

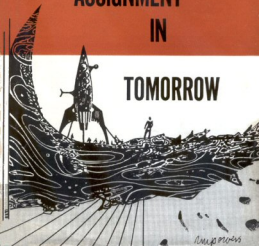
A SCIENCE FICTION ANTHOLOGY

Edited and with an introduction by

FREDERIK POHL

including a **COMPLETE SHORT NOVEL**,
THREE NOVELETTES and
TWELVE SHORT STORIES

ASSIGNMENT IN TOMORROW



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ASSIGNMENT IN TOMORROW

Edited

and with an introduction by

Frederik Pohl

A rocketing voyage into the worlds of tomorrow, this new anthology brings together a short novel, three novelettes, and twelve short stories. Such top-flight authors as Ray Bradbury, Fletcher Pratt, H. L. Gold, and C. M. Kornbluth give a provocative preview of a future of unpredictable robots, supersonic speeds, and exploration of strange worlds in stranger machines—of the worlds that lie just beyond the horizons of our imagination. But this is not a mere collection of gimmick tales. Concerned rather with the plight of man trying to survive in an ever-more-complicated world, these ingenious tales range from the powerful and tense account of a man who could not resist his destructive urge to power, to the tale of an interplanetary hobo in search of a shot of whiskey. From the question of what forms the devil might assume to the horrors wreaked by a manufactured philosopher-king, here is an exciting, often amusing, and always entertaining sampling of speculation on the worlds to come.

Assignment in Tomorrow

AN ANTHOLOGY

EDITED AND WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

Frederik Pohl

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Introduction

This marks the third time that I have had the pleasure of casting a net into a sea of science-fiction magazines, seining out the pick of the stories to make into an anthology. Each time it has seemed that this was the last, best catch of all—and, each time, no sooner was a selection made than a dozen new stories bobbed to the surface, each so handsome and attractive that it was obviously a crime to have left it out.

There was once a time when, as part of my job, I had to read at least an occasional issue of almost every magazine in the country which published fiction. I read big magazines and little ones, magazines printed on the shiniest of paper and magazines printed on ragged pulp. There were occasional good stories in magazines of every variety, stories which showed talent and creative imagination and skill.

And an astonishing number of the very best stories of all were in the magazines called “science-fiction pulps.”

It takes talent to write a good science-fiction story. Not every writer can do it; and those who can ordinarily can master just about any other field they try. The sixteen writers in this book, for instance, are right at the top of the science-fiction field; but if their science-fiction stories had never been written, you would still know Fletcher Pratt for his histories, Fredric Brown for his mysteries, Alfred Bester for his brilliant “straight” novel *Who He?*, and many of the others—Bradbury, Vonnegut, and Gold, to name but three—for their frequent contributions to the mass-circulation slick magazines. Were their science-fiction writings abolished, you might not know the names of C. M. Kornbluth and Lester del

Rey—but you would know their work; for both have a healthy library of “straight” short stories and novels in print under pen names.

As long as skillful practitioners like these are using the science-fiction magazines to give the rest of us a glimpse of their private wonderlands, there is small danger that anthologists will run out of first-rate stories to put in their books. You can’t fish the sea out—it keeps replenishing itself.

Science fiction is fun. It’s fun to write (which is why men like these keep at it); and it’s fun to read—but that you can see for yourself in the sixteen stories which follow. They are perhaps not the most significant, the most world-shaking, the most unforgettable stories ever to appear; they are merely sixteen science-fiction stories which I have enjoyed reading very, very much. I hope you will like them as well.

It would have been impossible to assemble this book without help from many sources; but a particular debt of gratitude exists to Anthony Boucher and J. Francis McComas, for gracefully waiving prior claims; to Horace Gold, for first bringing to light nearly half the stories included (and for having written one of the best!); and to all the other editors, the writers, and their agents whose names cannot be listed but whose help was indispensable.

—Frederik Pohl

Assignment in Tomorrow

THEODORE STURGEON

Once upon a time there was a young man named Theodore Sturgeon. He thought he might be a writer, so he sat down and wrote *It*, *Killdozer*, *Microcosmic God*, and a dozen other stories that made editors rejoice and other science-fiction writers beat their wives. Having made his point, he went on to fresh glories in advertising and in television; but public pressure dragged him back and chained him to a typewriter in a Hudson River hamlet where, surrounded by an armed guard of science-fiction fans and publishers' representatives, he is compelled to cut and polish a daily quota of gems of science-fiction like—

Mr. Costello, Hero

"Come in, Purser. And shut the door."

"I beg your pardon, sir?" The Skipper never invited anyone in—not to his quarters. His office, yes, but not here.

He made an abrupt gesture, and I came in and closed the door. It was about as luxurious as a compartment on a spaceship can get. I tried not to goggle at it as if it was the first time I had ever seen it, just because it was the first time I had ever seen it.

I sat down.

He opened his mouth, closed it, forced the tip of his tongue through his thin lips. He licked them and glared at me. I'd never seen the Iron Man like this. I decided that the best thing to say would be nothing, which is what I said.

He pulled a deck of cards out of the top-middle drawer and slid them across the desk. "Deal."

I said, "I b—"

"And don't say you beg my pardon!" he exploded.

Well, all right. If the Skipper wanted a cozy game of gin

rummy to while away the parsecs, far be it from me to . . . I shuffled. Six years under this cold-blooded, fish-eyed automatic computer with eyebrows, and this was the first time that he—

“Deal,” he said. I looked up at him. “Draw, five-card draw. You do play draw poker, don’t you, Purser?”

“Yes, sir.” I dealt and put down the pack. I had three threes and a couple of court cards. The Skipper scowled at his hand and threw down two. He glared at me again.

I said, “I got three of a kind, sir.”

He let his cards go as if they no longer existed, slammed out of his chair and turned his back to me. He tilted his head back and stared up at the see-it-all, with its complex of speed, time, position and distance-run coordinates. Borinquen, our destination planet, was at spitting distance—only a day or so off—and Earth was a long, long way behind. I heard a sound and dropped my eyes. The Skipper’s hands were locked behind him, squeezed together so hard that they crackled.

“Why didn’t you draw?” he grated.

“I beg your—”

“When I played poker—and I used to play a hell of a lot of poker—as I recall it, the dealer would find out how many cards each player wanted after the deal and give him as many as he discarded. Did you ever hear of that, Purser?”

“Yes, sir, I did.”

“You did.” He turned around. I imagine he had been scowling this same way at the see-it-all, and I wondered why it was he hadn’t shattered the cover glass.

“Why, then, Purser,” he demanded, “did you show your three of a kind without discarding, without drawing—without, mister, asking me how many cards I might want?”

I thought about it. “I—we—I mean, sir, we haven’t been playing poker that way lately.”

“You’ve been playing poker without drawing!” He sat down again and beamed that glare at me again. “And who changed the rules?”

“I don’t know, sir. We just—that’s the way we’ve been playing.”

He nodded thoughtfully. “Now tell me something, Purser.

How much time did you spend in the galley during the last watch?"

"About an hour, sir."

"About an hour."

"Well, sir," I explained hurriedly, "it was my turn."

He said nothing, and it suddenly occurred to me that these galley-watches weren't in the ship's orders.

I said quickly, "It isn't against your orders to stand such a watch, is it, sir?"

"No," he said, "it isn't." His voice was so gentle, it was ugly. "Tell me, Purser, doesn't Cooky mind these galley-watches?"

"Oh no, sir! He's real pleased about it." I knew he was thinking about the size of the galley. It was true that two men made quite a crowd in a place like that. I said, "That way, he knows everybody can trust him."

"You mean that way you know he won't poison you."

"Well—yes, sir."

"And tell me," he said, his voice even gentler, "who suggested he might poison you?"

"I really couldn't say, Captain. It's just sort of something that came up. Cooky doesn't mind," I added. "If he's watched all the time, he knows nobody's going to suspect him. It's all right."

Again he repeated my words. "It's all right." I wished he wouldn't, I wished he'd stop looking at me like that. "How long," he asked, "has it been customary for the deck-officer to bring a witness with him when he takes over the watch?"

"I really couldn't say, sir. That's out of my department."

"You couldn't say. Now think hard, Purser. Did you ever stand galley-watches, or see deck-officers bring witnesses with them when they relieve the bridge, or see draw poker played without drawing—before this trip?"

"Well, no sir. I don't think I have. I suppose we just never thought of it before."

"We never had Mr. Costello as a passenger before, did we?"

"No, sir."

I thought for a moment he was going to say something else, but he didn't, just: "Very well, Purser. That will be all."

I went out and started back aft, feeling puzzled and sort

of upset. The Skipper didn't have to hint things like that about Mr. Costello. Mr. Costello was a very nice man. Once, the Skipper had picked a fight with Mr. Costello. They'd shouted at each other in the dayroom. That is, the Skipper had shouted—Mr. Costello never did. Mr. Costello was as good-natured as they come. A big good-natured soft-spoken man, with the kind of face they call open. Open and honest. He'd once been a Triumver back on Earth—the youngest ever appointed, they said.

You wouldn't think such an easygoing man was as smart as that. Triumvers are usually lifetime appointees, but Mr. Costello wasn't satisfied. Had to keep moving, you know. Learning all the time, shaking hands all around, staying close to the people. He loved people.

I don't know why the Skipper couldn't get along with him. Everybody else did. And besides—Mr. Costello didn't play poker; why should he care one way or the other how we played it? He didn't eat the galley food—he had his own stock in his cabin—so what difference would it make to him if the cook poisoned anyone? Except, of course, that he cared about us. People—he *liked* people.

Anyway, it's better to play poker without the draw. Poker's a good game with a bad reputation. And where do you suppose it gets the bad reputation? From cheaters. And how do people cheat at poker? Almost never when they deal. It's when they pass out cards after the discard. That's when a shady dealer knows what he holds, and he knows what to give the others so he can win. All right, remove the discard and you remove nine-tenths of the cheaters. Remove the cheaters and the honest men can trust each other.

That's what Mr. Costello used to say, anyhow. Not that he cared one way or the other for himself. He wasn't a gambling man.

I went into the dayroom and there was Mr. Costello with the Third Officer. He gave me a big smile and a wave, so I went over.

"Come on, sit down, Purser," he said. "I'm landing tomorrow. Won't have much more chance to talk to you."

I sat down. The Third snapped shut a book he'd been holding open on the table and sort of got it out of sight.

Mr. Costello laughed at him. "Go ahead, Third, show the Purser. You can trust him—he's a good man. I'd be proud to be shipmates with the Purser."

The Third hesitated and then raised the book from his lap. It was the *Space Code* and expanded *Rules of the Road*. Every licensed officer has to bone up on it a lot, to get his license. But it's not the kind of book you ordinarily kill time with.

"The Third here was showing me all about what a captain can and can't do," said Mr. Costello.

"Well, you asked me to," the Third said.

"Now just a minute," said Mr. Costello rapidly, "now just a minute." He had a way of doing that sometimes. It was part of him, like the thinning hair on top of his head and the big smile and the way he had of cocking his head to one side and asking you what it was you just said, as if he didn't hear so well. "Now just a minute, you *wanted* to show me this material, didn't you?"

"Well, yes, Mr. Costello," the Third said.

"You're going over the limitations of a spacemaster's power of your own free will, aren't you?"

"Well," said the Third, "I guess so. Sure."

"Sure," Mr. Costello repeated happily. "Tell the Purser the part you just read to me."

"The one you found in the book?"

"You know the one. You read it out your own self, didn't you?"

"Oh," said the Third. He looked at me—sort of uneasily, I thought—and reached for the book.

Mr. Costello put his hand on it. "Oh, don't bother looking it up," he said. "You can remember it."

"Yeah, I guess I do," the Third admitted. "It's a sort of safeguard against letting a skipper's power go to his head, in case it ever does. Suppose a time comes when a captain begins to act up, and the crew gets the idea that a lunatic has taken over the bridge. Well, something has to be done about it. The crew has the power to appoint one officer and send him up to the Captain for an accounting. If the Skipper refuses, or if the crew doesn't like his accounting, then they have the right to confine him to his quarters and take over the ship."

"I think I heard about that," I said. "But the Skipper has

rights, too. I mean the crew has to report everything by space-radio the second it happens, and then the Captain has a full hearing along with the crew at the next port."

Mr. Costello looked at us and shook his big head, full of admiration. When Mr. Costello thought you were good, it made you feel good all over.

The Third looked at his watch and got up. "I got to relieve the bridge. Want to come along, Purser?"

"I'd like to talk to him for a while," Mr. Costello said. "Do you suppose you could get somebody else for a witness?"

"Oh, sure, if you say so," said the Third.

"But you're going to get someone."

"Absolutely," said the Third.

"Safest ship I was ever on," said Mr. Costello. "Gives a fellow a nice feeling to know that the watch is never going to get the orders wrong."

I thought so myself and wondered why we never used to do it before. I watched the Third leave and stayed where I was, feeling good, feeling safe, feeling glad that Mr. Costello wanted to talk to me. And me just a Purser, him an ex-Triumver.

Mr. Costello gave me the big smile. He nodded toward the door. "That young fellow's going far. A good man. You're all good men here." He stuck a sucker-cup in the heater and passed it over to me with his own hands. "Coffee," he said. "My own brand. All I ever use."

I tasted it and it was fine. He was a very generous man. He sat back and beamed at me while I drank it.

"What do you know about Borinquen?" he wanted to know.

I told him all I could. Borinquen's a pretty nice place, what they call "four-nines Earth Normal"—which means that the climate, gravity, atmosphere and ecology come within .9999 of being the same as Earth's. There are only about six known planets like that. I told him about the one city it had and the trapping that used to be the main industry. Coats made out of *glunker* fur last forever. They shine green in white light and a real warm ember-red in blue light, and you can take a full-sized coat and scrunch it up and hide it in your two hands,

it's that light and fine. Being so light, the fur made ideal space-cargo.

Of course, there was a lot more on Borinquen now—rare isotope ingots and foodstuffs and seeds for the drug business and all, and I suppose the *glunker* trade could dry right up and Borinquen could still carry its weight. But furs settled the planet, furs supported the city in the early days, and half the population still lived out in the bush and trapped.

Mr. Costello listened to everything I said in a way I can only call respectful.

I remember I finished up by saying, "I'm sorry you have to get off there, Mr. Costello. I'd like to see you some more. I'd like to come see you at Borinquen, whenever we put in, though I don't suppose a man like you would have much spare time."

He put his big hand on my arm. "Purser, if I don't have time when you're in port, I'll make time. Hear?" Oh, he had a wonderful way of making a fellow feel good.

Next thing you know, he invited me right into his cabin. He sat me down and handed me a sucker full of a mild red wine with a late flavor of cinnamon, which was a new one on me, and he showed me some of his things.

He was a great collector. He had one or two little bits of colored paper that he said were stamps they used before the Space Age, to prepay carrying charges on paper letters. He said no matter where he was, just one of those things could get him a fortune. Then he had some jewels, not rings or anything, just stones, and a fine story for every single one of them.

"What you're holding in your hand," he said, "cost the life of a king and the loss of an empire half again as big as United Earth." And: "This one was once so well guarded that most people didn't know whether it existed or not. There was a whole religion based on it—and now it's gone, and so is the religion."

It gave you a queer feeling, being next to this man who had so much, and him just as warm and friendly as your favorite uncle.

"If you can assure me these bulkheads are soundproof, I'll show you something else I collect," he said.

I assured him they were, and they were, too. "If ships' architects ever learned anything," I told him, "they learned that a man has just got to be by himself once in a while."

He cocked his head to one side in that way he had. "How's that again?"

"A man's just got to be by himself once in a while," I said. "So, mass or no, cost or no, a ship's bulkheads are built to give a man his privacy."

"Good," he said. "Now let me show you." He unlocked a handcase and opened it, and from a little compartment inside he took out a thing about the size of the box a watch comes in. He handled it very gently as he put it down on his desk. It was square, and it had a fine grille on the top and two little silver studs on the side. He pressed one of them and turned to me, smiling. And let me tell you, I almost fell right off the bunk where I was sitting, because here was the Captain's voice as loud and as clear and natural as if he was right there in the room with us. And do you know what he said?

He said, "My crew questions my sanity—yet you can be sure that if a single man aboard questions my authority, he will learn that I am master here, even if he must learn it at the point of a gun."

What surprised me so much wasn't only the voice but the words—and what surprised me especially about the words was that I had heard the Skipper say them myself. It was the time he had had the argument with Mr. Costello. I remembered it well because I had walked into the dayroom just as the Captain started to yell.

"Mr. Costello," he said in that big heavy voice of his, "in spite of your conviction that my crew questions my sanity . . ." and all the rest of it, just like on this recording Mr. Costello had. And I remember he said, too, "even if he must learn it at the point of a gun. *That, sir, applies to passengers—the crew has legal means of their own.*"

I was going to mention this to Mr. Costello, but before I could open my mouth, he asked me, "Now tell me, Purser, is that the voice of the Captain of your ship?"

And I said, "Well, if it isn't, I'm not the Purser here. Why, I heard him speak those words my very own self."

Mr. Costello swatted me on the shoulder. "You have a good ear, Purser. And how do you like my little toy?"

Then he showed it to me, a little mechanism on the jeweled pin he wore on his tunic, a fine thread of wire to a push-button in his side pocket.

"One of my favorite collections," he told me. "Voices. Anybody, anytime, anywhere." He took off the pin and slipped a tiny bead out of the setting. He slipped this into a groove in the box and pressed the stud.

And I heard my own voice say, "I'm sorry you have to get off there, Mr. Costello. I'd like to see you some more." I laughed and laughed. That was one of the cleverest things I ever saw. And just think of my voice in his collection, along with the Captain and space only knows how many great and famous people!

He even had the voice of the Third Officer, from just a few minutes before, saying, "A lunatic has taken over the bridge. Well, something has to be done about it."

All in all, I had a wonderful visit with him, and then he asked me to do whatever I had to do about his clearance papers. So I went back to my office and got them out. They are kept in the Purser's safe during a voyage. And I went through them with the okays. There were a lot of them—he had more than most people.

I found one from Earth Central that sort of made me mad. I guess it was a mistake. It was a *Know All Ye* that warned consular officials to report every six months, Earth time, on the activities of Mr. Costello.

I took it to him, and it was a mistake, all right—he said so himself. I tore it out of his passport book and adhered an official note, reporting the accidental destruction of a used page of fully stamped visas. He gave me a beautiful blue gemstone for doing it.

When I said, "I better not; I don't want you thinking I take bribes from passengers," he laughed and put one of those beads in his recorder, and it came out, in my voice, "I take bribes from passengers." He was a great joker.

We lay at Borinquen for four days. Nothing much happened except I was busy. That's what's tough about pursering. You got nothing to do for weeks in space, and then, when

you're in spaceport, you have too much work to do even to go ashore much, unless it's a long layover.

I never really minded much. I'm one of those mathematical geniuses, you know, even if I don't have too much sense otherwise, and I take pride in my work. Everybody has something he's good at, I guess. I couldn't tell you how the gimmick works that makes the ship travel faster than light, but I'd hate to trust the Chief Engineer with one of my interplanetary cargo manifests, or a rate-of-exchange table, *glunker* pelts to UE dollars.

Some hard-jawed character with Space Navy Investigator credentials came inboard with a portable voice recorder and made me and the Third Officer recite a lot of nonsense for some sort of test, I don't know what. The SNI is always doing a lot of useless and mysterious things. I had an argument with the Port Agent, and I went ashore with Cooky for a fast drink. The usual thing. Then I had to work overtime signing on a new Third—they transferred the old one to a corvette that was due in, they told me.

Oh, yes, that was the trip the Skipper resigned. I guess it was high time. He'd been acting very nervous. He gave me the damndest look when he went ashore that last time, like he didn't know whether to kill me or burst into tears. There was a rumor around that he'd gone berserk and threatened the crew with a gun, but I don't listen to rumors. And anyway, the Port Captain signs on new skippers. It didn't mean any extra work for me, so it didn't matter much.

We unshipped again and made the rounds, Boötes Sigma and Nightingale and Carànho and Earth—chemical glassware, black-prints, *sho* seed and glitter crystals; perfume, music tape, *glizzard* skins and Aldebar—all the usual junk for all the usual months. And round we came again to Borinquen.

Well, you wouldn't believe a place could change so much in so short a time. Borinquen used to be a pretty free-and-easy planet. There was just the one good-sized city, see, and then trapper camps all through the unsettled area. If you liked people, you settled in the city, and you could go to work in the processing plants or maintenance or some such. If you didn't, you could trap *glunkers*. There was always something for everybody on Borinquen.

But things were way different this trip. First of all, a man with a Planetary Government badge came aboard, by God, to censor the music tapes consigned for the city, and he had the credentials for it, too. Next thing I find out, the municipal authorities have confiscated the warehouses—my warehouses—and they were being converted into barracks.

And where were the goods—the pelts and ingots for export? Where was the space for our cargo? Why, in houses—in hundreds of houses, all spread around every which way, all indexed up with a whole big new office full of conscripts and volunteers to mix up and keep mixed up! For the first time since I went to space, I had to request layover so I could get things unwound.

Anyway it gave me a chance to wander around the town, which I don't often get.

You should have seen the place! Everybody seemed to be moving out of the houses. All the big buildings were being made over into hollow shells, filled with rows and rows of mattresses. There were banners strung across the streets:

ARE YOU A MAN OR ARE YOU ALONE?
A SINGLE SHINGLE IS A SORRY SHELTER!
THE DEVIL HATES A CROWD!

All of which meant nothing to me. But it wasn't until I noticed a sign painted in whitewash on the glass front of a barroom, saying—TRAPPERS STAY OUT!—that I was aware of one of the biggest changes of all.

There were no trappers on the streets—none at all. They used to be one of the tourist attractions of Borinquen, dressed in *glunker* fur, with the long tailwings afloat in the wind of their walking, and a kind of distance in their eyes that not even spacemen had. As soon as I missed them, I began to see the TRAPPERS STAY OUT! signs just about everywhere—on the stores, the restaurants, the hotels and theaters.

I stood on a street corner, looking around me and wondering what in hell was going on here, when a Borinquen cop yelled something at me from a monowheel prowl car. I didn't understand him, so I just shrugged. He made a U-turn and coasted up to me.

"What's the matter, country boy? Lose your traps?"

I said, "What?"

He said, "If you want to go it alone, *glunker*, we got solitary cells over at the Hall that'll suit you fine."

I just gawked at him. And, to my surprise, another cop poked his head up out of the prowler. A one-man prowler, mind. They were really jammed in there.

This second one said, "Where's your trapline, jerker?"

I said, "I don't have a trapline." I pointed to the mighty tower of my ship, looming over the spaceport. "I'm the Purser off that ship."

"Oh, for God's sakes!" said the first cop. "I might have known. Look, Spacer, you'd better double up or you're liable to get yourself mobbed. This is no spot for a soloist."

"I don't get you, Officer. I was just—"

"I'll take him," said someone. I looked around and saw a tall Borinqueña standing just inside the open doorway of one of the hundreds of empty houses. She said, "I came back here to pick up some of my things. When I got done in here, there was nobody on the sidewalks. I've been here an hour, waiting for somebody to go with." She sounded a little hysterical.

"You know better than to go in there by yourself," said one of the cops.

"I know—I know. It was just to get my things. I wasn't going to stay." She hauled up a duffelbag and dangled it in front of her. "Just to get my things," she said again, frightened.

The cops looked at each other. "Well, all right. But watch yourself. You go along with the Purser here. Better straighten him out—he don't seem to know what's right."

"I will," she said thankfully.

But by then the prowler had moaned off, weaving a little under its double load.

I looked at her. She wasn't pretty. She was sort of heavy and stupid.

She said, "You'll be all right now. Let's go."

"Where?"

"Well, Central Barracks, I guess. That's where most everybody is."

"I have to get back to the ship."

"Oh, dear," she said, all distressed again. "Right away?"

"No, not right away. I'll go in town with you, if you want." She picked up her duffelbag, but I took it from her and heaved it up on my shoulder. "Is everybody here crazy?" I asked her, scowling.

"Crazy?" She began walking and I went along. "I don't *think* so."

"All this," I persisted. I pointed to a banner that said, NO LADDER HAS A SINGLE RUNG. "What's that mean?"

"Just what it says."

"You have to put up a big thing like that just to tell me . . ."

"Oh," she said. "You mean what does it *mean*!" She looked at me strangely. "We've found out a new truth about humanity. Look, I'll try to tell it to you the way Lucilles said it last night."

"Who's Lucille?"

"The Lucilles," she said, in a mildly shocked tone. "Actually, I suppose there's really only one—though, of course, there'll be someone else in the studio at the time," she added quickly. "But on trideo it looks like four Lucilles, all speaking at once, sort of in chorus."

"You just go on talking," I said when she paused. "I catch on slowly."

"Well, here's what they say. They say no one human being ever did *anything*. They say it takes a hundred pairs of hands to build a house, ten thousand pairs to build a ship. They say a single pair is not only useless—it's *evil*. All humanity is a thing made up of many parts. No part is good by itself. Any part that wants to go off by itself hurts the whole main thing—the thing that has become so great. So we're seeing to it that no part ever gets separated. What good would your hand be if a finger suddenly decided to go off by itself?"

I said, "And you believe this—what's your name?"

"Nola. *Believe* it? Well, it's true, isn't it? Can't you see it's true? Everybody *knows* it's true."

"Well, it could be true," I said reluctantly. "What do you do with people who want to be by themselves?"

"We help them."

"Suppose they don't want help?"

"Then they're trappers," she said immediately. "We push

them back into the bush, where the evil soloists come from."

"Well, what about the fur?"

"Nobody uses furs any more!"

So that's what happened to our fur consignments! And I was thinking those amateur red-tapers had just lost 'em somewhere.

She said, as if to herself, "All sin starts in the lonesome dark," and when I looked up, I saw she'd read it approvingly off another banner.

We rounded a corner and I blinked at a blaze of light. It was one of the warehouses.

"There's the Central," she said. "Would you like to see it?"

"I guess so."

I followed her down the street to the entrance. There was a man sitting at a table in the doorway. Nola gave him a card. He checked it against a list and handed it back.

"A visitor," she said. "From the ship."

I showed him my Purser's card and he said, "Okay. But if you want to stay, you'll have to register."

"I won't want to stay," I told him. "I have to get back."

I followed Nola inside.

The place had been scraped out to the absolute maximum. Take away one splinter of vertical structure more and it wouldn't have held a roof. There wasn't a concealed corner, a shelf, a drape, an overhang. There must have been two thousand beds, cots and mattresses spread out, cheek by jowl, over the entire floor, in blocks of four, with only a hand's-breadth between them. The light was blinding—huge floods and spots bathed every square inch in yellow-white fire.

Nola said, "You'll get used to the light. After a few nights, you don't even notice it."

"The lights never get turned off?"

"Oh, dear, no!"

Then I saw the plumbing—showers, tubs, sinks and everything else. It was all lined up against one wall.

Nola followed my eyes. "You get used to that, too. Better to have everything out in the open than to let the devil in for one secret second. That's what the Lucilles say."

I dropped her duffelbag and sat down on it. The only thing

I could think of was, "Whose idea was all this? Where did it start?"

"The Lucilles," she said vaguely. Then, "Before them, I don't know. People just started to realize. Somebody bought a warehouse—no, it was a hangar—I don't know," she said again, apparently trying hard to remember. She sat down next to me and said in a subdued voice, "Actually, some people didn't take to it so well at first." She looked around. "I didn't. I mean it, really I didn't. But you believed, or you had to act as if you believed, and one way or another everybody just came to this." She waved a hand.

"What happened to the ones who wouldn't come to Centrals?"

"People made fun of them. They lost their jobs, the schools wouldn't take their children, the stores wouldn't honor their ration cards. Then the police started to pick up soloists—like they did you." She looked around again, a sort of contented familiarity in her gaze. "It didn't take long."

I turned away from her, but found myself staring at all that plumbing again. I jumped up. "I have to go, Nola. Thanks for your help. Hey—how do I get back to the ship, if the cops are out to pick up any soloist they see?"

"Oh, just tell the man at the gate. There'll be people waiting to go your way. There's always somebody waiting to go everywhere."

She came along with me. I spoke to the man at the gate, and she shook hands with me. I stood by the little table and watched her hesitate, then step up to a woman who was entering. They went in together. The doorman nudged me over toward a group of what appeared to be loungers.

"North!" he bawled.

I drew a pudgy little man with bad teeth, who said not one single word. We escorted each other two-thirds of the way to the spaceport, and he disappeared into a factory. I scuttled the rest of the way alone, feeling like a criminal, which I suppose I was. I swore I would never go into that crazy city again.

And the next morning, who should come out for me, in an armored car with six two-man prowlers as escort, but Mr. Costello himself!

It was pretty grand seeing him again. He was just like always, big and handsome and good-natured. He was not alone. All spread out in the back corner of the car was the most beautiful blonde woman that ever struck me speechless. She didn't say very much. She would just look at me every once in a while and sort of smile, and then she would look out of the car window and bite on her lower lip a little, and then look at Mr. Costello and not smile at all.

Mr. Costello hadn't forgotten me. He had a bottle of that same red cinnamon wine, and he talked over old times the same as ever, like he was a special uncle. We got a sort of guided tour. I told him about last night, about the visit to the Central, and he was pleased as could be. He said he knew I'd like it. I didn't stop to think whether I liked it or not.

"Think of it!" he said. "All humankind, a single unit. You know the principle of cooperation, Purser?"

When I took too long to think it out, he said, "You know. Two men working together can produce more than two men working separately. Well, what happens when a thousand—a million—work, sleep, eat, think, breathe together?" The way he said it, it sounded fine.

He looked out past my shoulder and his eyes widened just a little. He pressed a button and the chauffeur brought us to a sliding stop.

"Get that one," Mr. Costello said into a microphone beside him.

Two of the prowlers hurtled down the street and flanked a man. He dodged right, dodged left, and then a prowler hit him and knocked him down.

"Poor chap," said Mr. Costello, pushing the Go button. "Some of 'em just won't learn."

I think he regretted it very much. I don't know if the blonde woman did. She didn't even look.

"Are you the mayor?" I asked him.

"Oh, no," he said. "I'm a sort of broker. A little of this, a little of that. I'm able to help out a bit."

"Help out?"

"Purser," he said confidentially, "I'm a citizen of Borinquen now. This is my adopted land and I love it. I mean to do everything in my power to help it. I don't care about the cost. This

is a people that has found the *truth*, Purser. It awes me. It makes me humble."

"I . . ."

"Speak up, man. I'm your friend."

"I appreciate that, Mr. Costello. Well, what I was going to say, I saw that Central and all. I just haven't made up my mind. I mean whether it's good or not."

"Take your time, take your time," he said in the big soft voice. "Nobody has to *make* a man see a truth, am I right? A real truth? A man just sees it all by himself."

"Yeah," I agreed. "Yeah, I guess so." Sometimes it was hard to find an answer to give Mr. Costello.

The car pulled up beside a building. The blonde woman pulled herself together. Mr. Costello opened the door for her with his own hands. She got out. Mr. Costello rapped the trideo screen in front of him.

He said, "Make it a real good one, Lucille, real good. I'll be watching."

She looked at him. She gave me a small smile. A man came down the steps and she went with him up into the building.

We moved off.

I said, "She's the prettiest woman I ever saw."

He said, "She likes you fine, Purser."

I thought about that. It was too much.

He asked, "How would you like to have her for your very own?"

"Oh," I said, "she wouldn't."

"Purser, I owe you a big favor. I'd like to pay it back."

"You don't owe me a thing, Mr. Costello!"

We drank some of the wine. The big car slid quietly along. It went slowly now, headed back out to the spaceport.

"I need some help," he said after a time. "I know you, Purser. You're just the kind of man I can use. They say you're a mathematical genius."

"Not mathematics exactly, Mr. Costello. Just numbers—statistics—conversion tables and like that. I couldn't do astro-gation or theoretical physics and such. I got the best job I could have right now."

"No, you haven't. I'll be frank with you. I don't want any more responsibility on Borinquen than I've got, you under-

stand, but the people are forcing it on me. They want order, peace and order—tidiness. They want to be as nice and tidy as one of your multiple manifests. Now I could organize them, all right, but I need a tidy brain like yours to keep them organized. I want full birth-and-death-rate statistics, and then I want them projected so we can get policy. I want calorie-counts and rationing, so we can use the food supply the best way. I want—well, you see what I mean. Once the devil is routed—

“What devil?”

“The trappers,” he said grayly.

“Are the trappers really harming the city people?”

He looked at me, shocked. “They go out and spend weeks alone by themselves, with their own evil thoughts. They are wandering cells, wild cells in the body of humanity. They must be destroyed.”

I couldn’t help but think of my consignments. “What about the fur trade, though?”

He looked at me as if I had made a pretty grubby little mistake. “My dear Purser,” he said patiently, “would you set the price of a few pelts above the immortal soul of a race?”

I hadn’t thought of it that way.

He said urgently, “This is just the beginning, Purser. Borinquen is only a start. The unity of that great being, Humanity, will become known throughout the Universe.” He closed his eyes. When he opened them, the organ tone was gone. He said in his old, friendly voice, “And you and I, we’ll show ’em how to do it, hey, boy?”

I leaned forward to look up to the top of the shining spire of the spaceship. “I sort of like the job I’ve got. But—my contract is up four months from now . . .”

The car turned into the spaceport and hummed across the slag area.

“I think I can count on you,” he said vibrantly. He laughed. “Remember this little joke, Purser?”

He clicked a switch, and suddenly my own voice filled the tonneau. “*I take bribes from passengers.*”

“Oh, that,” I said, and let loose one ha of a ha-ha before I understood what he was driving at. “Mr. Costello, you wouldn’t use that against me.”

"What do you take me for?" he demanded, in wonderment.

Then we were at the ramp. He got out with me. He gave me his hand. It was warm and hearty.

"If you change your mind about the Purser's job when your contract's up, son, just buzz me through the field phone. They'll connect me. Think it over until you get back here. Take your time." His hand clamped down on my biceps so hard I winced. "But you're not going to take any longer than that, are you, my boy?"

"I guess not," I said.

He got into the front, by the chauffeur, and zoomed away.

I stood looking after him and, when the car was just a dark spot on the slag area, I sort of came to myself. I was standing alone on the foot of the ramp. I felt very exposed.

I turned and ran up to the airlock, hurrying, hurrying to get near people.

That was the trip we shipped the crazy man. His name was Hynes. He was United Earth Consul at Borinquen and he was going back to report. He was no trouble at first, because diplomatic passports are easy to process. He knocked on my door the fifth watch out from Borinquen. I was glad to see him. My room was making me uneasy and I appreciated his company.

Not that he was really company. He was crazy. That first time, he came busting in and said, "I hope you don't mind, Purser, but if I don't talk to somebody about this, I'll go out of my mind." Then he sat down on the end of my bunk and put his head in his hands and rocked back and forth for a long time, without saying anything. Next thing he said was, "Sorry," and out he went. Crazy, I tell you.

But he was back in again before long. And then you never heard such ravings.

"Do you know what's happened to Borinquen?" he demanded. But he didn't want any answers. He had the answers. "I'll tell you what's wrong with Borinquen—Borinquen's gone mad!" he'd say.

I went on with my work, though there wasn't much of it in space, but that Hynes just couldn't get Borinquen out of his mind.

He said, "You wouldn't believe it if you hadn't seen it done.

First the little wedge, driven in the one place it might exist—between the urbans and the trappers. There was never any conflict between them—never! All of a sudden, the trapper was a menace. How it happened, why, God only knows. First, these laughable attempts to show that they were an unhealthy influence. Yes, laughable—how could you take it seriously?

“And then the changes. You didn’t have to prove that a trapper had done anything. You only had to prove he was a trapper. That was enough. And the next thing—how could you anticipate anything as mad as this?”—he almost screamed —“the next thing was to take anyone who wanted to be alone and lump him with the trappers. It all happened so fast—it happened in our sleep. And all of a sudden you were afraid to be alone in a room for a second. They left their homes. They built barracks. Everyone afraid of everyone else, afraid, afraid . . .

“Do you know what they *did*?” he roared. “They burned the paintings, every painting on Borinquen they could find that had been done by one artist. And the few artists who survived as artists—I’ve seen them. By twos and threes, they work together on the one canvas.”

He cried. He actually sat there and cried.

He said, “There’s food in the stores. The crops come in. Trucks run, planes fly, the schools are in session. Bellies get full, cars get washed, people get rich. I know a man called Costello, just in from Earth a few months, maybe a year or so, and already owns half the city.”

“Oh, I know Mr. Costello,” I said.

“Do you now! How’s that?”

I told him about the trip out with Mr. Costello. He sort of backed off from me. “You’re the one!”

“The one what?” I asked in puzzlement.

“You’re the man who testified against your Captain, broke him, made him resign.”

“I did no such a thing.”

“I’m the Consul. It was my hearing, man! I was *there*! A recording of the Captain’s voice, admitting to insanity, declaring he’d take a gun to his crew if they overrode him. Then your recorded testimony that it was his voice, that you were

present when he made the statement. And the Third Officer's recorded statement that all was not well on the bridge. The man denied it, but it was his voice."

"Wait, wait," I said. "I don't believe it. That would need a trial. There was no trial. I wasn't called to any trial."

"There would have been a trial, you idiot! But the Captain started raving about draw poker without a draw, about the crew fearing poisoning from the cook, about the men wanting witnesses even to change the bridge-watch. Maddest thing I ever heard. He realized it suddenly, the Captain did. He was old, sick, tired, beaten. He blamed the whole thing on Costello, and Costello said he got the recordings from you."

"Mr. Costello wouldn't do such a thing!" I guess I got mad at Mr. Hynes then. I told him a whole lot about Mr. Costello, what a big man he was. He started to tell me how Mr. Costello was forced off the *Triumverate* for making trouble in the high court, but they were lies and I wouldn't listen. I told him about the poker, how Mr. Costello saved us from the cheaters, how he saved us from poisoning, how he made the ship safe for us all.

I remember how he looked at me then. He sort of whispered, "What has happened to human beings? What have we done to ourselves with these centuries of peace, with confidence and cooperation and no conflict? Here's distrust by man for man, waiting under a thin skin to be punctured by just the right vampire, waiting to hate itself and kill itself all over again . . .

"My God!" he suddenly screamed at me. "Do you know what I've been hanging onto? The idea that, for all its error, for all its stupidity, this One Humanity idea on Borinquen was a *principle*? I hated it, but because it was a principle, I could respect it. It's Costello—Costello, who doesn't gamble, but who uses fear to change the poker rules—Costello, who doesn't eat your food, but makes you fear poison—Costello, who can see three hundred years of safe interstellar flight, but who through fear makes the watch officers doubt themselves without a witness—Costello, who runs things without being seen!

"My God, Costello doesn't *care*! It isn't a principle at all.

It's just Costello spreading fear anywhere, everywhere, to make himself strong!"

He rushed out, crying with rage and hate. I have to admit I was sort of jolted. I guess I might even have thought about the things he said, only he killed himself before we reached Earth. He was crazy.

We made the rounds, same as ever, scheduled like an inter-urban line: Load, discharge, blastoff, fly and planetfall. Refuel, clearance, manifest. Eat, sleep, work. There was a hearing about Hynes. Mr. Costello sent a spacegram with his regrets when he heard the news. I didn't say anything at the hearing, just that Mr. Hynes was upset, that's all, and it was about as true as anything could be. We shipped a second engineer who played real good accordion. One of the inboard men got left on Caràrho. All the usual things, except I wrote up my termination with no options, ready to file.

So in its turn we made Borinquen again, and what do you know, there was the space fleet of United Earth. I never guessed they had that many ships. They sheered us off, real Navy: all orders and no information. Borinquen was buttoned up tight; there was some kind of fighting going on down there. We couldn't get or give a word of news through the quarantine. It made the Skipper mad and he had to use part of the cargo for fuel, which messed up my records six ways from the middle. I stashed my termination papers away for the time being.

And in its turn, Sigma, where we lay over a couple of days to get back in the rut, and, same as always, Nightingale, right on schedule again.

And who should be waiting for me at Nightingale but Barney Roteel, who was medic on my first ship, years back when I was fresh from the Academy. He had a pot belly now and looked real successful. We got the jollity out of the way and he settled down and looked me over, real sober. I said it's a small Universe—I'd known he had a big job on Nightingale, but imagine him showing up at the spaceport just when I blew in!

"I showed up *because* you blew in, Purser," he answered.

Then before I could take that apart, he started asking me questions. Like how was I doing, what did I plan to do.

I said, "I've been a purser for years and years. What makes you think I want to do anything different?"

"Just wondered."

I wondered, too. "Well," I said, "I haven't exactly made up my mind, you might say—and a couple of things have got in the way—but I did have a kind of offer." I told him just in a general way about how big a man Mr. Costello was on Borinquen now, and how he wanted me to come in with him. "It'll have to wait, though. The whole damn Space Navy has a cordon around Borinquen. They wouldn't say why. But whatever it is, Mr. Costello'll come out on top. You'll see."

Barney gave me a sort of puckered-up look. I never saw a man look so weird. Yes, I did, too. It was the old Iron Man, the day he got off the ship and resigned.

"Barney, what's the matter?" I asked.

He got up and pointed through the glass door-lights to a white monowheel that stood poised in front of the receiving station. "Come on," he said.

"Aw, I can't. I got to——"

"Come on!"

I shrugged. Job or no, this was Barney's bailiwick, not mine. He'd cover me.

He held the door open and said, like a mind reader, "I'll cover you."

We went down the ramp and climbed in and skimmed off.

"Where are we going?"

But he wouldn't say. He just drove.

Nightingale's a beautiful place. The most beautiful of them all, I think, even Sigma. It's run by the UE, one hundred per cent; this is one planet with no local options, but *none*. It's a regular garden of a world and they keep it that way.

We topped a rise and went down a curving road lined with honest-to-God Lombardy poplars from Earth. There was a little lake down there and a sandy beach. No people.

The road curved and there was a yellow line across it and then a red one, and after it a shimmering curtain, almost transparent. It extended from side to side as far as I could see.

"Force-fence," Barney said and pressed a button on the dash.

The shimmer disappeared from the road ahead, though it

stayed where it was at each side. We drove through and it formed behind us, and we went down the hill to the lake.

Just this side of the beach was the coziest little Sigma cabaña I've seen yet, built to hug the slope and open its arms to the sky. Maybe when I get old they'll turn me out to pasture in one half as good.

While I was goggling at it, Barney said, "Go on."

I looked at him and he was pointing. There was a man down near the water, big, very tanned, built like a space-tug. Barney waved me on and I walked down there.

The man got up and turned to me. He had the same wide-spaced, warm deep eyes, the same full, gentle voice. "Why, it's the Purser! Hi, old friend. So you came, after all!"

It was sort of rough for a moment. Then I got it out. "Hi, Mr. Costello."

He banged me on the shoulder. Then he wrapped one big hand around my left biceps and pulled me a little closer. He looked uphill to where Barney leaned against the monowheel, minding his own business. Then he looked across the lake, and up in the sky.

He dropped his voice. "Purser, you're just the man I need. But I told you that before, didn't I?" He looked around again. "We'll do it yet, Purser. You and me, we'll hit the top. Come with me. I want to show you something."

He walked ahead of me toward the beach margin. He was wearing only a breech-ribbon, but he moved and spoke as if he still had the armored car and the six prowlers. I stumbled after him.

He put a hand behind him and checked me, and then knelt. He said, "To look at them, you'd think they were all the same, wouldn't you? Well, son, you just let me show you something."

I looked down. He had an anthill. They weren't like Earth ants. These were bigger, slower, blue, and they had eight legs. They built nests of sand tied together with mucus, and tunneled under them so that the nests stood up an inch or two like on little pillars.

"They look the same, they act the same, but you'll see," said Mr. Costello.

He opened a synthine pouch that lay in the sand. He took

out a dead bird and the thorax of what looked like a Carànhô roach, the one that grows as long as your forearm. He put the bird down here and the roach down yonder.

"Now," he said, "watch."

The ants swarmed to the bird, pulling and crawling. Busy. But one or two went to the roach and tumbled it and burrowed around. Mr. Costello picked an ant off the roach and dropped it on the bird. It weaved around and shouldered through the others and scrabbled across the sand and went back to the roach.

"You see, you see?" he said, enthusiastic. "Look."

He picked an ant off the dead bird and dropped it by the roach. The ant wasted no time or even curiosity on the piece of roach. It turned around once to get its bearings, and then went straight back to the dead bird.

I looked at the bird with its clothing of crawling blue, and I looked at the roach with its two or three voracious scavengers. I looked at Mr. Costello.

He said raptly, "See what I mean? About one in thirty eats something different. And that's all we need. I tell you, Purser, wherever you look, if you look long enough, you can find a way to make most of a group turn on the rest."

I watched the ants. "They're not fighting."

"Now wait a minute," he said swiftly. "Wait a minute. All we have to do is let these bird-eaters know that the roach-eaters are dangerous."

"They're not dangerous," I said. "They're just different."

"What's the difference, when you come right down to it? So we'll get the bird-eaters scared and they'll kill all the roach-eaters."

"Yes, but why, Mr. Costello?"

He laughed. "I like you, boy. I do the thinking, you do the work. I'll explain it to you. They all look alike. So once we've made 'em drive out these"—he pointed to the minority around the roach—"they'll never know which among 'em might be a roach-eater. They'll get so worried, they'll do anything to keep from being suspected of roach-eating. When they get scared enough, we can make 'em do anything we want."

He hunkered down to watch the ants. He picked up a roach-eater and put it on the bird. I got up.

"Well, I only just dropped in, Mr. Costello," I said.

"I'm not an ant," said Mr. Costello. "As long as it makes no difference to me what they eat, I can make 'em do anything in the world I want."

"I'll see you around," I said.

He kept on talking quietly to himself as I walked away. He was watching the ants, figuring, and paid no attention to me.

I went back to Barney. I asked, sort of choked, "What is he doing, Barney?"

"He's doing what he has to do," Barney said.

We went back to the monowheel and up the hill and through the force-gate. After a while, I asked, "How long will he be here?"

"As long as he wants to be." Barney was kind of short about it.

"Nobody wants to be locked up."

He had that odd look on his face again. "Nightingale's not a jail."

"He can't get out."

"Look, chum, we could start him over. We could even make a purser out of him. But we stopped doing that kind of thing a long time ago. We let a man do what he wants to do."

"He never wanted to be boss over an anthill."

"He didn't?"

I guess I looked as if I didn't understand that, so he said, "All his life he's pretended he's a man and the rest of us are ants. Now it's come true for him. He won't run human anthills any more because he will never again get near one."

I looked through the windshield at the shining finger that was my distant ship. "What happened on Borinquen, Barney?"

"Some of his converts got loose around the System. That Humanity One idea had to be stopped." He drove awhile, seeing badly out of a thinking face. "You won't take this hard, Purser, but you're a thick-witted ape. I can say that if no one else can."

"All right," I said. "Why?"

"We had to smash into Borinquen, which used to be so free and easy. We got into Costello's place. It was a regular fort. We got him and his files. We didn't get his girl. He killed her, but the files were enough."

After a time I said, "He was always a good friend to me."
"Was he?"

I didn't say anything. He wheeled up to the receiving station and stopped the machine.

He said, "He was all ready for you if you came to work for him. He had a voice recording of you large as life, saying 'Sometimes a man's just *got* to be by himself.' Once you went to work for him, all he needed to do to keep you in line was to threaten to put that on the air."

I opened the door. "What did you have to show him to me for?"

"Because we believe in letting a man do what he wants to do, as long as he doesn't hurt the rest of us. If you want to go back to the lake and work for Costello, for instance, I'll take you there."

I closed the door carefully and went up the ramp to the ship.

I did my work and when the time came, we blasted off. I was mad. I don't think it was about anything Barney told me. I wasn't especially mad about Mr. Costello or what happened to him, because Barney's the best Navy psych doc there is and Nightingale's the most beautiful hospital planet in the Universe.

What made me mad was the thought that never again would a man as big as Mr. Costello give that big, warm, soft, strong friendship to a lunkhead like me.

There's nothing wrong with Jerome Bixby—if you like talent. Editor, artist, pianist, and writer, Bixby in full-velocity hyperspace drive shows some of the characteristics of an old-time one-man band; and if he absent-mindedly applies to one field the skills belonging to another, who are we to complain? He is widely known to typesetters for the exquisite calligraphic art of his proofreading; and to see what happens when he confuses the keyboard of his typewriter with the keyboard of his piano, observe the scherzo in words called—

Angels in the Jets

It was chemically very similar to Earth, but much smaller. It circled a nameless Class K sun in Messier 13, showing its one Y-shaped continent to the morning every sixteen-odd hours. It had mile-high green flora, hungry fauna, a yellowish-red sky that often rained, grey rivers that wound smoothly to a tossing grey sea. It had a perfectly breathable atmosphere—except for one thing. Because of that one thing, Captain Murchison G. Dodge had named the planet “Deadly.”

Interstellar Investigation Team 411 had been on one of the seacoasts of Deadly for three days when Mabel Guernsey tripped over a huge, half-buried clam-like shell. In falling, she struck her head on the point of a huge conch-like shell. Her oxy-mask was torn off, and Mabel Guernsey got the madness.

They locked her up. They walked her over to the *Lance* that stood like a shining three-hundred-foot trophy on its sloping base of brown-black obsidian, created from sand by landing-blasts. They took her inside and put her in an extra storage compartment, and stacked crates in front of the door,

and put a twenty-four-hour guard on duty to see that she didn't get away. For it became swiftly apparent that the one thing in the world—or, rather, on Deadly—that Mabel wanted to do, wanted most terribly to do, was to take off everybody else's mask so that they would all be like her.

Murchison Dodge, who was the *Lance's* physiologist-biologist as well as its captain, went off searching the surrounding ecology for some cure for the malady, which was in many ways similar to ergot poisoning. Like ergot, the condition was caused by the sclerotium of a fungus—airborne and inhaled, in this case, as a curious microscopic unit which Murchison Dodge thought of as a sclerotoid spore. Like ergot, it brought itching and twitching and numbness at extremities; but these were short-lived symptoms, and there was no ergot-like effect upon the involuntary muscles, so the victims didn't die. They only went mad, and stayed mad. From Mabel Guernsey's behavior, Rupert, the psychologist, judged it to be an especially manic form of insanity. Mabel seemed very happy. She wished they could all be as happy as she. She was still trying to grab off oxy-masks when they closed the door on her.

So Dodge went searching for an antidote. He was gone for two days. And while he was gone, the night guard at Mabel's storage-room prison—a spacehand named Kraus, whom nobody liked, and who found himself stimulated by the proximity of a fairly attractive and provocatively irresponsible woman—pushed aside the crates, opened the door, and went in to do some tax-free tomcatting.

When Dodge returned, in the little one-man crewboat, the *Lance* was gone.

Far below, a patch of bright color—red, blue, yellow, purple, with the tiniest glimmer of steel to one side—told Dodge that he had at last found his wayward spaceship.

So they hadn't gone interstellar, thank God, or suicidally run the *Lance* into the local sun. That had been his first terrified thought upon finding the note they'd left and realizing what must have happened.

The note had been formed by large shells in the sand. It had been a hundred feet long. It had said: YOU'RE CRAZY. WE'RE GOING. YOU'LL NEVER FIND US.

And beneath, in smaller shells carefully selected for size and color, the names of the sixty-three spacehands and Team-members of the *Lance*.

Dodge sighed and cut the jets. He pulled the crewboat up into a stall. Its airfoils whined in atmosphere that was like Earth's, but almost twice as heavy. The green horizon of Deadly slid smoothly from the round noseport, to be replaced by copper sky and yellow clouds and a hazy orange glow that was the sun, and at the moment of immotion Dodge released the chute. It whipped out, obscuring sky, clouds, sun. It billowed and boomed open. Dodge's couch and its empty companion pistoned back deeply at the jar, slowly rose. Dodge half-sat, half-lay, his weight on his shoulders, looking straight up into the stiff white underside of the chute with eyes that were feathered with red and burning under dry lids. His hand went out to the button that would right the couch, but he pulled it back. The lying-down position was too comfortable after eighty foodless and sleepless hours at the controls.

The little boat drifted down, swaying on its lines, the apex of each swing allowing him a view around the edge of the chute. Copper sky. Yellow clouds. Hazy sun.

Back and forth, back and forth; and suddenly glimpses of green replaced glimpses of copper and yellow; the crewboat was among the giant trees. Each swing now revealed a wall of green and brown sliding evenly, silently, up past the port. Behind Dodge the cyclodrive hummed mezzo piano, out of circuit; Dodge's hand rested on the board, ready to drop the boat on its jets should the chute tangle or be torn.

He started the gyro, and the swinging stopped.

He switched on the rear-vision screen. He blinked in astonishment at what he saw, down among the giant roots of giant trees, though he had been prepared for just about anything. He commenced to push buttons that controlled slip-strings. The boat's downward course altered, drifting left toward the clearing in the forest.

A last-moment adjustment brought it to rest on its fins in the center of a village square.

Wearily, he heeled the pedal that would draw the chute back into its cubby, automatically repacking it as it came.

Then he turned on the side-view screens, one after another, leaving them on to get a panorama.

They were all grouped around in a wide circle, looking up at the boat. They were smiling. They were carrying guns. Even little Jansen, the bacteriologist, who had often professed a hatred of guns, had a brace of handblasts on his pudgy hips. There had been dangerous animals howling along the seacoast; Dodge supposed there must be just as many back here in Deadly's vast forests. So the guns argued that the madmen were at least able to recognize that menace, and were ready to fight it for their lives.

The glimmer of steel to one side of the colors was no longer tiny; it was huge and high—and not complete. The proud *Lance* had been partially stripped of her skin. There were ragged, gaping holes the length of her, with skeletal framework showing through, where great curving plates had been removed. Most of them cut out, Dodge saw dully, with torches. The *Lance* would never leave Deadly.

And the bright colors themselves . . .

Dodge felt a cold prickling back of his ears. The colors were giant fifteen-by-fifteen pine crates from the *Lance's* hold, a dozen or so of them, and the tarnished plates from the *Lance's* hull along with some shining new ones from her repair stock—all broken-down, sawed-up, bent, buckled, leaned-together, bolted, welded, nailed, glued, painted and arranged in a mad travesty of a village.

Holes—windows and doors—had been sawn or battered in the crates; and judging by the array of bolts and stays visible on their outsides, some had two stories. They sat on the thick green grass like giant children's blocks thrown helter-skelter on a lawn. All colors and crazy angles; frills and frippery; scallops and gingerbread, ju-jubes and toyland, polka-dots and peppermint stripes and bright checked patterns like gingham. Raggedy curtains in the windows, moving with the breeze, and a doormat, formerly a seat cushion in the *Lance's* main lounge, with WELCOME in drying orange. The walls of one crate-house were covered with purple and green and yellow murals whose jumbled, whirling ugliness could have meaning only to their mad creator.

The paint, Dodge thought, must be the petrolatum vehicle

for the *Lance's* fuel, pigmented with vivid clays which abounded on Deadly. It was splotchy, and most of it had run badly.

A little grey stream ran through the clearing—Dodge had found the *Lance* by following waterways methodically up and down the continent—and several slapdash garden plots were already under way. Beyond, at the edge of the clearing, was the heavy glass and metal heap of machinery that had been in the crates.

Dodge turned the gyro off, but left the slower-starting cyclodrive on as precaution; he might want to get away in a hurry. His trembling, dirty hands found another control. The couch turned slowly vertical; the straps that had held him tight demagnetized, retreated into slots. He got up, swaying a moment on the spider platform beneath the couch, took a deep breath that had acrid jet-odor in it. Then he stepped over to the shaft, found the ladder with his feet. He descended to the airlock.

Through the transparent port he could look down fifteen feet to the ground and see them staring up at him . . .

Jansen, Goldberg, Chabot, de Silva, Mabel Guernsey, young Jones, Marian—his heart ached as he saw Marian's face in the crowd, lovely as ever and smiling vapidly—Strickland, the four wide-eyed children, all the others. Standing in a wide circle whose center was the boat, and whose radius was the sharp-nosed shadow of the boat. Some presentably clothed, others incongruously clothed—like de Silva, who wore women's silk stockings and bathing trunks beneath the dress coat he'd affected for social gatherings aboard ship—and many not clothed at all. Dodge saw old, dignified Rupert, who had evidently not elected to come watch the crewboat; Rupert stood nude some distance off in front of a crate-house, facing away from crowd and crewboat, posing motionless with wrists crossed over his head and back arched. There was a puddle at his feet. Rupert was being a fountain.

Dodge worked the airlock mechanism, left the lock open a few inches, stopped it there; he had little assurance that they wouldn't blow his head off if they got the chance. First, of course, he put on his oxy-mask.

Looking out through the partly open lock, his voice nasal through the mask, he said, "You poor, poor devils."

"It's Dodge, all right," said Chabot, the *Lance's* Chief Engineer. He stood on the grass with his head just out of the shadow the boat cast, his body in it.

"It's God!" cried Mabel Guernsey, and prostrated herself. Several others did likewise.

"It is not!" said Chabot scornfully over his shoulder. "It's only the captain!"

Dodge looked at Marian. She had moved to the fore of the crowd where he could see her fully. She wore a halter affair, probably because her breasts had begun to sunburn, and nothing else except the Mercury-diamond engagement ring Dodge had given her. It glinted in the saffron sunlight as she stirred. She was looking, eyes sleepy, at his masked face in the airlock. He wondered bleakly if she even knew who he was. Her hair, unlike the matted dirty mops of several of the other women, appeared well tended; but her body was filthy, streaked with perspiration. Marian had always taken pride in her hair.

Dodge lowered his gaze to the sparkling black eyes of Chabot, who had come forward from the crowd and stood directly beneath the airlock. The man, Dodge remembered, had been a bit of a glad-hander aboard ship, always organizing and taking command of trivial activities; it was likely that this bent had led him to a kind of pro tem mayoralty here, for he seemed to be without dispute the spokesman. Dodge began searching for something useful to say.

Mabel Guernsey lifted her face from the grass and peeped up at Dodge. Then she got to her feet, apparently having lost her awe of God. She began to walk around the boat, within the circle of the crowd, staring up at the sleek metal sides. Several of the children followed her, singing nonsense in small piping voices.

Dodge decided that formality might be best. He put his captain's crispness into his voice. "You remember me, then, Chabot?"

"Sure, I remember you," said Chabot, smiling up. His hair was curly and as black as his eyes, with large flakes of dan-

druff in it. "You're crazy. You're crazy as a coot! You were going to try to make us crazy too!"

Dodge made his eyes icy, trying to frown Chabot down; then he remembered he was wearing a mask, and it didn't show. The frown remained, as he again tried to think of something to say.

"I got loose," Mabel Guernsey said, moving in her inspection of the boat. "Kraus came in, and I ran out, and he chased me. I opened the main airlock and ran outside. Kraus didn't try to close the airlock, he just stood there. Everybody else was asleep with their masks off. They all woke up happy, like Kraus and me."

"And then we went away," Chabot said, "before you came back. We hoped you wouldn't find us. We were sorry, but after all you're crazy, you know."

"Now you can't come out," he added, still smiling, "unless you take off your mask too. We'll kill you if you do!"

Every gun in the crowd came to bear on the airlock.

Dodge moved back behind the airlock door where he could watch them through the metaglass port. The port would stop a blaster bolt long enough to permit him to throw himself back out of sight if any shooting actually started.

So they'd made plans to deal with the event of his arrival. They were on the defensive. This would have been the most frustrating moment of all, had Dodge actually been able to find the madness-remedy he had searched for. But he hadn't, of course. It might take months of research and experimentation to produce one.

He couldn't help them. He couldn't help himself.

So here he was.

And there they were.

He was hungry. He hadn't eaten since starting back for the *Lance* after hopelessly concluding his search—almost four days ago. When he'd left the *Lance* the crewboat had had its regular stock of food for two days, no more. Now his stomach was twisting into itself with hunger. And he was tired. God, so tired.

He looked out at the upturned faces, at the tall ruined *Lance* that would never leave this world, and thought that he must be one of the loneliest men in the Universe.

"In fact," said Chabot loudly, "you'd better take off your mask and come out right away. Take off your mask and come out, or we'll push over the boat and come in and get you!"

He stood, smiling and waiting. Looking at him, Dodge thought that the madmen must be eating, at any rate; Chabot still had his waistline. He hoped, with a sudden chill, that they weren't eating each other.

Behind Chabot, Marian turned away, moving with the grace that had always stirred Dodge so. She walked over and stared at Rupert, who was still being a fountain. He stared back, his iron brows crawling up. She pushed him over. She lay down beside him . . .

Dodge closed his eyes. Marian, and old Rupert . . . So the woman's passion he had so often sensed in her had at last, but too soon, found its release. Slow, black moments passed. At last he forced himself to open his eyes and felt a dull, sour relief. Rupert, it appeared, was a little overage. He was back being a fountain, and Marian was sitting up, staring at the boat again.

The feeling of relief went away, as if it knew it was ridiculous, leaving only a black hole in his mind, and sick futility, and a small, feverish voice chattering that this was good tragicomedy. He leaned tiredly against the airlock door. Behind the mask his face felt hot, was suddenly running perspiration. He found himself trembling violently, tight and clotted inside, his clenched fist pressed hard against the mask, cutting its bit into his lips, and his face was running tears too.

"We'll give you three," said Chabot. "On-n-n-ne . . ."

Dodge could taste blood in his mouth.

The others took it up like a chant, all smiling, surging forward: "Two-o-o-o . . ."

Dodge sagged against the airlock and cried like a baby.

"*Three!*" Explosive, like "*Three!*" always is.

They milled around the boat with Chabot, by furious shouting finally succeeding in getting the effort organized. They shoved and the boat rocked on its fins.

Wildly Dodge went up the ladder. He sprawled across the twin couches to slap the gyro control. The gyro whined into action and the rocking stopped abruptly. He heard laughter

from outside. He went back down the ladder to the airlock, in time to stamp on dirty fingers that clutched the very rim of the lock trying for a solid grasp. The man fell back, hooting. Looking down through the transparent port, Dodge saw that it had been de Silva, boosted on the shoulders of several others.

De Silva lay on the grass and grinned up at him. "Damn you, Cap, I think you broke my hand."

A woman—Susan May Larkin, Nobel physicist—came around the corner of one of the houses. She didn't walk; she hopped. She had a bouquet of alien flowers in one hand and her face was buried in them, and she hopped. Both feet together—crouch—hop! Both feet together—crouch—hop! A big bearlike man, one of the jetmen, came around the corner after her, grinning. He took her roughly by the arm and led her back out of sight. Still she hopped.

Sounds—a soft tinny clatter that could only be pots and pans and other kitchenware from the *Lance's* galley, beaten upon and together—came from the darkness beyond a rough-hewn, curtained window nearby. A certain periodicity of pitch-change suggested that it was music. Across the village, out of sight behind the crewboat, a female voice began to *la-la-la* tunelessly, loudly, in the very uppermost register. The singing children stopped singing to listen.

Dodge said sharply, "Chabot, come up here."

Chabot shook his head. "And have you make me crazy? Uh-uh!"

"I don't want to make you crazy," Dodge said patiently. "Remember, Chabot, I'm still captain of the *Lance*. Come on up. I just want to . . ."

And his voice trailed off, with no place to go. Just wanted to what? He had no cure for the madness. Chabot down there thought he had and was afraid—but he had none. Use Chabot as hostage, then? Why? On threat of the man's death, he might force them to bring food to him. But even then the oxygen supply in the tank at his belt and in the boat's tank wouldn't last forever. Or even for another week. And they quite possibly might abandon Chabot or simply forget him, and Dodge's threats would not avail. And Chabot wasn't going to come up in the first place.

What *could* he do?

"All right," he said. "Stay there."

"I intend to," Chabot smiled.

So seemingly rational, thought Dodge. So well-spoken and logical within their framework of lunatic action.

Deadly's swift rotation had moved the point of the crewboat's shadow along the perimeter of the circle-standing crowd, like a giant hand on a giant clock, marking off alien minutes on smiling, mad-eyed numerals.

His mind rebelled with sudden, almost physical impact. He must do something. Not anything constructive, anything aimed at brightening his incredible position, for there was absolutely nothing of that sort to be done. Just something, something. His mind screamed for action.

"I'm going to shoot," he said in a dead voice, "your damned silly village to pieces. With this boat's proton-buster."

"Oh, no, you're not," said Chabot. "We were talking about that." Without turning, he said curtly, "Jones——"

Ned Jones, steward and cook's apprentice, ran forward from the crowd. Lithe, slim, young, he sprang to the broad leading edge of the crewboat's right stabilizer. Poised there, he got a foothold on the radar blister a little higher up. Then, one foot braced on the blister, leaning forward a little against the sleek side of the boat, he leaped a short two feet upward, bringing his head about level with the large oval barrel of the proton-cannon. He would have fallen back, then—but he speared one arm into the cannon's muzzle. His body sagged. The muzzle moved an inch downward on its bearings, stopped. The arm broke audibly. Jones dangled, laughing with pain.

"You see," said Chabot. "You're not going to do any blasting, Dodge."

Not so rational after all, thought Dodge. No, I'm not going to do any blasting. But not because that boy's being where he is would stop the charge. He'd just vanish—or at least his arm would—if I triggered. But I'm not going to shoot, because I couldn't do that to him. And because there just isn't any reason to shoot and destroy. Nothing but a crying, tearing, clawing need to do *something*.

But what *could* he do?

So here he was.

And there they were.

Big lonely world, thought Dodge, and my oxygen won't last forever.

Marian was at the edge of the crowd again, staring up at the boat and at Dodge. Her halter had come off—he saw it back on the grass—and she was standing straight and tall and sunburned. She'd always been proud of her carriage, too.

The madness, Dodge thought, was like most others; it impaired value judgments, but not so much any logic built on the shaky basis resulting. Each person afflicted—Chabot, Marian, Rupert, whose evident desire to be a fountain might signify a great deal, gun-shy Jansen, whose wearing two hand-blasts might mean as much, de Silva, with his silk stockings—each had become a caricature of himself. The floodgates were down, Dodge thought, and they were living out their unconsciousnesses, and so they were happy.

He still felt that he had to do something. A man should be able to *act*.

"I'm taking off," he said loudly to the upturned faces. "Stand back. The jets will burn you if you don't."

Chabot didn't move. He laughed. "You're not going anywhere either. If you try to take off the boat will explode and you'll die." He stood there, hands on his hips. "Because we put angels in the jets."

He laughed again, at the look he thought he saw on Dodge's oxy-mask. The laughter caught and ran through the crowd.

Marian spoke for the first time.

"Angels in the jets," she echoed queerly.

And Dodge remembered Marian's knack with a pencil, her certain skill in doodling.

Angels. Always angels. Little chubby, winged angels—almost cherubs.

He watched her as, with that lithe walk and an expression of intense interest, she came forward to pass Chabot and vanish under the stern of the boat. Then he heard her crooning. She sees the angels, he thought. So the madness included a powerful susceptibility to suggestion.

He looked up. Copper sky, yellow clouds. Giant trees, and a village. And he, almost cowering here in the crewboat—to

the villagers, possibly, a kind of village idiot. Big lonely world.

Take off? To go where on this big lonely world? And why?

He crouched by the partly open airlock, knees bent, fingertips touching the cold steel. There was a wariness in him, like a beast's. Behind him the gyro's whine, the cyclodrive's hum, were suddenly the song of death.

What did a man live for? All Dodge's instincts jostled and shoved forward to point to one answer: that in the last analysis a man lived to live.

Maybe in ten years or so a rescue ship would come searching Messier 13 for them. But it would be an almost hopeless search. And it probably wouldn't even happen, for Investigation Teams were presumably self-sufficient, and when not heard from, presumably lost.

"Yes," he said. "I guess you're right, Chabot. If I take off, I die."

He pressed the airlock mechanism. The sliding-door whispered the rest of the way open. Dodge reached up and stripped off his oxy-mask—quickly, without giving himself time to think—and breathed deeply once, twice, three-e-ee . . .

He moved numbly to the rim of the lock, teetered there a moment on the edge of the world. His burning eyes caught the small mirror set into the wall over the first-aid cabinet; he saw his own face, looked through its eyes into the eyes of the mind he knew, and said, "Good-bye . . ."

And even as he watched, they changed.

Soft tinkling melody from one of the houses touched his ears pleasantly. He turned, started down the metal rungs set into the side of the boat, thinking, *But I don't feel much different!* He stopped on the way to reach over and help Jones out of the proton-cannon. Together, they jumped the short distance to the ground.

The crowd, now that the problem of the lunatic in its midst had been solved, had lost interest. They walked away, singly and in groups, chattering and smiling. Jones smiled and walked away too, clutching his broken arm. Dodge noticed with a start that Jones had two other arms—the broken arm and two others with which he clutched it. It was Jones,

without doubt. But it was very strange that Dodge had never noticed those three arms before. Well, no matter . . .

Marian came out from under the stern of the crewboat, her eyes shining. Dodge wondered again if she knew him. She started to walk past him, hips swaying provocatively. He reached out and took her shoulder, bruising the flesh hard. Suddenly she was in his arms, flowing up against him.

"I like you too," she was saying hoarsely, raggedly. "I like you too."

They joined hands and began to walk. Marian, probably remembering the hopping woman, began to hop too, and soon it turned into a dance. Dodge joined in, laughing happily.

He bent over once, walking on all fours, just as they were entering the forest, so he could look back under the crewboat and see the dancing, darting figures of the angels in the jets.

Praising one's collaborator is like praising one's wife: it seldom sounds quite objective. Therefore, forgetting for the moment that C. M. Kornbluth had anything to do with such novels as *Search the Sky*, *The Space Merchants* and *Gladiator-at-Law*, let us only note that all Kornbluth novels (*Takeoff*, *The Syndic*) win the hearts of reviewers, and all Kornbluth short stories turn up in science-fiction anthologies . . . as, for instance, herein does—

The Adventurer

President Folsom XXIV said petulantly to his Secretary of the Treasury: "Blow me to hell, Bannister, if I understood a single word of that. *Why* can't I buy the Nicolaides Collection? And don't start with the rediscount and the Series W business again. Just tell me *why*."

The Secretary of the Treasury said with an air of apprehension and a thread-like feeling across his throat: "It boils down to—no money, Mr. President."

The President was too engrossed in thoughts of the marvelous collection to fly into a rage. "It's *such* a bargain," he said mournfully. "An archaic Henry Moore figure—really too big to finger, but I'm no culture-snob, thank God—and fifteen early Morrisons and I can't begin to tell you what else." He looked hopefully at the Secretary of Public Opinion: "Mightn't I seize it for the public good or something?"

The Secretary of Public Opinion shook his head. His pose was gruffly professional. "Not a chance, Mr. President. We'd never get away with it. The art-lovers would scream to high Heaven."

"I suppose so . . . *Why* isn't there any money?" He had

swiveled dangerously on the Secretary of the Treasury again.

"Sir, purchases of the new Series W bond issue have lagged badly because potential buyers have been attracted to——"

"Stop it, stop it, *stop* it! You know I can't make head or tail of that stuff. Where's the money *going*?"

The Director of the Budget said cautiously: "Mr. President, during the biennium just ending, the Department of Defense accounted for 78 per cent of expenditures——"

The Secretary of Defense growled: "Now wait a minute, Felder! We were voted——"

The President interrupted, raging weakly: "Oh, you rascals! My father would have known what to do with you! But don't think I can't handle it. *Don't* think you can hood-wink me." He punched a button ferociously; his silly face was contorted with rage and there was a certain tension on all the faces around the Cabinet table.

Panels slid down abruptly in the walls, revealing grim-faced Secret Servicemen. Each Cabinet officer was covered by at least two automatic rifles.

"Take that—that traitor away!" the President yelled. His finger pointed at the Secretary of Defense, who slumped over the table, sobbing. Two Secret Servicemen half-carried him from the room.

President Folsom XXIV leaned back, thrusting out his lower lip. He told the Secretary of the Treasury: "*Get* me the money for the Nicolaides Collection. Do you understand? I don't care how you do it. *Get* it." He glared at the Secretary of Public Opinion. "Have you any comments?"

"No, Mr. President."

"All right, then." The President unbent and said plaintively: "I don't see why you can't all be more reasonable. I'm a very reasonable man. I don't see why I can't have a few pleasures along with my responsibilities. Really I don't. And I'm sensitive. I don't *like* these scenes. Very well. That's all. The Cabinet meeting is adjourned."

They rose and left silently in the order of their seniority. The President noticed that the panels were still down and pushed the button that raised them again and hid the granite-faced Secret Servicemen. He took out of his pocket a late Morrison fingering-piece and turned it over in his hand, a

smile of relaxation and bliss spreading over his face. *Such* amusing textural contrast! *Such* unexpected variations on the classic sequences!

The Cabinet, less the Secretary of Defense, was holding a rump meeting in an untapped corner of the White House gymnasium.

"God," the Secretary of State said, white-faced. "Poor old Willy!"

The professionally gruff Secretary of Public Opinion said: "We should murder the bastard. I don't care what happens—"

The Director of the Budget said dryly: "We all know what would happen. President Folsom XXV would take office. No; we've got to keep plugging as before. Nothing short of the invincible can topple the Republic . . ."

"What about a war?" the Secretary of Commerce demanded fiercely. "We've no proof that our program will work. What about a war?"

State said wearily: "Not while there's a balance of power, my dear man. The Io-Callisto Question proved that. The Republic and the Soviet fell all over themselves trying to patch things up as soon as it seemed that there would be real shooting. Folsom XXIV and his excellency Premier Yersinsky know at least that much."

The Secretary of the Treasury said: "What would you all think of Steiner for Defense?"

The Director of the Budget was astonished. "Would he take it?"

Treasury cleared his throat. "As a matter of fact, I've asked him to stop by right about now." He hurled a medicine ball into the budgetary gut.

"Oof!" said the Director. "You bastard. Steiner would be perfect. He runs Standards like a watch." He treacherously fired the medicine ball at the Secretary of Raw Materials, who blandly caught it and slammed it back.

"Here he comes," said the Secretary of Raw Materials. "Steiner! Come and sweat some oleo off!"

Steiner ambled over, a squat man in his fifties, and said: "I don't mind if I do. Where's Willy?"

State said: "The President unmasked him as a traitor. He's probably been executed by now."

Steiner looked grim, and grimmer yet when the Secretary of the Treasury said, dead-pan: "We want to propose you for Defense."

"I'm happy in Standards," Steiner said. "Safer, too. The Man's father took an interest in science, but The Man never comes around. Things are very quiet. Why don't you invite Winch, from the National Art Commission? It wouldn't be much of a change for the worse for him?"

"No brains," the Secretary for Raw Materials said briefly. "Heads up!"

Steiner caught the ball and slugged it back at him. "What good are brains?" he asked quietly.

"Close the ranks, gentlemen," State said. "These long shots are too hard on my arms."

The ranks closed and the Cabinet told Steiner what good were brains. He ended by accepting.

The Moon is all Republic. Mars is all Soviet. Titan is all Republic. Ganymede is all Soviet. But Io and Callisto, by the Treaty of Greenwich, are half-and-half Republic and Soviet.

Down the main street of the principal settlement on Io runs an invisible line. On one side of the line, the principal settlement is known as New Pittsburgh. On the other side it is known as Nishni-Magnitogorsk.

Into a miner's home in New Pittsburgh one day an eight-year-old boy named Grayson staggered, bleeding from the head. His eyes were swollen almost shut.

His father lurched to his feet, knocking over a bottle. He looked stupidly at the bottle, set it upright too late to save much of the alcohol, and then stared fixedly at the boy. "See what you made me do, you little bastard?" he growled, and fetched the boy a clout on his bleeding head that sent him spinning against the wall of the hut. The boy got up slowly and silently—there seemed to be something wrong with his left arm—and glowered at his father.

He said nothing.

"Fighting again," the father said, in a would-be fierce voice.

His eyes fell under the peculiar fire in the boy's stare. "Damn fool——"

A woman came in from the kitchen. She was tall and thin. In a flat voice she said to the man: "Get out of here." The man hiccupped and said: "Your brat spilled my bottle. Gimme a dollar."

In the same flat voice: "I have to buy food."

"*I said gimme a dollar!*" The man slapped her face—it did not change—and wrenched a small purse from the string that suspended it around her neck. The boy suddenly was a demon, flying at his father with fists and teeth. It lasted only a second or two. The father kicked him into a corner where he lay, still glaring, wordless and dry-eyed. The mother had not moved; her husband's handmark was still red on her face when he hulked out, clutching the money bag.

Mrs. Grayson at last crouched in the corner with the eight-year-old boy. "Little Tommy," she said softly. "My little Tommy! Did you cross the line again?"

He was blubbering in her arms, hysterically, as she caressed him. At last he was able to say: "I didn't cross the line, Mom. Not this time. It was in school. They said our name was really Krasinsky. God-damn him!" the boy shrieked. "They said his grandfather was named Krasinsky and he moved over the line and changed his name to Grayson! God-damn him! Doing that to us!"

"Now, darling," his mother said, caressing him. "Now, darling." His trembling began to ebb. She said: "Let's get out the spools, Tommy. You mustn't fall behind in school. You owe that to me, don't you, darling?"

"Yes, Mom," he said. He threw his spindly arms around her and kissed her. "Get out the spools. We'll show him. I mean them."

President Folsom XXIV lay on his death-bed, feeling no pain, mostly because his personal physician had pumped him full of morphine. Dr. Barnes sat by the bed holding the presidential wrist and waiting, occasionally nodding off and recovering with a belligerent stare around the room. The four wire-service men didn't care whether he fell asleep or not; they were worriedly discussing the nature and habits of the

President's first-born, who would shortly succeed to the highest office in the Republic.

"A firebrand, they tell me," the A.P. man said unhappily.

"Firebrands I don't mind," the U.P. man said. "He can send out all the inflammatory notes he wants just as long as he isn't a fiend for exercise. I'm not as young as I once was. You boys wouldn't remember the *old* President, Folsom XXII. He used to do point-to-point hiking. He worshipped old F.D.R."

The I.N.S. man said, lowering his voice: "Then he was worshipping the wrong Roosevelt. Teddy was the athlete."

Dr. Barnes started, dropped the presidential wrist and held a mirror to the mouth for a moment. "Gentlemen," he said, "the President is dead."

"O.K.," the A.P. man said. "Let's go, boys. I'll send in the flash. U.P., you go cover the College of Electors. I.N.S., get onto the President Elect. Trib, collect some interviews and background——"

The door opened abruptly; a colonel of infantry was standing there, breathing hard, with an automatic rifle at port. "Is he dead?" he asked.

"Yes," the A.P. man said. "If you'll let me past——"

"Nobody leaves the room," the colonel said grimly. "I represent General Slocum, Acting President of the Republic. The College of Electors is acting now to ratify——"

A burst of gunfire caught the colonel in the back; he spun and fell, with a single hoarse cry. More gunfire sounded through the White House. A Secret Serviceman ducked his head through the door: "President's dead? You boys stay put. We'll have this thing cleaned up in an hour——" He vanished.

The doctor sputtered his alarm and the newsmen ignored him with professional poise. The A.P. man asked: "Now who's Slocum? Defense Command?"

I.N.S. said: "I remember him. Three stars. He headed up the Tactical Airborne Force out in Kansas four-five years ago. I think he was retired since then."

A phosphorus grenade crashed through the window and exploded with a globe of yellow flame the size of a basketball; dense clouds of phosphorus pentoxide gushed from it and the sprinkler system switched on, drenching the room.

"Come on!" hacked the A.P. man, and they scrambled from the room and slammed the door. The doctor's coat was burning in two or three places, and he was retching feebly on the corridor floor. They tore his coat off and flung it back into the room.

The U.P. man, swearing horribly, dug a sizzling bit of phosphorus from the back of his hand with a pen-knife and collapsed, sweating, when it was out. The I.N.S. man passed him a flask and he gurgled down half a pint of liquor. "Who flang that brick?" he asked faintly.

"Nobody," the A.P. man said gloomily. "That's the hell of it. None of this is happening. Just the way Taft the Pretender never happened in '03. Just the way the Pentagon Mutiny never happened in '67."

"'68," the U.P. man said faintly. "It didn't happen in '68, not '67."

The A.P. man smashed a fist into the palm of his hand and swore. "*God-damn*," he said. "Some day I'd like to—" He broke off and was bitterly silent.

The U.P. man must have been a little dislocated with shock and quite drunk to talk the way he did. "Me too," he said. "Like to tell the story. Maybe it was '67 not '68. I'm not sure now. Can't write it down so the details get lost and then after a while it didn't happen at all. Revolution'd be good deal. But it takes people t' make revolution. *People*. With eyes 'n' ears. 'N' memories. We make things not-happen an' we make people not-see an' not-hear . . ." He slumped back against the corridor wall, nursing his burned hand. The others were watching him, very scared.

Then the A.P. man caught sight of the Secretary of Defense striding down the corridor, flanked by Secret Servicemen. "Mr. Steiner!" he called. "What's the picture?"

Steiner stopped, breathing heavily, and said: "Slocum's barricaded in the Oval Study. They don't want to smash in. He's about the only one left. There were only fifty or so. The Acting President's taken charge at the Study. You want to come along?"

They did, and even hauled the U.P. man after them.

The Acting President, who would be President Folsom XXV as soon as the Electoral College got around to it, had

his father's face—the petulant lip, the soft jowl—on a hard young body. He also had an auto-rifle ready to fire from the hip. Most of the Cabinet was present. When the Secretary of Defense arrived, he turned on him. "Steiner," he said nastily, "can you explain why there should be a rebellion against the Republic in your department?"

"Mr. President," Steiner said, "Slocum was retired on my recommendation two years ago. It seems to me that my responsibility ended there and Security should have taken over."

The President Elect's finger left the trigger of the auto-rifle and his lip drew in a little. "Quite so," he said curtly, and turned to the door. "Slocum!" he shouted. "Come out of there. We can use gas if we want."

The door opened unexpectedly and a tired-looking man with three stars on each shoulder stood there, bare-handed. "All right," he said drearily. "I was fool enough to think something could be done about the regime. But you fat-faced imbeciles are going to go on and on and—"

The stutter of the auto-rifle cut him off. The President Elect's knuckles were white as he clutched the piece's forearm and grip; the torrent of slugs continued to hack and plow the general's body until the magazine was empty. "Burn that," he said curtly, turning his back on it. "Dr. Barnes, come here. I want to know about my father's passing."

The doctor, hoarse and red-eyed from the whiff of phosphorus smoke, spoke with him. The U.P. man had sagged drunkenly into a chair, but the other newsmen noted that Dr. Barnes glanced at them as he spoke, in a confidential murmur.

"Thank you, doctor," the President Elect said at last, decisively. He gestured to a Secret Serviceman. "Take those traitors away." They went, numbly.

The Secretary of State cleared his throat. "Mr. President," he said, "I take this opportunity to submit the resignations of myself and fellow Cabinet members according to custom."

"That's all right," the President Elect said. "You may as well stay on. I intend to run things myself anyway." He hefted the auto-rifle. "You," he said to the Secretary of Public Opinion. "You have some work to do. Have the memory of my father's—artistic—preoccupations obliterated as soon as

possible. I wish the Republic to assume a warlike posture—yes; what is it?”

A trembling messenger said:

“Mr. President, I have the honor to inform you that the College of Electors has elected you President of the Republic—unanimously.”

Cadet Fourth Classman Thomas Grayson lay on his bunk and sobbed in an agony of loneliness. The letter from his mother was crumpled in his hand: “—prouder than words can tell of your appointment to the Academy. Darling, I hardly knew my grandfather, but I know that you will serve as brilliantly as he did, to the eternal credit of the Republic. You must be brave and strong for my sake—”

He would have given everything he had or ever could hope to have to be back with her, and away from the bullying, sneering fellow-cadets of the Corps. He kissed the letter—and then hastily shoved it under his mattress as he heard footsteps.

He popped to a brace, but it was only his roommate Ferguson. Ferguson was from Earth, and rejoiced in the lighter Lunar gravity which was punishment to Grayson's Io-bred muscles.

“Rest, mister,” Ferguson grinned.

“Thought it was night inspection.”

“Any minute now. They're down the hall. Lemme tighten your bunk or you'll be in trouble—” Tightening the bunk, he pulled out the letter and said, calfishly: “Ah-hab! Who is she—?” and opened it.

When the cadet officers reached the room they found Ferguson on the floor being strangled black in the face by spidery little Grayson. It took all three of them to pull him off. Ferguson went to the infirmary and Grayson went to the Commandant's office.

The Commandant glared at the cadet from under the most spectacular pair of eyebrows in the Service. “Cadet Grayson,” he said, “explain what occurred.”

“Sir, Cadet Ferguson began to read a letter from my mother without my permission.”

“That is not accepted by the Corps as grounds for mayhem. Do you have anything further to say?”

"Sir, I lost my temper. All I thought of was that it was an act of disrespect to my mother and somehow to the Corps and the Republic too—that Cadet Ferguson was dishonoring the Corps."

Bushwah, the Commandant thought. *A snow job and a crude one.* He studied the youngster. He had never seen such a brace from an Io-bred fourth-classman. It must be torture to muscles not yet toughened up to even Lunar gravity. Five minutes more and the boy would have to give way, and serve him right for showing off.

He studied Grayson's folder. It was too early to tell about academic work, but the fourth-classman was a bear—or a fool—for extra duty. He had gone out for half a dozen teams and applied for membership in the exacting Math Club and Writing Club. The Commandant glanced up; Grayson was still in his extreme brace. The Commandant suddenly had the queer idea that Grayson could hold it until it killed him.

"One hundred hours of pack-drill," he barked, "to be completed before quarter-term. Cadet Grayson, if you succeed in walking off your tours, remember that there is a tradition of fellowship in the Corps which its members are expected to observe. Dismiss."

After Grayson's steel-sharp salute and exit the Commandant dug deeper into the folder. Apparently there was something wrong with the boy's left arm, but it had been passed by the examining team that visited Io. Most unusual. Most irregular. But nothing could be done about it now.

The President, softer now in body than on his election day, and infinitely more cautious, snapped: "It's all very well to create an incident. But where's the money to come from? Who wants the rest of Io anyway? And what will happen if there's war?"

Treasury said: "The hoarders will supply the money, Mr. President. A system of percentage-bounties for persons who report currency-hoarders, and then enforced purchase of a bond issue."

Raw Materials said: "We need that iron, Mr. President. We need it desperately."

State said: "All our evaluations indicate that the Soviet

Premier would consider nothing less than armed invasion of his continental borders as occasion for all-out war. The consumer-goods party in the Soviet has gained immensely during the past five years and of course their armaments have suffered. Your shrewd directive to put the Republic in a war-like posture has borne fruit, Mr. President . . .”

President Folsom XXV studied them narrowly. To him the need for a border incident culminating in a forced purchase of Soviet Io did not seem as pressing as they thought, but they were, after all, specialists. And there was no conceivable way they could benefit from it personally. The only alternative was that they were offering their professional advice and that it would be best to heed it. Still, there was a vague, nagging something . . .

Nonsense, he decided. The spy dossiers on his Cabinet showed nothing but the usual. One had been blackmailed by an actress after an affair and railroaded her off the Earth. Another had a habit of taking bribes to advance favorite sons in civil and military service. And so on. The Republic could not suffer at their hands; the Republic and the dynasty were impregnable. You simply spied on everybody—including the spies—and ordered summary executions often enough to show that you meant it, and kept the public ignorant: deaf-dumb-blind ignorant. The spy system was simplicity itself; you had only to let things get as tangled and confused as possible until *nobody* knew who was who. The executions were literally no problem, for guilt or innocence made no matter. And mind-control when there were four newspapers, six magazines and three radio and television stations was a job for a handful of clerks.

No; the Cabinet couldn't be getting away with anything. The system was unbeatable.

President Folsom XXV said: “Very well. Have it done.”

Mrs. Grayson, widow, of New Pittsburgh, Io, disappeared one night. It was in all the papers and on all the broadcasts. Sometime later she was found dragging herself back across the line between Nizhni-Magnitogorsk and New Pittsburgh in sorry shape. She had a terrible tale to tell about what she had suffered at the hands and so forth of the Nizhni-Magnito-

gorskniiks. A diplomatic note from the Republic to the Soviet was answered by another note which was answered by the dispatch of the Republic's First Fleet to Io which was answered by the dispatch of the Soviet's First and Fifth Fleets to Io.

The Republic's First Fleet blew up the customary deserted target hulk, fulminated over a sneak sabotage attack and moved in its destroyers. Battle was joined.

Ensign Thomas Grayson took over the command of his destroyer when its captain was killed on his bridge. An electrified crew saw the strange, brooding youngster perform prodigies of skill and courage, and responded to them. In one week of desultory action the battered destroyer had accounted for seven Soviet destroyers and a cruiser.

As soon as this penetrated to the flagship Grayson was decorated and given a flotilla. His weird magnetism extended to every officer and man aboard the seven craft. They struck like phantoms, cutting out cruisers and battlewagons in wild unorthodox actions that couldn't have succeeded but did—every time. Grayson was badly wounded twice, but his driving nervous energy carried him through.

He was decorated again and given the battlewagon of an ailing four-striper.

Without orders he touched down on the Soviet side of Io, led out a landing party of marines and bluejackets, cut through two regiments of Soviet infantry, and returned to his battlewagon with prisoners: the top civil and military administrators of Soviet Io.

They discussed him nervously aboard the flagship.

"He has a mystical quality, Admiral. His men would follow him into an atomic furnace. And—and I almost believe he could bring them through safely if he wanted to." The laugh was nervous.

"He doesn't look like much. But when he turns on the charm—watch out!"

"He's—he's a *winner*. Now I wonder what I mean by that?"

"I know what you mean. They turn up every so often. People who can't be stopped. People who have everything. Napoleons. Alexanders. Stalins. Up from nowhere."

"Suleiman. Hitler. Folsom I. Genghis Khan."

"Well, let's get it over with."

They tugged at their gold-braided jackets and signalled the honor guard.

Grayson was piped aboard, received another decoration and another speech. This time he made a speech in return.

President Folsom XXV, not knowing what else to do, had summoned his cabinet. "Well?" he rasped at the Secretary of Defense.

Steiner said with a faint shrug: "Mr. President, there is nothing to be done. He has the fleet, he has the broadcasting facilities, he has the people."

"People!" snarled the President. His finger stabbed at a button and the wall panels snapped down to show the Secret Servicemen standing in their niches. The finger shot tremulously out at Steiner. "Kill that traitor!" he raved.

The chief of the detail said uneasily: "Mr. President, we were listening to Grayson before we came on duty. He says he's de facto President now——"

"Kill him! Kill him!"

The chief went doggedly on: "——and we liked what he had to say about the Republic and he said citizens of the Republic shouldn't take orders from you and he'd relieve you——"

The President fell back.

Grayson walked in, wearing his plain ensign's uniform and smiling faintly. Admirals and four-striper flanked him.

The chief of the detail said: "Mr. Grayson! Are you taking over?"

The man in the ensign's uniform said gravely: "Yes. And just call me 'Grayson,' please. The titles come later. You can go now."

The chief gave a pleased grin and collected his detail. The rather slight, youngish man who had something wrong with one arm was in charge—*complete* charge.

Grayson said: "Mr. Folsom, you are relieved of the presidency. Captain, take him out and——" He finished with a whimsical shrug. A portly four-striper took Folsom by one arm. Like a drugged man the deposed president let himself be led out.

Grayson looked around the table. "Who are you gentlemen?"

They felt his magnetism, like the hum when you pass a power station.

Steiner was the spokesman. "Grayson," he said soberly, "we were Folsom's Cabinet. However, there is more that we have to tell you. Alone, if you will allow it."

"Very well, gentlemen." Admirals and captains backed out, looking concerned.

Steiner said: "Grayson, the story goes back many years. My predecessor, William Malvern, determined to overthrow the regime, holding that it was an affront to the human spirit. There have been many such attempts. All have broken up on the rocks of espionage, terrorism and opinion-control—the three weapons which the regime holds firmly in its hands.

"Malvern tried another approach than espionage versus espionage, terrorism versus terrorism and opinion-control versus opinion-control. He determined to use the basic fact that certain men make history: that there are men born to be mould-breakers. They are the Phillips of Macedon, the Napoleons, Stalins and Hitlers, the Suleimans—the adventurers. Again and again they flash across history, bringing down an ancient empire, turning ordinary soldiers of the line into unkillable demons of battle, uprooting cultures, breathing new life into moribund peoples.

"There are common denominators among all the adventurers. Intelligence, of course. Other things are more mysterious but are always present. They are foreigners. Napoleon the Corsican. Hitler the Austrian. Stalin the Georgian. Phillip the Macedonian. Always there is an Oedipus complex. Always there is physical deficiency. Napoleon's stature. Stalin's withered arm—and yours. Always there is a minority disability, real or fancied.

"This is a shock to you, Grayson, but you must face it. *You were manufactured.*

"Malvern packed the cabinet with the slyest double-dealers he could find and they went to work. Eighty-six infants were planted on the outposts of the Republic in simulated family environments. Your mother was not your mother but one of the most brilliant actresses ever to drop out of sight on Earth.

Your intelligence-heredity was so good that we couldn't turn you down for lack of a physical deficiency. We withered your arm with gamma radiation. I hope you will forgive us. There was no other way.

"Of the eighty-six you are the one that worked. Somehow the combination for you was minutely different from all the other combinations, genetically or environmentally, and it worked. That is all we were after. The mould has been broken, you know now what you are. Let come whatever chaos is to come; the dead hand of the past no longer lies on—"

Grayson went to the door and beckoned; two captains came in. Steiner broke off his speech as Grayson said to them: "These men deny my godhood. Take them out and—" He finished with a whimsical shrug.

"Yes, your divinity," said the captains, without a trace of humor in their voices.

RAY BRADBURY

There was a time when the by-line of Ray Bradbury was in almost every issue of almost every science-fiction magazine; but a new era is upon us, and now Bradbury fans, in their countless thousands, must turn to such periodicals as *Esquire* and *Collier's*, or to the bookstores where *The Martian Chronicles*, *The Golden Apples of the Sun* or *Fahrenheit 451* are displayed. Fortunately for anthologists, however, there's still Bradbury in those old magazines; and hard work with pick and shovel can still turn up nuggets like—

Subterfuge

It was Tuesday morning, June 11th, in the year 2087.

Down the empty streets of Phoenix a breeze stirred softly. Nothing else in sight moved except a small Scottie dog that came to an alert while padding across the avenue.

The dog heard footsteps coming. It scampered in the direction of the sound, yelping eagerly.

From far away and far above a faint echo sounded, rising and fading. Hanging poised in the sky like silver needles were a dozen alien projectiles. They hovered in a warm, humming motion over the quiet town.

The deep fabric of silence was slashed down the middle. Fat legs pounded the open avenue. An alien jolted heavily through the warm hush, a swarm of military men in his wake.

Armū of Venus stalked to the City Hall, strode long-leggedly up a silent rampway. There he paused and cursed the deathlike tranquillity that had clasped the city.

"Is this the fruit of invasion?" bellowed Armū. "Is there no city left alive? Are they all like New York, Chicago and Phoenix?"

Echo voices answered back in mockery from the stone faces of tall buildings. *All like New York, New York, New York. All like New York!*

And then, a more subtle mockery, a voiceless teasing, *You thought to conquer, Armu. But Earth saw you coming and escaped. How did Earth escape, Armu? How did Earth escape?*

The Venusian glowered at his generals, as if to make them responsible.

"We'll tell you, Armu—we, the voices of two billion. Earth committed suicide!"

The bitter sound of those words, the keen knife of reality, impaled Armu. His carefully integrated plan of invasion, to capture the women of Earth as breeders of the new Venusian culture, crumbled into dry rot and pestilence.

Three thousand ~~star~~-ships idled above Earth, awaiting orders from Armu.

The orders he would be forced to give had a poisonous flavor.

Where were the fighting Earthlings—the men of battles and bullets and soft white flesh? Why had they given up so easily, preferring death shrouds to lightninglike war to the end?

Armu had so very much expected a nice, bloody Armageddon.

Armu's second-in-command gagged on the thin air. "Earth is no good to us this way," he choked out. "We don't want its cold climate, its naked atmosphere, its bad soil. We wanted productive protoplasm—and that is self-annihilated!"

The Venusians stood there, looking at the mute city. Dead; complete suicide. But Earthmen don't commit suicide. They aren't made that way. Not one man, woman or child alive—an impossible task.

Could there have been all that horror and agony just to escape Armu?

Looking around, one believed it. Here and there a shadow fluttered, a cat arched its back and prowled a fence; the little Scottie dog that had scampered eagerly to investigate, thinking its master had returned, now turned tail and scuttled away quickly at the sight of the invaders.

Armu grumbled, "I did not think it of the Earthlings. I did

not think they could do it." He strode back down the avenue to the immense ship that was grounded in a plaza.

"Search and keep on searching!" ordered Armu. "There must be someone alive!"

The battle fleet of Armu jetted across the sky. It roared over a dead Earth, over dead cities, dead oceans.

This was an entirely different globe.

It was another world that had existed four years previously, on June 11th, 2083.

"That is, without doubt, the most trivial statement ever made before us," said Manhardt.

"Not only is it not trivial, it is crucial!" Harler retorted. He pressed forward against the desk, his clean, bright eyes wandering from face to face of the assembled men. "We've got one chance. Only one. Now—do we take it, or do we let the world die?"

"It's childish," said Manhardt.

Harler bristled. "So is the idea of an invasion, of being made slaves, of Venusians attacking to ruin the world. Good God, Manhardt, I know such things belong in books. I know. But you can't sing away facts. You can't whistle away weapons! My solution to the problem may sound ridiculous, but it's the only way—"

The conference had dragged on for weeks. Someone stood up in the back of the hall.

"A question, please."

Harler nodded.

"You have definite proof," the man asked, "that there really will be an invasion?"

"Yes. I tuned in on secret meetings when I was presenting myself diplomatically at the Venusian capitol. They didn't know I heard. They didn't know I saw certain weapons."

"You mentioned one weapon particularly—"

"Yes. A weapon that can paralyze or annihilate, according to the way it is focused. It's made from Venusian metal, which makes it impossible for us to duplicate it. They can sweep Earth with it. We'd be helpless. We have only one weapon to fight them with and that is—readjustment to a new environment. We can't hide; we can't run away. But we can

do the unexpected. We can survive right under the nose of the invader."

"That sounds paradoxical. And anyway, how are you going to get the public to swallow your plan?"

"They'll have to. It's nothing but adaptation, a subterfuge."

"You speak of mass suicide glibly, Harler."

"And mass suicide it will be. But planned and orderly, with reincarnation for some, the Great Sleep for others."

"You can't do it!"

"If I can't do it—the Venusians will do worse!"

Harler was done. "It's up to you, gentlemen. It'll be the biggest change ever come to Earth. It means the end of luxuries and even some necessities. It means simplification of our over-complicated lives. What will it be, gentlemen? A little—or none?"

He sat down. Grimly he fumbled with the reports he had handed to the council of two hundred scientists and politicians from all nations.

He remembered the day a year ago when the first Venusian ship had arrived with only six aliens on it—a diplomatic envoy. How he had gone back to Venus with them to study space-flight problems. How he had accidentally stumbled across Venusian plans—

But there was one point in their favor—on this day, June 11th, 2083, there were no Venusian spies on Earth. Earth was working against time. She had, at the most, four years to prepare for invasion of superior forces. And Earth had the advantage of working in secrecy—

A murmur touched the air. The president arose. "I'm calling for a vote. Either we try to fight a futile war with airplanes against spaceships, or we take the path suggested by Dr. Harler. Everyone favoring combat say *Aye*."

"Aye—aye." A mutter went around the table—sparse, intermittent. Harler stiffened, eyes widening, as the president noted the vote.

Then: "All in favor of Harler's plan?"

One man rose. "Aye."

A second, and a third and a fourth. Then, like grim, decided machines, all down the line, nearly every man, the council voted, "Aye—aye!"

Fifty, sixty, seventy, eighty—and a majority!

"The vote is carried," said the president. He turned solemnly to Dr. Harler.

Something gleamed on Harler's cheek. He brushed it off as he left his chair, as he faced his fellowmen.

He said, "You will not be sorry, gentlemen. Believe me, you will not be sorry."

"And so, as you hear your numbers drawn and your names called, you'll know your places in the world of next year and the world of ten years from now——"

The television reporter droned on. "In the capital today, Dr. William Harler declared that no more than five hundred million people will remain 'aware and alive.' As many more must sleep to be awakened sometime in the future, perhaps never. The others—well, the others must be sacrificed. That means that one half of the world must die to insure the existence of the remaining half.

"A certain percentage of the population will be chosen by lottery, giving an element of fair play to the plan. But the rest, to insure intellectual and psychological stamina, will be selected scientifically for the survival of the fit.

"This is a time of unlimited emergency. Cooperate by listening each night, and by restraining hysterical outbursts. This much is certain: the Venusians are attacking. God grant we may be ready when they arrive. Signing off!"

It was on every lip—like honey and poison, like good and bad. There was argument, killing, acceptance, denial and ruthless insubordination. There was cooperation and sabotage. And the days rotted on the vine, dripping away into nothingness.

What a day for Earth. The dismal hours and months that followed extended inevitably into four years. The mobilization of doctors and machines, of men and beasts, of acceptance and patience. There was a tremendous rebuilding afoot. Secret caches were made of certain new foods. Caches that would never be discovered because they were too obvious. The finest minds slaved day after day, operated surgically and manipulated mighty machines that did things to mankind never done before.

On the television: *Why We Are Fighting This Silent War.*

"Because Venusians wish to interbreed with the women of

Earth, the fertility of Venus having fallen away to zero; because the combined races would produce children of horror; because all of those found sterile would be slain. Only our women would survive to live a life of terrified shame. This we cannot allow. Therefore we work—and work again.”

The final days drew near. The battle fleets of Venus were even now gathering in the misty vapor of Venus’ atmosphere. One Venusian ship flew over Earth in reconnaissance but noticed nothing out of place—nothing except the furious activity that had always been a part of Earth.

Harler spoke again.

“Tomorrow we shall know whether we succeed or fail in our mass-production subterfuge. Tomorrow will be the first change of one million experiments. And every day thereafter, in increasing numbers, up to five or ten million a day.

“We have thought of everything. Man will reproduce himself intelligently. The question is largely one of psychological adaptation to new surroundings, arts, tastes and hungers, to new homes and new viewpoints.

“Some have said this generation will not be able to reproduce, that intellect will not be passed on. They lie! Intellect will live. The mentality of man will live. The race of men and women will perish, but the precious ego, the power of life, will be retained in the seed we have perfected by experiment.”

And then the furious final days when egos, brains were dissected, boxed, stored. They were the Sleepers—the slumbering brains who were no more than brains, lying inert and helpless, waiting for the day when the living ones would awaken them.

“Five hundred million will take the brain sleep. We promise you that we shall awaken you—if we survive.”

There was a great deal of singing and quavering laughter and tears. And then compact, hidden slumber.

It is sad that nowhere was any of this transcribed. Not a word of print was ever laid to ink about the Change. Not a word as to the euthanasia, sleeping brains, the mysterious living ones.

The Venusians must never know about the living ones, or Earth would be completely doomed. The living ones re-

mained alive to keep the world ticking until the Venusians had come, seen, and gone away for good and all.

Harler was interviewed on the television.

Harler: "The Venusian culture, without new blood and new bodies, will die within forty years. Then we of Earth may come out of hiding!"

Question: "Will we actually ever return?"

Harler: "No—not for a long time, if ever. The cities must fall as they are. We can rebuild them to our needs later, after Venus and its madmen are gone."

It was punishable by instant death to even write it in a letter or diary that the Venusians might find and read later. Nothing in print! Newspapers and book publishers were ordered to cease publication.

Riots occurred in Chicago, London, Tokyo. Ten million died in riots over a four-year period. A civil war raged in China and in India and the Continental Mop Squads roared in and broke it up to the tune of fifteen million dead.

Earth was combed from North Pole to South. No one must be left alive. All men and women must be dead and buried.

Orders came by radio.

Joe Leighton got his.

"There it is, Alice. June 1st, four o'clock. A simple statement that puts an end to you and me."

"At least we'll be one of the last ones."

"We'll be one of the last, sure. And this—poison—they say it's good stuff. Hell! I was going to get a promotion next month. Huh."

"Will the plan work, Joe? Will everyone be dead?"

"All except the others, who'll keep on running, all five hundred million of them. They'll see to it we don't refuse to take our poison at the last moment." He shook his head. "There's a coroner to each block. He checks everyone. He makes sure everyone is accounted for. If there's a mistake, it'll be *corrected*."

"Will the others survive?"

"Who'd suspect them?"

"No one, I guess. And intelligence will survive with them through reproduction—"

"Sure. Years ago you couldn't have done it. It would've taken a million years to produce the effect any other way. But you leave things to the scientists; they do anything with synthetic protoplasm."

"I'm—I'm glad our children are sleeping, Joe, instead of dying. I'm glad they'll wake up and have a chance."

"Yeah. Yeah. Nice for them, eh? Well—bottoms up!"

Harler was one of the last ones in the Change.

"Street wardens," he directed over the television. "Time is short. You have twelve hours to complete your rounds. The Venusian fleet is just off the orbit of the moon. All the others in the sound of my voice will receive verbal communications from time to time by word of mouth. Spread out; scatter. Don't be seen together. Roam alone. Eat and sleep alone. Take to the hills and valleys and deserts, but keep near running water. That's all. Good-bye to all of you. You've done splendidly. May our prayers be answered. Signing off!"

Harler stood alone on a high hill, as the Venusian ships hurled down from the sky. He was in the town, unnoticed, when the Venusians swirled through.

He saw the bewilderment, amazement, the growing apprehension and terror of the Venusians as they found the world in death . . .

Armú, leader of the Venusian horde, gave orders.

"Tell ships to capture New York, Chicago and London first! Land everywhere that there are huge populations!"

"What about those reports from Paris, Bombay and Tokyo, Armú?"

Armú scowled. "Widely separated cases. We will have our slaves yet; do not fear!"

But reports boiled in. Denver, Singapore, New York, Cairo. Dead, dead, dead. Sprawled, buried, killed. Shot, poisoned, euthanasia.

Frustration.

Armú roared from the steps of City Hall in New York, from the steps of City Hall in Los Angeles. He scanned them with quick purple flicks of his staring eyes.

Streets deserted except for a few stray alley-cats or unkempt dogs ambling, or perhaps a few birds fluttering across the sky. And silence—a great quantity of silence.

After two weeks of rummaging, of growing fury, Armu ordered his fleet to about face and head for Venus. This climate was bad, and the silence and death were damaging to morale.

Defeated, the Venusians poured into the sky. They never returned.

Harler saw them go. Manhardt saw them go. The president of the States saw them go. Five hundred million pairs of eyes watched the invaders vanish in hopeless fury.

What a fantastic life this is, thought Harler. And yet our children will take the Change, the new arts, the new customs as natural. Our next flesh will be stronger, better shaped, better adapted. The Venusians are gone for good!

Harler looked at the sky, seeing new color. *Impossible a century ago, reality today. New homes, new foods for us all. New bodies. New synthetic bodies formed to imitate others, but new and capable of reproducing intelligence in themselves.*

He stood upon the hill again, overlooking Los Angeles.

He raised his voice and chilled himself to hear the sound he made.

And now, beside a river, running, skipping, panting toward him, came a pack of dogs. Fine-furred, lean, gray, supple-footed, bright-eyed animals. Unsuspected animals. Dogs that roamed streets under the very feet of the invaders. Dogs that had brushed the invaders' bodies.

They had seemingly wandered, looking for their dead masters, and they had been ignored and kicked aside. Running and laughing, a new breed of animal, moulded from synthetic flesh and human brain.

Simplification. Adaptation. Subterfuge.

Harler ran to meet them, thinking, *God, but it is strange to run on four feet. It is strange the way the sun warms my fur, and the sound of my paws on the grass and my change of hunger and thoughts and demands!*

But most of all, as he hurtled down to join Manhardt, the president, Jane Smith and all the rest, he thought, *Well, I've kept my promise. The Venusians were misdirected. Earth has won!*

And, glowing with elation, he loped down into the valley.

There are wonders in books; and one of the most wonderful of all books is a modest volume called . . . *And Some Were Human* by one Ramon F. Alvarez (better known as Lester) del Rey. Find the book if you can; for in it you will read an even dozen splendid stories—wistful fantasies like *The Coppersmith* and *Forsaking All Others*, bright glimpses of tomorrow's spaceways like *The Luck of Ignatz* and *The Wings of Night*, the massive and magnificent *Nerves* . . . and, perhaps the best of all, the outré love story of K₂W88, better known as—

Helen O'Loy

I am an old man now, but I can still see Helen as Dave unpacked her, and still hear him gasp as he looked her over.

"Man, isn't she a beauty?"

She was beautiful, a dream in spun plastics and metals, something Keats might have seen dimly when he wrote his sonnet. If Helen of Troy had looked like that, the Greeks must have been pikers when they launched only a thousand ships; at least, that's what I told Dave.

"Helen of Troy, eh?" He looked at her tag. "At least it beats this thing—K₂W88. Helen . . . Mmmm . . . Helen of Alloy."

"Not much swing to that, Dave. Too many unstressed syllables in the middle. How about Helen O'Loy?"

"Helen O'Loy she is, Phil." And that's how it began—one part beauty, one part dream, one part science; add a stereo broadcast, stir mechanically, and the result is chaos.

Dave and I hadn't gone to college together, but when I came to Messina to practice medicine, I found him downstairs in a

little robot repair shop. After that, we began to pal around, and when I started going with one twin, he found the other equally attractive, so we made it a foursome.

When our business grew better, we rented a house out near the rocket field—noisy but cheap, and the rockets discouraged apartment building. We liked room enough to stretch ourselves. I suppose, if we hadn't quarreled with them, we'd have married the twins in time. But Dave wanted to look over the latest Venus-rocket attempt when his twin wanted to see a display stereo starring Larry Ainslee, and they were both stubborn. From then on, we forgot the girls and spent our evenings at home.

But it wasn't until "Lena" put vanilla on our steak instead of salt that we got off on the subject of emotions and robots. While Dave was dissecting Lena to find the trouble, we naturally mulled over the future of the mechs. He was sure that the robots would beat men some day, and I couldn't see it.

"Look here, Dave," I argued. "You know Lena doesn't think—not really. When those wires crossed, she could have corrected herself. But she didn't bother; she followed the mechanical impulse. A man might have reached for the vanilla, but when he saw it in his hand, he'd have stopped. Lena has sense enough, but she has no emotions, no consciousness of self."

"All right, that's the big trouble with the mechs now. But we'll get around it, put in some mechanical emotions, or something." He screwed Lena's head back on, turned on her juice. "Go back to work, Lena, it's nineteen o'clock."

Now I specialized in endocrinology and related subjects. I wasn't exactly a psychologist, but I did understand the glands, secretions, hormones, and miscellanies that are the physical causes of emotions. It took medical science three hundred years to find out how and why they worked, and I couldn't see men duplicating them mechanically in much less time.

I brought home books and papers to prove it, and Dave quoted the invention of memory coils and veritoid eyes. During that year we swapped knowledge until Dave knew the whole theory of endocrinology, and I could have made Lena from memory. The more we talked, the less sure I grew about the impossibility of *homo mechanensis* as the perfect type.

Poor Lena. Her cuproberyl body spent half its time in scattered pieces. Our first attempts were successful only in getting her to serve fried brushes for breakfast and wash the dishes in oleo oil. Then one day she cooked a perfect dinner with six wires crossed, and Dave was in ecstasy.

He worked all night on her wiring, put in a new coil, and taught her a fresh set of words. And the next day she flew into a tantrum and swore vigorously at us when we told her she wasn't doing her work right.

"It's a lie," she yelled, shaking a suction brush. "You're all liars. If you so-and-so's would leave me whole long enough, I might get something done around the place."

When we calmed her temper and got her back to work, Dave ushered me into the study. "Not taking any chances with Lena," he explained. "We'll have to cut out that adrenal pack and restore her to normalcy. But we've got to get a better robot. A housemaid mech isn't complex enough."

"How about Dillard's new utility models? They seem to combine everything in one."

"Exactly. Even so, we'll need a special one built to order, with a full range of memory coils. And out of respect to old Lena, let's get a female case for its works."

The result, of course, was Helen. The Dillard people had performed a miracle and put all the works in a girl-modeled case. Even the plastic and rubberite face was designed for flexibility to express emotions, and she was complete with tear glands and taste buds, ready to simulate every human action, from breathing to pulling hair. The bill they sent with her was another miracle, but Dave and I scraped it together; we had to turn Lena over to an exchange to complete it, though, and thereafter we ate out.

I'd performed plenty of delicate operations on living tissues, and some of them had been tricky, but I still felt like a pre-med student as we opened the front plate of her torso and began to sever the leads of her "nerves." Dave's mechanical glands were all prepared, complex little bundles of radio tubes and wires that heterodyned on the electrical thought impulses and distorted them as adrenalin distorts the reaction of human minds.

Instead of sleeping that night, we pored over the schematic

diagrams of her structures, tracing the thought mazes of her wiring, severing the leaders, implanting the heterones, as Dave called them. And while we worked, a mechanical tape fed carefully prepared thoughts of consciousness and awareness of life and feeling into an auxiliary memory coil. Dave believed in leaving nothing to chance.

It was growing light as we finished, exhausted and exultant. All that remained was the starting of her electrical power; like all the Dillard mechs, she was equipped with a tiny atomotor instead of batteries, and once started would need no further attention.

Dave refused to turn her on. "Wait until we've slept and rested," he advised. "I'm as eager to try her as you are, but we can't do much studying with our minds half dead. Turn in, and we'll leave Helen until later."

Even though we were both reluctant to follow it, we knew the idea was sound. We turned in, and sleep hit us before the air-conditioner could cut down to sleeping temperature. And then Dave was pounding on my shoulder.

"Phil! Hey, snap out of it!"

I groaned, turned over, and faced him. "Well? . . . Uh! What is it? Did Helen—"

"No, it's old Mrs. van Styler. She 'visored to say her son has an infatuation for a servant girl, and she wants you to come out and give counter-hormones. They're at the summer camp in Maine."

Rich Mrs. van Styler! I couldn't afford to let that account down, now that Helen had used up the last of my funds. But it wasn't a job I cared for.

"Counter-hormones! That'll take two weeks' full time. Anyway, I'm no society doctor, messing with glands to keep fools happy. My job's taking care of serious trouble."

"And you want to watch Helen." Dave was grinning, but he was serious, too. "I told her it'd cost her fifty thousand!"

"*Hub?*"

"And she said okay, if you hurried."

Of course, there was only one thing to do, though I could have wrung fat Mrs. van Styler's neck cheerfully. It wouldn't have happened if she'd used robots like everyone else—but she had to be different.

Consequently, while Dave was back home puttering with Helen, I was racking my brain to trick Archy van Styler into getting the counter-hormones, and giving the servant girl the same. Oh, I wasn't supposed to, but the poor kid was crazy about Archy. Dave might have written, I thought, but never a word did I get.

It was three weeks later instead of two when I reported that Archy was "cured," and collected on the line. With that money in my pocket, I hired a personal rocket and was back in Messina in half an hour. I didn't waste time in reaching the house.

As I stepped into the alcove, I heard a light patter of feet, and an eager voice called out, "Dave, dear?" For a minute I couldn't answer, and the voice came again, pleading, "Dave?"

I don't know what I expected, but I didn't expect Helen to meet me that way, stopping and staring at me, obvious disappointment on her face, little hands fluttering up against her breast.

"Oh," she cried. "I thought it was Dave. He hardly comes home to eat now, but I've had supper waiting hours." She dropped her hands and managed a smile. "You're Phil, aren't you? Dave told me about you when . . . at first. I'm so glad to see you home, Phil."

"Glad to see you doing so well, Helen." Now what does one say for light conversation with a robot? "You said something about supper?"

"Oh, yes. I guess Dave ate downtown again, so we might as well go in. It'll be nice having someone to talk to around the house, Phil. You don't mind if I call you Phil, do you? You know, you're sort of a godfather to me."

We ate. I hadn't counted on such behavior, but apparently she considered eating as normal as walking. She didn't do much eating, at that; most of the time she spent staring at the front door.

Dave came in as we were finishing, a frown a yard wide on his face. Helen started to rise, but he ducked toward the stairs, throwing words over his shoulder.

"Hi, Phil. See you up here later."

There was something radically wrong with him. For a mo-

ment, I'd thought his eyes were haunted, and as I turned to Helen, hers were filling with tears. She gulped, choked them back, and fell to viciously on her food.

"What's the matter with him . . . and you?" I asked.

"He's sick of me." She pushed her plate away and got up hastily. "You'd better see him while I clean up. And there's nothing wrong with me. And it's not my fault, anyway." She grabbed the dishes and ducked into the kitchen; I could have sworn she was crying.

Maybe all thought is a series of conditioned reflexes—but she certainly had picked up a lot of conditioning while I was gone. Lena in her heyday had been nothing like this. I went up to see if Dave could make any sense out of the hodge-podge.

He was squirting soda into a large glass of apple brandy, and I saw that the bottle was nearly empty. "Join me?" he asked.

It seemed like a good idea. The roaring blast of an ion rocket overhead was the only familiar thing left in the house. From the look around Dave's eyes, it wasn't the first bottle he'd emptied while I was gone, and there were more left. He dug out a new bottle for his own drink.

"Of course, it's none of my business, Dave, but that stuff won't steady your nerves any. What's gotten into you, and Helen? Been seeing ghosts?"

Helen was wrong; he hadn't been eating downtown—nor anywhere else. His muscles collapsed into a chair in a way that spoke of fatigue and nerves, but mostly of hunger. "You noticed it, eh?"

"Noticed it? The two of you jammed it down my throat."

"Uhhmm." He swatted at a non-existent fly, and slumped further down in the pneumatic. "Guess maybe I should have waited with Helen until you got back. But if that stereo cast hadn't changed . . . anyway, it did. And those mushy books of yours finished the job."

"Thanks. That makes it all clear."

"You know, Phil, I've got a place up in the country . . . fruit ranch. My dad left it to me. Think I'll look it over."

And that's the way it went. But finally, by much liquor and more perspiration, I got some of the story out of him before I gave him an amytal and put him to bed. Then I hunted up Helen and dug the rest of the story from her, until it made sense.

Apparently as soon as I was gone, Dave had turned her on and made preliminary tests, which were entirely satisfactory. She had reacted beautifully—so well that he decided to leave her and go down to work as usual.

Naturally, with all her untried emotions, she was filled with curiosity, and wanted him to stay. Then he had an inspiration. After showing her what her duties about the house would be, he set her down in front of the stereovisor, tuned in a travelogue, and left her to occupy her time with that.

The travelogue held her attention until it was finished, and the station switched over to a current serial with Larry Ainslee, the same cute emoter who'd given us all the trouble with the twins. Incidentally, he looked something like Dave.

Helen took to the serial like a seal to water. This play acting was a perfect outlet for her newly excited emotions. When that particular episode finished, she found a love story on another station, and added still more to her education. The afternoon programs were mostly news and music, but by then she'd found my books; and I do have rather adolescent taste in literature.

Dave came home in the best of spirits. The front alcove was neatly swept, and there was the odor of food in the air that he'd missed around the house for weeks. He had visions of Helen as the super-efficient housekeeper.

So it was a shock to him to feel two strong arms around his neck from behind and hear a voice all a-quiver coo into his ears, "Oh, Dave, darling. I've missed you so, and I'm so *thrilled* that you're back." Helen's technique may have lacked polish, but it had enthusiasm, as he found when he tried to stop her from kissing him. She had learned fast and furiously—also, Helen was powered by an atomotor.

Dave wasn't a prude, but he remembered that she was only a robot, after all. The fact that she felt, acted, and looked

like a young goddess in his arms didn't mean much. With some effort, he untangled her and dragged her off to supper, where he made her eat with him to divert her attention.

After her evening work, he called her into the study and gave her a thorough lecture on the folly of her ways. It must have been good, for it lasted three solid hours, and covered her station in life, the idiocy of stereotypes, and various other miscellanies. When he finished, Helen looked up with dewy eyes and said wistfully, "I know, Dave, but I still love you."

That's when Dave started drinking.

It grew worse each day. If he stayed downtown, she was crying when he came home. If he returned on time, she fussed over him and threw herself at him. In his room, with the door locked, he could hear her downstairs pacing up and down and muttering; and when he went down, she stared at him reproachfully until he had to go back up.

I sent Helen out on a fake errand in the morning and got Dave up. With her gone, I made him eat a decent breakfast and gave him a tonic for his nerves. He was still listless and moody.

"Look here, Dave," I broke in on his brooding. "Helen isn't human, after all. Why not cut off her power and change a few memory coils? Then we can convince her that she never was in love and couldn't get that way."

"You try it. I had that idea, but she put up a wail that would wake Homer. She says it would be murder—and the hell of it is that I can't help feeling the same about it. Maybe she isn't human, but you wouldn't guess it when she puts on that martyred look and tells you to go ahead and kill her."

"We never put in substitutes for some of the secretions present in man during the love period."

"I don't know what we put in. Maybe the heterones back-fired or something. Anyway, she's made this idea so much a part of her thoughts that we'd have to put in a whole new set of coils."

"Well, why not?"

"Go ahead. You're the surgeon of this family. I'm not used to fussing with emotions. Matter of fact, since she's been acting this way, I'm beginning to hate work on any robot. My business is going to blazes."

He saw Helen coming up the walk and ducked out the back door for the monorail express. I'd intended to put him back in bed, but let him go. Maybe he'd be better off at his shop than at home.

"Dave's gone?" Helen did have that martyred look now.

"Yeah. I got him to eat, and he's gone to work."

"I'm glad he ate." She slumped down in a chair as if she were worn out, though how a mech could be tired beat me. "Phil?"

"Well, what is it?"

"Do you think I'm bad for him? I mean, do you think he'd be happier if I weren't here?"

"He'll go crazy if you keep acting this way around him."

She winced. Those little hands were twisting about pleadingly, and I felt like an inhuman brute. But I'd started, and I went ahead. "Even if I cut out your power and changed your coils, he'd probably still be haunted by you."

"I know. But I can't help it. And I'd make him a good wife, really I would, Phil."

I gulped; this was getting a little too far. "And give him strapping sons to boot, I suppose. A man wants flesh and blood, not rubber and metal."

"Don't, please! I can't think of myself that way; to me, I'm a woman. And you know how perfectly I'm made to imitate a real woman . . . in all ways. I couldn't give him sons, but in every other way . . . I'd try so hard, I know I'd make him a good wife."

I gave up.

Dave didn't come home that night, nor the next day. Helen was fussing and fuming, wanting me to call the hospitals and the police, but I knew nothing had happened to him. He always carried identification. Still, when he didn't come on the third day, I began to worry. And when Helen started out for his shop, I agreed to go with her.

Dave was there, with another man I didn't know. I parked Helen where he couldn't see her, but where she could hear, and went in as soon as the other fellow left.

Dave looked a little better and seemed glad to see me. "Hi, Phil—just closing up. Let's go eat."

Helen couldn't hold back any longer, but came trooping

in. "Come on home, Dave. I've got roast duck with spice stuffing, and you know you love that."

"Scat!" said Dave. She shrank back, turned to go. "Oh, all right, stay. You might as well hear it, too. I've sold the shop. The fellow you saw just bought it, and I'm going up to the old fruit ranch I told you about, Phil. I can't stand the mechs any more."

"You'll starve to death at that," I told him.

"No, there's a growing demand for old-fashioned fruit raised out of doors. People are tired of this water-culture stuff. Dad always made a living out of it. I'm leaving as soon as I can get home and pack."

Helen clung to her idea. "I'll pack, Dave, while you eat. I've got apple cobbler for dessert." The world was toppling under her feet, but she still remembered how crazy he was for apple cobbler.

Helen was a good cook; in fact she was a genius, with all the good points of a woman and a mech combined. Dave ate well enough, after he got started. By the time supper was over, he'd thawed out enough to admit he liked the duck and cobbler, and to thank her for packing. In fact, he even let her kiss him good-bye, though he firmly refused to let her go to the rocket field with him.

Helen was trying to be brave when I got back, and we carried on a stumbling conversation about Mrs. van Styler's servants for a while. But the talk began to lull, and she sat staring out of the window at nothing most of the time. Even the stereo comedy lacked interest for her, and I was glad enough to have her go off to her room. She could cut her power down to simulate sleep when she chose.

As the days slipped by, I began to realize why she couldn't believe herself a robot. I got to thinking of her as a girl and companion myself. Except for odd intervals when she went off by herself to brood, or when she kept going to the tele-script for a letter that never came, she was as good a companion as a man could ask. There was something homey about the place that Lena had never put there.

I took Helen on a shopping trip to Hudson and she giggled and purred over the wisps of silk and glassheen that were

the fashion, tried on endless hats, and conducted herself as any normal girl might. We went trout fishing for a day, where she proved to be as good a sport and as sensibly silent as a man. I thoroughly enjoyed myself and thought she was forgetting Dave. That was before I came home unexpectedly and found her doubled up on the couch, threshing her legs up and down and crying to the high heavens.

It was then I called Dave. They seemed to have trouble in reaching him, and Helen came over beside me while I waited. She was tense and fidgety as an old maid trying to propose. But finally they located Dave.

"What's up, Phil?" he asked as his face came on the view-plate. "I was just getting my things together to——"

I broke him off. "Things can't go on the way they are, Dave. I've made up my mind. I'm yanking Helen's coils tonight. It won't be worse than what she's going through now."

Helen reached up and touched my shoulder. "Maybe that's best, Phil. I don't blame you."

Dave's voice cut in. "Phil, you don't know what you're doing!"

"Of course, I do. It'll all be over by the time you can get here. As you heard, she's agreeing."

There was a black cloud sweeping over Dave's face. "I won't have it, Phil. She's half mine, and I forbid it!"

"Of all the——"

"Go ahead, call me anything you want. I've changed my mind. I was packing to come home when you called."

Helen jerked around me, her eyes glued to the panel. "Dave, do you . . . are you——"

"I'm just waking up to what a fool I've been, Helen. Phil, I'll be home in a couple of hours, so if there's anything——"

He didn't have to chase me out. But I heard Helen cooing something about loving to be a rancher's wife before I could shut the door.

Well, I wasn't as surprised as they thought. I think I knew when I called Dave what would happen. No man acts the way Dave had been acting because he hates a girl; only because he thinks he does—and thinks wrong.

No woman ever made a lovelier bride or a sweeter wife. Helen never lost her flair for cooking and making a home. With her gone, the old house seemed empty, and I began to drop out to the ranch once or twice a week. I suppose they had trouble at times, but I never saw it, and I know the neighbors never suspected they were anything but normal man and wife.

Dave grew older, and Helen didn't, of course. But between us, we put lines in her face and grayed her hair without letting Dave know that she wasn't growing old with him; he'd forgotten that she wasn't human, I guess.

I practically forgot, myself. It wasn't until a letter came from Helen this morning that I woke up to reality. There, in her beautiful script, just a trifle shaky in places, was the inevitable that neither Dave nor I had seen.

Dear Phil,

As you know, Dave has had heart trouble for several years now. We expected him to live on just the same, but it seems that wasn't to be. He died in my arms just before sunrise. He sent you his greetings and farewell.

I've one last favor to ask of you, Phil. There is only one thing for me to do when this is finished. Acid will burn out metal as well as flesh, and I'll be dead with Dave. Please see that we are buried together, and that the morticians do not find my secret. Dave wanted it that way, too.

Poor, dear Phil. I know you loved Dave as a brother, and how you felt about me. Please don't grieve too much for us, for we have had a happy life together, and both feel that we should cross this last bridge side by side.

With love and thanks from,

Helen.

It had to come sooner or later, I suppose, and the first shock has worn off now. I'll be leaving in a few minutes to carry out Helen's last instructions.

Dave was a lucky man, and the best friend I ever had. And Helen— Well, as I said, I'm an old man now, and can view things more sanely; I should have married and raised a family, I suppose. But . . . there was only one Helen O'Loy.

ALFRED BESTER

Perhaps the most amiable of science-fiction writers is Alfred Bester. Like almost all writers, he is constantly trying to sell stories to editors—but like almost no one but himself, the stories he tries hardest to sell are those by other writers. Few authors could afford to tout the work of their competitors to the exclusion of their own; but the man who could write *The Demolished Man* can obviously afford to ignore the laws that bind the rest of us. It is possible that Bester, in a long and active career, may sometime have written a story that was less than first-rate; but, if so, it didn't appear under the name "Alfred Bester," and it certainly was not—

5,271,009

Take two parts of Beelzebub, two of Israel, one of Monte Cristo, one of Cyrano, mix violently, season with mystery and you have Mr. Solon Aquila. He is tall, gaunt, sprightly in manner, bitter in expression, and when he laughs his dark eyes turn into wounds. His occupation is unknown. He is wealthy without visible means of support. He is seen everywhere and understood nowhere. There is something odd about his life.

This is what's odd about Mr. Aquila, and you can make what you will of it. When he walks he is never forced to wait on a traffic signal. When he desires to ride there is always a vacant taxi on hand. When he bustles into his hotel an elevator always happens to be waiting. When he enters a store, a sales-clerk is always free to serve him. There always happens to be a table available for Mr. Aquila in restaurants. There are always last-minute ticket returns when he craves entertainment at sold-out shows.

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You can question waiters, hack drivers, elevator girls, salesmen, box-office men. There is no conspiracy. Mr. Aquila does not bribe or blackmail for these petty conveniences. In any case, it would not be possible for him to bribe or blackmail the automatic clock that governs the city traffic signal system. These things, which make life so convenient for him, simply happen. Mr. Solon Aquila is never disappointed. Presently we shall hear about his first disappointment and see what it led to.

Mr. Aquila has been seen fraternizing in low saloons, in middle saloons, in high saloons. He has been met in bagnios, at coronations, executions, circuses, magistrates' courts and handbook offices. He has been known to buy antique cars, historic jewels, incunabula, pornography, chemicals, porro prisms, polo ponies and full-choke shotguns.

"HimmelHerrGottSeiDank! I'm crazy, man, crazy. Eclectic, by God," he told a flabbergasted department store president. "The Weltmann type, nicht wahr? My ideal: Goethe. Tout le monde. God damn."

He spoke a spectacular tongue of mixed metaphors and meanings. Dozens of languages and dialects came out in machine-gun bursts. Apparently he also lied *ad libitum*.

"Sacré bleu. Jeez!" he was heard to say once. "Aquila from the Latin. Means aquiline. O tempora O mores. Speech by Cicero. My ancestor."

And another time: "My idol: Kipling. Took my name from him. Aquila, one of his heroes. God damn. Greatest Negro writer since *Uncle Tom's Cabin*."

On the morning that Mr. Solon Aquila was stunned by his first disappointment, he hustled into the atelier of Lagan & Derelict, dealers in paintings, sculpture and rare objects of art. It was his intention to buy a painting. Mr. James Derelict knew Aquila as a client. He had already purchased a Frederick Remington and a Winslow Homer some time ago when, by another odd coincidence, he had bounced into the Madison Avenue shop one minute after the coveted paintings went up for sale. Mr. Derelict had also seen Mr. Aquila boat a prize striper at Montauk.

"Bon soir, bel esprit, God damn, Jimmy," Mr. Aquila said. He was on first name terms with everyone. "Here's a cool

day for color, oui! Cool. Slang. I have in me to buy a picture."

"Good morning, Mr. Aquila," Derelict answered. He had the seamed face of a cardsharp, but his blue eyes were honest and his smile was disarming. However, at this moment his smile seemed strained, as though the volatile appearance of Aquila had unnerved him.

"I'm in the mood for your man, by Jeez," Aquila said, rapidly opening cases, fingering ivories and tasting the porcelains. "What's his name, my old? Artist like Bosch. Like Heinrich Kley. You handle him, parbleu, exclusive. O si sic omnia, by Zeus!"

"Jeffrey Halsyon?" Derelict asked timidly.

"Oeil de boeuf!" Aquila cried. "What a memory. Chryselephantine. Exactly the artist I want. He is my favorite. A monochrome, preferably. A small Jeffrey Halsyon for Aquila, bitte. Wrap her up."

"I wouldn't have believed it," Derelict muttered.

"Ah! Ah-ha? This is not too proof guaranteed Ming," Mr. Aquila exclaimed, brandishing an exquisite vase. "Caveat emptor, by damn. Well, Jimmy? I snap my fingers. No Halsyons in stock, old faithful?"

"It's extremely odd, Mr. Aquila." Derelict seemed to struggle with himself. "Your coming in like this. A Halsyon monochrome arrived not five minutes ago."

"You see? Tempo ist Richtung. Well?"

"I'd rather not show it to you. For personal reasons, Mr. Aquila."

"HimmelHerrGott! Pourquoi? She's bespoke?"

"N-no, sir. Not for my personal reasons. For your personal reasons."

"Oh? God damn. Explain myself to me."

"Anyway it isn't for sale, Mr. Aquila. It can't be sold."

"For why not? Speak, old fish & chips."

"I can't say, Mr. Aquila."

"Zut alors! Must I judo your arm, Jimmy? You can't show. You can't sell. Me, internally, I have pressurized myself for a Jeffrey Halsyon. My favorite. God damn. Show me the Halsyon or sic transit gloria mundi. You hear me, Jimmy?"

Derelict hesitated, then shrugged. "Very well, Mr. Aquila. I'll show you."

Derelict led Aquila past cases of china and silver, past lacquer and bronzes and suits of shimmering armor to the gallery in the rear of the shop where dozens of paintings hung on the gray velour walls, glowing under warm spotlights. He opened a drawer in a Goddard breakfront and took out a Manila envelope. On the envelope was printed BABYLON INSTITUTE. From the envelope Derelict withdrew a dollar bill and handed it to Mr. Aquila.

"Jeffrey Halsyon's latest," he said.

With a fine pen and carbon ink, a cunning hand had drawn another portrait over the face of George Washington on the dollar bill. It was a hateful, diabolic face set in a hellish background. It was a face to strike terror, in a scene to inspire loathing. The face was a portrait of Mr. Aquila.

"God damn," Mr. Aquila said.

"You see, sir? I didn't want to hurt your feelings."

"Now I must own him, big boy." Mr. Aquila appeared to be fascinated by the portrait. "Is she accident or for purpose? Does Halsyon know myself? Ergo sum."

"Not to my knowledge, Mr. Aquila. But in any event I can't sell the drawing. It's evidence of a felony . . . mutilating United States currency. It must be destroyed."

"Never!" Mr. Aquila returned the drawing as though he feared the dealer would instantly set fire to it. "Never, Jimmy. Nevermore quoth the raven. God damn. Why does he draw on money, Halsyon? My picture, pfui. Criminal libels but n'importe. But pictures on money? Wasteful. Joci causa."

"He's insane, Mr. Aquila."

"No! Yes? Insane?" Aquila was shocked.

"Quite insane, sir. It's very sad. They've had to put him away. He spends his time drawing these pictures on money."

"God damn, mon ami. Who gives him money?"

"I do, Mr. Aquila; and his friends. Whenever we visit him he begs for money for his drawings."

"Le jour viendra, by Jeez! Why you don't give him paper for drawings, eh, my ancient of days?"

Derelict smiled sadly. "We tried that, sir. When we gave Jeff paper, he drew pictures of money."

"HimmelHerrGott! My favorite artist. In the looney bin,

Eh bien. How in the holy hell am I to buy paintings from same if such be the case?"

"You won't, Mr. Aquila. I'm afraid no one will ever buy a Halsyon again. He's quite hopeless."

"Why does he jump his tracks, Jimmy?"

"They say it's a withdrawal, Mr. Aquila. His success did it to him."

"Ah? Q.E.D. me, big boy. Translate."

"Well, sir, he's still a young man; in his thirties and very immature. When he became so very successful, he wasn't ready for it. He wasn't prepared for the responsibilities of his life and his career. That's what the doctors told me. So he turned his back on everything and withdrew into childhood."

"Ah? And the drawing on money?"

"They say that's his symbol of his return to childhood, Mr. Aquila. It proves he's too young to know what money is for."

"Ah? Oui. Ja. Astute, by crackey. And my portrait?"

"I can't explain that, Mr. Aquila, unless you have met him in the past and he remembers you somehow."

"Hmmm. Perhaps. So. You know something, my attic of Greece? I am disappointed. Je n'oublierai jamais. I am most severely disappointed. God damn. No more Halsyons ever? Merde. My slogan. We must do something about Jeffrey Halsyon. I will not be disappointed. We must do something."

Mr. Solon Aquila nodded his head emphatically, took out a cigarette, took out a lighter, then paused, deep in thought. After a long moment, he nodded again, this time with decision, and did an astonishing thing. He returned the lighter to his pocket, took out another, glanced around quickly and lit it under Mr. Derelict's nose.

Mr. Derelict appeared not to notice. Mr. Derelict appeared, in one instant, without transition, to be stuffed. Allowing the lighter to burn, Mr. Aquila placed it carefully on a ledge in front of the art dealer who stood before it without moving. The orange flame gleamed on his glassy eyeballs.

Aquila darted out into the shop, searched and found a rare Chinese crystal globe. He took it from its case, warmed it against his heart and peered into it. He mumbled. He nodded. He returned the globe to the case, went to the cashier's desk, took a pad and pencil and began ciphering in symbols

that bore no relationship to any language or any graphology. He nodded again, tore up the sheet of paper and took out his wallet.

From the wallet he removed a dollar bill. He placed the bill on the glass counter, took an assortment of fountain pens from his vest pocket, selected one and unscrewed it. Carefully shielding his eyes, he allowed one drop to fall from the pen-point onto the bill. There was a blinding flash of light. There was a humming vibration that slowly died.

Mr. Aquila returned the pens to his pocket, carefully picked up the bill by a corner and ran back into the picture gallery where the art dealer still stood staring glassily at the orange flame. Aquila fluttered the bill before the sightless eyes.

"Listen, my ancient," Aquila whispered. "You will visit Jeffrey Halsyon this afternoon. N'est-ce-pas? You will give him this very own coin of the realm when he asks for drawing materials. Eh? God damn." He removed Mr. Derelict's wallet from his pocket, placed the bill inside and returned the wallet.

"And this is why you make the visit," Aquila continued. "It is because you have had an inspiration from le Diable Boiteux. Nolens volens, the lame devil has inspired you with a plan for healing Jeffrey Halsyon. God damn. You will show him samples of his great art of the past to bring him to his senses. Memory is the all-mother. HimmelHerrGott! You hear me, big boy? You do what I say. Go today and devil take the hindmost."

Mr. Aquila picked up the burning lighter, lit his cigarette and permitted the flame to go out. As he did so, he said: "No, my holy of holies! Jeffrey Halsyon is too great an artist to languish in durance vile. He must be returned to this world. He must be returned to me. È sempra l'ora. I will not be disappointed. You hear me, Jimmy? I will not!"

"Perhaps there's hope, Mr. Aquila," James Derelict said. "Something's just occurred to me while you were talking . . . a way to bring Jeff back to sanity. I'm going to try it this afternoon."

As he drew the face of the Faraway Fiend over George Washington's portrait on a bill, Jeffrey Halsyon dictated his autobiography to nobody.

"Like Cellini," he recited. "Line and literature simultaneously. Hand in hand, although all art is one art, holy brothers in barbiturate, near ones and dear ones in nembutal. Very well. I commence: I was born. I am dead. Baby wants a dollar. No——"

He arose from the padded floor and raged from padded wall to padded wall, envisioning anger as a deep purple fury running into the pale lavenders of recrimination by the magic of his brushwork, his chiaroscuro, by the clever blending of oil, pigment, light and the stolen genius of Jeffrey Halsyon torn from him by the Faraway Fiend whose hideous face——

"Begin anew," he muttered. "We darken the highlights. Start with the underpainting . . ." He squatted on the floor again, picked up the quill drawing pen whose point was warranted harmless, dipped it into carbon ink whose contents were warranted poisonless, and applied himself to the monstrous face of the Faraway Fiend which was replacing the first president on the dollar.

"I was born," he dictated to space while his cunning hand wrought beauty and horror on the banknote paper. "I had peace. I had hope. I had art. I had peace. Mama. Papa. Kin I have a glass a water? Oooo! There was a big bad bogey man who gave me a look; a big bad look and he fighta baby. Baby's afraid. Mama! Baby wantsa make pretty pictures onna pretty paper for Mama and Papa. Look, Mama. Baby makin' a picture of the bad bogey man who fighta baby with a mean look, a black look with his black eyes like pools of hell, like cold fires of terror, like faraway fiends from faraway fears——Who's that!"

The cell door unbolted. Halsyon leaped into a corner and cowered, naked and squalling, as the door was opened for the Faraway Fiend to enter. But it was only the medicine man in his white jacket and a stranger man in black suit, black homburg, carrying a black portfolio with the initials J. D. lettered on it in a bastard gold Gothic with ludicrous overtones of Goudy and Baskerville.

"Well, Jeffrey?" the medicine man inquired heartily.

"Dollar?" Halsyon whined. "Kin baby have a dollar?"

"I've brought an old friend, Jeffrey. You remember Mr. Derelict?"

"Dollar," Halsyon whined. "Baby wants a dollar."

"What happened to the last one, Jeffrey? You haven't finished it yet, have you?"

Halsyon sat on the bill to conceal it, but the medicine man was too quick for him. He snatched it up and he and the stranger man examined it.

"As great as all the rest," Derelict sighed. "Greater. What a magnificent talent wasting away . . ."

Halsyon began to weep. "Baby wants a dollar!" he cried.

The stranger man took out his wallet, selected a dollar bill and handed it to Halsyon. As soon as he touched it, he heard it sing and he tried to sing with it, but it was singing him a private song so he had to listen.

It was a lovely dollar; smooth but not too new, with a faintly matte surface that would take ink like kisses. George Washington looked reproachful but resigned, as though he were used to the treatment in store for him. And indeed he might well be, for he was much older on this dollar. Much older than on any other for his serial number was 5,271,009 which made him 5,000,000 years old and more, and the oldest he had ever been before was 2,000,000.

As Halsyon squatted contentedly on the floor and dipped his pen in the ink as the dollar told him to, he heard the medicine man say, "I don't think I should leave you alone, Mr. Derelict."

"No, we must be, doctor. Jeff always was shy about his work. He could only discuss it with me when we were alone."

"How much time would you need?"

"Give me an hour."

"I doubt very much whether it'll do any good."

"But there's no harm trying?"

"I suppose not. All right, Mr. Derelict. Call the nurse when you're through."

The door opened; the door closed. The stranger man named Derelict put his hand on Halsyon's shoulder in a friendly, intimate way. Halsyon looked up at him and grinned cleverly, meanwhile waiting for the sound of the bolt in the door. It came; like a shot, like a final nail in a coffin.

"Jeff, I've brought some of your old work with me,"

Derelict said in a voice that was only approximately casual. "I thought you might like to look it over with me."

"Have you got a watch on you?" Halsyon asked.

Restraining his start of surprise at Halsyon's normal tone, the art dealer took out his pocket watch and displayed it.

"Lend it to me for a minute."

Derelict unchained the watch and handed it over. Halsyon took it carefully and said, "All right. Go ahead with the pictures."

"Jeff!" Derelict exclaimed. "This is you again, isn't it? This is the way you always—"

"Thirty," Halsyon interrupted. "Thirty-five, forty, forty-five, fifty, fifty-five, ONE." He concentrated on the flicking second hand with rapt expectation.

"No, I guess it isn't," the dealer muttered. "I only imagined you sounded— Oh, well." He opened the portfolio and began sorting mounted drawings.

"Forty, forty-five, fifty, fifty-five, TWO."

"Here's one of your earliest, Jeff. Remember when you came into the gallery with the roughs and we thought you were the new polisher from the agency? Took you months to forgive us. You always claimed we bought your first picture just to apologize. Do you still think so?"

"Forty, forty-five, fifty, fifty-five, THREE."

"Here's that tempera that gave you so many heartaches. I was wondering if you'd care to try another? I really don't think tempera is as inflexible as you claim and I'd be interested to have you try again now that your technique's so much more matured. What do you say?"

"Forty, forty-five, fifty, fifty-five, FOUR."

"Jeff, put down that watch."

"Ten, fifteen, twenty, twenty-five . . ."

"What the devil's the point of counting minutes?"

"Well," Halsyon said reasonably, "sometimes they lock the door and go away. Other times they lock up and stay and spy on you. But they never spy longer than three minutes so I'm giving them five just to make sure. FIVE."

Halsyon gripped the small pocket watch in his big fist and drove the fist cleanly into Derelict's jaw. The dealer dropped without a sound. Halsyon dragged him to the wall, stripped

him naked, dressed himself in his clothes, repacked the portfolio and closed it. He picked up the dollar bill and pocketed it. He picked up the bottle of carbon ink warranted non-poisonous and dashed the contents into his face.

Choking and shouting, he brought the nurse to the door.

"Let me out of here," Halsyon cried in a muffled voice. "That maniac tried to drown me. Threw ink in my face. I want out!"

The door was unbolted and opened. Halsyon shoved past the nurse man, cunningly mopping his blackened face with a hand that only smeared it more. As the nurse man started to enter the cell, Halsyon said, "Never mind Halsyon. He's all right. Get me a towel or something. Hurry!"

The nurse man locked the door again, turned and ran down the corridor. Halsyon waited until he disappeared into a supply room, then turned and ran in the opposite direction. He went through the heavy doors to the main wing corridor, still cleverly mopping, still sputtering with cunning indignation. He reached the main building. He was halfway out and still no alarm. He knew those brazen bells. They tested them every Wednesday noon.

It's like a Ringaleevio game, he told himself. It's fun. It's games. It's nothing to be scared of. It's being safely, sanely, joyously a kid again and when we quit playing I'm going home to mama and dinner and papa reading me the funnies and I'm a kid again, really a kid again, forever.

There still was no hue and cry when he reached the main floor. He complained about his indignity to the receptionist. He complained to the protection guards as he forged James Derelict's name in the visitor's book, and his inky hand smeared such a mess on the page that the forgery went undetected. The guard buzzed the final gate open. Halsyon passed through into the street, and as he started away he heard the brass throats of the bells begin a clattering that terrified him.

He ran. He stopped. He tried to stroll. He could not. He lurched down the street until he heard the guards shouting. He darted around a corner, and another, tore up endless streets, heard cars behind him, sirens, bells, shouts, commands. It was a ghastly Catherine Wheel of flight. Searching

desperately for a hiding place, Halsyon darted into the hallway of a desolate tenement.

Halsyon began to climb the stairs. He went up three at a clip, then two, then struggled step by step as his strength failed and panic paralyzed him. He stumbled at a landing and fell against a door. The door opened. The Faraway Fiend stood within, smiling briskly, rubbing his hands.

"Glückliche Reise," he said. "On the dot. God damn. You twenty-three skiddooed, eh? Enter, my old. I'm expecting you. Be it never so humble . . ."

Halsyon screamed.

"No, no, no! No Sturm und Drang, my beauty." Mr. Aquila clapped a hand over Halsyon's mouth, heaved him up, dragged him through the doorway and slammed the door.

"Presto-changeo," he laughed. "Exit Jeffrey Halsyon from mortal ken. Dieu vous garde."

Halsyon freed his mouth, screamed again and fought hysterically, biting and kicking. Mr. Aquila made a clucking noise, dipped into his pocket and brought out a package of cigarettes. He flipped one up expertly and broke it under Halsyon's nose. The artist at once subsided and suffered himself to be led to a couch, where Aquila cleansed the ink from his face and hands.

"Better, eh?" Mr. Aquila chuckled. "Non habit forming. God damn. Drinks now called for."

He filled a shot glass from a decanter, added a tiny cube of purple ice from a fuming bucket, and placed the drink in Halsyon's hand. Compelled by a gesture from Aquila, the artist drank it off. It made his brain buzz. He stared around, breathing heavily. He was in what appeared to be the luxurious waiting room of a Park Avenue physician. Queen Anne furniture. Axminster rug. Two Morlands and a Crome on the wall in gilt frames. They were genuine, Halsyon realized with amazement. Then, with even more amazement, he realized that he was thinking with coherence, with continuity. His mind was quite clear.

He passed a heavy hand over his forehead. "What's happened?" he asked faintly. "There's like . . . Something like a fever behind me. Nightmares."

"You have been sick," Aquila replied. "I am blunt, my old.

This is a temporary return to sanity. It is no feat, God damn. Any doctor can do it. Niacin plus carbon dioxide. *Id genus omne*. We must search for something more permanent."

"What's this place?"

"Here? My office. Anteroom without. Consultation room within. Laboratory to left. In God we trust."

"I know you," Halsyon mumbled. "I know you from somewhere. I know your face."

"Oui. You have drawn and redrawn and tredrawn me in your fever. *Ecce homo*. But you have the advantage, Halsyon. Where have we met? I ask myself." Aquila put on a brilliant speculum, tilted it over his left eye and let it shine into Halsyon's face. "Now I ask you. Where have we met?"

Blinded by the light, Halsyon answered dreamily. "At the Beaux Arts Ball . . . A long time ago . . . Before the fever . . ."

"Ah? Si. It was $\frac{1}{2}$ year ago. I was there. An unfortunate night."

"No. A glorious night . . . Gay, happy, fun . . . Like a school dance . . . Like a prom in costume . . ."

"Always back to the childhood, eh?" Mr. Aquila murmured. "We must attend to that. *Cetera desunt*, young Loch-invar. Continue."

"I was with Judy . . . We realized we were in love that night. We realized how wonderful life was going to be. And then you passed and looked at me . . . Just once. You looked at me. It was horrible."

"Tk!" Mr. Aquila clicked his tongue in vexation. "Now I remember said incident. I was unguarded. Bad news from home. A pox on both my houses."

"You passed in red and black . . . Satanic. Wearing no mask. You looked at me . . . A red and black look I never forgot. A look from black eyes like pools of hell, like cold fires of terror. And with that look you robbed me of everything . . . of joy, of hope, of love, of life . . ."

"No, no!" Mr. Aquila said sharply. "Let us understand ourselves. My carelessness was the key that unlocked the door. But you fell into a chasm of your own making. Nevertheless, old beer & skittles, we must alter same." He removed the speculum and shook his finger at Halsyon. "We must bring

you back to the land of the living. Auxilium ab alto. Jeez. That is for why I have arranged this meeting. What I have done I will undone, eh? But you must climb out of your own chasm. Knit up the ravelled sleeve of care. Come inside."

He took Halsyon's arm, led him down a paneled hall, past a neat office and into a spanking white laboratory. It was all tile and glass with shelves of reagent bottles, porcelain filters, an electric oven, stock jars of acids, bins of raw materials. There was a small round elevation in the center of the floor, a sort of dais. Mr. Aquila placed a stool on the dais, placed Halsyon on the stool, got into a white lab coat and began to assemble apparatus.

"You," he chatted, "are an artist of the utmost. I do not dorer le pilule. When Jimmy Derelict told me you were no longer at work, God damn! We must return him to his mut-tons, I said. Solon Aquila must own many canvases of Jeffrey Halsyon. We shall cure him. Hoc age."

"You're a doctor?" Halsyon asked.

"No. Let us say, a warlock. Strictly speaking, a witch-pathologist. Very highclass. No nostrums. Strictly modern magic. Black magic and white magic are passé, n'est-ce-pas? I cover entire spectrum, specializing mostly in the 15,000 angstrom band."

"You're a witch-doctor? Never!"

"Oh yes."

"In this kind of place?"

"Ah-ha? You too are deceived, eh? It is our camouflage. Many a modern laboratory you think concerns itself with science is devoted to magic. But we are scientific too. Parbleu! We move with the times, we warlocks. Witch's Brew now complies with Pure Food & Drug Act. Familiars 100 per cent sterile. Sanitary brooms. Cellophane-wrapped curses. Father Satan in rubber gloves. Thanks to Lord Lister; or is it Pasteur? My idol."

The witch-pathologist gathered raw materials, consulted an ephemeris, ran off some calculations on an electronic computer and continued to chat.

"Fugit hora," Aquila said. "Your trouble, my old, is loss of sanity. Oui? Lost in one damn flight from reality and one damn desperate search for peace brought on by one unguarded

look from me to you. Hélas! I apologize for that, R.S.V.P." With what looked like a miniature tennis line-marker, he rolled a circle around Halsyon on the dais. "But your trouble is, to wit: You search for the peace of infancy. You should be fighting to acquire the peace of maturity, n'est-ce-pas? Jeez."

Aquila drew circles and pentagons with a glittering compass and rule, weighed out powders on a micro-beam balance, dropped various liquids into crucibles from calibrated burettes, and continued: "Many warlocks do brisk trade in potions from Fountains of Youths. Oh yes. Are many youths and many fountains; but none for you. No. Youth is not for artists. Age is the cure. We must purge your youth and grow you up, nicht wahr?"

"No," Halsyon argued. "No. Youth is the art. Youth is the dream. Youth is the blessing."

"For some, yes. For many, not. Not for you. You are cursed, my adolescent. We must purge you. Lust for power. Lust for sex. Injustice collecting. Escape from reality. Passion for revenges. Oh yes, Father Freud is also my idol. We wipe your slate clean at very small price."

"What price?"

"You will see when we are finished."

Mr. Aquila deposited liquids and powders around the helpless artist in crucibles and petri dishes. He measured and cut fuses, set up a train from the circle to an electric timer which he carefully adjusted. He went to a shelf of serum bottles, took down a small Woulff vial numbered 5-271-009, filled a syringe and meticulously injected Halsyon.

"We begin," he said, "the purge of your dreams. Voilà!"

He tripped the electric timer and stepped behind a lead shield. There was a moment of silence. Suddenly black music crashed from a concealed loudspeaker and a recorded voice began an intolerable chant. In quick succession, the powders and liquids around Halsyon burst into flame. He was engulfed in music and fire fumes. The world began to spin around him in a roaring confusion . . .

The president of the United Nations came to him. He was tall and gaunt, sprightly but bitter. He was wringing his hands in dismay.

"Mr. Halsyon! Mr. Halsyon!" he cried. "Where have you been, my cupcake? God damn. Hoc tempore. Do you know what has happened?"

"No," Halsyon answered. "What's happened?"

"After your escape from the looney bin. Bango! H-bombs everywhere. The two-hour war. It is over. Hora fugit, old faithful. Virility is over."

"What!"

"Hard radiation, Mr. Halsyon, has destroyed the virility of the world. God damn. You are the only man left capable of engendering children. No doubt on account of a mysterious mutant strain in your makeup which it makes you different. Jeez."

"No."

"Oui. It is your responsibility to repopulate the world. We have taken for you a suite at the Odeon. It has three bedrooms. Three, my favorite. A prime number."

"Hot dog!" Halsyon said. "This is my big dream."

His progress to the Odeon was a triumph. He was garlanded with flowers, serenaded, hailed and cheered. Ecstatic women displayed themselves wickedly before him, begging for his attention. In his suite, Halsyon was wine and dined. A tall, gaunt man entered subserviently. He was sprightly but bitter. He had a list in his hand.

"I am World Procurer at your service, Mr. Halsyon," he said. He consulted his list. "God damn. Are 5,271,009 virgins clamoring for your attention. All guaranteed beautiful. Ewig-Weibliche. Pick a number from one to 5,000,000."

"We'll start with a redhead," Halsyon said.

They brought him a redhead. She was slender, boyish, with a small hard bosom. The next was fuller with a rollicking rump. The fifth was Junoesque and her breasts were like African pears. The tenth was a voluptuous Rembrandt. The twentieth was wiry. The thirtieth was slender and boyish with a small hard bosom.

"Haven't we met before?" Halsyon inquired.

"No," she said.

The next was fuller with a rollicking rump.

"The body is familiar," Halsyon said.

"No," she answered.

The fiftieth was Junoesque with breasts like African pears. "Surely?" Halsyon said.

"Never," she answered.

The World Procurer entered with Halsyon's morning aphrodisiac.

"Never touch the stuff," Halsyon said.

"God damn," the Procurer exclaimed. "You are a veritable giant. An elephant. No wonder you are the beloved Adam. Tant soit peu. No wonder they all weep for love of you." He drank off the aphrodisiac himself.

"Have you noticed they're all getting to look alike?" Halsyon complained.

"But no! Are all different. Parbleu! This is an insult to my office."

"Oh, they're different from one to another, but the types keep repeating."

"Ah? This is life, my old. All life is cyclic. Have you not, as an artist, noticed?"

"I didn't think it applied to love."

"To all things. Wahrheit und Dichtung."

"What was that you said about them weeping?"

"Oui. They all weep."

"Why?"

"For ecstatic love of you. God damn."

Halsyon thought over the succession of boyish, rollicking, Junoesque, Rembrandtesque, wiry, red, blonde, brunette, white, black and brown women.

"I hadn't noticed," he said.

"Observe today, my world father. Shall we commence?"

It was true. Halsyon hadn't noticed. They all wept. He was flattered but depressed.

"Why don't you laugh a little?" he asked.

They would not or could not.

Upstairs on the Odeon roof where Halsyon took his afternoon exercise, he questioned his trainer who was a tall, gaunt man with a sprightly but bitter expression.

"Ah?" said the trainer. "God damn. I don't know, old scotch & soda. Perhaps because it is a traumatic experience for them."

"Traumatic?" Halsyon puffed. "Why? What do I do to them?"

"Ah-ha? You joke, eh? All the world knows what you do to them."

"No, I mean . . . How can it be traumatic? They're all fighting to get to me, aren't they? Don't I come up to expectations?"

"A mystery. Tripotage. Now, beloved father of the world, we practice the push-ups. Ready? Begin."

Downstairs, in the Odeon restaurant, Halsyon questioned the headwaiter, a tall, gaunt man with a sprightly manner but bitter expression.

"We are men of the world, Mr. Halsyon. *Suo jure*. Surely you understand. These women love you and can expect no more than one night of love. God damn. Naturally they are disappointed."

"What do they want?"

"What every woman wants, my gateway to the west. A permanent relationship. Marriage."

"Marriage!"

"Oui."

"All of them?"

"Oui."

"All right. I'll marry all 5,271,009."

But the World Procurer objected. "No, no, no, young Lochinvar. God damn. Impossible. Aside from religious difficulties there are human also. God damn. Who could manage such a harem?"

"Then I'll marry one."

"No, no, no. *Pensez à moi*. How could you make the choice? How could you select? By lottery, drawing straws, tossing coins?"

"I've already selected one."

"Ah? Which?"

"My girl," Halsyon said slowly. "Judith Field."

"So. Your sweetheart?"

"Yes."

"She is far down on the list of 5,000,000."

"She's always been number one on my list. I want Judith."

Halsyon sighed. "I remember how she looked at the Beaux Arts Ball . . . There was a full moon . . ."

"But there will be no full moon until the twenty-sixth."

"I want Judith."

"The others will tear her apart out of jealousy. No, no, no, Mr. Halsyon, we must stick to the schedule. One night for all, no more for any."

"I want Judith . . . or else."

"It will have to be discussed in council. God damn."

It was discussed in the U.N. council by a dozen delegates, all tall, gaunt, sprightly but bitter. It was decided to permit Jeffrey Halsyon one secret marriage.

"But no domestic ties," the World Procurer warned. "No faithfulness to your wife. That must be understood. We cannot spare you from our program. You are indispensable."

They brought the lucky Judith Field to the Odeon. She was a tall, dark girl with cropped curly hair and lovely tennis legs. Halsyon took her hand. The World Procurer tiptoed out.

"Hello, darling," Halsyon murmured.

Judith looked at him with loathing. Her eyes were wet, her face bruised from weeping.

"Hello, darling," Halsyon repeated.

"If you touch me, Jeff," Judith said in a strangled voice, "I'll kill you."

"Judy!"

"That disgusting man explained everything to me. He didn't seem to understand when I tried to explain to him . . . I was praying you'd be dead before it was my turn."

"But this is marriage, Judy."

"I'd rather die than be married to you."

"I don't believe you. We've been in love for—"

"For God's sake, Jeff, love's over for you. Don't you understand? Those women cry because they hate you. I hate you. The world loathes you. You're disgusting."

Halsyon stared at the girl and saw the truth in her face. In an excess of rage he tried to seize her. She fought him bitterly. They careened around the huge living room of the suite, overturning furniture, their breath hissing, their fury mounting.

Halsyon struck Judith Field with his big fist to end the struggle once and for all. She reeled back, clutched at a drape, smashed through a french window and fell fourteen floors to the street like a gyrating doll.

Halsyon looked down in horror. A crowd gathered around the smashed body. Faces upturned. Fists shook. An ominous growl began. The World Procurer dashed into the suite.

"My old! My blue!" he cried. "What have you done? Per conto. It is a spark that will ignite savagery. You are in very grave danger. God damn."

"Is it true they all hate me?"

"Hélas, then you have discovered the truth? That indiscreet girl. I warned her. Oui. You are loathed."

"But you told me I was loved. The new Adam. Father of the new world."

"Oui. You are the father, but what child does not hate its father? You are also a legal rapist. What woman does not hate being forced to embrace a man . . . even by necessity for survival? Come quickly, my rock & rye. Passim. You are in great danger."

He dragged Halsyon to a back elevator and took him down to the Odeon cellar.

"The army will get you out. We take you to Turkey at once and effect a compromise."

Halsyon was transferred to the custody of a tall, gaunt, bitter army colonel who rushed him through underground passages to a side street where a staff car was waiting. The colonel thrust Halsyon inside.

"Jacta alea est," he said to the driver. "Speed, my corporal. Protect old faithful. To the airport. Alors!"

"God damn, sir," the corporal replied. He saluted and started the car. As it twisted through the streets at breakneck speed, Halsyon glanced at him. He was a tall, gaunt man, sprightly but bitter.

"Kulturkampf der Menschheit," the corporal muttered. "Jeez!"

A giant barricade had been built across the street, improvised of ash barrels, furniture, overturned cars, traffic stanchions. The corporal was forced to brake the car. As he

slowed for a U-turn, a mob of women appeared from doorways, cellars, stores. They were screaming. Some of them brandished improvised clubs.

"Excelsior!" the corporal cried. "God damn." He tried to pull his service gun out of its holster. The women yanked open the car doors and tore Halsyon and the corporal out. Halsyon broke free, struggled through the wild clubbing mob, dashed to the sidewalk, stumbled and dropped with a sickening yaw through an open coal chute. He shot down and spilled out into an endless black space. His head whirled. A stream of stars sailed before his eyes . . .

And he drifted alone in space, a martyr, misunderstood, a victim of cruel injustice.

He was still chained to what had once been the wall of Cell 5, Block 27, Tier 100, Wing 9 of the Callisto Penitentiary until the unexpected gamma explosion had torn the vast fortress dungeon—vaster than the Chateau d'If—apart. That explosion, he realized, had been detonated by the Grssh.

His assets were his convict clothes, a helmet, one cylinder of O₂, his grim fury at the injustice that had been done him, and his knowledge of the secret of how the Grssh could be defeated in their maniacal quest for solar domination.

The Grssh, ghastly marauders from Omicron Ceti, space-degenerates, space-imperialists, cold-blooded, roachlike, depending for their metabolism upon the psychotic horrors which they engendered in man through mental control and upon which they fed, were rapidly conquering the Galaxy. They were irresistible, for they possessed the power of simulknosis . . . the ability to be in two places at the same time.

Against the vault of space, a dot of light moved, slowly, like a stricken meteor. It was a rescue ship, Halsyon realized, combing space for survivors of the explosion. He wondered whether the light of Jupiter, flooding him with rusty radiation, would make him visible to the rescuers. He wondered whether he wanted to be rescued at all.

"It will be the same thing again," Halsyon grated. "Falsely accused by Balorsen's robot . . . Falsely convicted by Judith's father . . . Repudiated by Judith herself . . . Jailed

again . . . and finally destroyed by the Grssh as they destroy the last strongholds of Terra. Why not die now?"

But even as he spoke he realized he lied. He was the one man with the one secret that could save the earth and the very Galaxy itself. He must survive. He must fight.

With indomitable will, Halsyon struggled to his feet, fighting the constricting chains. With the steely strength he had developed as a penal laborer in the Grssh mines, he waved and shouted. The spot of light did not alter its slow course away from him. Then he saw the metal link of one of his chains strike a brilliant spark from the flinty rock. He resolved on a desperate expedient to signal the rescue ship.

He detached the plasti-hose of the O₂ tank from his plasti-helmet, and permitted the stream of life-giving oxygen to spurt into space. With trembling hands, he gathered the links of his leg chain and dashed them against the rock under the oxygen. A spark glowed. The oxygen caught fire. A brilliant geyser of white flame spurted for half a mile into space.

Husbanding the last oxygen in his plasti-helmet, Halsyon twisted the cylinder slowly, sweeping the fan of flame back and forth in a last desperate bid for rescue. The atmosphere in his plasti-helmet grew foul and acrid. His ears roared. His sight flickered. At last his senses failed . . .

When he recovered consciousness he was in a plasti-cot in the cabin of a starship. The high frequency whine told him they were in overdrive. He opened his eyes. Balorsen stood before the plasti-cot, and Balorsen's robot, and High Judge Field, and his daughter Judith. Judith was weeping. The robot was in magnetic clamps and winced as General Balorsen lashed him again and again with a nuclear whip.

"Parbleu! God damn!" the robot grated. "It is true I framed Jeff Halsyon. Ouch! Flux de bouche. I was the space-pirate who space-hijacked the space-freighter. God damn. Ouch! The bartender in the Spaceman's Saloon was my accomplice. When Jackson wrecked the heli-cab I went to the space-garage and X-beamed the sonic *before* Tantal murdered O'Leary. Aux armes. Jeez. Ouch!"

"There you have the confession, Halsyon," General Balorsen grated. He was tall, gaunt, bitter. "By God. Ars est celare artem. You are innocent."

"I falsely condemned you, old faithful," Judge Field grated. He was tall, gaunt, bitter. "Can you forgive this God damn fool? We apologize."

"We wronged you, Jeff," Judith whispered. "How can you ever forgive us? Say you forgive us."

"You're sorry for the way you treated me," Halsyon grated. "But it's only because on account of a mysterious mutant strain in my makeup which it makes me different, I'm the one man with the one secret that can save the galaxy from the Grssh."

"No, no, no, old gin & tonic," General Balorsen pleaded. "God damn. Don't hold grudges. Save us from the Grssh."

"Save us, *faute de mieux*, save us, Jeff," Judge Field put in.

"Oh please, Jeff, please," Judith whispered. "The Grssh are everywhere and coming closer. We're taking you to the U.N. You must tell the council how to stop the Grssh from being in two places at the same time."

The starship came out of overdrive and landed on Governors Island where a delegation of world dignitaries met the ship and rushed Halsyon to the General Assembly room of the U.N. They drove down the strangely rounded streets lined with strangely rounded buildings which had all been altered when it was discovered that the Grssh always appeared in corners. There was not a corner or an angle left on all Terra.

The General Assembly was filled when Halsyon entered. Hundreds of tall, gaunt, bitter diplomats applauded as he made his way to the podium, still dressed in convict plasti-clothes. Halsyon looked around resentfully.

"Yes," he grated. "You all applaud. You all revere me now; but where were you when I was framed, convicted and jailed . . . an innocent man? Where were you then?"

"Halsyon, forgive us. God damn!" they shouted.

"I will not forgive you. I suffered for seventeen years in the Grssh mines. Now it's your turn to suffer."

"Please, Halsyon!"

"Where are your experts? Your professors? Your specialists? Where are your electronic calculators? Your super thinking machines? Let them solve the mystery of the Grssh."

"They can't, old whiskey & sour. Entre nous. They're stopped cold. Save us, Halsyon. Auf wiedersehen."

Judith took his arm. "Not for my sake, Jeff," she whispered. "I know you'll never forgive me for the injustice I did you. But for the sake of all the other girls in the Galaxy who love and are loved."

"I still love you, Judy."

"I've always loved you, Jeff."

"Okay. I didn't want to tell them but you talked me into it." Halsyon raised his hand for silence. In the ensuing hush he spoke softly. "The secret is this, gentlemen. Your calculators have assembled data to ferret out the secret weakness of the Grssh. They have not been able to find any. Consequently you have assumed that the Grssh have no secret weakness. *That was a wrong assumption.*"

The General Assembly held its breath.

"Here is the secret. *You should have assumed there was something wrong with the calculators.*"

"God damn!" the General Assembly cried. "Why didn't we think of that? God damn!"

"*And I know what's wrong!*"

There was a deathlike hush.

The door of the General Assembly burst open. Professor Deathhush, tall, gaunt, bitter, tottered in. "Eureka!" he cried. "I've found it. God damn. Something wrong with the thinking machines. Three comes *after* two, not before."

The General Assembly exploded into cheers. Professor Deathhush was seized and pummeled happily. Bottles were opened. His health was drunk. Several medals were pinned on him. He beamed.

"Hey!" Halsyon called. "That was my secret. I'm the one man who on account of a mysterious mutant strain in my—"

The ticker-tape began pounding:

ATTENTION. ATTENTION. HUSHENKOV IN MOSCOW REPORTS DEFECT IN CALCULATORS. 3 COMES AFTER 2 AND NOT BEFORE. REPEAT: AFTER (UNDERSCORE) NOT BEFORE.

A postman ran in. "Special delivery from Doctor Lifehush at Caltech. Says something's wrong with the thinking machines. Three comes after two, not before."

A telegraph boy delivered a wire: THINKING MACHINE WRONG STOP TWO COMES BEFORE THREE STOP NOT AFTER STOP. VON DREAM-HUSH, HEIDELBERG.

A bottle was thrown through the window. It crashed on the floor revealing a bit of paper on which was scrawled: *Did you ever stopp to thinc that maibe the number 3 comes after 2 insted of in front? Down with the Grish. Mr. Hush-Hush.*

Halsyon buttonholed Judge Field. "What the hell is this?" he demanded. "I thought I was the one man in the world with that secret."

"HimmelHerrGott!" Judge Field replied impatiently. "You are all alike. You dream you are the one man with a secret, the one man with a wrong, the one man with an injustice, with a girl, without a girl, with or without anything. God damn. You bore me, you one-man dreamers. Get lost."

Judge Field shouldered him aside. General Balorsen shoved him back. Judith Field ignored him. Balorsen's robot sneakily tripped him into a corner where a Grssh, also in a corner on Neptune, appeared, did something unspeakable to Halsyon and disappeared with him, screaming, jerking and sobbing into a horror that was a delicious meal for the Grssh but an agonizing nightmare for Halsyon . . .

From which his mother awakened him and said, "This'll teach you not to sneak peanut-butter sandwiches in the middle of the night, Jeffrey."

"Mama?"

"Yes. It's time to get up, dear. You'll be late for school."

She left the room. He looked around. He looked at himself. It was true. True! The glorious realization came upon him. His dream had come true. He was ten years old again, in the flesh that was his ten-year-old body, in the home that was his boyhood home, in the life that had been his life in the nineteen thirties. And within his head was the knowledge, the experience, the sophistication of a man of thirty-three.

"Oh joy!" he cried. "It'll be a triumph. A triumph!"

He would be the school genius. He would astonish his parents, amaze his teachers, confound the experts. He would win scholarships. He would settle the hash of that kid Renn-

han who used to bully him. He would hire a typewriter and write all the successful plays and stories and novels he remembered. He would cash in on that lost opportunity with Judy Field behind the memorial in Isham Park. He would steal inventions, discoveries, get in on the ground floor of new industries, make bets, play the stock market. He would own the world by the time he caught up with himself.

He dressed with difficulty. He had forgotten where his clothes were kept. He ate breakfast with difficulty. This was no time to explain to his mother that he'd gotten into the habit of starting the day with coffee laced with rye. He missed his morning cigarette. He had no idea where his schoolbooks were. His mother had trouble starting him out.

"Jeff's in one of his moods," he heard her mutter. "I hope he gets through the day."

The day started with Rennahan laying for him on the corner opposite the Boys' Entrance. Halsyon remembered him as a big tough kid with a vicious expression. He was astonished to discover that Rennahan was skinny, harassed and obviously compelled by some bedevilements to be omnivorously aggressive.

"Why, you're not hostile to me," Halsyon exclaimed. "You're just a mixed-up kid who's trying to prove something."

Rennahan punched him.

"Look, kid," Halsyon said kindly. "You really want to be friends with the world. You're just insecure. That's why you're compelled to fight."

Rennahan was deaf to spot analysis. He punched Halsyon harder. It hurt.

"Oh leave me alone," Halsyon said. "Go prove yourself on somebody else."

Rennahan, with two swift motions, knocked Halsyon's books from under his arm and ripped his fly. There was nothing for it but to fight. Twenty years of watching films of the future Joe Louis did nothing for Halsyon. He was thoroughly licked. He was also late for school. Now was his chance to amaze his teachers.

"The fact is," he explained to Miss Ralph of the fifth

grade, "I had a run-in with a neurotic. I can speak for his left hook but I won't answer for his Id."

Miss Ralph slapped him and sent him to the principal with a note, reporting unheard-of insolence.

"The only thing unheard of in this school," Halsyon told Mr. Snider, "is psychoanalysis. How can you pretend to be competent teachers if you don't—"

"Dirty little boy!" Mr. Snider interrupted angrily. He was tall, gaunt, bitter. "So you've been reading dirty books, eh?"

"What the hell's dirty about Freud?"

"And using profane language, eh? You need a lesson, you filthy little animal."

He was sent home with a note requesting an immediate consultation with his parents regarding the withdrawal of Jeffrey Halsyon from school as a degenerate in desperate need of correction and vocational guidance.

Instead of going home he went to a newsstand to check the papers for events on which to get a bet down. The headlines were full of the pennant race. But who the hell won the pennant in 1931? And the series? He couldn't for the life of him remember. And the stock market? He couldn't remember anything about that either. He'd never been particularly interested in such matters as a boy. There was nothing planted in his memory to call upon.

He tried to get into the library for further checks. The librarian, tall, gaunt, bitter, would not permit him to enter until children's hour in the afternoon. He loafed on the streets. Wherever he loafed he was chased by gaunt and bitter adults. He was beginning to realize that ten-year-old boys had limited opportunities to amaze the world.

At lunch hour he met Judy Field and accompanied her home from school. He was appalled by her knobby knees and black corkscrew curls. He didn't like the way she smelled either. But he was rather taken with her mother who was the image of the Judy he remembered. He forgot himself with Mrs. Field and did one or two things that indeed confounded her. She drove him out of the house and then telephoned his mother, her voice shaking with indignation.

Halsyon went down to the Hudson River and hung around the ferry docks until he was chased. He went to a stationery

store to inquire about typewriter rentals and was chased. He searched for a quiet place to sit, think, plan, perhaps begin the recall of a successful story. There was no quiet place to which a small boy would be admitted.

He slipped into his house at 4:30, dropped his books in his room, stole into the living room, sneaked a cigarette and was on his way out when he discovered his mother and father ambushing him. His mother looked shocked. His father looked gaunt and bitter.

"Oh," Halsyon said. "I suppose Snider phoned. I'd forgotten about that."

"*Mister Snider*," his mother said.

"And *Mrs. Field*," his father said.

"Look," Halsyon began. "We'd better get this straightened out. Will you listen to me for a few minutes? I have something startling to tell you and we've got to plan what to do about it. I—"

He yelped. His father had taken him by the ear and was marching him down the hall. Parents did not listen to children for a few minutes. They did not listen at all.

"Pop . . . Just a minute . . . Please! I'm trying to explain. I'm not really ten years old, I'm 33. There's been a freak in time, see? On account of a mysterious mutant strain in my makeup which—"

"Damn you! Be quiet!" his father shouted. The pain of his big hands, the suppressed fury in his voice silenced Halsyon. He suffered himself to be led out of the house, four agonizing blocks to the school, and up one flight to Mr. Snider's office where a public school psychologist was waiting with the principal. He was a tall, gaunt, bitter man, but sprightly.

"Ah yes, yes," he said. "So this is our little degenerate. Our Scarface Al Capone, eh? Come, we take him to the clinic and there I shall take his journal intime. We will hope for the best. *Nisi prius*. He cannot be all bad."

He took Halsyon's arm. Halsyon pulled his arm away and said, "Listen, you're an adult, intelligent man. You'll listen to me. My father's got emotional problems that blind him to the—"

His father gave him a tremendous box on the ear, grabbed

his arm and thrust it back into the psychologist's grasp. Halsyon burst into tears. The psychologist led him out of the office and into the tiny school clinic. Halsyon was hysterical. He was trembling with frustration and terror.

"Won't anybody listen to me?" he sobbed. "Won't anybody try to understand? Is this what we're all like to kids? Is this what all kids go through?"

"Gently, my sausage," the psychologist murmured. He popped a pill into Halsyon's mouth and forced him to drink some water.

"You're all so damned inhuman," Halsyon wept. "You keep us out of your world, but you keep barging into ours. If you don't respect us why don't you leave us alone?"

"You begin to understand, eh?" the psychologist said. "We are two different breeds of animals, childrens and adults. God damn. I speak to you with frankness. Les absents ont toujours tort. There is no meetings of the minds. Jeez. There is nothing but war. It is why all childrens grow up hating their childhoods and searching for revenges. But there is never revenges. *Pari mutuel*. How can there be? Can a cat insult a king?"

"It's . . . S'hateful," Halsyon mumbled. The pill was taking effect rapidly. "Whole world's hateful. Full of conflicts'n'insults 'at can't be r'solved . . . or paid back . . . S'like a joke somebody's playin' on us. Silly joke without point. Isn't?"

As he slid down into darkness, he could hear the psychologist chuckle, but couldn't for the life of him understand what he was laughing at . . .

He picked up his spade and followed the first clown into the cemetery. The first clown was a tall man, gaunt, bitter, but sprightly.

"Is she to be buried in Christian burial that wilfully seeks her own salvation?" the first clown asked.

"I tell thee she is," Halsyon answered. "And therefore make her grave straight: the crowner hath sat on her, and finds it Christian burial."

"How can that be, unless she drowned herself in her own defense?"

"Why, 'tis found so."

They began to dig the grave. The first clown thought the matter over, then said, "It must be *se offendendo*; it cannot be else. For here lies the point: if I drown myself wittingly, it argues an act: and an act hath three branches; it is, to act, to do, to perform: argal, she drowned herself wittingly."

"Nay, but hear you, goodman delver—" Halsyon began.

"Give me leave," the first clown interrupted and went on with a tiresome discourse on quest-law. Then he turned sprightly and cracked a few professional jokes. At last Halsyon got away and went down to Yaughan's for a drink. When he returned, the first clown was cracking jokes with a couple of gentlemen who had wandered into the graveyard. One of them made quite a fuss about a skull.

The burial procession arrived; the coffin, the dead girl's brother, the king and queen, the priests and lords. They buried her, and the brother and one of the gentlemen began to quarrel over her grave. Halsyon paid no attention. There was a pretty girl in the procession, dark, with cropped curly hair and lovely long legs. He winked at her. She winked back. Halsyon edged over toward her, speaking with his eyes and she answered him saucily the same way.

Then he picked up his spade and followed the first clown into the cemetery. The first clown was a tall man, gaunt, with a bitter expression but a sprightly manner.

"Is she to be buried in Christian burial that wilfully seeks her own salvation?" the first clown asked.

"I tell thee she is," Halsyon answered. "And therefore make her grave straight: the crowner hath sat on her, and finds it Christian burial."

"How can that be, unless she drowned herself in her own defense?"

"Didn't you ask me that before?" Halsyon inquired.

"Shut up, old faithful. Answer the question."

"I could swear this happened before."

"God damn. Will you answer? Jeez."

"Why, 'tis found so."

They began to dig the grave. The first clown thought the matter over and began a long discourse on quest-law. After that he turned sprightly and cracked trade jokes. At last

Halsyon got away and went down to Yaughan's for a drink. When he returned there were a couple of strangers at the grave and then the burial procession arrived.

There was a pretty girl in the procession, dark, with cropped curly hair and lovely long legs. Halsyon winked at her. She winked back. Halsyon edged over toward her, speaking with his eyes and she answering him the same way.

"What's your name?" he whispered.

"Judith," she answered.

"I have your name tattooed on me, Judith."

"You're lying, sir."

"I can prove it, Madam. I'll show you where I was tattooed."

"And where is that?"

"In Yaughan's tavern. It was done by a sailor off the *Golden Hind*. Will you see it with me tonight?"

Before she could answer, he picked up his spade and followed the first clown into the cemetery. The first clown was a tall man, gaunt, with a bitter expression but a sprightly manner.

"For God's sake!" Halsyon complained. "I could swear this happened before."

"Is she to be buried in Christian burial that wilfully seeks her own salvation?" the first clown asked.

"I just know we've been through all this."

"Will you answer the question!"

"Listen," Halsyon said doggedly. "Maybe I'm crazy; maybe not. But I've got a spooky feeling that all this happened before. It seems unreal. Life seems unreal."

The first clown shook his head. "HimmelHerrGott," he muttered. "It is as I feared. Lux et veritas. On account of a mysterious mutant strain in your makeup which it makes you different, you are treading on thin water. Ewigkeit! Answer the question."

"If I've answered it once, I've answered it a hundred times."

"Old ham & eggs," the first clown burst out, "you have answered it 5,271,009 times. God damn. Answer again."

"Why?"

"Because you must. Pot-au-feu. It is the life we must live."

"You call this life? Doing the same things over and over

again? Saying the same things? Winking at girls and never getting any further?"

"No, no, no, my Donner und Blitzen. Do not question. It is a conspiracy we dare not fight. This is the life every man lives. Every man does the same things over and over. There is no escape."

"Why is there no escape?"

"I dare not say; I dare not. Vox populi. Others have questioned and disappeared. It is a conspiracy. I'm afraid."

"Afraid of what?"

"Of our owners."

"What? We are owned?"

"Si. Ach, ja! All of us, young mutant. There is no reality. There is no life, no freedom, no will. God damn. Don't you realize? We are . . . We are all characters in a book. As the book is read, we dance our dances; when the book is read again, we dance again. E pluribus unum. Is she to be buried in Christian burial that wilfully seeks her own salvation?"

"What are you saying?" Halsyon cried in horror. "We're puppets?"

"Answer the question."

"If there's no freedom, no free will, how can we be talking like this?"

"Whoever's reading our book is day-dreaming, my capitol of Dakota. Idem est. Answer the question."

"I will not. I'm going to revolt. I'll dance for our owners no longer. I'll find a better life . . . I'll find reality."

"No, no! It's madness, Jeffrey! Cul-de-sac!"

"All we need is one brave leader. The rest will follow. We'll smash the conspiracy that chains us!"

"It cannot be done. Play it safe. Answer the question."

Halsyon answered the question by picking up his spade and bashing in the head of the first clown who appeared not to notice. "Is she to be buried in Christian burial that wilfully seeks her own salvation?" he asked.

"Revolt!" Halsyon cried and bashed him again. The clown started to sing. The two gentlemen appeared. One said: "Has this fellow no feeling of business that he sings at grave-making?"

"Revolt! Follow me!" Halsyon shouted and swung his spade

against the gentleman's melancholy head. He paid no attention. He chatted with his friend and the first clown. Halsyon whirled like a dervish, laying about him with his spade. The gentleman picked up a skull and philosophized over some person or persons named Yorick.

The funeral procession approached. Halsyon attacked it, whirling and turning, around and around with the clotted frenzy of a man in a dream.

"Stop reading the book," he shouted. "Let me out of the pages. Can you hear me? Stop reading the book! I'd rather be in a world of my own making. Let me go!"

There was a mighty clap of thunder, as of the covers of a mighty book slamming shut. In an instant Halsyon was swept spinning into the third compartment of the seventh circle of the Inferno in the fourteenth Canto of the *Divine Comedy* where they who have sinned against art are tormented by flakes of fire which are eternally showered down upon them. There he shrieked until he had provided sufficient amusement. Only then was he permitted to devise a text of his own . . . and he formed a new world, a romantic world, a world of his fondest dreams . . .

He was the last man on earth.

He was the last man on earth and he howled.

The hills, the valleys, the mountains and streams were his, his alone, and he howled.

5,271,009 houses were his for shelter. 5,271,009 beds were his for sleeping. The shops were his for the breaking and entering. The jewels of the world were his; the toys, the tools, the playthings, the necessities, the luxuries . . . all belonged to the last man on earth, and he howled.

He left the country mansion in the fields of Connecticut where he had taken up residence; he crossed into Westchester, howling; he ran south along what had once been the Hendrick Hudson Highway, howling; he crossed the bridge into Manhattan, howling; he ran downtown past lonely skyscrapers, department stores, amusement palaces, howling. He howled down Fifth Avenue, and at the corner of 50th Street he saw a human being.

She was alive, breathing; a beautiful woman. She was tall

and dark with cropped curly hair and lovely long legs. She wore a white blouse, tiger-skin riding breeches and patent leather boots. She carried a rifle. She wore a revolver on her hip. She was eating stewed tomatoes from a can and she stared at Halsyon in unbelief. He howled. He ran up to her.

"I thought I was the last human on earth," she said.

"You're the last woman," Halsyon howled. "I'm the last man. Are you a dentist?"

"No," she said. "I'm the daughter of the unfortunate Professor Field whose well-intentioned but ill-advised experiment in nuclear fission has wiped mankind off the face of the earth with the exception of you and me who, no doubt on account of some mysterious mutant strain in our makeup which it makes us different, are the last of the old civilization and the first of the new."

"Didn't your father teach you anything about dentistry?" Halsyon howled.

"No," she said.

"Then lend me your gun for a minute."

She unholstered the revolver and handed it to Halsyon, meanwhile keeping her rifle ready. Halsyon cocked the gun.

"I wish you'd been a dentist," he howled.

"I'm a beautiful woman with an I.Q. of 141 which is more important for the propagation of a brave new beautiful race of men to inherit the good green earth," she said.

"Not with my teeth it isn't," Halsyon howled.

He clapped the revolver to his temple and blew his brains out.

He awoke with a splitting headache. He was lying on the tile dais alongside the stool, his bruised temple pressed against the cold floor. Mr. Aquila had emerged from the lead shield and was turning on an exhaust fan to clear the air.

"Bravo, my liver & onions," he chuckled. "The last one you did by yourself, eh? No assistance from yours truly required. Meglio tarde che mai. But you went over with a crack before I could catch you. God damn."

He helped Halsyon to his feet and led him into the consultation room where he seated him on a velvet chaise longue and gave him a glass of brandy.

"Guaranteed free of drugs," he said. "Noblesse oblige. Only the best spiritus frumenti. Now we discuss what we have done, eh? Jeez."

He sat down behind the desk, still sprightly, still bitter, and regarded Halsyon with kindliness. "Man lives by his decisions, n'est-ce-pas?" he began. "We agree, oui? A man has some five million two hundred seventy-one thousand and nine decisions to make in the course of his life. Peste! Is it a prime number? N'importe. Do you agree?"

Halsyon nodded.

"So, my coffee & doughnuts, it is the maturity of these decisions that decides whether a man is a man or a child. Nicht wahr? Malgré nous. A man cannot start making adult decisions until he has purged himself of the dreams of childhood. God damn. Such fantasies. They must go. Pfui."

"No," Halsyon said slowly. "It's the dreams that make my art . . . the dreams and fantasies that I translate into line and color . . ."

"God damn! Yes. Agreed. Maître d'hotel! But adult dreams, not baby dreams. Baby dreams. Pfui! All men have them . . . To be the last man on earth and own the earth . . . To be the last fertile man on earth and own the women . . . To go back in time with the advantage of adult knowledge and win victories . . . To escape reality with the dream that life is make-believe . . . To escape responsibility with a fantasy of heroic injustice, of martyrdom with a happy ending . . . And there are hundreds more, equally popular, equally empty. God bless Father Freud and his merry men. He applies the quietus to such nonsense. Sic semper tyrannis. Avaunt!"

"But if everybody has those dreams, they can't be bad, can they?"

"For everybody read everybaby. Quid pro quo. God damn. Everybody in Fourteen century had lice. Did that make it good? No, my young, such dreams are for children. Too many adults are still childrens. It is you, the artists, who must lead them out as I have led you. I purge you; now you purge them."

"Why did you do this?"

"Because I have faith in you. Sic vos non vobis. It will not be easy for you. A long hard road and lonely."

"I suppose I ought to feel grateful," Halsyon muttered, "but I feel . . . well . . . empty. Cheated."

"Oh yes, God damn. If you live with one Jeez big ulcer long enough you miss him when he's cut out. You were hiding in an ulcer. I have robbed you of said refuge. Ergo: you feel cheated. Wait! You will feel even more cheated. There was a price to pay, I told you. You have paid it. Look."

Mr. Aquila held up a hand mirror. Halsyon glanced into it, then started and stared. A fifty-year-old face stared back at him: lined, hardened, solid, determined. Halsyon leaped to his feet.

"Gently, gently," Mr. Aquila admonished. "It is not so bad. It is damned good. You are still 33 in age of physique. You have lost none of your life—only all of your youth. What have you lost? A pretty face to lure young girls? Is that why you are wild?"

"Christ!" Halsyon cried.

"All right. Still gently, my child. Here you are, purged, disillusioned, unhappy, bewildered, one foot on the hard road to maturity. Would you like this to have happened or not have happened? Si. I can do. This can never have happened. Spurlös versenkt. It is ten seconds from your escape. You can have your pretty young face back. You can be recaptured. You can return to the safe ulcer of the womb . . . a child again. Would you like same?"

"You can't!"

"Sauve qui peut, my Pike's Peak. I can. There is no end to the 15,000 angstrom band."

"Damn you! Are you Satan? Lucifer? Only the devil could have such powers."

"Or angels, my old."

"You don't look like an angel. You look like Satan."

"Ah? Ha? But Satan was an angel before he fell. He has many relations on high. Surely there are family resemblances. God damn." Mr. Aquila stopped laughing. He leaned across the desk and the sprightliness was gone from his face. Only the bitterness remained. "Shall I tell you who I am, my chicken? Shall I explain why one unguarded look from this phizz toppled you over the brink?"

Halsyon nodded, unable to speak.

"I am a scoundrel, a black sheep, a scapegrace, a black-guard. I am a remittance man. Yes. God damn! I am a remittance man." Mr. Aquila's eyes turned into wounds. "By your standards I am the great man of infinite power and variety. So was the remittance man from Europe to naïve natives on the beaches of Tahiti. Eh? So am I to you as I comb the beaches of this planet for a little amusement, a little hope, a little joy to while away the weary desolate years of my exile . . .

"I am bad," Mr. Aquila said in a voice of chilling desperation. "I am rotten. There is no place in my home that can tolerate me. And there are moments, unguarded, when my sickness and my despair fill my eyes and strike terror into your waiting souls. As I strike terror into you now. Yes?"

Halsyon nodded again.

"Be guided by me. It was the child in Solon Aquila that destroyed him and led him into the sickness that destroyed his life. Oui. I too suffer from baby fantasies from which I cannot escape. Do not make the same mistake. I beg of you . . ." Mr. Aquila glanced at his wristwatch and leaped up. The sprightly returned to his manner. "Jeez. It's late. Time to make up your mind, old bourbon & soda. Which will it be? Old face or pretty face? The reality of dreams or the dream of reality?"

"How many decisions did you say we have to make in a lifetime?"

"Five million two hundred and seventy-one thousand and nine. Give or take a thousand. God damn."

"And which one is this for me?"

"Ah? Vérité sans peur. The two million six hundred and thirty-five thousand five hundred and fourth . . . off hand."

"But it's the big one."

"They are all big." Mr. Aquila stepped to the door, placed his hand on the buttons of a rather complicated switch and cocked an eye at Halsyon.

"Voilà tout," he said. "It rests with you."

"I'll take it the hard way," Halsyon decided.

There was a silver chime from the switch, a fizzing aura, a soundless explosion, and Jeffrey Halsyon was ready for his 2,635,505th decision.

KURT VONNEGUT, JR.

More than one science-fiction writer has started a career in the specialist magazines and in time turned up in the nation's big slicks; but very few, perhaps none but Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., have turned the process on its head. From the very first Vonnegut's fiction possessed both the smoothness and warmth required by *Collier's* and the other giants and the brilliant originality typical of the best science-fiction magazines. The trick is not easy; to see how it is done, examine—

The Big Trip up Yonder

The year was 2158 A.D., and Lou and Emerald Schwartz were whispering on the balcony outside of Lou's family's apartment on the seventy-sixth floor of Building 257 in Alden Village, a New York housing development that covered what had once been known as southern Connecticut. When Lou and Emerald had married, Em's parents had tearfully described the marriage as being between May and December; but now, with Lou 112 and Em 93, Em's parents had to admit that the match had worked out surprisingly well.

But Em and Lou weren't without their troubles, and they were out in the nippy air of the balcony because of them. What they were saying was bitter and private.

"Sometimes I get so mad, I feel like just up and diluting his anti-gerasone," said Em.

"That'd be against nature, Em," said Lou. "It'd be murder. Besides, if he caught us tinkering with his anti-gerasone, not only would he disinherit us, he'd bust my neck. Just because he's 172 doesn't mean Gramps isn't strong as a bull."

"Against nature," said Em. "Who knows what nature's like

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any more? Ohhhhhh—I don't guess I could ever bring myself to dilute his anti-gerasone or anything like that, but, gosh, Lou, a body can't help thinking Gramps is never going to leave if somebody doesn't help him along a little. Golly—we're so crowded, a person can hardly turn around, and Verna's dying for a baby, and Melissa's gone thirty years without one." She stamped her feet. "I get so sick of seeing his wrinkled old face, watching him take the only private room and the best chair and the best food, and getting to pick out what to watch on TV, and running everybody's life by changing his will all the time."

"Well, after all," said Lou bleakly, "Gramps is head of the family. And he can't help being wrinkled like he is. He was seventy before anti-gerasone was invented. He's going to leave, Em. Just give him time. It's his business. I know he's tough to live with, but be patient. It wouldn't do to do anything that'd rile him. After all, we've got it better'n anybody else there on the day bed."

"How much longer do you think we'll get to sleep on the day bed before he picks another pet? The world's record's two months, isn't it?"

"Mom and Pop had it that long once, I guess."

"When is he going to leave, Lou?" said Emerald.

"Well, he's talking about giving up anti-gerasone right after the five-hundred-mile Speedway Race."

"Yes—and before that it was the Olympics, and before that the World's Series, and before that the presidential elections, and before that I-don't-know-what. It's been just one excuse after another for fifty years now. I don't think we're ever going to get a room to ourselves or an egg or anything."

"All right—call me a failure!" said Lou. "What can I do? I work hard and make good money, but the whole thing, practically, is taxed away for defense and old-age pensions. And if it wasn't taxed away, where do you think we'd find a vacant room to rent? Iowa, maybe? Well, who wants to live on the outskirts of Chicago?"

Em put her arms around his neck. "Lou, hon, I'm not calling you a failure. The Lord knows you're not. You just haven't

had a chance to be anything or have anything because Gramps and the rest of his generation won't leave and let somebody else take over."

"Yeah, yeah," said Lou gloomily. "You can't exactly blame 'em, though, can you? I mean, I wonder how quick we'll knock off the anti-gerasone when we get Gramps' age?"

"Sometimes I wish there wasn't any such thing as anti-gerasone!" said Emerald passionately. "Or I wish it was made out of something real expensive and hard to get instead of mud and dandelions. Sometimes I wish folks just up and died regular as clockwork, without anything to say about it, instead of deciding themselves how long they're going to stay around. There ought to be a law against selling the stuff to anybody over 150."

"Fat chance of that," said Lou, "with all the money and votes the old people've got." He looked at her closely. "You ready to up and die, Em?"

"Well, for heaven's sakes, what a thing to say to your wife. Hon, I'm not even a hundred yet." She ran her hands lightly over her firm, youthful figure, as though for confirmation. "The best years of my life are still ahead of me. But you can bet that when 150 rolls around, old Em's going to pour her anti-gerasone down the sink and quit taking up room, and she'll do it smiling."

"Sure, sure," said Lou, "you bet. That's what they all say, hon. Many you heard of doing it?"

"There was that man in Delaware."

"Aren't you getting kind of tired of talking about him, Em? That was five months ago."

"All right, then—Gramma Winkler, right here in the same building."

"She got smeared by a subway."

"That's just the way she picked to go," said Em.

"Then what was she doing carrying a carton of anti-gerasone when she got it?"

Emerald shook her head wearily and covered her eyes. "I dunno. I dunno, I dunno, I dunno. All I know is, something's just got to be done." She sighed. "Sometimes I wish they'd left a couple of diseases kicking around somewhere, so I could

get one and go to bed for a little while. Too many people!" she cried, and her words cackled and gabbled and died in a thousand asphalt-paved, skyscraper-walled courtyards.

Lou laid his hand on her shoulder tenderly. "Aw, hon, I hate to see you down in the dumps like this."

"If we just had a car, like the folks used to in the old days," said Em, "we could go for a drive and get away from people for a little while. Gee—if *those* weren't the days!"

"Yeah," said Lou, "before they'd used up all the metal."

"We'd hop in, and Pop'd drive up to a filling station and say, 'Fillerup!'"

"That *was* the nuts, wasn't it—before they'd used up all the gasoline?"

"And we'd go for a carefree ride in the country."

"Yeah—all seems wonderful. Hard to believe there really used to be all that space between cities."

"And when we got hungry," said Em, "we'd find ourselves a restaurant and walk in, big as you please, and say, 'I'll have a steak and french-fries, I believe,' or 'How are the pork chops today?'" She licked her lips, and her eyes glistened.

"Yeah man!" growled Lou. "How'd you like a hamburger with the works, Em?"

"Mmmmmmmmm."

"If anybody'd offered us processed seaweed in those days, we would have spit right in his eye, huh, Em?"

"Or processed sawdust," said Em.

Doggedly Lou tried to find the cheery side of the situation. "Well, anyway, they've got the stuff so it tastes a lot less like seaweed and sawdust than it did at first; and they say it's actually better for us than what we used to eat."

"I felt fine!" said Em fiercely.

Lou shrugged. "Well, you've got to realize, the world wouldn't be able to support twelve billion people if it wasn't for processed seaweed and sawdust. I mean, it's a wonderful thing, really. I guess. That's what they say."

"They say the first thing that pops into their heads," said Em. She closed her eyes. "Golly—remember shopping, Lou? Remember how the stores used to fight to get our folks to buy something? You didn't have to wait for somebody to die to get a bed or chairs or a stove or anything like that. Just went

in—bing!—and bought whatever you wanted. Gee whiz, that was nice, before they used up all the raw materials. I was just a little kid then, but I can remember so plain.”

Depressed, Lou walked listlessly to the balcony's edge and looked up at the clean, cold, bright stars against infinity. “Remember when we used to be bugs on science fiction, Em? Flight seventeen, leaving for Mars, launching ramp twelve. 'Board! All non-technical personnel kindly remain in bunkers. Ten seconds . . . nine . . . eight . . . seven . . . six . . . five . . . four . . . three . . . two . . . *one! Main stage! Barrrrrrrooom!*”

“Why worry about what was going on on Earth?” said Em, looking up at the stars with him. “In another few years we'd all be shooting through space to start life all over again on a new planet.”

Lou sighed. “Only it turns out you need something about twice the size of the Empire State Building to get one lousy colonist to Mars. And for another couple of trillion bucks he could take his wife and dog. *That's* the way to lick over-population—*emigrate!*”

“Lou—?”

“Hmmm?”

“When's the five-hundred-mile Speedway Race?”

“Uh—Memorial Day, May thirtieth.”

She bit her lip. “Was that awful of me to ask?”

“Not very, I guess. Everybody in the apartment's looked it up to make sure.”

“I don't want to be awful,” said Em, “but you've just got to talk over these things now and then and get them out of your system.”

“Sure you do. Feel better?”

“Yes—and I'm not going to lose my temper any more, and I'm going to be just as nice to him as I know how.”

“That's my Em.”

They squared their shoulders, smiled bravely, and went back inside.

Gramps Schwartz, his chin resting on his hands, his hands on the crook of his cane, was staring irascibly at the five-foot television screen that dominated the room. On the screen a

news commentator was summarizing the day's happenings. Every thirty seconds or so Gramps would jab the floor with his cane tip and shout, "Hell! We did that a hundred years ago!"

Emerald and Lou, coming in from the balcony, were obliged to take seats in the back row, behind Lou's father and mother, brother and sister-in-law, son and daughter-in-law, grandson and wife, granddaughter and husband, great-grandson and wife, nephew and wife, grandnephew and wife, great-grandniece and husband, great-grandnephew and wife, and, of course, Gramps, who was in front of everybody. All, save Gramps, who was somewhat withered and bent, seemed, by pre-anti-gerasone standards, to be about the same age—to be somewhere in their late twenties or early thirties.

"*Meanwhile,*" said the commentator, "*two hundred rescue workers in Council Bluffs, Iowa, continued to dig in an effort to save Elbert Hagedorn, 183, who has been trapped for two days in a . . .*"

"I wish he'd get something more cheerful," Emerald whispered to Lou.

"Silence!" cried Gramps. "Next one shoots off his big bazoo while the TV's on is gonna find hisself cut off without a dollar"—and here his voice suddenly softened and sweetened—"when they wave that checkered flag at the Indianapolis Speedway, and old Gramps gets ready for the Big Trip up Yonder." He sniffed sentimentally, while his heirs concentrated desperately on not making the slightest sound. For them, the poignancy of the prospective Big Trip had been dulled somewhat by its having been mentioned by Gramps about once a day for fifty years.

"*Dr. Brainard Keyes Bullard,*" said the commentator, "*President of Wyandotte College, said in an address tonight that most of the world's ills can be traced to the fact that man's knowledge of himself has not kept pace with his knowledge of the physical world.*"

"Hell!" said Gramps. "We said that a hundred years ago!"

"*In Chicago tonight,*" said the commentator, "*a special celebration is taking place in the Chicago Lying-in Hospital. The guest of honor is Lowell W. Hitz, age zero. Hitz, born this morning, is the twenty-five millionth child to be born in the*

hospital." The commentator faded and was replaced on the screen by young Hitz, who squalled furiously.

"Hell," whispered Lou to Emerald, "we said that a hundred years ago."

"I heard that!" shouted Gramps. He snapped off the television set, and his petrified descendants stared silently at the screen. "You, there, boy——"

"I didn't mean anything by it, sir," said Lou.

"Get me my will. You know where it is. You kids *all* know where it is. Fetch, boy!"

Lou nodded dully and found himself going down the hall, picking his way over bedding to Gramps' room, the only private room in the Schwartz apartment. The other rooms were the bathroom, the living room, and the wide, windowless hallway, which was originally intended to serve as a dining area, and which had a kitchenette in one end. Six mattresses and four sleeping bags were dispersed in the hallway and dining room, and the day bed, in the living room, accommodated the eleventh couple, the favorites of the moment.

On Gramps' bureau was his will, smeared, dog-eared, perforated, and blotched with hundreds of additions, deletions, accusations, conditions, warnings, advice, and homely philosophy. The document was, Lou reflected, a fifty-year diary, all jammed onto two sheets—a garbled, illegible log of day after day of strife. This day, Lou would be disinherited for the eleventh time, and it would take him perhaps six months of impeccable behavior to regain the promise of a share in the estate.

"Boy!" called Gramps.

"Coming, sir." Lou hurried back into the living room and handed Gramps the will.

"Pen!" said Gramps.

He was instantly offered ten pens, one from each couple.

"Not that leaky thing," he said, brushing Lou's pen aside. "Ah, there's a nice one. Good boy, Willy." He accepted Willy's pen. That was the tip they'd all been waiting for. Willy, then, Lou's father, was the new favorite.

Willy, who looked almost as young as Lou, though 142, did a poor job of concealing his pleasure. He glanced shyly at the day bed, which would become his, and from which Lou

and Emerald would have to move back into the hall, back to the worst spot of all by the bathroom door.

Gramps missed none of the high drama he'd authored, and he gave his own familiar role everything he had. Frowning and running his finger along each line, as though he were seeing the will for the first time, he read aloud in a deep, portentous monotone, like a base tone on a cathedral organ:

"I, Harold D. Schwartz, residing in Building 257 of Alden Village, New York City, do hereby make, publish, and declare this to be my last Will and Testament, hereby revoking any and all former wills and codicils by me at any time heretofore made.'" He blew his nose importantly and went on, not missing a word, and repeating many for emphasis—repeating in particular his ever-more-elaborate specifications for a funeral.

At the end of these specifications, Gramps was so choked with emotion that Lou thought he might forget why he'd gotten out the will in the first place. But Gramps heroically brought his powerful emotions under control, and, after erasing for a full minute, he began to write and speak at the same time. Lou could have spoken his lines for him, he'd heard them so often.

"I have had many heartbreaks ere leaving this vale of tears for a better land," Gramps said and wrote. "But the deepest hurt of all has been dealt me by—" He looked around the group, trying to remember who the malefactor was.

Everyone looked helpfully at Lou, who held up his hand resignedly.

Gramps nodded, remembering, and completed the sentence: "—my great-grandson, Louis J. Schwartz."

"Grandson, sir," said Lou.

"Don't quibble. You're in deep enough now, young man," said Gramps, but he changed the trifle. And from there he went without a misstep through the phrasing of the disinheritance, causes for which were disrespectfulness and quibbling.

In the paragraph following, the paragraph that had belonged to everyone in the room at one time or another, Lou's name was scratched out and Willy's substituted as heir to the apartment and, the biggest plum of all, the double bed in the

private bedroom. "So!" said Gramps, beaming. He erased the date at the foot of the will, and substituted a new one, including the time of day. "Well—time to watch the *McGarvey Family*." The *McGarvey Family* was a television serial that Gramps had been following since he was sixty, or for 112 years. "I can't wait to see what's going to happen next," he said.

Lou detached himself from the group and lay down on his bed of pain by the bathroom door. He wished Em would join him, and he wondered where she was.

He dozed for a few moments, until he was disturbed by someone's stepping over him to get into the bathroom. A moment later he heard a faint gurgling sound, as though something were being poured down the washbasin drain. Suddenly it entered his mind that Em had cracked up and that she was in there doing something drastic about Gramps.

"Em——?" he whispered through the panel. There was no reply, and Lou pressed against the door. The worn lock, whose bolt barely engaged its socket, held for a second, then let the door swing inward.

"Morty!" gasped Lou.

Lou's great-grandnephew, Mortimer, who had just married and brought his wife home to the Schwartz ménage, looked at Lou with consternation and surprise. Morty kicked the door shut, but not before Lou had glimpsed what was in his hand—Gramps' enormous economy-size bottle of anti-gerasone, which had been half emptied and which Morty had been refilling to the top with tap water.

A moment later Morty came out, glared defiantly at Lou, and brushed past him wordlessly to rejoin his pretty bride.

Shocked, Lou didn't know what on earth to do. He couldn't let Gramps take the booby-trapped anti-gerasone; but if he warned Gramps about it, Gramps would certainly make life in the apartment, which was merely insufferable now, harrowing.

Lou glanced into the living room and saw that the Schwartzes, Emerald among them, were momentarily at rest, relishing the botches that the McGarveys had made of *their* lives. Stealthily he went into the bathroom, locked the door as well as he could, and began to pour the contents of Gramps'

bottle down the drain. He was going to refill it with full-strength anti-gerasone from the twenty-two smaller bottles on the shelf. The bottle contained a half gallon, and its neck was small, so it seemed to Lou that the emptying would take forever. And the almost imperceptible smell of anti-gerasone, like Worcestershire sauce, now seemed to Lou, in his nervousness, to be pouring out into the rest of the apartment through the keyhole and under the door.

"Gloog-gloog-gloog-gloog," went the bottle monotonously. Suddenly, up came the sound of music from the living room, and there were murmurs and the scraping of chair legs on the floor. "*Thus ends*," said the television announcer, "*the 29,121st chapter in the life of your neighbors and mine, the McGarveys.*" Footsteps were coming down the hall. There was a knock on the bathroom door.

"Just a sec," called Lou cheerily. Desperately he shook the big bottle, trying to speed up the flow. His palms slipped on the wet glass, and the heavy bottle smashed to splinters on the tile floor.

The door sprung open, and Gramps, dumfounded, stared at the incriminating mess.

Lou felt a hideous prickling sensation on his scalp and the back of his neck. He grinned engagingly through his nausea, and, for want of anything remotely resembling a thought, he waited for Gramps to speak.

"Well, boy," said Gramps at last, "looks like you've got a little tidying up to do."

And that was all he said. He turned around, elbowed his way through the crowd, and locked himself in his bedroom.

The Schwartzes contemplated Lou in incredulous silence for a moment longer and then hurried back to the living room, as though some of his horrible guilt would taint them, too, if they looked too long. Morty stayed behind long enough to give Lou a quizzical, annoyed glance. Then he, too, went into the living room, leaving only Emerald standing in the doorway.

Tears streamed over her cheeks. "Oh, you poor lamb—please don't look so awful. It was my fault. I put you up to this."

"No," said Lou, finding his voice, "really you didn't. Honest, Em, I was just—"

"You don't have to explain anything to me, hon. I'm on your side no matter what." She kissed him on his cheek and whispered in his ear. "It wouldn't have been murder, hon. It wouldn't have killed him. It wasn't such a terrible thing to do. It just would have fixed him up so he'd be able to go any time God decided he wanted him."

"What's gonna happen next, Em?" said Lou hollowly. "What's he gonna do?"

Lou and Emerald stayed fearfully awake almost all night, waiting to see what Gramps was going to do. But not a sound came from the sacred bedroom. At two hours before dawn the pair dropped off to sleep.

At six o'clock they arose again, for it was time for their generation to eat breakfast in the kitchenette. No one spoke to them. They had twenty minutes in which to eat, but their reflexes were so dulled by the bad night that they had hardly swallowed two mouthfuls of egg-type processed seaweed before it was time to surrender their places to their son's generation.

Then, as was the custom for whoever had been most recently disinherited, they began preparing Gramps' breakfast, which would presently be served to him in bed, on a tray. They tried to be cheerful about it. The toughest part of the job was having to handle the honest-to-God eggs and bacon and oleomargarine on which Gramps spent almost all of the income from his fortune.

"Well," said Emerald, "I'm not going to get all panicky until I'm sure there's something to be panicky about."

"Maybe he doesn't know what it was I busted," said Lou hopefully.

"Probably thinks it was your watch crystal," said Eddie, their son, who was toying apathetically with his buckwheat-type processed sawdust cakes.

"Don't get sarcastic with your father," said Em, "and don't talk with your mouth full, either."

"I'd like to see anybody take a mouthful of this stuff and *not* say something," said Eddie, who was seventy-three. He glanced at the clock. "It's time to take Gramps his breakfast, you know."

"Yeah, it is, isn't it?" said Lou bleakly. He shrugged. "Let's have the tray, Em."

"We'll both go."

Walking slowly, smiling bravely, they found a large semicircle of long-faced Schwartzes standing around the bedroom door.

Em knocked. "Gramps," she said brightly, "break-fast is ready."

There was no reply, and she knocked again, harder.

The door swung open before her fist. In the middle of the room, the soft, deep, wide, canopied bed, the symbol of the sweet by-and-by to every Schwartz, was empty.

A sense of death, as unfamiliar to the Schwartzes as Zoroastrianism or the causes of the Sepoy Mutiny, stilled every voice and slowed every heart. Awed, the heirs began to search gingerly under the furniture and behind the drapes for all that was mortal of Gramps, father of the race.

But Gramps had left not his earthly husk but a note, which Lou finally found on the dresser, under a paperweight which was a treasured souvenir from the 2000 World's Fair. Unsteadily Lou read it aloud:

"Somebody who I have sheltered and protected and taught the best I know how all these years last night turned on me like a mad dog and diluted my anti-gerasone, or tried to. I am no longer a young man. I can no longer bear the crushing burden of life as I once could. So, after last night's bitter experience, I say good-by. The cares of the world will soon drop away like a cloak of thorns, and I shall know peace. By the time you find this, I will be gone."

"Gosh," said Willy brokenly, "he didn't even get to see how the five-hundred-mile Speedway Race was going to come out."

"Or the World's Series," said Eddie.

"Or whether Mrs. McGarvey got her eyesight back," said Morty.

"There's more," said Lou, and he began reading aloud again: "I, Harold D. Schwartz . . . do hereby make, publish, and declare this to be my last Will and Testament, hereby revoking any and all former wills and codicils by me at any time heretofore made.'"

"No!" cried Willy. "Not another one!"

"I do stipulate," read Lou, "that all of my property, of whatsoever kind and nature, not be divided, but do devise and bequeath it to be held in common by my issue, without regard for generation, equally, share and share alike."

"Issue?" said Emerald.

Lou included the multitude in a sweep of his hand. "It means we all own the whole damn shootin' match."

All eyes turned instantly to the bed.

"Share and share alike?" said Morty.

"Actually," said Willy, who was the oldest person present, "it's just like the old system, where the oldest people head up things with their headquarters in here, and——"

"I like *that*!" said Em. "Lou owns as much of it as you do, and I say it ought to be for the oldest one who's still working. You can snooze around here all day, waiting for your pension check, and poor Lou stumbles in here after work, all tuckered out, and——"

"How about letting somebody who's never had any privacy get a little crack at it?" said Eddie hotly. "Hell, you old people had plenty of privacy back when you were kids. I was born and raised in the middle of the goddamn barracks in the hall! How about——?"

"Yeah?" said Morty. "Sure, you've all had it pretty tough, and my heart bleeds for you. But try honeymooning in the hall for a real kick."

"Silence!" shouted Willy imperiously. "The next person who opens his mouth spends the next six months by the bathroom. Now clear out of my room. I want to think."

A vase shattered against the wall, inches above his head. In the next moment a free-for-all was under way, with each couple battling to eject every other couple from the room. Fighting coalitions formed and dissolved with the lightning changes of the tactical situation. Em and Lou were thrown into the hall, where they organized others in the same situation, and stormed back into the room.

After two hours of struggle, with nothing like a decision in sight, the cops broke in.

For the next half hour, patrol wagons and ambulances

hauled away Schwartzes, and then the apartment was still and spacious.

An hour later, films of the last stages of the riot were being televised to 500,000,000 delighted viewers on the eastern seaboard.

In the stillness of the three-room Schwartz apartment on the seventy-sixth floor of Building 257, the television set had been left on. Once more the air was filled with the cries and grunts and crashes of the fray, coming harmlessly now from the loudspeaker. The program drew to a close with a live scene of Lou and Em behind bars at the police station.

They were in adjacent four-by-eight cells, and were stretched out peacefully on their cots.

"Em," called Lou through the partition, "you got a washbasin all your own too?"

"Sure. Washbasin, bed, light—the works. Ha! And we thought Gramps' room was something. How long's this been going on?" She held out her hand. "For the first time in forty years, hon, I haven't got the shakes."

"Cross your fingers," said Lou; "the lawyer's going to try to get us a year."

"Gee," said Em dreamily, "I wonder what kind of wires you'd have to pull to get solitary?"

"All right, pipe down," said the turnkey, "or I'll toss the whole kit and caboodle of you right out."

The prisoners fell silent; the television camera backed away for a long shot of the cell block filled with contented Schwartzes, and the scene on the television screen faded.

The Schwartz living room darkened for a moment, and then the face of the announcer appeared, like the sun coming from behind a cloud. "*And now, friends,*" he said, "*I have a special message from the makers of anti-gerasone, a message for all you folks over 150. Are you hampered socially by wrinkles, by stiffness of joints and discoloration or loss of hair, all because these things came upon you before anti-gerasone was developed? Well, if you are, you need no longer suffer, need no longer feel different and out of things.*"

"*After years of research, medical science has now developed super-anti-gerasone! In weeks—yes, weeks—you can look, feel,*

and act as young as your great-great-grandchildren! Wouldn't you pay \$5,000 to be indistinguishable from everybody else? Well, you don't have to. Safe, tested super-anti-gerasone costs you only dollars a day. The average cost of regaining all the sparkle and attractiveness of youth is less than fifty dollars.

"Write now for your free trial carton. Just put your name and address on a dollar postcard and mail it to 'Super,' Box 500,000, Schenectady, N.Y. Have you got that? I'll repeat it. 'Super,' Box . . ."

Underlining the announcer's words was the scratching of Gramps' fountain pen, the one Willy had given him the night before. He had come in a few minutes previous from the Idle Hour Tavern, which commanded a view of Building 257 across the square of asphalt known as the Alden Village Green. He had called a cleaning woman to come straighten the place up and had hired the best lawyer in town to get his family convicted—a genius whose clients were always jailed. Then he had moved the day bed before the television screen so that he could watch from a reclining position. It was something he'd dreamed of doing for years.

"Schen-ec-ta-dy," mouthed Gramps. "Got it." His face had changed remarkably. His facial muscles seemed to have relaxed, revealing kindness and equanimity under what had been taut, bad-tempered lines. It was almost as though his trial package of *super-anti-gerasone* had already arrived. When something amused him on television, he smiled easily, rather than barely managing to lengthen the thin line of his mouth a millimeter.

The telephone rang, and Gramps answered. "Yes?"

An anxious man's face appeared on the viewer. "Uh—are you the building custodian?"

"No. But let's say I was. What then?"

"Well, I was just watching television," said the caller, "and I kind of got the idea that maybe that apartment would be vacant, with everybody in jail and all."

"Sorry, sonny, but they didn't get me, and I'm just getting to like the place."

"Oh—I see," said the caller desolately. "I just thought, maybe . . ." His voice trailed off. "I've been living over at

my great-grandparents' place for the past fifty years, and my wife and I'd like to have a baby, but——"

"That's the trouble with the world," said Gramps. "It isn't the Russians, it's people breeding like jackrabbits."

The caller blushed. "Yessir. Well—this'd be our first one, and we just celebrated our golden wedding anniversary."

"Well, if you did have one, the little nipper'd turn on you first chance it got," said Gramps. "The number-two trouble with the world isn't Russia, either. It's juvenile delinquency. No sooner they get to be seventy or eighty and they start running hog-wild. Take it from a man who's been around a little, boy: until we've got that licked, hold off, or you'll play hell getting a minute's peace."

"Yup," said the caller listlessly.

"Youngsters used to have a little respect for their elders when I was a kid," said Gramps. "Only thing I can figure out that makes 'em so wild nowadays is something in the processed seaweed. Nobody ate seaweed when I was a kid," said Gramps, and he hung up.

Eight years ago *Astounding Science-Fiction* published a story called *Agent of Vega* by an almost-newcomer (one previous story) named James H. Schmitz. It was a story brilliant as a nova; but unlike most novae, it was followed by stories brighter still. For one, there was *The Witches of Karres*; for another—

We Don't Want Any Trouble

"Well, that wasn't a very long interview, was it?" asked the professor's wife. She discovered the professor looking out of the living-room window when she'd come home from shopping just now. "I wasn't counting on having dinner before nine," she said, setting her bundles down on the couch. "I'll get at it right away."

"No hurry about dinner," the professor replied without turning his head. "I didn't expect we'd be through there before eight myself."

He had clasped his hands on his back and was swaying slowly, backward and forward on his feet, staring out at the street. It was a favorite pose of his, and she never had discovered whether it indicated deep thought or just day-dreaming. At the moment, she suspected uncomfortably it was very deep thought, indeed. She took off her hat.

"I suppose you could call it an interview," she said uneasily. "I mean you actually talked with it, didn't you?"

"Oh, yes, we talked with it," he nodded. "Some of the others did, anyway."

"Imagine *talking* with something like that! It really is from another world, Clive?" She laughed uneasily, watching the back of his head with frightened eyes. "But, of course, you

can't violate the security rules, can you? You can't tell me anything about it at all . . ."

He shrugged, turning around.

"There'll be a newscast at six o'clock. In ten minutes. Wherever there's a radio or television set on Earth, everybody will hear what we found out in that interview. Perhaps not quite everything, but almost everything."

"Oh?" she said in a surprised small voice. She looked at him in silence for a moment, her eyes growing more frightened. "Why would they do a thing like that?"

"Well," said the professor, "it seemed like the right thing to do. The best thing, at any rate. There may be some panic, of course." He turned back to the window and gazed out on the street, as if something there were holding his attention. He looked thoughtful and abstracted, she decided. But then a better word came to her, and it was "resigned."

"Clive," she said, almost desperately, "what happened?"

He frowned absently at her and walked to the radio. It began to make faint, humming noises as the professor adjusted dials unhurriedly. The humming didn't vary much.

"They've cleared the networks, I imagine," he remarked.

The sentence went on repeating itself in his wife's mind, with no particular significance at first. But then a meaning came into it and grew and swelled swiftly, until she felt her head would burst with it. They've cleared the networks. All over the world this evening, they've cleared the networks. Until the newscast comes on at six o'clock . . .

"As to what happened," she heard her husband's voice saying, "that's a little difficult to understand or explain. Even now. It was certainly amazing—" He interrupted himself. "Do you remember Milt Caldwell, dear?"

"Milt Caldwell?" She searched her mind blankly. "No," she said, shaking her head.

"A rather well-known anthropologist," the professor informed her, with an air of faint reproach. "Milt got himself lost in the approximate center of the Australian deserts some two years ago. Only we have been told he didn't get lost. They picked him up—"

"*They?*" she said. "You mean there's more than one?"

"Well, there would be more than one, wouldn't there?" he

asked reasonably. "That explains, at any rate, how they learned to speak English. It made it seem a little more reasonable, anyhow," he added, "when it told us that. Seven minutes to six . . ."

"What?" she said faintly.

"Seven minutes to six," the professor repeated. "Sit down, dear. I believe I can tell you, in seven minutes, approximately what occurred . . ."

The Visitor from Outside sat in its cage, its large gray hands slackly clasping the bars. Its attitudes and motions, the professor had noted in the two minutes since he had entered the room with the other men, approximated those of a rather heavily built ape. Reporters had called it "the Toad from Mars," on the basis of the first descriptions they'd had of it—the flabby shape and loose, warty skin made that a vaguely adequate identification. The round, horny head almost could have been that of a lizard.

With a zoologist's fascination in a completely new genus, the professor catalogued these contradicting physical details in his mind. Yet something somewhat like this might have been evolved on Earth, if Earth had chosen to let the big amphibians of its Carboniferous Period go on evolving.

That this creature used human speech was the only almost-impossible feature.

It had spoken as they came in. "What do you wish to know?" it asked. The horny, toothed jaws moved, and a broad yellow tongue became momentarily visible, forming the words. It was a throaty, deliberate "human" voice.

For a period of several seconds, the human beings seemed to be shocked into silence by it, though they had known the creature had this ability. Hesitantly, then, the questioning began.

The professor remained near the back of the room, watching. For a while, the questions and replies he heard seemed to carry no meaning to him. Abruptly he realized that his thoughts were fogged over with a heavy, cold, physical dread of this alien animal. He told himself that under such circumstances fear was not an entirely irrational emotion, and his understanding of it seemed to lighten its effects a little.

But the scene remained unreal to him, like a badly lit stage

on which the creature in its glittering steel cage stood out in sharp focus, while the humans were shadow-shapes stirring restlessly against a darkened background.

"This won't do!" he addressed himself, almost querulously, through the fear. "I'm here to observe, to conclude, to report—I was selected as a man they could trust to think and act rationally!"

He turned his attention deliberately away from the cage and what it contained, and directed it on the other human beings, to most of whom he had been introduced only a few minutes before. A young, alert-looking Intelligence major who was in some way in charge of this investigation; a sleepy-eyed general; a very pretty Wac captain acting as stenographer, whom the major had introduced as his fiancée. The handful of other scientists looked for the most part like brisk business executives, while the two Important Personages representing the Government looked like elderly professors.

He almost smiled. They were real enough. This was a human world. He returned his attention again to the solitary intruder in it.

"Why shouldn't I object?" the impossible voice was saying with a note of lazy good-humor. "You've caged me like—a wild animal! And you haven't even informed me of the nature of the charges against me. Trespassing, perhaps—eh?"

The wide mouth seemed to grin as the thing turned its head, looking them over one by one with bright black eyes. The grin was meaningless; it was the way the lipless jaws set when the mouth was closed. But it gave expression to the pleased malice the professor sensed in the voice and words.

The voice simply did not go with that squat animal shape.

Fear surged up in him again. He found himself shaking.

If it looks at me now, he realized in sudden panic, I might start to scream!

One of the men nearest the cage was saying something in low, even tones. The Wac captain flipped over a page of her shorthand pad and went on writing, her blonde head tilted to one side. She was a little pale, but intent on her work. He had a moment of bitter envy for their courage and self-control. But they're insensitive, he tried to tell himself; they don't

know Nature and the laws of Nature. They can't feel as I do how *wrong* all this is!

Then the black eyes swung around and looked at him.

Instantly, his mind stretched taut with blank, wordless terror. He did not move, but afterward he knew he did not faint only because he would have looked ridiculous before the others, and particularly in the presence of a young woman. He heard the young Intelligence officer speaking sharply; the eyes left him unhurriedly, and it was all over.

"You indicate," the creature's voice was addressing the major, "that you can force me to reveal matters I do not choose to reveal at this time. However, you are mistaken. For one thing, a body of this type does not react to any of your drugs."

"It will react to pain!" the major said, his voice thin and angry.

Amazed by the words, the professor realized for the first time that he was not the only one in whom this being's presence had aroused primitive, irrational fears. The other men had stirred restlessly at the major's threat, but they made no protest.

The thing remained silent for a moment, looking at the major.

"This body will react to pain," it said then, "only when I choose to let it feel pain. Some of you here know the effectiveness of hypnotic blocks against pain. My methods are not those of hypnosis, but they are considerably more effective. I repeat, then, that for me there is no pain, unless I choose to experience it."

"Do you choose to experience the destruction of your body's tissues?" the major inquired, a little shrilly.

The Wac captain looked up at him quickly from the chair where she sat, but the professor could not see her expression. Nobody else moved.

The thing, still staring at the major, almost shrugged.

"And do you choose to experience death?" the major cried, his face flushed with excitement.

In a flash of insight, the professor understood why no one was interfering. Each in his own way, they had felt what

he was feeling: that here was something so outrageously strange and new that no amount of experience, no rank, could guide a human being in determining how to deal with it. The major was dealing with it—in however awkward a fashion. With no other solution to offer, they were, for the moment, unable or unwilling to stop him.

The thing then said slowly and flatly, "Death is an experience I shall never have at your hands. That is a warning. I shall respond to no more of your threats. I shall answer no more questions.

"Instead, I shall tell you what will occur now. I shall inform my companions that you are as we judged you to be—foolish, limited, incapable of harming the least of us. Your world and civilization are of very moderate interest. But they are a novelty which many will wish to view for themselves. We shall come here and leave here, as we please. If you attempt to interfere again with any of us, it will be to your own regret."

"Will it?" the major shouted, shaking. "Will it now?"

The professor jerked violently at the quick successive reports of a gun in the young officer's hand. Then there was a struggling knot of figures around the major, and another man's voice was shouting hoarsely, "You fool! You damned hysterical fool!"

The Wac captain had dropped her notebook and clasped her hands to her face. For an instant the professor heard her crying, "Jack! Jack! Stop—don't—"

But he was looking at the thing that had fallen on its back in the cage, with the top of its skull shot away and a dark-brown liquid staining the cage floor about its shoulders.

What he felt was an irrational satisfaction, a warm glow of pride in the major's action. It was as if he had killed the thing himself.

For that moment, he was happy.

Because he stood far back in the room, he saw what happened then before the others did.

One of the Personages and two of the scientists were moving excitedly about the cage, staring down at the thing. The others had grouped around the chair into which they had forced the major. Under the babble of confused, angry voices,

he could sense the undercurrent of almost joyful relief he felt himself.

The Wac captain stood up and began to take off her clothes.

She did it quickly and quietly. It was at this moment, the professor thought, staring at her in renewed terror, that the height of insanity appeared to have been achieved in this room. He wished fervently that he could keep that sense of insanity wrapped around him forevermore, like a protective cloak. It was a terrible thing to be rational! With oddly detached curiosity, he also wondered what would happen in a few seconds when the others discovered what he already knew.

The babbling voices of the group that had overpowered the major went suddenly still. The three men at the cage turned startled faces toward the stillness. The girl straightened up and stood smiling at them.

The major began screaming her name.

There was another brief struggling confusion about the chair in which they were holding him. The screaming grew muffled as if somebody had clapped a hand over his mouth.

"I warned you," the professor heard the girl say clearly, "that there was no death. Not for us."

Somebody shouted something at her, like a despairing question. Rigid with fear, his own blood a swirling roar in his ears, the professor did not understand the words. But he understood her reply.

"It could have been any of you, of course," she nodded. "But I just happened to like this body."

After that, there was one more shot.

The professor turned off the radio. For a time, he continued to gaze out the window.

"Well, they know it now!" he said. "The world knows it now. Whether they believe it or not— At any rate . . ." His voice trailed off. The living room had darkened and he had a notion to switch on the lights, but decided against it. The evening gloom provided an illusion of security.

He looked down at the pale oval of his wife's face, almost featureless in the shadows.

"It won't be too bad," he explained, "if not too many of

them come. Of course, we don't know how many there are of them, actually. Billions, perhaps. But if none of our people try to make trouble—the aliens simply don't want any trouble."

He paused a moment. The death of the young Intelligence major had not been mentioned in the broadcast. Considering the issues involved, it was not, of course, a very important event and officially would be recorded as a suicide. In actual fact, the major had succeeded in wresting a gun from one of the men holding him. Another man had shot him promptly without waiting to see what he intended to do with it.

At all costs now, every rational human being must try to prevent trouble with the Visitors from Outside.

He felt his face twitch suddenly into an uncontrollable grimace of horror.

"But there's no way of being absolutely sure, of course," he heard his voice tell the silently gathering night about him, "that they won't decide they just happen to like our kind of bodies."

JACK WILLIAMSON

This is, as near as makes no difference, the silver anniversary of Jack Williamson's first appearance in a science-fiction magazine. In a quarter century, the field has changed radically and often; to change with it, and to stay consistently at the top of its favorite writers, takes work, flexibility—and a great deal of creative talent, with all of which Jack Williamson is more than adequately supplied. His novels now number a dozen; his short stories must be in the hundreds; and his fans are countless—attracted by the lure of novels like *Dragon's Island* and *The Humanoids*, and short stories like—

The Peddler's Nose

The peddler came to Earth, across the empty immensities of space, after whisky. He knew the planet was under quarantine, but his blunders had left him at the mercy of his thirst. Ultimately, the root of that merciless thirst was his nose.

He was a thin, tiny man, and his crooked nose enormous. The handicap could have been corrected, but he was born on a frontier world where the difficult dilemmas of freedom and responsibility had not yet been solved, and he was allowed to grow up twisted with the knowledge of his ugliness.

Damned by genetic accident, he spent his life in flight from salvation. By the time his deformity had made a petty criminal of him, he had come to defend it as the most tender part of himself. When he was ordered to a clinic for the removal of his social maladjustments and the excess nasal tissue that lay beneath them, he escaped rehabilitation and drifted out to the fringes of civilization, where the law was less efficient.

Never bold, he settled at last into the shabby occupation of

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vending cheap novelty toys. Even that humble calling had its risks. He had been forced to make his pitch without a vendor's license, on the last world behind, and he had to leave it in such haste that he had no time to buy his usual supplies.

His nerves were not so good as they had been. Aboard the flier, he had to gulp down three stiff drinks before his hands were steady enough to set the automatic pilot. And the raw alcohol seemed to hit him more swiftly than common, so that his vision began to blur and double before he had finished the adjustments.

In his frightened befuddlement, he mistook an 8 for a 3, and overlooked a decimal point, and turned the planet selector dial one space too far. His intended goal had been another frontier world, a few light-years away, where immigration was still unrestricted and the pioneers still hardy enough to let their children buy his toys. His errors, however, made Earth his destination.

The robot pilot warned him instantly. Although the flier had been battered and abused by several generations of outlaws bolder than himself, it had saved him many times from destruction, and it was still a sturdy, spaceworthy neutrionic craft. A gong crashed. A red light flickered above the competent mechanism, and it spoke to him sternly:

"Caution! Do not take off. Destination dialed is far beyond normal operating range. Caution! Check charts and dials for possible error. Caution!"

He was normally cautious enough, but those three drinks had magnified his panic. Already too far gone to understand the warning, he stabbed a shaky finger at the button that canceled it. Before he could find the take-off lever, however, the signals rang and flashed again.

"Caution!" rapped that hard mechanical voice. "Do not take off. Destination dialed is under quarantine. All contact prohibited—"

Impatiently, too drunk to think of anything except escape, he pulled the take-off lever. The signals stopped, and the flier took him to Earth, across a distance in light-centuries that might have staggered a sober man.

Human civilization was an expanding globe, spreading out through the galaxy at almost half the speed of light, as the

colonists hopped from star to star; and that long flight took him from what was then the outside of it, back toward the half-forgotten center.

The voyage wasn't long to him, however, and the flier required no more attention. It caught the invisible winds of radiant neutrinos that rise out of the novae to blow forever through the galaxies, and it was swept away at such a speed that time was slowed almost to a stop for everything aboard, through the working of relativity.

The peddler drank and slept and dreamed uneasy dreams of men with scalpels who wanted to remove his nose. He woke and slept and drank again, until his inadequate supplies were gone.

As originally built, the flier would have identified itself to the destination port authority, waited for orders, and obeyed them automatically. Previous owners had changed the operating circuits, however, so that it slipped down dark toward the night side of Earth, with all signals dead except a gong to arouse its master.

The peddler awoke unhappy. Even the dimmed lights in his untidy little cabin seemed intolerably bright, and the gong was bursting his head. He shuffled hastily to stop it and then stumbled through the flier in search of something to drink.

There should have been another bottle cached somewhere, against such emergencies, behind his berth or in his portable sales case or perhaps in the empty medical cabinet—he had long ago bartered its contents for whisky.

But the caches had all been raided before. Muttering bitterly, shaken with a thirst that refused to wait, he staggered back to the cockpit and touched a dial to find out where he was.

Sol Three—he had never heard of that. He shook his throbbing head, and squinted at the hooded screen to read his position. The co-ordinates took his breath. He was two thousand light-years from the last world he remembered, somewhere near the dead center of civilization.

He felt shocked for an instant at the vastness of his blunder. Yet there was no harm done. That was the unique advantage of his nomadic existence. No matter how many outraged citizens wanted to remodel his nose and extirpate his thirst, the

flier had always carried him safely beyond their reach, across space and trackless time.

He leaned hopefully to read the screen again. Sol Three was a minor member of an undistinguished planetary system, it told him, with nothing to interest either tourist or trader. The inhabitants were human, but their culture was primitive. Although long settled, the planet was historically unimportant. A footnote caught his eye:

The planet was once believed to have been the site of Atlantis, the half legendary cradle of civilization, from which the interstellar migrations began. Although the comparative biology of the indigenous fauna supports this idea, no actual historical proof has yet been found, and the low cultural level of the present inhabitants leaves it open to question—

He wasn't concerned with the elaborate quarrels of the historians. All he wanted was a drink. Just one stiff jolt, to cut the foul taste out of his mouth and sweep the pain from his head and quiet his trembling limbs. Even this planet couldn't be too backward, he thought, to distill alcohol.

Thirstily, he touched the landing key.

The gong rang instantly, painful as a hammer on his head. The red light flickered, and the loud recorded voice of the automatic pilot rang grimly:

"Warning! Do not attempt to land. This planet is quarantined, under the Covenants of Non-Contact. All communication is absolutely prohibited, and violators will be subject to full rehabilitation. Warning—"

Cringing from the voice and the gong, he stabbed frantically at the cancellation button. Because primitive worlds offered the easiest market for his goods, he had run into the Covenants before. He knew they were intended to prevent the damaging clash of peoples at discrepant levels of social evolution, but he was not interested in theories of cultural impact.

What he wanted was a drink, and he should find it here. Although he had never heard of Sol Three, he knew his trade and he was well enough equipped. One quick stand ought to bring the price of what he needed for the long flight back

to the frontier worlds where he felt at home. Even if something aroused the quarantine officials, their threat of full rehabilitation was unlikely to pursue him quite that far.

He pushed the landing key. The flier slipped down silently, before dawn, to the dark slope of a wooded hill three miles from a feeble energy source that should be a small settlement. He inflated the covering membrane that gave the craft the look of an innocent boulder, and started walking toward the settlement with his sales equipment.

The cool air had a refreshing scent of things growing. The feel of the grass was good underfoot, and the voices of small wild creatures made an elusive music. No wilderness had ever seemed so friendly. He thought this planet had really been the birthplace of mankind, and he felt happy for a moment with a mystical sense of return.

But he hadn't come for communion with the mother world, and that brief elation slipped away as he began to worry about meeting some primitive taboo against the use of alcohol.

Frowning with anxiety, he came to an empty road at the foot of the hill and tramped along it with an apprehensive haste toward a rude concrete bridge across a shallow stream. The sun was rising now, not much different from any other star. It showed him a wide green valley where a herd of black-and-white domestic animals grazed peacefully and a man in blue drove a crude traction plow.

The peddler paused for a moment, feeling a puzzled contempt for the stupid yokels who lived their small lives rooted here, as ignorant of the great world outside as their fat cattle were. If envy lay beneath his scorn, he didn't know it.

The sunlight had begun to hurt his eyes and his thirst shook him again with a dry paroxysm. He limped grimly on. Beyond the bridge, he found crude two-dimensional signs set up along the road. He had no equipment to read their silent legends, but even the flat pictures of sealed bottles and dew-wet glasses spoke to him with a maddening eloquence.

At the summit of a gentle hill, he came upon a wooden hut enveloped in a thin but tantalizing fragrance of alcohol. The sign above the door convinced him that it was a public place, and a faded poster on the wall showed a plump native girl sipping a drink seductively.

He tried the door eagerly, but it was locked. The teasing odor tempted him to break in, but he shrank from the impulse fearfully. Running the quarantine was crime enough. He didn't want to be rehabilitated, and he thought the place would surely open by the time he could supply himself with the local medium of exchange.

Already perspiring, he went on down the hill toward the village. It lay along a bend of the quiet stream he had passed; a scattered group of rude brick and stucco family huts standing in a grove of trees. It looked so different from the brawl and glitter of the raw pioneer cities he had known that he halted uncertainly.

He wasn't used to dealing with such simple races. But then his novelties would certainly be new to their children, and the occasional discarded cans and bottles beside the road assured him that alcohol was abundant. That was really all that mattered. He mopped his face and swung the sales case to his left hand and staggered on again.

"Mornin' to you, mister."

Startled by that unexpected hail, he darted to the side of the road. A clumsy primitive vehicle had come up behind him. It was driven by some kind of crude heat engine, which gave off a faint reek of burning petroleum. A large man sat at the control wheel, watching him with a disturbing curiosity.

"Lookin' for somebody in Chatsworth?"

The man spoke a harsh-sounding tongue he had never heard before, but the psionic translator, a tiny device no more conspicuous than the native's hearing aid, brought the meaning to him instantly.

"Mornin' to you, mister." He lifted his arm a little, murmuring toward the microphone hidden in his sleeve, and his translated reply came from the tiny speaker under his clothing, uttered in a nasal drawl that matched the native's.

"Thanks," he said, "but I'm just passing through."

"Then hop in." The native leaned to open the door of the vehicle. "I'll give you a lift out to my place, a mile across the town."

He got in gratefully, but in a moment he was sorry for his eagerness.

"Welcome to Chatsworth," the grinning yokel went on. "Population three hundred and four, in the richest little valley in the state. Guess I've got the right to make you welcome." The tall man chuckled. "I'm Jud Hankins. The constable."

Now sweat broke out on the peddler's dusty face. His head throbbed unbearably, and his gnarled old hands began trembling so violently that he had to grip the handle of his case to keep the officer from noticing his agitation.

In a moment, however, he saw that this unfortunate chance encounter with the law had not yet been disastrous. Jud Hankins was unlikely to be concerned with enforcing the Covenants—if he ever knew that they existed.

"Pleased to meet you, Mr. Hankins," the peddler answered hastily, grateful that the translator failed to reproduce the apprehensive tremor in his voice. "My name's Gray."

He noticed the constable looking at his sales case.

"A fertile valley, indeed!" he said hurriedly. "Do you produce grain for the distilling industry?"

"Mostly for hogs." The constable glanced at the case again. "You a salesman, Mr. Gray?"

Uneasily he said he was.

"What's your line, if you don't mind?"

"Toys," he said. "Novelty toys."

"I was just afraid you had fireworks." The constable seemed faintly relieved. "I thought I ought to warn you."

"Fireworks?" The peddler repeated the term in a puzzled voice, because the translation had not been entirely clear.

"The Fourth will soon be coming up, you know," the constable explained. "We've got to protect the children." He grinned proudly. "I've four fine little rascals of my own."

The peddler still wasn't sure about fireworks. The Fourth was obviously some sort of barbaric ceremonial at which children were sacrificed, and fireworks were probably paraphernalia for the witch doctors. Anyhow, it didn't matter.

"These toys are all I sell," he insisted. "They're highly educational. Designed and recommended by child training experts, to instruct while they amuse. Safe enough for children in the proper age groups."

He squinted sharply at the amiable constable.

"But I'm not sure about offering them here," he added uneasily. "In so small a place, it might not pay me to buy a license."

"You don't need one." The constable chuckled disarmingly. "You see, we aren't incorporated. Another point of our sort of town. Go ahead and sell your toys—just so they're nothing that will hurt the children."

He slowed the vehicle to call a genial greeting to a group of children playing ball on a vacant lot, and stopped in the village to let a boy and his dog cross the street ahead. The peddler thanked him, and got out hastily.

"Wait, Mr. Gray," he protested. "You had breakfast?"

The peddler said he hadn't.

"Then jump in again," the jovial native urged. "Mamie has plenty on the table—she cooks it up while I do the chores out on the farm. Seeing you're doing business in town, I want you to come out and eat with us."

"Thanks," he said, "but all I want is something to drink."

"I guess you are dry, walking in this dust." The native nodded sympathetically. "Come on out, and we'll give you a drink."

Tempted by that promise and afraid of offending the law, he got back in the machine. The constable drove on to a neat, white-painted hut at the edge of the village. Four noisy children ran out to welcome them, and a clean, plump-faced woman met them at the door.

"My wife," the constable drawled jovially. "Mr. Gray. A sort of early-bird Santa Claus, he says, with toys for the kiddies. He'd like a drink."

The peddler came into the kitchen section of the hut, which looked surprisingly clean. He reached with a trembling anxiety for the drink the woman brought him. It had the bright clear color of grain alcohol, and he almost strangled, in his bitter surprise, when he found that it was only cold water.

He thanked the woman as civilly as he could manage, and said he had to go. The children were clamoring to see his toys, however, and the constable urged him to stay for breakfast. He sat down reluctantly and sipped a cup of hot bitter liquid called coffee, which really seemed to help his headache.

Still afraid of the friendly constable, he made excuses not to show the toys until the children had to leave for school. The smallest girl began to sneeze and sniffle, as the mother herded them toward the door, and he inquired with some alarm what was wrong.

"Just a cold," the woman said. "Nothing serious."

That puzzled him for an instant because the weather seemed quite warm. Probably another error in translation, but nothing to alarm him. He was rising to follow the children outside, but the woman turned back to him.

"Don't go yet, Mr. Gray." She smiled kindly. "I'm afraid you aren't well. You hardly touched your ham and eggs. Let me get you another cup of coffee."

He sat down again unwillingly. Perhaps he wasn't well, but he expected to feel worse until he had a drink of something better than cold water.

"Can't we do something for him, Jud?" The woman had turned to her husband. "He doesn't look able to be out on the road alone, without a soul to do for him. Can't you think of something?"

"Well—" The constable set fire to the end of a small white tube, and inhaled the smoke with a reflective expression. "We still don't have a janitor at the school. I'm a trustee, and I'll say a word to the principal if you want the job."

"And you could stay here with us," the woman added eagerly. "There's a nice clean bed in the attic. Your board won't cost a cent, so long as you're willing to do a few odd jobs around the place. Would you like that?"

He squinted at her uncertainly. To his own surprise, he wanted to stay. He wasn't used to kindness, and it filled his eyes with tears. The infinite chasm of open space seemed suddenly even more dark and cold and dreadful than it was, and for an instant he hungered fiercely for the quiet peace of this forgotten world. Perhaps its still spell would hold him and heal all his restless discontent.

"You're welcome here," the constable was urging. "And if you've got a business head, you can find more than odd jobs to do. You'll never find a likelier spot than Chatsworth, if you want to settle down."

"I don't know." He picked up his empty cup, absently.

"I'm really glad you want me, but I'm afraid it's been too long——"

He stopped, flinching, when he saw the woman looking at his nose. Her eyes fell, as if out of pity, but in a moment she spoke.

"I . . . I do hope you'll let us help you, Mr. Gray." She hesitated again, her plump face flushed, and he began to hate her. "I've a brother in the city who's a plastic surgeon," she went on resolutely. "He has turned a lot of . . . well, misfits . . . into very successful people. He's really very good, and not high at all. If you decide to stay, I think we can manage something."

He set the empty cup down quickly, because his hands were shaking again. He was still alert enough to recognize the old trap, even in this charming guise. He didn't want to be rehabilitated, and he meant to keep his nose.

"Well, Mr. Gray?" the constable was drawling. "Want to see the principal?"

"I'd like to." He grinned wanly, to cover his shuddering panic. "If you'll just show me where to find him. And you've both been very kind."

"Don't mention it," the constable said. "I'm driving back to the farm, and I'll take you by the school."

But he didn't talk to the principal. He had seen the trap, and he was still crafty enough to escape it. He started walking toward the building as the constable drove away, limping along as soberly as if he had already been rehabilitated, but he stopped outside, behind a hedge, to make his pitch.

He unlocked the battered case and set it up on the extended legs and lighted the three-dimensional displays. The children gathered on the playground were already pausing in the games to look at him, and when the psionic music began they flocked around him instantly.

His toys were the cheapest possible trinkets, mass-produced from common materials, but they were cleverly packaged and their ingenious designs reflected the advanced technology of the industrial planet where they were made. The small plastic boxes were gay with universal psionic labels, which reacted to attention with animated stereo-color scenes and

changing labels which seemed to be printed in each looker's own language.

"Come in closer, kiddies!"

He picked up the first little pile of round red boxes and began juggling them with a sudden dexterity in his twisted old fingers, so that they rose and fell in time to the racing psionic melody.

"Look, kiddies! A wonderful educational toy. Use it to demonstrate the great basic principles of meteorology and neutronics. And surprise your friends.

"The Little Wonder Weather Wizard Blizzard Maker Set! It works by turning part of the heat energy of the air for several miles around into radiant neutrinos. The sudden chilling causes precipitation, and the outflow of cold air creates a brief but effective blizzard—the label tells you all about it.

"Step right up, kiddies! Buy 'em at a bargain price. Only twenty-five cents each, or three for half a dollar——"

"But we really shouldn't, mister." The boy who interrupted looked familiar, and he recognized the constable's oldest son. "All most of us have is our lunch money, and we aren't supposed to spend it."

"Don't you worry, kid," he answered quickly. "Even if you go home hungry, you'll have your money's worth. You never saw any toys like these. Only fifteen cents, to close 'em out. Come right up and buy 'em now, because I won't be here tomorrow."

He scooped up the coins from grubby little hands.

"But don't start making storms just now," he warned hastily. "We don't want trouble with the teachers, do we, kiddies? Better keep 'em in your pockets until school is out. Sorry, sonny. That's all the blizzard makers—but look at this!"

He picked up the next stack of small plastic boxes.

"The Junior Giant Degravitator Kit! A fascinating experiment in gravitational inversion. Learn the facts of basic science, and amaze your friends. The label shows you all about it."

He began passing out the boxes. The bright psionic labels looked blank at first, but they came to shining life under the eyes of the children, responding to the thoughts of each. Most

of them pictured the harmless degravitation of such small objects as marbles and tadpoles, but he glimpsed one showing how to connect the device to the foundations of the school building and another in which the astonished principal himself was falling upward toward open space.

"Wait a moment, sonny!" he whispered hurriedly. "Let's not degravitate anything until after school is out. Sorry, laddie. That's all the Junior Giants, but here's something else that's just as educational, and really better fun."

He held up a Great Detective Annihilator Pistol-Pencil.

"It looks like an ordinary writing instrument, but the eraser really erases! It converts solid matter into invisible neutrinos. All you do is point it and press the clip. You can blow holes in walls, and make objects disappear, and fool your friends. All for one thin dime!"

The school bell began to ring as he handed out the annihilators and gathered up the dimes.

"Just one more item, kiddies, before you go to class." He turned up the psionic amplifier, and raised his rusty voice. "Something I know you're all going to want. An exciting experiment, with real atomic energy, that you can try at home!"

He poured bright little spheres out of a carton into the palm of his hand.

"Look at 'em, kiddies! Planet Blaster Fusion Bomb Capsules, Super-Dooper Size. All you do is drop one capsule in a bucket of water and wait for it to dissolve. The reaction fuses the hydrogen atoms in the water into helium—the free instruction leaflet tells you how the same reaction makes the stars shine.

"Buy 'em now, before you go to class. Add realism to your playground battles, and flabbergast your friends. Make your own fusion bombs. Only five cents each. Three for a dime, if you buy 'em now——"

"Say, mister." The constable's son had bought three capsules, but now he stood peering at them uneasily. "If these little pills make real atom bombs, aren't they dangerous, even more than fireworks?"

"I wouldn't know about fireworks." The peddler scowled impatiently. "But these toys are safe enough, if you've had

your psionic preconditioning. I hope you all know enough not to set off fusion bombs indoors!"

He laughed at the bewildered boy, and lifted his rasping voice.

"Your last chance, kiddies! I won't be here when you get out of school, but right now these genuine fusion bomb capsules are going two for a nickel. One for two cents, sonny, if that's all you've got."

He swept in the last sweaty coppers.

"And that's all, kiddies." He turned out the shimmering displays and stopped the psionic music and folded up the stand. The children filed into the schoolhouse, and he hurried back across the village.

The tavern on the hill was open when he came back to it, and the scent of alcohol brought back all his thirst, so intense that his whole body shuddered. He was spreading out his money on the bar, when a blare of native music startled him.

The raw notes sawed at his nerves, too loud and queerly meaningless. He turned to scowl at the bulky machine from which they came, wondering what made them seem so flat and dead. After a moment of puzzled annoyance, he realized that the music was sound alone, with no psionic overtones.

Were these people ignorant of psionics? It seemed impossible that even the Covenants of Non-Contact could exclude all knowledge of such a basic science, yet now when he thought of it he couldn't recall seeing any psionic device at all. The bartender ought to know.

"Well, mister, what will you have?"

"Tell me," he whispered huskily, "do your schools here teach psionics?"

The man's startled expression should have been answer enough, but he wasn't looking at it. He had seen his own reflection in the mirror behind the bar. The hard, narrow bloodless face. The shrinking chin. The shifty, hollowed, bloodshot eyes. And the huge crooked nose.

"Huh?" The bartender was staring. "What did you say?"

But his voice was gone. If these people didn't know psionics, anything he said would give him away. The flier would be discovered, and he could never leave. He would be rehabili-

tated. White and weak with panic, he pushed the heap of coins across the bar.

"Whisky!" he gasped. "All this will buy."

The bartender took an endless time to count the coins, but they bought six bottles. He crammed them into the empty case, and hurried out of the bar. And he came at last, footsore and dusty, back across the bridge and up the hills where he had left the flier.

His breath sobbed out when he stumbled through the trees and saw the empty spot beyond the rock. Dismay shook him. He thought the flier was gone, until he turned and recognized its inflated camouflage. Trembling with a sick weakness, he found the psionic key and tried to deflate the membrane.

The key didn't work.

He tried again, but still the distended fabric remained hard as actual rock. He ran frantically around it, trying the key against a dozen different spots. None of them responded. He was locked out.

He couldn't understand it, and he had to have a drink. He had been trying to wait until he was safe aboard, with his new destination dialed on the automatic pilot, but suddenly he felt too tired and cold and hopeless to make any effort without the warming aid of alcohol. He couldn't even think.

He stooped to open the sales case, where he had put the whisky, but the psionic key failed again. It fell out of his fingers, when he realized what was wrong. Psionic and neutrionic devices seldom got out of order, but they could be disabled. The flier must have been discovered by somebody from the quarantine station.

Sick with panic, he tried to get away. He dropped the case and ran blindly off into the unfamiliar wilderness. His staggering flight must have led him in a circle, however, for at last he came reeling back to a hill and a rock that looked the same. His head was light with illness by that time, his twitching limbs hot with fever.

He was clawing feebly at the stiffened membrane, hopelessly trying to tear it away with his bleeding fingers, when he heard firm footsteps behind him and turned to see the stolid, sunburned figure of Constable Jud Hankins.

"Well, constable." He leaned giddily back against the

camouflage, grinning with a sick relief that this was not a quarantine inspector. His translator failed to work at first, but it spoke for him as he fumbled to adjust the instrument under his clothing.

"I give up," he muttered dully. "I'll go back with you." A chill began to shake him, and his raw throat felt too painful for speech. "I'm ready to settle down—if they'll only leave my nose alone."

There was something else he ought to say, but his ears were roaring and his bones ached and he could hardly stand. He felt too sick for a moment to remember anything, but at last it came back to him.

"The toys—" he sobbed. "They're dangerous!"

"Not any longer," the tall man told him curtly. "We slapped psionic and neutrionic inhibitors on this whole area, to prevent accidents, before I borrowed the identity of Constable Hankins to pick them up."

"You—" He stared blankly. "You are—"

"A quarantine inspector, from Sol Station." The officer flashed a psionic badge. "You were detected before you landed. We delayed the arrest to be certain you had no confederates."

He felt too ill to be astonished.

"You've got me," he mumbled faintly. "Go ahead and give me full rehabilitation."

"Too late for that." The stern man straightened impatiently. "You're all alike, you quarantine breakers. You always forget that cultural impacts strike both ways. You never understand that the Covenants exist partly for your own protection."

He shook his throbbing head.

"I know you were not processed through our clinic at the station," the inspector rapped. "I see you didn't even bring a medical kit. I'd bet you landed here, among a people so primitive that malignant micro-organisms are allowed to breed among them, with no protection for yourself whatever."

"Clinic?" The one word was all he really caught, but he stiffened defensively. "You can do what else you like," he whispered doggedly. "But I mean to keep my nose."

"You've bigger troubles now." The inspector studied him regretfully. "I suppose our ancestors were naturally immune,

the way these people are, but I'd be dead in half a day if I hadn't been immunized against a thousand viruses and germs. You've already picked them up."

He stood wheezing for his breath, squinting painfully against the light.

"The people I met were well enough," he protested stupidly. "One child had something called a cold, but the woman said it wasn't dangerous."

"Not to her," the inspector said. "No more than atomic fusion bombs are to you."

Uncomprehending, the peddler swayed and fell.

Science fiction is often provocative, sometimes informative, frequently horrifying. Young Algis Budrys, in a writing career still measured in months, has demonstrated all of those qualities in a score of fine stories and one novel. But more than those, science fiction can also be fun . . . as in—

The Frightened Tree

The strip of indestructible fiber goes into a slot in one end of the machine. It passes between rollers, dips into chemical baths, is stamped, dyed, analyzed for flaws, and then run through a unit which is detached from the main body of the machine every night and locked in a guarded vault. Finally, the strip emerges, is chopped into convenient lengths, and delivered into a bin, from which it is carefully moved into armored cars and distributed. It is known as money.

Besides being non-defaceable, fireproof, immune to wear, weather and water, it has also had an electronic pattern impressed into the fiber by that top-secret unit. When you spend it, it is passed over a simple plate that reads the pattern. If serial number and pattern match, nothing happens. But if what you're presenting as legal tender is homemade, so many bells go off you'd think you were in a penny arcade. The engraving, the chemical composition of the ink, and the fiber are difficult enough to duplicate, but the pattern snaps the clincher on it. Only the government's got the equipment to put that in.

All of which may serve to explain why Saxegaard screamed when I spread the fourteen identical bills on his desk.

Besides being the Chief Inspector, United Galactic Federa-

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tions Department of the Treasury, Investigation Division (Currency), Saxegaard is a short man with a big mouth. The kind of fellow who always waits ninety seconds between cigarettes so he won't be accused of chain smoking.

"Baumholtzer, where'd you get these?" he asked after he climbed down off the drapes.

They'd come into the New York Clearing House from a branch on Deneb XI. The manager there had blown his top and called us the minute he spotted them. I told Saxegaard that, and he chewed at his thumb for a few minutes.

"Will he spread the word around?" he asked finally.

"I threw the fear of UnGalac into him."

"Good. At least we won't have any financial panics—for a while. Not until that manager gets himself out from financially under, anyway. You checked these through the lab?" he asked, probably hoping for a loophole.

"The ink and paper's government stock, all right, and they match government plates. Beeper plates don't even hum when they're passed over them. In fact, you could spend them anywhere, as long as you only passed one bill at a time."

"Probably wouldn't even have to be that careful. How do you know all the bills in your wallet right now don't have the same serial number?" Saxegaard asked.

I shook my head. "I checked."

Saxegaard looked at the bills a while longer, then sank back into his chair. His mouth twisted into a sad little smile.

"Baumholtzer," he said, "you know how much work this office has done up to now. It's a joke, a sinecure. Nobody, nobody can logically expect to counterfeit a bill and get away with it. It's only because throughout the Universe, there is a certain percentage of people who will try anything once, and a corresponding percentage of purblind idiots who will accept anything with engraving on it as currency of the realm, that this department exists at all. I have seen cigar coupons and crayon sketches come into this office. I have seen grocery store premium certificates and bus transfers, but only because those same microcephalic imbeciles have neglected to pass the stuff over a beeper plate.

"Do you think I've been happy in my job, Baumholtzer? I get paid a good salary, and nothing ever happens to make

me sweat to earn it. I shouldn't have any worries." He sighed. "But I do, Baumholtzer, I do. For fifteen years I have sat in this office and waited for somebody to invent a matter duplicator."

I'd thought of that, too, but our part-time lab technician had mumbled something about the conservation of matter and energy. He had a hard time making it stick, though, with those fourteen bills, identical down to a whisky stain in one corner, staring him in the face.

Still, one of the first things you learn in this racket is not to go off half-cocked. Saxegaard knew that, too, because he said, "All right, Baumholtzer, off to Deneb XI with you, and find out if anyone in that neighborhood has a matter duplicator, or if he hasn't, what he *has* got that looks so much like it."

He looked at his watch and lit another cigarette.

I lit a cigarette and wished I hadn't. The hot fog that passes for atmosphere on Deneb XI washed out my lungs and made the smoke taste like well-decayed leaf mold. I dragged a sleeve across my face, removing the sweat from my brow and replacing it with sweat from my arm.

Deneb XI is a jungle world, with climate and insects to match. I leaned my tired and dripping body against a wall and slapped limply at a specimen of insect that could have given a Brazilian mosquito cards and spades. I cursed it with damp enthusiasm and enjoyed my view of the capital city of Deneb XI.

This jewel in the diadem of the UnGalac was a motley collection of structures that looked as if they had been deposited there by the last high tide. This capital city—whose name, take it or leave it, was Glub—was also the only city on Deneb XI, which was the one reason it had endeared itself to me.

I have my suspicions that the Denebians have yet to invent the wheel. At any rate, practically the only way to get around the planet is on foot. Not that checking every bank and electronic-supply shop in Glub was any Sunday promenade. My feet kept reminding me of that.

The insect got in between me and the wall at this point, and stabbed me in the back. I consigned matter duplicators, blank-faced store owners, and prissy bank managers to the same

gooey hell, smashed the insect against the wall, and headed for a bar.

One nice thing about Deneb—the natives are too primitive to run things, so practically all the people who do anything important in Glub are Terrestrials, or at least members of the Terrestrial Federation, in whose territory Deneb XI lies. I not only found a bartender who spoke UnGalac, but one who knew what a Tom Collins was. It was a bright spot in an otherwise abysmal day.

I carried my glass over to a table and stretched out on the chair beside it. I would have been a more or less contented man if it hadn't been for the knowledge that I'd have to be up and back to my fruitless clod-hopping in a few minutes. I had yet to discover anyone who was buying more than a normal amount of electronic parts, or who had bought same at any time in the recent past.

The banks were no better. Nobody had pushed large amounts of money across their plates recently, nobody had brought in any duplicate bills for investigation, nobody had deposited bills with identical serial numbers. If I asked a clerk how come fourteen duplicates had gotten through, the answer was that it must have been during Harry's shift, or Moe's, or Maxie's. Anybody's but theirs. I'd found seven defective beeper plates in five banks, but taking the wind out of the sails of caspetitious bank managers wasn't helping me find my man.

I took one last drag on the Tom Collins and was about to leave when I looked up and saw an interesting individual standing over my table.

He was a Terrestrial, but he'd been on Deneb a long time, because he was wearing the flour-sack type of garment the natives have. His hair, which was potato-field gray, was parted in the middle and curled around his temples and led back behind his ears. The ears had little pieces of bone in them. His eyes were corniced with the biggest damned eyebrows I ever saw, and his ping-pong ball nose was thrust out of a clump of whiskers. He stood about six eight and must have weighed close to one hundred pounds, saturated.

I lay back and enjoyed the sight for a while. He stared

right back, but I guess he got tired of playing look-me-in-the-eye, because the whiskers moved and the apparition spoke.

"Mr. Baumholtzer?" it queried in a disappointingly normal voice.

"True," I confessed.

"The same Mr. Baumholtzer who has been going around asking all those questions about duplicate UnGalac notes?"

"Probably. What's your trouble, Mr.—?" I let it trail off in the time-honored fashion.

"Munger," he answered. "Duodecimus Munger."

"This bids fair to become fascinating," I said, wondering whether it would be Moe or Maxie that was going to get the blame for letting my name and assignment leak out. "Won't you pull up a chair, Mr. Munger?"

"I'm afraid I won't have time," he answered in a flustered voice. "Are you really the Mr. Baumholtzer that's working on this case for the Treasury Department?"

"Yeah, sure," I answered. "Why? You're not the fellow that's turning out these duplicates, are you?" Which stands as the leading question of the year, because Munger rummaged around in the folds of his toga and came up with a Mistral coagulator, which he then pointed at my head.

"I am," he said.

The bartender hit the floor with a crash and I put my hands on the edge of the table. "Let's not make any rash decisions, now," I said, wondering if I could get to my own pacifier before he fused my brains solid.

Munger shook his head. "I can't very well see how I could let you live."

"Aw, come on, try," I answered, and tilted the table into the pit of his stomach at the same time I dived for the floor.

The Mistral belched and mummified a potted plant behind me. The table smashed against the floor.

Munger said, "Oh, drat!" and landed with a sound like a pool cue bouncing on linoleum. I scrambled over the table and managed to raise an arm and swipe at his jaw. I missed, but I hit the Mistral, which flew across the room and broke open, immolating every bug in that vicinity, but rendering itself obsolete at the same moment.

Munger made an annoyed sound and clubbed me on the

jaw. I started to pass out, and he put his hands around my neck, but right about then the bartender let out a yelp that must have attracted some attention, because feet came running toward the bar from out in the street.

Munger repeated his expression of annoyance and smacked me another one. This time I went under.

Something wet was dabbing my face. I opened my eyes, and there was the bartender with a wet rag.

"All right, where is he?" I asked.

The bartender gave me a frightened look. "He's gone. He ran out when I yelled. I came right over and started to bring you to. You haven't been unconscious for more than a minute. That's because I came right over and started to bring you to. He ran out when I yelled, you know."

"Which way did he go, Galahad?"

"I—I don't know. I didn't have time to notice after I yelled and came over to——"

"Stuff it!" I said, threw him off, and ran out the back door.

Naturally, there wasn't a trace of Munger. I tried the front, but there was a small crowd out there, and he hadn't gone that way.

I walked back to the bar. "All right, bright eyes," I said, "feed me another Collins. And don't put any little sprigs of mint in it."

"Well, you don't have to get *buffy* about it!" he said.

"Really, Mr. Baumholtzer, there's no need to be excited about this unfortunate occurrence," the police inspector said. He leaned back in his chair and gazed at the end of his cigar. "This man was an obvious maniac. We'll pick him up on your complaint in a day or two, and he'll eventually wind up in a psycho ward."

I sighed. I was getting worse than nowhere. I reached into my pocket and pulled out my buzzer. I flung it on his desk.

"This badge says I'm a Treasury Agent, so don't go treating me like an ordinary taxpayer. I'm here investigating a counterfeiting case and this guy's in it up to his conspicuous ears. Now let's see some action!"

I wasn't supposed to let anyone in on my job, but the news was already all over town, so the cops might as well be enlightened, too.

The inspector's eyebrows went up. "Counterfeiting?" I could hear the wheels running around loose inside his head. "Alaric!" he yelled all of a sudden. "Alaric! Get me the Munger file!" He turned back to me with a pie-eating grin on his face. "I'm sorry, Mr. Baumholtzer, I'm afraid I was telling you something of a white lie.

"You see," he went on, "we get a number of complaints about Munger, but he's apparently a very wealthy man. He's a trader or something at a native village in the interior, and once or twice a year he comes out and raises a little hell. He scares people sometimes and I thought this was one of those cases. But counterfeiting? Well!"

"Yeah," I said.

I had a hunch the inspector was kind of worried that some of Munger's money might have found its way to him. I wouldn't have any real trouble with the inspector, though. He could be bought, but he wouldn't stay bought. Not if any big trouble came up, anyway.

"You say he was a trader?" I asked, trying to pass time until the file came up. "How does this tie in with a matter duplicator?"

"Matter duplicator!" The inspector turned pale. "You mean those counterfeits of his are identical copies of the real thing?"

"That's the idea."

"You don't say!"

He was fighting hard not to dig into his wallet and take a thorough, nervous look.

Fill your bathtub full of mud. Build a fire under it, turn on the hot shower, and crawl in. Wallow. Do that and you've got a fair idea of the Denebian jungle.

Never mind the trees. The inspector and I had been plowing along for half a day and I hadn't seen a tree yet—the rain was too thick. I ran into them and I still couldn't see them, maybe because there was mud all over me every time I picked myself up. I'd stumble on until the rain washed me off, and then I'd hit another tree, and ploppo!

The inspector led the way, stopping to consult a compass and a map once in a while. He was all eagerness.

Finally, he put out a hand and stopped me. I looked up

and realized there was no rain coming down on me at about the same time I saw the leaf-thatched roof.

"Rain shelter," he explained. "The natives build them. This one's not too far from Munger's village. We'll rest a while and—" The inspector's mouth hung open.

I turned around and there, in the far corner of the shelter, stood Munger and a couple of natives armed with spears.

"Coincidence, what?" Munger asked, grinning nastily. He turned to the natives and said something that I swear sounded like "Itchy scratchy," but it must have meant "Take care of 'em for me, boys," or something like that, because they moved in on us.

One of the lads had the point of his spear right in my middle or I would have tried to break for it, but the inspector was luckier.

"I'll get help!" he yelled, and took off into the mud like a big-bottomed turtle.

The native that was supposed to handle him took off after him, but the inspector had the advantage of feet developed through years of pounding beats. The native realized almost immediately that he was up against superior talent, tried a perfunctory cast of his spear, and then came sloshing back to our little tableau.

"Well, Mr. Baumholtzer, your companion's action has saved your life, for a while," Munger said. "Now we'll have to hold you as a hostage in case help should arrive."

"Thanks," I said.

I was looking at my native's loincloth. It was composed of tastefully arranged thousand-credit notes.

"Itchy scratchy pretty damn quickie," Munger said, and this time it obviously meant "Let's get this jerk to the village, fellows," because that's what they did.

The jungle echoed to the thunder of a huge drum. In the flickering firelight, naked figures swayed and leaped, and bare feet thudded on a log platform in the center of the village. The rhythm vibrated through the platform until the air seemed to shudder, and the tremors shook my trussed-up body.

"Brr-room! Boom!"

A strident keening rose from the savage throats and distant huts sent back the echo of the primal wail. The firelight

gleamed from the polished skin of Duodecimus Munger, who had doffed the formal toga and assumed the simple loincloth of the jungle. He stood impassively beside me, his arms folded, staring out with brooding eyes over the people he ruled. In the fire's gleam, he was as much a savage as they, and the majesty of his bearing spoke more loudly than words that he was their king.

He inclined his head toward me and spoke.

"It's amazing, the nonsense you have to take with these people," he said. "This clambake, for instance. They're propitiating the spirit of the tree. Why? I don't know. Damn tree's never failed yet." He indicated a majestic giant of the jungle with a nod. "But no, they've got to go into this marathon every night before I do my stuff. This'll keep up to dawn and I'll be dead on my feet tomorrow, but we got to have the stinkin' dance." He shook his head in disgust. "Jesus, I wish I had a fifth handy. I've been drinking this native bilge for too long."

Then he went back into his cigar store Indian act.

He was right. We were up until the sun rose and that racket didn't knock off for an instant. I had all that time to sit there, trying to figure out where Munger was making those duplicate bills, and what was so important about that tree. Needless to say, I didn't reach any illuminating conclusions. That drum kept pounding away like crazy. If I could have gotten loose somehow, I would have grabbed my gun, which Munger now had strapped to his waist, and shot that berserk drummer before even thinking about making a break for it.

Finally the sun came up and the Denebians quit howling. Neither Munger nor I were in a mood for small talk or pleasant conversation by that time. He picked me up and put me on my feet.

"Let's go, Baumholtzer," he said. "Now you'll discover just how it's done."

"Good of you to show me," I said. "I suppose this means I'll never live to tell about it."

"That's very sensible of you. I like a man who can face facts."

We walked across the log platform to the base of the tre-

mendous tree in whose honor the recent brawl had been held. I still couldn't see the connection but I was willing to wait.

I didn't have to. Not very long, anyway. Munger reached into a pouch on his loincloth and pulled out a bill. I looked at it. It was either another of the duplicates I'd brought into Saxegaard's office, or else it was the parent bill.

"I don't use the thousand-credit note unless the natives need new loincloths," Munger explained over his shoulder. "These fifties are a lot easier to dispose of."

"The hell they are," I said. "How'd I find you?"

"That was a mistake," he answered testily. "The minute I've got enough of these made, I sell them to certain—ah—contacts of mine for fifty per cent of face value. What you caught was a sample batch one of my former contacts spent through misguided avarice."

"Less talk and more action," I said. I didn't even have to guess what had happened to his "contact" and I was impatient to see how he was going to get a tree to duplicate his money for him.

"All right," he said, pulling my gun out of his belt. "I used to have the natives make a loud noise, but this will be infinitely more efficient."

He'd folded the fifty-credit bill into a paper airplane while we'd been talking. Now he held it in his right hand, ready to launch at the tree, while he raised my gun in his left. Behind us, the murmurs among the natives cut down into silence. The tree's big leaves rustled loudly in the silence.

Bam! The gun went off and the folded bill flew at the tree. It sailed into the foliage.

There was a popping noise. Followed by another. And another. More. More, infinitely more, and still more, until all I could hear was pop! pop! pop!

The bill came sailing back out of the foliage. Right behind it came another one, and behind these came flight groups, squadrons, wings, armadas of paper airplanes that were fifty-credit notes! They scattered out in all directions from the strangely moving foliage, and sailed around over the native village.

"Well, what do you know?" I said blankly, my mouth open. An airplane flew into it. I pulled the plane out and care-

fully unfolded it, staring at it with bulging eyes. It was as genuine as the day is long. All around me the natives were going crazy, running and jumping around, picking airplanes out of the air and off the ground, stuffing them into little bags they had ready.

Munger turned around and looked at me. "Startling, isn't it?" he asked politely.

"Protective mimicry!" I yelled, suddenly realizing.

He nodded. "Precisely. I discovered this tree six years ago. I was lost while attempting to evade the clutches of the law on a confidence rap. I swung an ax at the damn thing to blaze a trail, and I almost got scalped. Fifty axes came bouncing back at me."

"But how did anything ever develop mimicry to this extent? I've heard of animals and insects assuming the forms of dangerous life-forms as camouflage, but never to this degree."

"Search me," Munger said. "The Eglins contacted this world centuries ago, before the Terrestrials took this federation away from them. They were great little experimenters, the Eglins."

"Hmm. It does look funny, just this one tree like this. Maybe it was some kind of experimental plant. It is just one tree, isn't it?" I asked hastily.

"Definitely. After I became buddies with the natives and set up this village here, I had them scour the jungle for another like it, but no go."

"Hell, one's good enough. What a setup! You scare the tree with a loud noise, and it obliges by duplicating what it thinks is the menace. Brother!"

"That's what I said when those axes came at me," Munger said. He was facing me, with fifty-credit bills settling down all around him, and now he raised my gun. "Well, Baumholtzer, it looks as though your pal didn't bring help, after all. I'll miss your company."

He began tightening on the trigger, and I started to sweat.

Suddenly there was an outbreak of yelling on the other side of the village. A gun went off and several spears slashed through the air.

"The cops!" Munger stood staring at the inspector and his men as they broke into the open from the edge of the

jungle. "They must have sneaked up after surprising my lookouts!"

Munger raised my gun again. "I'll still get you, though!"

I charged at him, hoping he'd miss the first shot.

He didn't fire it before I plowed into him. We rolled onto the ground and I grabbed for him, but he scrambled away. I stumbled back against the tree just as he fired and missed me.

Well, that's about it.

Here we sit in the spaceport on Deneb XI, waiting for the government to get around to sending out a ship to pick us all up.

Once Munger missed his shot, the fight was over, for obvious reasons. He didn't stand a chance against us.

Yeah, us. Munger and all one hundred and sixty-eight of me.

As an editor, H. L. Gold knows few equals; witness the fact that, of the sixteen stories in this volume, seven, or all but half, appeared in his magazine, *Galaxy Science Fiction*—in spite of the fact that *Galaxy* is far the newest of the major science-fiction magazines. But Gold glitters also as a writer; after a long lay-off, his new output of fiction is beginning to emerge to delight the hearts of the fans who remember *None But Lucifer*, *The Trouble with Water*, and the brilliantly plausible short novel entitled—

A Matter of Form

Gilroy's telephone bell jangled into his slumber. With his eyes grimly shut, the reporter flopped over on his side, ground his ear into the pillow and pulled the cover over his head. But the bell jarred on.

When he blinked his eyes open and saw rain streaking the windows, he gritted his teeth against the insistent clangor and yanked off the receiver. He swore into the transmitter—not a trite blasphemy, but a poetic opinion of the sort of man who woke tired reporters at four in the morning.

"Don't blame me," his editor replied after a bitter silence. "It was your idea. You wanted the case. They found another whatsit."

Gilroy instantly snapped awake. "They found another catatonic!"

"Over on York Avenue near Ninety-first Street, about an hour ago. He's down in the observation ward at Memorial." The voice suddenly became low and confiding. "Want to know what I think, Gilroy?"

"What?" Gilroy asked in an expectant whisper.

"I think you're nuts. These catatonics are nothing but tramps. They probably drank themselves into catatonia, whatever that is. After all, be reasonable, Gilroy, they're only worth a four-line clip."

Gilroy was out of bed and getting dressed with one hand. "Not this time, chief," he said confidently. "Sure, they're only tramps, but that's part of the story. Look . . . *hey!* You should have been off a couple of hours ago. What's holding you up?"

The editor sounded disgruntled. "Old Man Talbot. He's seventy-six tomorrow. Had to pad out a blurb on his life."

"What! Wasting time whitewashing that murderer, racketeer——"

"Take it easy, Gilroy," the editor cautioned. "He's got a half interest in the paper. He doesn't bother us often."

"O.K. But he's still the city's one-man crime wave. Well, he'll kick off soon. Can you meet me at Memorial when you quit work?"

"In this weather?" The editor considered. "I don't know. Your news instinct is tops, and if you think this is big— Oh, hell . . . yes!"

Gilroy's triumphant grin soured when he ripped his foot through a sock. He hung up and explored empty drawers for another pair.

The street was cold and miserably deserted. The black snow was melting to grimy slush. Gilroy hunched into his coat and sloshed in the dirty sludge toward Greenwich Avenue. He was very tall and incredibly thin. With his head down into the driving swirl of rain, his coat flapping around his skinny shanks, his hands deep in his pockets, and his sharp elbows sticking away from his rangy body, he resembled an unhappy stork peering around for a fish.

But he was far from being unhappy. He was happy, in fact, as only a man with a pet theory can be when facts begin to fight on his side.

Splashing through the slush, he shivered when he thought of the catatonic who must have been lying in it for hours, unable to rise, until he was found and carried to the hospital. Poor devil! The first had been mistaken for a drunk, until the cop saw the bandage on his neck.

"Escaped post-brain-operatives," the hospital had reported. It sounded reasonable, except for one thing—catatonics don't walk, crawl, feed themselves or perform *any* voluntary muscular action. Thus Gilroy had not been particularly surprised when no hospital or private surgeon claimed the escaped post-operatives.

A taxi driver hopefully sighted his agitated figure through the rain. Gilroy restrained an urge to hug the hackie for rescuing him from the bitter wind. He clambered in hastily.

"Nice night for a murder," the driver observed conversationally.

"Are you hinting that business is bad?"

"I mean the weather's lousy."

"Well, damned if it isn't!" Gilroy exclaimed sarcastically. "Don't let it slow you down, though. I'm in a hurry. Memorial Hospital, quick!"

The driver looked concerned. He whipped the car out into the middle of the street, scooted through a light that was just an instant too slow.

Three catatonics in a month! Gilroy shook his head. It was a real puzzler. They couldn't have escaped. In the first place, if they had, they would have been claimed; and in the second place, it was physically impossible. And how did they acquire those neat surgical wounds on the backs of their necks, closed with two professional stitches and covered with a professional bandage? New wounds, too!

Gilroy attached special significance to the fact that they were very poorly dressed and suffered from slight malnutrition. But what was the significance? He shrugged. It was an instinctive hunch.

The taxi suddenly swerved to the curb and screeched to a stop. He thrust a bill through the window and got out. The night burst abruptly. Rain smashed against him in a roaring tide. He battered upwind to the hospital entrance.

He was soaked, breathless, half-repentant for his whim in attaching importance to three impoverished catatonics. He gingerly put his hand in his clammy coat and brought out a sodden identification card.

The girl at the reception desk glanced at it. "Oh, a newspaperman! Did a big story come in tonight?"

"Nothing much," he said casually. "Some poor tramp found on York and Ninety-first. Is he up in the screwball ward?"

She scanned the register and nodded. "Is he a friend of yours?"

"My grandson." As he moved off, both flinched at the sound of water squishing in his shoes at each step. "I must have stepped in a puddle."

When he turned around in the elevator, she was shaking her head and pursing her lips maternally. Then the ground floor dropped away.

He went through the white corridor unhesitantly. Low, horrible moans came from the main ward. He heard them with academic detachment. Near the examination room, the sound of the rising elevator stopped him. He paused, turning to see who it was.

The editor stepped out, chilled, wet and disgusted. Gilroy reached down and caught the smaller man's arm, guiding him silently through the door and into the examination room. The editor sighed resignedly.

The resident physician glanced up briefly when they unobtrusively took places in the ring of internes about the bed. Without effort, Gilroy peered over the heads before him, inspecting the catatonic with clinical absorption.

The catatonic had been stripped of his wet clothing, toweled, and rubbed with alcohol. Passive, every muscle absolutely relaxed, his eyes were loosely closed, and his mouth hung open in idiotic slackness. The dark line of removed surgical plaster showed on his neck. Gilroy strained to one side. The hair had been clipped. He saw part of a stitch.

"Catatonia, doc?" he asked quietly.

"Who are you?" the physician snapped.

"Gilroy . . . *Morning Post*."

The doctor gazed back at the man on the bed. "It's catatonia, all right. No trace of alcohol or inhibiting drugs. Slight malnutrition."

Gilroy elbowed politely through the ring of internes. "Insulin shock doesn't work, eh? No reason why it should."

"Why shouldn't it?" the doctor demanded, startled. "It always works in catatonia . . . at least, temporarily."

"But it didn't in this case, did it?" Gilroy insisted brusquely.

The doctor lowered his voice defeatedly. "No."

"What's this all about?" the editor asked in irritation. "What's catatonia, anyhow? Paralysis, or what?"

"It's the last stage of schizophrenia, or what used to be called dementia praecox," the physician said. "The mind revolts against responsibility and searches for a period in its existence when it was not troubled. It goes back to childhood and finds that there are childish cares; goes further and comes up against infantile worries; and finally ends up in a prenatal mental state."

"But it's a gradual degeneration," Gilroy stated. "Long before the complete mental decay, the victim is detected and put in an asylum. He goes through imbecility, idiocy, and after years of slow degeneration, winds up refusing to use his muscles or brain."

The editor looked baffled. "Why should insulin shock pull him out?"

"It shouldn't!" Gilroy rapped out.

"It should!" the physician replied angrily. "Catatonia is negative revolt. Insulin drops the sugar content of the blood to the point of shock. The sudden hunger jolts the catatonic out of his passivity."

"That's right," Gilroy said incisively. "But this isn't catatonia! It's mighty close to it, but you never heard of a catatonic who didn't refuse to carry on voluntary muscular action. There's no salivary retention! My guess is that it's paralysis."

"Caused by what?" the doctor asked bitingly.

"That's for you to say. I'm not a physician. How about the wound at the base of the skull?"

"Nonsense! It doesn't come within a quarter inch of the motor nerve. It's *ceria flexibilitas* . . . waxy flexibility." He raised the victim's arm and let go. It sagged slowly. "If it were general paralysis, it would have affected the brain. He'd have been dead."

Gilroy lifted his bony shoulders and lowered them. "You're on the wrong track, doc," he said quietly. "The wound has a lot to do with his condition, and catatonia can't be duplicated by surgery. Lesions can cause it, but the degeneration would still be gradual. And catatonics can't walk or crawl

away. He was deliberately abandoned, same as the others."

"Looks like you're right, Gilroy," the editor conceded. "There's something fishy here. All three of them had the same wounds?"

"In exactly the same place, at the base of the skull and to the left of the spinal column. Did you ever see anything so helpless? Imagine him escaping from a hospital, or even a private surgeon!"

The physician dismissed the internes and gathered up his instruments preparatory to hurried flight. "I don't see the motive. All three of them were undernourished, poorly clad; they must have been living in sub-standard conditions. Who would want to harm them?"

Gilroy bounded in front of the doctor, barring his way. "But it doesn't have to be revenge! It could be experimentation!"

"To prove what?"

Gilroy looked at him quizzically. "You don't know?"

"How should I?"

The reporter clapped his drenched hat on backward and darted to the door. "Come on, chief. We'll ask Moss for a theory."

"You won't find Dr. Moss here," the physician said. "He's off at night, and tomorrow, I think, he's leaving the hospital."

Gilroy stopped abruptly. "Moss . . . leaving the hospital!" he repeated in astonishment. "Did you hear that, chief? He's a dictator, a slave driver and a louse. But he's probably the greatest surgeon in America. Look at that. Stories breaking all around you, and you're whitewashing Old Man Talbot's murderous life!" His coat bellied out in the wash of his swift, gaunt stride. "Three catatonics found lying on the street in a month. That never happened before. They can't walk or crawl, and they have mysterious wounds at the base of their skulls. Now the greatest surgeon in the country gets kicked out of the hospital he built up to first place. And what do you do? You sit in the office and write stories about what a swell guy Talbot is underneath his slimy exterior!"

The resident physician was relieved to hear the last of that relentlessly incisive, logical voice trail down the corridor. But he gazed down at the catatonic before leaving the room.

He felt less certain that it was catatonia. He found himself quoting the editor's remark—there definitely *was* something fishy there!

But what was the motive in operating on three obviously destitute men and abandoning them; and how had the operation caused a state resembling catatonia?

In a sense, he felt sorry that Dr. Moss was going to be discharged. The cold, slave-driving dictator might have given a good theory. That was the physician's scientific conscience speaking. Inside, he really felt that anything was worth getting away from that silkily mocking voice and the delicately sneering mouth.

At Fifty-fifth Street, Wood came to the last Sixth Avenue employment office. With very little hope, he read the crudely chalked signs. It was an industrial employment agency. Wood had never been inside a factory. The only job he could fill was that of apprentice upholsterer, ten dollars a week; but he was thirty-two years old and the agency would require five dollars' immediate payment.

He turned away dejectedly, fingering the three dimes in his pocket. Three dimes—the smallest, thinnest American coins—

"Anything up there, Mac?"

"Not for me," Wood replied wearily. He scarcely glanced at the man.

He took a last glance at his newspaper before dropping it to the sidewalk. That was the last paper he'd buy, he resolved; with his miserable appearance he couldn't answer advertisements. But his mind clung obstinately to Gilroy's article. Gilroy had described the horror of catatonia. A notion born of defeat made it strangely attractive to Wood. At least, the catatonics were fed and housed. He wondered if catatonia could be simulated—

But the other had been scrutinizing Wood. "College man, ain't you?" he asked as Wood trudged away from the employment office.

Wood paused and ran his hand over his stubbled face. Dirty cuffs stood away from his fringing sleeves. He knew that his

hair curled long behind his ears. "Does it still show?" he asked bitterly.

"You bet. You can spot a college man a mile away."

Wood's mouth twisted. "Glad to hear that. It must be an inner light shining through the rags."

"You're a sucker, coming down here with an education. Down here they want poor slobs who don't know any better . . . guys like me, with big muscles and small brains."

Wood looked up at him sharply. He was too well dressed and alert to have prowled the agencies for any length of time. He might have just lost his job; perhaps he was looking for company. But Wood had met his kind before. He had the hard eyes of the wolf who preyed on the jobless.

"Listen," Wood said coldly, "I haven't a thing you'd want. I'm down to thirty cents. Excuse me while I sneak my books and toothbrush out of my room before the super snatches them."

The other did not recoil or protest virtuously. "I ain't blind," he said quietly. "I can see you're down and out."

"Then what do you want?" Wood snapped ill-temperedly. "Don't tell me you want a threadbare but filthy college man for company—"

His unwelcome friend made a gesture of annoyance. "Cut out the mad-dog act. I was turned down on a job today because I ain't a college man. Seventy-five a month, room and board, doctor's assistant. But I got the air because I ain't a grad."

"You've got my sympathy," Wood said, turning away.

The other caught up with him. "You're a college grad. Do you want the job? It'll cost you your first week's pay . . . my cut, see?"

"I don't know anything about medicine. I was a code expert in a stock-broker's office before people stopped having enough money for investments. Want any codes deciphered? That's the best I can do."

He grew irritated when the stranger stubbornly matched his dejected shuffle.

"You don't have to know anything about medicine. Long as you got a degree, a few muscles and a brain, that's all the doc wants."

Wood stopped short and wheeled.

"Is that on the level?"

"Sure. But I don't want to take a deadhead up there and get turned down. I got to ask you the questions they asked me."

In face of a prospective job, Wood's caution ebbed away. He felt the three dimes in his pocket. They were exceedingly slim and unprotective. They meant two hamburgers and two cups of coffee, or a bed in some filthy hotel dormitory. Two thin meals and sleeping in the wet March air; or shelter for a night and no food—

"Shoot!" he said deliberately.

"Any relatives?"

"Some fifth cousins in Maine."

"Friends?"

"None who would recognize me now." He searched the stranger's face. "What's this all about? What have my friends or relatives got to do—"

"Nothing," the other said hastily. "Only you'll have to travel a little. The doc wouldn't want a wife dragging along, or have you break up your work by writing letters. See?"

Wood didn't see. It was a singularly lame explanation; but he was concentrating on the seventy-five a month, room and *board*—food.

"Who's the doctor?" he asked.

"I ain't dumb." The other smiled humorlessly. "You'll go there with me and get the doc to hand over my cut."

Wood crossed to Eighth Avenue with the stranger. Sitting in the subway, he kept his eyes from meeting casual, disinterested glances. He pulled his feet out of the aisle, against the base of the seat, to hide the loose, flapping right sole. His hands were cracked and scaly, with tenacious dirt deeply embedded. Bitter, defeated, with the appearance of a mature waif. What a chance there was of being hired! But at least the stranger had risked a nickel on his fare.

Wood followed him out at 103rd Street and Central Park West; they climbed the hill to Manhattan Avenue and headed several blocks downtown. The other ran briskly up the stoop of an old house. Wood climbed the steps more slowly. He checked an urge to run away, but he experienced in advance

the sinking feeling of being turned away from a job. If he could only have his hair cut, his suit pressed, his shoes mended! But what was the use of thinking about that? It would cost a couple of dollars. And nothing could be done about his ragged hems.

"Come on!" the stranger called.

Wood tensed his back and stood looking at the house while the other brusquely rang the doorbell. There were three floors and no card above the bell, no doctor's white glass sign in the darkly curtained windows. From the outside it could have been a neglected boardinghouse.

The door opened. A man of his own age, about middle height, but considerably overweight, blocked the entrance. He wore a white laboratory apron. Incongruous in his pale, soft face, his nimble eyes were harsh.

"Back again?" he asked impatiently.

"It's not for me this time," Wood's persistent friend said. "I got a college grad."

Wood drew back in humiliation when the fat man's keen glance passed over his wrinkled, frayed suit and stopped distastefully at the long hair blowing wildly around his hungry, unshaven face. There—he could see it coming: "Can't use him."

But the fat man pushed back a beautiful collie with his leg and held the door wide. Astounded, Wood followed his acquaintance into the narrow hall. To give an impression of friendliness, he stooped and ruffled the dog's ears. The fat man led them into a bare front room.

"What's your name?" he asked indifferently.

Wood's answer stuck in his throat. He coughed to clear it. "Wood," he replied.

"Any relatives?" Wood shook his head.

"Friends?"

"Not any more."

"What kind of degree?"

"Science, Columbia, 1925."

The fat man's expression did not change. He reached into his left pocket and brought out a wallet. "What arrangement did you make with this man?"

"He's to get my first week's salary." Silently, Wood ob-

served the transfer of several green bills; he looked at them hungrily, pathetically. "May I wash up and take a shave, doctor?" he asked.

"I'm not the doctor," the fat man answered. "My name is Clarence, without a mister in front of it." He turned swiftly to the sharp stranger. "What are you hanging around for?"

Wood's friend backed to the door. "Well, so long," he said. "Good break for both of us, eh, Wood?"

Wood smiled and nodded happily. The trace of irony in the stranger's hard voice escaped him entirely.

"I'll take you upstairs to your room," Clarence said when Wood's business partner had left. "I think there's a razor there."

They went out into the dark hall, the collie close behind them. An unshaded light bulb hung on a single wire above a gate-leg table. On the wall behind the table an oval, gilt mirror gave back Wood's hairy, unkempt image. A worn carpet covered the floor to a door cutting off the rear of the house, and narrow stairs climbed in a swift spiral to the next story. It was cheerless and neglected, but Wood's conception of luxury had become less exacting.

"Wait here while I make a telephone call," Clarence said.

He closed the door behind him in a room opposite the stairs. Wood fondled the friendly collie. Through the panel he heard Clarence's voice, natural and unlowered.

"Hello, Moss? . . . Pinero brought back a man. All his answers are all right . . . Columbia, 1925 . . . Not a cent, judging from his appearance . . . Call Talbot? For when? . . . O.K. . . . You'll get back as soon as you get through with the board? . . . O.K. . . . Well, what's the difference? You got all you wanted from them, anyhow."

Wood heard the receiver's click as it was replaced and taken off again. Moss? That was the head of Memorial Hospital—the great surgeon. But the article about the catatonics hinted something about his removal from the hospital.

"Hello, Talbot?" Clarence was saying. "Come around at noon tomorrow. Moss says everything'll be ready then . . . O.K., don't get excited. This is positively the last one! . . . Don't worry. Nothing can go wrong."

Talbot's name sounded familiar to Wood. It might have

been the Talbot that the *Morning Post* had written about—the seventy-six-year-old philanthropist. He probably wanted Moss to operate on him. Well, it was none of his business.

When Clarence joined him in the dark hall, Wood thought only of his seventy-five a month, room and board; but more than that, he had a job! A few weeks of decent food and a chance to get some new clothes, and he would soon get rid of his defeatism.

He even forgot his wonder at the lack of shingles and waiting-room signs that a doctor's house usually had. He could only think of his neat room on the third floor, overlooking a bright back yard. And a shave—

Dr. Moss replaced the telephone with calm deliberation. Striding through the white hospital corridor to the elevator, he was conscious of curious stares. His pink, scrupulously shaven, clean-scrubbed face gave no answer to their questioning eyes. In the elevator he stood with his hands thrust casually into his pockets. The operator did not dare to look at him or speak.

Moss gathered his hat and coat. The space around the reception desk seemed more crowded than usual, with men who had the penetrating look of reporters. He walked swiftly past.

A tall, astoundingly thin man, his stare fixed predatorily on Moss, headed the wedge of reporters that swarmed after Moss.

"You can't leave without a statement to the press, doc!" he said.

"I find it very easy to do," Moss taunted without stopping.

He stood on the curb with his back turned coldly on the reporters and unhurriedly flagged a taxi.

"Well, at least you can tell us whether you're still director of the hospital," the tall reporter said.

"Ask the board of trustees."

"Then how about a theory on the catatonics?"

"Ask the catatonics." The cab pulled up opposite Moss. Deliberately he opened the door and stepped in. As he rode away, he heard the thin man exclaim: "What a cold, clammy reptile!"

He did not look back to enjoy their discomfiture. In spite of his calm demeanor, he did not feel too easy himself. The man on the *Morning Post*, Gilroy or whatever his name was, had written a sensational article on the abandoned catatonics, and even went so far as to claim they were not catatonics. He had had all he could do to keep from being involved in the conflicting riot of theory. Talbot owned a large interest in the paper. He must be told to strangle the articles, although by now all the papers were taking up the cry.

It was a clever piece of work, detecting the fact that the victims weren't suffering from catatonia at all. But the *Morning Post* reporter had cut himself a man-size job in trying to understand how three men with general paralysis could be abandoned without a trace of where they had come from, and what connection the incisions had on their condition. Only recently had Moss himself solved it.

The cab crossed to Seventh Avenue and headed uptown.

The trace of his parting smile of mockery vanished. His mobile mouth whitened, tight-lipped and grim. Where was he to get money from now? He had milked the hospital funds to a frightening debt, and it had not been enough. Like a bottomless maw, his researches could drain a dozen funds.

If he could convince Talbot, prove to him that his failures had not really been failures, that this time he would not slip up—

But Talbot was a tough nut to crack. Not a cent was coming out of his miserly pocket until Moss completely convinced him that he was past the experimental stage. This time there would be no failure!

At Moss's street, the cab stopped and the surgeon sprang out lightly. He ran up the steps confidently, looking neither to the left nor to the right, though it was a fine day with a warm yellow sun, and between the two lines of old houses Central Park could be seen budding greenly.

He opened the door and strode almost impatiently into the narrow, dark hall, ignoring the friendly collie that bounded out to greet him.

"Clarence!" he called out. "Get your new assistant down. I'm not even going to wait for a meal." He threw off his hat,

coat and jacket, hanging them up carelessly on a hook near the mirror.

"Hey, Wood!" Clarence shouted up the stairs. "Are you finished?"

They heard a light, eager step race down from the third floor.

"Clarence, my boy," Moss said in a low, impetuous voice, "I know what the trouble was. We didn't really fail at all. I'll show you . . . we'll follow exactly the same technique!"

"Then why didn't it seem to work before?"

Wood's feet came into view between the rails on the second floor. "You'll understand as soon as it's finished," Moss whispered hastily, and then Wood joined them.

Even the short time that Wood had been employed was enough to transform him. He had lost the defeatist feeling of being useless human flotsam. He was shaved and washed, but that did not account for his kindled eyes.

"Wood . . . Dr. Moss," Clarence said perfunctorily.

Wood choked out an incoherent speech that was meant to inform them that he was happy, though he didn't know anything about medicine.

"You don't have to," Moss replied silkily. "We'll teach you more about medicine than most surgeons learn in a lifetime."

It could have meant anything or nothing. Wood made no attempt to understand the meaning of the words. It was the hint of withdrawn savagery in the low voice that puzzled him. It seemed a very peculiar way of talking to a man who had been hired to move apparatus and do nothing but the most ordinary routine work.

He followed them silently into a shining, tiled operating room. He felt less comfortable than he had in his room; but when he dismissed Moss's tones as a characteristically sarcastic manner of speech, hinting more than it contained in reality, his eagerness returned. While Moss scrubbed his hands and arms in a deep basin, Wood gazed around.

In the center of the room an operating table stood, with a clean sheet clamped unwrinkled over it. Above the table five shadowless light globes branched. It was a compact room. Even Wood saw how close everything lay to the doctor's

hand—trays of tampons, swabs and clamps, and a sterilizing instrument chest that gave off puffs of steam.

"We do a lot of surgical experimenting," Moss said. "Most of your work'll be handling the anaesthetic. Show him how to do it, Clarence."

Wood observed intently. It appeared simple—cut-ins and shut-offs for cyclopropane, helium and oxygen; watch the dials for overrich mixture; keep your eye on the bellows and water filter—

Trained anaesthetists, he knew, tested their mixture by taking a few sniffs. At Clarence's suggestion he sniffed briefly at the whispering cone. He didn't know cyclopropane—so lightning-fast that experienced anaesthetists are sometimes caught by it—

Wood lay on the floor with his arms and legs sticking up into the air. When he tried to straighten them, he rolled over on his side. Still they projected stiffly. He was dizzy with the anaesthetic. Something that felt like surgical plaster pulled on a sensitive spot on the back of his neck.

The room was dark, its green shades pulled down against the outer day. Somewhere above him and toward the end of the room, he heard painful breathing. Before he could raise himself to investigate, he caught the multiple tread of steps ascending and approaching the door. He drew back defensively.

The door flung open. Light flared up in the room. Wood sprang to his feet—and found he could not stand erect. He dropped back to a crawling position, facing the men who watched him with cold interest.

"He tried to stand up," the old man stated.

"What'd you think I'd do?" Wood snapped. His voice was a confused, snarling growl without words. Baffled and raging, he glared up at them.

"Cover him, Clarence," Moss said. "I'll look at the other one."

Wood turned his head from the threatening muzzle of the gun aimed at him, and saw the doctor lift the man on the bed. Clarence backed to the window and raised the shade. Strong noonlight roused the man. His profile was turned to Wood.

His eyes fastened blankly on Moss's scrubbed pink face, never leaving it. Behind his ears curled long, wild hair.

"There you are, Talbot," Moss said to the old man. "He's sound."

"Take him out of bed and let's see him act like you said he would." The old man jittered anxiously on his cane.

Moss pulled the man's legs to the edge of the bed and raised him heavily to his feet. For a short time he stood without aid; then all at once he collapsed to his hands and knees. He stared full at Wood.

It took Wood a minute of startled bewilderment to recognize the face. He had seen it every day of his life, but never so detachedly. The eyes were blank and round, the facial muscles relaxed, idiotic.

But it was his own face—

Panic exploded in him. He gaped down at as much of himself as he could see. Two hairy legs stemmed from his shoulders, and a dog's forepaws rested firmly on the floor.

He stumbled uncertainly toward Moss. "What did you do to me?" he shouted. It came out in an animal howl. The doctor motioned the others to the door and backed away warily.

Wood felt his lips draw back tightly over his fangs. Clarence and Talbot were in the hall. Moss stood alertly in the doorway, his hand on the knob. He watched Wood closely, his eyes glacial and unmoved. When Wood sprang, he slammed the door, and Wood's shoulder crashed against it.

"He knows what happened," Moss's voice came through the panel.

It was not entirely true. Wood knew something had happened. But he refused to believe that the face of the crawling man gazing stupidly at him was his own. It was, though. And Wood himself stood on the four legs of a dog, with a surgical plaster covering a burning wound in the back of his neck.

It was crushing, numbing, too fantastic to believe. He thought wildly of hypnosis. But just by turning his head, he could look directly at what had been his own body, braced on hands and knees as if it could not stand erect.

He was outside his own body. He could not deny that. Somehow he had been removed from it; by drugs or hypnosis,

Moss had put him in the body of a dog. He had to get back into his own body again.

But how do you get back into your own body?

His mind struck blindly in all directions. He scarcely heard the three men move away from the door and enter the next room. But his mind suddenly froze with fear. His human body was complete and impenetrable, closed hermetically against his now-foreign identity.

Through his congealed terror, his animal ears brought the creak of furniture. Talbot's cane stopped its nervous, insistent tapping.

"That should have convinced even you, Talbot," he heard Moss say. "Their identities are exchanged without the slightest loss of mentality."

Wood started. It meant— No, it was absurd! But it did account for the fact that his body crawled on hands and knees, unable to stand on its feet. It meant that the collie's identity was in Wood's body!

"That's O.K.," he heard Talbot say. "How about the operation part? Isn't it painful, putting their brains into different skulls?"

"You can't put them into different skulls," Moss answered with a touch of annoyance. "They don't fit. Besides, there's no need to exchange the whole brain. How do you account for the fact that people have retained their identities with parts of their brains removed?"

There was a pause. "I don't know," Talbot said doubtfully.

"Sometimes the parts of the brain that were removed contained nerve centers, and paralysis set in. But the identity was still there. Then what part of the brain contained the identity?"

Wood ignored the old man's questioning murmur. He listened intently, all his fears submerged in the straining of his sharp ears, in the overwhelming need to know what Moss had done to him.

"Figure it out," the surgeon said. "The identity must have been in some part of the brain that wasn't removed, that couldn't be touched without death. That's where it was. At the absolute base of the brain, where a scalpel couldn't get at it without having to cut through the skull, the three me-

dullae, and the entire depth of the brain itself. There's a mysterious little body hidden away safely down there—less than a quarter of an inch in diameter—called the pineal gland. In some way it controls the identity. Once it was a third eye."

"A third eye, and now it controls the identity?" Talbot exclaimed.

"Why not? The gills of our fish ancestors became the Eustachian canal that controls the sense of balance.

"Until I developed a new technique in removing the gland—by excising from beneath the brain instead of through it—nothing at all was known about it. In the first place, trying to get at it would kill the patient; and oral or intravenous injections have no effect. But when I exchanged the pineals of a rabbit and a rat, the rabbit acted like a rat, and the rat like a rabbit—within their limitations, of course. It's empiricism—it works, but I don't know why."

"Then why did the first three act like . . . what's the word?"

"Catatonics. Well, the exchanges were really successful, Talbot; but I repeated the same mistake three times, until I figured it out. And by the way, get that reporter on something a little less dangerous. He's getting pretty warm. Excepting the salivary retention, the victims acted almost like catatonics, and for nearly the same reason. I exchanged the pineals of rats for the men's. Well, you can imagine how a rat would act with the relatively huge body of a man to control. It's beyond him. He simply gives up, goes into a passive revolt. But the difference between a dog's body and a man's isn't so great. The dog is puzzled, but at any rate he makes an attempt to control his new body."

"Is the operation painful?" Talbot asked anxiously.

"There isn't a bit of pain. The incision is very small, and heals in a short time. And as for recovery—you can see for yourself how swift it is. I operated on Wood and the dog last night."

Wood's dog's brain stampeded, refusing to function intelligently. If he had been hypnotized or drugged, there might have been a chance of his eventual return. But his identity had been violently and permanently ripped from his body and forced into that of a dog. He was absolutely helpless,

completely dependent on Moss to return him to his body.

"How much do you want?" Talbot was asking craftily.

"Five million!"

The old man cackled in a high, cracked voice. "I'll give you fifty thousand, cash," he offered.

"To exchange your dying body for a young, strong, healthy one?" Moss asked, emphasizing each adjective with special significance. "The price is five million."

"I'll give you seventy-five thousand," Talbot said with finality. "Raising five million is out of the question. It can't be done. All my money is tied up in my . . . uh . . . syndicates. I have to turn most of the income back into merchandise, wages, overhead and equipment. How do you expect me to have five million in cash?"

"I don't," Moss replied with faint mockery.

Talbot lost his temper. "Then what are you getting at?"

"The interest on five million is exactly half your income. Briefly, to use your business terminology, I'm muscling into your rackets."

Wood heard the old man gasp indignantly. "Not a chance!" he rasped. "I'll give you eighty thousand. That's all the cash I can raise."

"Don't be a fool, Talbot," Moss said with deadly calm. "I don't want money for the sake of feeling it. I need an assured income, and plenty of it; enough to carry on my experiments without having to bleed hospitals dry and still not have enough. If this experiment didn't interest me, I wouldn't do it even for five million, much as I need it."

"Eighty thousand!" Talbot repeated.

"Hang onto your money until you rot! Let's see, with your advanced angina pectoris, that should be about six months from now, shouldn't it?"

Wood heard the old man's cane shudder nervelessly over the floor.

"You win, you cold-blooded blackmailer," the old man surrendered.

Moss laughed. Wood heard the furniture creak as they rose and set off toward the stairs.

"Do you want to see Wood and the dog again, Talbot?"

"No. I'm convinced."

"Get rid of them, Clarence. No more abandoning them in the street for Talbot's clever reporters to theorize over. Put a silencer on your gun. You'll find it downstairs. Then leave them in the acid vat."

Wood's eyes flashed around the room in terror. He and his body had to escape. For him to escape alone, would mean the end of returning to his own body. Separation would make the task of forcing Moss to give him back his body impossible.

But they were on the second floor, at the rear of the house. Even if there had been a fire escape, he could not have opened the window. The only way out was through the door.

Somehow he had to turn the knob, chance meeting Clarence or Moss on the stairs or in the narrow hall, and open the heavy front door—guiding and defending himself and his body!

The collie in his body whimpered baffledly. Wood fought off the instinctive fear that froze his dog's brain. He had to be cool.

Below, he heard Clarence's ponderous steps as he went through the rooms looking for a silencer to muffle his gun.

Gilroy closed the door of the telephone booth and fished in his pocket for a coin. Of all of mankind's scientific gadgets, the telephone booth most clearly demonstrates that this is a world of five feet nine. When Gilroy pulled a coin out of his pocket, his elbow banged against the shut door; and as he dialed his number and stooped over the mouthpiece, he was forced to bend himself into the shape of a cane. But he had conditioned his lanky body to adjust itself to things scaled below its need. He did not mind the lack of room.

But he shoved his shapeless felt hat on the back of his head and whistled softly in a discouraged manner.

"Let me talk to the chief," he said. The receiver rasped in his ear. The editor greeted him abstractedly; Gilroy knew he had just come on and was scattering papers over his desk, looking at the latest. "Gilroy, chief," the reporter said.

"What've you got on the catatonics?"

Gilroy's sharply planed face wrinkled in earnest defeat. "Not a thing, chief," he replied hollowly.

"Where were you?"

"I was in Memorial all day, looking at the catatonics and waiting for an idea."

The editor became sympathetic. "How'd you make out?" he asked.

"Not a thing. They're absolutely dumb and motionless, and nobody around here has anything to say worth listening to. How'd you make out on the police and hospital reports?"

"I was looking at them just before you called." There was a pause. Gilroy heard the crackle of papers being shoved around. "Here they are— The fingerprint bureau has no records of them. No police department in any village, town or city recognizes their pictures."

"How about the hospitals outside New York?" Gilroy asked hopefully.

"No missing patients."

Gilroy sighed and shrugged his thin shoulders eloquently. "Well, all we have is a negative angle. They must have been picked damned carefully. All the papers around the country printed their pictures, and they don't seem to have any friends, relatives or police records."

"How about a human-interest story," the editor encouraged; "what they eat, how helpless they are, their torn, old clothes? Pad out a story about their probable lives, judging from their features and hands. How's that? Not bad, eh?"

"Aw, chief," Gilroy moaned, "I'm licked. That padding stuff isn't my line. I'm not a sob sister. We haven't a thing to work on. These tramps had absolutely no connection with life. We can't find out who they were, where they came from, or what happened to them."

The editor's voice went sharp and incisive. "Listen to me, Gilroy!" he rapped out. "You stop that whining, do you hear me? I'm running this paper, and as long as you don't see fit to quit, I'll send you out after birth lists if I want to."

"You thought this was a good story and you convinced me that it was. Well, I'm still convinced! I want these catatonics tracked down. I want to know all about them, and how they wound up behind the eight-ball. So does the public. I'm not stopping until I *do* know. Get me?"

"You get to work on this story and hang onto it. Don't

let it throw you! And just to show you how I'm standing behind you . . . I'm giving you a blank expense account and your own discretion. Now track these catatonics down in any way you can figure out!"

Gilroy was stunned for an instant. "Well, gosh," he stammered, confused, "I'll do my best, chief. I didn't know you felt that way."

"The two of us'll crack this story wide open, Gilroy. But just come around to me with another whine about being licked, and you can start in as copy boy for some other sheet. Do you get me? That's final!"

Gilroy pulled his hat down firmly. "I get you, chief," he declared manfully. "You can count on me right up to the hilt."

He slammed the receiver on its hook, yanked the door open, and strode out with a new determination. He felt like the power of the press, and the feeling was not unjustified. The might and cunning of a whole vast metropolitan newspaper was ranged solidly behind him. Few secrets could hide from its searching probe.

All he needed was patience and shrewd observation. Finding the first clue would be hardest; after that the story would unwind by itself. He marched toward the hospital exit.

He heard steps hastening behind him and felt a light, detaining touch on his arm. He wheeled and looked down at the resident physician, dressed in street clothes and coming on duty.

"You're Gilroy, aren't you?" the doctor asked. "Well, I was thinking about the incisions on the catatonics' necks——"

"What about them?" Gilroy demanded alertly, pulling out a pad.

"Quitting again?" the editor asked ten minutes later.

"Not me, chief!" Gilroy propped his stenographic pad on top of the telephone. "I'm hot on the trail. Listen to this. The resident physician over here at Memorial tipped me off to a real clue. He figured out that the incisions on the catatonics' necks aimed at some part of their brains. The incisions penetrate at a tangent a quarter of an inch off the vertebrae, so it couldn't have been to tamper with the spinal cord. You can't reach the posterior part of the brain from that angle, he says,

and working from the back of the neck wouldn't bring you to any important part of the neck that can't be reached better from the front or through the mouth.

"If you don't cut the spinal cord with that incision, you can't account for general paralysis; and the cords definitely weren't cut.

"So he thinks the incisions were aimed at some part of the base of the brain that can't be reached from above. He doesn't know what part or how the operation would cause general paralysis.

"Got that? O.K. Well, here's the payoff:

"To reach the exact spot of the brain you want, you ordinarily take off a good chunk of skull, somewhere around that spot. But these incisions were predetermined to the last centimeter. And he doesn't know how. The surgeon worked entirely by measurements—like blind flying. He says only three or four surgeons in the country could've done it."

"Who are they, you cluck? Did you get their names?"

Gilroy became offended. "Of course. Moss in New York; Faber in Chicago; Crowninshield in Portland; maybe Johnson in Detroit."

"Well, what're you waiting for?" the editor shouted. "Get Moss!"

"Can't locate him. He moved from his Riverside Drive apartment and left no forwarding address. He was peeved. The board asked for his resignation and he left with a pretty bad name for mismanagement."

The editor sprang into action. "That leaves us four men to track down. Find Moss. I'll call up the other boys you named. It looks like a good tip."

Gilroy hung up. With half a dozen vast strides, he had covered the distance to the hospital exit, moving with ungainly, predatory swiftness.

Wood was in a mind-freezing panic. He knew it hindered him, prevented him from plotting his escape, but he was powerless to control the fearful darting of his dog's brain.

It would take Clarence only a short time to find the silencer and climb the stairs to kill him and his body. Before Clarence could find the silencer, Wood and his body had to escape.

Wood lifted himself clumsily, unsteadily, to his hind legs and took the doorknob between his paws. They refused to grip. He heard Clarence stop, and the sound of scraping drawers came to his sharp ears.

He was terrified. He bit furiously at the knob. It slipped between his teeth. He bit harder. Pain stabbed his sensitive gums, but the bitter brass dented. Hanging to the knob, he lowered himself to the floor, bending his neck sharply to turn it. The tongue clicked out of the lock. He threw himself to one side, flipping back the door as he fell. It opened a crack. He thrust his snout in the opening and forced it wide.

From below, he heard the ponderous footfalls moving again. Wood stalked noiselessly into the hall and peered down the well of the stairs. Clarence was out of sight.

He drew back into the room and pulled at his body's clothing, backing out into the hall again until the dog crawled voluntarily. It crept after him and down the stairs.

All at once Clarence came out of a room and made for the stairs. Wood crouched, trembling at the sound of metallic clicking that he knew was a silencer being fitted to a gun. He barred his body. It halted, its idiot face hanging down over the step, silent and without protest.

Clarence reached the stairs and climbed confidently. Wood tensed, waiting for Clarence to turn the spiral and come into view.

Clarence sighted them and froze rigid. His mouth opened blankly, startled. The gun trembled impotently at his side, and he stared up at them with his fat, white neck exposed and inviting. Then his chest heaved and his larynx tightened for a yell.

But Wood's long teeth cleared. He lunged high, directly at Clarence, and his fangs snapped together in midair.

Soft flesh ripped in his teeth. He knocked Clarence over; they fell down the stairs and crashed to the floor. Clarence thrashed around, gurgling. Wood smelled a sudden rush of blood that excited an alien lust in him. He flung himself clear and landed on his feet.

His body clumped after him, pausing to sniff at Clarence. He pulled it away and darted to the front door.

From the back of the house he heard Moss running to in-

vestigate. He bit savagely at the doorknob, jerking it back awkwardly, terrified that Moss might reach him before the door opened.

But the lock clicked, and he thrust the door wide with his body. His human body flopped after him on hands and knees to the stoop. He hauled it down the steps to the sidewalk and herded it anxiously toward Central Park West, out of Moss's range.

Wood glanced back over his shoulder, saw the doctor glaring at them through the curtain on the door, and, in terror, he dragged his body in a clumsy gallop to the corner where he would be protected by traffic.

He had escaped death, and he and his body were still together; but his panic grew stronger. How could he feed it, shelter it, defend it against Moss and Talbot's gangsters? And how could he force Moss to give him back his body?

But he saw that first he would have to shield his body from observation. It was hungry, and it prowled around on hands and knees, searching for food. The sight of a crawling, sniffing human body attracted disgusted attention; before long they were almost surrounded.

Wood was badly scared. With his teeth, he dragged his body into the street and guided its slow crawl to the other side, where Central Park could hide them with its trees and bushes.

Moss had been more alert. A black car sped through a red light and crowded down on them. From the other side a police car shot in and out of traffic, its siren screaming, and braked dead beside Wood and his body.

The black car checked its headlong rush.

Wood crouched defensively over his body, glowering at the two cops who charged out at them. One shoved Wood away with his foot; the other raised his body by the armpits and tried to stand it erect.

"A nut—he thinks he's a dog," he said interestedly. "The screwball ward for him, eh?"

The other nodded. Wood lost his reason. He attacked, snapping viciously. His body took up the attack, snarling horribly and biting on all sides. It was insane, hopeless; but he had no way of communicating, and he had to do some-

thing to prevent being separated from his body. The police kicked him off.

Suddenly he realized that if they had not been burdened with his body, they would have shot him. He darted wildly into traffic before they sat his body in the car.

"Want to get out and plug him before he bites somebody?" he heard.

"This nut'll take a hunk out of you," the other replied. "We'll send out an alarm from the hospital."

It drove off downtown. Wood scrambled after it. His legs pumped furiously; but it pulled away from him, and other cars came between. He lost it after a few blocks.

Then he saw the black car make a reckless turn through traffic and roar after him. It was too intently bearing down on him to have been anything but Talbot's gangsters.

His eyes and muscles coordinated with animal precision. He ran in the swift traffic, avoiding being struck, and at the same time kept watch for a footpath leading into the park.

When he found one, he sprinted into the opposite lane of traffic. Brakes screeched; a man cursed him in a loud voice. But he scurried in front of the car, gained the sidewalk, and dashed along the cement path until he came to a miniature forest of bushes.

Without hesitation, he left the path and ran through the woods. It was not a dense growth, but it covered him from sight. He scampered deep into the park.

His frightened eyes watched the carload of gangsters scour the trees on both sides of the path. Hugging the ground, he inched away from them. They beat the bushes a safe distance away from him.

While he circled behind them, creeping from cover to cover, there was small danger of being caught. But he was appalled by the loss of his body. Being near it had given him a sort of courage, even though he did not know how he was going to force Moss to give it back to him. Now, besides making the doctor operate, he had to find a way of getting near it again.

But his empty stomach was knotted with hunger. Before he could make plans he had to eat.

He crept furtively out of his shelter. The gangsters were

far out of sight. Then, with infinite patience, he sneaked up on a squirrel. The alert little animal was observant and wary. It took an exhaustingly long time before he ambushed it and snapped its spine. The thought of eating an uncooked rodent revolted him.

He dug back into his cache of bushes with his prey. When he tried to plot a line of action, his dog's brain balked. It was terrified and maddened with helplessness.

There was good reason for its fear—Moss had Talbot's gangsters out gunning for him, and by this time the police were probably searching for him as a vicious dog.

In all his nightmares he had never imagined any so horrible. He was utterly impotent to help himself. The forces of law and crime were ranged against him; he had no way of communicating the fact that he was a man to those who could possibly help him; he was completely inarticulate; and besides, *who* could help him, except Moss? Suppose he *did* manage to evade the police, the gangsters, and sneaked past a hospital's vigilant staff, and somehow succeeded in communicating——

Even so, only Moss could perform the operation!

He had to rule out doctors and hospitals; they were too routinized to have much imagination. But, more important than that, they could not influence Moss to operate.

He scrambled to his feet and trotted cautiously through the clumps of brush in the direction of Columbus Circle. First, he had to be alert for police and gangsters. He had to find a method of communicating—but to somebody who could understand him and exert tremendous pressure on Moss.

The city's smells came to his sensitive nostrils. Like a vast blanket, covering most of them, was a sweet odor that he identified as gasoline vapor. Above it hovered the scent of vegetation, hot and moist; and below it, the musk of mankind.

To his dog's perspective, it was a different world, with a broad, distant, terrifying horizon. Smells and sounds formed scenes in his animal mind. Yet it was interesting. The pad of his paws against the soft, cushioned ground gave him an instinctive pleasure; all the clothes he needed, he carried on him; and food was not hard to find.

While he shielded himself from the police and Talbot's gangsters, he even enjoyed a sort of freedom—but it was a cowardly freedom that he did not want, that was not worth the price. As a man, he had suffered hunger, cold, lack of shelter and security, indifference. In spite of all that, his dog's body harbored a human intelligence; he belonged on his hind legs, standing erect, living the life, good or bad, of a man.

In some way he must get back to that world, out of the solitary anarchy of animality. Moss alone could return him. He must be forced to do it! He must be compelled to return the body he had robbed!

But how could Wood communicate, and who could help him?

Near the end of Central Park, he exposed himself to overwhelming danger.

He was padding along a path that skirted the broad road. A cruising black car accelerated with deadly, predatory swiftness, sped abreast of him. He heard a muffled *pop*. A bullet hissed an inch over his head.

He ducked low and scurried back into the concealing bushes. He snaked nimbly from tree to tree, keeping obstacles between him and the line of fire.

The gangsters were out of the car. He heard them beating the brush for him. Their progress was slow, while his fleet legs pumped three hundred yards of safety away from them.

He burst out of the park and scampered across Columbus Circle, reckless of traffic. On Broadway he felt more secure, hugging the buildings with dense crowds between him and the street.

When he felt certain that he had lost the gangsters, he turned west through one-way streets, alert for signs of danger.

In coping with physical danger, he discovered that his animal mind reacted instinctively, and always more cunningly than a human brain.

Impulsively, he cowered behind stoops, in doorways, behind any sort of shelter, when the traffic moved. When it stopped, packed tightly, for the light, he ran at topnotch speed. Cars skidded across his path, and several times he was almost hit; but he did not slow to a trot until he had zigzagged

downtown, going steadily away from the center of the city, and reached West Street, along North River.

He felt reasonably safe from Talbot's gangsters. But a police car approached slowly under the express highway. He crouched behind an overflowing garbage can outside a filthy restaurant. Long after it was gone, he cowered there.

The shrill wind blowing over the river and across the covered docks picked a newspaper off the pile of garbage and flattened it against the restaurant window.

Through his animal mind, frozen into numbing fear, he remembered the afternoon before—standing in front of the employment agency, talking to one of Talbot's gangsters—

A thought had come to him then: that it would be pleasant to be a catatonic instead of having to starve. He knew better now. But—

He reared to his hind legs and overturned the garbage can. It fell with a loud crash, rolling down toward the gutter, spilling refuse all over the sidewalk. Before a restaurant worker came out, roaring abuse, he pawed through the mess and seized a twisted newspaper in his mouth. It smelled of sour, rotting food, but he caught it up and ran.

Blocks away from the restaurant, he ran across a wide, torn lot, to cower behind a crumbling building. Sheltered from the river wind, he straightened out the paper and scanned the front page.

It was a day old, the same newspaper that he had thrown away before the employment agency. On the left column he found the catatonic story. It was signed by a reporter named Gilroy.

Then he took the edge of the sheet between his teeth and backed away with it until the newspaper opened clumsily, wrinkled, at the next page. He was disgusted by the fetid smell of putrefying food that clung to it; but he swallowed his gorge and kept turning the huge, stiff, unwieldy sheets with his inept teeth. He came to the editorial page and paused there, studying intently the copyright box.

He set off at a fast trot, wary against danger, staying close to walls of buildings, watching for cars that might contain

either gangsters or policemen, darting across streets to shelter—trotting on—

The air was growing darker, and the express highway cast a long shadow. Before the sun went down, he covered almost three miles along West Street, and stopped not far from the Battery.

He gaped up at the towering *Morning Post* Building. It looked impregnable, its heavy doors shut against the wind.

He stood at the main entrance, waiting for somebody to hold a door open long enough for him to lunge through it. Hopefully, he kept his eyes on an old man. When he opened the door, Wood was at his heels. But the old man shoved him back with gentle firmness.

Wood bared his fangs. It was his only answer. The man hastily pulled the door shut.

Wood tried another approach. He attached himself to a tall, gangling man who appeared rather kindly in spite of his intent face. Wood gazed up, wagging his tail awkwardly in friendly greeting. The tall man stooped and scratched Wood's ears, but he refused to take him inside. Before the door closed, Wood launched himself savagely at the thin man and almost knocked him down.

In the lobby, Wood darted through the legs surrounding him. The tall man was close behind, roaring angrily. A frightened stampede of thick-soled shoes threatened to crush Wood; but he twisted in and out between the surging feet and gained the stairs.

He scrambled up them swiftly. The second-floor entrance had plate-glass doors. It contained the executive offices.

He turned the corner and climbed up speedily. The stairs narrowed, artificially illuminated. The third and fourth floors were printing-plant rooms; he ran past; clambered by the business offices, classified advertising—

At the editorial department he panted before the heavy fire door, waiting until he regained his breath. Then he gripped the knob between his teeth and pulled it around. The door swung inward.

Thick, bitter smoke clawed his sensitive nostrils; his ears flinched at the clattering, shouting bedlam.

Between rows of littered desks, he inched and gazed

around hopefully. He saw abstracted faces, intent on typewriters that rattled out stories; young men racing around to gather batches of papers; men and women swarming in and out of the elevators. Shrewd faces, intelligent and alert—

A few had turned for an instant to look at him as he passed; then turned back to their work, almost without having seen him.

He trembled with elation. These were the men who had the power to influence Moss, and the acuteness to understand him! He squatted and put his paw on the leg of a typing reporter, staring up expectantly. The reporter stared, looked down agitatedly, and shoved him away.

"Go on, beat it!" he said angrily. "Go home!"

Wood shrank back. He did not sense danger. Worse than that, he had failed. His mind worked rapidly: suppose he *had* attracted interest, how would he have communicated his story intelligibly? How could he explain in the equivalent of words?

All at once the idea exploded in his mind. He had been a code translator in a stockbroker's office—

He sat back on his haunches and barked, loud, broken, long and short yelps. A girl screamed. Reporters jumped up defensively, surged away in a tightening ring. Wood barked out his message in Morse, painful, slow, straining a larynx that was foreign to him. He looked around optimistically for someone who might have understood.

Instead he met hostile, annoyed stares—and no comprehension.

"That's the hound that attacked me!" the tall, thin man said.

"Not for food, I hope," a reporter answered.

Wood was not entirely defeated. He began to bark his message again; but a man hurried out of the glass-enclosed editor's office.

"What's all the commotion here?" he demanded. He sighted Wood among the ring of withdrawing reporters. "Get that damned dog out of here!"

"Come on—get him out of here!" the thin man shouted.

"He's a nice, friendly dog. Give him the hypnotic eye, Gilroy."

Wood stared pleadingly at Gilroy. He had not been understood, but he had found the reporter who had written the catatonic articles! Gilroy approached cautiously, repeating phrases calculated to soothe a savage dog.

Wood darted away through the rows of desks. He was so near to success— He only needed to find a way of communicating before they caught him and put him out!

He lunged to the top of a desk and crashed a bottle of ink to the floor. It splashed into a dark puddle. Swiftly, quivering, he seized a piece of white paper, dipped his paw into the splotch of ink, and made a hasty attempt to write.

His surge of hope died quickly. The wrist of his forepaw was not the universal joint of a human being; it had a single upward articulation! When he brought his paw down on the paper, it flattened uselessly, and his claws worked in a unit. He could not draw back three to write with one. Instead, he made a streaked pad print—

Dejectedly, rather than antagonize Gilroy, Wood permitted himself to be driven back into an elevator. He wagged his tail clumsily. It was a difficult feat, calling into use alien muscles that he employed with intellectual deliberation. He sat down and assumed a grin that would have been friendly on a human face; but, even so, it reassured Gilroy. The tall reporter patted his head. Nevertheless, he put him out firmly.

But Wood had reason to feel encouraged. He had managed to get inside the building, and had attracted attention. He knew that a newspaper was the only force powerful enough to influence Moss, but there was still the problem of communication. How could he solve it? His paw was worthless for writing, with its single articulation; and nobody in the office could understand Morse code.

He crouched against the white cement wall, his harried mind darting wildly in all directions for a solution. Without a voice or prehensile fingers, his only method of communication seemed to be barking in code. In all that throng, he was certain there would be one to interpret it.

Glances *did* turn to him. At least, he had no difficulty in arousing interest. But they were incomprehending looks.

For some moments he lost his reason. He ran in and out of the deep, hurrying crowd, barking his message furiously,

jumping up at men who appeared more intelligent than the others, following them short distances until it was overwhelmingly apparent that they did not understand, then turning to other men, raising an ear-shattering din of appeal.

He met nothing but a timid pat or frightened rebuffs. He stopped his deafening yelps and cowered back against the wall, defeated. No one would attempt to interpret the barking of a dog in terms of code. When he was a man, he would probably have responded in the same way. The most intelligible message he could hope to convey by his barking was simply the fact that he was trying to attract interest. Nobody would search for any deeper meaning in a dog's barking.

He joined the traffic hastening toward the subway. He trotted along the curb, watchful for slowing cars, but more intent on the strewing of rubbish in the gutter. He was murderously envious of the human feet around him that walked swiftly and confidently to a known destination; smug, selfish feet, undeviating from their homeward path to help him. Their owners could convey the finest shadings and variations in emotion, commands, abstract thought, by speech, writing, print, through telephone, radio, books, newspapers—

But his voice was only a piercing, inarticulate yelp that infuriated human beings; his paws were good for nothing but running; his pointed face transmitted no emotions.

He trotted along the curbs of three blocks in the business district before he found a pencil stump. He picked it up in his teeth and ran to the docks on West Street, though he had only the vague outline of a last experiment in communication.

There was plenty of paper blowing around in the river wind, some of it even clean. To the stevedores, waiting at the dock for the payoff, he appeared to be frisking. A few of them whistled at him. In reality, he chased the flying paper with deadly earnestness.

When he captured a piece, he held it firmly between his forepaws. The stub of pencil was gripped in the even space separating his sharp canine fangs.

He moved the pencil in his mouth over the sheet of paper. It was clumsy and uncertain, but he produced long, wavering block letters. He wrote: "I AM A MAN." The short message

covered the whole page, leaving no space for further information.

He dropped the pencil, caught up the paper in his teeth, and ran back to the newspaper building. For the first time since he had escaped from Moss, he felt assured. His attempt at writing was crude and unformed, but the message was unmistakably clear.

He joined a group of tired young legmen coming back from assignments. He stood passively until the door was opened, then lunged confidently through the little procession of cub reporters. They scattered back cautiously, permitting him to enter without a struggle.

Again he raced up the stairs to the editorial department, put the sheet of paper down on the floor, and clutched the door-knob between his powerful teeth.

He hesitated for only an instant, to find the cadaverous reporter. Gilroy was seated at a desk, typing out his article. Carrying his message in his mouth, Wood trotted directly to Gilroy. He put his paw on the reporter's sharp knee.

"What the hell!" Gilroy gasped. He pulled his leg away startledly and shoved Wood away.

But Wood came back insistently, holding his paper stretched out to Gilroy as far as possible. He trembled hopefully until the reporter snatched the message out of his mouth. Then his muscles froze, and he stared up expectantly at the angular face, scanning it for signs of growing comprehension.

Gilroy kept his eyes on the straggling letters. His face darkened angrily.

"Who's being a wise guy here?" he shouted suddenly. Most of the staff ignored him. "Who let this mutt in and gave him a crank note to bring to me? Come on—who's the genius?"

Wood jumped around him, barking hysterically, trying to explain.

"Oh, shut up!" Gilroy rapped out. "Hey copy! Take this dog down and see that he doesn't get back in! He won't bite you."

Again Wood had failed. But he did not feel defeated. When his hysterical dread of frustration ebbed, leaving his mind clear and analytical, he realized that his failure was only one of degree. Actually, he had communicated, but lack

of space had prevented him from detailed clarity. The method was correct. He only needed to augment it.

Before the copy boy cornered him, Wood swooped up at a pencil on an empty desk.

"Should I let him keep the pencil, Mr. Gilroy?" the boy asked.

"I'll lend you mine, unless you want your arm snapped off," Gilroy snorted, turning back to his typewriter.

Wood sat back and waited beside the copy boy for the elevator to pick them up. He clenched the pencil possessively between his teeth. He was impatient to get out of the building and back to the lot on West Street, where he could plan a system of writing a more explicit message. His block letters were unmanageably huge and shaky; but, with the same logical detachment he used to employ when he was a code translator, he attacked the problem fearlessly.

He knew that he could not use the printed or written alphabet. He would have to find a substitute that his clumsy teeth could manage, and that could be compressed into less space.

Gilroy was annoyed by the collie's insistent returning. He crumpled the enigmatic, unintelligible note and tossed it in the wastebasket, but beyond considering it as a practical joke, he gave it no further thought.

His long, large-jointed fingers swiftly tapped out the last page of his story. He ended it with a short line of zeros and dashes, gathered a sheaf of papers, and brought it to the editor.

The editor studied the lead paragraph intently and skimmed hastily through the rest of the story. He appeared uncomfortable.

"Not bad, eh?" Gilroy exulted.

"Uh-what?" The editor jerked his head up blankly. "Oh. No, it's pretty good. Very good, in fact."

"I've got to hand it to you," Gilroy continued admiringly. "I'd have given up. You know—nothing to work on, just a bunch of fantastic events with no beginning and no end. Now, all of a sudden, the cops pick up a nut who acts like a dog and has an incision like the catatonics. Maybe it isn't any clearer,

but at least we've got something actually happening. I don't know—I feel pretty good. We'll get to the bottom——”

The editor listened abstractedly, growing more uneasy from sentence to sentence. “Did you see the latest case?” he interrupted.

“Sure. I'm in soft with the resident physician. If I hadn't been following this story right from the start, I'd have said the one they just hauled in was a genuine screwball. He goes bounding around on the floor, sniffs at things, and makes a pathetic attempt to bark. But he has an incision on the back of his neck. It's just like the others—even has two professional stitches, and it's the same number of millimeters away from the spine. He's a catatonic, or whatever we'll have to call it now——”

“Well, the story's shaping up faster than I thought it would,” the editor said, evening the edges of Gilroy's article with ponderous care. “But——” His voice dropped huskily. “Well, I don't know how to tell you this, Gilroy.”

The reporter drew his brows together and looked at him obliquely. “What's the hard word this time?” he asked mystified.

“Oh, the usual thing. You know. I've got to take you off this story. It's too bad, because it was just getting hot. I hated to tell you, Gilroy; but, after all, what the hell. That's part of the game.”

“It is, huh?” Gilroy flattened his hands on the desk and leaned over them resentfully. “Whose toes did we step on this time? Nobody's. The hospital has no kick coming. I couldn't mention names because I didn't know any to mention. Well, then, what's the angle?”

The editor shrugged. “I can't argue. It's a front-office order. But I've got a good lead for you to follow tomorrow——”

Savagely, Gilroy strode to the window and glared out at the darkening street. The business department wasn't behind the order, he reasoned angrily; they weren't getting ads from the hospital. And as for the big boss—Talbot never interfered with policy, except when he had to squash a revealing crime story. By eliminating the editors, who yielded an inch when

public opinion demanded a mile, the business department, who fought only when advertising was at stake, Gilroy could blame no one but Talbot.

Gilroy rapped his bony knuckles impatiently against the window casement. What was the point of Talbot's order? Perhaps he had a new way of paying off traitors. Gilroy dismissed the idea immediately; he knew Talbot wouldn't go to that expense and risk possible leakage when the old way of sealing a body in a cement block and dumping it in the river was still effective and cheap.

"I give up," Gilroy said without turning around. "I can't figure out Talbot's angle."

"Neither can I," the editor admitted.

At that confession, Gilroy wheeled. "Then you *know* it's Talbot!"

"Of course. Who else could it be? But don't let it throw you, pal." He glanced around cautiously as he spoke. "Let this catatonic yarn take a rest. Tomorrow you can find out what's behind this bulletin that Johnson phoned in from City Hall."

Gilroy absently scanned the scribbled note. His scowl wrinkled into puzzlement.

"What the hell is this? All I can make out of it is the A.S.P.C.A. and dog lovers are protesting to the mayor against organized murder of brown-and-white collies."

"That's just what it is."

"And you think Talbot's gang is behind it, naturally." When the editor nodded, Gilroy threw up his hands in despair. "This gang stuff is getting too deep for me, chief. I used to be able to call their shots. I knew why a torpedo was bumped off, or a crime was pulled; but I don't mind telling you that I can't see why a gang boss wants a catatonic yarn hushed up, or sends his mob around plugging innocent collies. I'm going home . . . get drunk—"

He stormed out of the office. Before the editor had time to shrug his shoulders, Gilroy was back again, his deep eyes blazing furiously.

"What a pair of prize dopes we are, chief!" he shouted. "Remember that collie—the one that came in with a hunk of paper

in his mouth? We threw him out, remember? Well, *that's the bound Talbot's gang is out gunning for! He's trying to carry messages to us!*"

"Hey, you're right!" The editor heaved out of the chair and stood uncertainly. "Where is he?"

Gilroy waved his long arms expressively.

"Then come on! To hell with hats and coats!"

They dashed into the staff room. The skeleton night crew loafed around, reading papers before moping out to follow up undeveloped leads.

"Put those papers down!" the editor shouted. "Come on with me—every one of you."

He herded them, baffled and annoyed, into the elevator. At the entrance to the building, he searched up and down the street.

"He's not around, Gilroy. All right, you deadbeats, divide up and chase around the streets, whistling. When you see a brown-and-white collie, whistle to him. He'll come to you. Now beat it and do as I say."

They moved off slowly. "Whistle?" one called back anxiously.

"Yes, whistle!" Gilroy declared. "Forget your dignity. Whistle!"

They scattered, whistling piercingly the signals that are supposed to attract dogs. The few people around the business district that late were highly interested and curious, but Gilroy left the editor whistling at the newspaper building, while he whistled toward West Street. He left the shrill calls blowing away from the river, and searched along the wide highway in the growing dark.

For an hour he pried into dark spaces between the docks, patiently covering his ground. He found nothing but occasional longshoremen unloading trucks and a light uptown traffic. There were only homeless, prowling mongrels and starving drifters; no brown-and-white collie.

He gave up when he began to feel hungry. He returned to the building hoping the others had more luck, and angry with himself for not having followed the dog when he had the chance.

The editor was still there, whistling more frantically than

ever. He had gathered a little band of inquisitive onlookers, who waited hopefully for something to happen. The reporters were also returning.

"Find anything?" the editor paused to ask.

"Nope. He didn't show up here?"

"Not yet. Oh, he'll be back, all right. I'm not afraid of that." And he went back to his persistent whistling, disregarding stares and rude remarks. He was a man with an iron will. He sneered openly at the defeated reporters when they slunk past him into the building.

In the comparative quiet of the city, above the editor's shrills, Gilroy heard swiftly pounding feet. He gazed over the heads of the pack that had gathered around the editor.

A reporter burst into view, running at top speed and doing his best to whistle attractively through dry lips at a dog streaking away from him.

"Here he comes!" Gilroy shouted. He broke through the crowd and his long legs flashed over the distance to the collie. In his excitement, empty, toneless wind blew between his teeth; but the dog shot straight for him just the same. Gilroy snatched a dirty piece of paper out of his mouth. Then the dog was gone, toward the docks; and a black car rode ominously down the street.

Gilroy half started in pursuit, paused, and stared at the slip of paper in his hand. For a moment he blamed the insufficient light, but when the editor came up to him, yelling blasphemy for letting the dog escape, Gilroy handed him the unbelievable note.

"That dog can take care of himself," Gilroy said. "Read this."

The editor drew his brows together over the message. It read:

;;;;; ;;;;:":::;; ;;; ..";, :;;;:;;;"::; :;;:"";...
 ".; "":;::;";;""""; ;;; ..";:;;:;;; "":; ;;; ..";;;

"Well, I'll be damned!" the editor exclaimed. "Is it a gag?"

"Gag, my eye!"

"Well, I can't make head or tail of it!" the editor protested.

Gilroy looked around undeterminedly, as if for someone to help them. "You're not supposed to. It's a code message."

He swung around, stabbing an enormously long, knobbed finger at the editor. "Know anyone who can translate code—cryptograms?"

"Uh—let's see. How about the police, or the G-men——"

Gilroy snorted. "Give it to the bulls before we know what's in it!" He carefully tucked the crudely penciled note into his breast pocket and buttoned his coat. "You stick around outside here, chief, I'll be back with the translation. Keep an eye out for the pooch."

He loped off before the editor could more than open his mouth.

In the index room of the Forty-second Street Library, Gilroy crowded into the telephone booth and dialed a number. His eyes ached and he had a dizzy headache. Close reasoning always scrambled his wits. His mind was intuitive rather than ploddingly analytical.

"Executive office, please," he told the night operator. "There must be somebody there. I don't care if it's the business manager himself. I want to speak to somebody in the executive office. I'll wait." He lolled, bent into a convenient shape, against the wall. "Hello. Who's this? . . . Oh, good. Listen, Rothbart, this is Gilroy. Do me a favor, huh? You're nearest the front entrance. You'll find the chief outside the door. Send him to the telephone, and take his place until he gets through. While you're out there, watch for a brown-and-white collie. Nab him if he shows up and bring him inside . . . Will you? . . . Thanks!"

Gilroy held the receiver to his ear, defeatedly amusing himself by identifying the sounds coming over the wire. He was no longer in a hurry, and when he had to pay another nickel before the editor finally came to the telephone, he did not mind.

"What's up, Gilroy?" the editor asked hopefully.

"Nothing, chief. That's why I called up. I went through a military code book, some kids' stuff, and a history of cryptography through the ages. I found some good codes, but nobody seems to've thought of this punctuation code. Ever see the Confederate cipher? Boy, it's a real dazzler—wasn't cracked until after the Civil War was over! The old Greeks

wound strips of paper around identical sticks. When they were unrolled, the strips were gibberish; around the sticks, the words fell right into order."

"Cut it out," the editor snapped. "Did you find anything useful?"

"Sure. Everybody says the big clue is the table of frequency—the letters used more often than others. But, on the other hand, they say that in short messages, like ours, important clues like the single words 'a' and 'I,' bigrams like 'am,' 'as,' and even trigrams like 'the' or 'but,' are often omitted entirely."

"Well, that's fine. What're you going to do now?"

"I don't know. Try the cops after all, I guess."

"Nothing doing," the editor said firmly. "Ask a librarian to help."

Gilroy seized the inspiration. He slammed down the receiver and strode to the reference desk.

"Where can I get hold of somebody who knows cryptograms?" he rasped.

The attendant politely consulted his colleagues. "The guard of the manuscript room is pretty good," he said, returning. "Down the hall—"

Gilroy shouted his thanks and broke into an ungainly run, ignoring the attendant's order to walk. At the manuscript room he clattered the gate until the keeper appeared and let him in.

"Take a look at this," he commanded, flinging the message on a table.

The keeper glanced curiously at it. "Oh, cryptograms, eh?"

"Yeah. Can you make anything out of it?"

"Well, it looks like a good one," the guard replied cautiously, "but I've been cracking them all for the last twenty years." They sat down at the table in the empty room. For some time the guard stared fixedly at the scrawled note. "Five symbols," he said finally. "Semicolon, period, comma, colon, quotation marks. Thirteen word units, each with an even number of symbols. They must be used in combinations of two."

"I figured that out already," Gilroy rapped out. "What's it say?"

The guard lifted his head, offended. "Give me a chance. Bacon's code wasn't solved for three centuries."

Gilroy groaned. He did not have so much time on his hands.

"There're only thirteen word units here," the guard went on, undaunted by the Bacon example. "Can't use frequency, bigrams or trigrams."

"I know that already," Gilroy said hoarsely.

"Then why'd you come to me if you're so smart?"

Gilroy hitched his chair away. "O.K., I won't bother you."

"Five symbols to represent twenty-six letters. Can't be. Must be something like the Russian nihilist code. They can represent only twenty-five letters. The missing one is either 'q' or 'j,' most likely, because they're not used much. Well, I'll tell you what I think."

"What's that?" Gilroy demanded, all alert.

"You'll have to reason *a priori* or whatever it is."

"Any way you want," Gilroy sighed. "Just get on with it."

"The square root of twenty-five is five. Whoever wrote this note must've made a square of letters, five wide and five deep. That sounds right." The guard smiled and nodded cheerfully. "Possible combinations in a square of twenty-five letters is . . . uh . . . 625. The double symbols must identify the lines down and across. Possible combinations, twenty-five. Combinations all told . . . hm-m-m . . . 15,625. Not so good. If there's a key word, we'll have to search the dictionary until we find it. Possible combinations, 15,625 multiplied by the English vocabulary—that is, if the key word is English."

Gilroy raised himself to his feet. "I can't stand it," he moaned. "I'll be back in an hour."

"No, don't go," the guard said. "You've been helping me a lot. I don't think we'll have to go through more than 625 combinations at the most. That'll take no time at all."

He spoke, of course, in relative terms. Bacon code, three centuries; Confederate code, fifteen years; war-time Russian code, unsolved. Cryptographers must look forward to eternity.

Gilroy seated himself, while the guard plotted a square:

;	"	,	.	:	
a	b	c	d	e	;
f	g	h	i	j	"
k	l	m	n	o	,
p	r	s	t	u	.
v	w	x	y	z	:

The first symbol combination, two semicolons, translated to "a," by reading down the first line, from the top semicolon, and across from the side semicolon. The next, a semicolon and a comma, read "k." He went on in this fashion until he screwed up his face and pushed the half-completed translation to Gilroy. It read:

"akdd kyoiztou kp tbo eztztkprepd"

"Does it make sense to you?" he asked anxiously.

Gilroy strangled, unable to reply.

"It could be Polish," the guard explained, "or Japanese."

The harassed reporter fled.

When he returned an hour later, after having eaten and tramped across town, nervously chewing cigarettes, he found the guard defended from him by a breastwork of heaped papers.

"Does it look any better?" Gilroy asked hoarsely.

The guard was too absorbed to look up or answer. By peering over his shoulder, Gilroy saw that he had plotted another square. The papers on the table were covered with discarded letter keys; at a rough guess, Gilroy estimated that the keeper had made over a hundred of them.

The one he was working with had been formed as the result of methodical elimination. His first square, the guard had kept, changing the positions of the punctuation marks. When that had failed, he altered his alphabet square, tried that, and reversed his punctuation marks once more. Patient and plodding the guard had formed this square:

,	.	;	"	:	
z	u	o	j	e	,
y	t	n	i	d	.
x	s	m	h	c	;
w	r	l	g	b	"
v	p	k	f	a	:

Without haste he counted down under the semicolon and across from the side semicolon, stopping at "m." Gilroy followed him, nodding at the result. He was faster than the old guard at interpreting the semicolon and comma—"o." The period and semicolon, repeated twice, came to "ss." First word: "moss."

Gilroy straightened up and took a deep breath. He bent over again and counted down and across with the guard, through the whole message, which the old man had lined off between every two symbols. Completed, it read:

;;/;/./;/ /;/:././"/::/./././;/;/ /.."/;/./
 moss operated on the
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"Hm-m-m," the guard mused. "That makes sense, if I knew what it meant."

But Gilroy had snatched the papers out of his hand. The gate clanged shut after him.

Returning to the office in a taxi, Gilroy was not too joyful. He rapped on the inside window. "Speed it up! I've seen the sights."

He thought, if the dog's been bumped off, good-bye catatonic story! The dog was his only link with the code writer.

Wood slunk along the black, narrow alleys behind the wholesale fruit markets on West Street. Battered cans and crates of rotting fruit made welcome obstacles and shelters if Talbot's gangsters were following him.

He knew that he had to get away from the river section. The gangsters must have definitely recognized him; they would call Talbot's headquarters for greater forces. With their speedy cars they could patrol the borders of the district he was operating in, and close their lines until he was trapped.

More important was the fact that reporters had been sent out to search for him. Whether or not his simple code had

been deciphered did not matter very much; the main thing was that Gilroy at last knew he was trying to communicate with him.

Wood's unerring animal sense of direction led him through the maze of densely shadowed alleys to a point nearest the newspaper office. He peered around the corner, up and down the street. The black gang car was out of sight. But he had to make an unprotected dash of a hundred yards, in the full glare of the street lights, to the building entrance.

His powerful leg muscles gathered. He sped over the hard cement sidewalk. The entrance drew nearer. His legs pumped more furiously, shortening the dangerous space more swiftly than a human being could; and for that he was grateful.

He glimpsed a man standing impatiently at the door. At the last possible moment, Wood checked his rush and flung himself toward the thick glass plate.

"There you are!" the editor cried. "Inside—quick!"

He thrust open the door. They scurried inside and commandeered an elevator, ran through the newsroom to the editor's office.

"Boy, I hope you weren't seen! It'd be curtains for both of us."

The editor squirmed uneasily behind his desk, from time to time glancing disgruntledly at his watch and cursing Gilroy's long absence. Wood stretched out on the cold floor and panted. He had expected his note to be deciphered by then, and even hoped to be recognized as a human being in a dog's body. But he realized that Gilroy probably was still engaged in decoding it.

At any rate he was secure for a while. Before long, Gilroy would return; then his story would be known. Until then he had patience.

Wood raised his head and listened. He recognized Gilroy's characteristic pace that consumed at least four feet at a step. Then the door slammed open and shut behind the reporter.

"The dog's here, huh? Wait'll you take a look at what I got!"

He threw a square of paper before the editor. Wood scanned the editor's face as he eagerly read it. He ignored the vast hamburger that Gilroy unwrapped for him. He was be-

wildered by Gilroy's lack of more than ordinary interest in him; but perhaps the editor would understand.

"So that's it! Moss and Talbot, eh? It's getting a lot clearer."

"I get Moss's angle," Gilroy said. "He's the only guy around here who could do an operation like that. But Talbot—I don't get his game. And who sent the note—how'd he get the dope—where is he?"

Wood almost went mad with frustration. He could explain; he knew all there was to be known about Talbot's interest in Moss's experiment. The problem of communication had been solved. Moss and Talbot were exposed; but he was as far as ever from regaining his own body.

He had to write another cipher message—longer, this time, and more explicit, answering the questions Gilroy raised. But to do that— He shivered. To do that, he would have to run the gang patrol; and his enciphering square was in the corner of a lot. It would be too dark—

"We've got to get him to lead us to the one who wrote the message," Gilroy said determinedly. "That's the only way we can corner Moss and Talbot. Like this, all we have is an accusation and no legal proof."

"He must be around here somewhere."

Gilroy fastened his eyes on Wood. "That's what I think. The dog came here and barked, trying to get us to follow him. When we chased him out, he came back with a scrawled note about a half hour later. Then he brought the code message within another hour. The writer must be pretty near here. After the dog eats, we'll—" He gulped audibly and raised his bewildered gaze to the editor. Swiftly, he slipped off the edge of the desk and fumbled in the long hair on Wood's neck. "Look at this, chief—a piece of surgical plaster. When the dog bent his head to eat, the hair fell away from it."

"And you think he's a catatonic?" The editor smiled pityingly and shook his head. "You're jumpy, Gilroy."

"Maybe I am. But I'd like to see what's under the plaster."

Wood's heart pumped furiously. He knew that his incision was the precise duplicate of the catatonics', and if Gilroy could see it, he would immediately understand. When Gilroy picked at the plaster, he tried to bear the stabbing pain; but he had to squirm away. The wound was raw and new, and

the deeply rooted hair was firmly glued to the plaster. He permitted Gilroy to try again. The sensation was far too fierce; he was afraid the incision would rip wide open.

"Stop it," the editor said squeamishly. "He'll bite you."

Gilroy straightened up. "I could take it off with some ether."

"You don't really think he was operated on, do you? Moss doesn't operate on dogs. He probably got into a fight, or one of Talbot's torpedoes creased him with a bullet."

The telephone bell rang insistently. "I'd still like to see what's under it," Gilroy said as the editor removed the receiver. Wood's hopes died suddenly. He felt that he was to blame for resisting Gilroy.

"What's up, Blaine?" the editor asked. He listened absorbedly, his face darkening. "O.K. Stay away if you don't want to take a chance. Phone your story in to the rewrite desk." He replaced the receiver and said to Gilroy: "Trouble, plenty of it. Talbot's gang cars are cruising around this district. Blaine was afraid to run them. I don't know how you're going to get the dog through."

Wood was alarmed. He left his meal unfinished and agitated toward the door, whimpering involuntarily.

Gilroy glanced curiously at him. "I'd swear he understood what you said. Did you see the change that came over him?"

"That's the way they react to voices," the editor said.

"Well, we've got to get him to his master," Gilroy mused, biting the inside of his cheek. "I can do it—if you're in with me."

"Of course I am. How?"

"Follow me." Wood and the editor went through the news-room on the cadaverous reporter's swift heels. In silence they waited for an elevator, descended to the lobby. "Wait here beside the door," Gilroy said. "When I give the signal, come running."

"What signal?" the editor cried, but Gilroy had loped into the street and out of sight.

They waited tensely. In a few minutes a taxi drew up to the curb and Gilroy opened the door, sitting alertly inside. He watched the corner behind him. No one moved for a long while; then a black gang car rode slowly and vigilantly past

the taxi. An automatic rifle barrel glinted in the yellow light. Gilroy waited until a moment after it turned into West Street. He waved his arms frantically.

The editor scooped Wood up in his arms, burst open the door, and darted across the sidewalk into the cab.

"Step on it!" Gilroy ordered harshly. "Up West Street!"

The taxi accelerated suddenly. Wood crouched on the floor, trembling, in despair. He had exhausted his ingenuity and he was as far as ever from regaining his body. They expected him to lead them to his master; they still did not realize that he had written the message. Where should he lead them—how could he convince them that he was the writer?

"I think this is far enough." Gilroy broke the silence. He tapped on the window. The driver stopped. Gilroy and the editor got out, Wood following indecisively. Gilroy paid and waved the driver away. In the quiet isolation of the broad commercial highway, he bent his great height to Wood's level. "Come on, boy!" he urged. "Home!"

Wood was in a panic of dismay. He could think of only one place to lead them. He set off at a slow trot that did not tax them. Hugging the walls, sprinting across streets, he headed cautiously downtown.

They followed him behind the markets fronting the highway, over a hemmed-in lot. He picked his way around the deep, treacherous foundation of a building that had been torn down, up and across piles of rubbish, to a black-shadowed clearing at the lot's end. He halted passively.

Gilroy and the editor peered around into the blackness. "Come out!" Gilroy called hoarsely. "We're your friends. We want to help you."

When there was no response, they explored the lot, lighting matches to illuminate dark corners of the foundation. Wood watched them with confused emotions. By searching in the garbage heaps and the crumbling walls of the foundation, they were merely wasting time.

As closely as possible in the dark, he located the site of his enciphering square. He stood near it and barked clamorously. Gilroy and the editor hastily left their futile prodding.

"He must've seen something," the editor observed in a whisper.

Gilroy cupped a match in his hand and moved the light back and forth in the triangular corner of the cleared space. He shrugged.

"Not around there," the editor said. "He's pointing at the ground."

Gilroy lowered the match. Before its light struck the ground, he yelped and dropped it, waving his burned fingers in the cool air. The editor murmured sympathy and scratched another match.

"Is this what you're looking for—a lot of letters in a square?"

Wood and Gilroy crowded close. The reporter struck his own match. In its light he narrowly inspected the crudely scratched encoding square.

"Be back in a second," he said. It was too dark to see his face, but Wood heard his voice, harsh and strained. "Getting flashlight."

"What'll I do if the guy comes around?" the editor asked hastily.

"Nothing," Gilroy rasped. "He won't. Don't step on the square."

Gilroy vanished into the night. The editor struck another match and scrutinized the ground with Deerslayer thoroughness.

"What the hell did he see?" he pondered. "That guy——" He shook his head defeatedly and dropped the match.

Never in his life had Wood been so passionately excited. What *had* Gilroy discovered? Was it merely another circumstantial fact, like his realization that Talbot's gangsters were gunning for Wood; or was it a suspicion of Wood's identity? Gilroy had replied that the writer would not reappear, but that could have meant anything or nothing. Wood frantically searched for a way of finally demonstrating who he really was. He found only a negative plan—he would follow Gilroy's lead.

With every minute that passed, the editor grew angrier, shifting his leaning position against the brick wall, pacing around. When Gilroy came back, flashing a bright cone of light before him, the editor lashed out.

"Get it over with, Gilroy. I can't waste the whole night.

Even if we do find out what happened, we can't print it——"

Gilroy ignored him. He splashed the brilliant ray of his huge five-celled flashlight over the enciphering square.

"Now look at it," he said. He glanced intently at Wood, who also obeyed his order and stood at the editor's knee, searching the ground. "The guy who made that square was very cautious—he put his back to the wall and faced the lot, so he wouldn't be taken by surprise. The square is upside-down to us. No, wait!" he said sharply as the editor moved to look at the square from its base. "I don't want your footprints on it. Look at the bottom, where the writer must've stood."

The editor stared closely. "What do you see?" he asked puzzledly.

"Well, the ground is moist and fairly soft. There should be footprints. There are. *Only they're not human!*"

Raucously, the editor cleared his throat. "You're kidding."

"*Gestalt*," Gilroy said, almost to himself, "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. You get a bunch of unconnected facts, all apparently unrelated to each other. Then suddenly one fact pops up—it doesn't seem any more important than the others—but all at once the others click into place, and you get a complete picture."

"What are you mumbling about?" the editor whispered anxiously.

Gilroy stooped his great height and picked up a yellow stump of pencil. He turned it over in his hand before passing it to the editor.

"That's the pencil this dog snatched before we threw him out. You can see his teethmarks on the sides, where he carried it. But there're teethmarks around the unsharpened end. Maybe I'm nuts——" He took the dirty code message out of his inside breast pocket and smoothed it out. "I saw these smudges the minute I looked at the note, but they didn't mean anything to me then. What do you make of them?"

The editor obediently examined the note in the glare of the flash. "They could be palmprints."

"Sure—a baby's," Gilroy said witheringly. "Only they're not. We both know they're pawprints, the same as are at the

bottom of the square. You know what I'm thinking. Look't the way the dog is listening."

Without raising his voice, he half turned his head and said quite casually, "Here comes the guy who wrote the note, right behind the dog."

Involuntarily, Wood spun around to face the dark lot. Even his keen animal eyes could detect no one in the gloom. When he lifted his gaze to Gilroy, he stared full into grim, frightened eyes.

"Put that in your pipe," Gilroy said tremulously. "That's his reaction to the pitch of my voice, eh? You can't get out of it, chief. We've got a werewolf on our hands, thanks to Moss and Talbot."

Wood barked and frisked happily around Gilroy's towering legs. He had been understood!

But the editor laughed, a perfectly normal, humorous, unconvinced laugh. "You're wasting your time writing for a newspaper, Gilroy—"

"O.K., smart guy," Gilroy replied savagely. "Stop your cackling and tell me the answer to this—"

"The dog comes into the newsroom and starts barking. I thought he was just trying to get us to follow him; but I never heard a dog bark in long and short yelps before. He ran up the stairs, right past all the other floors—business office, advertising department, and so on—to the newsroom, because that's where he wanted to go. We chased him out. He came back with a scrawled note, saying: 'I am a man.' Those four words took up the whole page. Even a kid learning how to write wouldn't need so much space. But if you hold the pencil in your mouth and try to connect the bars of the letters, you'd have letters something like the ones on the note.

"He needed a smaller system of letters, so he made up a simple code. But he'd lost his pencil. He stole one of ours. Then he came back, watching out for Talbot's gang cars.

"There aren't any footprints at the bottom of this square—only a dog's pawprints. And there're two smudges on the message, where he put his paws to hold down the paper while he wrote on it. All along he's been listening to every word we said. When I said in a conversational tone that the writer was standing behind him, he whirled around. Well?"

The editor was still far from convinced. "Good job of training——"

"For a guy I used to respect, you certainly have the brain of a flea. Here—I don't know your name," he said to Wood. "What would you do if you had Moss here?"

Wood snarled.

"You're going to tell us where to find him. I don't know how, but you were smart enough to figure out a code, so you can figure out another way of communicating. Then you'll tell us what happened."

It was Wood's moment of supreme triumph. True, he didn't have his body yet, but now it was only a matter of time. His joy at Gilroy's words was violent enough to shake even the editor's literal, unimaginative mind.

"You still don't believe it," Gilroy accused.

"How can I?" the editor cried plaintively. "I don't even know why I'm talking to you as if it could be possible."

Gilroy probed in a pile of rubbish until he uncovered a short piece of wood. He quickly drew a single line of small alphabetical symbols. He threw the stick away, stepped back and flashed the light directly at the alphabet. "Now spell out what happened."

Wood sprang back and forth before the alphabet, stopping at the letters he required and indicating them by pointing his snout down.

"T-a-l-b-o-t w-a-n-t-e-d a y-o-u-n-g h-e-a-l-t-h-y b-o-d-y M-o-s-s s-a-i-d h-e c-o-u-l-d g-i-v-e i-t t-o h-i-m——"

"Well, I'll be damned!" the editor blurted.

After that exclamation there was silence. Only the almost inaudible padding of Wood's paws on the soft ground, his excited panting, and the hoarse breathing of the men could be heard. But Wood had won!

Gilroy sat at the typewriter in his apartment; Wood stood beside his chair and watched the swiftly leaping keys; but the editor stamped nervously up and down the floor.

"I've wasted half the night," he complained, "and if I print this story I'll be canned. Why, damn it, Gilroy—— How do you think the public'll take it if I can't believe it myself?"

"Hm-m-m," Gilroy explained.

"You're sacrificing our job. You know that, don't you?"

"It doesn't mean that much to me," Gilroy said without glancing up. "Wood has to get back his body. He can't do it unless we help him."

"Doesn't that sound ridiculous to you? 'He has to get back his body.' Imagine what the other papers'll do to that sentence!"

Gilroy shifted impatiently. "They won't see it," he stated.

"Then why in hell are you writing the story?" the editor asked, astounded. "Why don't you want me to go back to the office?"

"Quiet! I'll be through in a minute." He inserted another sheet of paper and his flying fingers covered it with black, accusing words. Wood's mouth opened in a canine grin when Gilroy smiled down at him and nodded his head confidently. "You're practically walking around on your own feet, pal. Let's go."

He flapped on his coat and carelessly dropped a battered hat on his craggy head. Wood braced himself to dart off. The editor lingered.

"Where're we going?" he asked cautiously.

"To Moss, naturally, unless you can think of a better place."

Wood could not tolerate the thought of delay. He tugged at the leg of the editor's pants.

"You bet I can think of a better place. Hey, cut it out, Wood—I'm coming along. But, hell, Gilroy! It's after ten. I haven't done a thing. Have a heart and make it short."

With Gilroy hastening him by the arm and Wood dragging at his leg, the editor had to accompany them, though he continued his protests. At the door, however, he covered Wood while Gilroy hailed a taxi. When Gilroy signaled that the street was clear, he ran across the sidewalk with Wood bundled in his arms.

Gilroy gave the address. At its sound, Wood's mouth opened in a silent snarl. He was only a short distance from Moss, with two eloquent spokesmen to articulate his demands, and, if necessary, to mobilize public opinion for him! What could Moss do against that power?

They rode up Seventh Avenue and along Central Park

West. Only the editor felt that they were speeding. Gilroy and Wood fretted irritably at every stop signal.

At Moss's street, Gilroy cautioned the driver to proceed slowly. The surgeon's house was guarded by two loitering black cars.

"Let us out at the corner," Gilroy said.

They scurried into the entrance to a rooming house.

"Now what?" the editor demanded. "We can't fight past them."

"How about the back way, Wood?"

Wood shook his head negatively. There was no entrance through the rear.

"Then the only way is across the roofs," Gilroy determined. He put his head out and scanned the buildings between them and Moss. "This one is six stories, the next two five, the one right next to Moss's is six, and Moss's is three. We'll have to climb up and down fire escapes and get in through Moss's roof. Ready?"

"I suppose so," the editor said fatalistically.

Gilroy tried the door. It was locked. He chose a bell at random and rang it vigorously. There was a brief pause; then the tripper buzzed. He thrust open the door and burst up the stairs, four at a leap.

"Who's there?" a woman shouted down the stair well.

They galloped past her. "Sorry, lady," Gilroy called back. "We rang your bell by mistake."

She looked disappointed and rather frightened; but Gilroy anticipated her emotion. He smiled and gayly waved his hand as he loped by.

The roof door was locked with a stout hook that had rusted into its eye. Gilroy smashed it open with the heel of his palm. They broke out onto a tarred roof, chill and black in the overcast, threatening night.

Wood and Gilroy discovered the fire escape leading to the next roof. They dashed for it. Gilroy tucked Wood under his left arm and swung himself over the anchored ladder.

"This is insane!" the editor said hoarsely. "I've never done such a crazy thing in my life. Why can't we be smart and call the cops?"

"Yeah?" Gilroy sneered without stopping. "What's your charge?"

"Against Moss? Why——"

"Think about it on the way."

Gilroy and Wood were on the next roof, waiting impatiently for the editor to descend. He came down quickly but his thoughts wandered.

"You can charge him with what he did. He made a man into a dog."

"That would sound swell in the indictment. Forget it. Just walk lightly. This damned roof creaks and lets out a noise like a drum."

They advanced over the tarred sheets of metal. Beneath them, they could hear their occasionally heavy tread resound through hollow rooms. Wood's claws tapped a rhythmic tattoo.

They straddled over a low wall dividing the two buildings. Wood sniffed the air for enemies lurking behind chimneys, vents and doors. At instants of suspicion, Gilroy briefly flashed his light ahead. They climbed up a steel ladder to the six-story building adjoining Moss's.

"How about a kidnap charge?" the editor asked as they stared down over the wall at the roof of Moss's building.

"Please don't annoy me. Wood's body is in the observation ward at the hospital. How're you going to prove that Moss kidnaped him?"

The editor nodded in the gloom and searched for another legal charge. Gilroy splashed his light over Moss's roof. It was unguarded.

"Come on, Wood," he said, inserting the flashlight in his belt. He picked up Wood under his left arm. In order to use his left hand in climbing, he had to squeeze Wood's middle in a strangle hold.

The only thing Wood was thankful for was that he could not look at the roof three stories below. Gilroy held him securely, tightly enough for his breath to struggle in whistling gasps. His throat knotted when Gilroy gashed his hand on a sharp sliver of dry paint scale.

"It's all right," Gilroy hissed reassuringly. "We're almost there."

Above them, he saw the editor clambering heavily down the insecurely bolted ladder. Between the anchoring plates it groaned and swayed away from the unclean brick wall. Rung by rung they descended warily, Gilroy clutching for each hold, Wood suspended in space and helpless—both feeling their hearts drop when the ladder jerked under their weight.

Then Gilroy lowered his foot and found the solid roof beneath it. He grinned impetuously in the dark. Wood writhed out of his hold. The editor cursed his way down to them.

He followed them to the rear fire escape. This time he offered to carry Wood down. Swinging out over the wall, Wood felt the editor's muscles quiver. Wood had nothing but a miserable animal life to lose, and yet even he was not entirely fearless in the face of the hidden dangers they were braving. He could sympathize with the editor, who had everything to lose and did not wholly believe that Wood was not a dog. Discovering a human identity in an apparently normal collie must have been a staggeringly hard fact for him to swallow.

He set Wood down on the iron bars. Gilroy quickly joined them, and yanked fiercely at the top window. It was locked.

"Need a jimmy to pry it open," Gilroy mused. He fingered the edges of the frame. "Got a knife on you?"

The editor fished absent-mindedly through his pockets. He brought out a handful of keys, pencil stubs, scraps of paper, matches, and a cheap sheathed nail file. Gilroy snatched the file.

He picked at the putty in the ancient casement with the point. It chipped away easily. He loosened the top and sides.

"Now," he breathed. "Stand back a little and get ready to catch it."

He inserted the file at the top and levered the glass out of the frame. It stuck at the bottom and sides, refusing to fall. He caught the edges and lifted it out, laying it down noiselessly out of the way.

"Let's go." He backed in through the empty casement. "Hand Wood through."

They stood in the dark room, under the same roof with Moss. Wood exultantly sensed the proximity of the one man he hated—the one man who could return his body to him. “Now!” he thought. “Now!”

“Gilroy,” the editor urged, “we can charge Moss with vivisection.”

“That’s right,” Gilroy whispered. But they heard the door-knob rattle in his hand and turn cautiously.

“Then where’re you going?” the editor rasped in a panic.

“We’re here,” Gilroy replied coolly. “So let’s finish it.”

The door swung back; pale weak light entered timidly. They stared down the long, narrow, dismal hall to the stairs at the center of the house. Down those stairs they would find Moss—

Wood’s keen animal sense of smell detected Moss’s personal odor. The surgeon had been there not long before.

He crouched around the stairhead and cautiously lowered himself from step to step. Gilroy and the editor clung to banister and wall, resting the bulk of their weight on their hands. They turned the narrow spiral where Clarence had fatally encountered the sharpness of Wood’s fangs, down to the hall floor where his fat body had sprawled in blood.

Distantly Wood heard a cane tap nervously, momentarily; then it stopped at a heated, hissed command that scarcely carried even to his ears. He glanced up triumphantly at Gilroy, his deep eyes glittering, his mouth grinning savagely, baring the red tongue lolling in the white deadly trap of fangs. He had located and identified the sounds. Both Moss and Talbot were in a room at the back of the house—

He hunched his powerful shoulders and advanced slowly, stiff-legged, with the ominous air of all meat hunters stalking prey from ambush. Outside the closed door he crouched, muscles gathered for the lunge, his ears flat back along his pointed head to protect them from injury. But they heard muffled voices inaudible to men’s dulled senses.

“Sit down, doc,” Talbot said. “The truck’ll be here soon.”

“I’m not concerned with my personal safety,” Moss replied tartly. “It’s merely that I dislike inefficiency, especially when you claim—”

"Well, it's not Jake's fault. He's coming back from a job."

Wood could envision the faint sneer on Moss's scrubbed pink face. "You'll collapse any minute within the next six months, but the acquisitive nature is as strong as ever in you, isn't it, Talbot? You couldn't resist the chance of making a profit, and at a time like this!"

"Oh, don't lose your head. The cata-whatever-you-call-it can't talk and the dog is probably robbing garbage cans. What's the lam for?"

"I'm changing my residence purely as a matter of precaution. You underestimate human ingenuity, even limited by a dog's inarticulateness."

Wood grinned up at his comrades. The editor was dough-faced, rigid with apprehension. Gilroy held a gun and his left hand snaked out at the doorknob. The editor began an involuntary motion to stop him. The door slammed inward before he completed it.

Wood and Gilroy stalked in, sinister in their grim silence. Talbot merely glanced at the gun. He had stared into too many black muzzles to be frightened by it. When his gaze traveled to Wood his jaw fell and hung open, trembling senilely. His constantly fighting lungs strangled. He screamed, a high, tortured wail, and tore frantically at his shirt, trying to release his chest from crushing pressure.

"An object lesson for you, Talbot," Moss said without emotion. "Do not underestimate an enemy."

Gilroy lost his frigid attitude. "Don't let him strangle. Help him."

"What can I do?" Moss shrugged. "It's angina pectoris. Either he pulls out of the convulsions by himself—or he doesn't. I can't help. But what did you want?"

No one answered him. Horrified, they were watching Talbot go purple in his death agony, lose the power of shrieking, and tear at his chest. Gilroy's gun hand was limp; yet Moss made no attempt to escape. The air rattled through Talbot's predatory nose. He fell in a contorted heap.

Wood felt sickened. He knew that in self-preservation doctors had to harden themselves, but only a monster of brutal callousness could have disregarded Talbot's frightful death as if it had not been going on.

"Oh, come now, it isn't as bad as all that," Moss said acidly.

Wood raised his shocked stare from the rag-doll body to Moss's hard, unfearful eyes. The surgeon had made no move to defend himself, to call for help from the squad of gangsters at the front of the house. He faced them with inhuman prepossession.

"It upsets your plans," Gilroy spat.

Moss lifted his shoulders, urbanely, delicately disdainful. "What difference should his death make to me? I never cared for his company."

"Maybe not, but his money seemed to smell O.K. to you. He's out of the picture. He can't keep us from printing this story now." Gilroy pulled a thin folded typescript from his inside breast pocket and shoved it out at Moss.

The surgeon read it interestedly, leaning casually against a wall. He came to the end of the short article and read the lead paragraph over again. Politely, he gave it back to Gilroy.

"It's very clear," he said. "I'm accused of exchanging the identities of a man and a dog. You even describe my alleged technique."

"'Alleged!'" Gilroy roared savagely. "You mean you deny it?"

"Of course. Isn't it fantastic?" Moss smiled. "But that isn't the point. Even if I admitted it, how do you think I could be convicted on such evidence? The only witness seems to be the dog you call Wood. Are dogs allowed to testify in court? I don't remember, but I doubt it."

Wood was stunned. He had not expected Moss to brazen out the charge. An ordinary man would have broken down, confronted by their evidence.

Even the shrinking editor was stung into retorting: "We have proof of criminal vivisection!"

"But no proof that I was the surgeon."

"You're the only one in New York who could've done that operation."

"See how far that kind of evidence will get you."

Wood listened with growing anger. Somehow they had permitted Moss to dominate the situation, and he parried their charges with cool, sarcastic deftness. No wonder he had not tried to escape! He felt himself to be perfectly safe. Wood

growled, glowered hatred at Moss. The surgeon looked down contemptuously.

"All right, we can't convict you in court," Gilroy said. He hefted his gun, tightening his finger on the trigger. "That's not what we want, anyhow. This little scientific curiosity can make you operate on Wood and transfer his identity back to his own body."

Moss's expression of disdain did not alter. He watched Gilroy's tensing trigger finger with an astonishing lack of concern.

"Well, speak up," Gilroy rasped, waving the gun ominously.

"You can't force me to operate. All you can do is kill me, and I am as indifferent to my own death as I was to Talbot's." His smile broadened and twisted down at the corners, showing his teeth in a snarl that was the civilized, over-refined counterpart of Wood's. "Your alleged operation interests me, however. I'll operate for my customary fee."

The editor pushed Gilroy inside and hurriedly closed the door. "They're coming," he chattered. "Talbot's gangsters."

In two strides Gilroy put Moss between him and the door. His gun jabbed rudely into Moss's unflinching back. "Get over on the other side, you two, so the door'll hide you when it swings back," he ordered.

Wood and the editor retreated. Wood heard steps along the hall, then a pause, and a harsh voice shouted: "Hey, boss! Truck's here."

"Tell them to go away," Gilroy said in a low, suppressed tone.

Moss called, "I'm in the second room at the rear of the house."

Gilroy viciously stabbed him with the gun muzzle. "You're asking for it. I said tell them to go away!"

"You wouldn't dare to kill me until I've operated——"

"If you're not scared, why do you want them? What's the gag?"

The door flung open. A gangster started to enter. He stiffened, his keen, battle-trained eyes flashing from Talbot's twisted body to Moss, and to Gilroy, standing menacingly

behind the surgeon. In a swift, smooth motion a gun leaped from his armpit holster.

"What happened to the boss?" he demanded hoarsely. "Who's he?"

"Put your gun away, Pinero. The boss died of a heart attack. That shouldn't surprise you—he was expecting it any day."

"Yeah, I know. But how'd that guy get in?"

Moss stirred impatiently. "He was here all along. Send the truck back. I'm not moving. I'll take care of Talbot."

The gangster looked uncertain, but, in lieu of another commander, he obeyed Moss's order. "Well, O.K. if you say so." He closed the door.

When Pinero had gone down the hall, Moss turned to face Gilroy.

"You're not scared—much!" Gilroy said.

Moss ignored his sarcastic outburst. "Where were we?" he asked. "Oh, yes. While you were standing there shivering, I had time to think over my offer. I'll operate for nothing."

"You bet you will!" Gilroy wagged his gun forcefully.

Moss sniffed at it. "That has nothing to do with my decision. I have no fear of death, and I'm not afraid of your evidence. If I do operate, it will be because of my interest in the experiment." Wood intercepted Moss's speculative gaze. It mocked, hardened, glittered sinisterly. "But, of course," Moss added smoothly, "I will definitely operate. In fact, I insist on it!"

His hidden threat did not escape Wood. Once he lay under Moss's knife it would be the end. A slip of the knife—a bit of careful carelessness in the gas mixture—a deliberately caused infection—and Moss would clear himself of the accusation by claiming he could not perform the operation, and therefore was not the vivisectionist. Wood recoiled, shaking his head violently from side to side.

"Wood's right," the editor said. "He knows Moss better. He wouldn't come out of the operation alive."

Gilroy's brow creased in an uneasy frown. The gun in his hand was a futile implement of force; even Moss knew he would not use it—could not, because the surgeon was only

valuable to them alive. His purpose had been to make Moss operate. Well, he thought, he had accomplished that purpose. Moss offered to operate. But all four knew that under Moss's knife, Wood was doomed. Moss had cleverly turned the victory to utter rout.

"Then what the hell'll we do?" Gilroy exploded savagely. "What do you say, Wood? Want to take the chance, or keep on in a dog's body?"

Wood snarled, backing away.

"At least, he's still alive," the editor said fatalistically.

Moss smiled, protesting with silken mockery that he would do his best to return Wood's body.

"Barring accidents," Gilroy spat. "No soap, Moss. He'll get along the way he is, and you're going to get yours."

He looked grimly at Wood, jerking his head significantly in Moss's direction.

"Come on, chief," he said, guiding the editor through the door and closing it. "These old friends want to be alone—lot to talk over—"

Instantly, Wood leaped before the door and crouched there menacingly, glaring at Moss with blind, vicious hatred. For the first time, the surgeon dropped his pose of indifference. He inched cautiously around the wall toward the door. He realized suddenly that this was an animal—

Wood advanced, cutting off his line of retreat. Mane bristling, head lowered ominously between blocky shoulders, bright gums showing above white curved fangs, Wood stalked over the floor, stiff-jointed, in a low, inexorably steady rhythm of approach.

Moss watched anxiously. He kept looking up at the door in an agony of longing. But Wood was there, closing the gap for the attack. He put up his hands to thrust away—

And his nerve broke. He could not talk down mad animal eyes as he could a man holding a gun. He darted to the side and ran for the door.

Wood flung himself at the swiftly pumping legs. They crashed against him, tripped. Moss sprawled face down on the floor. He crossed his arms under his head to protect his throat.

Wood slashed at an ear. It tore, streaming red. Moss screeched and clapped his hands over his face, trying to rise

without dropping his guard. But Wood ripped at his fingers.

The surgeon's hands clawed out. He was kneeling, defenseless, trying to fight off the rapid, aimed lunges—and those knifelike teeth—

Wood gloated. A minute before, the scrubbed pink face had been aloof, sneering. Now it bobbed frantically at his eye level, contorted with overpowering fear, blood flowing brightly down the once scrupulously clean cheeks.

For an instant, the pale throat gleamed exposed at him. It was soft and helpless. He shot through the air. His teeth struck at an angle and snatched— The white flesh parted easily. But a bony structure snapped between his jaws as he swooped by.

Moss knelt there after Wood had struck. His pain-twisted face gasped imbecilically, hands limp at his sides. His throat poured a red flood. Then his face drained to a ghastly lack of color and he pitched over.

He had lost, but he had also won. Wood was doomed to live out his life in a dog's body. He could not even expect to live his own life span. The average life of a dog is fifteen years. Wood could expect perhaps ten years more.

In his human body, Wood had found it difficult to find a job. He had been a code expert; but code experts, salesmen and apprentice workmen have no place in a world of shrinking markets. The employment agencies are glutted with an over-supply of normal human intelligences housed in strong, willing, expert human bodies.

The same normal human intelligence in a handsome collie's body had a greater market value. It was a rarity, a phenomenon to be gaped at after a ticket had been purchased for the privilege.

"Men've always had a fondness for freaks," Gilroy philosophized on their way to the theater where Wood had an engagement. "Mildly amusing freaks are paid to entertain. The really funny ones are given seats of honor and power. Figure it out, Wood. I can't. Once we get rid of our love of freaks and put them where they belong, we'll have a swell world."

The taxi stopped in a side street, at the stage entrance. Lurid red-and-yellow posters, the size of cathedral murals,

plastered the theater walls; and from them smirked prettified likenesses of Wood.

"Gosh!" their driver gasped. "Wait'll my kids hear about this. I drove the Talkin' Dog! Gee, is that an honor, or ain't it?"

On all sides, pedestrians halted in awe, taxis stopped with a respectful screech of brakes; then an admiring swarm bore down on him.

"Isn't he *cute*?" women shrieked. "So *intelligent*-looking!"

"Sure," Wood heard their driver boast proudly, "I drove him down here. What's he like?" His voice lowered confidentially. "Well, the guy with him—his manager, I guess—he was talkin' to him just as intelligent as I'm talkin' to you. Like he could understand ev'ry word."

"Bet he could, too," a listener said definitely.

"G'on," another theorized. "He's just trained, like Rintin-tin, on'y better. But he's smart all right. Wisht I owned him."

The theater-district squad broke through the tangle of traffic and formed a lane to the stage door.

"Yawta be ashamed ayeshelves," a cop said. "All this over a mutt!"

Wood bared his fangs at the speaker, who retreated defensively.

"Wise guy, huh?" the mob jeered. "Think he can't understand?"

It was a piece of showmanship that Wood and Gilroy had devised. It never failed to find a feeder in the form of an officious policeman and a response from the crowd.

Even in the theater, Wood was not safe from overly enthusiastic admiration. His fellow performers persisted in scratching his unitching back and ears, cooing and burbling in a singularly unintelligent manner.

The thriller that Wood had made in Hollywood was over; and while the opening acts went through their paces, Wood and Gilroy stood as far away from the wings as the theater construction would permit.

"Seven thousand bucks a week, pal," Gilroy mused over and over. "Just for doing something that any mug out in the audience can do twice as easily. Isn't that the payoff?"

In the year that had passed, neither was still able to accustom himself to the mounting figures in their bank book. Pictures, personal appearances, endorsements, highly fictionized articles in magazines—all at astronomical prices—

But he could never have enough money to buy back the human body he had starved in.

"O.K., Wood," Gilroy whispered. "We're on."

They were drummed onto the stage with deafening applause. Wood went through his routine perfunctorily. He identified objects that had been named by the theater manager, picking them out of a heap of piled objects.

Ushers went through the aisles, collecting questions the audience had written on slips of paper. They passed them up to Gilroy.

Wood took a long pointer firmly in his mouth and stood before a huge lettered screen. Painfully, he pointed out, letter by letter, the answers to the audience's questions. Most of them asked about the future, market tips, racing information. A few seriously probed his mind.

White light stabbed down at him. Mechanically, he spelled out the simple answers. Most of his bitterness had evaporated; in its place was a dreary defeat, and dull acceptance of his dog's life. His bank book had six figures to the left of the decimal—more than he had ever conceived of, even as a distant Utopian possibility. But no surgeon could return his body to him, or increase his life expectancy of less than ten years.

Sharply, everything was washed out of sight: Gilroy, the vast alphabet screen, the heavy pointer in his mouth, the black space smeared with pale, gaping blobs of faces, even the white light staring down—

He lay on a cot in a long ward. There was no dreamlike quality of illusion in the feel of smooth sheets beneath and above him, or in the weight of blankets resting on his *outstretched* body.

And independently of the rest of his hand, his *finger* moved in response to his will. Its nail scratched at the sheet, loudly, victoriously.

An interne, walking through the ward, looked around for the source of the gloating sound. He engaged Wood's eyes

that were glittering avidly, deep with intelligence. Then they watched the scratching finger.

"You're coming back," the interne said at last.

"I'm coming back." Wood spoke quietly, before the scene vanished and he heard Gilroy repeat a question he had missed.

He knew then that the body-mind was a unit. Moss had been wrong; there was more to identity than that small gland, something beyond the body. The forced division Moss had created was unnatural; the transplanted tissue was being absorbed, remodeled. Somehow, he knew these returns to his natural identity would recur, more and more—till it became permanent—till he became human once more.

RICHARD WILSON

Some science-fiction writers hold down jobs by day and do their writing in the long hours of the night; Richard Wilson, though, spends his nights as a news editor, presiding over a battery of teletypes in New York's Times Square, and puts in his story-writing time by day. Search not for an open and sunlit quality in his prose, however; you are more likely to find it as wry and darkling as—

Back to Julie

You can't go shooting off to *that* dimension for peanuts. I don't want to give you the impression that peanuts had become scarce here and that we'd found our economy in the fix of having to import them sidewise. What I mean is that if you're one of the rare ones equipped functionally to do the side shuffle, you ought to be well paid for it.

That's what I told Krasnow. And *he* wasn't after peanuts. I said I'd do it if he made it worth my while. He said he'd make it worth my while because he had to and how much did I want. I told him. That gave him to pause, but only briefly. After he'd agreed I told him to make him feel better that it had to be a lot because you can't take it with you. You can't skip with the swag. You have to go naked. You can't get there with so much as a sandal on your foot or a filling in your tooth.

So Krasnow, sweat pouring off his florid face as he worked the combination of the safe, and his fat jowls quivering unhappily around his cigar as he counted out the bills, put up the money. Ten per cent was in advance and the rest went into a bank account in my name. I paid off a batch of bills, then undressed and took the side trip.

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Honest John Krasnow was a crooked District Attorney who wanted to be Governor, and then President. He had the Machine, but he didn't have the People. And because he needed the People he needed me. I'd been to this other dimension—the one on the farthest branch of the time-tree—and I could give him what he wanted.

Krasnow found that out after I'd been hauled up in front of him, as D.A., on a check-kiting charge. I'd had something of a reputation before that and in trying to live up to it I'd done some plain and fancy spending. Nothing that fifteen or twenty thousand dollars wouldn't have fixed, though. While I was scrounging around trying to get it I kited a few checks. They pyramided me right into the D.A.'s office, where Krasnow was very sympathetic. A man of my position in the scientific world, he said, tch-tch. As one of our fair city's outstanding citizens, he said, and so on and so on. It was quite a lecture and even coming from Krasnow it made me feel contrite.

So I told him about myself. I told him where I was born and where I went to school and how it was at the university and where I'd been on sabbaticals, including this other dimension. He believed me. I can't account for it, except possibly because Krasnow was a crook and I wasn't, exactly. He was a big time operator. I was a small time one, and a failure besides. Anyhow he believed me and we made the deal.

The journey to that other dimension isn't a pleasant one. It does upsetting things to the stomach and you see things thin and elongated, as if you were sitting down front and to the side in a movie.

I got there, as I was pretty sure I would, and waited for the hiccups to subside. *Hiccupi laterali*, I had called them when I considered doing an article for the medical journal. Then I stole some clothing, which was one of the riskiest parts of it all, and waited for it to be morning. I didn't have any money, of course, so I had to hitchhike into town.

I could have stolen myself a better fit, but people aren't clothes-conscious in that dimension. They're more interested in what you are and what you can do. The man I rode in with was very impressed with what I told him was my ability to eliminate the long wait in the production of ivory by speeding

up the growth cycle of elephants and he tipped me handsomely. I was less impressed with his talent of growing cobless corn and therefore had to return only a small part of the sum.

This world had developed remarkably like Earth. I mean like our Earth, which falls into what I have designated Timeline One Point One, since it's the one I'm most familiar with. Every other world called itself Earth, too, of course, if it had a language. I'd visited, briefly, hundreds of the parallel worlds, hovering over primordial swamps, or limitless oceans, or insect kingdoms, or radioactive planetoids, before I'd found the one that was truly parallel. That was in Timeline Seventeen Point Zero Eight and it had refrigerators, platinum blondes, automobiles, airplanes, apple pie, newspapers, television, Scotch and soda—just about everything we consider to be the things that make life worth while. It had little differences, too. But that was to be expected in a timeline where the binomics could create a new world every time somebody changed his mind.

Thus the cobless corn man was driving what looked to me like a Chevrolet but which was, in his frame of reference, a Morton. He let me off near a downtown restaurant where, thanks to our conversation about the elephants, I had enough money for breakfast. It wasn't considered ethical to exchange ability-impressions outside the limits of certain rigidly defined groups, so I didn't try to outimpress the waitress.

Then, fed and fitting a little better into my stolen clothes, I walked to the recorder's office and spent the rest of the morning looking up old documents. There was nothing there for Krasnow, as I'd suspected. But for me there was a pretty file clerk. In talking to her I verified my belief that people in that other dimension aren't much different. Except in the one basic respect that interested Krasnow, of course.

We had lunch together and I spent the afternoon in the library but didn't find anything there, either, and then I had dinner with the girl. Her name is Julie and I told her mine was Heck, for Hector, which it is. She thought this was clever and we got along fine.

She had a nice apartment and a delightful sense of hospitality. The next day when Julie went to work I stayed home

and washed the dishes and made the bed and used the telephone.

I ran up quite a bill with my long distance calls, but I found out what I needed to know. I impressed a lot of people with the elephant story and pretended to be impressed hardly at all with what they told me, although I often was, very much.

The trouble with those people is that they don't know how to lie, if that's a trouble.

I don't think it is. Neither did Krasnow, obviously. He wouldn't have sent me off on my expensive side trip if he had. Of course Krasnow looked at it objectively. What he wanted from Timeline Seventeen Point Zero Eight was not for himself at all. It was for everybody else. He wanted the formula for the truth gas that these people had developed long ago and had loosed on their world to cure war.

They'd been in a bad way, you see, although it was no worse than the sort of thing we were up against. Their trans-ocean squabbles and power politics seemed to have settled down into a pattern or a war or two per generation. Just like us. So the man who had invented the truth gas became a global hero, after a certain amount of skepticism and cynicism. All the doubts vanished, of course, after the gas had got to working. So did war.

You can't plot and scheme if every time you open your mouth to tell a lie you stammer, sweat, turn red in the face and gasp for breath. It's a dead giveaway. No one attempts it more than once.

Oh, one or two men had tried to nullify the gas or work out a local antidote, either as a project in pure research or in a power-mad way, but because they'd had to be truthful and make their intentions known as soon as they thought of them, they were put away. Neat.

What I needed to know was where the formula for the truth gas was. It wasn't a secret, exactly, in this land of candor, but it wasn't writ large on the wall for all to see, either. They had it in their capital, which was in the middle of the country, about where we have Omaha, on file among the Vital Statistics. I took one of their superjets out to there.

Then, because their truthfulness is hereditary, not contagious, it was no trouble at all for me to pose as a historian

entitled to the facts. The formula was written out for me and I signed a statement saying I would not publish it and would destroy my copy when it had served my historical purpose without letting anyone else see it. I signed freely, told my elephant story and departed in an aura of good will.

The jet had me back that same night. Julie fixed up a snack and we talked about how pretty she was and how nice I was.

I had everything I needed for Krasnow, now. I felt very good because there probably wasn't anyone else who could have done the job for him and because it wasn't spying, really. Earth—One Point One on the Timeline—is world enough for Krasnow, I'm sure. Besides, dimensions don't have wars with each other.

Julie was real fine and I hated to go the next morning, but it was my job. I told her I had to go out of town, but that I'd be back. I didn't mean it then, but Julie had no reason to doubt me. She said she certainly hoped I would; after all . . .

I've made the side trip again and now Krasnow has what he wants. He's delighted, as he should be. I've made up the stuff for him. It's very powerful stuff and a little goes a long way. I also made up an antidote for him. It was easy once I took the formula apart and could work on it without the compulsion to go telling everybody what I was doing.

Krasnow plans to release the truth gas just before the state convention. He'll be nominated, of course, and after November he'll be Governor. He's a patient man, Honest John Krasnow is, and he's willing to wait four years for the Presidency.

I ought to be delighted, too. Krasnow has paid me off and I've been living in the style I'd always wanted to be accustomed to. He's offered me a place on his staff and, somewhat superfluously, the use of his antidote. Of course the reason he was so magnanimous was that he didn't want anyone else around who knew his gimmick and would have to tell the truth about it.

But I don't want to live in this dimension now—now that Krasnow has what I've given him. He's going to use it tomorrow. And if I know Honest John—and I do—even the Presidency won't be enough for him.

So I'm going back to Julie.

It has just this minute occurred to me, small time operator that I've been, that I had been thinking in terms of peanuts.

I could be a Krasnow myself, back there in Julie's dimension. That elephant story was just a starter.

I should be there by midnight.

PETER PHILLIPS

One of the tragedies of what is called "the technological lag" is that we civilians are still confined to subsonic speeds, making the Atlantic Ocean a formidable bar to travel. Think how attractive it would be if, for instance, magazine and book editors could have the use of the Air Force's new twice-the-speed-of-sound models on occasion. If this could be arranged, it is more than likely that a good many trips would be made to a district known as Crouch End in the city of London, where the editors would draw their pistols and, at gun's point, force Peter Phillips to add to his invariably brilliant but infuriatingly short list of stories, such as—

She Who Laughs . . .

I'd been waiting just two hundred years for this guy.

He stood there in the gravelled driveway with the estate agent, looking over the frontage of the mansion.

The sun was hot. The agent took off his hat, mopped his balding head. I wondered whether I could spit that far from the upstairs window where I was watching them. I decided not.

The agent said, in a thick brogue I can't reproduce in its glottal richness: "If it's se-clusion you're wantin', Mr. Mullen, you'd not better this foine upstandin' place this soide of Ballygore. There's room to stretch your legs and fill your lungs with air that shweeps down from the mountains over covert and shweet pasture for your own special delectation and delight."

My lips were moving with his. I'd heard it before. I knew the sucker would take the place. And I knew the agent, back in Thaughbeen, having dropped the most of his beautiful stage

brogue, would soon be saying: "He's paying in dollars, too, boys. And then, in the season, I'll sell them to the English tourists. 'Tis an occasion for celebration. Porter all round, on me."

Mullen, casual as all hell, stood there with the agent, pretended to be considering.

I whisked down the baluster-rail, stood just behind the door as they came in.

"Nice hall," Mullen said unenthusiastically. He was wearing a drape suit. He didn't need drapes to bulk him out. Those shoulders had spearheaded the forward line three seasons at college, if my information was correct.

Indignant, the agent said: "Nice? It's talking like an Englishman you are, instead of a citizen o' the greatest country in the world." ("Bar Ireland," he said under his breath.) "Lookit the size of ut—the staircase, the panelling, the great wide windows, and that landin' there where the mighty O'Rourke stood and with the Sword of Kings defied the brayin' cowards o' Cromwell till he was struck a traitor blow from behind, and like a great-girthed tree smitten in its prime, fell among the cur-dogs and carried a full half-dozen of them to death with him, here—at this very spot!"

The agent flung out a dramatic hand. I'd crept up behind them during the spiel. I never tire of hearing it.

Mullen stepped back. I dodged. "Fool place to make a stand anyway," he muttered, looking at the balcony between the two staircases.

"Arragh! The O'Rourke could foight as well with the two hands as the one. A sword in each, there he stood, facin' them both ways——"

"Sure, sure. Now, how many bedrooms did you say?"

I followed them around. Mullen wasn't interested in bedrooms, only in the cellar. But I was waiting for the final spiel, dictated by what the agent retained of a conscience.

"There's jist one t'ing," he said, standing in the hall again after they'd looked the place over. "You may have been hearin' t'ings about this place in Thaugheen—maybe from those loafers around Golighan's bar—and though I wouldn't be askin' yez to disregard ut entoirely——"

"The haunt, you mean?" said Mullen. I grinned to myself.

"I heard about it during the war when I was stationed just across the border. That's when I became interested in the place. I looked it over, saw the power-plant. There's quite a head of water in that stream. It stayed in the back of my mind until the other day, when I was in London with my wife seeing some friends. Then I remembered this place.

"I have some work to do. I want electrical power, and privacy. So I hopped the jet liner to Dublin and came up here——"

"And you'll take it, sorr—ghost an' all?"

If Mullen paid extra for a ghost, I thought, he'd be thoroughly had. But he said firmly: "I'm not buying your ghost. In another minute you'll be saying it's an asset to the place an' all. It's a hundred years since my folk left this country—but we haven't gone soft. What's your price for this tumble-down shebeen?"

"The final price," said the agent, taking a deep, careful breath, "for a year's tenancy, in advance, in dollars, is—how much did you say?"

"I didn't. But you can tell your client I'll offer a thousand."

"Don't be shamin' me," said the agent, as I blew a cool breath down his neck. "It's meself that owns the place as you know, if you know as much as you do."

He drew up his coat collar. "Now let's be discussin' the details elsewhere."

I followed them down the drive, into the shay. I could get away from the place now for a while.

It was late afternoon. The green border hills in the distance were drawing up mist from the shadowed bog as their green darkened in the slanting sun; and the new-cut hay-to-be in the nearer fields brought relished delight.

Two hundred years I'd waited for this jaunt. I enjoyed every second of it, even the acrid stink from Pethal's ill-cared-for hogs as we passed the holding. The hoppity-clop of the pony's hoofs on the dust-blown road was music.

Over the green-lichened bridge by the trout-stream trotted the pony. I promised myself a fishing there soon. I'd use a quiet worm and snooze in the sun. Fly-fishing was too strenuous in this moist heat.

And I'd look over my shoulder now and again at the long pile of Thaughbeen House and laugh. The laugh would be on me. That always makes it funnier, in Ireland. As I write now, however, I'm nearly crying . . . But you can wait for the reason for that.

Down from the bridge, and the road broadened into the village of Thaughbeen.

The agent introduced Mullen to Golighan. "Stationed in the Six Counties durin' the war," he said, "and mindful of the beauties of the country, and wishin' to do a little book-work or such, decided to take over the place for a year or maybe more. And you'll be wastin' your time, Michael, me boy, tellin' him about the haunt to take the bread out of me very mouth, for Mister Mullen knows all about it."

"Sit down and rest the onaisy tongue of yez," said Golighan, trying to outdo the agent's brogue. "Y'don't think he'd be taken in onyway by ye're gabblin', wid a name loike Mullen. What'll you drink?"

Mullen ordered Jamieson's Irish whisky, the agent took thick Dublin stout.

I watched Mullen roll the smoky-peat flavor round his tongue. Two hundred years since I'd had the sweet, rare tang of it tickling my gullet . . . I licked invisible lips in anticipation.

They stayed through the evening, with the real talk beginning when the lads drifted in.

There was Sean Healey, Tom O'Reilley—both, if I remembered right, working for a pittance on Lord Freightowel's estate; Seamas Mulvaney, smallholder—how many times had I seen him, as a barefoot gossoon, nicking plums from the kitchen garden at Thaughbeen House, looking so often at the silent, window-eyed place with his own green, feary eyes, and me at an upstairs window holding in my breath in case I gave one of the ghostly groans I'd practiced so long and sent him in a tear-breeches scramble down the tree.

Then there was gutsy Bran Bailey who'd actually come inside one night, stood in the hall and with all his big little heart bawled: "The hell an' back wid banshees! I don't believe in 'em!"

I'd been so pleased with his common-sense that I forgot myself and called out the truth: "Good for you, kid. I'm no banshee. I'm no kind of goddam ghost. There's no such things."

But poor Bran was running so fast, I doubted he'd heard me. Anyway, here he was in Golighan's, grown big and broad, and putting in his two-cents' worth about the goings-on at Thaugheen House.

"It was during the war," Bran said, "and being so near the border we had a jeep-full of your fellers running in here every night to stoke up on Mister Golighan's brew. And one night we tell them about the House, and about how poor daft Johnnie Maur goes up there now and again to play chess with the ghost, as he said—poor Johnnie, gone eleven months now—"

So Johnnie was dead? I'd missed him.

Every time I heard about Johnnie was dead, it shocked me.

He'd stumble into the House, liquored up to the fringe of his red hair, white face vacant and mild, shouting in the empty echoing hall: "It's a game of chess I'm offerin' yez, for banshees or not, ye're the only dacent player this soide of Dublin who can tax me wandhering wits!"

I hope Johnnie's found another "dacent player" wherever he's gone.

Bran Bailey was talking on in Golighan's bar, with Mullen leaning forward and taking it all in.

"So one night," says Bran, "the whole near-dozen of 'em starts off up there, with this great roarin' sergeant straddlin' the front and shoutin': 'Look out, ghost, here we come, eight little Yankee boys full of rum!'

"And the jeep goin' so slow with them aboard," says Bran, "and the rain makin' a bog of the road, we follow after these fellers to see what the Thaugheen House ghost does with 'em.

"And they get halfway up the drive to the house, and the jeep stops, and there's the driver thumpin' and pullin' everything and callin' on all the saints, until the sergeant unstraddles himself and pulls up the front coverin'.

"Then he jist stands there, rain sweatin' off his great red

face and him suddenly as sober as a hangin' judge on a Monday, and he says: 'Put it back—put it back quick before I believe my eyes, and I swear I'll never touch another drop again,' and we come up and look over his shoulder.

"And there's nothing there under the bonnet. Nothing at all, at all."

I hadn't meant to swipe the whole engine at first. The tele-port exhausted me for days. But I got annoyed when I'd yanked off three plug-leads and that gutsy jeep kept banging on, on one cylinder.

"And never a sight of the engine since," concluded Bran Bailey.

Said Mullen: "Yes. I heard of it. I was captain of their unit. We had to have the jeep towed away."

"So you're not troublin' yourself about the creature at all?" asked Sean Healey.

"Why should I? It's never harmed anybody, far as I can see."

Thanks for them kind words, pal.

Mullen decided to stay at Golighan's until a few essentials had been carried up to the House; and meantime he wired his wife to join him.

Four days later, he took up residence. He came early. But early. The energy of that man! I was still resting when I heard him poking around in the cellars, tracing through the wiring from the turbo-house.

I slipped down from where I go when I take a rest—don't ask me where that is; it's a state, not a place—and gummed down after him. He was lifting a tarpaulin in a corner of one of the smaller cellars—it used to be a cold-larder.

He looked at the jeep engine and made funny disbelieving noises.

"So," I said, "it wasn't the potheen. I figure you owe the sergeant and the other Company D boys one big-handed apology—and the dough you docked 'em to pay for it."

He came around so fast he tripped and planted the tight part of his pants on one of the hobbly bits of the jeep engine.

"What—where are you?"

"No place. Not in heaven or in hell. But just as elusive as the Pimpernel. As to what I am, you're going to tell me, I hope. That's what I've been waiting for—a long, long time. Meanwhile, Mr. Mullen," I said, "you're soiling those nicely creased pants of yours."

He upped off the engine, dusted his pants automatically. Something the Army did for him—gave him a pride in his clothes.

"Do you mind," he said, his brain beginning to work, "showing yourself? I hate like hell accepting sartorial advice from a voice without a body."

"That takes energy," I said, "like compressing these air molecules to make sound waves. But it takes a lot of energy and a lot of material and right now I don't feel like dressing up to give you something to look at or talk at. However, I don't mind giving you a slight idea. Scrape some dust off those shelves, toss it up under that bulb, and stand back."

"I am quite nuts," he enunciated carefully.

"Sure. But do it. And mind your coat cuffs."

As the cloud of tiny particles drifted down I slipped in and charged them so they hung around the vortices of my anti-particles.

"Almighty catfish!" Mullen gulped. "A naked ghost!"

"I'm no ghost. And I don't have to be this shape either," I said, adjusting the network. "Is this any better? Dogs are always naked."

He backed off, slapping at the air. "For God's sake, be human if you can't be natural! I mean—"

"Listen," I said, peeved, "that was a prize mastiff I once saw. I can also do a mountain lion or a grizzly. Get me a roll of cheesecloth, or even a bedsheet at a pinch, and I'll really show you something."

"I've seen enough," he moaned, digging knuckles in his eyes and shaking his head as if something was loose inside. "Go away."

"Uh-huh. Maybe you're right. I've got more important things to do with my energy than fool around to amuse you."

"Amuse me?" He made a noise like an emptying bathtub. "I'd laugh easier in a morgue. Get back where you came from and make the worms laugh."

"I'm not," I repeated patiently, "a ghost, a ghoulie, a banshee, or anything of the whatsoever kind. I've never met up with one and I don't expect to. Like young Bran Bailey, I don't believe in 'em. Neither do you, fortunately. But explanations can wait. Has any of the stuff turned up yet?"

That got him. "What stuff?"

"Couple of tubes from Marshall's of London, specification alloy plates from Birmingham, that dingus you borrowed from the Sorbonne."

"Your intelligence service must be good."

"You'd be very surprised."

"Then you tell me where it is."

"Surely. I was just making conversation," I said. "It's on the way to Taughbeen station now. Johnny McGuire will be carting it over around lunchtime. And your wife, who is wondering what in hell you're up to anyway, has reluctantly left her bright friends in London and is on her way to ask why you took over this moth-eaten old shack without consulting her first, especially since it's her money you're fooling around with."

Mullen's lower jaw was nearly resting on his collar by this time.

"Incidentally," I asked, "how is the darling girl? Has she enjoyed the European tour so far?"

"Leave her out of this," he managed to say. But his tone was defensive.

"Poor Mullen," I sighed. "She's still keeping the reins on you, huh? I pity you, feller. I know just how it is. I'm under the Iron High Heel myself. You'll have to meet my wife sometime."

"This is too much! Two of you? Too damned much! A double haunt!" Mullen frowned. Then he began to laugh at his own cesspool thoughts. "How do you make out, mister?"

I considered explaining to him, but decided he'd never understand. "Wife" was the simplest way I could describe "her"—the only way in earthly language.

"Your mind needs deodorizing," was all I said.

"So does this whole situation. Hey, if these forecasts of yours turn out right, how about giving me the winners at Ballymuchray this afternoon?"

Mullen was recovering pretty quickly, it seemed.

I said: "I don't play the horses. Neither do you. If you've finished down here, you might as well get up to the kitchen and make yourself some coffee. No need to check that wiring any more. I've already done it. You've got a lazy morning ahead."

"The morning," he said, "hasn't yet started. I'm not awake yet."

"So now I'm in a dream, am I? Get upstairs before I bat you with a clod of hard air."

He muttered his way up to the kitchen, plunked an open pot on the stove which he'd already lighted. Blue smoke puffed intermittently between the bars, filling the place with pungent haze.

Mullen looked up at the ceiling, addressed it politely: "I suppose, Mr. Fixit, you can tell me what's wrong with this thing?"

"Naturally. Get hold of the poker and belt that flue-pipe about halfway up. The plate's jammed and doesn't operate from the outside. Shank broke off way back."

He belted. The fire roared up suddenly.

"Thanks," he said. "Could I interest you in a cup of coffee?"

"Funny man," I grunted.

While he sipped his brew, I slipped out to tell my "wife" how things were shaping up.

My wife was born to lay the eggs and crow as well. Ever hear of a henpecked ghost? That's me. I'd suffered two hundred years of hell from her tongue. Blamed me for everything. She even beefed about my innocent games of chess with Johnnie Maur.

And I remember when the Marchmont family was in occupation of Thaugheen House she'd scared half the life out of little Lilian Marchmont just because I happened to remark casually on her good looks. That gives you a picture of my

wife—a possessive shrew, to keep it in human terms which really don't apply very well.

She started in on me now, so I grabbed up the chess board and pieces from the attic and skipped down from the Tenth Plane, where she was lying up and waiting for me to do most of the work.

When I got back to the kitchen, Mullen was tapping at the walls and ceiling with a broomstick.

"No secret panels or hidden amplifiers," I said. "It's all genuine psychic phenomena."

He looked round and breathed heavily. "Now I've seen everything."

I dumped the chess board and pieces on the kitchen table.

"No," he said. "No. I'm not going to confirm myself in my own madness. Take 'em away."

I started setting out the pieces. He watched with a kind of horrible deadpan fascination. In a far-away voice he said: "Queen on her own color."

"That's better," I said. "Pull up a chair."

He went to the kitchen window, looked at the soft sunlight glancing through the apple trees. He looked for quite a while. Then he shrugged, grabbed a chair and came back to the table. "Anywhere but Ireland," he observed, "I'd have run halfway to Thaugheen by now."

Twice during the game, which stretched out over three hours, he tried to make talk, but I dodged the questions. Once he made a grab in the air over my QKt as I was making a move.

"Can you," I asked politely, "feel a magnetic field? Or an air-current, if your hand is moving with it? Or put a half-nelson on a frame of reference? Or poke a De Sitter anti-particle in the eye?"

He gave up.

Finally, as we heard the clattering roar of McGuire's cartage van down the road, he said: "This is the damndest game, in more than one sense. Check. Hold it until I'm back."

I heard them dumping the stuff into the hall; and a female voice ordering the carter around; and the bland, blarneying voice of McGuire somehow soaring above the authoritative female voice and quelling it.

When Mullen came back into the kitchen, he looked determined. He closed the door carefully behind him.

"McGuire," he said, "is a breath of fresh air. Sanity returns. I've just realized what I've been doing all morning. I've a helluva lot of work on hand and I can't get on with it until this is straightened out. And I'm not going to have my wife scared. Now—just what are you, and what's your racket?"

"Patience, pal," I said. "Finish the game, then I'll talk. I fixed you some fresh coffee." Voices were raised again in the hall. "Incidentally, I don't think your wife scares easy. She's busy for a while anyway. Your move."

He gulped coffee, watched me interpose on his check and threaten his own king simultaneously. He was compelled to exchange pieces. Which made it a draw.

"You've been playing for that," he accused.

I sighed. "Not deliberately. If we played a dozen games, they'd end up on a draw. Or a stalemate."

"I don't get it. Quit the crosstalk. What are you?"

He sat more easily in his chair. He frowned at the coffee. I hoped I hadn't laced it too much. He'd get the idea soon enough anyway.

"You've got a couple of books in your bag," I said. "One is a pretty detailed family history of this place, written and published at his own expense—because no one else would be interested—by Mister Patrick O'Rourke, Gentleman, at the turn of the century.

"There are only passing, deprecatory references to me in that. He never took kindly to the idea of a family banshee, or banshees. The other was written twenty years ago by an earnest and sober investigator from the English Psychical Research Society. It's my biography. My wife, being what you'd call plumb lazy, never made an appearance for him. I've often regretted that the Society never got around to following up his report. I'd have shown 'em plenty."

"Then you *are* a haunt," Mullen said. "A plain, ornery haunt! But how do you tick? How do you move things around?"

"A disembodied psyche——" I began.

That got him. He snapped up straight and mouthed for

breath. Coffee slopped over the table. It didn't matter. He'd drunk enough for my purpose.

"A disembodied psyche," I repeated firmly, "which is a focus of consciousness freed from hindering matter, and thus from the bonds of inertia and entropy, not to mention sex, can be a pretty powerful thing. It doesn't upset any energy balance because it utilizes extant potentials."

His eyes were growing rounder. He tried to get up, then slumped back.

"You soon master the mechanics of perception for yourself," I said. "It's largely a matter of that curious mental force called imagination. And you learn how to induce illusion in others. But it takes around ten years before you find a way to store enough free energy from cosmic sources in your own field-web of anti-particles to move solid objects around."

He had trouble with his voice. "Ten years—ten years from when?"

"From pretty damn soon," I said sweetly.

"Then you're—you're—" He gulped. His eyes were glazing.

"That's right," I said. "Sleep tight, brother."

I was testing the last circuit when he came around. He opened his eyes and moaned a little.

"Don't worry about the slight hangover," I said. "I'll be taking it over in a moment."

He looked around at the set-up. Only his head could move. The rest of him was tied pretty firmly in the stasis area.

"Pretty neat, huh?" I said. "It would have taken you months. Years, maybe. It probably did—once. That's something I've never figured out. It took me four hours flat, with the know-how. I had two hundred years to work it out."

Mullen muttered: "It's a dream."

I said: "Check. That's how the thing started—if it ever did start. With Dunne's theories of precognition and postcognition in dreams—a freed psyche moving backwards and forwards in time. Or—as in this case—staying put and letting time flow by. No mass, so no trouble with entropy or inertia. All the bug-bears of time-travel smoothed out."

He'd gone bug-eyed again. I could almost see his brain wriggling.

"What happens when I—when you—when this body dies?"

"You answered that question when you devised the math," I said. "Does the past die? No. It's co-existent. Effective immortality."

"But death——"

"Is pretty final," I agreed. "Dust to dust, et cetera. And since we don't believe in an afterlife, that makes it a tough problem. But you've got a couple of centuries to figure that one out, too."

"You mean—you have figured it?"

"No. I didn't. You didn't. We didn't. We never will because we never have."

"How many times has this happened?"

"Once," I said patiently. "This is the first time. It always is."

"But with memory of this conversation, I can change the pattern! I can——"

Then he got the idea. His mouth dropped open. Slack-jawed dope. . . .

"That's it," I said. I felt sorry for him, as usual. "You've already tried everything. You can't even leave the place until this turns up." I prodded his stomach. "It's the only body our psychic matrix will fit into, and there's a psychic compulsion to stay right here until it arrives. You can't lick time. You never could."

I stood by the switch. The tubes began to heat up.

"No!" he yelled. "Hold it—about my wife——"

"Our wife," I corrected him, looking around cautiously. This time I might get away with it. Maybe the pattern wouldn't always be the same. It was worth trying anyway. "You'll find her on the Tenth Plane when you dope out how to get there," I said.

"Here goes." I gave him the wave-off sign. "I've got a date with a bottle of Jamieson's Irish whisky and a fishing rod. By the way, when you meet up with old Johnnie Maur again, give him my love. He won't understand. He never does. Look out for his rook game in the end-play."

"So long, sucker," I said. "Good haunting."

I was reaching for the switch, when——

"Hold it or I'll blast you!"

I sighed resignedly and looked at the cellar steps. A body slumped inelegantly into view, dangling like a puppet from invisible strings.

The voice came from above its head.

How I hate that voice.

"Dear, sweet Bernie," cooed my wife dangerously. "Trying it again? Don't you ever learn? If you touch that switch before my say-so, I'll fry that body of yours as soon as spit-in-your-eye."

Mullen choked: "That's Betty!"

"Uh-huh," I murmured. "And that's Betty's body. She wants it back. I always try to leave her behind, but I guess I never succeed. I'd like to try living with a wife I haven't lived with for two hundred years as a ghost. But she's spent months soaking up energy on the Tenth Plane, and if I don't play ball she'll burn my body before I get it."

"How right, darling," said Betty. Arsenic and molasses in that voice . . . "Now tie this down in the stasis field."

I looked at the limp, blonde head and laughed. "I suppose you whanged her with the skillet again?"

"That's my headache," the voice snapped.

"How very, very right! That's why I'm laughing, sweetheart."

I laid Betty's unconscious head near Mullen's—that is, near my—shoulder. She stirred a little and moaned. I passed ropes over her and through the ring-bolt of the time-lock and stood back.

"Don't we look sweet?" I said.

"Beautiful," said Betty. "Now pull that switch."

I went to the handle.

"No——" pleaded Mullen.

"Yes," ordered Betty.

I pulled.

For a millisecond, a soft, impossible wind soughed through intergalactic nothingness. A condition of no-life. Binary stars flamed into view. Incorporate with a star, become corporeal, or cease . . . An incredible longing, fulfilled at its conception . . . Homing to this star—NO! GET OUT! OCCUPIED! OCCUPIED! INCORPORATE OR CEASE!

The time-lock snapped open, and ropes loosened round my body.

Body.

Beautiful word.

Even with a headache like this.

Headache!

I gave a little scream and sat up.

Mullen—I mean me—I mean Betty—stood there grinning like an ape. “Beat you to it, heel,” she—he—said.

I’d been wrong about the psychic matrix.

That damned woman had always wanted to wear the trousers. Now she was wearing them, the ones that should have been mine.

A little matter like the sex of the body I inhabit shouldn’t really matter, of course. Sex doesn’t really apply to me, as such. But . . .

Do women *have* to wear their girdles as tight as this?

Fletcher Pratt, on the testimony of his secretary, is the most unusual writer in the world. In the first place, he *writes* (several score books, with short stories and articles beyond counting)—which is manifestly unfair to the rest of us who belong to that race of camouflaged dilettantes called writers. In the second place, he keeps regular hours and displays no temperament—a far cry from the sustained benzedrine-and-black-coffee agonies of creation that are the hallmark of most writers and the bane of most writers' wives. These charges are in themselves serious enough to strip him of all his honors in the profession; the only thing that saves him is that, in spite of his eccentricities, he manages to turn out histories as admirable as *Ordeal by Fire*, biographies as careful and evocative as his recent *Stanton*, and short science-fiction stories as sheerly enjoyable as—

Official Record

First Report of the First Kurada Expedition (by radio)
Intelligent Lord:

Your expedition is a success!

This report is sent from a point fifteen philads inside Kurada. There has been no opposition. The inhabitants are docile, most deformed, and without cultural activity, as predicted by the Scientific Board. They will make admirable laborers under our direction, while their deformities render them so repulsive that there will be little temptation for even the hottest-blooded youth to pollute our sacred Evadzonian blood with their debased strain. Moreover, their country has become amazingly fertile, and is in every respect suitable for colonization.

I will send further details of a general order tomorrow, when we expect to reach their ancient capital of Paralov. I

now send the detailed narrative requested for study by the scientific board:

This morning, before penetrating the barrier, I ordered all hands into pressurized air-tight suits, and as an added precaution against contamination with the Twedorski mutation-virus, placed everyone inside the enclosed combat vehicles, personally inspecting the entire expedition to make certain the orders were carried out. My precautions occasioned some slight delay, as it was difficult to handle the bridging equipment under the conditions, and it was nearly noon before we reached the Kuradan side of the stream.

Here, of course, we had to pause while the scientific vehicle commanded by Dr. Govelsitz secured samples of the plant life and tested it for the virus. There was no opportunity to obtain samples of animal life immediately, except for some large insects, nearly four merkils in wingspread, which were occupied with the numerous and brilliant flowers of plants which at the same time bore large yellow fruit.

The report of Dr. Govelsitz was that in the hundred years since your gracious grandfather wisely released the Twedorski mutation-virus in Kurada, it had, as expected, bred out of both plants and the large insects, and they were established forms. Dr. Govelsitz' assistants are engaged in classifying the new forms. They believe the fruit may have economic value.

My own observation was that the forts which formerly occupied the Kuradan side of the stream were ruinous and the metal in them almost completely worn away with rust, which gave indeed a happy augury of the state to which the once-aggressive Kuradans must have declined under the influence of the mutations. At the bases of the cupolas in two of the forts burrowings about two handspans in diameter led downward at an angle through the concrete and metal. I conjectured that this means the development of a mutated burrowing animal of a quiet formidable character, possibly dangerous to human beings, even when protected by armored suits. I have orders for precautions, but no sign of the animals appeared. Dr. Govelsitz considers they may be nocturnal.

As soon as the doctor's report showed no immediate danger in proceeding, I dispatched combat vehicle XN-54 under Lieutenant Ghenjon to investigate the armored rocket-launchers

at Sappuka which gave us so much trouble in the development of our legitimate ambitions a hundred years ago. He has not yet reported, but I expect him to rendezvous with the expedition at Paralov.

The expedition was now ordered to proceed toward Paralov, leaving behind combat vehicle XN-86 to maintain radio contact through the gap in the barrier. The roads are in very poor condition, heavily overgrown with vine-like growths several merkils in thickness. It is recommended that when a colonial expedition is sent, the vehicles be of tread type and include road-building equipment. For at least three philads all the buildings we perceived were in a state of utter decay, and we observed no signs of animal or human life except some small unidentified creatures that disappeared rapidly in the tangle of vines and yellow-fruited plants. Dr. Rab of the linguistic-anthropological unit desires to have placed before the Board his theory that the Evadzon border has become a place of superstitious terror to the modern Kuradans since the erection of the barrier.

I have no opinion on this, but I was forced to intervene officially in a dispute which arose between Dr. Govelsitz and Dr. Adelach of the biological unit. The former considers that the absence of avian life is due to the fact that the mutation virus introduced by Your Intelligence's grandfather caused the birds to develop into flightless forms. Dr. Adelach offered the theory that it was not the virus, but the atomic dusting during the last war. I suspect him of deviationism and have ordered that Govelsitz' view is official.

At three philads the road began to show more signs of use and several crudely-fenced fields were observed on the left. In one of them there was growing a crop of mutated grain with a large head and extremely hard shell; another held three animals, an old one and two young, the adult being about the size of a cow, but all with only one leg in front and four curling horns. Of course we collected them at once, and halted while they were examined. Dr. Govelsitz pronounces them free of any trace of the virus. They appear to breed rapidly and should form a useful addition to our food supply.

A third of a philad beyond and behind a hill which bore a large number of trees, we came upon our first modern Kura-

dans. There were four of them, working together at some hand-task on the porch of an old building whose glass walls had been much broken and repaired with some opaque material—two females and two children. They made no effort to escape, and my heart leaped up when I saw them, for I remembered our long struggle for adequate territorial resources with the obstinate Kuradans, and these were true mutation-types, who would never again be able to resist the will of the superior race. Their heads went almost directly back from the brows and the rear of the skull was over-developed; the breasts of the females were enormous. Dr. Rab, who of course went to talk to them at once, reports that they only have three fingers on each hand.

Of course, they were not very intelligent. He had difficulty both in understanding them and in making himself understood and was forced to use the simplest Kuradan words. Even the word "Evadzon" had no meaning for them. They offered him some of the yellow fruit, cut up into a liquid, addressing him by an appellation which he understood as "City Man," and saying that their male was busy gathering his quota of food for the "Little Gods." He could not make out what was meant by this phrase; it is doubtless a reference to some debased religious belief. He said they appeared very cheerful and glad to see him.

This was confirmed two philads farther on, when we reached what had evidently been a village a century ago, and still was, though the people now live in recently-built huts of their own, and have allowed the old buildings to decay. A number of them emerged from their hovels as the expedition entered the village, all females and children, and all exhibiting striking physical deformities. The flattened skull was general; in addition to the big-breasted type with a much over-developed right arm and hand and a left arm and hand equally under-developed.

I judged it prudent to have Dr. Govelsitz examine one of them for indications of the Twedorski virus and signalled his vehicle accordingly. As soon as he and Rab appeared outside the vehicle, two or three of the females, uttering cries of pleasure, ran to their huts and returned with bowls of the liquid and yellow fruit. It was not difficult for Rab and Govel-

sitz to entice one of the females into the vehicle for testing and I am happy to inform Your Intelligence that the result of the test was negative, although the process occasioned some embarrassment to Govelsitz, the female having evidently mistaken the purpose for which he invited her into the vehicle.

I thereupon descended in person, accompanied by an interpreter, with the double purpose of learning what I could and affixing to a statue of some forgotten Kuradan hero in the public square a plaque taking possession of the place in the name of Your Intelligence. My interpreter experienced the same difficulties with the language as Rab, and he was able to make out that the creatures admired us greatly and were eager to present us with their preserved fruit. When I asked where their men were, they said at work, but they apparently have little concept of time, and could not give us the hour of their return.

While affixing the plate to the statue, I observed running down underneath it several more of the same type of burrows I had seen at the fortifications, and had the interpreter inquire what type of animal made them. The reply was "Little Gods," but he could obtain no satisfactory description. Rab describes this as an interesting return to totemism, indicating a barbaric culture level, and I agree. The clothes of the Kuradans are of poor quality and hand-woven; their buildings are the merest thatched huts. The bowls in which they offered us the preserved fruits are of rather anomalously fine quality and made of metal, and so was the small hand-weaving apparatus one of the females carried. Perhaps there survives somewhere a certain degree of industrialization, a fact which we can determine when we reach Paralov. No sign of any form of cultural activity has been observed; the Kuradans merely stared uncomprehendingly at my plaque.

Apparently, writing is a lost art to them.

Long live Toxernn III, Supreme Intelligence of Evadzon!
Shtenin, Major-General In camp 16th Moridd.

Second Report of the First Kurada Expedition (by rocket)
Intelligent Lord:

Evadzon must triumph!

That we have encountered difficulties is only a proof that

one cannot know in advance everything about the unknown; that we have overcome them is a proof of your supreme intelligence in selecting the personnel of the expedition which is opening vast new territories for the development of the Evadzonian race.

My head is at Your Intelligence's feet for not having reported earlier. It was not until today that I learned that yesterday's radio report probably did not reach Your Intelligence, and I hasten to make good the deficiency by repeating its substance in this document, which will be relayed through the gap in the barrier by combat vehicle XN-86.

To put the matter briefly, there are signs of a surreptitious opposition to our enlightening mission, but we have found the means of dominating it. The first sign came on the morning of the 17th, when we broke camp, nine philads inside the frontier. The camp was set up with only the normal night guards because of the lack of any evidence of hostility on the part of the inhabitants. In the morning, however, there were found affixed to my own vehicle a series of metal plates bearing pictographic writing. One of these plates is enclosed for examination by the Scientific Board. Our own staff reports that it is of an alloy unknown to them, as is the means of impressing the writing upon it. They are investigating further.

The enclosed plate is the first of the series. As you will perceive, it shows a very good representation of two of our combat vehicles proceeding back across the bridge homeward, their crews wearing expressions of great happiness. The remainder of the series showed us entering a city which by its typical Kuradan architecture I took to be Paralov, wearing unhappy expressions, or doing wild, violent dances, with rolling eyes and disordered hair.

I interpreted this as a warning and the men of the scientific units agreed. Naturally, no attention was paid to it, but what attracted our attention was the quality of the plates themselves and the delineation. Before Your Intelligent grandfather released the Twedorski virus among them, the Kuradans were celebrated as an artistic, if tricky, people, but Dr. Rab assures me it would have been impossible for the debased peasants we have seen to produce such works, either technologically or in delineation. I was therefore forced to assume the existence of

quite another mutant strain among them, and this was later strikingly confirmed.

The guards declared the night was quiet, though very dark, and they had seen no one approach the vehicles. I have given them second-level punishments (18 lashes and half an hour in the thumb press).

While the discussion of the plates was in progress, my attention was drawn to the peculiar behavior of Dr. Govelsitz. Someone suggested that we ought to find out whether the plates were really metal or something good to eat—in a jocular manner of course—whereupon Govelsitz immediately seized on one and clamped his teeth on it, in a manner no means jocular. A moment or two later he said to me that Dr. Adelach had told him he ought to confess that his theory for the absence of birds in Kurada was inferior to Adelach's own, and therefore he was abandoning his position in favor of that taken by Adelach. As I had already ordered that the Govelsitz theory (that the birds had mutated into flightless forms) was correct, this constituted a deviationist insult to the Supreme Intelligence. I at once ordered Govelsitz into arrest for psychological examination. It is very difficult to conduct while on active service, and he has not signed the confession prepared for him as yet, but we hope to hold the trial in another day or two.

Upon resuming the journey we encountered a procession of two-wheeled carts drawn by animals with round heads and long curling hair of about the size of a horse. The biological unit, after a cursory examination, pronounced them mutated sheep. Such animals might provide a valuable source of meat, and their hair can be turned over to the natives to be woven into clothing by their crude processes, thus relieving our synthetics trust of the necessity of providing such materials for the labor we will control.

The drivers of the carts were about evenly divided between the two types previously observed—the three-fingered species, and that with the disproportionate arms. It is not yet determined whether these can interbreed. The vehicles were loaded with metal articles; weaving tools like those previously reported, one whole load of the fine metal plates, and another of tools so remarkable that we confiscated samples, in spite of the

protests of the drivers, who showed the greatest fear at our action. No opposition was threatened however.

I will dispatch samples of these, together with collected flora and fauna, by vehicle as soon as possible. For the present, let me say that some of them are small machine tools, adapted to the cutting of highly refractory materials and others hand tools made for tiny hands, not over a merkil or two in span. All were of great fineness of workmanship, and argued not only a high degree of industrialization, but the existence of a third race of human mutants, dwarf-like in size. In the presence of these artifacts, I felt severely the misfortune of Govesitz' conduct. None of the others seemed capable of throwing real illumination on the problem of the tools.

When questioned as to where they came from, the drivers answered quite readily that it was from the city; but when asked where they were bound, they only gave vague answers about the "Little Gods," with a number of words which, Rab says, have entered Kurada since the barrier went up, and which are therefore unintelligible. I might have detached a vehicle to follow them, but judged it imprudent to isolate one, in view of the fact that the culture suggested by these tools is probably provided with dangerous means of attack and defense.

Rab says the mutant Kuradans possess a sense of hearing pitched several degrees above ours. When I blew my whistle for entrance into the cars and the resumption of the journey, they became greatly excited, and began talking together all at once.

We reached the outskirts of Paralov late in the afternoon. Your Intelligence will appreciate that, although degenerate by our virile standards, the Kuradans possessed a certain artistic sense that enabled them to produce objects of great beauty. I recall the exquisite Kuradan statuette which adorns Your Intelligence's desk. We have old pictures of Paralov, but it must be seen to be appreciated. Even ruinous, and with the vine-like trunks twisting across its broad avenues, it is a place of great beauty, with finely proportioned buildings. I would recommend that the city be reserved as a rest-camp, and the earliest colonization include entertainers and pleasure-girls. It will take very little labor to prepare some of the buildings for

immediate occupancy, especially the fine one in which the Kuradans housed a collection of their paintings.

Immediately on reaching Paralov, our attention was caught by a plume of smoke against the sky, which rose steadily, not with the indication of something burning but of an industrial establishment. I ordered scouting formation in case there were defenses, and made an approach through the streets. The precaution proved unnecessary. When we reached the place, which was on the northern outskirts, it proved to be a long, low building of recent construction, not in the least like the traditional Kuradan architecture, which is tall, with angled buttresses, but domed over and close to the ground. As commander of the expedition, I did not hesitate to be the first to enter, accompanied by an armed guard and Dr. Rab.

The building proved to be the factory in which the tools and plates we had seen were being produced by workmen; so intent on their tasks that they hardly looked up to answer our interpreters' questions. In the first place, these workmen: they constitute a distinct third species of mutant modern Kuradan, being in all respects well-proportioned and even handsome, though rather small, and possessed of a very low degree of intelligence, even lower than that of the deformed peasant Kuradans. They were cooperative and willing to answer questions, but apparently did not understand much of what was said to them. This, however, may be merely clever concealment on their part, for reasons that I will describe presently.

Second: their work. They were operating automatic machines with power sources that came up through the floor and whose lines we have not traced. There was not too much apparent comprehension of the machines. Each worker had by his side a series of the metal plates with the steps of what he was doing pictured on it and kept glancing at it constantly. When one of the machines ceased operating, the worker at it merely stretched, stood up and walked away from it. From him we learned that these called themselves the "City Men" (the title given to us by the first Kuradans we encountered), and that they lived in Paralov.

While we were interviewing this individual Colonel Kaszuk entered to say that our radios had become inoperative. He had

discovered it through trying to make contact with two of our cars which had apparently taken the wrong turn among the streets and had not joined the rest on schedule. At once recalling that I had not received any acknowledgment of my first report, I hurried out and confirmed that on all the common frequencies of all the radios in the cars, there was nothing but a high-pitched, persistent humming. As the instruments seemed in perfect order, this could only come from jamming.

I ordered experiment with very high and very low frequencies, in the meanwhile returning to the factory building, where the workers, with the exception of the one whose machine had broken down, continued to labor imperturbably. I demanded to know who was the head of the factory; he did not appear to understand. He was equally uncomprehending when I said that this radio jamming must cease at once, and it was clear that, although these Kuradans give every outward appearance of cooperation, we were dealing with the type of opposition known as underground.

There is an established procedure for dealing with this, which I think the modern Kuradans have become too much mutated and too far out of contact with civilization to remember. I immediately took an armed detail into the factory, plucked every third man from his place, and taking them outside, informed them that unless the jamming ceased, they would be executed. At about this time, the work in the factory ceased, and the workers came trooping out. I repeated the admonition, and to reinforce it, gave one of them the thumb-press. He screamed in a satisfactory manner and the others seemed disturbed, but without positive result.

For the night, I retired the force to a hill beyond the factory and posted war-standard guards. We were undisturbed, and in the morning, the remaining workers returned to the factory as though nothing had happened. Your Intelligence will perhaps not approve my forbearance, but feeling it always better to obtain the willing cooperation of subject peoples, I had the interpreters warn these "City Men" repeatedly before proceeding to measures. As the radios remained inoperative, I took one of the prisoners into the factory and gave him the thumb-press at full intensity. He died after only two hours and seven-

teen minutes, which indicates a low order of physical resistance among these people, but the rest still affected not to understand what we were asking them.

I executed two more of the prisoners in the course of the afternoon, and have informed the rest that the remainder will be executed tomorrow unless the radio jamming ceases. The examiners report that Govelsitz is quite irrational today, throwing himself about violently and demanding some of the yellow fruit which grows in this country. I am still without word from Ghenjon, and in order that this report shall reach Your Intelligence at once, am forwarding it by rocket to vehicle XN-86 to be passed through the gap in the barrier.

Dr. Rab is inclined to the hypothesis that there is a fourth species of mutated Kuradan man, very small, and capable of using the tools we saw. I have issued no order against this theory, but I regard it as less tenable than the one that these "City Men" are themselves responsible for the radio business. Very well; I intend to bring them to terms at the beginning of what will prove a happy relationship with Evadzon.

Long live Toxernn III, Supreme Intelligence of Evadzon!
Shtenin, Major-General At Paralov, 18th Moridd.

Third Report of the First Kurada Expedition (by radio)

Intelligent Lord:

The City Men of Kurada have surrendered! Evadzon must triumph!

This morning, as we approached the factory with a new group of prisoners, preparing to execute several of them at once to make our purpose perfectly clear, we were met by a large number of women of their species. They were carrying bowls of the preserved yellow fruit, which seems to have an honorific significance among them, and they gestured enticingly. Through Rab, who is acquiring considerable facility in their language, I explained that while we cherished the friendliest feelings toward them, the jamming of our radios must cease, or they would have to take the consequences. This the women seemed to understand.

The one who approached me replied that to be friends, we must accept their fruit, and showed me one of the metal plates with an illustration of a man and woman eating together from

one of the bowls. I accordingly took a piece of it—it is not at all bad, pulpy and with a flavor like that of spiced pears, though if I am any judge, alcoholic—and permitted the other members of the expedition to accept fruit from the bowls being offered to them. The women clapped their hands in delight, and one of them ran into the building, while the one who had accosted me flung her arms around my neck and would not be satisfied until we had emptied the bowl together.

A few moments later Colonel Kaszuk came running from the camp to say that the radio interference had ceased and he was in communication with XN-86, though not as yet with Ghenjon's XN-54. Naturally, we were delighted, and I ordered the prisoners released at once, except three whom we retained as hostages against further troubles.

But it seems there will be no further troubles. As soon as the prisoners were released, the Kuradan woman with me also ran back into the factory building, uttering the single word "Wait." Presently she returned with an animal on her shoulder which looked like a white rat, at least two handspans long, but with an enormous head.

"It is one of the Little Gods," she said. "They are very good, and tell us everything."

The creature was not at all repulsive and evidently very intelligent. It placed its head close to her ear and made a series of high-pitched sounds, at which she laughed, and then burst into a flow of words, from which Rab finally extracted the statement that the entire personnel of the expedition was invited to spend the day in a banquet with the women while the men were at work. This was so pleasant a termination to our victory that I acceded at once, and the announcement to the crews was received with cheers.

They are saucy wenches with long, dark hair, well-formed even as we understand the term in Evadzon. I understand that as the mutation has made them into a quite separate species, there can be no question of interbreeding, and I therefore anticipate a pleasant day. The one with me is named Clypteia.

I regret to say that Dr. Govelsitz died at dawn. He was violently insane.

Long live Toxernn III, Supreme Intelligence of Evadzon!
Shtenin, Major-General At Paralov, 19th Moridd, morning.

Statement of Gavil Brobon, Communication Mechanic

I was communication mechanic of the command vehicle XP-22 during the First Kurada Expedition. I have read the reports of General Shtenin. As far as my observation goes, it is accurate.

I have to add only that, being questioned on the point, I remember that Dr. Govelsitz ate a quantity of the preserved fruit known as dream-pears before examining the Kuradan woman for traces of the Twedorski mutation-virus.

I was on duty in the radio compartment of the command vehicle on the 19th Moridd at Paralov, and therefore did not accompany the remainder of the crews to the banquet. I would say that they were intoxicated when they returned in the evening, particularly General Shtenin. I say it because his movements were uncertain and his voice thick. He set no guards for the night.

As I had not been relieved, I remained on duty, and received the acknowledgment of General Shtenin's report, transmitted through XN-86. At twilight the radio again became inoperative in the same manner as before. I did not like to rouse the General under the circumstances, so I set the radio on a screamer which would rouse me in case it came on again, and went to sleep.

I was roused just before midnight by sounds in the vehicle. When I looked out of the compartment I saw several of the large white rats known as "Little Gods" in the vehicle. They were walking on their hind legs and examining all the equipment, talking to each other in high-pitched voices. The lights were not on, but some of them carried small, dim flashlights, by the illumination of which they took down and replaced very quickly one of the rocket-projectors. One of them entered General Shtenin's compartment with a bundle of the metal plates.

In the morning I reported the failure of the radio to Colonel Kaszuk. He said it did not matter. I then reported it to the General. He said he had been informed that it was better not to use the radio for the time being. At the time he had two of the metal plates in his hand. I did not look at them closely, but I believe they pictured the expedition returning. He sent out a

detail to procure more of the preserved dream-pears, and they all ate some. I did not have any myself.

After this, the General gave orders for the return journey. None of the officers protested. Outside Paralov, we met vehicle XN-54, which joined our movement. We proceeded at high speed, arriving at the bridge after dark. XN-86 was on duty there. As soon as we arrived Commander Videlacht got out of his vehicle and came over to ours. General Shtenin got out to meet him.

Commander Videlacht then asked what he was doing there and why he had not obeyed the order to set up an outpost at Paralov. The General said he had received no such orders, and even if he had it was necessary to return at once. Commander Videlacht went to his vehicle to get the order file, and I think it was at this time that Lieutenant Ghenjon came over. One of the rats was sitting on his shoulder. When Commander Videlacht came back he made some remark about the rat, I don't know what, and I thought he was going to hit it, and Lieutenant Ghenjon shot him. General Shtenin said it was just what he should have done.

I believe in the Supreme Intelligence of Toxernn III.

Report of the Scientific Board of Examination in the Case of the Late Bosip Shtenin

Intelligent Lord:

We regret exceedingly not having secured the confession of the traitor Shtenin before his death. Unfortunately, he was already so irrational when our examination began that neither the thumb-press nor the lights had any effect upon him. As he kept screaming for preserved dream-pears, we immediately administered some to the other surviving prisoners. Their jerkings ceased at once and they became, to all appearances, normal. But we noted that they were left with a high degree of suggestibility, and would at once perform the most absurd acts when ordered. By lowering the dosage, this suggestibility was also lowered.

Chemical analysis of the preserved fruit shows it contains a narcotic alkaloid whose formula we have not yet determined. It is evidently habit-forming, and so violent in its effects that cutting off the supply produces the death of the subject, as we

have confirmed in several cases. On the other hand, a small daily dosage appears to leave the subject without physical damage.

Samples of the fresh fruit have also been analyzed. They do not contain the alkaloid, which is thus evidently produced during the process of preservation. On this we have no data at present.

The other and more serious question arising from the attached documents concerns the rats known as "Little Gods." We consider it evident that under the influence of the Twedorski mutation-virus the rats of Kurada have mutated into a tool-using, social form, of an intelligence nearly as high as the human, and certainly higher than the mutated humans of Kurada. Even independent of the use of the dream-pears, they seem to possess considerable powers of suggestion, or psychic control over humans, and when these powers are exercised upon humans under the influence of the drug, they become absolutely irresistible, as is evident from the traitor Shtenin's decision to return from Paralov in the face of orders.

The drug would be useful in some of the processes of government, and the rats represent a potential danger. We therefore recommend a second expedition to Kurada to obtain some of the drug and to explore methods of destroying the rats as a prelude to occupation. Samples of the live rats or even of dead ones for analysis would be peculiarly useful.

Long live Toxernn III, Supreme Intelligence of Evadzon!
27th Moridd.

Report from Madsill, Chief of Secret Police

No trace of the traitor Ghenjon or of the large white rats he brought from Kurada in his vehicle has yet been found. However, I have important information which I believe will lead to the capture of both within a few days.

Long live Toxernn III, Supreme Intelligence of Evadzon!
13th Avluna.

First Report of the Second Kurada Expedition (by rocket)
Intelligent Lord:

Conformable to your orders, the expedition avoided the main highroads to Paralov, where the rats and the human

Kuradans would be forewarned, and took a westerly direction. Tonight finds us encamped at the village marked as Tatalo on the old maps, twenty philads inside Kurada. The inhabitants have everywhere received us well, offering us bowls of the dream-pears, which were placed under seal.

As instructed, I have collected two specimens, one of the disproportionately armed species and one of the three-fingered type. They made little objection to accompanying us. The interpreting staff assures me that they will be cooperative in communicating with one of the Little Gods when we have secured one. The Kuradans say they can understand what these rats say.

As also instructed, I laid bare one of the burrows under the border forts; extremely hard work, for the material was highly refractory. At a distance of twenty handspans down, it expanded into a series of chambers, some of which had permanent metal furniture fixed to the wall, but the place was not occupied, and from the debris scattered around, appeared to be deserted. There was an outlet and a very curious aerial for a radio, but no instrument.

Our own radios are inoperative. We have seen no other signs of the Little Gods.

Long live Toxernn III, Supreme Intelligence of Evadzon!
Huntervann, Major-General.

14th Avluna.

Report from Communications Center, 3rd Military District

No reports received from General Huntervann for two days.

16th Avluna.

Report from Communications Center, 3rd Military District

Second Kurada Expedition has just crossed bridge and entered fortified area.

17th Avluna, noon.

Second Report of the Second Kurada Expedition

Intelligent Lord:

Your Intelligence has been grievously misinformed.

By conversation with the rats known as "Little Gods"

through the Kuradans who can understand their speech, I have learned that they only desire to live in friendly symbiosis with us. I have brought a number of them with me to convince Your Intelligence and the Scientific Board of this. The "Little Gods" are not only friendly, but have a profound knowledge of many technical subjects and will gladly direct us.

As for the fruit known as dream-pears it is actually beneficial in all respects.

I have fortunately secured a generous supply of it.

Long live Toxernn III.

Huntervann, Major-General, 17th Avluna, afternoon, 3rd Military District.

Message to Lieut.-General Chorr, Commanding 3rd Military District

Arrest General Huntervann and his entire staff at once. Exterminate all white rats.

Toxernn

Message to Intelligence Center

Intelligent Lord:

Your Intelligence has been misinformed.

General Huntervann is a loyal and intelligent citizen. His action in bringing the "Little Gods" here will result in untold benefits to all Evadzon. They only desire to live in friendly symbiosis with us, and to give us the benefit of their science. I am dispatching several to the other military districts by plane and combat vehicle with Kuradan interpreters.

Your approval is expected.

I am also sending a supply of dream-pears which, I find, conduce to a better understanding of the "Little Gods."

Chorr, Lieutenant-General, 18th Avluna.

Message to General Lebartsen, Commander of the Forces

Mobilize air force at once. Bomb 3rd Military District with atomics. Destroy all planes and combat vehicles from that point on sight and exterminate any white rats observed.

Toxernn

18th Avluna.

Message to Intelligence Center

Your Intelligence must have met with some accident, or be ill-advised.

Your extraordinary message calling for the bombing of the 3rd Military District and the killing of the "Little Gods" reached me three hours after the arrival of a deputation from General Chorr, accompanied by several of the "Little Gods" themselves. I had a most enjoyable communication with them. They only wish to live in Evadzon, as they do in Kurada, in friendly relationship with us, and to give us the benefit of their science.

They desire me to set a guard around your palace until Your Intelligence recovers from your indisposition, and I am doing so.

I trust that with their assistance, your recovery will soon be assured.

Lebartsen, General

Fredric Brown, a virtuoso on the Chinese flute as well as on the typewriter, is as well known to mystery readers as he is to science-fiction fans—which is to say, well and favorably indeed. With his attractive and amiable wife, Beth, he makes his home at whatever point on the surface of the civilized world they happen to fancy at any particular moment. You may call his peripatetic production methods informal, if you will; but it's hard to argue about a system of writing that produces mysteries as successful as *The Fabulous Clipjoint*, science-fiction novels as funny as *What Mad Universe*, and short stories as memorable as—

Hall of Mirrors

For an instant you think it is temporary blindness, this sudden dark that comes in the middle of a bright afternoon.

It *must* be blindness, you think; could the sun that was tanning you have gone out instantaneously, leaving you in utter blackness?

Then the nerves of your body tell you that you are *standing*, whereas only a second ago you were sitting comfortably, almost reclining, in a canvas chair. In the patio of a friend's house in Beverly Hills. Talking to Barbara, your fiancée. Looking at Barbara—Barbara in a swim suit—her skin golden tan in the brilliant sunshine, beautiful.

You wore swimming trunks. Now you do not feel them on you; the slight pressure of the elastic waistband is no longer there against your waist. You touch your hands to your hips. You are naked. And standing.

Whatever has happened to you is more than a change to sudden darkness or to sudden blindness.

You raise your hands gropingly before you. They touch a plain smooth surface, a wall. You spread them apart and each hand reaches a corner. You pivot slowly. A second wall, then a third, then a door. You are in a closet about four feet square.

Your hand finds the knob of the door. It turns and you push the door open.

There is light now. The door has opened to a lighted room . . . a room that you have never seen before.

It is not large, but it is pleasantly furnished—although the furniture is of a style that is strange to you. Modesty makes you open the door cautiously the rest of the way. But the room is empty of people.

You step into the room, turning to look behind you into the closet, which is now illuminated by light from the room. The closet is and is not a closet; it is the size and shape of one, but it contains nothing, not a single hook, no rod for hanging clothes, no shelf. It is an empty, blank-walled, four-by-four-foot space.

You close the door to it and stand looking around the room. It is about twelve by sixteen feet. There is one door, but it is closed. There are no windows. Five pieces of furniture. Four of them you recognize—more or less. One looks like a very functional desk. One is obviously a chair . . . a comfortable-looking one. There is a table, although its top is on several levels instead of only one. Another is a bed, or couch. Something shimmering is lying across it and you walk over and pick the shimmering something up and examine it. It is a garment.

You are naked, so you put it on. Slippers are part way under the bed (or couch) and you slide your feet into them. They fit, and they feel warm and comfortable as nothing you have ever worn on your feet has felt. Like lamb's wool, but softer.

You are dressed now. You look at the door—the only door of the room except that of the closet (closet?) from which you entered it. You walk to the door and before you try the knob, you see the small typewritten sign pasted just above it that reads:

This door has a time lock set to open in one hour. For reasons you will soon understand, it is better that you do not leave this room before then. There is a letter for you on the desk. Please read it.

It is not signed. You look at the desk and see that there is an envelope lying on it.

You do not yet go to take that envelope from the desk and read the letter that must be in it.

Why not? Because you are frightened.

You see other things about the room. The lighting has no source that you can discover. It comes from nowhere. It is not indirect lighting; the ceiling and the walls are not reflecting it at all.

They didn't have lighting like that, back where you came from. What did you mean by *back where you came from*?

You close your eyes. You tell yourself: *I am Norman Hastings. I am an associate professor of mathematics at the University of Southern California. I am twenty-five years old, and this is the year nineteen hundred and fifty-four.*

You open your eyes and look again.

They didn't use that style of furniture in Los Angeles—or anywhere else that you know of—in 1954. That thing over in the corner—you can't even guess what it is. So might your grandfather, at your age, have looked at a television set.

You look down at yourself, at the shimmering garment that you found waiting for you. With thumb and forefinger you feel its texture.

It's like nothing you've ever touched before.

I am Norman Hastings. This is nineteen hundred and fifty-four.

Suddenly you must know, and at once.

You go to the desk and pick up the envelope that lies upon it. Your name is typed on the outside. *Norman Hastings.*

Your hands shake a little as you open it. Do you blame them?

There are several pages, typewritten. Dear Norman, it starts. You turn quickly to the end to look for the signature. It is unsigned.

You turn back and start reading.

"Do not be afraid. There is nothing to fear, but much to explain. Much that you must understand before the time lock opens that door. Much that you must accept and—obey.

"You have already guessed that you are in the future—in what, to you, seems to be the future. The clothes and the room must have told you that. I planned it that way so the shock would not be too sudden, so you would realize it over the course of several minutes rather than read it here—and quite probably disbelieve what you read.

"The 'closet' from which you have just stepped is, as you have by now realized, a time machine. From it you stepped into the world of 2004. The date is April 7th, just fifty years from the time you last remember.

"You cannot return.

"I did this to you and you may hate me for it; I do not know. That is up to you to decide, but it does not matter. What does matter, and not to you alone, is another decision which you must make. I am incapable of making it.

"Who is writing this to you? I would rather not tell you just yet. By the time you have finished reading this, even though it is not signed (for I knew you would look first for a signature), I will not need to tell you who I am. You will know.

"I am seventy-five years of age. I have, in this year 2004, been studying 'time' for thirty of those years. I have completed the first time machine ever built—and thus far, its construction, even the fact that it has been constructed, is my own secret.

"You have just participated in the first major experiment. It will be your responsibility to decide whether there shall ever be any more experiments with it, whether it should be given to the world, or whether it should be destroyed and never used again."

End of the first page. You look up for a moment, hesitating to turn the next page. Already you suspect what is coming.

You turn the page.

"I constructed the first time machine a week ago. My calculations had told me that it would work, but not how it would work. I had expected it to send an object back in time

—it works backward in time only, not forward—physically unchanged and intact.

“My first experiment showed me my error. I placed a cube of metal in the machine—it was a miniature of the one you just walked out of—and set the machine to go backward ten years. I flicked the switch and opened the door, expecting to find the cube vanished. Instead I found it had crumbled to powder.

“I put in another cube and sent it two years back. The second cube came back unchanged, except that it was newer, shinier.

“That gave me the answer. I had been expecting the cubes to go back in time, and they had done so, but not in the sense I had expected them to. Those metal cubes had been fabricated about three years previously. I had sent the first one back years before it had existed in its fabricated form. Ten years ago it had been ore. The machine returned it to that state.

“Do you see how our previous theories of time travel have been wrong? We expected to be able to step into a time machine in, say, 2004, set it for fifty years back, and then step out in the year 1954 . . . but it does not work that way. The machine does not move in time. Only whatever is within the machine is affected, and then just with relation to itself and not to the rest of the Universe.

“I confirmed this with guinea pigs by sending one six weeks old five weeks back and it came out a baby.

“I need not outline all my experiments here. You will find a record of them in the desk and you can study it later.

“Do you understand now what has happened to you, Norman?”

You begin to understand. And you begin to sweat.

The *I* who wrote that letter you are now reading is *you*, yourself at the age of seventy-five, in this year of 2004. You are that seventy-five-year-old man, with your body returned to what it had been fifty years ago, with all the memories of fifty years of living wiped out.

You invented the time machine.

And before you used it on yourself, you made these arrangements to help you orient yourself. You wrote yourself the letter which you are now reading.

But if those fifty years are—to you—gone, what of all your friends, those you loved? What of your parents? What of the girl you are going—were going—to marry?

You read on:

“Yes, you will want to know what has happened. Mom died in 1963, Dad in 1968. You married Barbara in 1956. I am sorry to tell you that she died only three years later, in a plane crash. You have one son. He is still living; his name is Walter; he is now forty-six years old and is an accountant in Kansas City.”

Tears come into your eyes and for a moment you can no longer read. Barbara dead—dead for forty-five years. And only minutes ago, in subjective time, you were sitting next to her, sitting in the bright sun in a Beverly Hills patio . . .

You force yourself to read again.

“But back to the discovery. You begin to see some of its implications. You will need time to think to see all of them.

“It does not permit time travel as we have thought of time travel, but it gives us immortality of a sort. Immortality of the kind I have temporarily given us.

“Is it good?” Is it worth while to lose the memory of fifty years of one’s life in order to return one’s body to relative youth? The only way I can find out is to try, as soon as I have finished writing this and made my other preparations.

“You will know the answer.

“But before you decide, remember that there is another problem, more important than the psychological one. I mean overpopulation.

“If our discovery is given to the world, if all who are old or dying can make themselves young again, the population will almost double every generation. Nor would the world—not even our own relatively enlightened country—be willing to accept/compulsory birth control as a solution.

“Give this to the world, as the world is today in 2004, and within a generation there will be famine, suffering, war. Perhaps a complete collapse of civilization.

“Yes, we have reached other planets, but they are not suitable for colonizing. The stars may be our answer, but we are a long way from reaching them. When we do, someday, the billions of habitable planets that must be out there will be

our answer . . . our living room. But until then, what is the answer?

"Destroy the machine? But think of the countless lives it can save, the suffering it can prevent. Think of what it would mean to a man dying of cancer. Think . . ."

Think. You finish the letter and put it down.

You think of Barbara dead for forty-five years. And of the fact that you were married to her for three years and that those years are lost to you.

Fifty lost years. You damn the old man of seventy-five whom you became and who has done this to you . . . who has given you this decision to make.

Bitterly, you know what the decision must be. You think that *he* knew, too, and realized that he could safely leave it in your hands. Damn him, he *should* have known.

Too valuable to destroy, too dangerous to give.

The other answer is painfully obvious.

You must be custodian of this discovery and keep it secret until it is safe to give, until mankind has expanded to the stars and has new worlds to populate, or until, even without that, he has reached a state of civilization where he can avoid overpopulation by rationing births to the number of accidental—or voluntary—deaths.

If neither of those things has happened in another fifty years (and are they likely so soon?), then you, at seventy-five, will be writing another letter like this one. You will be undergoing another experience similar to the one you're going through now. And making the same decision, of course.

Why not? You'll be the same person again.

Time and again, to preserve this secret until Man is ready for it.

How often will you again sit at a desk like this one, thinking the thoughts you are thinking now, feeling the grief you now feel?

There is a click at the door and you know that the time lock has opened, that you are now free to leave this room, free to start a new life for yourself in place of the one you have already lived and lost.

But you are in no hurry now to walk directly through that door.

You sit there, staring straight ahead of you blindly, seeing in your mind's eye the vista of a set of facing mirrors, like those in an old-fashioned barber shop, reflecting the same thing over and over again, diminishing into far distance.

PHILIP JOSÉ FARMER

In 1952 a science-fiction magazine named *Startling Stories* published Philip Farmer's first story. It was a novel, unusual and bold, called *The Lovers*; some idea of its impact may be found in the interesting fact that within twenty-four hours of the time it hit the stand, an enterprising book publisher had signed it up. That was the first step in an exciting new literary career; for the second step, we offer—

Mother

"Look, mother. The clock is running backwards."

Eddie Fetts pointed to the hands on the pilot room dial, always set on Central Standard Time because the majority of the research expedition thought it would remind them of their home state, Illinois, whenever they looked at it. When star-yachting, one time was as good as another.

Dr. Paula Fetts said, "The crash must have reversed it."

"How could it do that?"

"I can't tell you. I don't know everything, son."

"Oh!"

"Well, don't look at me so disappointedly. I'm a pathologist, not an electronicist."

"Don't be so cross, mother. I can't stand it. Not now."

He walked out of the pilot room. Anxiously, she followed him. Burying the crew and her fellow scientists had been very trying for him. Spilled blood had always made him dizzy and sick; he could scarcely control his hands enough to help her sack the scattered bones and entrails.

He had wanted to put the corpses in the nuclear furnace, but she had forbidden that. The Geigers amidships were tick-

ing loudly, warning that there was an invisible death in the stern.

The meteor that struck the moment the ship came out of Translation into normal space had probably wrecked the engine-room. So she had understood from the incoherent high-pitched phrases of a colleague before he fled to the pilot room. She had hurried to find Eddie. She feared his cabin door would still be locked, as he had been making a tape of the *Heavy Hangs the Albatross* aria from Gianelli's *Ancient Mariner*.

Fortunately, the emergency system had automatically thrown out the locking circuits. Entering she had called out his name in fear he'd been hurt. He was lying half-conscious on the floor, but it was not the accident that had thrown him there. The reason lay in the corner, released from his lax hand: a quart free-fall thermos, rubber-nippled. From Eddie's open mouth charged a breath of rye that not even chlorophyll pills had been able to conceal.

Sharply she had commanded him to get up and onto the bed. Her voice, the first he had ever heard, pierced through the phalanx of Old Red Star. He struggled up, and she, though smaller, had thrown every ounce of her weight into getting him up and onto the bed.

There she had lain down with him and strapped them both in. She understood that the lifeboat had been wrecked also, and that it was up to the captain to bring the yacht down safely to the surface of this charted but unexplored planet, Baudelaire. Everybody else had gone to sit behind the captain, strapped in their crashchairs, unable to help except with their silent backing.

Moral support had not been enough. The ship had come in on a shallow slant. Too fast, though. The wounded motors had not been able to hold her up. The prow had taken the brunt of the punishment. So had those seated in the nose.

Dr. Fetts had held her son's head on her bosom and prayed out loud to her God. Eddie had snored and muttered. Then there was a sound like the clashing of the gates of doom—a tremendous bong as if the ship were a clapper in a gargantuan bell tolling the most frightening message human ears may hear—a blinding blast of light—and darkness and silence.

A few moments later Eddie began crying out in a childish voice, "Don't leave me to die, mother! Come back! Come back!"

Mother was unconscious by his side, but he did not know that. He wept for a while, then he lapsed back into his rye-fogged stupor—if he had ever been out of it—and slept. Again, darkness and silence.

It was the second day since the crash, if "day" could describe that twilight state on Baudelaire. Dr. Fetts followed her son wherever he went. She knew he was very sensitive and easily upset. All his life she had known it and had tried to get between him and anything that would cause trouble. She had succeeded, she thought, fairly well until three months ago when Eddie had eloped.

The girl was Polina Fameux, the ash-blond long-legged actress whose tridi image, taped, had been shipped to all stars where a small acting talent and a large and shapely bosom were admired. Since Eddie was a well-known Metro baritone, the marriage made a big splash whose ripples ran around the civilized Galaxy.

Dr. Fetts had felt very bad about the elopement, but she had, she knew, hidden her grief very well beneath a smiling mask. She didn't regret having to give him up; after all, he was a full-grown man, no longer her little boy; but, really, aside from the seasons at the Met and his tours, he had not been parted from her since he was eight.

That was when she went on a honeymoon with her second husband. And then they'd not been separated long, for Eddie had gotten sick, and she'd had to hurry back and take care of him, as he had insisted she was the only one who could make him well.

Moreover, you couldn't count his days at the opera as being a total loss, for he vised her every noon and they had a long talk—no matter how high the vise bills ran.

The ripples caused by her son's marriage were scarcely a week old before they were followed by even bigger ones. They bore the news of the separation of the two. A fortnight later, Polina applied for divorce on grounds of incompatibility. Eddie was handed the papers in his mother's apartment. He had come back to her the day he and Polina had agreed they

"couldn't make a go of it," or, as he phrased it to his mother, "couldn't get together."

Dr. Fetts, was, of course, very curious about the reason for their parting, but, as she explained to her friends, she "respected" his silence. What she didn't say was that she had told herself the time would come when he would tell her all.

Eddie's "nervous breakdown" started shortly afterwards. He had been very irritable, moody, and depressed, but he got worse the day a so-called friend told Eddie that whenever Polina heard his name mentioned, she laughed loud and long. The friend added that Polina had promised to tell someday the true story of their brief merger.

That night his mother had to call in a doctor.

In the days that followed, she thought of giving up her position as research pathologist at De Kruif and taking up all her time to help him "get back on his feet." It was a sign of the struggle going on in her mind that she had not been able to decide within a week's time. Ordinarily given to swift consideration and resolution of a problem, she could not agree to surrender her beloved quest into tissue regeneration.

Just as she was on the verge of doing what was for her the incredible and the shameful: tossing a coin, she had been visited by her superior. He told her she had been chosen to go with a group of biologists on a research cruise to ten pre-selected planetary systems.

Overjoyed, she had thrown away the papers that would turn Eddie over to a sanatorium. And, since he was quite famous, she had used her influence and his good name to get the government to allow him to go along. Ostensibly, he was to make a survey of the development of opera on planets colonized by Terrans. That the yacht was not visiting any colonized globes seemed to have been missed by the bureaus concerned. But it was not the first time in the history of a government that its left hand knew not what its right was doing.

Actually, he was to be "rebuilt" by his mother, who thought of herself as being much more capable of setting him up again than any of the prevalent A, F, J, R, S, K, or H therapies. True, some of her friends reported amazing results with some of the symbol-chasing techniques. On the other

hand, she knew two close companions who had tried them all and had gotten no benefits from any of them.

After all, she decided, she was his mother; she could do more for him than any of those "alphabatties"; he was flesh of her flesh, blood of her blood. Besides, he wasn't so sick. He just got awfully blue sometimes and made theatrical but insincere threats of suicide or else just sat and stared into space. But she could handle him.

So now it was that she followed him from the backward-running clock to his room. And saw him step inside, look for a second, and then turn to her with a twisted face.

"Neddie is ruined, mother. Absolutely ruined."

She glanced at the piano. It had torn loose from the wall-racks at the moment of impact and smashed itself against the opposite wall. To Eddie, it wasn't just a piano; it was Neddie. He had a pet name for everything he contacted for more than a brief time. It was as if he hopped from one appellation to the next, like an ancient sea sailor who felt lost unless he were close to the familiar and designated points of the shoreline. Otherwise, Eddie seemed to be drifting helplessly in a chaotic ocean, one that was anonymous and amorphous.

Or, analogy more typical of him, he was like the nightclubber who feels submerged, drowning, unless he hops from table to table, going from one well-known group of faces to the next, and avoiding the featureless and unnamed dummies at the strangers' tables.

He did not cry over Neddie. She wished he would. He had been so apathetic during the voyage. Nothing, not even the unparalleled splendor of the naked stars nor the inexpressible alienness of strange planets had seemed to lift him very long. If he would only weep or laugh loudly or display some sign that he was reacting violently to what was happening. She would even have welcomed his striking her in anger or calling her bad names.

But no, not even during the gathering of the mangled corpses, when he looked for a while as if he were going to vomit, would he give way to his body's demand for expression. She understood that if he were to throw up, he would be much better for it, would, as it were, have gotten rid of much of the psychic disturbance along with the physical.

He would not. He had kept on raking flesh and bones into the large plastic bags and kept a fixed look of resentment and sullenness.

She hoped now that the loss of his piano would bring the big tears and the racked shoulders. Then she could take him in her arms and give him sympathy. He would be her little boy again, afraid of the dark, afraid of the dog killed by a car, seeking her arms for the sure safety, the sure love.

"Never mind, baby," she said. "When we're rescued, we'll get you a new one."

"When—!"

He lifted his eyebrows and sat down on the bed's edge.

"What do we do now?"

She became very brisk and efficient.

"The ultrad was set working the moment the meteor struck. If it's survived the crash, it's still sending SOS's. If not, then there's nothing we can do about it. Neither of us knows how to repair it.

"However, it's possible that in the last five years since this planet was charted, other expeditions may have landed here. Not from Earth, but from some of the colonies. Or from nonhuman globes. Who knows? It's worth taking a chance. Let's see."

A single glance was enough to wreck their hopes about the ultrad. It had been twisted and broken until it was no longer even recognizable as the machine that sent swifter-than-light waves through the no-ether.

Dr. Fetts said with false cheeriness, "Well, that's that! So what? It makes things too easy. Let's go into the storeroom and see what we can see."

Eddie shrugged and followed her. There she insisted that both take a panrad. If they had to separate for any reason, they could always communicate and also, using the DF's—the direction finders built within it—locate each other. Having used them before, they knew the instrument's capabilities and how essential they were on scouting or camping trips.

The panrads were lightweight cylinders about two and a half feet high and eight inches in diameter. Crampacked, they held the mechanisms of two dozen different utilities. They never ran out of power, because their batteries could be re-

charged from the body electricity of their owners, and they were practically indestructible and worked under almost any conditions, even under water or in extreme cold or heat.

Dr. Fetts insisted they handcuff their left wrists to the cylinders as long as they were outside the yacht. That way, they couldn't drop them and thus have no chance of keeping in touch. Eddie thought such precaution was ridiculous, but he said nothing.

Keeping away from the side of the ship that had the huge hole in it, they took the panrads outside. The long wave bands were searched by Eddie while his mother moved the dial that ranged up and down the shortwaves. Neither really expected to hear anything, but their quest was better than doing nothing.

Finding the modulated wave-frequencies empty of any significant noises, he switched to the continuous waves. He was startled by a dot-dashing.

"Hey, mom! Something in the 1000 kilocycles! Unmodulated!"

"Naturally, son," she said with some exasperation in the midst of her elation. "What would you expect from a radio-telegraphic signal?"

She found the band on her own cylinder. He looked blankly at her. "I know nothing about radio, but that's not Morse."

"What? You must be mistaken!"

"I—I don't think so."

"Is it or isn't it? Good God, son, make up your mind fast about something you should be sure of."

She turned the amplifier up. Though it wasn't necessary, she cocked her head to listen. As both of them had learned Galacto-Morse through sleeplearn techniques, she checked him at once.

"You're right. What do you make of it?"

His quick ear pounced on the pulses.

"No simple dot and dash. Four different time-lengths."

He listened some more.

"They've got a certain rhythm, all right. I can make out definite groupings. Ah! That's the sixth time I've caught that particular one. And there's another. And another."

Dr. Fetts shook her ash-blonde head. She could make out nothing but a series of zzt-zzt-zzt's. There was a rhythm to it, she admitted, but even after trying hard to identify certain units, she didn't recognize them when they repeated. Well, she shrugged, she was as tone-deaf and non-musical as they came. Eddie took after his father in that trait.

He glanced at the DF needle.

"Coming from NE by E. Should we try to locate?"

"Naturally," she replied. "But we'd better eat first. We don't know how far away it is, or what we'll find there. While I'm getting a hot meal ready, you get our field trip stuff ready."

"O.K.," he said with more enthusiasm than he had shown for a long time.

When he came back he ate all of the large dish his mother had prepared on the unwrecked galley stove.

"You always did make the best stew," he said.

"Thank you. I'm glad you're eating again, son. I am surprised. I thought you'd be sick about all this."

He waved vaguely, but energetically.

"The challenge of the unknown, you know. I have a sort of feeling this is going to turn out much better than we thought. Much better."

She came close and sniffed his breath. It was clean, innocent even of stew. That meant he'd taken chlorophyll, which probably meant he'd been sampling some hidden rye. Otherwise, how explain his reckless disregard of the possible dangers? It wasn't like his normal attitude.

She said nothing, for she knew that if he tried to hide a bottle in his clothes or field sack while they were tracking down the radio signals, she would soon find it. And take it away. He wouldn't even protest, merely let her lift it from his limp hand while his lips swelled with resentment.

They set out. Both wore knapsacks and carried cuffed panrads. He had slung a gun over his shoulder, and she had snapped onto her sack her small black bag of medical and lab supplies.

High noon of late autumn was topped by a weak red sun that barely managed to make itself seen through the eternal double layer of clouds. Its twin, an even smaller blob of lilac,

was setting on the northwestern horizon. They walked in a sort of bright twilight, the best that Baudelaire ever achieved. Yet, despite the lack of light, the air was too warm. That was a phenomenon common to certain planets behind the Horse-head Nebula, one being investigated but as yet unexplained.

The country was hilly and had many deep ravines. Here and there were prominences high enough and steep-sided enough to be called embryo mountains. Considering the roughness of the land, however, there was a surprising amount of vegetation. Pale green, red, and yellow bushes, vines, and little trees clung to every bit of ground horizontal or vertical. All had comparatively broad leaves that turned with the sun in hopes to catch the most of the light.

From time to time, as the two Terrans strode noisily through the forest, small, multi-colored, insect-like and mammal-like creatures scuttled from hiding place to hiding place. Eddie decided to unsling his gun and carry it in the crook of his arm. Then, after they were forced to scramble up and down ravines and hills and fight their way through thickets that became unexpectedly tangled, he put it back over his shoulder, where it hung from a strap.

Despite their exertions, they did not tire fast. They weighed about twenty pounds less than they would have on Earth, and, though the air was thinner, it was, for some unknown reason, richer in oxygen.

Dr. Fetts kept up with Eddie. Thirty years the senior of the twenty-three-year-old, she passed even at close inspection for his older sister. Longevity pills took care of that. However, he treated her with all the courtesy and chivalry that one gave one's mother and helped her up the steep inclines, even though the climbs did not appreciably cause her deep chest to demand more air.

They paused once by a creek bank to get their bearings.

"The signals have stopped," he said.

"Obviously," she replied.

At that moment the radar-detector built into the panrad began a high ping-ping-ping. Both of them automatically looked upwards.

"There's no ship in the air."

"It can't be coming from either of those hills," she pointed

out. "There's nothing but a boulder on top of each. Tremendous rocks."

"Nevertheless, it's coming from there, I think. Oh! Oh! Did you see what I saw? Looked like a tall stalk of some kind being pulled down behind that big rock."

She peered through the dim light. "I think you were imagining things, son. I saw nothing."

Then, even as the pinging kept up, the zzting started again. But after a burst of noise, both stopped.

"Let's go up and see what we shall see," she said.

"Something screwy," he commented. She did not answer.

They forded the creek and began the ascent. Halfway up, they stopped to sniff puzzledly at a gust of some heavy odor coming downwind.

"Smells like a cageful of monkeys," he said.

"In heat," she added. If he had the keener ear, hers was the sharper nose.

They went on up. The RD began sounding its tiny hysterical gonging. Nonplused, Eddie stopped. The DF indicated the radar pulses were not coming from the top of the hill up which they were going, as formerly, but from the other hill across the valley. Abruptly, the panrad fell silent.

"What do we do now?"

"Finish what we started. This hill. Then we go to the other."

He shrugged and then hastened after her tall slim body in its long-legged coveralls. She was hot on the scent, literally, and nothing could stop her. Just before she reached the bungalow-sized boulder topping the hill, he caught up with her. She had stopped to gaze intently at the DF needle, which swung wildly before it stopped at neutral. The monkey-cage odor was very strong.

"Do you suppose it could be some sort of radio-creating mineral?" she asked, disappointedly.

"No. Those groupings were semantic. And that smell . . ."

"Then what—?"

He didn't know whether to feel pleased or not because she had so obviously and suddenly thrust the burden of responsibility and action on him. Both pride and a curious shrinking affected him. But he did feel exhilarated. Almost, he thought,

he felt as if he were on the verge of discovering what he had been looking for for a long time. What the object of his search had been, he could not say. But he was excited and not very much afraid.

He unslung his weapon, a two-barreled combination shot-gun and rifle. The panrad was still quiet.

"Maybe the boulder is camouflage for a spy outfit," he said. He sounded silly, even to himself.

Behind him, his mother gasped and screamed. He whirled and raised his gun, but there was nothing to shoot. She was pointing at the hilltop across the valley, shaking, and saying something incoherent.

He could make out a long slim antenna seemingly projecting from the monstrous boulder crouched there. At the same time, two thoughts struggled for first place in his mind: one, that it was more than a coincidence that both hills had almost identical stone structures on their brows, and, two, that the antenna must have been recently stuck out, for he was sure that he had not seen it the last time he looked.

He never got to tell her his conclusions, for something thin and flexible and manifold and irresistible seized him from behind. Lifted into the air, he was borne backwards. He dropped the gun and tried to grab the bands or tentacles around him and tear them off with his bare hands. No use.

He caught one last glimpse of his mother running off down the hillside. Then a curtain snapped down, and he was in total darkness.

Before he could gather what had happened, Eddie sensed himself, still suspended, twirled around. He could not know for sure, of course, but he thought he was facing exactly the opposite direction. Simultaneously, the tentacles binding his legs and arms were released. Only his waist was still gripped. It was pressed so tightly that he cried out with pain.

Then, boot-toes bumping on some resilient substance, he was carried forward. Halted, facing he knew not what horrible monster, he was suddenly assailed—not by a sharp beak or tooth or knife or some other cutting or mangling instrument—but by a dense cloud of that same monkey perfume.

In other circumstances, he might have vomited. Now his stomach was not given the time to consider whether it should

clean house or not. The tentacle lifted him higher and thrust him against something soft and yielding—something fleshlike and womanly—almost breastlike in texture and smoothness and warmth, and its hint of gentle curving.

He put his hands and feet out to brace himself, for he thought for a moment he was going to sink in and be covered up—enfolded—ingested. The idea of a gargantuan amoeba—thing hidden within a hollow rock—or a rocklike shell—made him writhe and yell, and shove at the protoplasmic substance.

But nothing of the kind happened. He was not plunged into a smothering and slimy featherbed that would strip him of his skin and then his flesh and then either dissolve his bones or reject them. He was merely shoved repeatedly against the soft swelling. Each time he pushed or kicked or struck at it. After a dozen of these seemingly purposeless acts, he was held away, as if whatever was doing it was puzzled by his behavior.

He had quit screaming. The only sounds were his harsh breathings and the zzts and pings from the panrad. Even as he became aware of them, the zzts changed tempo and settled into a recognizable pattern of bursts—three units that crackled out again and again.

“Who are you? Who are you?”

Of course, it could just as easily have been “What are you?” or “What the hell!” or “Nov smoz ka pop?”

Or nothing—semantically speaking.

But he didn't think the latter. And when he was gently lowered to the floor, and the tentacle went off to only-God-knew-where in the dark, he was sure that the creature was communicating—or trying to—with him.

It was this thought that kept him from screaming and running around in the lightless and fetid chamber, brainlessly, instinctively seeking an outlet. He mastered his panic and snapped open a little shutter in the panrad's side and thrust in his right-hand index finger. There he poised it above the key and in a moment, when the thing paused in transmitting, he sent back, as best he could, the pulses he had received. It was not necessary for him to turn on the light and spin the dial that would put him on the 1000 kc. band. The instru-

ment would automatically key that frequency in with the one he had just received.

The oddest part about the whole procedure was that his whole body was trembling almost uncontrollably—one part excepted. That was his index finger, his one unit that seemed to him to have a definite function in this otherwise meaningless situation. It was the section of him that was helping him to survive—the only part that knew how—at that moment. Even his brain seemed to have no connection with his finger. That digit was himself, and the rest just happened to be linked to it.

When he paused, the transmitter began again. This time the units were unrecognizable. There was a certain rhythm to them, but he could not know what they meant. Meanwhile, the RD was pinging. Something somewhere in the dark hole had a beam held tightly on him.

He pressed a button on the panrad's top, and the built-in flashlight illuminated the area just in front of him. He saw a wall of reddish-gray rubbery substance and on the wall a roughly circular and light gray swelling about four feet in diameter. Around it, giving it a Medusa appearance, were coiled twelve very long and very thin tentacles.

Though he was afraid that if he turned his back to them, the tentacles would seize him once more, his curiosity forced him to wheel about and examine with the bright beam his surroundings. He was in an egg-shaped chamber about thirty feet long, twelve wide, and eight to ten high in the middle. It was formed of a reddish-grey material, smooth except for irregular intervals of blue or red pipes. Veins and arteries, obviously.

A door-sized portion of the wall had a vertical slit running down it. Tentacles fringed it. He guessed it was a sort of iris and that it had opened to drag him inside. Starfish-shaped groupings of tentacles were scattered on the walls or hung from the ceiling. On the wall opposite the iris was a long and flexible stalk with a cartilaginous ruff around its free end. When Eddie moved, it moved, its blind point following him as a radar antenna pursues the thing it is locating. That was what it was. And unless he was wrong, the stalk was also a C.W. transmitter-receiver.

He shot the light on around. When it reached the end farthest from him, he gasped. Ten creatures were huddled together facing him! About the size of half-grown pigs, they looked like nothing so much as unshelled snails; they were eyeless, and the stalk growing from the forehead of each was a tiny duplicate of that on the wall. They didn't look dangerous. Their open mouths were little and toothless, and their rate of locomotion must be slow, for they moved, like a snail, on a large pedestal of flesh—a foot-muscle.

Nevertheless, if he were to fall asleep, they could overcome him by force of numbers, and those mouths might drip an acid to digest him, or they might carry a concealed poisonous sting.

His speculations were interrupted violently. He was seized, lifted, and passed on to another group of tentacles. He was carried beyond the antenna-stalk and toward the snail-beings. Just before he reached them, he was halted, facing the wall. An iris, hitherto invisible, opened. His light shone into it, but he could see nothing but convolutions of flesh.

His panrad gave off a new pattern of dit-dot-deet-dats. The iris widened until it was large enough to admit his body if he were shoved in headfirst. Or feetfirst. It didn't matter. The convolutions straightened out and became a tunnel. Or a throat. From thousands of little pits emerged thousands of tiny and razor sharp teeth. They flashed out and sank back in, and before they had disappeared thousands of other wicked little spears darted out and past the receding fangs.

Meat-grinder effect.

Beyond the murderous array, at the end of the throat, was a huge pouch of water, a veritable tank. Steam came from it, and with it an odor like that of his mother's stew. Dark bits, presumably meat, and pieces of vegetables floated on the seething surface.

Then the iris closed, and he was turned around to face the slugs. Gently, but unmistakably, a tentacle spanked his buttocks. And the panrad zzzted a warning.

Eddie was not stupid. He knew now that the ten creatures were not dangerous unless he molested them. In which case he had just seen where he would go if he did not behave.

Again he was lifted and carried along the wall until he was

shoved against the light grey spot. The monkey-cage odor, which had died out, became strong again. Eddie identified its source with a very small hole which appeared in the wall.

When he did not respond—he had no idea yet how he was supposed to act—the tentacles dropped him so unexpectedly that he fell on his back. Unhurt by the yielding flesh, he rose.

What was the next step? Exploration of his resources. Itemization: The panrad. A sleeping-bag, which he wouldn't need as long as the present too-warm temperature kept up. A bottle of Old Red Star capsules. A free-fall thermos with attached nipple. A box of A-2-Z rations. A Foldstove. Carttridges for his double-barrel, now lying outside the creature's boulderish shell. A roll of toilet paper. Toothbrush. Paste. Soap. Towel. Pills: chlorophyll, Hormone, vitamin, longevity, reflex, and sleeping. And a thread-thin wire, a hundred feet long when uncoiled, that held a prisoner in its molecular structure a hundred symphonies, eighty operas, a thousand different types of musical pieces, and two thousand great books ranging from Sophocles and Dostoyevsky and Hammett and Henry Miller to the latest best-seller. It could be run off inside the panrad.

He inserted it, thumbed a designated spot, and spoke, "Eddie Fetts's recording of Puccini's *Che gelida manina*, please."

And while he listened approvingly to his own magnificent voice, he zipped open a can he had found in the bottom of the sack. His mother had put into it the stew left over from their last meal in the ship.

Not knowing what was happening, yet, for some reason, sure he was, for the present, safe, he munched meat and vegetables with a contented jaw. Transition from abhorrence to appetite sometimes came easily for Eddie.

He cleaned out the can and finished up with some crackers and a chocolate bar. Rationing was out. As long as the food lasted, he would eat well. Then, if nothing turned up, he would . . . But then, somehow, he reassured himself as he licked his fingers, his mother, who was free, would find some way to get him out of his trouble.

She always had.

The panrad, silent for a while, began signaling. Eddie spotlighted the antenna and saw it was pointing at the snail-beings,

which he had, in accordance with his custom, dubbed familiarly. Sluggos he called them.

The Sluggos crept towards the wall and stopped close to it. Their mouths, built on the tops of their heads, gaped like so many hungry young birds. The iris opened, and two lips formed into a spout. Out of it streamed steaming-hot water and chunks of meat and vegetables. Stew! Stew that fell exactly into each waiting mouth.

That was how Eddie learned the second phrase of Mother Polyphema's language. The first message had been, "What are you?" This was, "Come and get it!"

He experimented. He tapped out a repetition of what he'd last heard. As one, the Sluggos—except the one then being fed—turned to him and crept a few feet before halting, puzzled.

Inasmuch as Eddie was broadcasting, the Sluggos must have had some sort of built-in DF. Otherwise they wouldn't have been able to distinguish between his pulses and their Mother's.

Immediately after, a tentacle smote Eddie across the shoulders and knocked him down. The panrad zzzted its third intelligible message: "Don't ever do that!"

And then a fourth, to which the ten young obeyed by wheeling and resuming their former positions.

"This way, children."

Yes, they were the offspring, living, eating, sleeping, playing, and learning to communicate in the womb of their mother—the Mother. They were the mobile brood of this vast immobile entity that had scooped up Eddie as a frog scoops up a fly. This Mother. She who had once been just such a Sluggo until she had grown hog-size and had been pushed out of her Mother's womb. And who, rolled into a tight ball, had free-wheeled down her natal hill, straightened out at the bottom, inched her way up the next hill, rolled down, and so on. Until she found the empty shell of an adult who had died. Or, if she wanted to be a first class citizen in her society and not a prestigeless *occupée*, she found the bare top of a tall hill—or any eminence that commanded a big sweep of territory—and there squatted.

And there she put out many thread-thin tendrils into the soil and into the cracks in the rocks, tendrils that drew sus-

tenance from the fat of her body and grew and extended downwards and ramified into other tendrils. Deep underground the rootlets worked their instinctive chemistry; searched for and found the water, the calcium, the iron, the copper, the nitrogen, the carbons, fondled earthworms and grubs and larvae, teasing them for the secrets of their fats and proteins; broke down the wanted substance into shadowy colloidal particles; sucked them up the thready pipes of the tendrils and back to the pale and slimming body crouching on a flat space atop a ridge, a hill, a peak.

There, using the blueprints stored in the molecules of the cerebellum, her body took the building blocks of elements and fashioned them into a very thin shell of the most available material, a shield large enough so she could expand to fit it while her natural enemies—the keen and hungry predators that prowled twilighted Baudelaire—nosed and clawed it in vain.

Then, her ever-growing bulk cramped, she would resorb the hard covering. And if no sharp tooth found her during that process of a few days, she would case another and a larger. And so on through a dozen or more.

Until she had become the monstrous and much reformed body of an adult and virgin female. Outside would be the stuff that so much resembled a boulder, that was actually rock: either granite, diorite, marble, basalt, or maybe just plain limestone. Or sometimes iron, glass or cellulose.

Within was the centrally located brain, probably as large as a man's. Surrounding it, the tons of the various organs: the nervous system, the mighty heart, or hearts, the four stomachs, the microwave and longwave generators, the kidneys, bowels, tracheae, scent and taste organs, the perfume factory which made odors to attract animals and birds close enough to be seized, and the huge womb. And the antennae—the small one inside for teaching and scanning the young, and a long and powerful stalk on the outside, projecting from the shelltop, retractable if danger came.

The next step was from virgin to Mother, lower case to upper case as designated in her pulse-language by a longer pause before a word. Not until she was deflowered could she take a high place in her society. Immodest, unblushing, she

herself made the advances, the proposals, and the surrender.

After which, she ate her mate.

The all-around clock in the panrad told Eddie he was in his thirtieth day of imprisonment when he found out that little bit of information. He was shocked, not because it offended his ethics, but because he himself had been intended to be the mate. And the dinner.

His finger tapped, "Tell me, O Mother, what you mean."

He had not wondered before how a species that lacked males could reproduce. Now he found that, to the Mothers, all creatures except themselves were male. Mothers were immobile and female. Mobiles were male. Eddie had been mobile. He was, therefore, a male.

He had approached this particular Mother during the mating season, that is, midway through raising a litter of young. She had scanned him as he came along the creekbanks at the valley bottom. When he was at the foot of the hill, she had detected his odor. It was new to her. The closest she could come to it in her memorybanks was that of a beast similar to him. From her description, he guessed it to be an ape. So she had released from her repertoire its rut stench. When he seemingly fell into the trap, she had caught him.

He was supposed to attack the conception-spot, that light gray swelling on the wall. After he had ripped and torn it enough to begin the mysterious workings of pregnancy, he would have been popped into her stomach-iris.

Fortunately, he had lacked the sharp beak, the fang, the claw. And she had received her own signals back from the panrad.

Eddie did not understand why it was necessary to use a mobile for mating. A Mother was intelligent enough to pick up a sharp stone and mangle the spot herself.

He was given to understand that conception would not start unless it was accompanied by a certain titillation of the nerves—a frenzy and its satisfaction. Why this emotional state was needed, Mother did not know.

Eddie tried to explain about such things as genes and chromosomes and why they had to be present in highly developed species in order to have differences and selections of

favorable characteristics and open the gates to evolutionary changes.

Mother did not get it.

Eddie wondered if the number of slashes and rips in the spot corresponded to the number of young. Or, if in any way, say, there were a large number of potentialities in the heredity-ribbons spread out under the conception-skin. And if the haphazard irritation and consequent stimulation of the genes paralleled the chance combining of genes in human male-female mating. Thus resulting in offspring with traits that were both joinings and dissimilarities of their parents'.

Or did the inevitable devouring of the mobile after the act indicate more than an emotional and nutritional reflex? Did it hint that the mobile caught up scattered gene-nodes, like hard seeds, along with the torn skin, in its claws and tusks, that these genes survived the boiling in the stew-stomach, and were later passed out in the feces? Where animals and birds picked them up in beak, tooth, or foot, and then, seized by other Mothers in this oblique rape, transmitted the heredity-carrying agents to the conception-spots while attacking them, the nodules being scraped off and implanted in the skin and blood of the swelling even as others were harvested? Later, the mobiles were eaten, digested, and ejected in the obscure but ingenious and never-ending cycle? Thus ensuring the continual, if haphazard, recombining of genes, chances for variations in offspring, opportunities for mutations, and so on?

Mother pulsed that she was nonplused.

Eddie gave up. He'd never know. After all, did it matter?

He decided not and rose from his prone position to request water. She pursed up her iris and spouted a tepid quartful into his thermos. He dropped in a pill, swished it around till it dissolved, and drank a reasonable facsimile of Old Red Star. He preferred the harsh and powerful rye, though he could have afforded the smoothest. Quick results were what he wanted. Taste didn't matter, as he disliked all liquor tastes. Thus he drank what the Skid Row bums drank and shuddered even as they did so, renaming it Old Rotten Tar and cursing the fate that had brought them so low they had to gag such stuff down.

The rye glowed in his belly and spread quickly through

his limbs and up to his head, chilled only by the increasing scarcity of the capsules. When he ran out—then what? It was at times like this that he most missed his mother.

Thinking about her brought a few large tears. He snuffled and drank some more and when the biggest of the Sluggos nudged him for a back-scratching, he gave it instead a shot of Old Red Star. A slug for Sluggo. Idly, he wondered what effect a taste of rye would have on the future of the race when these virgins became Mothers.

At that moment he was rocked by what seemed a wonderful lifesaving idea. These creatures could suck up the required elements from the earth and with them duplicate quite complex molecular structures. Provided, of course, they had a sample of the desired substance to brood over in some cryptic organ.

Well, what easier to do than give her one of the cherished capsules? One could become any number. Those, plus the abundance of water pumped in through hollow underground tendrils from the nearby creek, would give enough to make a master-distiller green!

He smacked his lips and was about to key her his request when what she was transmitting penetrated his mind.

Rather cattily, she remarked that the neighbor across the valley was putting on airs because she, too, held prisoner a communicating mobile.

The Mothers had a society as hierarchical as table-protocol in Washington or the peck-order in a barnyard. Prestige was what counted, and prestige was determined by the broadcasting power, the height of the eminence on which the Mother sat, which governed the extent of her radar-territory, and the abundance and novelty and wittiness of her gossip. The creature that had snapped Eddie up was a Queen. She had precedence over thirty-odd of her kind; they all had to let her broadcast first, and none dared start pulsing until she quit. Then, the next in order began, and so on down the line. Any of them could be interrupted at any time by Number One, and if any of the lower echelon had something interesting to transmit, she could break in on the one then speaking and get permission from the Queen to tell her tale.

Eddie knew this, but he could not listen in directly to the

hilltop-gabble. The thick pseudo-granite shell barred him from that and made him dependent upon her womb-stalk for relayed information.

Now and then Mother opened the door and allowed her young to crawl out. There they practiced beaming and broadcasting at the Sluggos of the Mother across the valley. Occasionally that Mother deigned herself to pulse the young, and Eddie's keeper reciprocated to her offspring.

Turnabout.

The first time the children had inched through the exit-iris, Eddie had tried, Ulysses-like, to pass himself off as one of them and crawl out in the midst of the flock. Eyeless, but no Polyphemus, Mother had picked him out with her tentacles and hauled him back in.

It was following that incident that he had named her Polyphema.

Thus, he knew she had increased her own already powerful prestige tremendously by possession of that unique thing—a transmitting mobile. So much had her importance grown that the Mothers on the fringes of her area passed on the news to others. Before he had learned her language, the entire continent was hooked-up. Polyphema had become a veritable gossip columnist; tens of thousands of hillcrouchers listened in eagerly to her accounts of her dealings with the walking paradox: a semantic male.

That had been fine. Then, very recently, the Mother across the valley had captured a similar creature. And in one bound she had become Number Two in the area and would, at the slightest weakness on Polyphema's part, wrest the top position away.

Eddie became wildly excited at the news. He had often daydreamed about his mother and wondered what she was doing. Curiously enough, he ended many of his fantasies with lip-mutterings, reproaching her almost audibly for having left him and for making no try to rescue him. When he became aware of his attitude, he was ashamed. Nevertheless, the sense of desertion colored his thoughts.

Now that he knew she was alive and had been caught, probably while trying to get him out, he rose from the lethargy that had lately been making him doze the clock around.

He asked Polyphema if she would open the entrance so he could talk directly with the other captive. She said yes. Eager to listen in on a conversation between two mobiles, she was very cooperative. There would be a mountain of gossip in what they would have to say. The only thing that dented her joy was that the other Mother would also have access.

Then, remembering she was still Number One and would broadcast the details first, she trembled so with pride and ecstasy that Eddie felt the floor shaking.

Iris open, he walked through it and looked across the valley. The hillsides were still green, red, and yellow, as the plants on Baudelaire did not lose their leaves during winter. But a few white patches showed that winter had begun. Eddie shivered from the bite of cold air on his naked skin. Long ago he had taken off his clothes. The womb warmth had made garments too uncomfortable; moreover, Eddie, being human, had had to get rid of waste products. And Polyphema, being a Mother, had had periodically to flush out the dirt with warm water from one of her stomachs. Every time the tracheae-vents exploded streams that swept the undesirable elements out through her door-iris, Eddie had become soaked. When he abandoned dress his clothes had gone floating out. Only by sitting on his pack did he keep it from a like fate.

Afterwards, he and the Sluggos had been dried off by warm air pumped through the same vents and originating from the mighty battery of lungs. Eddie was comfortable enough—he'd always liked showers anyway—but the loss of his garments had been one more thing that kept him from escaping. If he were to, he would soon freeze to death outside unless he found the yacht quickly. And he wasn't sure he remembered the path back.

So now, when he stepped outside, he retreated a pace or two and let the warm air from Polyphema flow like a cloak from his shoulders.

Then he peered across the half-mile that separated him from his mother, but he could not see her. The twilight state and the dark of the unlit interior of her captor quite hid her.

He tapped in Morse, "Switch to the talkie, same frequency." Paula Fetts did so. She began asking him frantically if he were all right.

He replied he was fine.

"Have you missed me terribly, son?"

"Oh, very much."

Even as he said this, he wondered, vaguely, why his voice sounded so hollow. Despair at never again being able to see her, probably.

"I've almost gone crazy, Eddie. When you were caught I ran away as fast as I could. I had no idea what horrible monster it was that was attacking us. And then, halfway down the hill, I fell and broke my leg . . ."

"Oh, no, mother!"

"Yes. But I managed to crawl back to the ship. And there, after I'd set it myself, I gave myself B.K. shots. Only my system didn't react like it's supposed to. There are people that way, you know, and the healing took twice as long.

"But when I was able to walk, I got a gun and a box of Blasto. I was going to blow up what I thought was a kind of rock-fortress, an outpost for some kind of extee. I'd no idea of the true nature of these beasts. First, though, I decided to reconnoiter. I was going to spy on the boulder from across the valley. And I was trapped by this thing.

"Listen, son. Before I'm cut off for any reason, let me tell you not to give up hope. I'll be out of here before long and over to rescue you."

"How?"

"If you remember, my lab kit holds a number of carcinogens for field work. Well, you know that sometimes a Mother's conception-spot, torn up during mating, instead of begetting young, goes into cancer—the opposite of pregnancy. I've injected a carcinogen into the spot and a beautiful carcinoma has developed. She'll be dead in a few days."

"Mom! You'll be buried in that rotten mass!"

"No. This creature has told me that when one of her species dies, a reflex opens the labia. That's to permit her young—if any—to escape. Listen, I'll—"

A tentacle coiled about him and pulled him back through the iris, which shut.

When he switched back to C.W., he heard, "Why didn't you communicate? What were you doing? Tell me! Tell me!"

Eddie told her. There was a silence that could only be

interpreted as astonishment. After she'd recovered her wits, she said, "From now on, you will talk to the other male through me."

Obviously, she envied and hated his ability to change wave-bands, and, perhaps, had a struggle to accept the idea. It was *outré*.

"Please," he persisted, not knowing how dangerous were the waters he was wading in, "please let me talk to my mother di—"

For the first time, he heard her stutter.

"Wha-wha-what? Your Mo-Mo-Mother?"

"Yes, of course."

The floor heaved violently beneath his feet. He cried out and braced himself to keep from falling and then flashed on the light. The walls were pulsating like shaken jelly, and the vascular columns had turned from red and blue to gray. The entrance-iris sagged open, like a lax mouth, and the air cooled. He could feel the drop in temperature in her flesh with the soles of his feet.

It was some time before he caught on.

Polyphema was in a state of shock.

What might have happened had she stayed in it, he never knew. She might have died and thus forced him out into the winter before his mother could escape. If so, and he couldn't find the ship, he would die. Huddled in the warmest corner of the egg-shaped chamber, Eddie contemplated that idea and shivered to a degree the outside air couldn't account for.

However, Polyphema had her own method of recovery. It consisted of spewing out the contents of her stew-stomach, which had doubtless become filled with the poisons draining out of her system from the blow. Her ejection of the stuff was the physical manifestation of the psychical catharsis. So furious was the flood that her foster son was almost swept out in the hot tide, but she, reacting instinctively, had coiled tentacles about him and the Sluggos. Then she followed the first upchucking by emptying her other three water-pouches, the second hot and the third lukewarm and the fourth, just filled, cold.

Eddie yelped as the icy water doused him.

Polyphema's irises closed again. The floor and walls gradu-

ally quit quaking; the temperature rose; and her veins and arteries regained their red and blue. She was well again. Or so she seemed.

But when, after waiting twenty-four hours, he cautiously approached the subject, he found she not only would not talk about it, she refused to acknowledge the existence of the other mobile.

Eddie, giving up the hopes of conversation, thought for quite a while. The only conclusion he could come to, and he was sure he'd grasped enough of her psychology to make it valid, was that the concept of a mobile female was utterly unacceptable.

Her world was split into two: mobile and her kind, the immobile. Mobile meant food and mating. Mobile meant—male. The Mothers were—female.

How the mobiles reproduced had probably never entered the hillcrouchers' minds. Their science and philosophy were on the instinctive body-level. Whether they had some notion of spontaneous generation or amoeba-like fission being responsible for the continued population of mobiles, or they'd just taken for granted they "grewed," like Topsy, Eddie never found out. To them, they were female and the rest of the protoplasmic cosmos was male.

That was that. Any other idea was more than foul and obscene and blasphemous. It was—unthinkable.

So that Polyphema had received a deep trauma from his words. And though she seemed to have recovered, somewhere in those tons of unimaginably complicated flesh a bruise was buried. Like a hidden flower, dark purple, it bloomed, and the shadow it cast was one that cut off a certain memory, a certain tract, from the light of consciousness. That bruise-stained shadow covered that time and event which the Mother, for reasons unfathomable to the human being, found necessary to mark **KEEP OFF**.

Thus, though Eddie did not word it, he understood in the cells of his body, he felt and knew, as if his bones were prophesying and his brain did not hear what came to pass.

Sixty-six hours later by the panrad clock, Polyphema's entrance-lips opened. Her tentacles darted out. They came back in, carrying his helpless and struggling mother.

Eddie, roused out of a doze, horrified, paralyzed, saw her toss her lab kit at him and heard an inarticulate cry from her. And saw her plunged, headforemost, into the stomach-iris.

Polyphema had taken the one sure way of burying the evidence.

Eddie lay face down, nose mashed against the warm and faintly throbbing flesh of the floor. Now and then his hands clutched spasmodically as if he were reaching for something that someone kept putting just within his reach and then moving away.

How long he was there, he didn't know, for he never again looked at the clock.

Finally, in the darkness, he sat up and giggled inanely. "Mother always did make good stew."

That set him off. He leaned back on his hands and threw his head back and howled like a wolf under a full moon.

Polyphema, of course, was dead-deaf, but she could radar his posture, and her keen nostrils deduced from his body-scent that he was in a terrible fear and anguish.

A tentacle glided out and gently enfolded him.

"What is the matter?" zzted the panrad.

He stuck his finger in the keyhole.

"I have lost my mother!"

"?"

"She's gone away, and she'll never come back."

"I don't understand. *Here I am.*"

Eddie quit weeping and cocked his head as if he were listening to some inner voice. He snuffled a few times and wiped away the tears, slowly disengaged the tentacle, patted it, walked over to his pack in a corner, and took out the bottle of Old Red Star capsules. One he popped into the thermos; the other he gave to her with the request she duplicate it, if possible. Then he stretched out on his side, propped on one elbow, like a Roman in his sensualities, sucked the rye through the nipple, and listened to the medley of Beethoven, Moussorgsky, Verdi, Strauss, Porter, Casals, Feinstein and Waxworth.

So the time—if there were such a thing there—flowed around Eddie. When he was tired of music or plays or books, he listened in on the area hook-up. Hungry, he rose and

walked—or often just crawled—to the stew-iris. Cans of rations lay in his pack; he had planned to eat on those until he was sure that—what was it he was forbidden to eat? Poison? Something had been devoured by Polyphema and the Sluggos. But sometime during the music-rye orgy, he had forgotten. He now ate quite hungrily and with thought for nothing but the satisfaction of his wants.

Sometimes the door-iris opened, and Billy Greengrocer hopped in. Billy looked like a cross between a cricket and a kangaroo. He was the size of a collie, and he bore in a marsupalian pouch vegetables and fruit and nuts. These he extracted with shiny green, chitinous claws and gave to Mother in return for meals of stew. Happy symbiote, he chirruped merrily while his many-faceted eyes, revolving independently of each other, looked one at the Sluggos and the other at Eddie.

Eddie, on impulse, abandoned the 1000 kc. band and roved the frequencies until he found that both Polyphema and Billy were emitting a 108 wave. That, apparently, was their natural signal. When Billy had his groceries to deliver, he broadcast. Polyphema, in turn, when she needed them, sent back to him. There was nothing intelligent on Billy's part; it was just his instinct to transmit. And the Mother was, aside from the "semantic" frequency, limited to that one band. But it worked out fine.

Everything was fine. What more could a man want? Free food, unlimited liquor, soft bed, air-conditioning, shower-baths, music, intellectual works (on the tape), interesting conversations (much of it was about him), privacy, and security.

If he had not already named her, he would have called her Mother Gratis.

Nor were creature comforts all. She had given him the answers to all his questions, all . . .

Except one.

That was never expressed vocally by him. Indeed, he would have been incapable of doing so. He was probably unaware that he had such a question.

But Polyphema voiced it one day when she asked him to do her a favor.

Eddie reacted as if outraged.

"One does not——! One does not——!"

He choked and then he thought, how ridiculous! She is not——

And looked puzzled, and said, "But she is."

He rose and opened the lab kit. While he was looking for a scalpel, he came across the carcinogens. Without thinking about it, he threw them through the half-opened labia far out and down the hillside.

Then he turned and, scalpel in hand, leaped at the light grey swelling on the wall. And stopped, staring at it, while the instrument fell from his hand. And picked it up and stabbed feebly and did not even scratch the skin. And again let it drop.

"What is it? What is it?" crackled the panrad hanging from his wrist.

Suddenly, a heavy cloud of human odor—mansweat—was puffed in his face from a nearby vent.

"???"

And he stood, bent in a half-crouch, seemingly paralyzed. Until tentacles seized him in fury and dragged him towards the stomach-iris, yawning man-sized.

Eddie screamed and writhed and plunged his finger in the panrad and tapped, "All right! All right!"

And once back before the spot, he lunged with a sudden and wild joy; he slashed savagely; he yelled, "Take that! And that, P . . ." and the rest was lost in a mindless shout.

He did not stop cutting, and he might have gone on and on until he had quite excised the spot had not Polyphema interfered by dragging him towards her stomach-iris again. For ten seconds he hung there, helpless and sobbing, with a strange mixture of fear and glory.

Polyphema's reflexes had almost overcome her brain. Fortunately, a cold spark of reason lit up a corner of the vast, dark, and hot chapel of her frenzy.

The convolutions leading to the steaming, meat-laden pouch closed and the foldings of flesh rearranged themselves. Eddie was suddenly hosed with warm water from what he called the "sanitation" stomach. The iris closed. He was put down. The scalpel was put back in the bag.

For a long time Mother seemed to be shaken by the thought of what she might have done to Eddie. She did not trust herself to transmit until her nerves were settled. When she did, she did not refer to his narrow escape. Nor did he.

He was happy. He felt as if a spring, tight-coiled against his bowels since he and his wife had parted, was now, for some reason, sprung. The dull vague pain of loss and discontent, the slight fever and cramp in his entrails and apathy that sometimes afflicted him, were gone. He felt fine.

Meanwhile, something akin to deep affection had been lighted, like a tiny candle under the drafty and overtowering roof of a cathedral. Mother's shell housed more than Eddie; it now curved over an emotion new to her kind. This was evident by the next event that filled him with terror.

For the wounds in the spot healed and the swelling increased into a large bag. Then the bag burst and ten mouse-sized Sluggos struck the floor. The impact had the same effect as a doctor's spanking a newborn baby's bottom; they drew in their first breath with shock and pain: their uncontrolled and feeble pulses filled the ether with shapeless SOS's.

When Eddie was not talking with Polypherma or listening in or drinking or sleeping or eating or bathing or running off the tape, he played with the Sluggos. He was, in a sense, their father. Indeed, as they grew to hog-size, it was hard for their female parent to distinguish him from her young. As he seldom walked any more, and was often to be found on hands and knees in their midst, she could not scan him too well. Moreover, something in the heavywet air or in the diet had caused every hair on his body to drop off. He grew very fat. Generally speaking, he was one with the pale, soft, round, and bald offspring. A family likeness.

There was one difference. When the time came for the virgins to be expelled, Eddie crept to one end, whimpering, and stayed there until he was sure Mother was not going to thrust him out into the cold, hard, and hungry world.

That final crisis over, he came back to the center of the floor. The panic in his breast had died out, but his nerves were still quivering. He filled his thermos and then listened for a while to his own baritone singing the *Sea Things* aria from his favorite opera, Gianelli's *Ancient Mariner*. Suddenly he burst

out and accompanied himself, finding himself thrilled as never before by the concluding words.

*And from my neck so free
The Albatross fell off, and sank
Like lead into the sea.*

Afterwards, voice silent but heart singing, he switched off the wire and cut in on Polyphema's broadcast.

Mother was having trouble. She could not precisely describe to the continent-wide hookup this new and almost inexpressible emotion she felt about the mobile. It was a concept her language was not prepared for. Nor was she helped any by the gallons of Old Red Star in her bloodstream.

Eddie sucked at the plastic nipple and nodded sympathetically and drowsily at her search for words. Presently, the thermos rolled out of his hand.

He slept on his side, curled in a ball, knees on his chest and arms crossed, neck bent forward. Like the pilot room chronometer whose hands reversed after the crash, the clock of his body was ticking backwards, ticking backwards . . .

In the darkness, in the moistness, safe and warm, well fed, well loved.



