

There was once an accountant who lived in a small house in a new part of the city. He lived with his wife and three daughters. He loved them dearly, and they him. His one fear in life was that a machine would come to do his job.

"What will happen?" he would ask his wife by the fireside, "when the machines come? They will add the figures I add, and make the entries I make, and much faster, much faster than I. Nor do they take holidays, or get sick.

"You do not get sick," his wife replied, "you haven't had one day off work in fifteen years, not since our youngest was born."

"But I take holidays," he replied, "and the machines do not."

"Don't worry," said his wife, "we'll manage."

But the accountant was disturbed, and nothing could stop his fear. ~~It made it~~ ^{He} began to eat less, and drink more, and spend hours staring at the situations vacant pages of the papers. "How could I manage a casual job?" he wondered. "What will we live on?"

His daughters laughed at him when they heard him talking of his fears. The eldest was about to marry, and her husband-to-be designed computers. The second daughter did not like her father as much as she pretended to, and gave no thought for her future. The youngest daughter only wanted to gather flowers and sit by the water, and she laughed at her father because she

Let not understand.

The day came when the machines arrived, in the evening, the accountant came home, and when the family had finished eating, he addressed them all, saying,

"Dear wife, and children, the machines have come to my work, and there is no longer any value in what I can do. Tomorrow, I will stay home, for there is no work for me to do any more, ever again."

"Nonsense," said his eldest daughter, "You can learn to programme computers, like the man I am going to marry."

"Stupid father" said his second daughter, "you've worried for all these years, — you've said that the machines are coming, and now that ~~if~~ they have come, you are none the wiser."

"What will you do if you cannot work?" asked the youngest daughter. "There must be other things that are dear to you, father."

But the accountant sat there with his chin on his knuckles, contemplating tomorrow when there would be no work.

"Help me wash up" said his wife, "we'll work something out, — tomorrow. You can grow vegetables in the back garden, perhaps."

That night, the accountant lay in the big bed beside his wife, and did not sleep. All around him he could hear the breathing of unworried women.

"I do not to be taken care of" he said to himself.

"I do not want to learn to programme computers. I do not like machines." He thought also: "Why should I like machines? They have taken away my soul."

Towards dawn, when the street lights went out, he said to himself: "My eldest gets married tomorrow, and her husband the computer designer will take care of her. My second daughter does not really care for me, and her mother will take care of her. As for my youngest, nothing touches her dreams. Perhaps a year of ~~poverty~~ poverty will add steel to her dreams." And, he added "I most definitely do not intend to grow vegetables in the back garden."

He put on his holiday clothes, packed a small suitcase, and without a thought of how his wife would manage, ~~for~~ he left. ~~He~~

He knew not what he would do. After a week in the city, eating in restaurants and sleeping in hotels, he had no money and no peace, and no one to talk to, except

himself. He read of his daughters' marriage on the back page of the morning paper, and of his wife's death in their burning house on the front page of the evening paper. The other daughters, it said, were being cared for by their brother-in-law.

So the accountant sat on the park bench and thought.

"There is no-one," he thought, "to look after me. There is no-one for me to look after. I am free."

He wept. The birds and the derelicts and the lovers and the office-workers with their sandwiches watched him as he sat on the bench and wept. The sun went down, the office-workers left the park, and the derelicts, for it was getting cold. Still, the accountant sat on the bench, and wept without stopping.

It grew dark, the streetlights came on, and the accountant still could not leave the bench, as the tears would not stop welling out of his eyes. The police came in ^{covered} a truck, with a searchlight, and bundled him into the back, without a word.

He banged on the back of the cab.

"What law have I broken?" he howled.

"What law have I broken by being alone on a bench in a park?"

"You were crying" said the police. "You can't cry in public. Go home and cry on your wife's lap."

"My wife is dead," said the accountant, "and my daughters do not care for me."

"You left them" said the police, "We read about it in the papers. They say you set fire to your house and family and ran away. Crying in the park indeed!" and the police laughed.

The next morning, the accountant was brought to court. He was weeping no longer, but hungry and angry.

"You are accused of setting fire to your house and family" said the judge. "What have you to say?"

But the accountant said nothing. The accountant's daughter stepped into the witness box, and swore to tell the truth. "Is this man your father?" asked the judge. "He was my father," she

replied, but I am married now, and have a computer-degreer for my husband."

The accountant's second daughter took the oath, and the judge asked her, "Is this man your father?" "No," said the girl. "My father was an accountant and kept us all in a house together. I no longer have a house or a home, so how could I have a father?"

The youngest sister stepped into the witness box. The judge asked her as he had asked the other two, "Is this man your father?"

And the youngest girl replied:

"Yes, he is my father. One day he lost his job because the machine came to his work, and the next day he was gone. My mother cooked a big dinner hoping he would come home, but the fat got in the fire, and the house burned, and she burned too, waiting for him to come. He never came, but he is still my father. He did not burn down the house."

The judge turned to the accountant and asked him: "Do you have anything to say before you are sentenced by me?"

Then the accountant said: "~~One~~"
"That girl is my daughter, and we can look after each other. I am no longer angry about the machines."

"Then what are you angry about?" asked the judge. "If you cannot tell me, it will go badly for you, believe me."

But the accountant was silent, although his eyes flashed, and his eldest daughters knew not where to look.

Then the judge put on a red robe, and stood behind the bench, and looked at the accountant for a long time. At length, he spoke, and said:

"I sentence you to three years of solitude. One year is for leaving your family so that they became prey to accident and destruction. ~~One year is~~ The second year is for poverty of imagination.

And the third year is for crying in the park. Your youngest daughter can visit you for a day at the end of the first year and the second year. There is no remission for good behaviour, or for being angry. It is too late."

The accountant bowed his head, and was led away.

During the first year, he thought often of his wife, and how she died. Try as he could, he could not see the justice in the punishment for her death and the family's destruction. When his daughter came at the end of that year, she asked him: "Father, do you miss my mother?" And he answered, in anger: "No, I do not miss her. She could share my house and my bed, but she could not share my fears. A man is not a man, nor a woman a woman, who does not know fear. Yet I am angry at her still."

In the second year, he thought of what he might do when the time came to leave the prison. He found he no longer cared for figures and charts, and was in no way sorry that

The machines had come to his work. "They have not taken my soul," he reflected, "but ~~the~~ for now I can face my fear and my future." When his daughter came at the end of the second year, she smiled to see her father, for his head was no longer bowed. "Father," she asked him, "do you miss me?"

He was silent, but his eyes were shining.

"I will not come again," said the daughter. "I have had many thoughts myself this past year concerning you, my father. You are a good man, but I no longer need you, for I am grown like my sisters and want children of my own."

The accountant sat in the dark for the next year, and felt for most of that time that his life was at an end. "There is no-one to care for me, and no-one for me to care for," he reflected. "I am free."

And when the police opened the door of the prison at the end of the third year, he was free.

