

THE GREEN CHILDREN

#1

(revised)

by Stanley Lieber

Wake up.

Was it the dog?

What had he been dreaming about? Tried to fall back asleep. After a while it (sort of) worked. Fifteen minutes later and this time he was sure it was definitely the dog.

And now it was his back.

Gave up. Looked at the clock. Thirty minutes to reorient, okay. Decision point: piss and wake up his brother, or hold it inside until the urine poisoned his blood. Today he decided to stay put.

His pillow was lump. Awful.

Who was he kidding? It was all him.

Okay, messages. Mail server locked up again. Web console and reboot the VM. There we go.

Message from his dog.

Pale sunlight.

Voice from his school phone. Annoying, but better to know what he was in for later in the day.

Kitchen, somehow.

Wadded up the dog mats. Windex. Lysol. Fresh mats. Took the dogs outside. Let them back in. Fed them. He had nineteen dogs. Just kidding, there was only one dog. Let him back outside again or else he'd whine all through breakfast.

Put on a record.

He had forgot to light the incense. Kitchen smelled like dog piss. The whole flat smelled like dog piss.

Outside, the tornado approached.

He hated dog piss.

He liked to imagine what it would be like to have a brother. Having to be careful what he said about Mom and Dad. Having to pretend to care what someone else thought. They'd share his double bed because there wasn't enough room in the flat for anyone else to have their own room.

As it was, he was lucky to live in a flat with ground floor access. All the way up there. Most families weren't even allowed to leave the silo.

His hypothetical brother could come and go as he pleased. All access. Tommy liked the way his brother was able to grow his hair long, was allowed to pick out his own clothes. Not like the buzz cut and parka he was forced to model after their father.

They were twins, of course, but his brother was slightly older.

It made all the difference in the world.

The dog didn't mind.

It had belonged to their father. It was dead, now, but still it pissed wherever it liked. Tommy was left to clean up the mess.

Presently, Tommy found himself facing another morning.

There would be no point in arguing with the animal. Inferior reasoning skills. Therefore, Tommy bagged up the soiled pads and got on with his life. He issued a mental command to order new pads.

From time to time he wondered where the trash bags went. He would drag them down to the pallet at the end of their hallway, over to the freight elevator. But then what? Who came along to collect them? He'd never been able to catch them in the act, but obviously, *some* anonymous hero was removing the trash on a regular basis. It never had a chance to pile up.

Tommy surrendered to his ignorance.

His brother would probably know.

Bear could only watch in silent frustration as the green children went about their lives, wholly ignorant of his efforts to change them. The one with the long hair should really have known better. Before long, he'd have to talk to them face to face.

This brought up an interesting point. How much longer *should* Bear let them continue in ignorance? Bear could feel himself failing to live up to his own expectations. Each of the boys evinced a peculiar insularity, constitutionally (or otherwise) averse to outside stimulation. Bear would have thought that each boy would instinctively draw inspiration from some personal, deeply idiosyncratic view of the world. But not so. What Bear found instead was that each boy lacked any point of view at all. Nothing was inside either of them that he hadn't planted there himself. Dead flowers, already.

What a way to live.

In the end it scarcely mattered. Tommy and Peter did what children do.

They ignored him.