They were at their dinner that Wednesday night when the phone rang.

"Yeah," said Leon. "Yeah. Hold on a minute." He covered the mouthpiece and said to Danny, "It's for you. Somebody named Butch Harrison. Friend of yours from school?"

Danny shrugged. He had never heard of any Butch Harrison.

"You tell your friend Butch Harrison that suppertime is not when you go phoning people."

Danny nodded and took the phone. "Hello?"

"Is this Daniel Shapiro?"

"Uh-huh."

"This is Butch Harrison."

"Uh-huh?"

"Butch Harrison. From the Sky Rangers Airport."

"Uh-huh."

There was a moment's silence. Then Butch Harrison said irritably, "Look, is this Daniel Shapiro? In--what the hell is it?--Kellerfield, Pennsylvania?"

"Yes," said Danny. "That's me."

"The office gave me your letter. You said you wanted to talk to me."

"Oh, of course. Of course." The Sky Rangers Airport was one of a dozen or so small private airports in South Jersey to which Danny had written letters nearly a month ago, trying to confirm that somebody somewhere had picked up UFOs on radar some time in the early morning hours of April 7. None of them had bothered to answer. The events in Scofield, more recent and more dramatic, had driven that whole business out of his mind.

"Tell him you'll phone him back after dinner," Leon hissed. Anna gazed at him, frightened, unhappy, imploring. Danny held up his hand, palm toward his parents, as if to hold them off for just a moment or two. Some fifty miles away in New Jersey, at the Sky Rangers Airport, Butch Harrison drew in his breath impatiently.

"It's about those reports," Danny said, desperately trying to bring back the facts that were at his fingertips when he'd written all those letters. "That there were radar sightings of unknown objects after midnight last--last--uh, April seventh. And lights in the sky at the same time."

"Yeah, I know," said Butch Harrison. "You said so in your letter. I was up there. So was Pete Lucci. Don't know what the damn thing was, though. We couldn't catch up with it. Couldn't even get close."

"You went up in an airplane? After--whatever it was?" Danny saw that Leon was staring at him, a puzzled expression on his face. "It's somebody from the Sky Rangers Airport," he whispered, holding his palm as tightly as he could over the telephone's mouthpiece. "In New Jersey. By Sanford."

"Yeah, me and Pete Lucci. The people in the radar tower in the Camden airport wanted us to go up and take a look, so we did. Not that we saw anything, except for that light. It was in the papers, wasn't it? Pete told me it was."

"The papers had some reports. But they weren't very detailed. And the object was picked up on radar? At the Camden airport?"

"Yeah. And at the Air Force base too. Both of them were in contact with us, maybe for an hour, maybe more. Why do you keep asking? Is there some problem?"

"Camden airport has denied it," said Danny. He had been in Philadelphia the Saturday right after the sightings, which was the Saturday before Passover. He had used a pay phone in the library to call the radar tower at Philadelphia International Airport; and, just to make sure all bases were covered, the Camden airport as well.

"Denied it? They were on the radio with Pete and me for a goddam hour, and they denied it?"

Denied it, Danny thought; and hung up on me when I asked to speak with the people who were actually on duty that night. He remembered his letter from Darrell P. Whitmore, Major, USAF. "The Air Force has denied it too," he said.

"Sonofabitch," said Butch Harrison. "Sonofabitch."

Danny looked at his father and mother. Anna still looked scared and unhappy. But in Leon's face there was something new, something he had not seen before. Interest, perhaps? Curiosity? He could not concern himself with that now. "What did you say the other man's name was?" he said, reaching for a pencil and a used envelope on the kitchen sink. "Lucci, was it?"

"Yeah, Lucci. Pete Lucci. Listen, Mister Shapiro, I don't know who the hell you and your organization are. But if you're some government agency, I'm hanging up this phone right now."

"No, no," Danny assured him. "We don't have any connection with the government. We're a private research organization. Our concern is purely scientific."

"Scientific, huh?"

"Yes, scientific."

"Yeah? Well, then you need to hear our side of it. From Pete and me. And not go believing every cockamamy story those assholes in the radar tower want to tell you about us."

Danny could hardly believe what he was hearing. "When would be a good time for me to phone you? Talk with you and Mr. Lucci?" He looked at Leon, expecting to see his father's face contort with rage over the prospect of a long-distance phone bill. No, no, no! he was sure Leon would shout silently at him. But Leon shouted nothing. That strange new look--perhaps of curiosity, perhaps of something more akin to nostalgia--did not leave his face.

"Phone, hell. Come on out here to the Sky Rangers. We'll both be here all Saturday afternoon. There's a coffee shop. We'll sit there and talk, for as long as it takes."

"Come out there Saturday? I--I don't think I can."

"Why not? You busy? We'll make it another weekend."

"I don't have a car. I mean, I don't drive."

"You don't drive?"

"I mean--well, it's like--it's like this." Danny took a deep breath. He had no choice but to say it. "I'm fifteen years old."

There was a silence at the other end of the line. Danny felt the hot redness in his face, the sweat beginning to drip from his armpits. He wanted to hang up, leave the dinner table, go back to his schoolwork, forget he had ever heard of UFOs. He could only imagine the rebukes he had in store from Leon and Anna.

"Well, hell," said Butch Harrison. His tone was lighter now, and friendlier. "Why don't you see if you can find somebody to drive you?"

"To drive me? Well, I don't know--I don't think--" Jeff Stollard, he knew, would be sixteen later that month. Could he get his license quick enough that the two of them could drive down to the Sky Rangers Airport and talk to Harrison and Lucci, before the Philadelphia sightings had become ancient history? It seemed unlikely. Even if Jeff might have some interest in helping him investigate the sightings, which seemed even more unlikely.

"Danny," said Leon.

"Excuse me a second," Danny said into the telephone. He unhappily cupped his hand over the mouthpiece, and looked toward his father.

"Do you need a ride to that airport?" said Leon.

Danny nodded.

"This Saturday?"

He nodded again.

"I can take you. If you want me to." And, correctly reading the expression on Danny's face, he added: "Ask him what time he wants us there."

For the first time in this conversation, Danny now found himself stammering. He did manage, though, to arrange with Butch Harrison that they would meet him and Lucci at the Sky Rangers coffee shop on Saturday afternoon at three o'clock. He managed to describe himself so Harrison would recognize him: thin, medium height, dark brown hair, black horn-rimmed glasses. With very thick lenses, he said; and Anna, hearing this, laughed.

Danny hung up the phone. "Well, me bai-i-i," said Leon. "You see the advantage of working for the state. I have Saturdays off these days. Can do what I please."

This was true. Though Leon still normally chose to spend his Saturdays in Trenton. There were collections to be made, he said, on a few accounts still outstanding from his days in the furniture store. Always work left over from the week, he said; and he liked to clean it up before the new week began. Anna was not alone. Sophie and Ida came every Saturday to stay with her, as they had back in the days of the store.

Weary with relief, Danny began to sit back down in his place at the table. Suddenly he stood straight up. "Omigod!" he said.

"What? What is it?" said Leon.

"Nothing," Danny said hastily. "I just remembered something I forgot, that's all."

Anna laughed, and they resumed eating. Danny did not tell them that what he had forgotten was that he was supposed to go back to Scofield that Saturday and have dinner with the Jamesons. He had so far not found a suitable opportunity to tell his parents that he had been invited to the Jamesons' for dinner in the first place, or even that the Jamesons existed.

He would have to change a dollar bill or two, he thought, and go down to the shopping center where there were public phones. From there he would phone Mr. and Mrs. Jameson and tell them that he could not make it. Something had come up, he would tell them. There had been an important break in the official cover-up of what might be a crucial sighting. Mr. and Mrs. Jameson, who were interested in UFOlogy, would realize this was important. Mr. and Mrs. Jameson would understand.

That Friday at school, seventh and eighth periods were cancelled. They were cancelled because it was spring, and because the school year was coming to an end. Perhaps, come to think of it, they had been cancelled on the spur of the moment, just because that day was so extraordinarily beautiful.

Everyone went out to the courtyard and sat on the grass, while the Delhaas Songsters stood beneath an archway connecting the old school building to the new, and sang for them.

Mary Ellen Penn was in the Delhaas Songsters. This was something Danny had not known. He had not seen Mary Ellen for weeks, or perhaps even months. She was no longer in any of his classes, and their paths had for some reason never crossed in the hallways. Her pretty brown hair, he saw, had been cut in the same style as Christie Jameson's. But her face had ripened into a lovely sad tenderness which Christie, coarsely pretty as she was, could not match.

Moon River, Mary Ellen sang, wider than a mile, I'll be crossing you in style some day--

Danny had never heard the song before. It seemed to him at this moment to incarnate all the world's beauty, that which was felt and that which was anticipated.

My dream maker, you heart breaker, wherever you're going I'm going your way--

He marvelled at the solemn purity of her face, profiled against the crystalline blue of the May afternoon. Connie Keating, he realized, had been a cheap distraction. His heart belonged, as it had from the beginning, to Mary Ellen.

Two drifters, off to see the world.

There's such a lot of world to see--

To hell! he thought with sudden violence; as he felt his heart, exultant, lift itself into the sky on the sweetness of Mary Ellen's voice. To hell with Ezra and Nehemiah! To hell with all their stupid restrictions!

And he thought, more soberly now, that he must find a time and a place to break the news to his mother. That he was fifteen years old. That he was ready for a girl.

The fine weather continued into the next afternoon, when Danny and Leon got into the ancient Chevrolet and set out for the Sky Rangers Airport.

The engine started up all right, but then died as soon as Leon put it into reverse and started to back out of the carport. It died again when he backed out from the driveway into Sandy Creek Drive.

"Mom's waving to us," Leon said to Danny. He looked and saw his mother through the kitchen window, in her rocker, smiling gaily as she waved goodbye. They both smiled and waved back.

Leon started the car again and sighed deeply. "Afraid she's on her last legs, me bai-i-i," he said. "Hanging on by a thread, as it were."

Danny stared at him, alarmed.

"I just hope she's not going to start overheating on us," said Leon. "Once we start going at highway speed."

Good. It was the car he was talking about. Danny settled back into his seat, relieved.

"And I think, me bai-i-i," Leon went on, "that when the new models come out this fall, that'll be the end of our time with this good old Chevy. Any idea what kind of a new car you'd like us to get?"

"Not really," Danny said.

"No, I don't suppose you would," said Leon. "You don't give very much thought to cars, do you?"

He began to lecture Danny on trade-ins, and how a used car dealership operated. Danny tried to listen, but his mind kept wandering. He imagined himself at the driver's seat of some car, with Mary Ellen Penn at his side. He didn't know what kind of car it would be, only that it would not be a 1949 Chevrolet. It would have seat belts, like all the newer cars. They would buckle up for safety, as the radio jingle said. Only perhaps they would not, so Mary Ellen could slide over and press her neat little body against his.

Danny stayed in this world of his, while Leon talked and talked about the advantages of standard transmissions and automatic transmissions. Since Mary Ellen had erupted into his thoughts yesterday afternoon, she had hardly once been out of them. His waking thoughts, that is. As far as he could remember, he had had no dreams of her last night, and that struck him as a little bit odd.

They crossed over into Jersey at Burlington, and continued southward. Danny cast an occasional glance at the temperature gauge, reassuring himself each time that the car wasn't overheating. If it did overheat, they might be hours late for their meeting with Harrison and Lucci.

"All built up, my boy," Leon intoned as he drove. "One development after the next, each with its stores, each with its shopping centers. Did you notice that new shopping center we just passed? Did you? I bet it's no more than a year or two old. And you know what used to be there, before they put up the buildings, before they covered the place with concrete?"

"Trees?" Danny said.

"Right with Eversharp!" Leon said, laughing in that strange artificial way he sometimes had. "Trees. South Jersey used to be woods. Mile after mile of pine trees. And where there weren't woods there'd be farmland. We'd go for drives here, you and Mom and me. Back before Mom got so sick. We used to call these the wide open spaces. We'd all drive through it together and we'd sing that song about the wide open spaces. You remember that?"

"A little," said Danny.

"Hope you do remember," said Leon. "Because they're all gone now, my boy. All the wide open spaces. Most of them, anyway. You see any wide open spaces here now?"

"Uh-uh," Danny said. He gave this answer because it was obviously the one Leon was looking for. As far as he was concerned, the whole area still looked rural enough. What did Leon want, farmhouses and windmills?

"There were lakes here too," said Leon. "One time we stayed by a lake. You, me, and Mom. We took out the rowboat the next day. You must have been two years old then. You remember any of that?"

"Mom told me about it."

"Oh, of course," said Leon sourly. "I'd forgot. Mom tells you everything." And he said nothing more for a long time.

They came to a traffic circle. The roads radiating from it were poorly marked, and they had to slow down and look closely at the signs before they realized which was the road to Sanford. A car passed them on the right and honked, which was a good thing, because if he hadn't honked Leon would have driven right into him. "Sonofabitch!" Leon hissed. Danny was thankful it was Leon at the wheel and not him. But he had noticed that one of the other roads leading off the circle went to Scofield, and he thought that if he were driving the car and Leon wasn't there he might just decide to take the Scofield road after all and stop by and see how the Jamesons were doing. Maybe pick up Christie and take her with him to meet Butch Harrison and Pete Lucci.

"Mom was the sweetest girl back then," Leon said. "Do you remember her the way she used to be, Danny?"

Danny realized that any answer he might give to this question would be wrong. He tried to grunt non-committally.

"Just goes to show you what a long illness will do," said Leon.

Signs for the Sky Rangers Airport had begun to appear along the roadside, and they found the place without too much trouble. It was 2:47 by Danny's watch when they pulled into the parking lot.

"You're Shapiro, right?" Pete Lucci said to Danny as he and Leon stepped into the coffee shop. Actually, it was Butch Harrison who said this, but Danny thought at first it was Pete Lucci because he naturally expected Pete Lucci to be the one with the dark curly hair and not the blond crew cut. But it turned out to be the other way around; and when Danny said, "And you're Pete Lucci?" both men laughed, and Butch Harrison said, "I look like I ought to be Pete Lucci, right? But that's Pete. I'm Butch." They were both husky young men, in their mid-twenties.

"I'm Leon Shapiro," said Leon. "I'm Danny's father."

Leon pulled out his wallet when they reached the cash register. "Nah, nah," said Butch Harrison. "This is on us. You're our guests. Real nice of you to drive Danny out here, Mister Shapiro." Danny remembered that he had been "Mister Shapiro" the week before, in Scofield, when he had travelled by bus. No doubt would be again, once he had his license.

They all had coffee. Danny would have liked some toast with grape jelly, but he hadn't seen any behind the glass of the counter. "Well, fire away, Danny," Butch Harrison said when they had all sat down. "What would you like to know?"

"One thing I'm a little confused about," said Danny, fishing out a ball-point pen and opening his small blue notebook. "How many objects were there? The newspaper stories spoke of several UFOs, but you mentioned only one light."

Harrison and Lucci both began to answer at once. Lucci quickly fell silent, though, and let Harrison give Danny the details of the episode, nodding his confirmation at key points. Danny had more questions. As the men spoke, the full story of the Sky Rangers UFO sighting began to take shape. Leon sat silent, listening closely.

Neither Harrison nor Lucci, nor anyone else who had been at the Sky Rangers airport after midnight on April 7, had actually seen more than one object. The people at Camden airport, however, had had up to three unidentified blips on their radar screen at any one time. The objects, whatever they were, seemed to be moving around in the skies in the vicinity of Sanford. So someone named Ken Seagroves, with whom both Harrison and Lucci were distantly acquainted, had radioed the Sky Rangers to see if there was anyone around who wanted to take a plane up and have a look.

The object was clearly visible from the ground, Harrison said. It was a kind of orangey-red, egg-shaped light--Danny's heart beat a little faster when he heard this description--which seemed to be jumping about irregularly in the night sky. Harrison remembered that it was a little before one in the morning when he and Lucci had climbed into Harrison's plane and taken off after it.

"For a minute there," Harrison said, "we were scared we were gonna catch it."

"Or it was gonna catch us," said Lucci; and all four of them laughed.

"It looked like you were gaining on it?" Danny asked.

"Gaining isn't the word," Harrison said. "It got so close to us, so fast, that we figured it had to be coming at us. We figured, if we were Martians or something trying to catch us some specimen earthlings, we might do just what they were doing. Hang out in the sky, just high enough to get people curious so somebody'd be dumb enough to come up to see what we were. And then we'd nab 'em. Know what I mean, Mister Shapiro?"

Leon nodded. "But it looks like they didn't nab you," he said.

"No they didn't. What do they do then but make a hundred and eighty degree turn, zoom right off, till they're so far away they're just a tiny little point of light. I said, `Pete, we're not gonna be able to catch them, if anything we'll just get ourselves killed trying.' So we radioed Seagroves we were coming back down, the Camden boys could chase them if they wanted. He was pretty pissed but there wasn't nothing he could do about it."

"Except lie about the whole thing a couple weeks after," said Lucci. "Say they never got anything on radar." He shook his head. "Pisses me off, what some people will do."

"The object was pretty high up, you think?" said Danny.

"Way up," said Harrison. "About like this." Lifting his hand, he pointed to a light fixture in the ceiling of the coffee shop.

A disagreeable thought crossed Danny's mind. Harrison had earlier spoken of the UFO as being in the south, and now it appeared that it had been fairly close to the zenith. Hadn't Arcturus been in the south, near the zenith, in the early morning hours of April 7? He'd studied his star chart pretty carefully; he was pretty sure he remembered that. And Arcturus was supposed to be orange-colored; not that the stars ever really were the colors the books said they were supposed to be. He raised this possibility very gingerly, so as not to insult the two pilots, who surely had seen Arcturus once or twice before.

"Who said the UFOs were Arcturus?" Harrison demanded.

"The Philadelphia Inquirer quoted that from the `experts,'" said Danny. "The reporter didn't say who the experts were."

"The geniuses of the newsroom," said Harrison. "Wish one of those geniuses was in the plane when that thing came flying straight at us. He wouldn't be making genius talk. He'd be down under his seat, peeing in his pants."

"The reporter I talked to wasn't such a genius," Danny said. "He kept calling Arcturus a planet. When I told him it was a star and not a planet, he said, `Sir, did you phone to demonstrate your knowledge of astronomy?' And when I tried to explain, he said, `Sir, I suggest that you and the rest of you flying saucer nuts all go knock your thick heads together. Then you'll see more stars than you can count.' And then he hung up on me."

"Sheesh," said Harrison, shaking his head. "That's one hell of a way to talk to a kid. Isn't it, Mister Shapiro?"

"Yeah, I guess it is," said Leon.

"Really pisses me off," said Harrison.

"Pisses me off too," said Lucci.

Lucci looked at his watch and saw it was nearly five o'clock. He pushed away from the table a stood up. "Thanks for the coffee, Butch," he said. "Nice meeting you, Mr. Shapiro. Danny, you keep chasing 'em."

Chasing what? Danny thought. UFOs, no doubt. But he wasn't entirely sure that was what Lucci had meant.

"I guess we'd better be going too," Leon said. "We've got a long drive. And Danny's mother is home waiting for us."

"You really gotta run, Mister Shapiro?" said Butch Harrison. Leon hesitated. Harrison went on, "Seems to me, if you got some time, you and Danny might like to go up in the plane with me. Just for a ride. You spend so much time driving to the airport, it's a shame if you never even get into the air."

Danny said nothing, tried to keep his face pure of any expression. "Well, that's mighty kind of you," said Leon. From the tone of his voice, Danny could tell his father was pleased and excited. "I don't believe Danny's ever flown in a plane. Have you, Danny?" Danny shook his head no. "Would you like to?" said Leon.

The three of them walked to Harrison's airplane, through a field bathed in the late afternoon sunshine. It was turning a bit chilly, Danny noticed. You might need a coat by the time it got dark. The sky was a pure deep blue, so dry and clear that the daytime moon shone vivid white in the southwestern sky; though it was still hardly more than a crescent, hardly even halfway full.

"Who wants to sit next to me?" Harrison asked, climbing in behind the controls. Danny deferred to his father. "No, no," said Leon. "You sit there, Danny. I'll sit behind you. I've been in the pilot's seat a few times." He said to Harrison, "I did a bit of flying when I was in the service. Back during the war."

"Is that so?" said Harrison. "Were you in the Air Force, Mister Shapiro?"

"Army Air Corps, they called it back then," Leon corrected him. "But no, I wasn't. Just the regular Army. But they taught a lot of us to fly, back then."

They all fastened their seat belts. Harrison switched on the engines. The racket was terrific. Danny wondered how Harrison and Lucci had communicated with each other that April night, as they climbed in pursuit of a UFO that was about to turn and pursue them. They taxied down the runway, then launched themselves, more abruptly than Danny would ever have expected, into the sky.

The ground fell away rapidly. The trees, buildings, automobiles became almost at once tiny and toylike beneath them. The airport's main building reminded Danny, for just a moment, of that miniature toy house made of Lincoln Logs or possibly American Bricks, which he had built and unbuilt and built and unbuilt a thousand times over during those endless afternoons in his grandmother's living room, while his mother lay sick upstairs. Then it became too small even for that; just one tiny red hotel on the great Monopoly board that spread beneath them. Somewhere by the horizon, a distant lake glittered in the sun.

Their right wing dipped suddenly. The plane wheeled sharply. Danny again felt, for a few seconds, the thrilling rush of ascent in his stomach and his genitalia. The moon now lay directly ahead of them. They climbed steeply toward it; as though Harrison had decided, without telling them, to fly away altogether from the earth and set his course for the moon. Danny felt it leaping toward them out of the blue.

Gentlemen, Danny imagined Harrison announcing over some loudspeaker, mankind's first ever journey to the moon is now underway.

He turned around, to look at his father. Leon was sitting with his head back, his face set in an expression of anticipated or perhaps remembered ecstasy. His eyes were half shut. His mouth was slightly open, his tongue pressed expectantly against his lower teeth, as though sensing the approach of some enormous nipple filled with milk all for him.

Disconcerted, yet strangely pleased, Danny did not stay to watch. He set his face forward again, and lost himself in the moon's looming countenance.