

# NANNY

**Philip K. Dick**

"WHEN I look back," Mary Fields said, "I marvel that we ever could have grown up without a Nanny to take care of us."

There was no doubt that Nanny had changed the whole life of the Fields's house since she had come. From the time the children opened their eyes in the morning to their last sleepy nod at night, Nanny was in there with them, watching them, hovering about them, seeing that all their wants were taken care of.

Mr. Fields knew, when he went to the office, that his kids were safe, perfectly safe. And Mary was relieved of a countless procession of chores and worries. She did not have to wake the children up, dress them, see that they were washed, ate their meals, or anything else. She did not even have to take them to school. And after school, if they did not come right home, she did not have to pace back and forth in anxiety, worried that something had happened to them.

Not that Nanny spoiled them, of course. When they demanded something absurd or harmful (a whole storeful of candy, or a policeman's motorcycle) Nanny's will was like iron. Like a good shepherd she knew when to refuse the flock its wishes.

Both children loved her. Once, when Nanny had to be sent to the repair shop, they cried and cried without stopping. Neither their mother nor their father could console them. But at last Nanny was back again, and everything was all right. And just in time! Mrs. Fields was exhausted.

"Lord," she said, throwing herself down. "What would we do without her?"

Mr. Fields looked up. "Without who?"

"Without Nanny."

"Heaven only knows," Mr. Fields said. After Nanny had aroused the children from sleep—by emitting a soft, musical whirr a few feet from their heads—she made certain that they were dressed and down at the breakfast table promptly, with faces clean and dispositions unclouded. If they were cross Nanny allowed them the pleasure of riding downstairs on her back.

Coveted pleasure! Almost like a roller coaster, with Bobby and Jean hanging on for dear life and Nanny flowing down step by step in the funny rolling way she had.

Nanny did not prepare breakfast, of course. That was all done by the kitchen. But she remained to see that the children ate properly and then, when breakfast was over, she supervised their preparations for school. And after they had got their books together and were all brushed and neat, her most important job: seeing that they were safe on the busy streets.

There were many hazards in the city, quite enough to keep Nanny watchful. The swift rocket cruisers that swept along, carrying businessmen to work. The time a bully had tried to hurt Bobby. One quick push from Nanny's starboard grapple and away he went, howling for all he was worth. And the time a drunk started talking to Jean, with heaven knows *what* in mind. Nanny tipped him into the gutter with one nudge of her powerful metal side.

Sometimes the children would linger in front of a store. Nanny would have to prod them gently, urging them on. Or if (as sometimes happened) the children were late to school, Nanny would put them on her back and fairly speed along the sidewalk, her treads buzzing and flapping at a great rate.

After school Nanny was with them constantly, supervising their play, watching over them, protecting them, and at last, when it began to get dark and late, dragging them away from their games and turned in the direction of home.

Sure enough, just as dinner was being set on the table, there was Nanny, herding Bobby and Jean in through the front door, clicking and whirring admonishingly at them. Just in time for dinner! A quick run to the bathroom to wash their faces and hands.

And at night—

Mrs. Fields was silent, frowning just a little. At night . . . "Tom?" she said.

Her husband looked up from his paper. "What?"

"I've been meaning to talk to you about something. It's very odd, something I don't understand. Of course, I don't know anything about mechanical things. But Tom, at night when we're all asleep and the house is quiet, Nanny—"

There was a sound.

"Mommy!" Jean and Bobby came scampering into the living room, their faces flushed with pleasure. "Mommy, we raced Nanny all the way home, and we won!"

"We won," Bobby said. "We beat her."

"We ran a lot faster than she did," Jean said.

"Where is Nanny, children?" Mrs. Fields asked.

"She's coming. Hello, Daddy."

"Hello, kids," Tom Fields said. He cocked his head to one side, listening. From the front porch came an odd scraping sound, an unusual whirr and scrape. He smiled.

"That's Nanny," Bobby said.

And into the room came Nanny.

Mr. Fields watched her. She had always intrigued him. The only sound in the room was her metal treads, scraping against the hardwood floor, a peculiar rhythmic sound. Nanny came to a halt in front of him, stopping a few feet away. Two unwinking photocell eyes appraised him, eyes on flexible wire stalks. The stalks moved speculatively, weaving slightly. Then they withdrew.

Nanny was built in the shape of a sphere, a large metal sphere, flattened on the bottom. Her surface had been sprayed with a dull green enamel, which had become chipped and gouged through wear. There was not much visible in addition to the eye stalks. The treads could not be seen. On each side of the hull was the outline of a door. From these the magnetic grapples came, when they were needed. The front of the hull came to a

point, and there the metal was reinforced. The extra plates welded both fore and aft made her look almost like a weapon of war. A tank of some land. Or a ship, a rounded metal ship that had come up on land. Or like an insect. A sowbug, as they are called.

"Come on!" Bobby shouted.

Abruptly Nanny moved, spinning slightly as her treads gripped the floor and turned her around. One of her side doors opened. A long metal rod shot out. Playfully, Nanny caught Bobby's arm with her grapple and drew him to her. She perched him on her back. Bobby's legs straddled the metal hull. He kicked with his heels excitedly, jumping up and down.

"Race you around the block!" Jean shouted. "Giddup!" Bobby cried. Nanny moved away, out of the room with him. A great round bug of whirring metal and relays, clicking photocells and tubes. Jean ran beside her. There was silence. The parents were alone again. "Isn't she amazing?" Mrs. Fields said. "Of course, robots are a common sight these days. Certainly more so than a few years ago. You see them everywhere you go, behind counters in stores, driving buses, digging ditches—"

"But Nanny is different," Tom Fields murmured.

"She's—she's not like a machine. She's like a person. A living person. But after all, she's much more complex than any other kind. She has to be. They say she's even more intricate than the kitchen."

"We certainly paid enough for her," Tom said.

"Yes," Mary Fields murmured. "She's very much like a living creature." There was a strange note in her voice. "Very much so."

"She sure takes care of the kids," Tom said, returning to his newspaper.

"But I'm worried." Mary put her coffee cup down, frowning. They were eating dinner. It was late. The two children had been sent up to bed. Mary touched her mouth with her napkin. "Tom, I'm worried. I wish you'd listen to me."

Tom Fields blinked. "Worried? What about?"

"About her. About Nanny."

"Why?"

"I—I don't know."

"You mean we're going to have to repair her again? We just got through fixing her. What is it this time? If those kids didn't get her to—"

"It's not that." "What, then?"

For a long time his wife did not answer. Abruptly she got up from the table and walked across the room to the stairs. She peered up, staring into the darkness. Tom watched her, puzzled.

"What's the matter?"

"I want to be sure she can't hear us."

"She? Nanny?"

Mary came toward him. "Tom, I woke up last night again. Because of the sounds. I heard them again, the same sounds, the sounds I heard before. And you told me it didn't mean anything!"

Tom gestured. "It doesn't. What does it mean?"

"I don't know. That's what worries me. But after we're all asleep she comes downstairs. She leaves their room. She slips down the stairs as quietly as she can, as soon as she's sure we're all asleep."

"But why?"

"I don't know! Last night I heard her going down, slithering down the stairs, as quiet as a mouse. I heard her moving around down here. And then—"

"Then what?"

"Tom, then I heard her go out the back door. Out, outside the house. She went into the back yard. That was all I heard for awhile."

Tom rubbed his jaw. "Go on."

"I listened. I sat up in bed. You were asleep, of course. Sound asleep. No use trying to wake you. I got up and went to the window. I lifted the shade and looked out. She was out there, out in the back yard."

"What was she doing?"

"I don't know." Mary Fields's face was lined with worry. "I don't know! What in the world *would* a Nanny be doing outside at night, in the back yard?"

It was dark. Terribly dark. But the infrared filter clicked into place, and the darkness vanished. The metal shape moved forward, easing through the kitchen, its treads half-retracted for greatest quiet. It came to the back door and halted, listening.

There was no sound. The house was still. They were all asleep upstairs. Sound asleep.

The Nanny pushed, and the back door opened. It moved out onto the porch, letting the door close gently behind it. The night air was thin and cold. And full of smells, all the strange, tingling smells of the night, when spring has begun to change into summer, when the ground is still moist and the hot July sun has not had a chance to kill all the little growing things.

The Nanny went down the steps, onto the cement path. Then it moved cautiously onto the lawn, the wet blades of grass slapping its sides. After a time it stopped, rising up on its back treads. Its front part jutted up into the air. Its eye stalks stretched, rigid and taut, waving very slightly. Then it settled back down and continued its motion forward.

It was just going around the peach tree, coming back toward the house, when the noise came.

It stopped instantly, alert. Its side doors fell away and its grapples ran out their full lengths, lithe and wary. On the other side of the board fence, beyond the row of shasta daisies, something had stirred. The Nanny peered, clicking filters rapidly. Only a few faint stars winked in the sky overhead. But it saw, and that was enough.

On the other side of the fence a second Nanny was moving, making its way softly through the flowers, coming toward the fence. It was trying to make as little noise as possible. Both Nannies stopped, suddenly unmoving, regarding each other—the green Nanny waiting in its own yard, the blue prowler that had been coming toward the fence.

The blue prowler was a larger Nanny, built to manage two young boys. Its sides were dented and warped from use, but its grapples were still strong and powerful. In addition to the usual reinforced plates across its

nose there was a gouge of tough steel, a jutting jaw that was already sliding into position, ready and able.

Mecho-Products, its manufacturer, had lavished attention on this jaw-construction. It was their trademark, their unique feature. Their ads, their brochures, stressed the massive frontal scoop mounted on all their models. And there was an optional assist: a cutting edge, power-driven, that at extra cost could easily be installed in their "Luxury-line" models.

This blue Nanny was so equipped.

Moving cautiously ahead, the blue Nanny reached the fence. It stopped and carefully inspected the boards. They were thin and rotted, put up a long time ago. It pushed its hard head against the wood. The fence gave, splintering and ripping. At once the green Nanny rose on its back treads, its grapples leaping out. A fierce joy filled it, a bursting excitement. The wild frenzy of battle.

The two closed, rolling silently on the ground, their grapples locked. Neither made any noise, the blue Mecho-Products Nanny nor the smaller, lighter, pale-green Service Industries, Inc., Nanny. On and on they fought, hugged tightly together, the great jaw trying to push underneath, into the soft treads. And the green Nanny trying to hook its metal point into the eyes that gleamed fitfully against its side. The green Nanny had the disadvantage of being a medium-priced model; it was outclassed and outweighed. But it fought grimly, furiously.

On and on they struggled, rolling in the wet soil. Without sound of any kind. Performing the wrathful, ultimate task for which each had been designed.

"I can't imagine," Mary Fields murmured, shaking her head. "I just don't know."

"Do you suppose some animal did it?" Tom conjectured. "Are there any big dogs in the neighborhood?"

"No. There was a big red Irish setter, but they moved away, to the country. That was Mr. Petty's dog."

The two of them watched, troubled and disturbed. Nanny lay at rest by the bathroom door, watching Bobby to make sure he brushed his teeth. The green hull was twisted and bent. One eye had been shattered, the glass knocked out, splintered. One grapple no longer retracted completely; it

hung forlornly out of its little door, dragging uselessly.

"I just don't understand," Mary repeated. "I'll call the repair place and see what they say. Tom, it must have happened sometime during the night. While we were asleep. The noises I heard—"

"Shhh," Tom muttered warningly. Nanny was coming toward them, away from the bathroom. Clicking and whirring raggedly, she passed them, a limping green tub of metal that emitted an unrhythmic, grating sound. Tom and Mary Fields unhappily watched her as she lumbered slowly into the living room. "I wonder," Mary murmured.

"Wonder what?"

"I wonder if this will happen again." She glanced up suddenly at her husband, eyes full of worry. "You know how the children love her . . . and they need her so. They just wouldn't be safe without her. Would they?"

"Maybe it won't happen again," Tom said soothingly. "Maybe it was an accident." But he didn't believe it; he knew better. What had happened was no accident.

From the garage he backed his surface cruiser, maneuvered it until its loading entrance was locked against the rear door of the house. It took only a moment to load the sagging, dented Nanny inside; within ten minutes he was on his way across town to the repair and maintenance department of Service Industries, Inc.

The serviceman, in grease-stained white overalls, met him at the entrance. "Troubles?" he asked wearily; behind him, in the depths of the block-long building, stood rows of battered Nannies, in various stages of disassembly. "What seems to be the matter this time?"

Tom said nothing. He ordered the Nanny out of the cruiser and waited while the serviceman examined it for himself.

Shaking his head, the serviceman crawled to his feet and wiped grease from his hands. "That's going to run into money," he said. "The whole neural transmission's out."

His throat dry, Tom demanded: "Ever seen anything like this before? It didn't break; you know that. It was demolished."

"Sure," the serviceman agreed tonelessly. "It pretty much got taken

down a peg. On the basis of those missing chunks—" He indicated the dented anterior hull-sections. "I'd guess it was one of Mecho's new jaw-models."

Tom Fields's blood stopped moving in his veins. "Then this isn't new to you," he said softly, his chest constricting. "This goes on all the time."

"Well, Mecho just put out that jaw-model. It's not half bad . . . costs about twice what this model ran. Of course," the serviceman added thoughtfully, "we have an equivalent. We can match their best, and for less money."

Keeping his voice as calm as possible, Tom said: "I want this one fixed. I'm not getting another."

"I'll do what I can. But it won't be the same as it was. The damage goes pretty deep. I'd advise you to trade it in—you can get damn near what you paid. With the new models coming out in a month or so, the salesmen are eager as hell to—"

"Let me get this straight." Shakily, Tom Fields lit up a cigarette. "You people really don't want to fix these, do you? You want to sell brand-new ones, when these break down." He eyed the repairman intently. "Break down, or are knocked down."

The repairman shrugged. "It seems like a waste of time to fix it up. It's going to get finished off, anyhow, soon." He kicked the misshapen green hull with his boot. "This model is around three years old. Mister, it's obsolete."

"Fix it up," Tom grated. He was beginning to see the whole picture; his self-control was about to snap. "I'm not getting a new one! I want this one fixed!"

"Sure," the serviceman said, resigned. He began making out a work-order sheet. "We'll do our best. But don't expect miracles."

While Tom Fields was jerkily signing his name to the sheet, two more damaged Nannies were brought into the repair building.

"When can I get it back?" he demanded.

"It'll take a couple of days," the mechanic said, nodding toward the rows of semi-repaired Nannies behind him. "As you can see," he added

leisurely, "we're pretty well full-up."

"I'll wait," Tom said tautly. "Even if it takes a month."

"Let's go to the park!" Jean cried.

So they went to the park.

It was a lovely day, with the sun shining down hotly and the grass and flowers blowing in the wind. The two children strolled along the gravel path, breathing the warm-scented air, taking deep breaths and holding the presence of roses and hydrangeas and orange blossoms inside them as long as possible. They passed through a swaying grove of dark, rich cedars. The ground was soft with mold underfoot, the velvet, moist fur of a living world beneath their feet. Beyond the cedars, where the sun returned and the blue sky flashed back into being, a great green lawn stretched out.

Behind them Nanny came, trudging slowly, her treads clicking noisily. The dragging grapple had been repaired, and a new optic unit had been installed in place of the damaged one. But the smooth coordination of the old days was lacking; and the clean-cut lines of her hull had not been restored. Occasionally she halted, and the two children halted, too, waiting impatiently for her to catch up with them.

"What's the matter, Nanny?" Bobby asked her.

"Something's wrong with her," Jean complained. "She's been all funny since last Wednesday. Real slow and funny. And she was gone, for awhile."

"She was in the repair shop," Bobby announced. "I guess she got sort of tired. She's old, Daddy says. I heard him and Mommy talking."

A little sadly they continued on, with Nanny painfully following. Now they had come to benches placed here and there on the lawn, with people languidly dozing in the sun. On the grass lay a young man, a newspaper over his face, his coat rolled up under his head. They crossed carefully around him, so as not to step on him.

"There's the lake!" Jean shouted, her spirits returning.

The great field of grass sloped gradually down, lower and lower. At the far end, the lowest end, lay a path, a gravel trail, and beyond that, a blue lake. The two children scampered excitedly, filled with anticipation. They hurried faster and faster down the carefully-graded slope, Nanny

struggling miserably to keep up with them.

"The lake!"

"Last one there's a dead Martian stinko-bug!"

Breathlessly, they rushed across the path, onto the tiny strip of green bank against which the water lapped. Bobby threw himself down on his hands and knees, laughing and panting and peering down into the water. Jean settled down beside him, smoothing her dress tidily into place. Deep in the cloudy-blue water some tadpoles and minnows moved, minute artificial fish too small to catch.

At one end of the lake some children were floating boats with flapping white sails. At a bench a fat man sat laboriously reading a book, a pipe jammed in his mouth. A young man and woman strolled along the edge of the lake together, arm in arm, intent on each other, oblivious of the world around them.

"I wish we had a boat," Bobby said wistfully.

Grinding and clashing, Nanny managed to make her way across the path and up to them. She stopped, settling down, retracting her treads. She did not stir. One eye, the good eye, reflected the sunlight. The other had not been synchronized; it gaped with futile emptiness. She had managed to shift most of her weight on her less-damaged side, but her motion was bad and uneven, and slow. There was a smell about her, an odor of burning oil and friction.

Jean studied her. Finally she patted the bent green side sympathetically. "Poor Nanny! What did you do, Nanny? What happened to you? Were you in a wreck?"

"Let's push Nanny in," Bobby said lazily. "And see if she can swim. Can a Nanny swim?"

Jean said no, because she was too heavy. She would sink to the bottom and they would never see her again.

"Then we won't push her in," Bobby agreed.

For a time there was silence. Overhead a few birds fluttered past, plump specks streaking swiftly across the sky. A small boy on a bicycle came riding hesitantly along the gravel path, his front wheel wobbling.

"I wish I had a bicycle," Bobby murmured.

The boy careened on past. Across the lake the fat man stood up and knocked his pipe against the bench. He closed his book and sauntered off along the path, wiping his perspiring forehead with a vast red handkerchief.

"What happens to Nannies when they get old?" Bobby asked wonderingly. "What do they do? Where do they go?"

"They go to heaven." Jean lovingly thumped the green dented hull with her hand. "Just like everybody else."

"Are Nannies born? Were there always Nannies?" Bobby had begun to conjecture on ultimate cosmic mysteries. "Maybe there was a time before there were Nannies. I wonder what the world was like in the days before Nannies lived."

"Of course there were always Nannies," Jean said impatiently. "If there weren't, where did they come from?"

Bobby couldn't answer that. He meditated for a time, but presently he became sleepy . . . he was really too young to solve such problems. His eyelids became heavy and he yawned. Both he and Jean lay on the warm grass by the edge of the lake, watching the sky and the clouds, listening to the wind moving through the grove of cedar trees. Beside them the battered green Nanny rested and recuperated her meager strength.

A little girl came slowly across the field of grass, a pretty child in a blue dress with a bright ribbon in her long dark hair. She was coming toward the lake.

"Look," Jean said. "There's Phyllis Casworthy. She has an *orange* Nanny."

They watched, interested. "Who ever heard of an orange Nanny?" Bobby said, disgusted. The girl and her Nanny crossed the path a short distance down, and reached the edge of the lake. She and her orange Nanny halted, gazing around at the water and the white sails of toy boats, the mechanical fish.

"Her Nanny is bigger than ours," Jean observed.

"That's true," Bobby admitted. He thumped the green side loyally. "But

ours is nicer. Isn't she?"

Their Nanny did not move. Surprised, he turned to look. The green Nanny stood rigid, taut. Its better eye stalk was far out, staring at the orange Nanny fixedly, unwinkingly.

"What's the matter?" Bobby asked uncomfortably.

"Nanny, what's the matter?" Jean echoed.

The green Nanny whirred, as its gears meshed. Its treads dropped and locked into place with a sharp metallic snap. Slowly its doors retracted and its grapples slithered out.

"Nanny, what are you doing?" Jean scrambled nervously to her feet. Bobby leaped up, too. "Nanny! What's going on?"

"Let's go." Jean said, frightened. "Let's go home."

"Come on, Nanny," Bobby ordered. "We're going home, now."

The green Nanny moved away from them; it was totally unaware of their existence. Down the lake-side the other Nanny, the great orange Nanny, detached itself from the little girl and began to flow.

"Nanny, you come back!" the little girl's voice came, shrill and apprehensive.

Jean and Bobby rushed up the sloping lawn, away from the lake. "She'll come!" Bobby said. "Nanny! Please come!"

But the Nanny did not come.

The orange Nanny neared. It was huge, much more immense than the blue Mecho jaw-model that had come into the back yard that night. That one now lay scattered in pieces on the far side of the fence, hull ripped open, its parts strewn everywhere.

This Nanny was the largest the green Nanny had ever seen. The green Nanny moved awkwardly to meet it, raising its grapples and preparing its internal shields. But the orange Nanny was unbending a. square arm of metal, mounted on a long cable. The metal arm whipped out, rising high in the air. It began to whirl in a circle, gathering ominous velocity, faster and faster.

The green Nanny hesitated. It retreated, moving uncertainly away from the swinging mace of metal. And as it rested warily, unhappily, trying to make up its mind, the other leaped.

"Nanny!" Jean screamed.

"Nanny! Nanny!"

The two metal bodies rolled furiously in the grass, fighting and struggling desperately. Again and again the metal mace came, bashing wildly into the green side. The warm sun shone benignly down on them. The surface of the lake eddied gently in the wind.

"Nanny!" Bobby screamed, helplessly jumping up and down.

But there was no response from the frenzied, twisting mass of crashing orange and green.

"What are you going to do?" Mary Fields asked, tight-lipped and pale.

"You stay here." Tom grabbed up his coat and threw it on; he yanked his hat down from the closet shelf and strode toward the front door.

"Where are you going?"

"Is the cruiser out front?" Tom pulled open the front door and made his way out onto the porch. The two children, miserable and trembling, watched him fearfully.

"Yes," Mary murmured, "it's out front. But where—"

Tom turned abruptly to the children. "You're sure she's—*dead*?"

Bobby nodded. His face was streaked with grimy tears. "Pieces ... all over the lawn."

Tom nodded grimly. "I'll be right back. And don't worry at all. You three stay here."

He strode down the front steps, down the walk, to the parked cruiser. A moment later they heard him drive furiously away.

He had to go to several agencies before he found what he wanted. Service Industries had nothing he could use; he was through with them. It was at Allied Domestic that he saw exactly what he was looking for, displayed in their luxurious, well-lighted window. They were just closing,

but the clerk let him inside when he saw the expression on his face.

"I'll take it," Tom said, reaching into his coat for his checkbook.

"Which one, sir?" the clerk faltered.

"The big one. The big black one in the window. With the four arms and the ram in front."

The clerk beamed, his face aglow with pleasure. "Yes sir!" he cried, whipping out his order pad. "The Emperor Delux, with power-beam focus. Did you want the optional high-velocity grapple-lock and the remote-control feedback? At moderate cost, we can equip her with a visual report screen; you can follow the situation from the comfort of your own living room."

"The situation?" Tom said thickly.

"As she goes into action." The clerk began writing rapidly. "And I mean *action*—this model warms up and closes in on its adversary within fifteen seconds of the time its activated. You can't find faster reaction in any single-unit models, ours or anybody else's. Six months ago, they said fifteen second closing was a pipe dream." The clerk laughed excitedly. "But science strides on."

A strange cold numbness settled over Tom Fields. "Listen," he said hoarsely. Grabbing the clerk by the lapel he yanked him closer. The order pad fluttered away; the clerk gulped with surprise and fright. "Listen to me," Tom grated, "you're building these things bigger all the time— *aren't you?* Every year, new models, new weapons. You and all the other companies—building them with improved equipment to destroy each other."

"Oh," the clerk squeaked indignantly, "Allied Domestic's models are *never* destroyed. Banged up a little now and then, perhaps, but you show me one of our models that's been put out of commission." With dignity, he retrieved his order pad and smoothed down his coat. "No, sir," he said emphatically, "our models survive. Why, I saw a seven-year-old Allied running around, an old Model 3-S. Dented a bit, perhaps, but plenty of fire left. I'd like to see one of those cheap Protecto-Corp. models try to tangle with *that*."

Controlling himself with an effort, Tom asked: "But why? What's it all for? What's the purpose in this—competition between them?"

The clerk hesitated. Uncertainly, he began again with his order pad. "Yes sir," he said. "Competition; you put your finger right on it. Successful competition, to be exact. Allied Domestic doesn't meet competition—it *demolishes* it."

It took a second for Tom Fields to react. Then understanding came. "I see," he said. "In other words, every year these things are obsolete. No good, not large enough. Not powerful enough. And if they're not replaced, if I don't get a new one, a more advanced model—"

"Your present Nanny was, ah, the loser?" The clerk smiled knowingly. "Your present model was, perhaps, slightly anachronistic? It failed to meet present-day standards of competition? It, ah, failed to come out at the end of the day?"

"It never came home," Tom said thickly.

"Yes, it was demolished . . . I fully understand. Very common. You see, sir, you don't have a choice. It's nobody's fault, sir. Don't blame us; don't blame Allied Domestic."

"But," Tom said harshly, "when one is destroyed, that means you sell another one. That means a sale for you. Money in the cash register."

"True. But we all have to meet contemporary standards of excellence. We can't let ourselves fall behind . . . as you saw, sir, if you don't mind my saying so, you saw the unfortunate consequences of falling behind."

"Yes," Tom agreed, in an almost inaudible voice. "They told me not to have her repaired. They said I should replace her."

The clerk's confident, smugly-beaming face seemed to expand. Like a miniature sun, it glowed happily, exaltedly. "But now you're all set up, sir. With this model you're right up there in the front. Your worries are over, Mr. . . ." He halted expectantly. "Your name, sir? To whom shall I make out this purchase order?"

Bobby and Jean watched with fascination as the delivery men lugged the enormous crate into the living room. Grunting and sweating, they set it down and straightened gratefully up.

"All right," Tom said crisply. "Thanks."

"Not at all, mister." The delivery men stalked out, noisily closing the

door after them.

"Daddy, what is it?" Jean whispered. The two children came cautiously around the crate, wide-eyed and awed.

"You'll see in a minute."

"Tom, it's past their bedtime," Mary protested. "Can't they look at it tomorrow?"

"I want them to look at it *now*." Tom disappeared downstairs into the basement and returned with a screwdriver. Kneeling on the floor beside the crate he began rapidly unscrewing the bolts that held it together. "They can go to bed a little late, for once."

He removed the boards, one by one, working expertly and calmly. At last the final board was gone, propped up : against the wall with the others. He unclipped the book of instructions and the 90-day warranty and handed them to Mary. "Hold onto these."

"It's a Nanny!" Bobby cried.

"It's a huge, huge Nanny!"

In the crate the great black shape lay quietly, like an enormous metal tortoise, encased in a coating of grease. Carefully checked, oiled, and fully guaranteed. Tom nodded. "That's right. It's a Nanny, a new Nanny. To take the place of the old one."

"For *us*?"

"Yes." Tom sat down in a nearby chair and lit a cigarette. "Tomorrow morning we'll turn her on and warm her up. See how she runs."

The children's eyes were like saucers. Neither of them could breathe or speak.

"But this time," Mary said, "you must stay away from the park. Don't take her near the park. You hear?"

"No," Tom contradicted. "They can go in the park."

Mary glanced uncertainly at him. "But that orange thing might—"

Tom smiled grimly. "It's fine with me if they go into the park." He leaned toward Bobby and Jean. "You kids go into the park any time you

want. And don't be afraid of anything. Of anything or anyone. Remember that."

He kicked the end of the massive crate with his toe.

"There isn't anything in the world you have to be afraid of. Not anymore."

Bobby and Jean nodded, still gazing fixedly into the crate.

"All right, Daddy," Jean breathed.

"Boy, look at her!" Bobby whispered. "Just look at her! I can hardly wait till tomorrow!"

Mrs. Andrew Casworthy greeted her husband on the front steps of their attractive three-story house, wringing her hands anxiously.

"What's the matter?" Casworthy grunted, taking off his hat. With his pocket handkerchief he wiped sweat from his florid face. "Lord, it was hot today. What's wrong? What is it?"

"Andrew, I'm afraid—"

"What the hell happened?"

"Phyllis came home from the park today without her Nanny. She was bent and scratched yesterday when Phyllis brought her home, and Phyllis is so upset I can't make out—"

*"Without her Nanny?"*

"She came home alone. By herself. All alone."

Slow rage suffused the man's heavy features. "What happened?"

"Something in the park, like yesterday. Something attacked her Nanny. Destroyed her! I can't get the story exactly straight, but something black, something huge and black . . . it must have been another Nanny."

Casworthy's jaw slowly jutted out. His thickset face turned ugly dark red, a deep unwholesome flush that rose ominously and settled in place. Abruptly, he turned on his heel.

"Where are you going?" his wife fluttered nervously.

The paunchy, red-faced man stalked rapidly down the walk toward his sleek surface cruiser, already reaching for the door handle.

"I'm going to shop for another Nanny," he muttered. "The best damn Nanny I can get. Even if I have to go to a hundred stores. I want the best—and the biggest."

"But, dear," his wife began, hurrying apprehensively after him, "can we really afford it?" Wringing her hands together anxiously, she raced on: "I mean, wouldn't it be better to wait? Until you've had time to think it over, perhaps. Maybe later on, when you're a little more—calm."

But Andrew Casworthy wasn't listening. Already the surface cruiser boiled with quick, eager life, ready to leap forward. "Nobody's going to get ahead of me," he said grimly, his heavy lips twitching. "I'll show them, all of them. Even if I have to get a new size designed. Even if I have to get one of those manufacturers to turn out a new model for me!"

And, oddly, he knew one of them would.

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