

FRIENDS AND ENEMIES

By FRITZ LEIBER

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*In a world blasted by super-bombs
and run by super-thugs, Art vs.
Science can be a deadly debate!*

The sun hadn't quite risen, but now that the five men were out from under the trees it already felt hot. Far ahead, off to the left of the road, the spires of New Angeles gleamed dusky blue against the departing night. The two unarmed men gazed back wistfully at the little town, dark and asleep under its moist leafy umbrellas. The one who was thin and had hair flecked with gray looked all intellect; the other, young and with a curly mop, looked all feeling.

The fat man barring their way back to town mopped his head. The two young men flanking him with shotgun and squirtgun hadn't started to sweat yet.

The fat man stuffed the big handkerchief back in his pocket, wiped his hands on his shirt, rested his wrists lightly on the pistols holstered either side his stomach, looked at the two unarmed men, indicated the hot road with a nod, and said, "There's your way, professors. Get going."

The thin man looked at the hand-smears on the fat man's shirt. "But you haven't even explained to me," he protested softly, "why I'm being turned out of Ozona College."

"Look here, Mr. Ellenby, I've tried to make it easy for you," the fat man said. "I'm doing it before the town wakes up. Would you rather be chased by a mob?"

"But why—?"

"Because we found out you weren't just a math teacher, Mr. Ellenby." The fat man's voice went hard. "You'd been a physicist once. *Nuclear* physicist."

The young man with the shotgun spat. Ellenby watched the spittle curl in the dust like a little brown worm. He shifted his gaze to a dead eucalyptus leaf. "I'd like to talk to the college board of regents," he said tonelessly.

"I'm the board of regents," the fat man told him. "Didn't you even know that?"

At this point the other unarmed man spoke up loudly. "But that doesn't explain my case. I've devoted my whole life to warning people against physicists and other scientists. How they'd smash us with their bombs. How they were destroying our minds with 3D and telefax and handies. How they were blaspheming against Nature, killing all imagination, crushing all beauty out of life!"

"I'd shut my mouth if I were you, Madson," the fat man said critically, "or at least lower my voice. When I mentioned a mob, I wasn't fooling. I saw them burn Cal Tech. In fact, I got a bit excited and helped."

The young man with the shotgun grinned.

"Cal Tech," Ellenby murmured, his eyes growing distant. "Cal Tech burns and Ozona stands."

"Ozona stands for the decencies of life," the fat man grated, "not alphabet bombs and pituitary gas. Its purpose is to save a town, not help kill a world."

"But why should *I* be driven out?" Madson persisted. "I'm just a poet singing the beauties of the simple life unmarred by science."

"Not simple enough for Ozona!" the fat man snorted. "We happen to know, Mr. Poet Madson, that you've written some stories about free love. We don't want anyone telling Ozona girls it's all right to be careless."

"But those were just ideas, ideas in a story," Madson protested. "I wasn't advocating—"

"No difference," the fat man cut him short. "Talk to a woman about ideas and pretty soon she gets some." His voice became almost kindly. "Look here, if you wanted a woman without getting hitched to her, why didn't you go to shantytown?"

Madson squared his shoulders. "You've missed the whole point. I'd never do such a thing. I never have."

"Then you shouldn't have boasted," the fat man said. "And you shouldn't have fooled around with Councilman Classen's daughter."

At the name, Ellenby came out of his trance and looked sharply at Madson, who said indignantly, "I wasn't fooling around with Vera- Ellen, whatever her crazy father says. She came to my office because she has poetic ability and I wanted to encourage it."

"Yeah, so she'd encourage you," the fat man finished. "That girl's wild enough already, which I suppose is what you mean by poetic ability. And in this town, her father's word counts." He hitched up his belt. "And now, professors, it's time you started."

Madson and Ellenby looked at each other doubtfully. The young man with the squirtgun raised its acid-etched muzzle. The fat man looked hard at Madson and Ellenby. "I think I hear alarm clocks going off," he said quietly.

They watched the two men trudge a hundred yards, watched Ellenby shift the rolled-up towel under his elbow to the other side, watched Madson pause to thumb tobacco into a pipe and glance carelessly back, then shove the pipe in his pocket and go on hurriedly.

"Couple of pretty harmless coots, if you ask me," the young man with the shotgun observed.

"Sure," the fat man agreed, "but we got to remember peoples' feelings and keep Ozona straight. We don't like mobs or fear *or* girls gone wild."

The young man with the shotgun grinned. "That Vera-Ellen," he murmured, shaking his head.

"You better keep *your* mind off her too," the fat man said sourly. "She's wild enough without anybody to encourage her poetic ability or anything else. It's a good thing we gave those two their walking papers."

"They'll probably walk right into the arms of the Harvey gang," the young man with the squirtgun remarked, "especially if they try to short-cut."

"Pretty small pickings for Harvey, those two," the young man with the shotgun countered. "Which won't please him at all."

The fat man shrugged. "Their own fault. If only they'd had sense enough to keep their mouths shut. Early in life."

"They don't seem to realize it's 1993," said the young man with the shotgun.

The fat man nodded. "Come on," he said, turning back toward the town and the coolness. "We've done our duty."

The young man with the squirtgun took a last look. "There they go, Art and Science," he observed with satisfaction. "Those two subjects always did make my head ache."

On the hot road Madson began to stride briskly. His nostrils flared. "Smell the morning air," he commanded. "It's good, good!"

Ellenby, matching his stride with longer if older legs, looked at him with mild wonder.

"Smell the hot sour grass," Madson continued. "It's things like this man was meant for, not machines and formulas. Look at the dew. Have you seen the dew in years? Look at it on that spiderweb!"

The physicist paused obediently to observe the softly twinkling strands. "Perfect catenaries," he murmured.

"What?"

"A kind of curve," Ellenby explained. "The locus of the focus of a parabola rolling on a straight line."

"Locus-focus hocus-pocus!" Madson snorted. "Reducing the wonders of Nature to chalk marks. It's disgusting."

Suddenly each tiny drop of dew turned blood-red. Ellenby turned his back on the spiderweb, whipped a crooked little brass tube from an inside pocket and squinted through it.

"What's that?" Madson asked.

"Spectroscope," Ellenby explained. "Early morning spectra of the sun are fascinating."

Madson huffed. "There you go. Analyzing. Tearing beauty apart. It's a disease." He paused. "Say, won't you hurt your eyes?"

Turning back, Ellenby shook his head. "I keep a smoked glass on it," he said. "I'm always hoping that some day I'll get a glimpse of an atomic bomb explosion."

"You mean to say you've missed all the dozens they dropped on this country? That's too bad."

"The ball of fire's quite fleeting. The opportunities haven't been as good as you think."

"But you're a physicist, aren't you? Don't you people have all sorts of lovely photographs to gloat over in your laboratories?"

"Atomic bomb spectra were never declassified," Ellenby told him wistfully. "At least not in my part of the project. I've never seen one."

"Well, you'll probably get your chance," Madson told him harshly. "If you've been reading your dirty telefax, you'll know the Hot Truce is coming to a boil. And the Angeles area will be a prime target." Ellenby nodded mutely.

They trudged on. The sun began to beat on their backs like an open fire. Ellenby turned up his collar. He watched his companion thoughtfully. Finally he said, "So you're the Madson who wrote those *Enemies of Science* stories about a world ruled by poets. It never occurred to me back at Ozona. And that non-fiction book about us—what was it called?"

"*Murderers of Imagination*," Madson growled. "And it would have been a good thing if you'd listened to my warnings instead of going on building machines and dissecting Nature and destroying all the lovely myths that make life worthwhile."

"Are you sure that Nature is so lovely and kind?" Ellenby ventured. Madson did not deign to answer.

They passed a crossroad leading, the battered sign said, one way to Palmdale, the other to San Bernardino. They were perhaps a hundred yards beyond it when Ellenby let go a little chuckle. "I have a confession to make. When I was very young I wrote an article about how children shouldn't be taught the Santa Claus myth or any similar fictions."

Madson laughed sardonically. "A perfect member of your dry-souled tribe! Worrying about Santa Claus, when all the while something very different was about to come flying down from over the North Pole and land on our housetops."

"We did try to warn people about the intercontinental missiles," Ellenby reminded him.

"Yes, without any success. The last two reindeer—Donner and Blitzen!"

Ellenby nodded glumly, but he couldn't keep a smile off his face for long. "I wrote another article too—it was never published—about how poetry is completely pointless, how rhymes inevitably distort meanings, and so on."

Madson whirled on him with a peal of laughter. "So you even thought you were big enough to wreck poetry!" He jerked a limp, thinnish volume from his coat pocket. "You thought you could destroy this!"

Ellenby's expression changed. He reached for the book, but Madson held it away from him. Ellenby said, "That's Keats, isn't it?"

"How would you know?"

Ellenby hesitated. "Oh, I got to like some of his poetry, quite a while after I wrote the article." He paused again and looked squarely at Madson. "Also, Vera-Ellen was reading me some pieces out of that volume. I guess you'd loaned it to her."

"Vera-Ellen?" Madson's jaw dropped.

Ellenby nodded. "She had trouble with her geometry. Some conferences were necessary." He smiled. "We physicists aren't such a dry-souled tribe, you know."

Madson looked outraged. "Why, you're old enough to be her father!"

"Or her husband," Ellenby replied coolly. "Young women are often attracted to father images. But all that can't make any difference to us now."

"You're right," Madson said shortly. He shoved the poetry volume back in his pocket, flung the sweat out of his eyes, and looked around with impatience. "Say, you're going to New Angeles, aren't you?" he asked, and when Ellenby nodded uncertainly, said, "Then let's cut across the fields. This road is taking us out of our way." And without waiting for a reply he jumped across the little ditch to the left of the road and into the yellowing wheat field. Ellenby watched him for a moment, then hitched his rolled towel further up under his arm and followed.

It was stifling in the field. The wheat seemed to paralyze any stray breezes. Their boots hissed against the dry stems. Far off they heard a lazy drumming. After a while they came to a wide, brimful irrigation ditch. They could see that some hundreds of feet ahead it was crossed by a little bridge. They followed the ditch.

Ellenby felt strangely giddy, as if he were looking at everything through a microscope. That may have been due to the tremendous size of the wheat, its spikes almost as big as corncobs, the spikelets bigger than kernels—rich orange stuff taut with flour. But then they came to a section marred by larger and larger splotches of a powdery purple blight.

The lazy drumming became louder. Ellenby was the first to see the low-swinging helicopter with its thick, trailing plume of greenish mist. He knocked Madson on the shoulder and both men started to run. Purple dust puffed. Once Ellenby stumbled and Madson stopped to jerk him to his feet. Still they would have escaped except that the copter swerved toward them. A moment later they were enveloped in sweet oily fumes.

Madson heard jeering laughter, glimpsed a grotesquely long-nosed face peering down from above. Then, through the cloud, Ellenby squeaked, "Don't breathe!" and Madson felt himself dragged roughly into the ditch. The water closed over him with a splash.

Puffing and blowing, he came to his feet—the water hardly reached his waist—to find himself being dragged by Ellenby toward the bridge. It was all he could do to keep his footing on the muddy bottom. By the time he got breath enough to voice his indignation, Ellenby was saying, "That's far enough. The stuff's settling away from us. Now strip and scrub yourself."

Ellenby unrolled the towel he'd held tightly clutched to his side all the while, and produced a bar of soap. In response to Madson's question he explained, "That fungicide was probably TTTR or some other relative of the nerve-gas family. They are absorbed through the skin."

Seconds later Madson was scouring his head and chest. He hesitated at his trousers, muttering, "They'll probably have me for indecent exposure. Claim I was trying to start a nudist colony as well as a free-love cult." But Ellenby's warning had been a chilly one.

Ellenby soaped Madson's back and he in turn soaped the older man's ridgy one.

"I suppose that's why he had an elephant's nose," Madson mused.

"What?"

"Man in the copter," Madson explained. "Wearing a respirator."

Ellenby nodded and made them move nearer the bridge for a change of water.

They started to scrub their clothes, rinse and wring them, and lay them on the bank to dry. They watched the copter buzzing along in the distance, but it didn't seem inclined to come near again. Madson felt impelled to say, "You know, it's your chemist friends who have introduced that viciousness into the common man's spirit, giving him horrible poisons to use against Nature. Otherwise he wouldn't have tried to douse us with that stuff."

"He just acted like an ordinary farmer to me," Ellenby replied, scrubbing vigorously.

"Think we're safe?" Madson asked.

Ellenby shrugged. "We'll discover," he said briefly.

Madson shivered, but the rhythmic job was soothing. After a bit he began to feel almost playful. Lathering his shirt, he got some fine large bubbles, held them so he could see their colors flow in the sunlight.

"Tiny perfect worlds of every hue," he murmured. "Violet, blue, green, yellow, orange, red."

"And dead black," Ellenby added.

"You would say something like that!" Madson grunted. "What did you think I was talking about?"

"Bubbles."

"Maybe some of your friends' poisons have black bubbles," Madson said biting. "But I was talking about these."

"So was I. Give me your pipe."

The authority in Ellenby's voice made Madson look around startledly. "Give me your pipe," Ellenby repeated firmly, holding out his hand.

Madson fished it out of the pocket of the trousers he was about to wash and handed it over. Ellenby knocked out the soggy tobacco, swished it in the water a few times, and began to soap the inside of the bowl.

Madson started to object, but, "You'd be washing it anyway," Ellenby assured him. "Now look here, Madson, I'm going to blow a bubble and I want you to watch, I want you to observe Nature for all you're worth. If poets and physicists have one thing in common it's that they're both supposed to be able to observe. Accurately."

He took a breath. "Now see, I'm going to hold the pipe mouth down and let the bubble hang from it, but with one side of the bowl tipped up a bit, so that the strain on the bubble's skin will be greatest on that side."

He blew a big bubble, held the pipe with one hand and pointed with a finger of the other. "There's the place to watch now. There!" The bubble burst.

"What was that?" Madson asked in a new voice. "It really was black for an instant, dull like soot."

"A bubble bursts because its skin gets thinner and thinner," Ellenby said. "When it gets thin enough it shows colors, as interference eliminates different wavelengths. With yellow eliminated it shows violet, and so on. But finally, just for a moment at the place where it's going to break, the skin becomes

only one molecule thick. Such a mono-molecular layer absorbs all light, hence shows as dead black."

"Everything's got a black lining, eh?"

"Black can be beautiful. Here, I'll do it again."

Madson put his hand on Ellenby's shoulder to steady himself. They were standing hip-deep in water, their bodies still flecked with suds. Their heads were inches from the new bubble. As it burst a voice floated down to them.

"Is this the Ozona Faculty Kindergarten?"

They whirled around, simultaneously crouching in the water.

"Vera-Ellen, what are you doing here?" Madson demanded.

"Watching the kiddies play," the girl on the bridge replied, running a hand through her touseled violet hair. She looked down at her slacks and jacket. "Wish I'd brought my swim suit, though I gather it wouldn't be expected."

"Vera-Ellen!" Madson said apprehensively.

"It doesn't look very inviting down there, though," she mused. "Guess I'll wait for Aqua Heaven at New Angeles."

"You're going to New Angeles?" Ellenby put in. It is not easy to be conversationally brilliant while squatting chest deep in muddy water, acutely conscious of the absence of clothes.

Vera-Ellen nodded lazily, leaning on the railing. "Going to get me a city job. With its reduced faculty Ozona holds no more

intellectual interest for me. Did you know math's going to be made part of the Home Eck department, Mr. Ellenby?"

"But how did you know that we—"

"Daughter of the man who got you run out of town ought to know what the old bully's up to. And if you're worrying that they'll come after me and find us together, I'll just head along by myself."

Madson and Ellenby both protested, though it is even harder to protest effectively than to be conversationally brilliant while squatting naked in coffee-colored water.

Vera-Ellen said, "All right, so quit playing and let's get on. You have to tell me all about New Angeles and the kind of jobs we'll get."

"But—?"

"Modest, eh? I'm afraid Pa wouldn't count it in your favor. But all right." She turned her back and sauntered to the other side of the bridge.

Madson and Ellenby cautiously climbed out of the ditch, brushed the water from their skins, and wormed into their soggy clothes.

"We've got to persuade her to go back," Madson whispered.

"Vera-Ellen?" Ellenby replied and raised his eyebrows.

Madson groaned softly.

"Cheer up," Ellenby said. And he seemed in a cheerful humor himself when they climbed to the bridge. "Vera-Ellen," he said,

"we've been having an argument as to whether man ruined Nature or Nature ruined man to start with."

"Is this a class, Mr. Ellenby?"

"Of sorts," he told her. Behind him Madson snorted, flipping his Keats to dry the pages. They started off together.

"Well," said Vera-Ellen, "I like Nature and I like ... human beings. And I don't feel ruined at all. Where's the argument?"

"What about the bombs?" Madson demanded automatically. "By man our physicist here means Technology. Whereas I mean—"

"Oh, the bombs," she said with a shrug. "What sort of job do you think I should get in New Angeles?"

"Well ..." Madson began.

"Say, I'm getting hungry," she raced on, turning to Ellenby.

"So am I," he agreed.

They looked at the road ahead. A jagged hill now hid all but the tips of the spires of New Angeles. On the top of the hill was a tremendous house with sagging roofs of cracked tiles, stucco walls dark with rain stains and green with moss yet also showing cracks, and windows of age-blued glass, some splintered, flashing in the sun, which tempted Ellenby to whip out his spectroscope.

Curving down from the house came a weedy and balding expanse that had obviously once been a well-tended lawn. A few stalwart patches of thick grass held out tenaciously.

Pale-trunked eucalyptus trees towered behind the house and to either side of the road where it curved over the hill.

In a hollow at the foot of the one-time lawn, just where it met the road, something gleamed. As Madson, Ellenby and Vera-Ellen tramped forward, they saw it was an old automobile, one of the jet antiques that were the rage around 1970—in fact, a Lunar '69. Coming closer Ellenby realized that it had custom-built features, such as jet brakes and collision springs.

A man with an odd cap was poking a probe into the air intake, while in the back seat a woman was sitting, shadowed by a hat four feet across. At the sound of their footsteps the man whirled to his feet, quickly enough though unsteadily. He stared at them, wagging the probe. Just at that moment something that looked like an animated orange furpiece leaped from the tonneau.

"George!" the woman cried. "Widgie's got away."

The small flattish creature came on in undulating bounds. It was past the man in the cap before he could turn. It headed for Ellenby, then changed direction. Madson made an impulsive dive for it, but it widened itself still more and sailed over him straight into Vera-Ellen's arms.

They walked toward the car. Widgie wriggled, Vera-Ellen stroked his ears. He seemed to be a flying fox of some sort. The man eyed them hostilely, raising the probe. Madson stared puzzledly at the cap. Out of his older knowledge Ellenby whispered an explanation: "Chauffeur."

The woman stood in the back seat, swaying slightly. She was wearing a white swim suit and dark teleglasses under her hat. At

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