



A Most Beautiful Model

How a small boy helped an artist
solve his biggest problem.

By MICHAEL FORRESTIER

As he climbed the worn, elaborate stairs, Tim was dreaming again about the wonderful box down the street in the window of Rain's Paints and Hardware. It was a small oblong of a box, shiny black on the outside, white inside, with a brush and six of the brightest colors of the rainbow packed in a row of little cups. There were three shallow scoops in the lid. Tim knew you were supposed to mix the colors in those scoops, using the brush and lots of water.

This week Tim's dream of bliss was to mix all those rainbow colors together and make a painting of a rocket ship in flight. There was a cup of just the right vivid red to do the streaks of fire, to show the rocket jets roaring out into space.

Only one thing stood between Tim's dream and its fulfillment: a ticket on the box that said \$1. Tim didn't have one dollar. And he must never, never ask for money.

At the top of the old converted house, Tim rapped gently on the door of 4B. He went in and held the knob to keep the door from slamming. Tim couldn't see much of him because most of Mr. Burford was behind the large,



"Would you mind if I tried one more drawing?" Mr. Burford asked.

tilted drawing table. He could see Mr. Burford's legs, though; the feet in beat-up carpet slippers hooked around the rungs of his chair.

Mr. Burford, for his part, couldn't see who had come in, so he knew who it was.

"Morning, Tim," Mr. Burford said. "How's your mother? In?"

Tim said, "She's wrestling with a murderer, so I have to be quiet. Are you chalking up another ulcer?"

Tim looked out through the window. It had stopped snowing, the sun was shining, and the tree in the back yard was edged with white, so that the branches were like licorice whips topped with vanilla icing. Tim tried to imagine the taste of the two flavors together.

Mr. Burford carefully finished what he was doing before he answered, "A gilt-edged ulcer. A five-hundred-dollar one this time. It should keep the wolf slavering on the wrong side of the door a while longer." Mr. Burford sighed. "That is, if good old George likes it."

Tim looked at the little jars of paint that glowed on the table by Mr. Burford's elbow. He was never allowed to touch those special colors. Tim thought he'd like to have rubies

like that—green, blue, red and yellow rubies, and the Rajah's turban to wear them in when he played baseball. Tim said, "Who is good old George?"

"Good old George Dockwra, from the advertising agency of that name, who hires my talented brush."

"Oh." Tim looked next at the reproductions pinned up on the wall. The ones on the left were done by Picasso, those on the right by Norman Rockwell. He looked over at the couch and saw Picasso and Norman Rockwell sleeping quietly against each other.

Tim knew that Picasso was the greatest artist in the world, and so was Norman Rockwell. Mr. Burford had told him so. He knew that the Rajah was a National League batter named Hornsby, an immortal; and that all rajahs wore turbans. Tim knew a lot of things that Mr. Burford told him. Mr. Burford told him that he chalked up another ulcer each time he got a new job to do.

Tim went to look at the new ulcer Mr. Burford was chalking up. Ulcers can look different; this one looked like a grown-up lady in a swim suit. She was reclining on an ice

floe, holding up a bottle and laughing with delight.

While Tim stood behind him, Mr. Burford waited with shoulders hunched and hand poised over his work.

"Well?" he said, after a nervous pause.

Tim said, "Won't the lady catch cold, lying on all that ice?"

"Friend," Mr. Burford said, "I'll let you in on a most important fact of life. *You* know she'll catch cold and *I* know she'll catch cold. But then, who are we? Poor ordinary humans, that's who. Now agency men, on the other hand, they're not human. They're geniuses. And of all the geniuses of agency men, good old George is the greatest genius of the lot." Mr. Burford paused. "There should be a lesson there someplace."

Tim continued to stare at the painting. "Her legs look funny."

Mr. Burford groaned. "My pal! Tim, the world's greatest critic. You know you're right, critic? I've been having trouble with those funny legs all morning. Any suggestions? Think hard, critic, maybe you can help me out. Good old George

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is due here any time to see how it's coming along."

Tim thought so hard that he scowled. "Couldn't you ask Picasso and Norman Rockwell to do them?" he suggested.

Mr. Burford leaped up. "By golly, that's a terrific idea!" He flung his hand up to his hair and the brush left a blue streak on his forehead. "I'll send them a telegram. I'll say—what'll I say? Dear Pablo, please rush a set of your finest legs by return. How's that? Dear Norm, on the subject of —" Mr. Burford stopped; he threw his brush down in disgust. "Nah! There isn't time. Besides, they may be busy."

"Who, Norm and Picasso?" Tim looked at the couch. Norman Rockwell stretched, turned around twice, twitched his whiskers and went back to sleep.

"I could ask them," Tim said. "They're not busy now."

"Let me get this straight," Mr. Burford said in a hushed voice. "You know what Picasso is doing, you can actually see Norman Rockwell? Right this minute, across all the far-flung miles of time and space? Please, you wouldn't kid me?"

"They're not so far." Tim pointed to the two Siamese cats curled up on the couch.

"Oh. Sure." Mr. Burford shook his head. "Boy, do I need a coffee break!" He plugged in the hot plate. "How's about a bite to eat? A hamburger strike you? If you'll just run down to Uzbek's." Mr. Burford pulled out a dollar bill.

Tim licked his lips. "I'm not supposed to eat before lunch. Thank you."

Mr. Burford said, "Let's call it *petit déjeuner*. *Almuerzo*. Let's say *chota hazri*."

"Chota hazri," Tim said. He took the bill and tiptoed to the door.

"Get three," said Mr. Burford. "The extra one is for good old George. Chili sauce. And don't forget the dills."

Tim nodded. He reached the door, gave it a quick tug. There was no slavering wolf outside, though Mr. Burford said it practically lived there. As always, Tim just missed it.

He went zooming down, captain of a rocket ship coming in for a landing on the moon. He cruised past the third floor—3B, where he and his mother lived; and 3A, that had a card with a printed name: MISS MARY EULALIA RUMSEY. Maidenly, starched, Miss Mary kept goldfish, and she creaked. It was always pink, beaded dusk in Miss Mary's, even at bright noon.

Tim braked on the second floor of the tall, decaying building. Like its neighbors in this city backwater, it had been somebody's mansion once; but now all the Uzbeks lived on the second floor and rented the rest of the house as apartments.

Tim, the connoisseur, sniffed at the cooking smells that enriched the Uzbeks' corridor. Then he sped on down, taxied

along the hall and opened the front door.

He was stopped by the all-night snow that sparkled on Hollis Street, blanketing the sidewalk. He dared not chance it. He might step on a crack that he couldn't see in the pavement, and that would break his mother's back.

He climbed along the iron rails the few feet to the entrance to Uzbek's Snacks and Delicatessen.

Inside, the store was cozy and redolent. Miss Mary was there, saying in her up-town voice, ". . . and a quarter pound of your nice potato salad." Miss Mary had fluffy hair and a pale mustache, and she smelled of dried leaves. She said, "You'd better make that half a pound, the girls are dropping in for a game of bolivia."

Mr. Uzbek smiled at Tim. He said, "Nu, Tim. What can I do for you?"

"Three hamburgers, please. Chili sauce. And don't forget the dills."

"That'll be all," Miss Mary said. She opened her purse, then she pulled off her glove and it caught on the charm bracelet at her wrist. "I lost my heart outside in the street last night," she sighed. "Such a nuisance! When I was fishing for my key."

"At your age!" Mr. Uzbek rolled his eyes.

Miss Mary tittered. "One of my lucky charms, you know. It was only a tiny wee thing, made of soft white gold, but I valued it dearly." She turned to Tim. "If you should find my heart, little boy, I'll give you something for it."

"How's that beautiful mother of yours?" Mr. Uzbek asked Tim.

"Fine, thank you. She's wrestling with a murderer."

"A wonderful woman!" said Mr. Uzbek admiringly. "Working all the time. How such an innocent young girl, you should excuse me, knows to write detective books—"

"She has to," Miss Mary cut in. "She has to pay the bills for that sick husband of hers in —" She stopped and widened her eyes at Tim. "Little pitchers!" she said archly.

"I'm a big pitcher," Tim said. "I'm the world's greatest, an immortal." He stepped up to the mound, he was in Yankee Stadium, last game of the Series, last half of the ninth and the score was tied. In the tense hush he began his windup.

"Oy," said Mr. Uzbek. "A six-year-old, he's the world's greatest immortal pitcher already! So mind the trays."

"Don't forget my heart, little boy," Miss Mary trilled as she went out.

Mr. Uzbek put three meat patties on the grill. Tim listened to them spit. He said, "Mr. Burford's got a five-hundred-dollar ulcer this time."

Mr. Uzbek cut three buns. "Mr. Burford's ulcers, it should happen to me. You want a slice pastrami?"

"I'm not supposed to eat before lunch. Couldn't you say it's chota hazri?"

"I say it's pastrami. That other I don't stock." Mr. Uzbek shaved off a slice. "Take it anyways, eat it in health." He said, "Go on up by the inside, you got no galoshes on."

Tim took the hamburgers through the back storeroom. He climbed the stairs, chewing pastrami, and wondered why everybody suddenly stopped talking about his father. He knew his dad lived far away in the sanatorium with his chest. Mom got letters from him all the time. She would take the letters to the window and read them, and sit staring out at the sky. After some letters she would hug Tim and laugh, and after others she would bite her lip and her eyes would be bright, trying not to cry. And sometimes she couldn't help it, she cried. What was so secret about that?

When Tim arrived at 4B, Mr. Burford was sitting on the couch with his eyes shut, listening to the hi-fi. Hot coffee and a glass of cold milk stood on a cleared-off corner of the painting table.

Tim put a hamburger into Mr. Burford's groping hand.

"You know who that is?" Mr. Burford asked with his mouth full.

"Sure. Satchmo." Mr. Burford always played Satchmo.

"The world's greatest artist." Mr. Burford flourished his hamburger. "Listen to that! That's the way to paint legs."

Tim listened, but he couldn't hear any legs at all. He said, "Can I borrow a pencil and paper?"

"The world's greatest artist," Mr. Burford mumbled. "Help yourself."

Between bites, Tim began to draw a rocket ship. "Is everybody the world's greatest artist?" he asked.

"Everybody."

"Is my mom?"

"Unquestionably the world's greatest artist."

"And you too?"

Mr. Burford grinned. "Only in the slapstick sense of the word," he said.

There was a rap outside. Mr. Burford went to the door. "Well," he cried. "Here's good old George!"

A lean man entered, unbuttoning his topcoat. He brought with him the smell of the cold, clean winter air.

Mr. Burford said to him, "I want you to meet my best friend, Tim. The noblest critic of them all."

"An honor," said George.

Tim shook hands. He thought that good old George was not so old, although he had a high, blond forehead. Tim said, "Mr. Burford's got a five-hundred-dollar ulcer for you, if you like it."

"That's neighborly of him," George said. "But I've already got one of my own, thanks."

"It's not quite finished," Mr. Burford said. "But take a look anyway."

The three of them stood before the swim-suit lady, turning their heads gravely, first on one side, then on the other.

At length George said, "H'm'm." Then he said quickly, "I'm not knocking it, mind you. Far from it. It's just the anatomical legs—all those muscles! What we need here is something other-directed. Know what I mean? Glamour!" George sketched with his hands. "Give me glamorous, seductive legs, and the rest is jake."

Tim watched solemnly as George was speaking. "You're not human," Tim said.

"Not this morning, I'm not," George said. "I'm sick. I've got trouble."

Tim said, "You're the greatest genius of the lot."



"I didn't know it showed." George's smile made Tim feel ticklish clear down to his toes.

Tim said, "There should be a lesson there someplace."

Mr. Burford said in a rush, "There's a hamburger and coffee waiting for you, George."

Tim went back to his unfinished bun and his drawing.

George said to Mr. Burford, "The answer for you is obvious. All you need is an elegant model, female type, and you've got it made. I wish the answer to my headache were as easy."

"I can't use elegant female models," Mr. Burford said. "They make me itch. What's your problem?"

"Carmer's Canned Beef," George said. "I wish I'd never heard of the stuff."

"All the beef gone putrid?"

"Please!" George said. "Take your hat off, Carmer's is our fattest account! We're putting on a tremendous spring campaign, we'll hit all the magazines across the country. Double-page spreads, the works." He said, "Carmer's has been on every kitchen shelf since the dawn of the century. So after everything has been said and said again about it, what's left to say?" George shuddered. "Big meeting of the top brass this P.M., and I'm the boy who's got to come up with something dazzling, or else. And by a sinister wrench of fate I can't get off my launching pad. My fuse has sputtered out, completely! Sure, I know, I can make with the words. I proliferate on all sides like Maoris' tattooing."

Tim pricked up his ears. He had once seen a man in a carnival with tattoos all over him, gorgeous paintings of steamboats and mermaids, serpents, lions, and ladies that danced when the man flexed his muscles; but Tim never dreamed that similar tattooing proliferated on all sides of Miss Mary!

"... yet," George was saying, "my mind has been numb for days. Plain old mental block. Therefore, I am now going to crawl down a rathole and tear my brains apart."

Tim's attention came back to George. "Won't that hurt?"

"Like fury." George glanced down at Tim's drawing. "Looky here, a rocket ship! You going to put a label on it?"

"What for?" Tim asked.

"So we'll all know what it is."

"But we all know what it is. You just said what it is. Of course," Tim added wistfully, eyeing the pots of paint, "if I had lots of colors it would look much nicer."

"I'm a devout believer in four-color work myself." George shrugged into his topcoat and stalked to the door. He paused with the door open, then turned and came back to peer intently at Tim's drawing. "H'm'm," he said, and the skin on his high forehead moved up. "H'm'm," he said again, and frowned. He walked thoughtfully out of the room.

Tim shared everybody's crumbs with Picasso and Norman Rockwell. He was touching a final pencil lick to his rocket when he heard his mother's lilting voice. "Tim! Oh, Tim, where are you?"

Mr. Burford called, "He's here, Mrs. Shea. Won't you come up?"

She wore old black corduroys with elegance; the masses of her honey hair hung tousled to her shoulders. She looked pale, there was a smudge on her tip-tilted nose.

Mr. Burford stared at her and swallowed. He said, "Who won?"

"Who won what?" Tim's mother asked blankly.

"The wrestling match. With the murderer."

"That!" She laughed at Tim. "So far, it's two falls to the villain, with no help in sight. I'm stuck. And how is your ulcer?"

"Don't mention it, please!" Mr. Burford's gaze narrowed. He gulped, his face flushed scarlet. "Pardon me for asking," he blurted. "Have you got glamorous, seductive legs?"

Her stare shriveled him. "Come on, Tim," she said. "Lunch."

Tim crept to the door, yanked it open and looked outside. Still no wolf. Just once he wanted to see it slaving. He thought it would be lathering soap on its face before shaving, as in Mr. Spirelli, Three Barbers, Manicure.

"What in the world are you looking for?" his mother asked.

"The slaving wolf," Tim said.

"You're looking on the wrong side of the door," she said, and slammed it in Mr. Burford's stricken face.

After lunch Tim was helping with the dishes. "Did a letter come today?" he asked.

His mother hesitated. "No. Not yet. Perhaps it will get here by the late post." Of a sudden she trembled. A cup fell down to shatter at her feet. She gripped the sink with white-knuckled fingers. "I'm tired!" she whispered. "If only I could rest an hour, if only I could sit and do absolutely nothing!"

"Why don't you?" Tim asked.

She straightened wearily and smiled. "Mr. If Only never gets anything done."

So we won't let him in, we'll do it by ourselves." She swept up the shards. "Even my wretched villain. He leads a charmed life, but we'll get him in the end. I wish to heaven I knew how," she added. "And you, young fella, you want to take a nap this afternoon?"

"No, thank you."

"You want to play?"

"Outside," he said.

"I'm sorry, Tim. Truly, I'm sorry! I know it's no fun, but I've simply got to work. I'll make it up to you one day, that's a promise! Will you believe me?"

"Sure I believe you, mom!" Tim smiled.

"I don't know how I'd live without you," she said. "Come on, then. Into your coat! Cap. Mitts. Keep them on, mind."

Tim asked, "Are you going to work again?"

"Chained to that clacking machine." She tossed her hair back from her face. "Kiss your best girl now, darling. Be sure and come back before it gets dark!"

Tim went out in the hall, wondering what to do first. He looked across at Miss Mary's, and thought about his mother's villain with the charmed life. He remembered Miss Mary's heart; she had said it was a charm too. Maybe, he thought with excitement, if he found Miss Mary's heart it would work magic so that she would give him one dollar. Then he could buy Rain's wondrous box of paints! But how did a charm work?

He rushed downstairs, into Uzbek's Delicatessen. "Hello yourself," said Mr. Uzbek. "How's your nice mother?"

"She's chained to a clacking machine," Tim panted. "Do you know how a charm works?"

"A question." Mr. Uzbek's hand went to his cheek. "What kind charm you have in mind?"

"A magic charm, to make your dreams come true. Does it really work?"

Mr. Uzbek's dark eyes crinkled, he stroked his hairless scalp. "For me, no. Only for towheads with blue eyes. You got to do it exactly right, though. Watch!" He licked a fat thumb and stamped it into his palm. "Then you take your magic charm—he reached for a sausage—and you hold it in your hand. Tight, tight. You shut your eyes." Mr. Uzbek screwed up his eyes as though in agony. "You say the mystic words: 'Shalom! Shalom! Shalom!' After that you open your eyes, you open your fist, and there you are!" Mr. Uzbek opened his eyes and saw the ruin of a sausage in his hand. "Nothing to it," he said.

"Gosh, thanks! Now I've only got to find the charm."

"An essential," Mr. Uzbek agreed to Tim's disappearing back.

The snow was trampled into slush and the afternoon thaw piled the gutter as Tim began at the top step by his front door. Slowly he worked down, one step lower at a time, sifting the cold, gray slurry in his hands until his mitts were sodden through. He peeled them off and thrust them into a pocket.

His naked fingers ran like ferrets into every joint, each crack, each chip-edged break in stone. He knew it was just beyond his reach—the heart, the box of brilliant colors—so he must reach a little farther for it.

No more steps, he was on the sidewalk. From rails to gutter he pounced, treasured and discarded limp cigarette stubs and shreds of paper that turned to muck in his hands. He backed farther from his door, kneeling to gather all that never could have been a heart with fingers growing red and numb.

The low sun slipped behind an edge of murk, chill crept along the street and slowly the pavement saddened to a pig-iron shade. Tim's eyes began to water. He saw that he had reached as far as the corner of Grant Avenue. Mr. McConkey was walking his beat in broad, benevolent blue.

"Good night to ye, Tim," the policeman said. "Out late, aren't you? And why not? Winter's about done. Stays chilly, though."

The lampposts around them burst into sudden primrose bloom against the purple haze.

"You'd better be off indoors," the policeman said. "Say hello to your mother for me. Good night, now."

"Yes, sir. Good night, Mr. McConkey. But please," Tim said, "I want to see this first."

Tim stared into the brightness of Rain's Hardware window. There it was!—the box with the glorious, nested colors, the brush still waiting for his hand. And above it, the sign: \$1.

As he pressed his nose against the glass, mist came up between Tim and the box. The colors bleached out behind a thickening fog, seeped back away out of sight, out of reach, to the far end of the world until they were blotted out.

The raw night bit delicately at Tim's spine. He whirled, shivering. Mr. McConkey was gone.

Tim went back into Hollis Street. It was a tunnel of shadows now, baleful dark-nesses splayed out between the brassy teeth of the store-front lights. The houses drew away from him, towered up into gloom and stared down with their hooded eyes. Red and green worms crawled on the face of the buildings, crackling their neon intestines off and on.

Tim tromped resolutely through freezing gutter mud and searched in the rutted road. His feet were leaden, fingers stiff and slow.

Doors had already clicked shut, suppers were soon to come; the street lights were a tundra apart in empty Hollis Street. A nightmare shadow lanced out, shrank back again to the feet of a passing stranger.

Tim looked up at length and recognized his door. He knew it was past the hour when he should be upstairs. There were warmth and security inside; outside, there was a lost heart. He sat on an icy step, put his hands within his jacket, under his armpits, and tried tiredly to recall what a heart looked like.

A man hurried past; his cigarette sparked as he flipped it to the curb.

Tim's teeth chattered. He huddled his knees under him, burrowed chin into collar. Down the road a dragon snorted steam from a basement laundry.

A shapeless figure loomed. As it came near, Tim made out an old man in a dirty cap, who swayed bent head as blindly as a slug.

Tim cowered back, hoped that Mr. McConkey would come by this very minute.

A yard away, the tramp stopped. He peered, muttered; reached a claw hand down.

Tim saw it then at the man's feet—a pinpoint dazzle of lights in the shape of a heart.

The tramp's hand fumbled, clutched. Tim was paralyzed. The hand moved up again. Miraculously, the heart still glittered on the ground! The tramp sucked at his new cigarette butt and shuffled off, complaining to himself.

Tim leaped to the spot. Then he knew why the old man had not picked it up; there was no heart there.

He went back to his step and palmed moisture from his eyes. He opened them

and there it shone again; a minute, steady beacon. Tim shifted; the beacon disappeared. He tilted his head back; it was there once more. He crept up cautiously, holding the luster in his sight. Tim's incredulous fingers touched it, clenched it with all his strength. The heart!

He turned his streaked face to the sky and smiled.

He raced in to the exultant warmth, rehearsing the wish he now must make, remembering the words, seeing all the splendid colors, the colors of circuses and suns and azure oceans that he held tight in his hand. He thought he would go upstairs, close to Miss Mary before he made his wish, so that the charm would be strong.

Tim had passed the second floor when his mother found him. "Darling, where on earth have you been? I've been frantic! I was just going out to look for you." She hugged him. "Poor lamb, you're frozen! Run up quick; I won't be a minute, might as well go on down and see if there's any mail. Dear God," she sighed, "please let there be a letter!"

As Tim listened to his mother's heels clicking down to the mailbox, he thought how happy she would be if she got a letter from his dad tonight. Somehow, his feet began to drag. He looked up along the staircase—the old familiar route of pirate raids, the Indian trail, wake of an ocean liner to its ports of call. Tim thought of Rain's paintbox; he thought of all those friendly, welcoming ports of call.

He was outside Miss Mary's door. Tim faltered, he found it hard to see clearly. Then he drew a sobbing breath and squeezed the heart in his fist. He reviewed all he wanted to say, and uttered the mystic words. At last:

Please, he thought behind closed lids, let mom get a letter tonight. Let Mr. Burford paint his glamorous legs. Let good old George climb out of a rathole and get off his launching pad. Let Mr. Uzbeck get lots of ulcers, like he wants. No, wait! Mr. Uzbeck doesn't paint, so ulcers won't do him any good. Let him stock chota hazri. Let mom get her villain in the end, and let her sit down and rest. Thank you. Amen. "Shalom!" he said aloud.

Miss Mary opened her door. "Heaven help the child, how dirty he is!"

"I found your heart." Tim proffered the golden wishes in his grubby hand.

"Such a nice little boy, you've found my favorite charm!" Miss Mary seized the trinket. "I must give you a present. Come in, close the door. Don't come any nearer, your boots are muddy."

Tim watched her with awe, so many things about her that didn't show on the outside! He wondered how Miss Mary's tattooing proliferated, and if the needles had hurt.

She brought him two thin slices of caraway-seed cake on a paper doily on her best china. "One for you and one for your mother," she smiled. "Don't forget to return the plate!"

When he got home, Tim's mother was there before him. She held a letter in her hand and she was crying. But she was laughing too.

She knelt and hugged him close. "Tim, the most wonderful news! Your dad is going to be all right, he'll be home by spring! He was waiting to hear what the doctors said, that's why his letter was so late. Oh, Tim, we'll be the happiest. . . ." She noticed the plate in his hand. "What have you got there?"

"A present for both of us from Miss Mary," Tim said.

"How very kind of her! This surely is your day," Tim's mother said. "You can have my piece, too, with your supper."

Scrubbed, fed, into pajamas and swathed in fleecy bathrobe, Tim was sitting close to his mother in the hour before bedtime, absorbed in her reading of a sea fight near the Spanish Main. Hers was a specially dramatic rendering, with gestures.

"You're the world's greatest artist," Tim said as he watched.

She ruffled his hair. "Get along with you, Timmy Shea! I do believe you're the world's greatest little kidder."

"Mr. Burford said you were the world's greatest."

"Did he, indeed! You know, I used to like your friend—until today. Wonder what made him get so fresh?"

"He wasn't fresh, he was just asking," Tim said. "He needs some glamorous legs to paint, so that good old George will like his five-hundred-dollar ulcer."

"Oh?" Tim's mother put the book aside; she stretched out her toes, smiled down at her long, smooth legs. Suddenly she chuckled. "I'll be right back," she said.

She went into her bedroom. She was wearing a swim suit when she came out again, and a pair of mules as soft as little clouds. She caught up an old camel's-hair coat.

"Come on, chaperon," she said. "Let's share the wealth. Let's give Mr. Burford a great big surprise!"

An hour later, with crumpled drawings strewn around, Mr. Burford was still surprised. "I really think I've got it licked," he said. "Would you mind if I tried one more drawing?"

"I wouldn't mind if you tried two," Tim's mother said. She lay stretched on a rug on the dais under the lights, utterly still and relaxed. Somewhere in a corner Satchmo's horn was making muted music; one of the cats slept purring across her stomach.

Tim looked at his mother. "That's warmer than sitting on a piece of ice," he said.

"Especially with Norman Rockwell in my lap. Or is it Picasso? What a delicious thought! All I need now is for Gat Gunsten to use his handsome, fat head." She laughed at the question in Mr. Burford's face. "Gat is the hero of my current opus, and a more noble, stubborn private eye you've never met. He's managed to get into the clutches of a fiendish murderer, and I can't think what he can do to save himself."

"Why doesn't he yell for Mr. McConkey?" Tim asked, wide-eyed.

She turned to him in amazement. "Lord, yes; the cops! It's time they complicated the plot. Darling, you're not only a chaperon, you're a genius!"

"Aw." Tim turned to Mr. Burford. "When will you have your ulcer done?"

"I'll work all night," said Mr. Burford cheerily. "I'm in the groove, the greatest artist in the world. Come up in the morning and you'll see!"

When Tim went in next morning, Mr. Burford was putting the last touches to his work. Tim thought the legs looked nice now, like his mother's. He said, "The lady looks fine."

"You can say that again!" said Mr. Burford. "You'd think she was painted by Norman Rockwell."

Tim looked at the Siamese cats on the couch. "And Picasso?"

"Perhaps in his blue period," Mr. Burford conceded.

Footsteps drummed on the stairs, the door crashed open, good old George came charging in. "Where is he? Where's that genius of an adman?" He spotted Tim. "You're the lad I want to see. You really buttoned up the bird for me, you put me in orbit!"

"I did?" Tim said.

George slapped Mr. Burford's back. "The deal went over like an I.C.B.M. Just a sharp, clean photo, full color, with the name in central focus—Carmer's Canned Beef. No other words. Remember what Tim said about the picture of his rocket, why it needed no label? Same with Carmer's; everybody knows what it is, we've already said what it is!" George turned to Tim. "So help me, I should be in the office this minute, but I had to run down to pay your salary. Didn't know what you really wanted, had an idea, though, when I saw you eying those paint pots." He held out a gift-wrapped parcel. "So I got this in the hardware on the corner. And this goes with it." He produced a pad of creamiest water-color paper. "From me to you," George said. "Go on, open it!"

Tim carefully undid the gift-wrapped parcel. He opened the black box and stared at the colors.

"Now you've got it, what are you going to do? I want to hear this," George said. "You could come up with another million-dollar idea."

They whirled before Tim's fascinated gaze, all the things he now could paint; they came before him in a shimmering blur that danced up to the sky.

Tim sighed with bliss. He said, "I'm going to proliferate like Miss Mary's tattooing."

THE END

