

Howard stands for a while longer, in the kitchen, slicing his hostly bread; then, the chore done, he walks back into his own party. It has changed, grown weak at the centre, active at the circumference. In the living-room, where the main illumination is the flashing string of lights on the children's Christmas tree, there is torpor; a few people lie about, chatting, in varieties of intimacy. In the Victorian conservatory, there is desultory rhythmic dancing; junior members of faculty bounce and rock in the near-darkness. In the dining-room, the piles of bread and cheese stand in a state of neglect; Howard's dutiful ministrations are no longer needed. The party's momentum is clearly elsewhere, in nooks here and there, in the upper parts of the house, in the garden, perhaps even in the waste land beyond. A few people are going, in the hall; there in the hall stands a figure wearing an anorak and a large orange backpack, from which protrude various large objects. 'I'm off now, Howard,' says Felicity Phee. 'Someone's giving me a ride to London. I've cleared out all my stuff.' 'I'll see you next term,' says Howard. 'I don't know whether you will see me next term,' says Felicity. 'Haven't you sort of passed me up?' 'Well, we'll meet in class,' says Howard. 'I doubt it,' says Felicity. 'I went to see Professor Marvin today, and asked him to find me a new teacher.' 'Oh, I don't think he'll do that,' says Howard, 'after the trouble with George Carmody.' Felicity looks at him; she says, 'I really don't think you'd better stand in my way. I mean, I know as much as anyone about what happened with George Carmody. Do you plan to get rid of me too?' 'Of course not,' says Howard. 'Of course not,' says Felicity, 'I know everything about you.' 'What does that mean?' asks Howard. 'I wanted to help you,' says Felicity. 'I wanted you to recognize me.' 'You did help me,' says Howard. 'Okay, well, it didn't do me any good, did it?' asks Felicity. 'You won and I didn't. So now just leave me alone.' 'I will,' says Howard. 'Well, do,' says Felicity. 'Say goodbye to Barbara for me. If you can find her.'

**Malcolm Bradbury, *The History Man*, 1975**