

“Now, now,” she says, making a perfect landing. “You’ll get used to being in the air again, and, unlike you, I promise to be very gentle on that first tug.”

SOMEBODY’S FOOL

He walks barefoot on thumbtacks to keep his mind off his mind. Interviewed, reviewed, but not yet previewed, he’s imperfect for the job—too anal, enough imagination to be annoying. “Stick to poetry,” an inner voice murmurs, “something like *Tender Buttons*, only kinkier.”

At night, alone in his bed he smokes, reads self-help manuals, talks continuously to himself. “Is it my fault? Is anything my fault?” At which question a father-figure appears, clad in nothing but stained boxer shorts. “Of course it’s your fault,” he says. But how to take a father-figure seriously who wears stained boxer shorts and has bloody chunks of toilet paper spotting his face, a man with no hair on his chest, whose movements suggest something mechanical working inside his limbs.

And so he butts out his cigarette, and gives himself to darkness until the next morning comes upon him like a wet rhinoceros. He sits up in bed, reviews his qualifications. He massages the holes in his feet with Vaseline. He awaits a sign to get out of bed: a circa 1930 dirigible hovering outside his window, an urgent telegram from a snowed-in Tibetan monk, a cat floating into his bedroom on little fog feet. . . .

PRIVATE CITIZEN

He has this dream where he walks in on the President and First Lady while they’re making love. They both look at him as if to ask, Don’t we have enough problems with inflation and detente without you barging into our bedroom? He’s so embarrassed he apologizes, explaining he wouldn’t have interrupted them if he weren’t on urgent business. But he’s still uneasy, because as he’s talking to the President, he can’t take his eyes off the First Lady’s breasts. The President notices this, becomes suspicious, and asks for his credentials.

He’s tried to get help. He phoned his friend in California, who’s a psy-

chiatrist to movie stars. She said his dream itself wasn't unusual, and she referred him to certain books, which he's read, but the dream still persists.

He told his wife about the dream. She said he was sick and dirty, and she refused to sleep with him. Eventually, she ran off with another man. He's gotten to the point where he's afraid to sleep at night, afraid the dream will return—and lately it has. Perhaps his wife was right. He certainly feels sick, and even unpatriotic.

He can't even suffer anonymously. Word has gotten around, and many local journalists want to write feature stories on him. A well-known network interviewer suggested he go nationwide with his story. She said the entire country wants to know about his dream. She's even heard the President wants to meet him, that he's about to invite him to the White House. Lord, how he wants to meet the President, but how can he look The Commander in Chief in the eye, knowing so much about him and his wife.