Giovanni stood up courageously. But once on his feet, he wasn't able to give a clear answer.

Zanelli, sitting in the seat in front of him, turned around and giggled at him.

Giovanni was flustered, blushing from one ear to the other.

The teacher spoke once again.

'If you were to take a close look at the Milky Way through a big telescope, what would you find it made of?'

Giovanni was now absolutely sure that you'd find stars, but just like the moment before, he couldn't get his answer out.

The teacher, perplexed, finally turned his gaze to Campanella.

'Well, what about you, Campanella?'

Campanella, who had raised his hand so readily a moment ago, just stood in his place fidgeting, unable to answer the question.

The teacher, now more surprised than ever, stared for some time at

him, then said, pointing at the starmap...

'All right, then, fine. When you look at this hazy-white Milky Way through a good big telescope, the blur is resolved into a great number of tiny stars. Isn't that right, Giovanni?'

Giovanni, now red as a beet, nodded, and before he knew it his eyes were filled with tears and he thought...

That's right, I knew it all along, and so does Campanella, because it was all in a magazine that we once read together at Campanella's father's house, and he's a scholar!

Campanella leafed through that magazine and went straight into his father's library, brought a thick book from the shelf, opened it to MILKY WAY, and we spent forever together looking at the lovely photograph of white spec ks that covered the pitch-black page.

The reason why Campanella didn't answer the teacher right away, even though there was no reason at all for him to forget, is because he feels sorry for me because I have to work hard before and after school and then I feel too down-in-the-dumps to play with everybody or even to talk with him very much.

When Giovanni thought about how Campanella had deliberately not

answered out of sympathy for him, he felt indescribably sad both for himself and for Campanella.

The teacher began again.

'So, if we think of the Milky Way as the Celestial River, then each and every one of these tiny little stars may be seen to be a grain of sand or pebble on the bed of that river. If we imagine it to be a giant stream of milk, then it's even more like a river, and the stars become minute fatty globules floating inside the white liquid.'

'Now, ask yourself, what does this liquid actually do, and you will see that it transmits light at a given speed through the void of space, and our Sun and Earth are both floating inside it too. So, you see, we are all living in the liquid of the Celestial River, and when we gaze out from where we are, just as water appears bluest at its deepest spots, so will the places with the most stars look to us the whitest and haziest. That is where the sky's river bed is the densest and most far-reaching. Now look at this model.'

The teacher pointed to a large lens that was convex on both sides. Inside the lens were countless grains of sand, all gleaming.

'This very much resembles the shape of the Milky Way. You can think of all these glittering grains of sand as stars, all radiating their own light just as our Sun does. Our Sun lies some distance from the