 there is a carnival
of blue morning glories;
the mockingbird squawks
their sudden thoughts,
the hummingbird steals
their intuitions. If I love
the body that is yours
for a time, wild phlox,
marigold, weed, if I love
the cactus that holds on
and the thistle burning
alone, if we are
our bodies, naked
in the sun of 'Tater Hill,
tipped with sweat
and chilled in the winds,
will we come at last
to dirt and stone and love them?
I ask with this tongue
which makes words and is
itself a word, this breath
humming among the 22
graves of my mouth.
If the body's hair
moves in a slow dance, one
part fire, three parts
water, if the eye
is an island that beholds,
do we therefore say,
"You are the apple
of my eye?"
First cold
morning in September
on a rock overlooking
Lake Huron. I said,
"It ends here." A wild horse,
I might have run
where the fields pulled.
I might have prayed for wings
and flown. Remembering,
I laugh. I back my car
out over the grass, I
slow on 41 to avoid
the smear of possum,
I pass the schoolyard
with its fence of spikes
and broken glass. I work
today, head down at my desk,
not daring to look out for fear
there will be snow falling
and each flake must be counted.
Among all the letters, one
from my mother. She has lost
her name, can I tell her
how she was born and came
to be in Los Angeles?
Do I recall the lilacs
she passed each morning,
the mock orange I planted
to please her and how
it sprang up like corn,
how the children grew
and thickened like August days,
how each was one more
small charge against the sky?
If I held her head now
it would be clay,
it would be a clear ache
of blue. If I asked why,
my tongue would curl back
and be swallowed. Covered
with dust, rags over
their mouths, our sisters
go out in open trucks
to burn in the fields.
Everyone inches up or down,
step by step. The heart
of a peach glows on its tree,
at dusk a worm calls itself
by a name no one knows.
Everyone brings some piece
of himself to the table,
and the old wood groans.
Even I heal and become
new again. Under the scab
the skin is pink and shiny,
and though the hand kinks
until the fingers are a cup
of five pains that once held
water and flesh, I will sleep
and waken by the road
below the Renault garage.
Down the oiled path of cans
and inner tubes in the field
by the river, the young
mechanic ties up his beans
at dawn, weeds his herb garden
fenced with string, marjoram,
costmary, dill, and worships
one part more than another
because they are his.

—PHILIP LEVINE

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tures. With brandy and whiskey and that in them. From all over. Different countries."

The second time they had coffee together, she watched him grinding the beans and said, "You always do that? Always when you make coffee?"

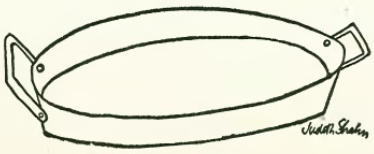
"But of course. Is it no good, for you? Do I make it too strong?"

"Oh, it's just I'm not used to it. We buy it ready—you know, coffee essence, it's in a bottle; you just add a bit to the milk or water."

He laughed. "That's not coffee," he said. "That's a liquid synthetically flavored. In my country we drink only real coffee, fresh, from the beans. You smell how good it is as it's being ground?"

One day, she was stopped by the caretaker and asked what she wanted in the building. Heavy with the *bona fides* of groceries clutched to her body, she said she was working at No. 718, on the seventh floor. The caretaker did not tell her not to use the whites' lift. After all, she was not black; her family was very light-skinned.

One day, there was the item "gray button for trousers" on one of his shopping lists. As she unpacked the shopping basket in the flat, she said, "Give me the pants, then," and spread them on her lap as she sat on his sofa, which was always gritty with fragments of pipe tobacco. She sewed swiftly in and out through the four holes of the button with firm, fluent movements of the right hand, her gestures supplying an articulacy missing from her talk. She had a little gap—a peasant's gap, he thought of it—between her two front teeth when she smiled. He didn't much like this, but when her face was turned away to a three-quarter angle, with her eyes cast down in concentration and her soft lips almost closed, it didn't matter. Watching her sew, he said, "You're a good girl;" and touched her.



SHE remade the bed every late afternoon when they left it and she dressed again before she went home. After a week, there was a day when late afternoon became evening and they were still in the bed.

"Can't you stay the night?"

"My mother," she said.

"Phone her. Make an excuse." He was a foreigner. He had been in the country five years, but he didn't yet understand that where she lived people didn't have telephones in their houses. She got up to dress. He didn't want that tender body to go out in the night cold, and kept hindering her with his hands, saying nothing. Before she put on her coat, when the body had

"In Larchmont! Well, really!"

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already disappeared, he spoke. "But you must make some arrangement."

"Oh, my mother!"

Her face showed a fear and vacancy he could not read. Did the mother still think of her daughter as some pure and unsullied virgin?

"Why?" he said.

The girl said, "S'e'll be scared. S'e'll be scared we get caught."

"Don't tell her anything," he said. "Say I'm employing you." In his building there were rooms on the roof for tenants' servants.

She said, "That's what I told the caretaker."

SHE ground fresh coffee beans whenever he wanted a cup while he was working at night. She never attempted to cook anything until she had watched him do it the way he liked, and she learned to reproduce exactly the simple dishes he preferred. Sometimes she handled his pieces of rock and stone, at first admiring the colors: "It'd make a beautiful ring or a necklace, ay." Then he showed her the striations, the formation of each piece, and explained what each stone was, and how, in the long life of the earth, it had been formed. He named the mineral it yielded and what that was used for. He worked at his papers, writing, writing, every night, so it did not matter that they could not go out together to public places. On Sundays, she got into his car in the basement garage, and they drove to the country and picnicked away up in the Magaliesberg, where there was no one. He read or poked about among the rocks; they climbed together to the mountain pools. He taught her to swim. She squealed and shrieked in the water, showing the gap between her teeth as—it crossed his mind—she must when among her own people.

Occasionally, he had to go out to dinner at the houses of colleagues from the mining company. She sewed and listened to the radio in the flat, and he found her in the bed, warm and already asleep, by the time he came in. He made his way into her body without speaking; she made him welcome without a word. Once, he put on evening clothes for a dinner at his country's consulate. Watching him brush one or two fallen hairs from the shoul-

"Granted, we don't want to overcommercialize the Bicentennial. On the other hand, we don't want to undercommercialize it, either."

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ders of the dark jacket that sat so well on him, she saw a huge room, all chandeliers, and people dancing some dance from a costume film—stately, hand in hand. She supposed he was going to fetch a partner for the evening, to sit in her place in the car. They never kissed when either of them left the flat. Suddenly, kindly, pausing as he picked up cigarettes and keys, he said, "Don't be lonely." And added, "Wouldn't you like to visit your family sometimes, when I have to go out?"

He had told her that after Christmas he was going home to his mother in the forests and mountains of his country, near the Italian border (he showed her on the map). She had not told him how her mother, not knowing there was any other variety, assumed he was a medical doctor, or how she had talked to her mother about the doctor's children and the doctor's wife, who was a very kind lady, glad to have someone who could help out in the surgery as well as the flat.

She remarked wonderingly on his ability to work until midnight or later, after a day at work. When she came home from her cash register at the supermarket, she was so tired that once dinner was eaten she could scarcely keep awake. He explained, in a way she could understand, that while the work she did was repetitive, requiring little mental or physical effort, and therefore unrewarding, his work was his greatest interest; it taxed his mental capacities to their limit, exercised all his concentration, and rewarded him constantly, as much with the excitement of a problem presented as with the satisfaction of a problem solved. Later, putting away his papers, speaking out of a silence, he said, "Have you done other kinds of work?" She said, "I was in a clothing factory before. Sportbeau Shirts—you know? But the pay's better in the shop."

Of course. Being a conscientious newspaper reader, he was aware that it was only recently that the retail trade here had been allowed to employ Coloreds as shop assistants; even punching a cash register represented advancement. With the continuing shortage of semi-skilled whites, a girl like this might be able to edge a little further into the white-collar category. He began to teach her to type. He was aware that her English was poor, but because he was a foreigner her pronunciation did not offend him, nor categorize her. He corrected her grammatical mistakes but missed the less obvious ones because of his own sometimes unusual English usage. She continued to use the singular "it" for the plural "they." Because he was a foreigner (although so clever, she saw), she was less inhibited than she might have been by the words she knew she misspelled in her typing. While she sat at the typewriter, she thought how one day she would type notes for him, as well as making coffee the way he liked it and taking him inside her body without saying anything and sitting (even if only through the empty streets of quiet Sundays) beside him in his car, like a wife.

ON a summer night near Christmas—he had already bought and hidden a slightly showy but good watch he thought she would like—there was a knocking at the door that brought her out of the bathroom and him to his feet, at his worktable. During the day, it might have been a canvasser or a hawker, but no one ever came to the flat at night; he was not at home to friends. The summons was an imperious banging that clearly would not stop until the door was opened.

Wearing a big bath towel, she stood in the bathroom doorway, gazing at him across the passage into the living room; her feet and shoulders were bare. She said nothing, did not even whisper. The flat seemed to shake with the strong, unhurried blows.

He made as if to go to the door at last, but now she ran and clutched him by both arms. She shook her head wildly. Her lips drew back, but her teeth were clenched. She didn't speak. She pulled him into the bedroom, snatched some clothes from the clean laundry laid out on the bed, and got into the built-in wardrobe, thrusting the key at his hand. His arms and calves felt weak and cold, but he was distastefully embarrassed at the sight of her crouching there under his suits and coats; it was horrible and ridiculous. "*Come out!*" he whispered. "*No! Come out!*"

"Where?" she said. "Where can I go?"

"*Never mind! Get out of there!*"

He put out his hand to grasp her. At bay, baring the gap in her teeth, she said in a terrible whisper, "*I'll throw myself out the window!*"

She forced the key into his hand like the handle of a knife. He closed the door on her face and drove the key home in the lock, then dropped it among the coins in his trouser pocket.

He unslotted the chain that was looped across the entrance door of the flat. He turned the serrated knob of the Yale lock. Three policemen, two in plain clothes, stood there without impatience, although they had been banging on the door for several minutes. One of the plainclothesmen—a big, dark man with an elaborate mustache—held out, in a hand wearing a plaited gilt ring, some sort of identity card.

"What is it?" Dr. von Leinsdorf said quietly, the blood coming strangely back to legs and arms.

The sergeant told him they knew there was a Colored girl in the flat. They had had information. "I been watching this flat three months," he said. "I know."

"I am alone here." Dr. von Leinsdorf did not raise his voice.

"I know, I know who is here. Come." And the sergeant and his two assistants passed him and moved systematically through the living room, the kitchen, the bathroom (the sergeant picked up a bottle of after-shave cologne and seemed to study the French label), and entered the bedroom. The assistants removed the clean laundry that was laid upon the bed and then turned back the bedding, carrying the sheets over to be examined by the sergeant under the lamp. They talked to one another in Afrikaans, which the doctor did not understand. The sergeant himself looked under the bed and lifted the long curtains at the window. The built-in wardrobe was of the kind that has no knobs; he saw that it was closed, and began to ask in Afrikaans, then politely changed to English, "Give us the key."

Dr. von Leinsdorf said, "I'm sorry, I left it at my office. I always lock up and take my keys with me in the mornings."

"It's no good, man. You better give me the key."

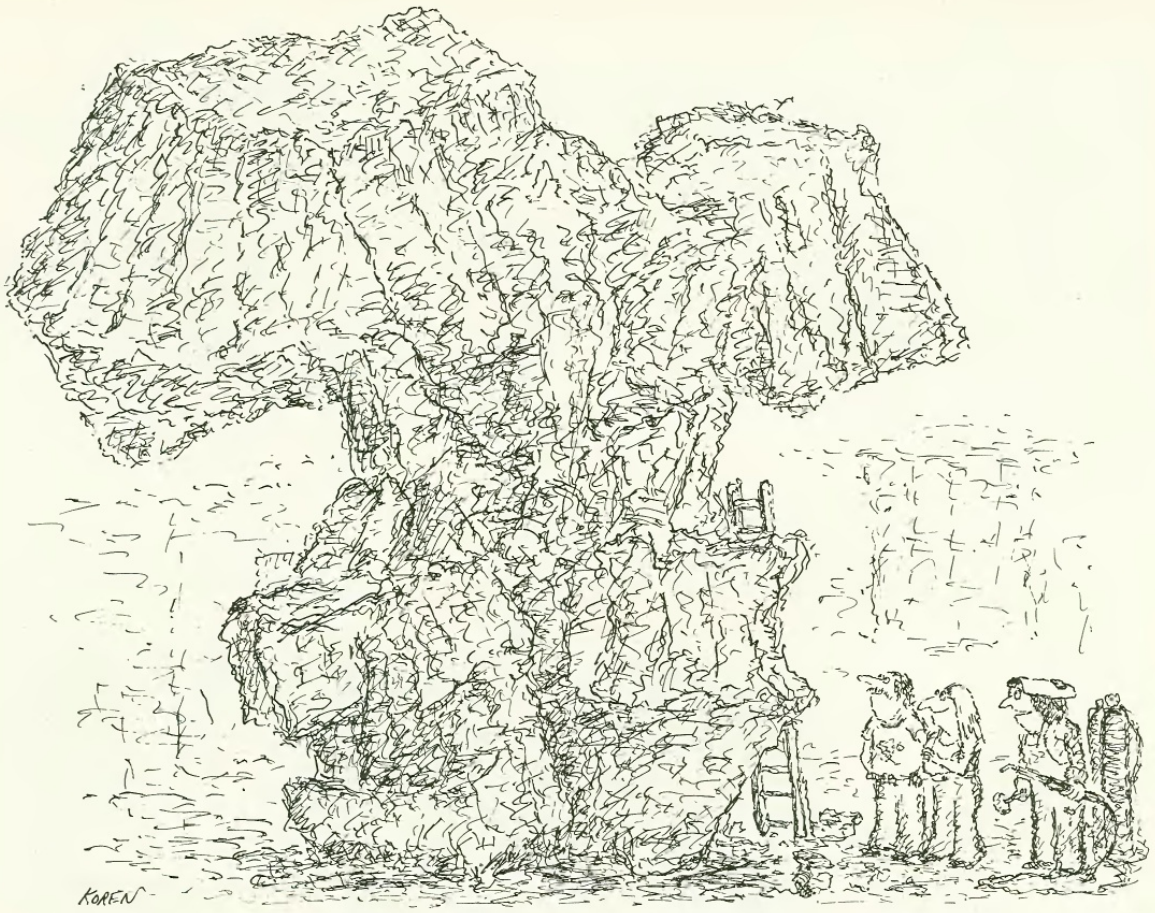
He smiled a little, reasonably. "It's on my office desk."

The assistants produced a screwdriver, and he watched while they inserted it where the wardrobe doors met and gave it a quick leverage. He heard the lock give.

She had been naked, it was true, when he had locked her in, but now she was wearing a long-sleeved shirt with an appliquéd butterfly motif on one breast, and a pair of jeans. Her feet were still bare. In the dark, she had managed to get into some of the clothing she had snatched from the bed, but she had no shoes. She had perhaps been weeping behind the door (her cheeks looked stained), but now her face was sullen and she was breathing heavily, her diaphragm contracting and expanding exaggeratedly and her breasts pushing against the cloth. She looked angry, but it might simply have been that she was half suffocated in the wardrobe and needed air. She did not look at Dr. von Leinsdorf. She would not reply to the sergeant's questions.

They were taken to the police station, where they were at once separated and led in turn for examination by the district surgeon. The man's underwear was taken away and examined, as the sheets had been, for signs of his seed. When the girl was undressed, it was discovered that beneath her jeans she was wearing a pair of men's briefs, with his name on the neatly sewn laundry tag. In her haste, she had taken the wrong garment to her hiding place.

Now she cried, standing there before the district surgeon in a man's underwear. He courteously pretended not to notice. He handed the briefs, jeans, and shirt to someone outside the door, and motioned her to lie on a white-sheeted high table, where he placed her legs apart, resting in stirrups, and put into her where the other had



"Is it too cutesy?"

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made his way so warmly a cold, hard instrument that expanded wider and wider. Her body opened. Her thighs and knees trembled uncontrollably while the doctor looked into her and touched her deep inside with other hard instruments carrying wafers of gauze.

When she came out of the examining room, back to the charge office, Dr. von Leinsdorf was not there; they must have taken him somewhere else. She spent what was left of the night in a cell, but early in the morning she was released and taken home to her mother's house in the Colored township. She was driven by a white man who explained he was the clerk of the lawyer who had been engaged for her by Dr. von Leinsdorf. The clerk said Dr. von Leinsdorf had also been bailed out that morning. She was not told when or if she would see him again.

A STATEMENT made by the girl to the police was handed in peared to meet charges of contravening the Immorality Act in a Johannesburg flat. "I lived with the white man in his flat," it read. "He had intercourse with me sometimes. He gave me tablets to take to prevent me becoming pregnant."

Interviewed by the Sunday papers, the girl said, "I'm sorry for the sadness brought to my mother." She said she was one of nine children of a female laundry worker. She had left school in Standard Three because there was no money at home for gym clothes or a school blazer. She had worked as a machinist in a factory and a cashier in a supermarket. Dr. von Leinsdorf taught her to type his notes.

Dr. Franz-Josef von Leinsdorf, described in the newspaper as the grandson of a baroness—a cultured man engaged in international mineralogical research—said he accepted social distinctions between people but didn't think they should be legally imposed. "Even in my own country it's difficult marry one from a lower class," he said.

The two accused gave no evidence. They did not greet or speak to each other in court. The defense argued that the sergeant's evidence that they had been living together as man and wife was hearsay. (The woman with dachshund had reported suspicions, perhaps, or maybe it was the caretaker.) The magistrate acquitted them because the state failed to prove that carnal intercourse had taken place on the stated night.

In the Sunday papers there was a photograph of the girl's mother, who was quoted as saying, "I won't let my daughter work as a servant for a white man again." —NADINE GORDIMER

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Agreed generally that all land use at the airport should relate to aviation, except that which does not.—*Announcement by the City Airport Commission in the Santa Barbara (Calif.) News-Press.*

to the court when she and the man ap- for a person from a higher class to Was there much debate