

D2474



A SIGNET BOOK

Now in one exciting volume—a short novel and six stories by the brilliant, off-beat creator of **THE DEMOLISHED MAN**.

**ALFRED BESTER**

The book cover features a dark, textured background with a large, glowing red sphere in the center. Inside the sphere, two silhouetted figures stand on a dark, rocky surface, looking up at a bright, fiery light source. The overall mood is mysterious and dramatic.

**THE  
DARK SIDE  
OF THE  
EARTH**





# **This Is**

***Alfred Bester's  
first story collection  
since Starburst.***

***In it you will find tales about  
the last man and woman on Earth,  
a curious antique collector  
from the "past,"  
a telephone conversation to someone  
living in another time ...***

***—in all, seven tales  
to taunt the imagination.***

***All bear the Bester trademark:  
the ability to portray the  
extraordinary occurrence—  
no matter how bizarre or unlikely—  
exactly as it may happen today ...  
or tomorrow.***



## Recent SIGNET Science Fiction

### **STARSWARM**

*by Brian Aldiss*

An exciting tale about man's bizarre descendants struggling for survival on myriads of far-flung worlds.

(#D2411—50¢)

### **STARSHIP TROOPERS**

*by Robert A. Heinlein*

The story of a combat soldier five hundred years in the future, fighting for mankind on distant planets.

(#D2381—50¢)

### **THE DOOR INTO SUMMER**

*by Robert A. Heinlein*

What happens when a man becomes the victim of a "Deep Sleep" and awakens in the year 2000 A.D.

(#D2443—50¢)

### **I, ROBOT**

*by Isaac Asimov*

Nine strange tales about Earth in the years ahead, when robots threaten to control the world.

(#D2458—50¢)

## TO OUR READERS

If your dealer does not have the SIGNET and MENTOR books you want, you may order them by mail, enclosing the list price plus 5c a copy to cover mailing. If you would like our free catalog, please request it by postcard. The New American Library of Canada Limited, 156 Front Street West, Toronto 1, Canada.

# **The Dark Side of the Earth**

**ALFRED BESTER**



**A Signet Book**

**Published by the NEW AMERICAN LIBRARY  
of Canada Limited**



**COPYRIGHT © 1964 BY ALFRED BESTER**

**TIME IS THE TRAITOR** Copyright 1953 by Mercury Press, Inc. (formerly Fantasy House, Inc.); **THE MEN WHO MURDERED MOHAMMED**, Copyright © 1958 by Mercury Press, Inc.; **THEY DON'T MAKE LIFE LIKE THEY USED TO**, Copyright © 1963 by Mercury Press, Inc.; **THE PI MAN**, Copyright © 1959 by Mercury Press, Inc.; **WILL YOU WAIT?** Copyright © 1959 by Mercury Press, Inc. All these stories reprinted from *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*.

**FIRST PRINTING, MAY, 1964**

**SIGNET TRADEMARK REG. U.S. PAT. OFF. AND FOREIGN COUNTRIES  
REGISTERED TRADEMARK — MARCA REGISTRADA  
HECHO EN WINNIPEG, CANADA**

***SIGNET BOOKS are published in Canada by  
The New American Library of Canada Limited  
Toronto, Ontario***

**PRINTED IN CANADA**

**COVER PRINTED IN U.S.A.**

# **Contents**

<b>Time Is the Traitor</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>The Men Who Murdered Mohammed</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Out of this World</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>The Pi Man</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>The Flowered Thundermug</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>Will You Wait?</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>They Don't Make Life Like They Used To</b>	<b>125</b>





## **TIME IS THE TRAITOR**

**You can't go back and you can't catch up. Happy endings are always bittersweet.**

**There was a man named John Strapp; the most valuable, the most powerful, the most legendary man in a world containing seven hundred planets and seventeen hundred billion people. He was prized for one quality alone. He could make Decisions. Note the capital D. He was one of the few men who could make Major Decisions in a world of incredible complexity, and his Decisions were 87 per cent correct. He sold his Decisions for high prices.**

**There would be an industry named, say, Bruxton Biotics, with plants on Deneb Alpha, Mizar III, Terra, and main offices on Alcor IV. Bruxton's gross income was Cr. 270 millions. The involutions of Bruxton's trade relations with consumers and competitors required the specialized services of two hundred company economists, each an expert on one tiny facet of the vast over-all picture. No one was big enough to coordinate the entire picture.**

**Bruxton would need a Major Decision on policy. A research expert named E. T. A. Goland in the Deneb laboratories had discovered a new catalyst for biotic synthesis. It was an embryological hormone that rendered nucleonic molecules as plastic as clay. The clay could be**



modeled and developed in any direction. Query: Should Bruxton abandon the old culture methods and retool for this new technique? The Decision involved an infinite ramification of interreacting factors: cost, saving, time, supply, demand, training, patents, patent legislation, court actions and so on. There was only one answer. Ask Strapp.

The initial negotiations were crisp. Strapp Associates replied that John Strapp's fee was Cr. 100,000 plus 1 per cent of the voting stock of Bruxton Biotics. Take it or leave it. Bruxton Biotics took it with pleasure.

The second step was more complicated. John Strapp was very much in demand. He was scheduled for Decisions at the rate of two a week straight through to the first of the year. Could Bruxton wait that long for an appointment? Bruxton could not. Bruxton was TT'd a list of John Strapp's future appointments and told to arrange a swap with any of the clients as best he could. Bruxton bargained, bribed, blackmailed and arranged a trade. John Strapp was to appear at the Alcor central plant on Monday, June 29, at noon precisely.

Then the mystery began. At nine o'clock that Monday morning, Aldous Fisher, the acidulous liaison man for Strapp, appeared at Bruxton's offices. After a brief conference with Old Man Bruxton himself, the following announcement was broadcast through the plant: ATTENTION! ATTENTION! URGENT! URGENT! ALL MALE PERSONNEL NAMED KRUGER REPORT TO CENTRAL. REPEAT. ALL MALE PERSONNEL NAMED KRUGER REPORT TO CENTRAL. URGENT! REPEAT. URGENT!

Forty-seven men named Kruger reported to Central and were sent home with strict instructions to stay at home until further notice. The plant police organized a hasty winnowing and, goaded by the irascible Fisher, checked the identification cards of all employees they could reach. Nobody named Kruger should remain in the plant, but it was impossible to comb out 2,500 men in three hours. Fisher burned and fumed like nitric acid.

By eleven-thirty, Bruxton Biotics was running a fever. Why send home all the Krugers? What did it have to do with the legendary John Strapp? What kind of man was Strapp? What did he look like? How did he act? He

earned Cr. 10 millions a year. He owned 1 per cent of the world. He was so close to God in the minds of the personnel that they expected angels and golden trumpets and a giant bearded creature of infinite wisdom and compassion.

At eleven-forty Strapp's personal bodyguard arrived—a security squad of ten men in plain clothes who checked doors and halls and cul-de-sacs with icy efficiency. They gave orders. This had to be removed. That had to be locked. Such and such had to be done. It was done. No one argued with John Strapp. The security squad took up positions and waited. Bruxton Biotics held its breath.

Noon struck, and a silver mote appeared in the sky. It approached with a high whine and landed with agonizing speed and precision before the main gate. The door of the ship snapped open. Two burly men stepped out alertly, their eyes busy. The chief of the security squad made a sign. Out of the ship came two secretaries, brunette and redheaded, striking, chic, efficient. After them came a thin, fortyish clerk in a baggy suit with papers stuffed in his side pockets, wearing horn-rimmed spectacles and a harassed air. After him came a magnificent creature, tall, majestic, clean-shaven but of infinite wisdom and compassion.

The burly men closed in on the beautiful man and escorted him up the steps and through the main door. Bruxton Biotics sighed happily. John Strapp was no disappointment. He was indeed God, and it was a pleasure to have 1 per cent of yourself owned by him. The visitors marched down the main hall to Old Man Bruxton's office and entered. Bruxton had waited for them, poised majestically behind his desk. Now he leaped to his feet and ran forward. He grasped the magnificent man's hand fervently and exclaimed, "Mr. Strapp, sir, on behalf of my entire organization, I welcome you."

The clerk closed the door and said, "I'm Strapp." He nodded to his decoy, who sat down quietly in a corner. "Where's your data?"

Old Man Bruxton pointed faintly to his desk. Strapp sat down behind it, picked up the fat folders and began to read. A thin man. A harassed man. A fortyish man.

Straight black hair. China-blue eyes. A good mouth. Good bones under the skin. One quality stood out—a complete lack of self-consciousness. But when he spoke there was a hysterical undercurrent in his voice that showed something violent and possessed deep inside him.

After two hours of breakneck reading and muttered comments to his secretaries, who made cryptic notes in Whitehead symbols, Strapp said, "I want to see the plant."

"Why?" Bruxton asked.

"To feel it," Strapp answered. "There's always the nuance involved in a Decision. It's the most important factor."

They left the office and the parade began: the security squad, the burly men, the secretaries, the clerk, the acidulous Fisher and the magnificent decoy. They marched everywhere. They saw everything. The "clerk" did most of the leg work for "Strapp." He spoke to workers, foremen, technicians, high, low and middle brass. He asked names, gossiped, introduced them to the great man, talked about their families, working conditions, ambitions. He explored, smelled and felt. After four exhausting hours they returned to Bruxton's office. The "clerk" closed the door. The decoy stepped aside.

"Well?" Bruxton asked. "Yes or No?"

"Wait," Strapp said.

He glanced through his secretaries' notes, absorbed them, closed his eyes and stood still and silent in the middle of the office like a man straining to hear a distant whisper.

"Yes," he Decided, and was Cr. 100,000 and 1 per cent of the voting stock of Bruxton Biotics richer. In return, Bruxton had an 87 per cent assurance that the Decision was correct. Strapp opened the door again, the parade reassembled and marched out of the plant. Personnel grabbed its last chance to take photos and touch the great man. The clerk helped promote public relations with eager affability. He asked names, introduced and amused. The sound of voices and laughter increased as they reached the ship. Then the incredible happened.

"You!" the clerk cried suddenly. His voice screeched horribly. "You son of a bitch! You goddamned lousy

murdering bastard! I've been waiting for this. I've waited ten years!" He pulled a flat gun from his inside pocket and shot a man through the forehead.

Time stood still. It took hours for the brains and blood to burst out of the back of the head and for the body to crumple. Then the Strapp staff leaped into action. They hurled the clerk into the ship. The secretaries followed, then the decoy. The two burly men leaped after them and slammed the door. The ship took off and disappeared with a fading whine. The ten men in plain clothes quietly drifted off and vanished. Only Fisher, the Strapp liaison man, was left alongside the body in the center of the horrified crowd.

"Check his identification," Fisher snapped.

Someone pulled the dead man's wallet out and opened it.

"William F. Kruger, biomechanic."

"The damned fool!" Fisher said savagely. "We warned him. We warned all the Krugers. All right. Call the police."

That was John Strapp's sixth murder. It cost exactly Cr. 500,000 to fix. The other five had cost the same, and half the amount usually went to a man desperate enough to substitute for the killer and plead temporary insanity. The other half went to the heirs of the deceased. There were six of these substitutes languishing in various penitentiaries, serving from twenty to fifty years, their families Cr. 250,000 richer.

In their suite in the Alcor Splendide, the Strapp staff consulted gloomily.

"Six in six years," Aldous Fisher said bitterly. "We can't keep it quiet much longer. Sooner or later somebody's going to ask why John Strapp always hires crazy clerks."

"Then we fix him too," the redheaded secretary said. "Strapp can afford it."

"He can afford a murder a month," the magnificent decoy murmured.

"No." Fisher shook his head sharply. "You can fix so far and no further. You reach a saturation point. We've reached it now. What are we going to do?"

"What the hell's the matter with Strapp anyway?" one of the burly men inquired.

"Who knows?" Fisher exclaimed in exasperation. "He's got a Kruger fixation. He meets a man named Kruger—any man named Kruger. He screams. He curses. He murders. Don't ask me why. It's something buried in his past."

"Haven't you asked him?"

"How can I? It's like an epileptic fit. He never knows it happened."

"Take him to a psychoanalyst," the decoy suggested.

"Out of the question."

"Why?"

"You're new," Fisher said. "You don't understand."

"Make me understand."

"I'll make an analogy. Back in the nineteen hundreds, people played card games with fifty-two cards in the deck. Those were simple times. Today everything's more complex. We're playing with fifty-two hundred in the deck. Understand?"

"I'll go along with it."

"A mind can figure fifty-two cards. It can make decisions on that total. They had it easy in the nineteen hundreds. But no mind is big enough to figure fifty-two hundred—no mind except Strapp's."

"We've got computers."

"And they're perfect when only cards are involved. But when you have to figure fifty-two hundred card players too, their likes, dislikes, motives, inclinations, prospects, tendencies and so on—what Strapp calls the nuances—then Strapp can do what a machine can't do. He's unique, and we might destroy his uniqueness with psychoanalysis."

"Why?"

"Because it's an unconscious process in Strapp," Fisher explained irritably. "He doesn't know how he does it. If he did he'd be one hundred per cent right instead of eighty-seven per cent. It's an unconscious process and for all we know it may be linked up with the same abnormality that makes him murder Krugers. If we get rid



of one we may destroy the other. We can't take the chance."

"Then what do we do?"

"Protect our property," Fisher said, looking around ominously. "Never forget that for a minute. We've put in too much work on Strapp to let it be destroyed. We protect our property!"

"I think he needs a friend," the brunette said.

"Why?"

"We could find out what's bothering him without destroying anything. People talk to their friends. Strapp might talk."

"We're his friends."

"No, we're not. We're his associates."

"Has he talked with you?"

"No."

"You?" Fisher shot at the redhead.

She shook her head.

"He's looking for something he never finds."

"What?"

"A woman, I think. A special kind of woman."

"A woman named Kruger?"

"I don't know."

"Damn it, it doesn't make sense." Fisher thought a moment. "All right. We'll have to hire him a friend, and we'll have to ease off the schedule to give the friend a chance to make Strapp talk. From now on we cut the program to one Decision a week."

"My God!" the brunette exclaimed. "That's cutting five million a year."

"It's got to be done," Fisher said grimly. "It's cut now or take a total loss later. We're rich enough to stand it."

"What are you going to do for a friend?" the decoy asked.

"I said we'd hire one. We'll hire the best. Get Terra on the TT. Tell them to locate Frank Alceste and put him through urgent."

"Frankie!" the redhead squealed. "I swoon."

"Ooh! Frankie!" The brunette fanned herself.

"You mean Fatal Frank Alceste? The heavyweight

champ?" the burly man asked in awe. "I saw him fight Lonzo Jordan. Oh, man!"

"He's an actor now," the decoy explained. "I worked with him once. He sings. He dances. He—"

"And he's twice as fatal," Fisher interrupted. "We'll hire him. Make out a contract. He'll be Strapp's friend. As soon as Strapp meets him, he'll—"

"Meets who?" Strapp appeared in the doorway of his bedroom, yawning, blinking in the light. He always slept deeply after his attacks. "Who am I going to meet?" He looked around, thin, graceful, but harassed and indubitably possessed.

"A man named Frank Alceste," Fisher said. "He badgered us for an introduction and we can't hold him off any longer."

"Frank Alceste?" Strapp murmured. "Never heard of him."

Strapp could make Decisions; Alceste could make friends. He was a powerful man in his middle thirties, sandy-haired, freckle-faced, with a broken nose and deep-set gray eyes. His voice was high and soft. He moved with the athlete's lazy poise that is almost feminine. He charmed you without knowing how he did it, or even wanting to do it. He charmed Strapp, but Strapp also charmed him. They became friends.

"No, it really is friends," Alceste told Fisher when he returned the check that had been paid him. "I don't need the money, and old Johnny needs me. Forget you hired me original-like. Tear up the contract. I'll try to straighten Johnny out on my own."

Alceste turned to leave the suite in the Rigel Splendide and passed the great-eyed secretaries. "If I wasn't so busy, ladies," he murmured, "I'd sure like to chase you a little."

"Chase me, Frankie," the brunette blurted.

The redhead looked caught.

And as Strapp Associates zigzagged in slow tempo from city to city and planet to planet, making the one Decision a week, Alceste and Strapp enjoyed themselves while the magnificent decoy gave interviews and posed for pictures. There were interruptions when Frankie had to

return to Terra to make a picture, but in between they golfed, tennised, brubaged, bet on horses, dogs and dowlens, and went to fights and routs. They hit the night spots and Alceste came back with a curious report.

"Me, I don't know how close you folks been watching Johnny," he told Fisher, "but if you think he's been sleeping every night, safe in his little trundle, you better switch notions."

"How's that?" Fisher asked in surprise.

"Old Johnny, he's been sneaking out nights all along when you folks thought he was getting his brain rest."

"How do you know?"

"By his reputation," Alceste told him sadly. "They know him everywhere. They know old Johnny in every bistro from here to Orion. And they know him the worst way."

"By name?"

"By nickname. Wasteland, they call him."

"Wasteland!"

"Uh huh. Mr. Devastation. He runs through women like a prairie fire. You don't know this?"

Fisher shook his head.

"Must pay off out of his personal pocket," Alceste mused and departed.

There was a terrifying quality to the possessed way that Strapp ran through women. He would enter a club with Alceste, take a table, sit down and drink. Then he would stand up and coolly survey the room, table by table, woman by woman. Upon occasion men would become angered and offer to fight. Strapp disposed of them coldly and viciously, in a manner that excited Alceste's professional admiration. Frankie never fought himself. No professional ever touches an amateur. But he tried to keep the peace, and failing that, at least kept the ring.

After the survey of the women guests, Strapp would sit down and wait for the show, relaxed, chatting, laughing. When the girls appeared, his grim possession would take over again and he would examine the line carefully and dispassionately. Very rarely he would discover a girl that interested him; always the identical type—a girl with jet

hair, inky eyes and clear silken skin. Then the trouble began.

If it was an entertainer, Strapp went backstage after the show. He bribed, fought, blustered and forced his way into her dressing room. He would confront the astonished girl, examine her in silence, then ask her to speak. He would listen to her voice, then close in like a tiger and make a violent and unexpected pass. Sometimes there would be shrieks, sometimes a spirited defense, sometimes compliance. At no time was Strapp satisfied. He would abandon the girl abruptly, pay off all complaints and damages like a gentleman, and leave to repeat the performance in club after club until curfew.

If it was one of the guests, Strapp immediately cut in, disposed of her escort, or if that was impossible, followed the girl home and there repeated the dressing-room attack. Again he would abandon the girl, pay like a gentleman and leave to continue his possessed search.

"Me, I been around, but I'm scared by it," Alceste told Fisher. "I never saw such a hasty man. He could have most any woman agreeable if he'd slow down a little. But he can't. He's driven."

"By what?"

"I don't know. It's like he's working against time."

After Strapp and Alceste became intimate, Strapp permitted him to come along on a daytime quest that was even stranger. As Strapp Associates continued its round through the planets and industries, Strapp visited the Bureau of Vital Statistics in each city. There he bribed the chief clerk and presented a slip of paper. On it was written:

Height	5' 6"
Weight	110
Hair	Black
Eyes	Black
Bust	34
Waist	26
Hips	36
Size	12

"I want the name and address of every girl over twenty-one who fits this description," Strapp would say. "I'll pay ten credits a name."

Twenty-four hours later would come the list, and off Strapp would chase on a possessed search, examining, talking, listening, sometimes making the terrifying pass, always paying off like a gentleman. The procession of tall, jet-haired, inky-eyed, busty girls made Alceste dizzy.

"He's got an idee fix," Alceste told Fisher in the Cygnus Splendide, "and I got it figured this much. He's looking for a special particular girl and nobody comes up to specifications."

"A girl named Kruger?"

"I don't know if the Kruger business comes into it."

"Is he hard to please?"

"Well, I'll tell you. Some of those girls—me, I'd call them sensational. But he don't pay any mind to them. Just looks and moves on. Others—dogs, practically; he jumps like old Wasteland."

"What is it?"

"I think it's a kind of test. Something to make the girls react hard and natural. It ain't that kind of passion with old Wasteland. It's a cold-blooded trick so he can watch 'em in action."

"But what's he looking for?"

"I don't know yet," Alceste said, "but I'm going to find out. I got a little trick figured. It's taking a chance, but Johnny's worth it."

It happened in the arena where Strapp and Alceste went to watch a pair of gorillas tear each other to pieces inside a glass cage. It was a bloody affair, and both men agreed that gorilla-fighting was no more civilized than cockfighting and left in disgust. Outside, in the empty concrete corridor, a shriveled man loitered. When Alceste signaled to him, he ran up to them like an auto-graph hound.

"Frankie!" the shriveled man shouted. "Good old Frankie! Don't you remember me?"

Alceste stared.

"I'm Blooper Davis. We was raised together in the old precinct. Don't you remember Blooper Davis?"

"Blooper!" Alceste's face lit up. "Sure enough. But it was Blooper Davidoff then."

"Sure." The shriveled man laughed. "And it was Frankie Kruger then."

"Kruger!" Strapp cried in a thin, screeching voice.

"That's right," Frankie said. "Kruger. I changed my name when I went into the fight game." He motioned sharply to the shriveled man, who backed against the corridor wall and slid away.

"You son of a bitch!" Strapp cried. His face was white and twitched hideously. "You goddamned lousy murdering bastard! I've been waiting for this. I've waited ten years."

He whipped a flat gun from his inside pocket and fired. Alceste sidestepped barely in time and the slug ricocheted down the corridor with a high whine. Strapp fired again and the flame seared Alceste's cheek. He closed in, caught Strapp's wrist and paralyzed it with his powerful grip. He pointed the gun away and clinched. Strapp's breath was hissing. His eyes rolled. Overhead sounded the wild roars of the crowd.

"All right, I'm Kruger," Alceste grunted. "Kruger's the name, Mr. Strapp. So what? What are you going to do about it?"

"Son of a bitch!" Strapp screamed, struggling like one of the gorillas. "Killer! Murderer! I'll rip your guts out!"

"Why me? Why Kruger?" Exerting all his strength, Alceste dragged Strapp to a niche and slammed him into it. He caged him with his huge frame. "What did I ever do to you ten years ago?"

He got the story in hysterical animal outbursts before Strapp fainted.

After he put Strapp to bed, Alceste went out into the lush living room of the suite in the Indi Splendide and explained to the staff.

"Old Johnny was in love with a girl named Sima Morgan," he began. "She was in love with him. It was big romantic stuff. They were going to be married. Then Sima Morgan got killed by a guy named Kruger."

"Kruger! So that's the connection. How?"

"This Kruger was a drunken no-good. Society. He had a bad driving record. They took his license away from him, but that didn't make any difference to Kruger's kind of money. He bribed a dealer and bought a hot-rod jet without a license. One day he buzzed a school for the hell of it. He smashed the roof in and killed thirteen children and their teacher. . . . This was on Terra in Berlin.

"They never got Kruger. He started planet-hopping and he's still on the lam. The family sends him money. The police can't find him. Strapp's looking for him because the schoolteacher was his girl, Sima Morgan."

There was a pause, then Fisher asked, "How long ago was this?"

"Near as I can figure, ten years eight months."

Fisher calculated intently. "And ten years three months ago, Strapp first showed he could make decisions. The Big Decisions. Up to then he was nobody. Then came the tragedy, and with it the hysteria and the ability. Don't tell me one didn't produce the other."

"Nobody's telling you anything."

"So he kills Kruger over and over again," Fisher said coldly. "Right. Revenge fixation. But what about the girls and the Wasteland business?"

Alceste smiled sadly. "You ever hear the expression 'One girl in a million'?"

"Who hasn't?"

"If your girl was one in a million, that means there ought to be nine more like her in a city of ten million, yes?"

The Strapp staff nodded, wondering.

"Old Johnny's working on that idea. He thinks he can find Sima Morgan's duplicate."

"How?"

"He's worked it out arithmetic-wise. He's thinking like so: There's one chance in sixty-four billion of fingerprints matching. But today there's seventeen hundred billion people. That means there can be twenty-six with one matching print, and maybe more."

"Not necessarily."

"Sure, not necessarily, but there's the chance and

that's all old Johnny wants. He figures if there's twenty-six chances of one print matching, there's an outside chance of one person matching. He thinks he can find Sima Morgan's duplicate if he just keeps on looking hard enough."

"That's outlandish!"

"I didn't say it wasn't, but it's the only thing that keeps him going. It's a kind of life preserver made out of numbers. It keeps his head above water—the crazy notion that sooner or later he can pick up where death left him off ten years ago."

"Ridiculous!" Fisher snapped.

"Not to Johnny. He's still in love."

"Impossible."

"I wish you could feel it like I feel it," Alceste answered. "He's looking . . . looking. He meets girl after girl. He hopes. He talks. He makes the pass. If it's Sima's duplicate he knows she'll respond just the way he remembers Sima responding ten years ago. 'Are you Sima?' he asks himself. 'No,' he says and moves on. It hurts, thinking about a lost guy like that. We ought to do something for him."

"No," Fisher said.

"We ought to help him find his duplicate. We ought to coax him into believing some girl's the duplicate. We ought to make him fall in love again."

"No," Fisher repeated emphatically.

"Why no?"

"Because the moment Strapp finds his girl, he heals himself. He stops being the great John Strapp, the Decider. He turns back into a nobody—a man in love."

"What's he care about being great? He wants to be happy."

"Everybody wants to be happy," Fisher snarled. "Nobody is. Strapp's no worse off than any other man, but he's a lot richer. We maintain the *status quo*."

"Don't you mean *you're* a lot richer?"

"We maintain the *status quo*," Fisher repeated. He eyed Alceste coldly. "I think we'd better terminate the contract. We have no further use for your services."

"Mister, we terminated when I handed back the check. You're talking to Johnny's friend now."



"I'm sorry, Mr. Alceste, but Strapp won't have much time for his friends from now on. I'll let you know when he'll be free next year."

"You'll never pull it off. I'll see Johnny when and where I please."

"Do you want him for a friend?" Fisher smiled unpleasantly. "Then you'll see him when and where I please. Either you see him on those terms or Strapp sees the contract we gave you. I still have it in the files, Mr. Alceste. I did not tear it up. I never part with anything. How long do you imagine Strapp will believe in your friendship after he sees the contract you signed?"

Alceste clenched his fists. Fisher held his ground. For a moment they glared at each other, then Frankie turned away.

"Poor Johnny," he muttered. "It's like a man being run by his tapeworm. I'll say so long to him. Let me know when you're ready for me to see him again."

He went into the bedroom, where Strapp was just awakening from his attack without the faintest memory, as usual. Alceste sat down on the edge of the bed.

"Hey, old Johnny." He grinned.

"Hey, Frankie." Strapp smiled.

They punched each other solemnly, which is the only way that men friends can embrace and kiss.

"What happened after that gorilla fight?" Strapp asked. "I got fuzzy."

"Man, you got plastered. I never saw a guy take on such a load." Alceste punched Strapp again. "Listen, old Johnny, I got to get back to work. I got a three-picture-a-year contract and they're howling."

"Why, you took a month off six planets back," Strapp said in disappointment. "I thought you caught up."

"Nope. I'll be pulling out today, Johnny. Be seeing you real soon."

"Listen," Strapp said. "To hell with the pictures. Be my partner. I'll tell Fisher to draw up an agreement." He blew his nose. "This is the first time I've had laughs in—in a long time."

"Maybe later, Johnny. Right now I'm stuck with a contract. Soon as I can get back, I'll come a-running. Cheers."

"Cheers," Strapp said wistfully.

Outside the bedroom, Fisher was waiting like a watchdog. Alceste looked at him with disgust.

"One thing you learn in the fight game," he said slowly. "It's never won till the last round. I give you this one, but it isn't the last."

As he left, Alceste said, half to himself, half aloud, "I want him to be happy. I want every man to be happy. Seems like every man could be happy if we'd all just lend a hand."

Which is why Frankie Alceste couldn't help making friends.

So the Strapp staff settled back into the same old watchful vigilance of the murdering years, and stepped up Strapp's Decision appointments to two a week. They knew why Strapp had to be watched. They knew why the Krugers had to be protected. But that was the only difference. Their man was miserable, hysteric, almost psychotic; it made no difference. That was a fair price to pay for 1 per cent of the world.

But Frankie Alceste kept his own counsel, and visited the Deneb laboratories of Bruxton Biotics. There he consulted with one E. T. A. Goland, the research genius who had discovered that novel technique for molding life which first brought Strapp to Bruxton, and was indirectly responsible for his friendship with Alceste. Ernst Theodor Amadeus Goland was short, fat, asthmatic and enthusiastic.

"But yes, yes," he sputtered when the layman had finally made himself clear to the scientist. "Yes, indeed! A most ingenious notion. Why it never occurred to me, I cannot think. It could be accomplished without any difficulty whatsoever." He considered. "Except money," he added.

"You could duplicate the girl that died ten years ago?" Alceste asked.

"Without any difficulty, except money." Goland nodded emphatically.

"She'd look the same? Act the same? Be the same?"

"Up to ninety-five per cent, plus or minus point nine seven five."

"Would that make any difference? I mean ninety-five per cent of a person as against one hundred per cent."

"Ach! No. It is a most remarkable individual who is aware of more than eighty per cent of the total characteristics of another person. Above ninety per cent is unheard of."

"How would you go about it?"

"Ach? So. Empirically we have two sources. One: complete psychological pattern of the subject in the Centaurus Master Files. They will TT a transcript upon application and payment of one hundred credits through formal channels. I will apply."

"And I'll pay. Two?"

"Two: the embalmmment process of modern times, which — She is buried, yes?"

"Yes."

"Which is ninety-eight per cent perfect. From remains and psychological pattern we reconstruct body and psyche by the equation  $\sigma = \sqrt{-2}$  over — We do it without any difficulty, except money."

"Me, I've got the money," Frankie Alceste said. "You do the rest."

For the sake of his friend, Alceste paid Cr. 100 and expedited the formal application to the Master Files on Centaurus for the transcript of the complete psychological pattern of Sima Morgan, deceased. After it arrived, Alceste returned to Terra and a city called Berlin, where he blackmailed a gimpster named Augenblick into turning grave robber. Augenblick visited the *Staats-Gottesacker* and removed the porcelain coffin from under the marble headstone that read SIMA MORGAN. It contained what appeared to be a black-haired, silken-skinned girl in deep sleep. By devious routes, Alceste got the porcelain coffin through four customs barriers to Deneb.

One aspect of the trip of which Alceste was not aware, but which bewildered various police organizations, was the series of catastrophes that pursued him and never quite caught up. There was the jetliner explosion that destroyed the ship and an acre of docks half an hour

after passengers and freight were discharged. There was a hotel holocaust ten minutes after Alceste checked out. There was the shuttle disaster that extinguished the pneumatic train for which Alceste had unexpectedly canceled passage. Despite all this he was able to present the coffin to biochemist Goland.

"Ach!" said Ernst Theodor Amadeus. "A beautiful creature. She is worth re-creating. The rest now is simple, except money."

For the sake of his friend, Alceste arranged a leave of absence for Goland, bought him a laboratory and financed an incredibly expensive series of experiments. For the sake of his friend, Alceste poured forth money and patience until at last, eight months later, there emerged from the opaque maturation chamber a black-haired, inky-eyed, silken-skinned creature with long legs and a high bust. She answered to the name of Sima Morgan.

"I heard the jet coming down toward the school," Sima said, unaware that she was speaking eleven years later. "Then I heard a crash. What happened?"

Alceste was jolted. Up to this moment she had been an objective . . . a goal . . . unreal, unalive. This was a living woman. There was a curious hesitation in her speech, almost a lisp. Her head had an engaging tilt when she spoke. She arose from the edge of the table, and she was not fluid or graceful as Alceste had expected she would be. She moved boyishly.

"I'm Frank Alceste," he said quietly. He took her shoulders. "I want you to look at me and make up your mind whether you can trust me."

Their eyes locked in a steady gaze. Sima examined him gravely. Again Alceste was jolted and moved. His hands began to tremble and he released the girl's shoulders in panic.

"Yes," Sima said. "I can trust you."

"No matter what I say, you must trust me. No matter what I tell you to do, you must trust me and do it."

"Why?"

"For the sake of Johnny Strapp."

Her eyes widened. "Something's happened to him," she said quickly. "What is it?"

"Not to him, Sima. To you. Be patient, honey. I'll explain. I had it in my mind to explain now, but I can't. I—I'd best wait until tomorrow."

They put her to bed and Alceste went out for a wrestling match with himself. The Deneb nights are soft and black as velvet, thick and sweet with romance—or so it seemed to Frankie Alceste that night.

"You can't be falling in love with her," he muttered. "It's crazy."

And later, "You saw hundreds like her when Johnny was hunting. Why didn't you fall for one of them?"

And last of all, "What are you going to do?"

He did the only thing an honorable man can do in a situation like that, and tried to turn his desire into friendship. He came into Sima's room the next morning, wearing tattered old jeans, needing a shave, with his hair standing on end. He hoisted himself up on the foot of her bed, and while she ate the first of the careful meals Goland had prescribed, Frankie chewed on a cigarette and explained to her. When she wept, he did not take her in his arms to console her, but thumped her on the back like a brother.

He ordered a dress for her. He had ordered the wrong size, and when she showed herself to him in it, she looked so adorable that he wanted to kiss her. Instead he punched her, very gently and very solemnly, and took her out to buy a wardrobe. When she showed herself to him in proper clothes, she looked so enchanting that he had to punch her again. Then they went to a ticket office and booked immediate passage for Ross-Alpha III.

Alceste had intended delaying a few days to rest the girl, but he was compelled to rush for fear of himself. It was this alone that saved both from the explosion that destroyed the private home and private laboratory of biochemist Goland, and destroyed the biochemist too. Alceste never knew this. He was already on board ship with Sima, frantically fighting temptation.

One of the things that everybody knows about space travel but never mentions is its aphrodisiac quality. Like the ancient days when travelers crossed oceans on ships, the passengers are isolated in their own tiny world

for a week. They're cut off from reality. A magic mood of freedom from ties and responsibilities pervades the jetliner. Everyone has a fling. There are thousands of jet romances every week—quick, passionate affairs that are enjoyed in complete safety and ended on landing day.

In this atmosphere, Frankie Alceste maintained a rigid self-control. He was not aided by the fact that he was a celebrity with a tremendous animal magnetism. While a dozen handsome women threw themselves at him, he persevered in the role of big brother and thumped and punched Sima until she protested.

"I know you're a wonderful friend to Johnny and me," she said on the last night out. "But you are exhausting, Frankie. I'm covered with bruises."

"Yeah. I know. It's habit. Some people, like Johnny, they think with their brains. Me, I think with my fists."

They were standing before the starboard crystal, bathed in the soft light of the approaching Ross-Alpha, and there is nothing more damnably romantic than the velvet of space illuminated by the white-violet of a distant sun. Sima tilted her head and looked at him.

"I was talking to some of the passengers," she said. "You're famous, aren't you?"

"More notorious-like."

"There's so much to catch up on. But I must catch up on you first."

"Me?"

Sima nodded. "It's all been so sudden. I've been bewildered—and so excited that I haven't had a chance to thank you, Frankie. I do thank you. I'm beholden to you forever."

She put her arms around his neck and kissed him with parted lips. Alceste began to shake.

"No," he thought. "No. She doesn't know what she's doing. She's so crazy happy at the idea of being with Johnny again that she doesn't realize . . ."

He reached behind him until he felt the icy surface of the crystal, which passengers are strictly enjoined from touching. Before he could give way, he deliberately pressed the backs of his hands against the subzero surface. The pain made him start. Sima released him in surprise,

and when he pulled his hands away, he left six square inches of skin and blood behind.

So he landed on Ross-Alpha III with one girl in good condition and two hands in bad shape and he was met by the acid-faced Aldous Fisher, accompanied by an official who requested Mr. Alceste to step into an office for a very serious private talk.

"It has been brought to our attention by Mr. Fisher," the official said, "that you are attempting to bring in a young woman of illegal status."

"How would Mr. Fisher know?" Alceste asked.

"You fool!" Fisher spat. "Did you think I would let it go at that? You were followed. Every minute."

"Mr. Fisher informs us," the official continued austerely, "that the woman with you is traveling under an assumed name. Her papers are fraudulent."

"How fraudulent?" Alceste said. "She's Sima Morgan. Her papers say she's Sima Morgan."

"Sima Morgan died eleven years ago," Fisher answered. "The woman with you can't be Sima Morgan."

"And unless the question of her true identity is cleared up," the official said, "she will not be permitted entry."

"I'll have the documentation on Sima Morgan's death here within the week," Fisher added triumphantly.

Alceste looked at Fisher and shook his head wearily. "You don't know it, but you're making it easy for me," he said. "The one thing in the world I'd like to do is take her out of here and never let Johnny see her. I'm so crazy to keep her for myself that—" He stopped himself and touched the bandages on his hands. "Withdraw your charge, Fisher."

"No," Fisher snapped.

"You can't keep 'em apart. Not this way. Suppose she's interned? Who's the first man I subpoena to establish her identity? John Strapp. Who's the first man I call to come and see her? John Strapp. D'you think you could stop him?"

"That contract," Fisher began. "I'll—"

"To hell with the contract. Show it to him. He wants his girl, not me. Withdraw your charge, Fisher. And stop fighting. You've lost your meal ticket."

Fisher glared malevolently, then swallowed. "I withdraw the charge," he growled. Then he looked at Alceste with blood in his eyes. "It isn't the last round yet," he said and stamped out of the office.

Fisher was prepared. At a distance of light years he might be too late with too little. Here on Ross-Alpha III he was protecting his property. He had all the power and money of John Strapp to call on. The floater that Frankie Alceste and Sima took from the spaceport was piloted by a Fisher aide who unlatched the cabin door and performed steep banks to tumble his fares out into the air. Alceste smashed the glass partition and hooked a meaty arm around the driver's throat until he righted the floater and brought them safely to earth. Alceste was pleased to note that Sima did not fuss more than was necessary.

On the road level they were picked up by one of a hundred cars that had been pacing the floater from below. At the first shot, Alceste clubbed Sima into a doorway and followed her at the expense of a burst shoulder, which he bound hastily with strips of Sima's lingerie. Her dark eyes were enormous but she made no complaint. Alceste complimented her with mighty thumps and took her up to the roof and down into the adjoining building, where he broke into an apartment and telephoned for an ambulance.

When the ambulance arrived, Alceste and Sima descended to the street, where they were met by uniformed policemen who had official instructions to pick up a couple answering to their description. "Wanted for floater robbery with assault. Dangerous. Shoot to kill." The police Alceste disposed of, and also the ambulance driver and intern. He and Sima departed in the ambulance, Alceste driving like a fury, Sima operating the siren like a banshee.

They abandoned the ambulance in the downtown shopping district, entered a department store, and emerged forty minutes later as a young valet in uniform pushing an old man in a wheelchair. Outside the difficulty of the bust, Sima was boyish enough to pass as a valet. Frankie



was weak enough from assorted injuries to simulate the old man.

They checked into the Ross Splendide, where Alceste barricaded Sima in a suite, had his shoulder attended to and bought a gun. Then he went looking for John Strapp. He found him in the Bureau of Vital Statistics, bribing the chief clerk and presenting him with a slip of paper that gave the same description of the long-lost love.

"Hey, old Johnny," Alceste said.

"Hey, Frankiel!" Strapp cried in delight.

They punched each other affectionately. With a happy grin, Alceste watched Strapp explain and offer further bribes to the chief clerk for the names and addresses of all girls over twenty-one who fitted the description on the slip of paper. As they left, Alceste said, "I met a girl who might fit that, old Johnny."

That cold look came into Strapp's eyes. "Oh?" he said.

"She's got a kind of half lisp."

Strapp looked at Alceste strangely.

"And a funny way of tilting her head when she talks."

Strapp clutched Alceste's arm.

"Only trouble is, she isn't girlie-girlie like most. More like a fella. You know what I mean? Spunky-like."

"Show her to me, Frankie," Strapp said in a low voice.

They hopped a floater and were taxied to the Ross Splendide roof. They took the elevator down to the twentieth floor and walked to suite 20-M. Alceste code-knocked on the door. A girl's voice called, "Come in." Alceste shook Strapp's hand and said, "Cheers, Johnny." He unlocked the door, then walked down the hall to lean against the balcony balustrade. He drew his gun just in case Fisher might get around to last-ditch interruptions. Looking out across the glittering city, he reflected that every man could be happy if everybody would just lend a hand; but sometimes that hand was expensive.

John Strapp walked into the suite. He shut the door, turned and examined the jet-haired inky-eyed girl, coldly, intently. She stared at him in amazement. Strapp stepped closer, walked around her, faced her again.

"Say something," he said.

"You're not John Strapp?" she faltered.

"Yes."

"No!" she exclaimed. "No! My Johnny's young. My Johnny is—"

Strapp closed in like a tiger. His hands and lips savaged her while his eyes watched coldly and intently. The girl screamed and struggled, terrified by those strange eyes that were alien, by the harsh hands that were alien, by the alien compulsions of the creature who was once her Johnny Strapp but was now aching years of change apart from her.

"You're someone else!" she cried. "You're not Johnny Strapp. You're another man."

And Strapp, not so much eleven years older as eleven years other than the man whose memory he was fighting to fulfill, asked himself, "Are you my Sima? Are you my love—my lost dead love?" And the change within him answered, "No, this isn't Sima. This isn't your love yet. Move on, Johnny. Move on and search. You'll find her someday—the girl you lost."

He paid like a gentleman and departed.

From the balcony, Alceste saw him leave. He was so astonished that he could not call to him. He went back to the suite and found Sima standing there, stunned, staring at a sheaf of money on a table. He realized what had happened at once. When Sima saw Alceste, she began to cry—not like a girl, but boyishly, with her fists clenched and her face screwed up.

"Frankie," she wept. "My God! Frankie!" She held out her arms to him in desperation. She was lost in a world that had passed her by.

He took a step, then hesitated. He made a last attempt to quench the love within him for this creature, searching for a way to bring her and Strapp together. Then he lost all control and took her in his arms.

"She doesn't know what she's doing," he thought. "She's so scared of being lost. She's not mine. Not yet. Maybe never."

And then, "Fisher's won, and I've lost."

And last of all, "We only remember the past; we never know it when we meet it. The mind goes back, but time goes on, and farewells should be forever."

## THE MEN WHO MURDERED MOHAMMED

There was a man who mutilated history. He toppled empires and uprooted dynasties. Because of him, Mount Vernon should not be a national shrine, and Columbus, Ohio, should be called Cabot, Ohio. Because of him the name Marie Curie should be cursed in France, and no one should swear by the beard of the Prophet. Actually, these realities did not happen, because he was a mad professor; or, to put it another way, he only succeeded in making them unreal for himself.

Now, the patient reader is too familiar with the conventional mad professor, undersized and overbrowed, creating monsters in his laboratory which invariably turn on their maker and menace his lovely daughter. This story isn't about that sort of make-believe man. It's about Henry Hassel, a genuine mad professor in a class with such better-known men as Ludwig Boltzmann (*see* Ideal Gas Law), Jacques Charles and André Marie Ampère (1775–1836).

Everyone ought to know that the electrical ampere was so named in honor of Ampère. Ludwig Boltzmann was a distinguished Austrian physicist, as famous for his research on black-body radiation as on Ideal Gases. You can look him up in Volume Three of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, BALT to BRAI. Jacques Alexandre César Charles was the first mathematician to become interested

in flight, and he invented the hydrogen balloon. These were real men.

They were also real mad professors. Ampère, for example, was on his way to an important meeting of scientists in Paris. In his taxi he got a brilliant idea (of an electrical nature, I assume) and whipped out a pencil and jotted the equation on the wall of the hansom cab. Roughly, it was:  $dH = i p dl / r^2$  in which  $p$  is the perpendicular distance from  $P$  to the line of the element  $dl$ ; or  $dH = i \sin \phi dl / r^2$ . This is sometimes known as Laplace's Law, although he wasn't at the meeting.

Anyway, the cab arrived at the Académie. Ampère jumped out, paid the driver and rushed into the meeting to tell everybody about his idea. Then he realized he didn't have the note on him, remembered where he'd left it, and had to chase through the streets of Paris after the taxi to recover his runaway equation. Sometimes I imagine that's how Fermat lost his famous "Last Theorem," although Fermat wasn't at the meeting either, having died some two hundred years earlier.

Or take Boltzmann. Giving a course in Advanced Ideal Gases, he peppered his lectures with involved calculus, which he worked out quickly and casually in his head. He had that kind of head. His students had so much trouble trying to puzzle out the math by ear that they couldn't keep up with the lectures, and they begged Boltzmann to work out his equations on the blackboard.

Boltzmann apologized and promised to be more helpful in the future. At the next lecture he began, "Gentlemen, combining Boyle's Law with the Law of Charles, we arrive at the equation  $p v = p_0 v_0 (1 + \alpha t)$ . Now, obviously, if  $\int_a^b f(x) dx = F(b) - F(a)$ , then  $p v = RT$  and  $\int f(x, y, z) dV = 0$ . It's as simple as two plus two equals four." At this point Boltzmann remembered his promise. He turned to the blackboard, conscientiously chalked  $2 + 2 = 4$ , and then breezed on, casually doing the complicated calculus in his head.

Jacques Charles, the brilliant mathematician who discovered Charles' Law (sometimes known as Gay-Lussac's Law), which Boltzmann mentioned in his lecture, had a lunatic passion to become a famous paleographer—

that is, a discoverer of ancient manuscripts. I think that being forced to share credit with Gay-Lussac may have unhinged him.

He paid a transparent swindler named Vrain-Lucas 200,000 francs for holograph letters purportedly written by Julius Caesar, Alexander the Great, and Pontius Pilate. Charles, a man who could see through any gas, ideal or not, actually believed in these forgeries despite the fact that the maladroit Vrain-Lucas had written them in modern French on modern notepaper bearing modern watermarks. Charles even tried to donate them to the Louvre.

Now, these men weren't idiots. They were geniuses who paid a high price for their genius because the rest of their thinking was other-world. A genius is someone who travels to truth by an unexpected path. Unfortunately, unexpected paths lead to disaster in everyday life. This is what happened to Henry Hassel, professor of Applied Compulsion at Unknown University in the year 1980.

Nobody knows where Unknown University is or what they teach there. It has a faculty of some two hundred eccentrics, and a student body of two thousand misfits—the kind that remain anonymous until they win Nobel prizes or become the First Man on Mars. You can always spot a graduate of U.U. when you ask people where they went to school. If you get an evasive reply like: "State," or "Oh, a fresh-water school you never heard of," you can bet they went to Unknown. Someday I hope to tell you more about this university, which is a center of learning only in the Pickwickian sense.

Anyway, Henry Hassel started home from his office in the Psychotic Psenter early one afternoon, strolling through the Physical Culture arcade. It is not true that he did this to leer at the nude coeds practicing Arcane Eurythmics; rather, Hassel liked to admire the trophies displayed in the arcade in memory of great Unknown teams which had won the sort of championships that Unknown teams win—in sports like Strabismus, Occlusion and Botulism. (Hassel had been Frambesia singles champion three years running.) He arrived home uplifted,

and burst gaily into the house to discover his wife in the arms of a man.

There she was, a lovely woman of thirty-five, with smoky red hair and almond eyes, being heartily embraced by a person whose pockets were stuffed with pamphlets, microchemical apparatus and a patella-reflex hammer—a typical campus character of U.U., in fact. The embrace was so concentrated that neither of the offending parties noticed Henry Hassel glaring at them from the hallway.

Now, remember Ampère and Charles and Boltzmann. Hassel weighed one hundred and ninety pounds. He was muscular and uninhibited. It would have been child's play for him to have dismembered his wife and her lover, and thus simply and directly achieve the goal he desired—the end of his wife's life. But Henry Hassel was in the genius class; his mind just didn't operate that way.

Hassel breathed hard, turned and lumbered into his private laboratory like a freight engine. He opened a drawer labeled DUODENUM and removed a .45-caliber revolver. He opened other drawers, more interestingly labeled, and assembled apparatus. In exactly seven and one half minutes (such was his rage), he put together a time machine (such was his genius).

Professor Hassel assembled the time machine around him, set a dial for 1902, picked up the revolver and pressed a button. The machine made a noise like defective plumbing and Hassel disappeared. He reappeared in Philadelphia on June 3, 1902, went directly to No. 1218 Walnut Street, a red-brick house with marble steps, and rang the bell. A man who might have passed for the third Smith Brother opened the door and looked at Henry Hassel.

"Mr. Jessup?" Hassel asked in a suffocated voice.

"Yes?"

"You are Mr. Jessup?"

"I am."

"You will have a son, Edgar? Edgar Allan Jessup—so named because of your regrettable admiration for Poe?"

The third Smith Brother was startled. "Not that I know of," he said. "I'm not married yet."

"You will be," Hassel said angrily. "I have the misfortune to be married to your son's daughter, Greta. Excuse me." He raised the revolver and shot his wife's grandfather-to-be.

"She will have ceased to exist," Hassel muttered, blowing smoke out of the revolver. "I'll be a bachelor. I may even be married to somebody else. . . . Good God! Who?"

Hassel waited impatiently for the automatic recall of the time machine to snatch him back to his own laboratory. He rushed into his living room. There was his red-headed wife, still in the arms of a man.

Hassel was thunderstruck.

"So that's it," he growled. "A family tradition of faithlessness. Well, we'll see about that. We have ways and means." He permitted himself a hollow laugh, returned to his laboratory, and sent himself back to the year 1901, where he shot and killed Emma Hotchkiss, his wife's maternal grandmother-to-be. He returned to his own home in his own time. There was his redheaded wife, still in the arms of another man.

"But I *know* the old bitch was her grandmother," Hassel muttered. "You couldn't miss the resemblance. What the hell's gone wrong?"

Hassel was confused and dismayed, but not without resources. He went to his study, had difficulty picking up the phone, but finally managed to dial the Malpractice Laboratory. His finger kept oozing out of the dial holes.

"Sam?" he said. "This is Henry."

"Who?"

"Henry."

"You'll have to speak up."

"Henry Hassel!"

"Oh, good afternoon, Henry."

"Tell me all about time."

"Time? Hmmm . . ." The Simplex-and-Multiplex Computer cleared its throat while it waited for the data circuits to link up. "Ahem. Time. (1) Absolute. (2) Relative. (3) Recurrent. (1) Absolute: period, contingent, duration, diurnity, perpetuity—"

"Sorry, Sam. Wrong request. Go back. I want time, reference to succession of, travel in."

Sam shifted gears and began again. Hassel listened intently. He nodded. He grunted. "Uh huh. Uh huh. Right. I see. Thought so. A continuum, eh? Acts performed in past must alter future. Then I'm on the right track. But act must be significant, eh? Mass-action effect. Trivia cannot divert existing phenomena streams. Hmmm. But how trivial is a grandmother?"

"What are you trying to do, Henry?"

"Kill my wife," Hassel snapped. He hung up. He returned to his laboratory. He considered, still in a jealous rage.

"Got to do something significant," he muttered. "Wipe Greta out. Wipe it all out. All right, by God! I'll show 'em."

Hassel went back to the year 1775, visited a Virginia farm and shot a young colonel in the brisket. The colonel's name was George Washington, and Hassel made sure he was dead. He returned to his own time and his own home. There was his redheaded wife, still in the arms of another.

"Damn!" said Hassel. He was running out of ammunition. He opened a fresh box of cartridges, went back in time and massacred Christopher Columbus, Napoleon, Mohammed and half a dozen other celebrities. "That ought to do it, by God!" said Hassel.

He returned to his own time, and found his wife as before.

His knees turned to water; his feet seemed to melt into the floor. He went back to his laboratory, walking through nightmare quicksands.

"What the hell is significant?" Hassel asked himself painfully. "How much does it take to change futurity? By God, I'll really change it this time. I'll go for broke."

He traveled to Paris at the turn of the twentieth century and visited a Madame Curie in an attic workshop near the Sorbonne. "Madame," he said in his execrable French, "I am a stranger to you of the utmost, but a scientist entire. Knowing of your experiments with radium— Oh? You haven't got to radium yet? No matter. I am here to teach you all of nuclear fission."

He taught her. He had the satisfaction of seeing Paris



go up in a mushroom of smoke before the automatic recall brought him home. "That'll teach women to be faithless," he growled. . . . "Guhhh!" The last was wrenched from his lips when he saw his redheaded wife still— But no need to belabor the obvious.

Hassel swam through fogs to his study and sat down to think. While he's thinking I'd better warn you that this is not a conventional time story. If you imagine for a moment that Henry is going to discover that the man fondling his wife is himself, you're mistaken. The viper is not Henry Hassel, his son, a relation, or even Ludwig Boltzmann (1844–1906). Hassel does not make a circle in time, ending where the story begins—to the satisfaction of nobody and the fury of everybody—for the simple reason that time isn't circular, or linear, or tandem, discoid, syzygous, longinquitous, or pandiculated. Time is a private matter, as Hassel discovered.

"Maybe I slipped up somehow," Hassel muttered. "I'd better find out." He fought with the telephone, which seemed to weigh a hundred tons, and at last managed to get through to the library.

"Hello, Library? This is Henry."

"Who?"

"Henry Hassel."

"Speak up, please."

"HENRY HASSEL!"

"Oh. Good afternoon, Henry."

"What have you got on George Washington?"

Library clucked while her scanners sorted through her catalogues. "George Washington, first president of the United States, was born in—"

"First president? Wasn't he murdered in 1775?"

"Really, Henry. That's an absurd question. Everybody knows that George Wash—"

"Doesn't anybody know he was shot?"

"By whom?"

"Me."

"When?"

"In 1775."

"How did you manage to do that?"

"I've got a revolver."

"No, I mean, how did you do it two hundred years ago?"

"I've got a time machine."

"Well, there's no record here," Library said. "He's still doing fine in my files. You must have missed."

"I did not miss. What about Christopher Columbus? Any record of his death in 1489?"

"But he discovered the New World in 1492."

"He did not. He was murdered in 1489."

"How?"

"With a forty-five slug in the gizzard."

"You again, Henry?"

"Yes."

"There's no record here," Library insisted. "You must be one lousy shot."

"I will not lose my temper," Hassel said in a trembling voice.

"Why not, Henry?"

"Because it's lost already," he shouted. "All right! What about Marie Curie? Did she or did she not discover the fission bomb which destroyed Paris at the turn of the century?"

"She did not. Enrico Fermi—"

"She did."

"She didn't."

"I personally taught her. Me. Henry Hassel."

"Everybody says you're a wonderful theoretician, but a lousy teacher, Henry. You—"

"Go to hell, you old biddy. This has got to be explained."

"Why?"

"I forget. There was something on my mind, but it doesn't matter now. What would you suggest?"

"You really have a time machine?"

"Of course I've got a time machine."

"Then go back and check."

Hassel returned to the year 1775, visited Mount Vernon, and interrupted the spring planting. "Excuse me, Colonel," he began.

The big man looked at him curiously. "You talk funny, stranger," he said. "Where are you from?"

"Oh, a fresh-water school you never heard of."

"You look funny too. Kind of misty, so to speak."

"Tell me, Colonel, what do you hear from Christopher Columbus?"

"Not much," Colonel Washington answered. "Been dead two, three hundred years."

"When did he die?"

"Year fifteen hundred some-odd, near as I remember."

"He did not. He died in 1489."

"Got your dates wrong, friend. He discovered America in 1492."

"Cabot discovered America. Sebastian Cabot."

"Nope. Cabot came a mite later."

"I have infallible proof!" Hassel began, but broke off as a stocky and rather stout man, with a face ludicrously reddened by rage, approached. He was wearing baggy gray slacks and a tweed jacket two sizes too small for him. He was carrying a .45 revolver. It was only after he had stared for a moment that Henry Hassel realized that he was looking at himself and not relishing the sight.

"My God!" Hassel murmured. "It's me, coming back to murder Washington that first time. If I'd made this second trip an hour later, I'd have found Washington dead. Hey!" he called. "Not yet. Hold off a minute. I've got to straighten something out first."

Hassel paid no attention to himself; indeed, he did not appear to be aware of himself. He marched straight up to Colonel Washington and shot him in the gizzard. Colonel Washington collapsed, emphatically dead. The first murderer inspected the body, and then, ignoring Hassel's attempt to stop him and engage him in dispute, turned and marched off, muttering venomously to himself.

"He didn't hear me," Hassel wondered. "He didn't even feel me. And why don't I remember myself trying to stop me the first time I shot the colonel? What the hell is going on?"

Considerably disturbed, Henry Hassel visited Chicago and dropped into the Chicago University squash courts in the early 1940's. There, in a slippery mess of graphite bricks and graphite dust that coated him, he located an Italian scientist named Fermi.

"Repeating Marie Curie's work, I see, *dottore?*" Hassel said.

Fermi glanced about as though he had heard a faint sound.

"Repeating Marie Curie's work, *dottore*?" Hassel roared.

Fermi looked at him strangely. "Where you from, *amico*?"

"State."

"State Department?"

"Just State. It's true, isn't it, *dottore*, that Marie Curie discovered nuclear fission back in nineteen ought ought?"

"No! No! No!" Fermi cried. "We are the first, and we are not there yet. Police! Police! Spy!"

"This time I'll go on record," Hassel growled. He pulled out his trusty .45, emptied it into Dr. Fermi's chest, and awaited arrest and immolation in newspaper files. To his amazement, Dr. Fermi did not collapse. Dr. Fermi merely explored his chest tenderly and, to the men who answered his cry, said, "It is nothing. I felt in my within a sudden sensation of burn which may be a neuralgia of the cardiac nerve, but is most likely gas."

Hassel was too agitated to wait for the automatic recall of the time machine. Instead he returned at once to Unknown University under his own power. This should have given him a clue, but he was too possessed to notice. It was at this time that I (1913-1975) first saw him—a dim figure tramping through parked cars, closed doors and brick walls, with the light of lunatic determination on his face.

He oozed into the library, prepared for an exhaustive discussion, but could not make himself felt or heard by the catalogues. He went to the Malpractice Laboratory, where Sam, the Simplex-and-Multiplex Computer, has installations sensitive up to 10,700 angstroms. Sam could not see Henry, but managed to hear him through a sort of wave-interference phenomenon.

"Sam," Hassel said, "I've made one hell of a discovery."

"You're always making discoveries, Henry," Sam complained. "Your data allocation is filled. Do I have to start another tape for you?"

"But I need advice. Who's the leading authority on time, reference to succession of, travel in?"

"That would be Israel Lennox, spatial mechanics, professor of, Yale."

"How do I get in touch with him?"

"You don't, Henry. He's dead. Died in '75."

"What authority have you got on time, travel in, living?"

"Wiley Murphy."

"Murphy? From our own Trauma Department? That's a break. Where is he now?"

"As a matter of fact, Henry, he went over to your house to ask you something."

Hassel went home without walking, searched through his laboratory and study without finding anyone, and at last floated into the living room, where his redheaded wife was still in the arms of another man. (All this, you understand, had taken place within the space of a few moments after the construction of the time machine; such is the nature of time and time travel.) Hassel cleared his throat once or twice and tried to tap his wife on the shoulder. His fingers went through her.

"Excuse me, darling," he said. "Has Wiley Murphy been in to see me?"

Then he looked closer and saw that the man embracing his wife was Murphy himself.

"Murphy!" Hassel exclaimed. "The very man I'm looking for. I've had the most extraordinary experience." Hassel at once launched into a lucid description of his extraordinary experience, which went something like this: "Murphy,  $u - v = (u' - v') (u^2 + u^2 v' + v^2)$  but when George Washington  $F(x)y^2 dx$  and Enrico Fermi  $F(u') dx dt$  one half of Marie Curie, then what about Christopher Columbus times the square root of minus one?"

Murphy ignored Hassel, as did Mrs. Hassel. I jotted down Hassel's equations on the hood of a passing taxi.

"Do listen to me, Murphy," Hassel said. "Greta dear, would you mind leaving us for a moment? I— For heaven's sake, will you two stop that nonsense? This is serious."

Hassel tried to separate the couple. He could no more touch them than make them hear him. His face turned

red again and he became quite choleric as he beat at Mrs. Hassel and Murphy. It was like beating an Ideal Gas. I thought it best to interfere.

"Hassel!"

"Who's that?"

"Come outside a moment. I want to talk to you."

He shot through the wall. "Where are you?"

"Over here."

"You're sort of dim."

"So are you."

"Who are you?"

"My name's Lennox. Israel Lennox."

"Israel Lennox, spatial mechanics, professor of, Yale?"

"The same."

"But you died in '75."

"I disappeared in '75."

"What d'you mean?"

"I invented a time machine."

"By God! So did I," Hassel said. "This afternoon. The idea came to me in a flash—I don't know why—and I've had the most extraordinary experience. Lennox, time is not a continuum."

"No?"

"It's a series of discrete particles—like pearls on a string."

"Yes?"

"Each pearl is a 'Now.' Each 'Now' has its own past and future. But none of them relate to any others. You see? If  $a = a_1 + a_2j + a_3k + a_4l$ —"

"Never mind the mathematics, Henry."

"It's a form of quantum transfer of energy. Time is emitted in discrete corpuscles or quanta. We can visit each individual quantum and make changes within it, but no change in any one corpuscle affects any other corpuscle. Right?"

"Wrong," I said sorrowfully.

"What d'you mean, 'Wrong'?" he said, angrily gesturing through the cleavage of a passing coed. "You take the trochoid equations and—"

"Wrong," I repeated firmly. "Will you listen to me, Henry?"

"Oh, go ahead," he said.

"Have you noticed that you've become rather insubstantial? Dim? Spectral? Space and time no longer affect you?"

"Yes."

"Henry, I had the misfortune to construct a time machine back in '75."

"So you said. Listen, what about power input? I figure I'm using about 7.3 kilowatts per—"

"Never mind the power input, Henry. On my first trip into the past, I visited the Pleistocene. I was eager to photograph the mastodon, the giant ground sloth, and the saber-tooth tiger. While I was backing up to get a mastodon fully in the field of view at  $f/6.3$  at  $1/100$ th of a second, or on the LVS scale—"

"Never mind the LVS scale," he said.

"While I was backing up, I inadvertently trampled and killed a small Pleistocene insect."

"Aha!" said Hassel.

"I was terrified by the incident. I had visions of returning to my world to find it completely changed as a result of this single death. Imagine my surprise when I returned to my world to find that nothing had changed."

"Oho!" said Hassel.

"I became curious. I went back to the Pleistocene and killed the mastodon. Nothing was changed in 1975. I returned to the Pleistocene and slaughtered the wild life—still with no effect. I ranged through time, killing and destroying, in an attempt to alter the present."

"Then you did it just like me," Hassel exclaimed. "Odd we didn't run into each other."

"Not odd at all."

"I got Columbus."

"I got Marco Polo."

"I got Napoleon."

"I thought Einstein was more important."

"Mohammed didn't change things much—I expected more from him."

"I know. I got him too."

"What do you mean, you got him too?" Hassel demanded.

"I killed him September 16, 599. Old Style."

"Why, I got Mohammed January 5, 598."

"I believe you."

"But how could you have killed him after I killed him?"

"We both killed him."

"That's impossible."

"My boy," I said, "time is entirely subjective. It's a private matter—a personal experience. There is no such thing as objective time, just as there is no such thing as objective love, or an objective soul."

"Do you mean to say that time travel is impossible? But we've done it."

"To be sure, and many others, for all I know. But we each travel into our own past, and no other person's. There is no universal continuum, Henry. There are only billions of individuals, each with his own continuum; and one continuum cannot affect the other. We're like millions of strands of spaghetti in the same pot. No time traveler can ever meet another time traveler in the past or future. Each of us must travel up and down his own strand alone."

"But we're meeting each other now."

"We're no longer time travelers, Henry. We've become the spaghetti sauce."

"Spaghetti sauce?"

"Yes. You and I can visit any strand we like, because we've destroyed ourselves."

"I don't understand."

"When a man changes the past he only affects his own past—no one else's. The past is like memory. When you erase a man's memory, you wipe him out, but you don't wipe out anybody else. You and I have erased our past. The individual worlds of the others go on, but we have ceased to exist." I paused significantly.

"What d'you mean, 'ceased to exist'?"

"With each act of destruction we dissolved a little. Now we're all gone. We've committed chronicide. We're ghosts. I hope Mrs. Hassel will be very happy with Mr. Murphy. . . . Now let's go over to the Académie. Ampère is telling a great story about Ludwig Boltzmann."



## OUT OF THIS WORLD

I'm telling this just the way it happened because I share a vice with all men. Although I'm happily married and still in love with my wife, I keep falling in love with transient women. I stop for a red light, glance at a girl in the cab alongside, and fall desperately in love with her. I go up in an elevator and am captivated by a girl in the car with a sheaf of stencils in her hand. When she gets off at the tenth floor, she takes my heart with her. I remember once falling in love with a model in the crosstown bus. She was carrying a letter to mail and I tried to read the return address and memorize it.

Wrong numbers are always the strongest temptation. The phone rings, I pick it up, a girl says, "May I talk to David, please?" There's no David in our house and I know it's a strange voice, but thrilling and tempting. In two seconds I've woven a fantasy of dating this stranger, meeting her, having an affair with her, breaking up my home, running off to Capri and living in glorious sin. Then I say, "What number are you calling, please?" And after I hang up I can hardly look at my wife, I feel so guilty.

So when this call came to my office at 509 Madison, I fell into the same old trap. Both my secretary and my bookkeeper were out to lunch, so I took the call directly

at my desk. An exciting voice began talking fifteen to the dozen.

"Hello, Janet! I got the job, darling. They've got a lovely office just around the corner from the old Tiffany building on Fifth Avenue and my hours are nine to four. I've got a desk and a cubbyhole and a window all to myself, and I—"

"I'm sorry," I said, after I finished my fantasy. "What number are you calling?"

"My goodness! I'm certainly not calling you."

"I'm afraid not."

"I'm awfully sorry I bothered you."

"Not at all. Congratulations on the new job."

She laughed. "Thank you very much."

We hung up. She sounded so enchanting that I decided to make it Tahiti instead of Capri. Then the phone rang again. It was the same voice.

"Janet, darling, this is Patsy. I just had the most awful thing happen. I called you and got the wrong number and I was jabbering away when suddenly the most romantic voice said—"

"Thank you, Patsy. You've got the wrong number again."

"Oh, goodness! You again?"

"Uh huh."

"This isn't Prescott 9-3232?"

"Not even faintly. This is Plaza 6-5000."

"I don't see how I could have dialed that. I must be extra stupid today."

"Maybe just extra excited."

"Please excuse me."

"Not at all," I said. "I think you've got a romantic voice too, Patsy."

We hung up and I went out for lunch, memorizing Prescott 9-3232. . . . I'd dial and ask for Janet and tell her— What? I didn't know. I knew I'd never do it; but there was that dreamy glow that lasted until I came back to the office to face the afternoon's problems. Then I shook it off and returned to reality.

But I was cheating, because when I went home that night, I didn't tell my wife about it. She used to work

for me before we got married and still takes a lively interest in everything that goes on in my office. We spend a pleasant hour or so every evening discussing and dissecting the day I've had. We did it this night, but I withheld Patsy's call. I felt guilty.

I was so guilty that I went down to the office extra early next morning, trying to placate my conscience with extra work. Neither of my girls was in yet, so the incoming line was open direct to my desk. Around eight-thirty my phone rang and I picked it up.

"Plaza 6-5000," I said.

There was dead air on the other end, which infuriated me. I hate the kind of switchboard girl who rings you and then lets you hang while she's placing other calls.

"Listen, monster!" I said. "I hope you can hear me. For pity's sake don't call unless you're ready to put me through to whoever's calling. What am I? A lackey? Go to hell!"

Just as I was about to bang the phone down, a small voice said, "Excuse me."

"What? Patsy? Is that you again?"

"Yes," she said.

My heart flipped because I knew—I knew this couldn't be an accident. She'd memorized my number. She wanted to speak to me again.

"Good morning, Patsy," I said.

"My, you have a dreadful temper."

"I'm afraid I was rude to you."

"No. It's my fault. I shouldn't be bothering you like this. But when I call Jan, I keep getting your number. Our wires must be crossed somewhere."

"Oh. I'm disappointed. I'd hoped you were calling me to listen to my romantic voice."

She laughed. "It isn't *that* romantic."

"That's because I was rude. I'm willing to make it up to you. I'll buy you lunch today."

"No, thank you."

"When do you start the new job?"

"This morning. Good-bye."

"Lots of luck, Patsy. Call Jan this afternoon and tell me all about it."

I hung up and asked myself if I hadn't come to the office early more in hopes of receiving this call than out of the desire to do extra work. I couldn't defend myself from my conscience. When you're standing on untenable ground, everything you do is suspect and defenseless. I was angry with myself and gave my girls a tough morning.

When I returned from lunch, I asked my secretary if there'd been any calls while I was out.

"Just the district phone supervisor," she said. "They're having some trouble with the lines."

I thought, "Then it *was* an accident this morning. Patsy didn't want to speak to me again."

At four o'clock I let both my girls go for the day to make up to them for my being obnoxious in the morning—at least that's what I kept telling myself. I loafed around the office from four to five-thirty, waiting for Patsy to call, building fantasies until I was ashamed of myself.

I had a drink from the last bottle left over from the Christmas office party, locked up and started for home. Just as I pressed the button for the elevator, I heard the phone ringing in my office. I tore back to the door, unlocked it (I still had the key in my hand) and got to the phone—feeling like a damned fool. I tried to cover with a joke.

"Prescott 9-3232," I said, half out of breath.

"Sorry," my wife said. "I've got the wrong number."

I had to let her hang up. I couldn't explain. I waited for her to call again, trying to figure what kind of voice to use so she'd know it was me and still not be able to match it with what she'd heard before. I decided to use the off-phone technique, so when it rang again I picked it up, held it a few feet away from my mouth and called crisp instructions to the empty office. Then I put my mouth close and spoke.

"Hello?"

"My, you sound distinguished. Like a general."

"Patsy?" My heart went bump.

"I'm afraid so."

"Are you calling me or Jan?"

"Janet, of course. These lines are a nuisance, aren't they? We've reported them to the company."

"I know. How'd the new job go today?"

"All right . . . I guess. There's an office manager who barks just like you. He scares me."

"I'll give you some advice, Patsy. Don't be scared. When a man yells like that, it's usually to cover his own guilty conscience."

"I don't understand."

"Well . . . maybe he's holding down a job that's too big for him and he knows it. So he tries to cover up by playing big shot."

"Oh, I don't think that could be it."

"Or maybe he's attracted to you and he's afraid that's going to interfere with efficiency. So he yells at you to keep himself from being too attentive."

"It couldn't be that either."

"Why? Aren't you attractive?"

"I'm not the one to ask."

"You have a wonderful voice."

"Thank you, sir."

"Patsy," I said. "I've much wise and seasoned advice to give you. It's obvious we've been fated by Alexander Graham Bell to meet, so who are we to buck fate? Let's have lunch together tomorrow."

"Oh I'm afraid I couldn't—"

"Do you have lunch with Janet?"

"Yes."

"Then why not with me? Here I am, doing half Jan's work—taking calls for her—and what do I get out of it? A complaint from the phone supervisor. Is this justice, Patsy? We'll have half a lunch together. You can wrap up the other half and take it to Jan."

She laughed. It was a delicious laugh. "You are a charmer, aren't you? What's your name?"

"Howard."

"Howard what?"

"Patsy what?"

"You go first."

"I'm taking no chances. Either I tell you at lunch or I remain anonymous."

"All right," she said. "My hour's one to two. Where shall we meet?"

"Rockefeller Plaza. Third flagpole from the left."

"How glamorous."

"Third flagpole from the left. Got it?"

"Yes."

"One o'clock tomorrow?"

"One o'clock," Patsy repeated.

"You'll recognize me by the bone stuck through my nose. I have no last name. I'm an aborigine."

We laughed and hung up. I rushed out of the office to avoid my wife's call. I wasn't an honest man at home that night, but I was excited. I could hardly sleep. One o'clock next afternoon I was waiting in front of the third flagpole from the left at Rockefeller Plaza, rehearsing bright dialogue and trying to look my best. I knew Patsy'd probably look me over before she decided to reveal herself.

I kept watching the girls as they passed, trying to guess which she'd be. The loveliest women in the world can be found by the hundreds in Rockefeller Plaza during lunch hour. I had high hopes. I waited and rehearsed. She never showed up. At half past one I realized that I'd failed to pass the examination. She'd looked me over and decided to forget the whole thing. I was never so humiliated and angry in my life.

My bookkeeper quit that afternoon, and deep in my heart I couldn't blame her. No self-respecting girl could have endured me. I had to stay late, hasseling with the employment agency for a new girl. Just before six, my phone rang. It was Patsy.

"Are you calling me or Jan?" I asked angrily.

"I'm calling you," she said, just as angrily.

"Plaza 6-5000?"

"No. There's no such number and you know it. You're a cheat. I have to call Jan and hope the crossed wires get me through to you."

"What d'you mean there's no such number?"

"I don't know what kind of sense of humor you think

you have, Mr. Aborigine, but I know you played a filthy trick on me today. . . . Keeping me waiting for an hour and never showing up. You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"You waited for an hour? That's a lie. You never were there."

"I was there and you stood me up."

"Patsy, that's impossible. I waited for you until half past one. When did you get there?"

"One o'clock sharp."

"Then there's been an awful mistake. Are you sure you had it right? Third flagpole from the left?"

"Yes. Third flagpole from the left."

"We must have got our flagpoles mixed. I can't tell you how badly I feel about this."

"I don't believe you."

"What can I say? I thought you stood me up. I was so angry this afternoon that my bookkeeper quit on me. You aren't a bookkeeper by any chance?"

"No. And I'm not looking for a job."

"Patsy, we'll have lunch tomorrow, and this time we'll meet where we can't miss each other."

"I don't know if I want to. . . ."

"Please. I want to settle this business about there being no Plaza 6-5000. That doesn't make sense."

"There's no such number."

"Then what's this I'm using? A string telephone?"

She laughed.

"What's your number, Patsy?"

"Oh, no. It's like the last names. I won't give you mine if I don't know yours."

"But you know mine."

"No I don't. I tried to call you this afternoon and the operator said there was no such exchange. She—"

"She's crazy. We'll discuss it tomorrow. One o'clock again?"

"But not in front of any flagpole."

"All right. You told Jan you're around the corner from the old Tiffany building?"

"That's right."

"On Fifth Avenue?"

"Yes."

"I'll be on that corner at one sharp."

"You'd better be."

"Patsy . . ."

"Yes, Howard?"

"You sound even more wonderful when you're angry."

It rained torrents next day. I got to the southeast corner of Thirty-seventh and Fifth, where the old Tiffany building stands, and I waited in the rain from twelve-fifty to one-forty. Patsy never showed up. I couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe anyone could be mean enough to play a trick like that. Then I remembered her lovely voice and enchanting manner and I hoped the rain had kept her home that day. I hoped she'd called to warn me after I left.

I took a cab back to my office and asked if there were any phone messages. There were none. I was so disgusted and disappointed that I went down to the Madison Avenue Hotel bar and had a few drinks to ward off the chill and the wet. I stayed there, drinking and dreaming, calling my office every hour just to keep in touch. Once I had a brainstorm and dialed Prescott 9-3232 to speak to Janet. The operator cut into the line.

"What number are you calling, please?"

"Prescott 9-3232."

"I'm sorry. There is no such exchange listed. Will you consult your directory again, please?"

So that was that. I hung up, had a few more drinks, saw that it was five-thirty and decided to check in for the last time and go home. I dialed my office number. There was a click and a buzz and then Patsy answered the phone. I couldn't mistake her voice.

"Patsy!"

"Who's this?"

"Howard. What the devil are you doing in my office?"

"I'm home. How did you find my number?"

"I didn't. I was calling my shop and got you instead. The crossed wires must work both ways."

"I don't want to talk to you."

"You ought to be ashamed to talk to me."

"What's that supposed to mean?"



"Listen, Patsy, it was a dirty trick standing me up like that. If you wanted revenge you could have—"

"I did not stand you up. You stood me up."

"Oh, for God's sake, don't start that. If you're not interested in me, have the decency to say so. I got soaked standing on that corner. I'm still wet."

"Soaked? How do you mean?"

"In the rain!" I shouted. "How else could I mean?"

"What rain?" Patsy asked in surprise.

"Don't dummy up. It's been pouring all day. It's still pouring."

"I think you're crazy," she said in a hushed voice. "There's been nothing but bright sunshine all day."

"Here in town?"

"Of course."

"Outside your office?"

"Certainly."

"Bright sunshine all day at Thirty-seventy and Fifth?"

"Why Thirty-seventh and Fifth?"

"Because that's where the old Tiffany building is," I said in exasperation. "You're around the corner from it."

"You're frightening me," she whispered. "I—I think I'd better hang up now."

"Why? What's wrong now?"

"The old Tiffany building is at Fifty-seventh and Fifth."

"No, idiot! That's the new one."

"It's the old one. You know they had to move, back in 1945."

"Move?"

"Yes. They couldn't rebuild on account of the radiation."

"What radiation? What are you—"

"From the bomb crater."

A chill ran down my spine, and it wasn't from the damp and the cold. "Patsy," I said slowly. "This is serious, dear. I think maybe something more than telephone wires have been crossed. What's your phone exchange? Never mind the number. Just tell me your exchange."

"America 5."

I looked at the list of exchange names before me in the booth: ACademy 2, ADirondack 4, ALgonquin 4, ALgonquin 5, ATwater 9. . . . There wasn't any AMerica 5.

"Here in Manhattan?"

"Of course, here in Manhattan. Where else?"

"The Bronx," I answered. "Or Brooklyn or Queens."

"Would I be living in occupation camps?"

I took a breath. "Patsy, dear, what's your last name? I think we'd better be honest about this because I think we're involved in something fantastic. I'm Howard Campbell."

She gasped.

"What's your last name, Patsy?"

"Shimabara," she said.

"You're Japanese?"

"Yes. You're Yank?"

"Yes. Were you born here, Patsy?"

"No. I came over in 1945—with the occupation unit."

"I see. We lost the war—where you are."

"Of course. That's history. But, Howard, I'm here. I'm here in New York. It's 1954. It—"

"But the sun is shining and you dropped the A-bomb on us and licked us and you're occupying America." I began to laugh hysterically. "We're on different time tracks, Patsy. Your history isn't my history. We're in alternate worlds."

"I don't understand you, Howard."

"Don't you see? Each time the world reaches a cross-road, it goes both ways. And both exist. Like if you wonder what would have happened if Columbus hadn't discovered America. Well, somewhere there's a world where he didn't. It's an alternate world, parallel to us. There must be thousands of parallel worlds in existence, side by side, and you're in another one from me. You're out of my world, Patsy. The telephone lines between our alternate worlds have gotten crossed. I'm trying to date a girl who doesn't exist—for me."

"But, Howard . . ."

"We're parallel but different, here and there—the phone exchanges, the weather, the war. . . . We've both

got a Rockefeller Plaza and we were both standing there yesterday at one o'clock, but so far apart, Patsy darling, so impossibly far apart. . . ."

At that moment the operator opened the line and said, "Your time is up, sir. Five cents for the next five minutes, please."

I felt in my pocket for change. "Patsy, are you still there?"

"Yes, Howard."

"I haven't any change on me. Tell the operator to reverse the charge. We've got to keep this line open. We may never get through again."

"But how can she—"

"Don't you understand? We're repairing the line here, and you're repairing it there, and sooner or later it'll be fixed. We'll be cut off forever. Tell her to reverse the charges, Patsy."

"I'm sorry, sir," the operator said. "We cannot reverse the charges. You may hang up and call again."

"Patsy, keep calling me, will you? Call Janet. I'll go back to my office and wait."

"Your time is up, sir."

"Patsy, what do you look like? Tell me. Quickly, darling. I—"

The phone went dead, and my dime rattled down into the coin box.

I went back to my office and waited until eight o'clock. She didn't phone or she couldn't phone. I kept an open line direct to my desk for a week and answered every incoming call myself. She never got through to me again. Somewhere, here or there, they had repaired that crossed wire.

I never forgot Patsy. I never got over the memory of her enchanting voice. I couldn't tell anyone about her. I wouldn't be telling you now, only I've lost my heart to a girl with lovely legs ice skating round and round while the music plays in Rockefeller Plaza.

## THE PI MAN

How to say? How to write? When sometimes I can  
be fluent, even polished, and then, *reculer, pour mieux  
sauter*, it takes hold of me. Push. Force. Compel.  
Sometimes

to            not            but            back            go            must            I

jump; no, not even to jump better. I have no control  
over self, speech, love, fate. I must compensate. Al-  
ways.

But I try anyway.

*Quae nocent docent.* Translation follows: Things that  
injure, teach. I am injured and have hurt many. What  
have we learned? However. I wake up the morning of  
the biggest hurt of all wondering which house. Wealth,  
you understand. Damm! Mews cottage in London, villa  
in Rome, penthouse in New York, rancho in California.  
I awake. I look. Ah! Layout of this place I am in is  
familiar. Thus:

Bedroom	Foyer	T
Bath		e
Bath		r
	Living Room	r
Bedroom		a
Kitchen		c
Terrace		e

Oh oh! I am in penthouse in New York; but that bath-bath back to back. Pfui. All rhythm wrong. Balance off. Pattern painful. I telephone downstairs to janitor-mans. At that moment I lose my English. (You must understand I speak in all tongues. A goulash. I am compelled. Why? Ah!)

*"Pronto. Ecco mi, Signore Storm. No. Forced to parlato Italiano. Wait. I call back in cinque minuti."*

*Re infecta.* Latin. The business being unfinished, I shower body, teeth, hairs, shave face, dry everything and try again. *Voilà!* The English, she come. Back to invention of A. G. Bell ("Mr. Watson, come here, I need you."). On telephone I speak to janitor. Nice chap. Gets a job of work done in two twos.

"Hallo? Abraham Storm here, again. Yes. Right. Chap in the penthouse. Mr. Lundgren, be my personal rabbi and get some workmen up here this morning. I want those two baths converted into one. Yes. I'll leave five thousand dollars on top of the refrigerator. Thanks, Mr. Lundgren."

Wanted to wear gray flannel this morning, but had to put on the sharkskin. Damnation! African nationalism has queer side effects. Went to the back bedroom (*see* diagram) and unlocked the door, which was installed by National Safe Co., Inc. I went in.

Everything broadcasting beautifully. Up and down the electromagnetic spectrum. Visual off from ultraviolet and jamming toward the infrared. Ultra short wave screaming. Alpha, beta and gamma radiation hearty. And the interrupters innn tt errrrr up ppp ttttingggggg at random and comfortably. I am at peace. Christ Jesus! To know even a moment of peace!

I take subway to office in Wall Street. Chauffeur too dangerous; might become friendly. I don't dare have friends. Best of all, morning subway jam-packed, mass-packed; no patterns to adjust, no shiftings and compensations required. Peace! I buy all morning papers; because of the patterns, you understand. Too many *Timeses* being read; I must read *Tribune* to balance pattern. Too many *Newses*; I read *Mirror*. &c.

In subway car I catch a glimpse of an eye; narrow, bleak, gray-blue, the possession of an anonymous man who conveys the conviction that you've never seen him before and never will again. But I picked up that glance and it rang a bell in the back of my mind. He knew it. He saw the flash in my eye before I could conceal it. So I was being tailed again? But by whom? U.S.A.? U.S.S.R.? Matoids?

I blasted out of the subway at City Hall and gave them a false trail to the Woolworth Building, in case they were operating double-tails. The whole theory of the hunters and the hunted is not to avoid being spotted—no one can escape that—but to lay so many trails for them to follow that they become overextended. Then they're forced to abandon you. They have so many men for so many operations. It's a question of diminishing returns.

City Hall traffic was out of sync (as it always is) and I had to walk on the hot side of the street to compensate. Took elevator up to 10th floor of bldg. There I was suddenly seized by something from sss ome wwvhh ere. SS—ommme tth inggg b addd. I began to cry, but no help. An elderly clerk emerge from office wearing alpaca coat, carry papers, gold spectacles.

"Not him," I plead with nowhere. "Nice mans. Not him. Please."

But I am force. Approach. Two blows; neck and gut. Down he go, writhing. I trample spectacles. Remove watch from pocket and smash. Shatter pens. Tear papers. Then I am permitted to get back into elevator and go downstairs again. It was ten-thirty. I was late. Damned inconvenient. Took taxi to 99 Wall Street. Tipped driver ten dollars. Sealed one thousand in en-

velope (secretly) and sent driver back to bldg to find and give to clerk.

Routine morning's work in office. Market jumpy; big board hectic; hell to balance and compensate, even though I know the patterns of money. I am behind by the sum of \$109,872.43 by eleven-thirty; but, *a pas de géant* the patterns put me ahead \$57,075.94 by half-past twelve o'clock noon, Daylight Saving Time, which my father used to call Woodrow Wilson time.

57075 makes nice pattern, but that 94¢. Pfui. Made the whole balance sheet look lopsided, ugly. Symmetry above all else. Only 24¢ in my pocket. Called secretary, borrowed 70¢ from her and threw sum total out window. Felt better as I watched it chime down to the street, but then I caught her looking at me with surprise and delight. Very bad. Very dangerous.

Fired girl on the spot.

"But why, Mr. Storm? Why?" she asked, trying not to cry. Darling little thing. Freckled face and saucy, but not so saucy now.

"Because you're beginning to like me."

"What's the harm in that?"

"When I hired you I warned you not to like me."

"I thought you were kidding."

"I wasn't. Out you go. Beat it."

"But why?"

"I'm afraid I might start liking you."

"Is this a new kind of pass?" she asked.

"God forbid."

"Well, you don't have to fire me," she flared. "I hate you."

"Good. Then I can go to bed with you."

She turned crimson and opened her mouth to denounce me, the while her eyes twinkled at the corners. A darling girl. I could not endanger her. I put her into her hat and coat, gave her a year's salary for a bonus, and threw her out. *Punkt*. Made memo: Hire nothing but men, preferably married, misanthropic and murderous. Men who could hate me.

So, lunch. Went to nicely balanced restaurant. Tables attached to floor. No moving them. All chairs filled by

patrons. Nice pattern. No need for me to compensate and adjust. Ordered nicely patterned luncheon for self:

Martini

Martini

Martini

Croque M'sieur Roquefort

Salad

Coffee

But so much sugar being consumed in restaurant, I had to take my coffee black, which I dislike. However, still a nice pattern. Balanced.

$\times^2 + \times + 41 =$  prime number.

Excuse, please. Sometimes I'm in control and see what compensating must be done. Other times it's forced on me from God only knows where or why. Then I must do what I'm compelled to do, blindly, like speaking the gibberish I speak; sometimes hating it, like the clerk in the Woolworth Building. Anyway, the equation breaks down when  $x = 40$ .

The afternoon was quiet. For a moment I thought I might be forced to leave for Rome (Italy), but something adjusted without needing me. The A.S.P.C.A. finally caught up with me for beating my dog to death, but I'd contributed \$10,000 to their Shelter. Got off with a shaking of heads. I penciled mustaches on posters, rescued a drowning kitten, saved a woman from a mugging, and had my head shaved. Normal day for me.

In the evening to the ballet to relax with all the beautiful patterns, balanced, peaceful, soothing. Then I take deep breath, quash my nausea, and force myself to go to *Le Bitnique*, the Beatnik joint. I hate *Le Bitnique*, but I need a woman and I must go where I hate. That freckled girl I fire . . . so slender and full of delicious mischief, and making eyes at me. So, *poisson d'avril*, I advance myself to *Le Bitnique*.

Chaos. Blackness. Sounds and smells a cacophony.



One 25-watt bulb in ceiling. One maladroit pianist play Progressive. Against L. wall sit Beatnik boys, wearing berets, black glasses, and pubic beards, playing chess. Against R. wall is bar and Beatnik girls with brown paper bags under arms containing toilet articles. They are shuffling and maneuvering for a pad for the night.

Those Beatnik girls! All skinny—exciting to me tonight because too many American men dream about overstuffed women, and I must compensate. (In England I like overstuff because England like women skinny.) All wear tight slack, loose sweater, Brigitte Bardot hair, Italian makeup—black eye, white lip—and when they walk they make with the gait that flipped that Herrick cat three centuries ago when he split and wrote:

Next, when I lift mine eyes and see  
That brave vibration each way free;  
Oh, how that glittering taketh me!

I pick one who glitter. I talk. She insult. I insult back and buy drinks. She drink and insult<sup>2</sup>. I hope she is lesbian and insult<sup>3</sup>. She snarl and hate, but helpless. No pad for tonight. The pathetic brown paper bag under her arm. I quell sympathy and hate back. She does not bathe. Her thinking patterns are jangles. Safe. No harm can come to her. I take her home to seduce by mutual contempt. And in living room (*see diagram*) sits slender little freckly-face secretary, recently fired, now waiting for me.

I  
I  
now  
write  
part of  
s P  
t a  
o r  
r i  
y in s  
Capital of France

Address: 49 bis Avenue Hoche. Paris, 8eme, France.

Forced to go there by what happened in Singapore, you understand. It needed extreme compensation and adjustment. Almost, for a moment, I thought I would have to attack the conductor of the Opéra Comique, but fate was kind and let me off with nothing worse than indecent exposure under the Petite Carrousel. And I was able to found a scholarship at the Sorbonne before I was taken away.

Anyway, she sat there, my little one, in my pent-house now with one (1) bathroom, and \$1,997.00 change on top of the refrigerator. Ugh! Throw \$6.00 out window and am soothed by lovely 1991 remaining. She sat there, wearing a basic black cocktail dress with tight skirt, sheer black stockings, black opera pumps. The freckly skin gleamed reddish rose from embarrassment. Also red for danger. Her saucy face was very tight from the daring thing she thought she was doing. Dammel I like that.

I also like the nice even curve of the legs, and the bosom. Balanced, you understand? \* \* Like so; but not too thrusting. Tactful. Also her cleavage. ) ( Like so; and just as rosy as her face, despite desperate powdering to make her skin milky. That powder; a nuisance. I go to kitchen and rub burnt cork on shirt front to compensate.

"Oh-so," I say. "Me-fella be ve'y happy ask why you-fella chop-chop invade along my apa'tment. Excep' mus' now speak pidgin English. Ve'y much embarrass along me. Excuse, please, until change come."

"I bribed Mr. Lundgren," she blurted. "I told him you needed important papers from your office."

*"Entschuldigen Sie, bitte. Meine pidgin haben sich geaendert. Sprachen Sie Deutsch?"*

"No."

*"Dann warte ich."*

The Beatnik turned on her heel and bounced out, her brave vibration each way free. I caught up with her in front of the elevator, put \$101\$ (perfect pattern) into her hand and said good night in Spanish. She

hated me. I did a naughty thing to her \* \* (no excuse) and returned to the apartment when my American English returned to me.

"What's she got?" the Freckle ask.

"What's your name?" I indict.

"My God! I've been working in your office for three months. You don't know my name? You really don't?"

"No, and I don't want to know it now."

"I'm Lizzie Chalmers."

"Go away, Lizzie Chalmers."

"So that's why you always called me 'Miss.' Why did you shave your head?"

"Trouble in Vienna."

"It's chic," she said judgmentally, "but I don't know. You remind me of a movie star I loathe. What do you mean, trouble in Vienna?"

"None of your business. What are you doing here? What do you want from me?"

"You," she said, blushing fiery.

"Will you, for God's sake, go away!"

"What did she have that I don't?" Lizzie Chalmers demanded. Then her face crinkled. "Don't? Is that right? What. Did. She. Have. That. I. Do. Not. Yes, right. I'm going to Bennington. They're strong on aggression, but weak on grammar."

"What do you mean, you're going to Bennington?"

"Why, it's a college. I thought everybody knew."

"But *going*?"

"I'm in my junior year. They drive you out with whips to acquire experience in your field."

"What's your field?"

"It used to be economics. Now it's you. How old are you?"

"One hundred and nine thousand eight hundred and seventy-two."

"Oh, come on! Forty?"

"Thirty."

"No! Really?" She nodded contentedly. "That makes ten years difference between us. Just right."

"Are you in love with me, Lizzie?"

"Well, I'm trying to get something going."

"Does it have to be me?"

"I know it sounds like a notion." She lowered her eyes. "And I suppose women are always throwing themselves at you."

"Not always."

"What are you, blasé or something? I mean—I know I'm not staggering, but I'm not exactly repulsive."

"You're lovely."

"Then why don't you touch me?"

"I'm trying to protect you."

"I can protect myself when the time comes."

"The time is now, Lizzie."

"The least you could do is offend me the way you did that girl in front of the elevator."

"You snooped?"

"Sure I snooped. You didn't expect me to sit here on my hands, did you? I've got my man to take care of."

"Your man?"

"It happens," she said in a low voice. "I never believed it, but it happens. You fall in and out of love, and each time you think it's for real and forever. And then you meet somebody and it isn't a question of love any more. You just know he's your man, and you're stuck. I'm stuck."

She raised her eyes and looked at me . . . violet eyes, full of youth and determination and tenderness, and yet older than twenty years—much older. And I knew how lonely I was, never daring to love, always compelled to live with those I hated. I could fall into those violet eyes and never come up.

"I'm going to shock you," I said. I looked at the clock. 1:30 A.M. A quiet time. Please God the American tongue would stay with me a while longer. I took off my jacket and shirt and showed her my back, cross-hatched with scars. Lizzie gasped.

"Self-inflicted," I told her. "Because I permitted myself to like a man and become friendly with him. This is the price I paid, and I was lucky. Now wait here."

I went into the master bedroom where my heart's shame was embalmed in a silver case hidden in the right-

hand drawer of my desk. I brought it to the living room. Lizzie watched me with great eyes.

"Five years ago a girl fell in love with me," I told her.

"A girl like you. I was lonely then, as always. Instead of protecting her from myself, I indulged myself. Now I want to show you the price *she* paid. You'll loathe me for this, but I must show you—"

A flash caught my eye. Lights in a building down the street going on. I leaped to the window and stared. The lights in the building three down from me went off—five seconds eclipse—then on. It happened to the building two down, and then to the one next door. The girl came to my side and took my arm. She trembled slightly.

"What is it?" she asked. "What's the matter?"

"Wait," I said.

The lights in my apartment went out for five seconds and then came on again.

"They've located me," I told her.

"They? Located?"

"They've spotted my broadcasts by D.F."

"What's D.F.?"

"Direction finder. Then they turned off the current in each building in the neighborhood for five seconds—building by building—until the broadcast stopped. Now they know I'm in this house, but they don't know which apartment." I put on my shirt and jacket. "Good night, Lizzie. I wish I could kiss you."

She clamped her arms around my neck and gave me a smacking kiss; all warmth, all velvet, all giving. I tried to push her away.

"You're a spy," she said. "I'll go to the chair with you."

"I wish to heaven I were a spy," I said. "Good-bye, my dearest love. Remember me."

*Soyez ferme.* A great mistake letting that slip. It happen, I think, because my American slip too. Suddenly talk jumble again. As I run out, the little devil kick off opera pumps and rip slit in cocktail skirt up to thigh so she can run. She is alongside me going down the fire stairs to the garage in basement. I hit her to stop,

and swear at her. She hit back and swear worse, all the time laughing and crying. I love her for it. Damnation! She is doomed.

We get into car, Aston Martin, but with left-hand drive, and speed west on 53rd Street, east on 54th Street, and north on First Avenue. I am making for 59th Street bridge to get off Manhattan island. I own plane in Babylon, Long Island, which is always ready for this sort of awkwardness.

"*J'y suis, j'y reste* is not my motto," I tell Elizabeth Chalmers, whose French is as uncertain as her grammar—an endearing weakness. "Once they trapped me in London at post office. I received mail at General Delivery. They sent me a blank letter in a red envelope, and that's how they followed me to 139 Piccadilly, London W.1. Telephone Mayfair 7211. Red for danger. Is your skin red all over?"

"It's not red!" she said indignantly.

"I meant rosy."

"Only where the freckles merge," she said. "What is all this escape? Why do you talk so funny, and act so peculiar? Are you sure you're not a spy?"

"Only positive."

"Are you a being from another world who came on an Unidentified Flying Object?"

"Would that horrify you?"

"Yes, if it meant we couldn't make love."

"What about conquering earth?"

"I'm only interested in conquering you."

"I am not and have never been a being from another world who came on an Unidentified Flying Object."

"Then what are you?"

"A compensator."

"What's that?"

"Do you know dictionary of Mistrs Funk & Wagnalls? Edited by Frank H. Vizetelly, Litt.D., LL.D.? I quote: 'One who or that which compensates, as a device for neutralizing the influence of local attraction upon a compass needle or an automatic apparatus for equalizing the pressure of gas in the'— Damn!"

Litt.D. Frank H. Vizetelly does not use that bad word.

Is my own because roadblock now faces me on 59th Street bridge. Should have anticipated. Should have felt patterns, but too swept up with this darling girl. Probably there are roadblocks on all bridges and tunnels leading out of this \$24 island. Could drive off bridge but might harm my angelic Elizabeth Chalmers, which would make me a *brute figura* as well as sadden me beyond redemption. So. Stop car. Surrender.

"Kamerad," I pronounce, and ask, "Who you? Ku Klux Klan?"

Hard-faced mans say no.

"White Supremacists of the World, Inc.?"

No agains. I feel better. Always nasty when captured by lunatic fringes looking for figureheads.

"U.S.S.R.?"

He stare, then speak. "Special Agent Krimms from the FBI," and show his badge. I enthuse and embrace him in gratitude. FBI is salvation. He recoil, wonder if I fairy. I don't care. I kiss Elizabeth Chalmers and she open mouth under mine to mutter, "Admit nothing; deny everything. I've got a lawyer."

Brilliant lights in the office in Foley Square. The chairs are placed just so; the shadows arranged just so. I have been through this so often before. The anonymous man with the bleak eyes from the subway this morning is questioning me. His name is S. I. Dolan. We exchange a glance. His says, I goofed this morning. Mine says, So did I. We respect each other, and then the grilling starts.

"Your name's Abraham Storm?"

"The nickname is 'Base.' "

"Born December 25th?"

"I was a Christmas baby."

"1929?"

"I was a depression baby."

"You seem pretty jaunty."

"Gallows humor, S. I. Dolan. Despair. I know you'll never convict me of anything, and I'm desperate."

"Very funny."

"Very tragic. I want to be convicted—but it's hopeless."

"Home town San Francisco?"

"Yes."

"Grand High School. Two years at Berkeley. Four years in the Navy. Finished at Berkeley. Majored in statistics."

"Yes. Hundred-per-cent American boy."

"Present occupation, financier?"

"Yes."

"Offices in New York, Rome, Paris, London?"

"Also Rio."

"Known assets from bank deposits, stock and bond holdings, three million dollars?"

"No, no, no!" I was agonized. "Three million, three hundred and thirty-three thousand, three hundred and thirty-three dollars and thirty-three cents."

"Three million dollars," Dolan insisted. "In round numbers."

"There are no round numbers; there are only patterns."

"Storm, what the hell are you up to?"

"Convict me," I pleaded. "I want to go to the chair and get this over with."

"What are you talking about?"

"You ask and I'll explain."

"What are you broadcasting from your apartment?"

"Which apartment? I broadcast from all of them."

"In New York. We can't break the code."

"There is no code; only randomness."

"Only what?"

"Only peace, Dolan."

"Peace!"

"I've been through this so often before. In Geneva, Berlin, London, Rio. Will you let me explain it my own way, and for God's sake trap me if you can?" I beseeched.

"Go ahead."

I took a breath. It's always so difficult. You have to do it with metaphor. But it was 3:00 A.M. and my American would hold for a while. "Do you like to dance?"

"What the hell . . . ?"

"Be patient. I'm explaining. Do you like to dance?"



"Yes."

"What's the pleasure of dancing? It's a man and woman making rhythms together—patterns. Balancing, anticipating, following, leading, cooperating. Yes?"

"So?"

"And parades. Do you like parades? Masses of men and women cooperating to make patterns. Why is war a time of joy for a country, although nobody admits it? Because it's an entire people cooperating, balancing and sacrificing to make a big pattern. Yes?"

"Now wait a minute, Storm—"

"Just listen, Dolan. I'm sensitive to patterns—more than dancing or parades or war; far more. More than the 2/4 pattern of day and night, or the 4/4 pattern of the seasons—far, far more. I'm sensitive to the patterns of the whole spectrum of the universe—sight and sound, gamma rays, groupings of peoples, acts of hostility and benign charity, cruelties and kindnesses, the music of the spheres—and I'm forced to compensate. Always."

"Compensate?"

"Yes. If a child falls and hurts itself, the mother kisses it. Agreed? That's compensation. It restores a pattern. If a man beats a horse, you beat him. Yes? Pattern again. If a beggar wrings too much sympathy from you, you want to kick him, don't you? More compensation. The husband unfaithful to the wife is never more kind to her. All wives know that pattern, and dread it. What is sportsmanship but a compensating pattern to offset the embarrassment of winning or losing? Do not the murderer and murderess seek each other to fulfill their patterns?"

"Multiply that by infinity and you have me. I have to kiss and kick. I'm driven. Compelled. I don't know how to name my compulsion. They call extrasensory perception Psi. What do you call extra pattern perception? Pi?"

"Pie? What pie?"

"Sixteenth letter of the Greek alphabet. It designates the relation of the circumference of a circle to its diameter. 3.14159+. The series goes on endlessly. It is transcendental and can never be resolved into a finite

pattern; and it's agony to me—like pi in printing, which means jumbled and confused type, without order or pattern."

"What the hell are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about patterns; order in the universe. I'm compelled to keep it and restore it. Sometimes I'm compelled to do wonderful and generous things; other times I'm forced to do insane things—talk garbage languages, go to strange places, perform abominable acts—because patterns which I can't perceive demand adjustment."

"What abominable acts?"

"You can pry and I can confess, but it won't do any good. The patterns won't permit me to be convicted. They won't let me end. People refuse to testify. Facts will not give evidence. What is done becomes undone. Harm is transformed into good."

"Storm, I swear you're crazy."

"Maybe, but you won't be able to get me committed to an asylum. It's been tried before. I even tried committing myself. It didn't work."

"What about those broadcasts?"

"We're flooded with wave emissions, quanta, particles, and I'm sensitive to them too; but they're too garbled to shape into patterns. They have to be neutralized. So I broadcast an antipattern to jam them and get a little peace."

"Are you claiming to be a superman?"

"No. Never. I'm just the man Simple Simon met."

"Don't clown."

"I'm not clowning. Don't you remember the jingle? 'Simple Simon met a pieman, going to the fair'? For Pee-eye-ee-man, read Pee-eye-man. I'm the Pi Man."

Dolan scowled. At last he said, "My full name is Simon Ignatius Dolan."

"I'm sorry. I didn't know. Nothing personal implied."

He glared at me, then threw my dossier down. He sighed and slumped into a chair. That made the pattern wrong and I had to shift. He cocked an eye at me.

"Pi Man," I explained.

"All right," he said. "We can't hold you."

"They all try," I said, "but they never can."

"Who try?"

"Governments, thinking I'm in espionage; police, wanting to know why I'm involved with so many people in such cockeyed ways; politicians in exile hoping I'll finance a counterrevolution; fanatics, dreaming I'm their rich messiah; lunatic fringes; religious sects; flat-worlders; Forteanes. . . . They all track me down, hoping they can use me. Nobody can. I'm part of something much bigger. I think maybe we all are, only I'm the first to be aware of it."

"Off the record, what's this about abominable acts?"

I took a breath. "That's why I can't have friends. Or a girl. Sometimes things get so bad somewhere that I have to make frightful sacrifices to restore the pattern. I must destroy something I love. I— There was a dog I loved. A Labrador retriever . . . I don't like to think about him. I had a girl once. She loved me. And I— And a guy in the Navy with me. He— I don't want to talk about it."

"Chicken, all of a sudden?"

"No, damn you; I'm accursed! Because some of the patterns I must adjust to are out-world rhythms—like nothing you ever felt on earth. 29/51 . . . 108/303—tempi like that. What are you staring at? You don't think that can be terrifying? Beat a 7/5 tempo for me."

"I don't know music."

"This has nothing to do with music. Try to beat five with one hand and seven with the other, and make them come out even. Then you'll understand the complexity and terror of those strange patterns that are coming to me."

Suddenly Dolan's face lit up. "You mean like homing instinct?"

"Homing instinct?"

"The patterns that help birds and animals find home from anywhere. No one knows how."

"That's it; only bigger."

"You belong in a lab, Storm. Where does it all come from?"

"I don't know. It's an unknown universe, too big to

comprehend; but I have to beat the tempi of its patterns and make them come out even—with my actions, reactions, emotions, senses, while those giant pressures

push  
and reverse me  
back  
and turn me  
forth inside  
and out  
back . . ."

"The other arm now," Elizabeth said firmly. "Lift."

I am on my bed, me. Thinking upheaved again. Half ( $\frac{1}{2}$ ) into pajamas; other half ( $\frac{1}{2}$ ) being wrestled by freckly girl. I lift. She yank. Pajamas now on, and it's my turn to blush. They raise me prudish in San Francisco.

"*Om mani padme hum,*" I said. "Translation follows: 'Oh, the jewel in the lotus.' Meaning you. What happened?"

"You passed out," she said. "Keeled over. Mr. Dolan had to let you go. Mr. Lundgren helped carry you into the apartment. How much should I give him?"

"*Cinque lire. No. Parla Italiano, gentile signorina?*"

"Mr. Dolan told me what you told him. Is that your patterns again?"

"*Si.*" I nod and wait. After stopovers in Greece and Portugal, American English finally returns to me. "Why don't you get the hell out of here while the getting's good, Lizzie Chalmers?"

"I'm still stuck," she said. "Get into bed—and make room for me."

"No."

"Yes. You can marry me later."

"Where's the silver case?"

"Down the incinerator."

"Do you know what was in it?"

"I know what was in it."

"And you're still here?"

"It was monstrous, what you did. Monstrous!" The

saucy little face was streaked with mascara. She had been crying. "Where is she now?"

"I don't know. The checks go out every quarter to a number account in Switzerland. I don't want to know. How much can the heart endure?"

"I think I'm going to find out," she said. She put out the lights. In the darkness came the sound of rustling clothes. Never before have I heard the music of one I love undressing for me—for me. I make one last attempt to save this beloved.

"I love you," I said, "and you know what that means. When the patterns demand a sacrifice, I may be even crueller to you, more monstrous. . . ."

"No," she said. "You never were in love before. Love creates patterns too." She kissed me. Her lips were parched, her skin was icy. She was afraid, but her heart beat hot and strong. "Nothing can hurt us now. Believe me."

"I don't know what to believe any more. We're part of a universe that's big beyond knowledge. What if it turns out to be too gigantic for love?"

"All right," she said composedly. "We won't be dogs in the manger. If love is a little thing and has to end, then let it end. Let all the little things like love and honor and mercy and laughter end—if there's something bigger beyond."

"But what can be bigger? What can be beyond?"

"If we're too small to survive, how can we know?"

She crept close to me, the tips of her body like frost. And so we huddled together, breast to breast, warming ourselves with our love, frightened creatures in a wondrous world beyond knowing—fearful and yet an tic ccip ppat inggg.

## THE FLOWERED THUNDERMUG

"We will conclude this first semester of Antiquities 107," Professor Paul Muni said, "with a reconstruction of an average day in the life of a mid-twentieth-century inhabitant of the United States of America, as Great L. A. was known five hundred years ago.

"Let us refer to him as Jukes, one of the proudest names of the times, immortalized in the Kallikak-Jukes-feud sagas. It is now generally agreed that the mysterious code letters JU, found in the directories of Hollywood East, or New York City as it was called then—viz., JU 6-0600 or JU 2-1914—indicate in some manner a genealogical relationship to the powerful Jukes dynasty.

"The year is 1950. Mr. Jukes, a typical 'loner'—i.e., 'bachelor'—lives on a small ranch outside New York. He rises at dawn, dresses in spurred boots, Daks slacks, rawhide shirt, gray flannel waistcoat and black knit tie. He arms himself with a Police Positive revolver or a Frontier Six Shooter and goes out to the Bar-B-Q to prepare his breakfast of curried plankton or converted algae. He may or may not surprise juvenile delinquents or red Indians on his ranch in the act of lynching a victim or rustling his automobiles, of which he has a herd of perhaps one hundred and fifty.

"These hooligans he disperses after single combat with his fists. Like all twentieth-century Americans, Jukes is

a brute of fantastic strength, giving and receiving sledgehammer blows, or being battered by articles of furniture with inexhaustible resilience. He rarely uses his gun on such occasions; it is usually reserved for ceremonial rituals.

"Mr. Jukes journeys to his job in New York City on horseback, in a sports car (a kind of open automobile), or on an electric trolley car. He reads his morning newspaper, which will feature such stories as: 'The Discovery of the North Pole,' 'The Sinking of the Luxury Liner *Titanic*,' 'The Successful Orbiting of Mars by Manned Space Capsule,' or 'The Strange Death of President Harding.'

"Jukes works in an advertising agency situated on Madison Avenue (now Sunset Boulevard East), which, in those days, was a rough muddy highway, traversed by stagecoaches, lined with gin mills and populated by bullies, corpses and beautiful night-club performers in abbreviated dresses. Jukes is an agency man, dedicated to the guidance of taste, the improvement of culture, the election of public officers and the selection of national heroes.

"His office on the twentieth floor of a towering skyscraper is decorated in the characteristic style of the mid-twentieth century. He has a roll-top desk, a Null-G, or Free Fall chair and a brass spittoon. Illumination is by Optical Maser light pumps. Large fans suspended from the ceiling cool him in the summer, and an infrared Franklin stove warms him in the winter.

"The walls are decorated with rare pictures executed by such famous painters as Michelangelo, Renoir and Sunday. Alongside the desk is a tape recorder, which he uses for dictation. His words are later written down by a secretary using a pen and carbon ink. (It has, by now, been clearly demonstrated that the typewriting machine was not developed until the onset of the Computer Age at the end of the twentieth century.)

"Mr. Jukes's work involves the creation of the spiritual slogans that uplift the consumer half of the nation. A few of these have come down to us in more or less fragmentary condition, and those of you who have taken

Professor Rex Harrison's course, Linguistics 916, know the extraordinary difficulties we are encountering in our attempts to interpret: 'Good to the Last Drop' (for 'good' read 'God?'); 'Does She or Doesn't She?' (what?); and 'I Dreamed I Went to the Circus in My Maiden-form Bra' (incomprehensible).

"At midday, Mr. Jukes takes a second meal, usually a community affair with thousands of others in a giant stadium. He returns to his office and resumes work, but you must understand that conditions were not ideal for concentration, which is why he was forced to labor as much as four and six hours a day. In those deplorable times there was a constant uproar of highway robberies, hijackings, gang wars and other brutalities. The air was filled with falling bodies as despairing brokers leaped from their office windows.

"Consequently it is only natural for Mr. Jukes to seek spiritual peace at the end of the day. This he finds at a ritual called a 'cocktail party.' He and many other believers stand close-packed in a small room, praying aloud, and filling the air with the sacred residues of marijuana and mescaline. The women worshippers often wear vestments called 'cocktail dresses,' otherwise known as 'basic black.'

"Afterward, Mr. Jukes may take his last meal of the day in a night club, an underground place of entertainment where raree shows are presented. He is often accompanied by his 'expense account,' a phrase difficult to interpret. Dr. David Niven argues most cogently that it was cant for 'a woman of easy virtue,' but Professor Nelson Eddy points out that this merely compounds the difficulty, since no one today knows what 'a woman of easy virtue' was.

"Finally, Mr. Jukes returns to his ranch on a 'commuters' special,' a species of steam car, on which he plays games of chance with the professional gamblers who infested all the transportation systems of the times. At home, he builds a small outdoor fire, calculates the day's expenses on his abacus, plays sad music on his guitar, makes love to one of the thousands of strange women who made it a practice of intruding on camp-



fires at odd hours, rolls up in a blanket and goes to sleep.

"Such was the barbarism of that age—an age so hysteric that few men lived beyond one hundred years. And yet romantics today yearn for that monstrous era of turmoil and terror. Twentieth-century Americana is all the vogue. Only recently, a single copy of *Life*, a sort of mail-order catalogue, was bought at auction by the noted collector Clifton Webb for \$150,000. I might mention, in passing, that in my analysis of that curio in the current *Phil. Trans.* I cast grave doubts on its authenticity. Certain anachronisms in the text indicate a possible forgery.

"And now a final word about your term examinations. There has been some talk about bias on the part of the computer. It has been suggested that when this department took over the Multi-III from Biochemistry, various circuits were overlooked and left operative, prejudicing the computer in favor of the mathematical approach. This is utter nonsense. Our computer psychiatrist assures me that the Multi-III was completely brainwashed and reindoctrinated. Exhaustive checks have shown that all errors were the result of student carelessness.

"I urge you to observe the standard sterilization procedures before taking your examination. Do not scamp your wash-up. Make sure your surgical caps, gowns, masks and gloves are properly adjusted. Be certain that your punching tools are in register and sterile. Remember that one speck of contamination on your answer card can wreck your results. The Multi-III is not a machine, it is a brain, and requires the same care and consideration you give your own bodies. Thank you, good luck, and I hope to see you all again next semester."

Coming out of the lecture hall, Professor Muni was met in the crowded corridor by his secretary, Ann Sothern. She was wearing a polka dot bikini, carried a tray of drinks and had a pair of the professor's swim trunks draped over her arm. Muni nodded in appreciation, swallowed a quick one and frowned at the traditional musical production number with which the students

moved from class to class. He began reassembling his lecture notes as they hurried from the building.

"No time for a dip, Miss Sothern," he said. "I'm scheduled to sneer at a revolutionary discovery in the Medical Arts Building this afternoon."

"It's not on your calendar, Dr. Muni."

"I know. I know. But Raymond Massey is sick, and I'm standing in for him. Ray says he'll substitute for me the next time I'm due to advise a young genius to give up poetry."

They left the Sociology Building, passed the teardrop swimming pool, the book-shaped library, the heart-shaped Heart Clinic, and came to the faculty-shaped Faculty-Building. It was in a grove of royal palms through which a miniature golf course meandered, its air conditioners emitting a sibilant sound. Inside the Faculty Building, concealed loudspeakers were broadcasting the latest noise-hit.

"What is it—Caruso's 'Niagara'?" Professor Muni asked absently.

"No, Callas's 'Johnstown Flood,'" Miss Sothern answered, opening the door of Muni's office. "Why, that's odd. I could have sworn I left the lights on." She felt for the light switch.

"Stop," Professor Muni snapped. "There's more here than meets the eye, Miss Sothern."

"You mean . . . ?"

"Who does one traditionally encounter on a surprise visit in a darkened room? I mean, *whom*."

"Th-the Bad Guys?"

"Precisely."

A nasal voice spoke. "You are so right, my dear professor, but I assure you this is purely a private business matter."

"Dr. Muni," Miss Sothern gasped. "There's someone in your office."

"Do come in, professor," the nasal voice said. "That is, if you will permit me to invite you into your own office. There is no use trying to turn on the lights, Miss Sothern. They have been—attended to."

"What is the meaning of this intrusion?" Professor Muni demanded.

"Come in. Come in. Boris, guide the professor to a chair. The goon who is taking your arm, Professor Muni, is my ruthless bodyguard, Boris Karloff. I am Peter Lorre."

"I demand an explanation," Muni shouted. "Why have you invaded my office? Why are the lights out? By what right do you—"

"The lights are out because it is best that people do not see Boris. He is a most useful man, but not, shall we say, an aesthetic delight. Why I have invaded your office will be made known to you after you have answered one or two trifling questions."

"I will do nothing of the sort. Miss Sothern, get the dean."

"You will remain where you are, Miss Sothern."

"Do as you're told, Miss Sothern. I will not permit this—"

"Boris, light something."

Something was lit. Miss Sothern screamed. Professor Muni was dumb-struck.

"All right, Boris, put it out. Now, my dear professor, to business. First, let me inform you that it will be worth your while to answer my questions honestly. Be good enough to put out your hand." Professor Muni extended his hand. A sheaf of bills was placed in it. "Here is one thousand dollars; your consultation fee. Would you care to count it? Shall I have Boris light something?"

"I believe you," Muni muttered.

"Very good. Professor Muni, where and how long did you study American history?"

"That's an odd question, Mr. Lorre."

"You have been paid, Professor Muni."

"Very true. Well . . . I studied at Hollywood High, Harvard High, Yale High and the College of the Pacific."

"What is 'college'?"

"The old name for a high. They're traditionalists at Pacific—hidebound reactionaries."

"And how long did you study?"

"Some twenty years."

"How long have you been teaching here at Columbia High?"

"Fifteen years."

"Then that adds up to thirty-five years of experience. Would you say that you had an extensive knowledge of the merits and qualifications of the various living historians?"

"Fairly extensive. Yes."

"Then who, in your opinion, is the leading authority on twentieth-century Americana?"

"Ah. So. Very interesting. Harrison, of course, on advertising copy, newspaper headlines, and photo captions. Taylor on domestic science—that's Dr. Elizabeth Taylor. Gable is probably your best bet for transportation. Clark's at Cambridge High now, but he—"

"Excuse me, Professor Muni. I put the question badly. I should have asked: Who is the leading authority on twentieth-century objects of virtue? Antiques, paintings, furniture, curios, *objets d'art*, and so forth . . ."

"Ah! I have no hesitation in answering that, Mr. Lorre. Myself."

"Very good. Very good. Now listen carefully, Professor Muni. I have been delegated by a little group of powerful men to hire your professional services. You will be paid ten thousand dollars in advance. You will give your word that the transaction will be kept secret. And it must be understood that if your mission fails, we will do nothing to help you."

"That's a lot of money," Professor Muni said slowly. "How can I be sure that this offer is from the Good Guys?"

"You have my assurance that it is for freedom and justice, the man on the street, the underdogs and the L.A. Way of Life. Of course, you can refuse this dangerous assignment, and it will not be held against you, but you are the one man in all Great L.A. who can carry it out."

"Well," Professor Muni said, "seeing that I have nothing better to do than mistakenly sneer at a cancer cure today, I might as well accept."

"I knew we could depend on you. You are the sort of little man that makes L.A. great. Boris, sing the national anthem."

"Thank you, but I need no praise. I'm just doing what any loyal, red-blooded, one-hundred-percent Angelino would do."

"Very good. I will pick you up at midnight. You will be wearing rough tweeds, a felt hat pulled down over your face and stout shoes. You will carry one hundred feet of mountaineering rope, prism binoculars and an ugly snub-nosed fission gun. Your code identity will be .369."

"This," Peter Lorre said, "is .369. .369, may I have the pleasure of introducing you to X, Y and Z?"

"Good evening, Professor Muni," the Italian-looking gentleman said. "I am Vittorio De Sica. This is Miss Garbo. That is Edward Everett Horton. Thank you, Peter. You may go."

Mr. Lorre exited. Muni stared around. He was in a sumptuous penthouse apartment decorated entirely in white. Even the fire burning in the grate was, by some miracle of chemistry, composed entirely of milk-white flames. Mr. Horton was pacing nervously before the fire. Miss Garbo reclined languidly on a polar-bear skin, an ivory cigarette holder drooping from her hand.

"Let me relieve you of that rope, professor," De Sica said. "And the customary binoculars and snub-nosed pistol, I presume? I'll take them too. Do make yourself comfortable. You must forgive our being in faultless evening dress; our cover identities, you understand. We operate the gambling hell downstairs. Actually we are—"

"No!" Mr. Horton cried in alarm.

"Unless we have full faith in Professor Muni and are perfectly candid, we will get nowhere, my dear Horton. You agree, Greta?"

Miss Garbo nodded.

"Actually," De Sica continued, "we are a little group of powerful art dealers."

Muni stammered, "Th-then . . . Then you're *the* De Sica, and *the* Garbo, and *the* Horton?"

"We are."

"B-but . . . But everyone says you don't exist. Everyone believes that the organization known as the Little Group of Powerful Art Dealers is really owned by 'The Thirty-nine Steps,' with the controlling interest vested in *Cosa Vostro*. It is said that—"

"Yes, yes," De Sica interrupted. "That is what we desire to have believed; hence our cover identity as the sinister trio operating this gambling syndicate. But it is we three who control the art of the world, and that is why you are here."

"I don't understand."

"Show him the list," Miss Garbo growled.

De Sica produced a sheet of paper and handed it to Muni. "Be good enough to read this list of articles, Professor. Study it carefully. A great deal will depend on the conclusions you draw."

Automatic grill-waffler

Steam-spray iron

12-speed electric mixer

Automatic 6-cup percolator

Electric aluminum fry pan

4-burner gas heater-range w. griddle

11-cubic-foot refrigerator plus 170-lb. freezer

Power sweeper, canister-type, w. vinyl bumper

Sewing machine w. bobbins and needles

Maple-finished-pine wagon-wheel chandelier

Opal-glass ceiling-fixture lamp

Hobnail-glass Provincial-style lamp

Pull-down brass lamp w. beaded glass diffuser

Double-bell black-faced alarm clock

50-piece service for 8, mirror-lite flatware

16-piece service for 4, Du Barry-pattern dinnerware

All-nylon pile rug, 9x12, spice beige

Colonial rug, oval, 9x12, fern green

Hemp outdoor "Welcome" mat, 18x30

Sofa-bed and chair, sage green

Round foam-rubber hassock

Serofoam recliner chair w. 3-way mechanism  
Drop-leaf extension table, seats 8  
4 captain's chairs w. scoop seats  
Colonial oak bachelor's chest, 3 drawers  
Colonial oak double dresser, 6 drawers  
French Provincial canopy bed, 54 in. wide

After studying the list for ten minutes, Professor Muni put the paper down and heaved a deep sigh. "It reads like the most fabulous buried treasure in history," he said.

"Oh, it is not buried, Professor."

Muni sat bolt upright. "You mean these objects actually exist?" he exclaimed.

"Most certainly they do. More of that later. First, have you absorbed the items?"

"Yes."

"You have them in your mind's eye?"

"I do."

"Then can you answer this question: Are these treasures all of a kind, of a style, of a taste?"

"You are obscure, Vittorio," Miss Garbo growled.

"What we want to know," Edward Everett Horton burst out, "is whether one man could—"

"Gently, my dear Horton. Each question in its proper sequence. Professor, perhaps I have been obscure. What I am asking is this: Do these treasures represent one man's taste? That is to say, could the man who—let us say—collected the twelve-speed electric mixer also be the man who collected the hemp outdoor 'Welcome' mat?"

"If he could afford both," Muni chuckled.

"We will, for the sake of argument, say that he can afford all the items on that list."

"A national government couldn't afford all of them," Muni replied. "However, let me think. . . ." He leaned back in his chair and squinted at the ceiling, hardly aware that the Little Group of Powerful Art Dealers was watching him intently. After much face-contorting concentration, Muni opened his eyes and looked around.

"Well? Well?" Horton demanded anxiously.

"I've been visualizing those treasures in one room," Muni said. "They go remarkably well together. In fact, they would make one of the most impressive and beautiful rooms in the world. If one were to walk into such a room, one would immediately want to know who the genius was who decorated it."

"Then . . . ?"

"Yes. I would say this was the taste of one man."

"Aha! Then your guess was right, Greta. We are dealing with a lone shark."

"No, no, no. It's impossible." Horton hurled his B&B glass into the fire, and then flinched at the crash. "It can't be a lone shark. It must be many men, all kinds, operating independently. I tell you—"

"My dear Horton, pour yourself another drink and calm yourself. You are only confusing the good doctor. Professor Muni, I told you that the items on that list exist. They do. But I did not tell you that we don't know where they are at present. We do not for a very good reason; they have all been stolen."

"No! I can't believe it."

"But yes, plus perhaps a dozen more rarities, which we have not bothered to itemize because they are rather minor."

"Surely this was not a single, comprehensive collection of Americana. I would have been aware of its existence."

"No. Such a single collection never was and never will be."

"We would not permit it," Miss Garbo said.

"Then how were they stolen? Where?"

"By crooks," Horton exclaimed, waving the Brandy & Banana decanter. "By dozens of different thieves. It can't be one man's work."

"The professor has said it is one man's taste."

"It's impossible. Forty daring robberies in fifteen months? I won't believe it."

"The rare objects on that list," De Sica continued to Muni, "were stolen over a period of fifteen months from collectors, museums, dealers and importers, all



in the Hollywood East area. If, as you say, the objects represent one man's taste—"

"I do."

"Then it is obvious we have on our hands a *rara avis*, a clever criminal who is also a connoisseur, or, what is perhaps even more dangerous, a connoisseur who has turned criminal."

"But why particularize?" Muni asked. "Why must he be a connoisseur? Any average art dealer could tell a crook the value of antique *objets d'art*. The information could even be obtained from a library."

"I say connoisseur," De Sica answered, "because none of the stolen objects has ever been seen again. None has been offered for sale anywhere in the four orbits of the world, despite the fact that any one of them would be worth a king's ransom. Ergo, we are dealing with a man who steals to add to his own collection."

"Enough, Vittorio," Miss Garbo growled. "Ask him the next question."

"Professor, we now assume we are dealing with a man of taste. You have seen the list of what he has stolen thus far. I ask you, as a historian: can you suggest any object of vertu that obviously belongs in his collection? If a rare item were to come to his attention, something that would fit in beautifully with that hypothetical room you visualized—what might it be? What would tempt the connoisseur in the criminal?"

"Or the criminal in the connoisseur," Muni added. Again he squinted at the ceiling while the others watched breathlessly. At last he muttered, "Yes . . . Yes . . . That's it. It must be. It would be the focal point of the entire collection."

"What?" Horton cried. "What are you talking about?"

"The Flowered Thundermug," Muni answered solemnly.

The three art dealers looked so perplexed that Muni was forced to elaborate. "It is a blue porcelain jardiniere of uncertain function, decorated with a border of white and gold marguerites. It was discovered over a century ago by a French interpreter in Nigeria. He brought it to Greece, where he offered it for sale, but he was mur-

dered, and the mug disappeared. It next turned up in the possession of an Uzbek prostitute traveling under a Formosan passport who surrendered it to a quack in Civitavecchia in return for an alleged aphrodisiac.

"The quack hired a Swiss, a deserter from the Vatican Guards, to safeguard him to Quebec, where he hoped to sell the mug to a Canadian uranium tycoon, but he disappeared en route. Ten years later a French acrobat with a Korean passport and a Swiss accent sold the mug in Paris. It was bought by the ninth Duke of Stratford for one million gold francs, and has remained in the Olivier family ever since."

"And this," De Sica asked keenly, "could be the focal point of our connoisseur's entire collection?"

"Most definitely. I stake my reputation on it."

"Bravo! Then our plan is simplicity itself. We much publicize a pretended sale of the Flowered Thunder-mug to a prominent Hollywood East collector. Perhaps Mr. Clifton Webb is best suited to the role. We much publicize the shipment of the rare treasure to Mr. Webb. We bait a trap in the home of Mr. Webb for our criminal, and—*Mah!* We have him."

"Will the Duke and Mr. Webb cooperate?" Muni asked.

"They will. They must."

"They must? Why?"

"Because we have sold art treasures to both of them, Professor Muni."

"I don't follow."

"My good doctor, sales today are entirely on the residual basis. From five to fifty percent of ownership, control and resale value of all works of art remain in our possession. We own residual rights in all those stolen objects too, which is why they must be recovered. Do you understand now?"

"I do, and I see that I'm in the wrong business."

"So. Peter has paid you already?"

"Yes."

"And pledged you to secrecy?"

"I gave my word."

"*Grazie*. Then if you will excuse us, we have much work to do."

As De Sica handed Muni the coil of rope, binoculars and snub-nosed gun, Miss Garbo said, "No."

De Sica gave her an inquiring glance. "Is there something else, *cara mia*?"

"You and Horton go and do your work somewhere else," she growled. "Peter may have paid him, but I have not. *Ve vant to be alone.*" And she beckoned Professor Muni to the bearskin.

In the ornate library of the Clifton Webb mansion on Skouras Drive, Detective Inspector Edward G. Robinson introduced his assistants to the Little Group of Powerful Art Dealers. His staff was lined up before the exquisitely simulated trompe-l'oeil bookshelves, and were rather trompe-l'oeil themselves in their uniforms of household servants.

"Sergeant Eddie Brophy, footman," Inspector Robinson announced. "Sergeant Eddie Albert, second footman. Sergeant Ed Begley, chef. Sergeant Eddie Mayhoff, second chef. Detectives Edgar Kennedy, chauffeur, and Edna May Oliver, maid."

Inspector Robinson himself was in the uniform of a butler. "Now, ladies and gents, the trap is baited and set, with the invaluable aid of the Police Costume, Prop and Makeup Department, Deputy Commissioner Eddie Fisher in charge, than which there is none better."

"We congratulate you," De Sica said.

"As you very well know," Robinson continued, "everybody believes that Mr. Clifton Webb has bought the Thundermug from Duke Stratford for two million dollars. They are well aware that it was secretly shipped to Hollywood East under armed guard and that at this very moment the art treasure reposes in a concealed safe in Mr. Webb's library." The inspector pointed to a wall, where the combination dial of a safe was artfully set in the navel of a nude by Amedeo Modigliani (2381-2431), and highlighted by a concealed pin spot.

"Where is Mr. Webb now?" Miss Garbo asked.

"Having turned over his palatial mansion to us at

your request," Robinson answered, "he is presently on a pleasure cruise of the Carib with his family and servants. As you very well know, this is a closely guarded secret."

"And the Thundermug?" Horton asked nervously. "Where is it?"

"Why, sir, in that safe."

"You mean—you mean you actually brought it over from Stratford? It's here? Oh, my God! Why? Why?"

"We had to have the art treasure transported, Mr. Horton. How else could we have leaked the closely guarded secret to Associated Press, United Television, Reuters News and the Satellite Syndicate, thus enabling them to take sneak photographs?"

"B-but . . . But if it's actually stolen. . . . Oh, my God! This is awful."

"Ladies and gents," Robinson said. "Me and my associates, the best cops on the Hollywood East force, the Honorable Edmund Kean, Commissioner, will be here, nominally going through the duties of the household staff, actually keeping our eyes peeled, leaving no stone unturned, up to every trick and dodge known in the annals of crime. If anything's taken, it will not be the Flowered Thundermug; it will be the Artsy-Craftsy Kid."

"The who?" De Sica asked.

"Your crooked connoisseur, sir. That's our nickname for him on the Bunco Squad. And now, if you will be good enough to slip out under cover of darkness, using a little-known door in the back garden, me and my associates will begin our simulated domestic duties. We have a hot tip from the underworld that the Artsy-Craftsy Kid will strike—tonight."

The Little Group of Powerful Art Dealers departed under cover of darkness; the Bunco Squad began the evening household routine to reassure any suspicious observer that life was proceeding normally in the Webb pleasance. Inspector Robinson was to be seen, gravely pacing back and forth before the living room windows, carrying a silver salver on which was glued a wineglass, its interior ingeniously painted red to simulate claret.

Sergeants Brophy and Albert, the footmen, alternately opened the front door for each other with much elab-

orate formality as they took turns going out to mail letters. Detective Kennedy painted the garage. Detective Edna May Oliver hung the bedding out the upstairs windows to air. And at frequent intervals Sergeant Begley (chef) chased Sergeant Mayhoff (second chef) through the house with a meat cleaver.

At 2300 hours, Inspector Robinson put the salver down and yawned prodigiously. The cue was picked up by his staff, and the entire mansion echoed with yawns. In the living room, Inspector Robinson undressed, put on a nightgown and nightcap, lit a candle and extinguished the lights. He put out the library lights, leaving only the pin spot focused on the safe dial. Then he trudged upstairs. In other parts of the house his staff also changed to nightgowns, and then joined him. The Webb home was dark and silent.

An hour passed; a clock chimed twenty-four. A loud clank sounded from the direction of Skouras Drive.

"The front gate," Ed whispered.

"Someone's coming in," Ed said.

"It's the Artsy-Craftsy Kid," Ed added.

"Keep your voices down!"

"Right, Chief."

There was a crunch-crunch-crunch of gravel.

"Coming up the front drive," Ed muttered.

"Oh, he's a deep one," Ed said.

The gravel noises changed to mushy sounds.

"Crossing the flower border," Ed said.

"You got to hand it to him," Ed said.

There was a dull thud, a stumble and an imprecation.

"Stepped into a flowerpot," Ed said.

There came a series of thuddy noises at irregular intervals.

"Can't get it off," Ed said.

A crack and a clatter.

"Got it off now," Ed said.

"Oh, he's slick all right," Ed said.

There came exploratory taps on glass.

"At the library window," Ed said.

"Did you unlock it?"

"I thought Ed was going to do that, Chief."

"Did you, Ed?"

"No, Chief. I thought Ed was supposed to."

"He'll never get in. Ed, see if you can unlock it without him seeing—"

A crash of glass.

"Never mind, he's got it open. You can always trust a pro."

The window creaked up; there were scrapes and grunts as the midnight intruder climbed through. When he finally stood upright in the library, his silhouette against the beam of the pin spot was apelike. He looked around uncertainly for some time, and at last began searching aimlessly through drawers and cupboards.

"He'll never find it," Ed whispered. "I told you we should of put a sign under the dial, Chief."

"No, trust an old pro. See? What'd I tell you? He's spotted it. All set now?"

"Don't you want to wait for him to crack it, Chief?"

"Why?"

"Catch him red-handed."

"For God's sake, that safe's burglar proof. Come on now. Ready? Go!"

The library was flooded with light. The thief started back from the concealed safe in consternation, to find himself surrounded by seven grim detectives, all leveling guns at his head. The fact that they were wearing night-shirts did not make them look any less resolute. For their part, the detectives saw a broad-shouldered, bull-necked burglar with a lantern jaw. The fact that he had not altogether shaken off the contents of the flowerpot, and wore a Parma violet (*Viola pallida plena*) on his right shoe, did not make him look any less vicious.

"And now, Kid, if you please," Inspector Robinson said with the exaggerated courtesy that made his admirers call him the Beau Brummel of the Bunco Squad.

They bore the malefactor off to headquarters in triumph.

Five minutes after the detectives departed with their captive, a gentleman in full evening cloak sauntered up to the front door of the Webb mansion. He rang

the doorbell. From within came the music of the first eight bars of Ravel's *Bolero* played on full carillon orchestra in waltz tempo. While the gentleman appeared to wait carelessly, his right hand slid through a slit in his cloak and rapidly tried a series of keys in the lock. The gentleman rang the bell again. Midway through the second rendition of the *Bolero*, he found a key that fitted.

He turned the lock, thrust the door open a few inches with a twist of his toe, and spoke pleasantly, as to an invisible servant inside.

"Good evening. I'm afraid I'm rather late. Is everybody asleep, or am I still expected? Oh, good. Thank you." The gentleman entered the house, shut the door behind him softly, looked around at the dark, empty foyer, and grinned. "Like taking candy from kids," he murmured. "I ought to be ashamed of myself."

He located the library, entered and turned on all the lights. He removed his cloak, lit a cigarette, noticed the bar and then poured himself a drink from one of the more appealing decanters. He tried it and gagged. "Ack! A new horror, and I thought I knew them all. What the hell is it?" He dipped his tongue into the glass. "Scotch, yes; but Scotch and what?" He sampled again. "My God, it's broccoli juice."

He glanced around, found the safe, crossed to it and inspected it. "Great heavens!" he exclaimed. "A whole three-number dial—all of twenty-seven possible combinations. Absolutely burglar-proof. I really am impressed."

He reached for the dial, looked up, met the nude's melting glance, and smiled apologetically. "I beg your pardon," he said, and began twisting the dial: 1-1-1, 1-1-2, 1-1-3, 1-2-1, 1-2-2, 1-2-3, and so on, each time trying the handle of the safe, which had been cleverly disguised as the nude's forefinger. At 3-2-1, the handle came down with a smart click. The safe door opened, eviscerating, at it were, the lovely belly. The cracksman reached in and brought out the Flowered Thundermug. He contemplated it for a full minute.

A low voice spoke. "Remarkable, isn't it?"

The cracksman looked up quickly. A girl was standing

in the library door, examining him casually. She was tall and slender, with chestnut hair and very dark-blue eyes. She was wearing a revealing white sheath, and her clear skin gleamed under the lights.

"Good evening, Miss Webb—Mrs.—?"

"Miss." She flicked the third finger of her left hand at him.

"I'm afraid I didn't hear you come in."

"Nor I you." She strolled into the library. "You do think it's remarkable, don't you? I mean, I hope you're not disappointed."

"No, I'm not. It's unique."

"Who do you suppose designed it?"

"We'll never know."

"Do you think he didn't make many? Is that why it's so rare?"

"It would be pointless to speculate, Miss Webb. That's rather like asking how many colors an artist used in a painting, or how many notes a composer used in an opera."

She flowed onto a lounge. "Cigarette, please? Are you by any chance being condescending?"

"Not at all. Light?"

"Thank you."

"When we contemplate beauty we should see only the *Ding an sich*, the thing in itself. Surely you're aware of that, Miss Webb."

"I suspect you're rather detached."

"Me? Detached? Not at all. When I contemplate you, I also see only the beauty in itself. And while you're a work of art, you're hardly a museum piece."

"So you're also an expert in flattery."

"You could make any man an expert, Miss Webb."

"And now that you've broken into my father's safe, what next?"

"I intend to spend many hours admiring this work of art."

"Make yourself at home."

"I couldn't think of intruding. I'll take it along with me."

"So you're going to steal it."



"I beg you to forgive me."

"You're doing a very cruel thing, you know."

"I'm ashamed of myself."

"Do you know what that mug means to my father?"

"Certainly. A two-million-dollar investment."

"You think he trades in beauty, like brokers on the stock exchange?"

"Of course. All wealthy collectors do. They buy to own to sell at a profit."

"My father isn't wealthy."

"Oh come now, Miss Webb. Two million dollars?"

"He borrowed the money."

"Nonsense."

"He did." She spoke with great intensity, and her dark-blue eyes narrowed. "He has no money, not really. He has nothing but credit. You must know how Hollywood financiers manage that. He borrowed the money, and that mug is the security." She surged up from the lounge. "If it's stolen it will be a disaster for him—and for me."

"Miss Webb, I—"

"I beg you, don't take it. Can I persuade you?"

"Please don't come any closer."

"Oh, I'm not armed."

"You're endowed with deadly weapons that you're using ruthlessly."

"If you love this work of art for its beauty alone, why not share it with us? Or are you the kind of man you hate, the kind that must own?"

"I'm getting the worst of this."

"Why can't you leave it here? If you give it up now, you'll have won a half interest in it forever. You'll be free to come and go as you please. You'll have won a half interest in our family—my father, me, all of us. . . ."

"My God! I'm completely outclassed. All right, keep your confounded—" He broke off.

"What's the matter?"

He was staring at her left arm. "What's that on your arm?" he asked slowly.

"Nothing."

"What is it?" he persisted.

"It's a scar. I fell when I was a child and—"

"That's no scar. It's a vaccination mark."

She was silent.

"It's a vaccination mark," he repeated in awe. "They haven't vaccinated in four hundred years—not like that, they haven't."

She stared at him. "How do you know?"

In answer he rolled up his left sleeve and showed her his vaccination mark.

Her eyes widened. "You too?"

He nodded.

"Then we're both from . . ."

"From then? Yes."

They gazed at each other in amazement. Then they began to laugh with incredulous delight. They embraced and thumped each other, very much like tourists from the same home town meeting unexpectedly on top of the Eiffel Tower. At last they separated.

"It's the most fantastic coincidence in history," he said.

"Isn't it?" She shook her head in bewilderment. "I still can't quite believe it. When were you born?"

"Nineteen fifty. You?"

"You're not supposed to ask a lady."

"Come on! Come on!"

"Nineteen fifty-four."

"Fifty-four?" He grinned. "You're five hundred and ten years old."

"See? Never trust a man."

"So you're not the Webb girl. What's your real name?"

"Dugan. Violet Dugan."

"What a nice, plain, wholesome sound that has."

"What's yours?"

"Sam Bauer."

"That's even plainer and nicer. Well!"

"Shake, Violet."

"Pleased to meet you, Sam."

"It's a pleasure."

"Likewise, I'm sure."

"I was a computer man at the Denver Project in

seventy-five," Bauer said, sipping his gin and ginger-snap, the least horrific combination from the Webb bar.

"Seventy-five?" Violet exclaimed. "That was the year it blew up."

"Don't I know it. They'd bought one of the new IBM 1709's, and IBM sent me along as installation engineer to train the Army personnel. I remember the night of the blast—at least I figure it was the blast. All I know is, I was showing them how to program some new algorithms for the computer when—"

"When what?"

"Somebody put out the lights. When I woke up, I was in a hospital in Philadelphia—Santa Monica East, they call it—and I learned that I'd been kicked five centuries into the future. I'd been picked up, naked, half dead, no identification."

"Did you tell them who you really were?"

"No. Who'd believe me? So they patched me up and discharged me, and I hustled around until I found a job."

"As a computer engineer?"

"Oh, no; not for what they pay. I calculate odds for one of the biggest bookies in the East. Now, what about you?"

"Practically the same story. I was on assignment at Cape Kennedy, doing illustrations for a magazine piece on the first Mars shoot. I'm an artist by trade—"

"The Mars shoot? That was scheduled for seventy-six, wasn't it? Don't tell me they loused it."

"They must have, but I can't find out much in the history books."

"They're pretty vague about our time. I think that war must have wiped most of it out."

"Anyway, I was in the control center doing sketches and making color notes during the countdown, when—well, the way you said, somebody put out the lights."

"My God! The first atomic shoot, and they blew it."

"I woke up in a hospital in Boston—Burbank North—exactly like you. After I got out, I got a job."

"As an artist?"

"Sort of. I'm an antique-faker. I work for one of the biggest art dealers in the country."

"So here we are, Violet."

"Here we are. How do you think it happened, Sam?"

"I have no idea, but I'm not surprised. When you fool around with atomic energy on such a massive scale, anything can happen. Do you think there are any more of us?"

"Shot forward?"

"Uh huh."

"I couldn't say. You're the first I ever met."

"If I thought there were, I'd look for them. My God, Violet, I'm so homesick for the twentieth century."

"Me too."

"It's grotesque here; it's all B picture," Bauer said. "Pure Hollywood cliché. The names. The homes. The way they talk. The way they carry on. All like it's straight out of the world's worst double feature."

"It is. Didn't you know?"

"Know? Know what? Tell me."

"I got it from their history books. It seems after that war nearly everything was wiped out. When they started building a new civilization, all they had for a pattern was the remains of Hollywood. It was comparatively untouched in the war."

"Why?"

"I guess nobody thought it was worth bombing."

"Who were the two sides, us and Russia?"

"I don't know. Their history books just call them the Good Guys and the Bad Guys."

"Typical. Christ, Violet, they're like idiot children. No, they're like extras in a bad movie. And what kills me is that they're happy. They're all living this grade Z synthetic life out of a Cecil B. De Mille spectacle, and the idiots love it. Did you see President Spencer Tracy's funeral? They carried the coffin in a full-sized Sphinx."

"That's nothing. Did you see Princess Joan's wedding?"

"Fontaine?"

"Crawford. She was married under anesthesia."

"You're kidding."

"I am not. She and her husband were joined in holy matrimony by a plastic surgeon."

Bauer shuddered. "Good old Great L.A. Have you been to a football game?"

"No."

"They don't play football; they just give two hours of half-time entertainment."

"Like the marching bands; no musicians, nothing but drum majorettes with batons."

"They've got everything air conditioned, even outdoors."

"With Muzak in every tree."

"Swimming pools on every street corner."

"Kleig lights on every roof."

"Commissaries for restaurants."

"Vending machines for autographs."

"And for medical diagnosis. They call them Medicamats."

"Cheesecake impressions in the sidewalks."

"And here we are, trapped in hell," Bauer grunted. "Which reminds me, shouldn't we get out of this house? Where's the Webb family?"

"On a cruise. They won't be back for days. Where's the cops?"

"I got rid of them with a decoy. They won't be back for hours. Another drink?"

"All right. Thanks." Violet looked at Bauer curiously. "Is that why you're stealing, Sam, because you hate it here? Is it revenge?"

"No, nothing like that. It's because I'm homesick. . . . Try this; I think it's Rum and Rhubarb. . . . I've got a place out on Long Island—Catalina East, I ought to say—and I'm trying to turn it into a twentieth-century home. Naturally I have to steal the stuff. I spend weekends there, and it's bliss, Violet. It's my only escape."

"I see."

"Which again reminds me. What the devil were you doing here, masquerading as the Webb girl?"

"I was after the Flowered Thundermug too."

"You were going to steal it?"

"Of course. Who was as surprised as I when I discovered someone was ahead of me?"

"And that poor-little-rich-girl routine—you were trying to swindle it out of me?"

"I was. As a matter of fact, I did."

"You did indeed. Why?"

"Not the same reason as you. I want to go into business for myself."

"As an antique-faker?"

"Faker and dealer both. I'm building up my stock, but I haven't been nearly as successful as you."

"Then was it you who got away with that three-panel vanity mirror framed in simulated gold?"

"Yes."

"And that brass bedside reading lamp with adjustable extension?"

"That was me."

"Too bad; I really wanted that. How about the tufted chaise longue covered in crewel?"

She nodded. "Me again. It nearly broke my back."

"Couldn't you get help?"

"How could I trust anyone? Don't you work alone?"

"Yes," Bauer said thoughtfully. "Up to now, yes; but I don't see any reason for going on that way. Violet, we've been working against each other without knowing it. Now that we've met, why don't we set up housekeeping together?"

"What housekeeping?"

"We'll work together, furnish my house together and make a wonderful sanctuary. And at the same time you can be building up your stock. I mean, if you want to sell a chair out from under me, that'll be all right. We can always pinch another one."

"You mean share your house together?"

"Sure."

"Couldn't we take turns?"

"Take turns how?"

"Sort of like alternate weekends?"

"Why?"

"You know."

"I don't know. Tell me."

"Oh, forget it."

"No, tell me why."

She flushed. "How can you be so stupid? You know perfectly well why. Do you think I'm the kind of girl who spends weekends with men?"

Bauer was taken aback. "But I had no such proposition in mind, I assure you. The house has two bedrooms. You'll be perfectly safe. The first thing we'll do is steal a Yale lock for your door."

"It's out of the question," she said. "I know men."

"I give you my word, this will be entirely on a friendly basis. Every decorum will be observed."

"I know men," she repeated firmly.

"Aren't you being a little unrealistic?" he asked. "Here we are, refugees in this Hollywood nightmare; we ought to be helping and comforting each other; and you let a silly moral issue stand between us."

"Can you look me in the eye and tell me that sooner or later the comfort won't wind up in bed?" she countered. "Can you?"

"No, I can't," he answered honestly. "That would be denying the fact that you're a damned attractive girl. But I—"

"Then it's out of the question, unless you want to legalize it; and I'm not promising that I'll accept."

"No," Bauer said sharply. "There I draw the line, Violet. That would be doing it the L.A. way. Every time a couple want a one-night stand they go to a Wedmaton, put in a quarter and get hitched. The next morning they go to a Renomaton and get unhitched, and their conscience is clear. It's hypocrisy! When I think of the girls who've put me through that humiliation: Jane Russell, Jane Powell, Jayne Mansfield, Jane Withers, Jane Fonda, Jane Tarzan—Iyechu!"

"Oh! You!" Violet Dugan leaped to her feet in a fury. "So, after all that talk about loathing it here, you've gone Hollywood too."

"Go argue with a woman." Bauer was exasperated. "I just said I didn't want to do it the L.A. way, and she accuses me of going Hollywood. Female logic!"

"Don't you pull your male supremacy on me," she

flared. "When I listen to you, it takes me back to the old days, and it makes me sick."

"Violet . . . Violet . . . Don't let's fight. We have to stick together. Look, I'll go along with it your way. What the hell, it's only a quarter. But we'll put that lock on your door anyway. All right?"

"Oh! You! Only a quarter! You're disgusting." She picked up the Flowered Thundermug and turned.

"Just a minute," Bauer said. "Where do you think you're going?"

"I'm going home."

"Then we don't team up?"

"No."

"We don't get together on any terms?"

"No. Go and comfort yourself with those tramps named Jane. Good night."

"You're not leaving, Violet."

"I'm on my way, Mr. Bauer."

"Not with that Thundermug."

"It's mine."

"I did the stealing."

"And I did the swindling."

"Put it down, Violet."

"You gave it to me. Remember?"

"I'm telling you, put it down."

"I will not. Don't you come near me!"

"You know men. Remember? But not all about them. Now put that mug down like a good girl or you're going to learn something else about male supremacy. I'm warning you, Violet. . . . All right, love, here it comes."

Pale dawn shone into the office of Inspector Edward G. Robinson, casting blue beams through the dense cigarette smoke. The Bunco Squad made an ominous circle around the apelike figure slumped in a chair. Inspector Robinson spoke wearily.

"All right, let's hear your story again."

The man in the chair stirred and attempted to raise his head. "My name is William Bendix," he mumbled. "I am forty years of age. I am a pinnacle expediter in



the employ of Groucho, Chico, Harpo and Marx, construction engineers, at 12203 Goldwyn Terrace."

"What is a pinnacle expediter?"

"A pinnacle expediter is a specialist whereby when the firm builds like a shoe-shaped building for a shoe store, he ties the laces on top; also he puts the straws on top of an ice cream parlor; also he—"

"What was your last job?"

"The Memory Institute at 30449 Louis B. Mayer Boulevard."

"What did you do?"

"I put the veins in the brain."

"Have you got a police record?"

"No, *sir*."

"What were you perpetrating in the luxurious residence of Clifton Webb on or about midnight last night?"

"Like I said, I was having a vodka-and-spinach in Ye Olde Moderne Beer Taverne—I put the foam on top when we built it—and this guy come up to me and got to talking. He told me all about this art treasury just imported by a rich guy. He told me he was a collector hisself, but couldn't afford to buy this treasury, and the rich guy was so jealous of him he wouldn't even let him see it. He told me he would give a hundred dollars just to get a look at it."

"You mean steal it."

"No, *sir*, look at it. He said if I would just bring it to the window so he could look at it, he would pay me a hundred dollars."

"And how much if you handed it to him?"

"No, *sir*, just look at it. Then I was supposed to put it back from whence it come from, and that was the whole deal."

"Describe the man."

"He was maybe thirty years old. Dressed good. Talked a little funny, like a foreigner, and laughed a lot, like he had a joke he wanted to tell. He was maybe medium height, maybe taller. His eyes was dark. His hair was dark and thick and wavy; it would of looked good on top of a barbershop."

There was an urgent rap on the office door. Detective Edna May Oliver burst in, looking distressed.

"Well?" Inspector Robinson snapped.

"His story stands up, Chief," Detective Oliver reported. "He was seen in Ye Olde Moderne Banana Split last night—"

"No, no, no. It was Ye Olde Moderne Beer Taverne."

"Same place, Chief. They just renovated for another grand opening tonight."

"Who put the cherries on top?" Bendix wanted to know. He was ignored.

"This perpetrator was seen talking to the mystery man he described," Detective Oliver continued. "They left together."

"It was the Artsy-Craftsy Kid."

"Yes, Chief."

"Could anyone identify him?"

"No, Chief."

"Damn! Damn! Damn!" Inspector Robinson smote the desk in exasperation. "I have a hunch that we've been tricked."

"How, Chief?"

"Don't you see, Ed? There's a chance the Kid might have found out about our secret trap."

"I don't get it, Chief."

"Think, Ed. Think! Maybe *he* was the underworld informer who sent us the anonymous tip that the Kid would strike last night."

"You mean squeal on himself?"

"Exactly."

"But why, Chief?"

"To trick us into arresting the wrong man. I tell you, he's diabolical."

"But what did that get him, Chief? You already seen through the trick."

"You're right, Ed. The Kid's plan must go deeper than that. But how? How?" Inspector Robinson arose and began pacing, his powerful mind grappling with the tortuous complications of the Artsy-Craftsy Kid's caper.

"So how about me?" Bendix asked.

"Oh, you can go," Robinson said wearily. "You're just a pawn in a far bigger game, my man."

"No, I mean, can I go through with that deal now? He's prolly still waiting outside the house for a look."

"What's that you say? Waiting?" Robinson exclaimed. "You mean he was there when we arrested you?"

"He must of been."

"I've got it! I've got it!" Robinson cried. "Now I see it all."

"See what, Chief?"

"Don't you get the picture, Ed? The Kid watched us leave with this dupe. Then, after we left, *the Kid entered the house.*"

"You mean . . . ?"

"He's probably there right now, cracking that safe."

"Great Scot!"

"Ed, alert the Flying Squad and the Riot Squad."

"Right, Chief."

"Ed, I want roadblocks all around the house."

"Check, Chief."

"Ed, you and Ed come with me."

"Where to, Chief?"

"The Webb mansion."

"You can't, Chief. It's madness."

"I must. This town isn't big enough for both of us. This time it's the Artsy-Craftsy Kid—or me."

It made headlines: how the Bunco Squad had seen through the diabolical plan of the Artsy-Craftsy Kid and arrived at the fabled Webb mansion only moments after he had made off with the Flowered Thundermug; how they had found his unconscious victim, the plucky Audrey Hepburn, devoted assistant to the mysterious gambling overlord Greta "Snake Eyes" Garbo; how Audrey, intuitively suspecting that something was amiss, had taken it upon herself to investigate; how the canny cracksman had played a sinister cat-and-mouse game with her until the opportunity came to fell her with a brutal blow.

Interviewed by the news syndicates, Miss Hepburn said, "It was just a woman's intuition. I suspected something

was amiss and took it upon myself to investigate. The canny cracksman played a sinister cat-and-mouse game with me until the opportunity came to fell me with a brutal blow."

She received seventeen proposals of marriage by Wedmaton, three offers of screen tests, twenty-five dollars from the Hollywood East Community Chest, the Darryl F. Zanuck Award for Human Interest and a reprimand from her boss.

"You should also have said you were ravished, Audrey," Miss Garbo told her. "It would have improved the story."

"I'm sorry, Miss Garbo. I'll try to remember next time. He did make an indecent proposal."

This was in Miss Garbo's secret atelier, where Violet Dugan (Audrey Hepburn) was busily engaged in faking a calendar of the Corn Exchange Bank for the year 1943, while the members of the Little Group of Powerful Art Dealers consulted.

"*Cara mia*," De Sica asked Violet, "can you not give us a fuller description of the scoundrel?"

"I've told you everything I can remember, Mr. De Sica. The one detail that seems to help is the fact that he computes odds for one of the biggest bookies in the East."

"*Mah!* There are hundreds of that species. It is no help at all. You did not get a clue to his name?"

"No, sir; at least, not the name he uses now."

"The name he uses now? How do you mean that?"

"I—I meant—the name he uses when he isn't the Artsy-Craftsy Kid."

"I see. And his home?"

"He said somewhere in Catalina East."

"There are a hundred and forty miles of homes in Catalina East," Horton said irritably.

"I can't help that, Mr. Horton."

"Audrey," Miss Garbo commanded, "put down that calendar and look at me."

"Yes, Miss Garbo."

"You have fallen in love with this man. To you he is a romantic figure, and you do not want him brought to justice. Is that not so?"

"No, Miss Garbo," Violet answered vehemently. "If there's anything in the world I want, it's to have him arrested." She fingered her jaw. "In love with him? I hate him!"

"So." De Sica sighed. "It is a disaster. Plainly, we are obliged to pay his grace two million dollars if the Thundermug is not recovered."

"In my opinion," Horton burst out, "the police will never find it. They're dolts! Almost as big a pack of fools as we were to get mixed up in this thing in the first place."

"Then it must be a case for a private eye. With our unsavory underworld connections, we should have no difficulty contacting the right man. Are there any suggestions?"

"Nero Wolfe," Miss Garbo said.

"Excellent, *cara mia*. A gentleman of culture and erudition."

"Mike Hammer," Horton said.

"The nomination is noted. What would you say to Perry Mason?"

"That shyster is too honest," Horton snapped.

"The shyster is scratched. Any further suggestions?"

"Mrs. North," Violet said.

"Who, my dear? Oh, yes, Pamela North, the lady detective. No—no, I think not. This is hardly a case for a woman."

"Why not, Mr. De Sica?"

"There are prospects of violence that make it unsuited to the tender sex, my dear Audrey."

"I don't see that," Violet said. "We women can take care of ourselves."

"She is right," Miss Garbo growled.

"I think not, Greta; and her experience last night proves it."

"He felled me with a brutal blow when I wasn't looking," Violet protested.

"Perhaps. Shall we vote? I say Nero Wolfe."

"Why not Mike Hammer?" Horton demanded. "He gets results, and he doesn't care how."

"But that carelessness may recover the Thundermug in pieces."

"My God! I never thought of that. All right, I'll go along with Wolfe."

"Mrs. North," Miss Garbo said.

"You are outvoted, *cara mia*. So, it is to be Wolfe, then. *Bene*. I think we had best approach him without Greta, Horton. He is notoriously *antipatico* to women. Dear ladies, *arrivederci*."

After two of the three Powerful Art Dealers had left, Violet glared at Miss Garbo. "Male chauvinists!" she grumbled. "Are we going to stand for it?"

"Vhat can ve do about it, Audrey?"

"Miss Garbo, I want permission to track that man down myself."

"You do not mean this?"

"I'm serious."

"But vhat could you do?"

"There has to be a woman in his life somewhere."

"Naturally."

"*Cherchez la femme*."

"But that is brilliant!"

"He mentioned a few likely names, so if I find her, I find him. May I have a leave of absence, Miss Garbo?"

"Go, Audrey. Bring him back alive."

The old lady wearing the Welsh hat, white apron, hexagonal spectacles, and carrying a mass of knitting bristling with needles, stumbled on the reproduction of the Spanish Stairs, which led to the King's Arms Residenza. The King's Arms was shaped like an imperial crown, with a fifty-foot replica of the Hope diamond sparkling on top.

"Damn!" Violet Dugan muttered. "I shouldn't have been so authentic with the shoes. Sandals are hell."

She entered the Residenza and mounted to the tenth floor, where she rang a hanging bell alongside a door flanked by a lion and a unicorn, which roared and brayed alternately. The door turned misty and then cleared, revealing an Alice in Wonderland with great innocent eyes.

"Lou?" she said eagerly. Then her face fell.

"Good morning, Miss Powell," Violet said, her eyes

peering past the lady and examining the apartment. "I represent Slander Service, Inc. Does gossip give you the go-by? Are you missing out on the juiciest scandals? Our staff of trained mongers guarantees the latest news within five minutes after the event; news defamatory, news derogatory, news libelous, scurrilous, disparaging and vituperative—"

"Flam," Miss Powell said. The door turned opaque.

The Marquise de Pompadour, in full brocade skirt and lace bodice, her powdered wig standing no less than two feet high, entered the grilled portico of Birdies' Rest, a private home shaped like a birdcage. A cacophony of bird calls assailed the ears from the gilt dome. Madame Pompadour blew the bird whistle set in the door, which was shaped like a cuckoo clock. The little hatch above the clock face flew open, and a TV eye popped out with a cheerful "Cuckoo!" and inspected her.

Violet sank into a deep curtsy. "May I see the lady of the house, please?"

The door opened. Peter Pan stood there, dressed in Lincoln-green transparencies, which revealed her sex.

"Good afternoon, Miss Withers. This is Avon calling. Ignatz Avon, the Topper Tailor, designs wigs, transformations, chignons, merkins, toupees and hairpieces for fun, fashion and—"

"Fawf," Miss Withers said. The door slammed. The Marquise de Pompadour fawfed.

The Left Bank artiste in beret and velvet smock carried her palette and easel to the fifteenth floor of La Pyramide. Just under the apex there were six Egyptian columns fronting a massive basalt door. When the artiste tossed baksheesh onto a stone beggar's plate, the door swung open on pivots, revealing a gloomy tomb in which stood a Cleopatra type dressed like a Cretan serpent goddess, with serpents to match.

"Good morning, Miss Russell. Tiffany's proudly presents a new coup in organic jewelry, the Tifftoo skin gems. Tattooed in high relief, Tifftoo skin gems incorporate a source of gamma radiation, warranted harmless for thirty days, which outscintillates diamonds of the finest water."

"Shlock!" Miss Russell said. The door closed on its pivots, accompanied by the closing bars of *Aida*, softly moaned by a harmonica choir.

The schoolmarm in crisp *tailleur*, her hair skinned back into a tight bun, her eyes magnified by thick glasses, carried her schoolbooks across the drawbridge of The Manor House. She was lifted by a crenelated elevator to the twelfth floor, where she was forced to leap across a small moat before she could wield the door knocker, which was shaped like a mailed fist. The door rumbled upward, a miniature portcullis, and there stood Goldilocks.

"Louis?" she laughed. Then her face fell.

"Good evening, Miss Mansfield. Read-Eze offers a spectacular new personalized service. Why submit to the monotony of mechanical readers when Read-Eze experts with cultivated voices, capable of coloring each individual word, will, in person, read you comic books, true-confession and movie magazines at five dollars an hour; mysteries, westerns and society columns at—"

The portcullis rumbled down.

"First Lou, then Louis," Violet muttered. "I wonder."

The little pagoda was set in an exact reproduction of the landscape on a Willow Pattern plate, including the figures of three coolies posed on the bridge. The movie starlet wearing black sunglasses and a white sweater stretched over her forty-four-inch *poitrine*, patted their heads as she passed.

"That tickles, doll," the last one said.

"Oh, excuse me! I thought you were dummies."

"At fifty cents an hour we are, but that's show business."

Madame Butterfly came to the archway of the pagoda, hissing and bowing like a geisha, but rather oddly decorated with a black patch over her left eye.

"Good morning, Miss Fonda. Sky's The Limit is making an introductory offer of a revolutionary concept in bosom uplift. One application of Breast-G, our flesh-tinted antigravity powder, under the bust works miracles. Comes in three tints: blond, titian and brunette; and three uplifts: grapefruit, Persian melon and—"



"I don't need no balloon ascension," Miss Fonda said drearily. "Fawf."

"Sorry to have bothered you." Violet hesitated. "Forgive me, Miss Fonda, but isn't that eye patch out of character?"

"It ain't no prop, dearie; it's for Real City. That Jourdan's a bastard."

"Jourdan," Violet said to herself, retracing her steps across the bridge. "Louis Jourdan. Could it be?"

The frogman in black rubber, complete with full scuba equipment including face mask, oxygen tank and harpoon, trudged through the jungle path to Strawberry Hill Place, frightening the chimpanzees. In the distance an elephant trumpeted. The frogman banged on a brazen gong suspended from a coconut palm, and African drums answered. A seven-foot Watusi appeared and conducted the visitor to the rear of the house, where a Pocahontas type was dangling her legs in a hundred-foot replica of the Congo.

"Is it Louis Bwana?" she called. Then her face fell.

"Good afternoon, Miss Tarzan," Violet said. "Up-Chuck, with a fifty-year record of bonded performance, guarantees sterile swimming pleasure whether it's an Olympic pool or just a plain, old-fashioned swimming hole. With its patented mercury-pump vacuum-cleaning system, Up-Chuck chucks up mud, sand, silt, drunks, dregs, debris—"

The brazen gong sounded, and was again answered by drums.

"Oh! That must be Louis now," Miss Tarzan cried. "I knew he'd keep his promise."

Miss Tarzan ran around to the front of the house. Miss Dugan pulled the mask down over her face and plunged into the Congo. On the far side she came to the surface behind a frond of bamboo, alongside a most realistic alligator. She poked its head once to make sure it was stuffed. Then she turned just in time to see Sam Bauer come strolling into the jungle garden, arm in arm with Jane Tarzan.

Concealed in the telephone-shaped booth across the

street from Strawberry Hill Place, Violet Dugan and Miss Garbo argued heatedly.

"It vas a mistake to call the police, Audrey."

"No, Miss Garbo."

"Inspector Robinson has been in that house ten minutes already. He vill blunder again."

"That's what I'm counting on, Miss Garbo."

"Then I vas right. You do not vant this—this Louis Jourdan to be caught."

"I do, Miss Garbo. I do! If you'll just let me explain!"

"He captured your fancy vith his indecent proposal."

"Please listen, Miss Garbo. The important thing isn't so much to catch him as it is to recover the stolen loot. Isn't that right?"

"Excuses! Excuses!"

"If he's arrested now, he may never tell us where the Thundermug is."

"So?"

"So we've got to make him show us where it is."

"But how?"

"I've taken a leaf from his book. Remember how he duped a decoy into fooling the police?"

"That stupid creature Bendix."

"Well, Inspector Robinson is our decoy. Oh, look! Something's happening."

Pandemonium was breaking loose in Strawberry Hill Place. The chimpanzees were screaming and flitting from branch to branch. The Watusi appeared, running hard, pursued by Inspector Robinson. The elephant began trumpeting. A giant alligator crawled hastily through the heavy grass. Jane Tarzan appeared, running hard, pursued by Inspector Robinson. The African drums pounded.

"I could have sworn that alligator was stuffed," Violet muttered.

"Vhat vas that, Audrey?"

"That alligator . . . Yes, I was right! Excuse me, Miss Garbo. I've got to be going."

The alligator had risen to its hind legs and was now strolling down Strawberry Lane. Violet left the telephone booth and began following it at a leisurely pace. The spectacle of a strolling alligator followed, at a discreet

distance, by a strolling frogman evoked no particular interest in the passers-by of Hollywood East.

The alligator glanced back over his shoulder once or twice and at last noticed the frogman. He quickened his pace. The frogman stayed with him. He began to run. The frogman ran, was outdistanced, turned on her oxygen tank and began to close the gap. The alligator leaped for a handle on the crosstown straphanger and was borne east, dangling from the cable. The frogman hailed a passing rickshaw. "Follow that alligator!" she cried into the hearing aid of the robot.

At the zoo, the alligator dropped off the straphanger and disappeared into the crowd. The frogman leaped out of the rickshaw and hunted frantically through the Berlin House, the Moscow House and the London House. In the Rome House, where sightseers were tossing pizzas to the specimens behind the bars, she saw one of the Romans lying naked and unconscious in a small corner cage. Alongside him was an empty alligator skin. Violet looked around hastily and saw Bauer slinking out, dressed in a striped suit and a Borsalino hat.

She ran after him. Bauer pulled a small boy off an electric carrousel pony, leaped on its back and began galloping west. Violet leaped onto the back of a passing Lama. "Follow that carrousel," she cried. The Lama began running. "*Ch-lao hsi-fu nan tso mei mi chou*," he complained. "But that's always been my problem."

At Hudson Terminal, Bauer abandoned the pony, was corked in a bottle and jetted across the river. Violet leaped into the coxswain's seat of an eight-oared shell. "Follow that bottle," she cried. On the Jersey side (Nevada East) Violet pursued Bauer onto the Freeway and thence, by Dodge-Em Kar, to Old Newark, where Bauer leaped onto a trampoline and was catapulted up to the forward cylinder of the Block Island & Nantucket Monorail. Violet shrewdly waited until the monorail left the terminal, and then just made the rear cylinder.

Inside, at point of harpoon, she held up a teenage madam and forced her to exchange clothes. Dressed in opera pumps, black net stockings, checked skirt, silk blouse and hair rollers, she threw the cursing madam

off the monorail at the East Vine Street station and began watching the forward cylinder more openly. At Montauk, the easternmost point on Catalina East, Bauer slipped off.

Again she waited until the monorail was leaving the station before she followed. On the platform below, Bauer slid into a Commuters' Cannon and was shot into space. Violet ran to the same cannon, carefully left the co-ordinate dials exactly as Bauer had set them, and slipped into the muzzle. She was shot off less than thirty seconds after Bauer, and bounced into the landing net just as he was climbing down the rope ladder.

"You!" he exclaimed.

"Me."

"Was that you in the frog suit?"

"Yes."

"I thought I ditched you in Newark."

"No, you didn't," she said grimly. "I've got you dead to rights, Kid."

Then she saw the house.

It was shaped like the house that children used to draw back in the twentieth century: two stories; peaked roof, covered with torn tar paper; dirty brown shingles, half of them hanging; plain windows with four panes in each sash; brick chimney overgrown with poison ivy; sagging front porch; the rotted remains of a two-car garage on the right; a clump of sickly sumac on the left. In the gloom of evening it looked like a haunted house.

"Oh, Sam," she breathed. "It's beautiful!"

"It's a home," he said simply.

"What's it like inside?"

"Come and see."

Inside it was unadulterated mail-order house; it was dime store, bargain basement, second hand, castoff, thrift shop, flea market.

"It's sheer heaven," Violet said. She lingered lovingly over the power sweeper, canister-type, w. vinyl bumper. "It's so—so soothing. I haven't been this happy in years."

"Wait, wait!" Bauer said, bursting with pride. He knelt before the fireplace and lit a birch-log fire. The flames crackled yellow and orange. "Look," he said. "Real

wood, and real flames. And I know a museum where they've got a pair of matching andirons."

"No! Really?"

He nodded. "The Peabody, at Yale High."

Violet made up her mind. "Sam, I'll help you."

He stared at her.

"I'll help you steal them," she said. "I—I'll help you steal anything you want."

"You mean that, Violet?"

"I was a fool. I never realized. . . . I— You were right. I should never have let such a silly thing come between us."

"You're not just saying that to trick me, Violet?"

"I'm not, Sam. Honest."

"Or because you love my house?"

"Of course I love it, but that's not the whole reason."

"Then we're partners?"

"Yes."

"Shake."

Instead she flung her arms around his neck and pressed herself against him. Minutes later, on the Serofoam recliner chair w. three-way mechanism, she murmured in his ear, "It's us against everybody, Sam."

"Let 'em watch out, is all I have to say."

"And 'everybody' includes those women named Jane."

"Violet, I swear it was never serious with them. If you could see them—"

"I have."

"You have? Where? How?"

"I'll tell you some other time."

"But—"

"Oh, hush!"

Much later he said, "If we don't put a lock on that bedroom door, we're in for trouble."

"To hell with the lock," Violet said.

"ATTENTION LOUIS JOURDAN," a voice blared.

Sam and Violet scrambled out of the chair in astonishment. Blue-white light blazed through the windows of the house. There came the excited clamor of a lynch mob, the galloping crescendo of the *William Tell Overture*, and sound effects of the Kentucky Derby, a 4-6-4 loco-

tive, destroyers at battle stations, and the Saskatchewan Rapids.

"ATTENTION LOUIS JOURDAN," the voice brayed again.

They ran to a window and peered out. The house was surrounded by blinding Kleig lights. Dimly they could see a horde of *Jacqueries* with a guillotine, television and news cameras, a ninety-piece orchestra, a battery of sound tables manned by technicians wearing earphones, a director in jodhpurs carrying a megaphone, Inspector Robinson at a microphone, and a ring of canvas deck chairs in which were seated a dozen men and women wearing theatrical makeup.

"ATTENTION LOUIS JOURDAN. THIS IS INSPECTOR EDWARD G. ROBINSON SPEAKING. YOU ARE SURROUNDED. WE—WHAT? OH, TIME FOR A COMMERCIAL? ALL RIGHT. GO AHEAD."

Bauer glared at Violet. "So it was a trick."

"No, Sam, I swear it."

"Then what are they doing here?"

"I don't know."

"You brought them."

"No, Sam, no! I— Maybe I wasn't as smart as I thought I was. Maybe they trailed me when I was chasing you; but I swear I never saw them."

"You're lying."

"No, Sam." She began to cry.

"You sold me out."

"ATTENTION LOUIS JOURDAN. ATTENTION LOUIS JOURDAN. YOU WILL RELEASE AUDREY HEPBURN AT ONCE."

"Who?" Bauer was confused.

"Th-that's me," Violet sobbed. "It's the name I took, just like you. Audrey Hepburn and Violet Dugan are one and the s-same person. They think you captured me; but I didn't sell you out, S-Sam. I'm no fink."

"You're leveling with me?"

"Honest."

"ATTENTION LOUIS JOURDAN. WE KNOW YOU ARE THE ARTSY-CRAFTSY KID. COME OUT WITH YOUR HANDS UP. RELEASE AUDREY HEPBURN AND COME OUT WITH YOUR HANDS UP."

Bauer flung the window open. "Come and get me, copper," he yelled.

"WAIT UNTIL AFTER THE NETWORK I.D., WISE GUY."

There was a ten-second pause for network identification. Then a fusillade of shots rang out. Minuscule mushroom clouds arose where the fission slugs struck. Violet screamed. Bauer slammed the window down.

"Got their ammunition damped to the lowest exponent," he said. "Afraid of hurting the goodies in here. Maybe there's a chance, Violet."

"No! Please, darling, don't try to fight them."

"I can't. I haven't got anything to fight with."

The shots came continuously now. A picture fell off the wall.

"Sam, listen to me," she pleaded. "Give yourself up. I know it's ninety days for burglary, but I'll be waiting for you when you come out."

A window shattered.

"You'll wait for me, Violet?"

"I swear it."

A curtain caught fire.

"But ninety days! Three whole months!"

"We'll make a new life together."

Outside, Inspector Robinson suddenly groaned and clutched his shoulder.

"All right," Bauer said, "I'll quit. But look at them, turning it into a damned Spectacular—'Gang Busters' and 'The Untouchables' and 'The Roaring Twenties.' I'm damned if I let them get anything I've pinched. Wait a minute. . . ."

"What are you going to do?"

Outside, the Bunco Squad began coughing, as if from tear gas.

"Blow it all up," Bauer said, rooting around in a sugar canister.

"Blow it up? How?"

"I've got some dynamite I lifted from Groucho, Chico, Harpo and Marx when I was after their pickax collection. Didn't get a pickax, but I got this." He displayed a small red stick with a clockwork top. On the side of the stick was stenciled: TNT.

Outside, Ed (Begley) clutched his heart, smiled bravely and collapsed.

"I don't know how much time the fuse will give us," Bauer said. "So when I start it, go like hell. All set?"

"Y-yes," she quavered.

He snapped the fuse, which began an ominous ticking, and tossed the TNT onto the sage-green sofabed.

"Run!"

They charged out through the front door into the blinding light with their hands up.

The TNT stood for thermonuclear toluene.

"Dr. Culpepper," Mr. Pepys said, "this is Mr. Christopher Wren. That is Mr. Robert Hooke. Pray, be seated, sir. We have begged you to wait upon the Royal Society and advantage us with your advice as the foremost physician-astrologer in London. However, we must pledge you to secrecy."

Dr. Culpepper nodded gravely and stole a glance at the mysterious basket resting on the table before the three gentlemen. It was covered with green felt.

"*Imprimis*," Mr. Hooke said, "the articles we shall show you were sent to the Royal Society from Oxford, where they were required of various artificers, the designs for same being supplied by the purchaser. We obtained these specimens from the said craftsmen by stealth. *Secundo*, the fabrication of the objects was commissioned in secret by certain persons who have attained great power and wealth at the colleges through sundry soothsayings, predictions, auguries and premonstrations. Mr. Wren?"

Mr. Wren delicately lifted the felt cloth as though he feared infection. Displayed in the basket were: a neat pile of soft paper napkins; twelve wooden splinters, their heads curiously dipped in sulphur; a pair of tortoise shell spectacles with lenses of a dark, smoky color; an extraordinary pin, doubled upon itself so that the point locked in a cap; and two large fluffy flannel cloths, one embroidered HIS, and the other, HERS.

"Dr. Culpepper," Mr. Pepys asked in sepulchral tones, "are these the amulets of witchcraft?"



**WILL  
YOU  
WAIT?**

They keep writing those antiquated stories about bargains with the Devil. You know—sulfur, spells and pentagrams; tricks, snares and delusions. They don't know what they're talking about. Twentieth-century diabolism is slick and streamlined, like jukeboxes and automatic elevators and television and all the other modern efficiencies that leave you helpless and infuriated.

A year ago I got fired from an agency job for the third time in ten months. I had to face the fact that I was a failure. I was also dead broke. I decided to sell my soul to the Devil, but the problem was how to find him. I went down to the main reference room of the library and read everything on demonology and devillore. Like I said, it was all just talk. Anyway, if I could have afforded the expensive ingredients which they claimed could raise the Devil, I wouldn't have had to deal with him in the first place.

I was stumped, so I did the obvious thing; I called Celebrity Service. A delicate young man answered.

I asked, "Can you tell me where the Devil is?"

"Are you a subscriber to Celebrity Service?"

"No."

"Then I can give you no information."

"I can afford to pay a small fee for one item."

"You wish limited service?"

"Yes."

"Who is the celebrity, please?"

"The Devil."

"Who?"

"The Devil—Satan, Lucifer, Scratch, Old Nick—the Devil."

"One moment, please." In five minutes he was back, extremely annoyed. "Veddy soddy. The Devil is no longer a celebrity."

He hung up. I did the sensible thing and looked through the telephone directory. On a page decorated with ads for Sardi's Restaurant I found Satan, Shaitan, Carnage & Bael, 477 Madison Avenue, Judson 3-1900. I called them. A bright young woman answered.

"SSC&B. Good morning."

"May I speak to Mr. Satan, please?"

"The lines are busy. Will you wait?"

I waited and lost my dime. I wrangled with the operator and lost another dime but got the promise of a refund in postage stamps. I called Satan, Shaitan, Carnage & Bael again.

"SSC&B. Good morning."

"May I speak to Mr. Satan? And please don't leave me hanging on the phone. I'm calling from a—"

The switchboard cut me off and buzzed. I waited. The coin box gave a warning click. At last a line opened.

"Miss Hogan's office."

"May I speak to Mr. Satan?"

"Who's calling?"

"He doesn't know me. It's a personal matter."

"I'm sorry. Mr. Satan is no longer with our organization."

"Can you tell me where I can find him?"

There was muffled discussion in broad Brooklyn and then Miss Hogan spoke in crisp Secretary: "Mr. Satan is now with Beelzebub, Belial, Devil & Orgy."

I looked them up in the phone directory. 383 Madison Avenue, Murray Hill 2-1900. I dialed. The phone rang once and then choked. A metallic voice spoke in sing-song: "The number you are dialing is not a working number. Kindly consult your directory for the correct number. This is a recorded message." I consulted my di-

rectory. It said Murray Hill 2-1900. I dialed again and got the same recorded message.

I finally broke through to a live operator, who was persuaded to give me the new number of Beelzebub, Belial, Devil & Orgy. I called them. A bright young woman answered.

"BBDO. Good morning."

"May I speak to Mr. Satan, please?"

"Who?"

"Mr. Satan."

"I'm sorry. There is no such person with our organization."

"Then give me Beelzebub or the Devil."

"One moment, please."

I waited. Every half minute she opened my wire long enough to gasp, "Still ringing the Dev—" and then cut off before I had a chance to answer. At last a bright young woman spoke. "Mr. Devil's office."

"May I speak to him?"

"Who's calling?"

I gave her my name.

"He's on another line. Will you wait?"

I waited. I was fortified with a dwindling reserve of nickels and dimes. After twenty minutes, the bright young woman spoke again: "He's just gone into an emergency meeting. Can he call you back?"

"No. I'll try again."

Nine days later I finally got him.

"Yes, sir? What can I do for you?"

I took a breath. "I want to sell you my soul."

"Have you got anything on paper?"

"What do you mean, anything on paper?"

"The Property, my boy. The Sell. You can't expect BBDO to buy a pig in a poke. We may drink out of Dixie cups up here, but the sauce has got to be a hundred proof. Bring in your Presentation. My girl'll set up an appointment."

I prepared a Presentation of my soul with plenty of Sell. Then I called his girl.

"I'm sorry, he's on the Coast. Call back in two weeks."

Five weeks later she gave me an appointment. I went up and sat in the photomontage reception room of BBDO for two hours, balancing my Sell on my knees. Finally I was ushered into a corner office decorated with Texas brands in glowing neon. The Devil was lounging on his contour chair, dictating to an Iron Maiden. He was a tall man with the phony voice of a sales manager; the kind that talks loud in elevators. He gave me a Sincere handshake and immediately looked through my Presentation.

"Not bad," he said. "Not bad at all. I think we can do business. Now, what did you have in mind? The usual?"

"Money, success, happiness."

He nodded. "The usual. Now, we're square-shooters in this shop. BBDO doesn't dry-gulch. We'll guarantee money, success and happiness."

"For how long?"

"Normal life span. No tricks, my boy. We take our estimates from the actuary tables. Offhand I'd say you're good for another forty, forty-five years. We can pinpoint that in the contract later."

"No tricks?"

He gestured impatiently. "That's all bad public relations, what you're thinking. I promise you, no tricks."

"Guaranteed?"

"Not only do we guarantee service; we *insist* on giving service. BBDO doesn't want any beefs going up to the Fair Practice Committee. You'll have to call on us for service at least twice a year or the contract will be terminated."

"What kind of service?"

He shrugged. "Any kind. Shine your shoes; empty ashtrays; bring you dancing girls. That can be pinpointed later. We just insist that you use us at least twice a year. We've got to give you a *quid* for your *quo*. *Quid pro quo*. Check?"

"But no tricks?"

"No tricks. I'll have our legal department draw up the contract. Who's representing you?"

"You mean an agent? I haven't got one."

He was startled. "Haven't got an agent? My boy,

you're living dangerously. Why, we could skin you alive. Get yourself an agent and tell him to call me."

"Yes, sir. M-may I . . . Could I ask a question?"

"Shoot. Everything is open and aboveboard at BBDO."

"What will it be like for me—wh-when the contract terminates?"

"You really want to know?"

"Yes."

"I don't advise it."

"I want to know."

He showed me. It was like a hideous session with a psychoanalyst, in perpetuity—an eternal, agonizing self-indictment. It was hell. I was shaken.

"I'd rather have inhuman fiends torturing me," I said.

He laughed. "They can't compare to man's inhumanity to himself. Well . . . changed your mind, or is it a deal?"

"It's a deal."

We shook hands and he ushered me out. "Don't forget," he warned. "Protect yourself. Get an agent. Get the best."

I signed with Sibyl & Sphinx. That was on March third. I called S&S on March fifteenth. Mrs. Sphinx said, "Oh, yes, there's been a hitch. Miss Sibyl was negotiating with BBDO for you, but she had to fly to Sheol. I've taken over for her."

I called April first. Miss Sibyl said, "Oh, yes, there's been a slight delay. Mrs. Sphinx had to go to Salem for a tryout. A witch-burning. She'll be back next week."

I called April fifteenth. Miss Sibyl's bright young secretary told me that there was some delay getting the contracts typed. It seemed that BBDO was reorganizing its legal department. On May first Sibyl & Sphinx told me that the contracts had arrived and that *their* legal department was looking them over.

I had to take a menial job in June to keep body and soul together. I worked in the stencil department of a network. At least once a week a script would come in about a bargain with the Devil that was signed, sealed and delivered before the opening commercial. I used to laugh at them. After four months of negotiation I was still threadbare.

I saw the Devil once, bustling down Park Avenue. He was running for Congress and was very busy being jolly and hearty with the electorate. He addressed every cop and doorman by his first name. When I spoke to him he got a little frightened, thinking I was a Communist or worse. He didn't remember me at all.

In July, all negotiations stopped; everybody was away on vacation. In August everybody was overseas for some Black Mass Festival. In September Sibyl & Sphinx called me to their office to sign the contract. It was thirty-seven pages long, and fluttered with pasted-in corrections and additions. There were half a dozen tiny boxes stamped on the margin of every page.

"If you only knew the work that went into this contract," Sibyl & Sphinx told me with satisfaction.

"It's kind of long, isn't it?"

"It's the short contracts that make all the trouble. Initial every box, and sign on the last page. All six copies."

I initialed and signed. When I was finished, I didn't feel any different. I'd expected to start tingling with money, success and happiness.

"Is it a deal now?" I asked.

"Not until *he's* signed it."

"I can't hold out much longer."

"We'll send it over by messenger."

I waited a week and then called.

"You forgot to initial one of the boxes," they told me.

I went to the office and initialed. After another week I called.

"*He* forgot to initial one of the boxes," they told me that time.

On October first I received a special-delivery parcel. I also received a registered letter. The parcel contained the signed, sealed and delivered contract between me and the Devil. I could at last be rich, successful and happy. The registered letter was from BBDO and informed me that in view of my failure to comply with Clause 27-A of the contract, it was considered terminated, and I was due for collection at their convenience. I rushed down to Sibyl & Sphinx.

"What's Clause 27-A?" they asked.

We looked it up. It was the clause that required me to use the services of the Devil at least once every six months.

"What's the date of the contract?" Sibyl & Sphinx asked.

We looked it up. The contract was dated March first, the day I'd had my first talk with the Devil in his office.

"March, April, May . . ." Miss Sibyl counted on her fingers. "That's right. Seven months have elapsed. Are you sure you didn't ask for *any* service?"

"How could I? I didn't have a contract."

"We'll see about this," Mrs. Sphinx said grimly. She called BBDO and had a spirited argument with the Devil and his legal department. Then she hung up. "He says you shook hands on the deal March first," she reported. "He was prepared in good faith to go ahead with his side of the bargain."

"How could I know? I didn't have a contract."

"Didn't you ask for anything?"

"No. I was waiting for the contract."

Sibyl & Sphinx called in their legal department and presented the case.

"You'll have to arbitrate," the legal department said, and explained that agents are forbidden to act as their client's attorney.

I hired the legal firm of Wizard, Warlock, Voodoo, Dowser & Hag (99 Wall Street, Exchange 3-1900) to represent me before the Arbitration Board (479 Madison Avenue, Lexington 5-1900). They asked for a two-hundred-dollar retainer plus 20 percent of the contract's benefits. I'd managed to save thirty-four dollars during the four months I was working in the stencil department. They waived the retainer and went ahead with the Arbitration preliminaries.

On November fifteenth the network demoted me to the mail room, and I seriously contemplated suicide. Only the fact that my soul was in jeopardy in an arbitration stopped me.

The case came up December twelfth. It was tried before a panel of three impartial Arbitrators and took all

day. I was told they'd mail me their decision. I waited a week and called Wizard, Warlock, Voodoo, Dowser & Hag.

"They've recessed for the Christmas holidays," they told me.

I called January second.

"One of them's out of town."

I called January tenth.

"He's back, but the other two are out of town."

"When will I get a decision?"

"It could take months."

"How do you think my chances look?"

"Well, we've never lost an arbitration."

"That sounds pretty good."

"But there can always be a first time."

That sounded pretty bad. I got scared and figured I'd better copper my bets. I did the sensible thing and hunted through the telephone directory until I found Seraphim, Cherubim and Angel, 666 Fifth Avenue, Templeton 4-1900. I called them. A bright young woman answered.

"Seraphim, Cherubim and Angel. Good morning."

"May I speak to Mr. Angel, please?"

"He's on another line. Will you wait?"

I'm still waiting.



## THEY DON'T MAKE LIFE LIKE THEY USED TO

The girl driving the jeep was very fair and very Nordic. Her blonde hair was pulled back in a pony tail, but it was so long that it was more a mare's tail. She wore sandals, a pair of soiled bluejeans, and nothing else. She was nicely tanned. As she turned the jeep off Fifth Avenue and drove bouncing up the steps of the library, her bosom danced enchantingly.

She parked in front of the library entrance, stepped out, and was about to enter when her attention was attracted by something across the street. She peered, hesitated, then glanced down at her jeans and made a face. She pulled off the pants and hurled them at the pigeons eternally cooing and courting on the library steps. As they clattered up in fright, she ran down to Fifth Avenue, crossed, and stopped before a shop window. There was a plum-colored wool dress on display. It had a high waist, a full skirt, and not too many moth holes. The price was \$79.90.

The girl rummaged through old cars skewed on the avenue until she found a loose fender. She smashed the plate-glass shop door, carefully stepped across the splinters, entered, and sorted through the dusty dress racks. She was a big girl and had trouble fitting herself. Finally she abandoned the plum-colored wool and compromised on a dark tartan, size 12, \$120 reduced to

\$99.90. She located a salesbook and pencil, blew the dust off, and carefully wrote: *I.O.U. \$99.90. Linda Nielsen.*

She returned to the library and went through the main doors which had taken her a week to batter in with a sledge hammer. She ran across the great hall, filthied with five years of droppings from the pigeons roosting there. As she ran, she clapped her arms over her head to shield her hair from stray shots. She climbed the stairs to the third floor and entered the Print Room. As always, she signed the register: *Date—June 20, 1981. Name—Linda Nielsen. Address—Central Park Model Boat Pond. Business or Firm—Last Man on Earth.*

She had had a long debate with herself about *Business or Firm* the first time she broke into the library. Strictly speaking, she was the last woman on earth, but she had felt that if she wrote that it would seem chauvinistic; and "Last Person on Earth" sounded silly, like calling a drink a beverage.

She pulled portfolios out of racks and leafed through them. She knew exactly what she wanted; something warm with blue accents to fit a twenty by thirty frame for her bedroom. In a priceless collection of Hiroshige prints she found a lovely landscape. She filled out a slip, placed it carefully on the librarian's desk, and left with the print.

Downstairs, she stopped off in the main circulation room, went to the back shelves, and selected two Italian grammars and an Italian dictionary. Then she backtracked through the main hall, went out to the jeep, and placed the books and print on the front seat alongside her companion, an exquisite Dresden China doll. She picked up a list that read:

Jap. print  
Italian  
20 x 30 pict. fr.  
Lobster bisque  
Brass polish  
Detergent  
Furn. polish  
Wet mop

She crossed off the first two items, replaced the list on the dashboard, got into the jeep, and bounced down the library steps. She drove up Fifth Avenue, threading her way through crumbling wreckage. As she was passing the ruins of St. Patrick's Cathedral at 50th Street, a man appeared from nowhere.

He stepped out of the rubble and, without looking left or right, started crossing the avenue just in front of her. She exclaimed, banged on the horn which remained mute, and braked so sharply that the jeep slewed and slammed into the remains of a No. 3 bus. The man let out a squawk, jumped ten feet, and then stood frozen, staring at her.

"You crazy jaywalker," she yelled. "Why don't you look where you're going? D'you think you own the whole city?"

He stared and stammered. He was a big man, with thick, grizzled hair, a red beard, and weathered skin. He was wearing army fatigues, heavy ski boots, and had a bursting knapsack and blanket roll on his back. He carried a battered shotgun, and his pockets were crammed with odds and ends. He looked like a prospector.

"My God," he whispered in a rusty voice. "Somebody at last. I knew it. I always knew I'd find someone." Then, as he noticed her long, fair hair, his face fell. "But a woman," he muttered. "Just my goddam lousy luck."

"What are you, some kind of nut?" she demanded. "Don't you know better than to cross against the lights?"

He looked around in bewilderment. "What lights?"

"So all right, there aren't any lights, but couldn't you look where you were going?"

"I'm sorry, lady. To tell the truth, I wasn't expecting any traffic."

"Just plain common sense," she grumbled, backing the jeep off the bus.

"Hey lady, wait a minute."

"Yes?"

"Listen, you know anything about TV? Electronics, how they say . . ."

"Are you trying to be funny?"

"No, this is straight. Honest."

She snorted and tried to continue driving up Fifth Avenue, but he wouldn't get out of the way.

"Please, lady," he persisted. "I got a reason for asking. Do you know?"

"No."

"Damn! I never get a break. Lady, excuse me, no offense, but you got any guys in this town?"

"There's nobody but me. I'm the last man on earth."

"That's funny. I always thought I was."

"So all right, I'm the last woman on earth."

He shook his head. "There's got to be other people; there just has to. Stands to reason. South, maybe you think? I'm down from New Haven, and I figured if I headed where the climate was like warmer, there'd be some guys I could ask something."

"Ask what?"

"Aw, a woman wouldn't understand. No offense."

"Well, if you want to head south you're going the wrong way."

"That's south, ain't it?" he asked, pointing down Fifth Avenue.

"Yes, but you'll just come to a dead end. Manhattan's an island. What you have to do is go uptown and cross the George Washington bridge to Jersey."

"Uptown? Which way is that?"

"Go straight up Fifth to Cathedral Parkway, then over to the West Side and up Riverside. You can't miss it."

He looked at her helplessly.

"Stranger in town?"

He nodded.

"Oh, all right," she said. "Hop in. I'll give you a lift."

She transferred the books and the china doll to the back seat, and he squeezed in alongside her. As she started the jeep she looked down at his worn ski boots.

"Hiking?"

"Yeah."

"Why don't you drive? You can get a car working, and there's plenty of gas and oil."

"I don't know how to drive," he said despondently. "It's the story of my life."

He heaved a sigh, and that made his knapsack jolt mas-

sively against her shoulder. She examined him out of the corner of her eye. He had a powerful chest, a long, thick back, and strong legs. His hands were big and hard, and his neck was corded with muscles. She thought for a moment, then nodded to herself and stopped the jeep.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "Won't it go?"

"What's your name?"

"Mayo. Jim Mayo."

"I'm Linda Nielsen."

"Yeah. Nice meeting you. Why don't it go?"

"Jim, I've got a proposition for you."

"Oh?" He looked at her doubtfully. "I'll be glad to listen, lady—I mean Linda, but I ought to tell you, I got something on my mind that's going to keep me pretty busy for a long t . . ." His voice trailed off as he turned away from her intense gaze.

"Jim, if you'll do something for me, I'll do something for you."

"Like what, for instance?"

"Well, I get terribly lonesome, nights. It isn't so bad during the day—there's always a lot of chores to keep you busy—but at night it's just awful."

"Yeah, I know," he muttered.

"I've got to do something about it."

"But how do I come into this?" he asked nervously.

"Why don't you stay in New York for a while? If you do, I'll teach you how to drive, and find you a car so you don't have to hike south."

"Say, that's an idea. Is it hard, driving?"

"I could teach you in a couple of days."

"I don't learn things so quick."

"All right, a couple of weeks, but think of how much time you'll save in the long run."

"Gee," he said, "that sounds great." Then he turned away again. "But what do I have to do for you?"

Her face lit up with excitement. "Jim, I want you to help me move a piano."

"A piano? What piano?"

"A rosewood grand from Steinway's on Fifty-sev-

enth Street. I'm dying to have it in my place. The living room is just crying for it."

"Oh, you mean you're furnishing, huh?"

"Yes, but I want to play after dinner, too. You can't listen to records all the time. I've got it all planned; books on how to play, and books on how to tune a piano. . . . I've been able to figure everything except how to move the piano in."

"Yeah, but . . . but there's apartments all over this town with pianos in them," he objected. "There must be hundreds, at least. Stands to reason. Why don't you live in one of them?"

"Never! I love my place. I've spent five years decorating it, and it's beautiful. Besides, there's the problem of water."

He nodded. "Water's always a headache. How do you handle it?"

"I'm living in the house in Central Park where they used to keep the model yachts. It faces the boat pond. It's a darling place, and I've got it all fixed up. We could get the piano in together, Jim. It wouldn't be hard."

"Well, I don't know, Lena . . ."

"Linda."

"Excuse me. Linda. I——"

"You look strong enough. What'd you do, before?"

"I used to be a pro rassler."

"There! I knew you were strong."

"Oh, I'm not a rassler anymore. I became a bartender and went into the restaurant business. I opened 'The Body Slam' up in New Haven. Maybe you heard of it?"

"I'm sorry."

"It was sort of famous with the sports crowd. What'd you do before?"

"I was a researcher for BBDO."

"What's that?"

"An advertising agency," she explained impatiently. "We can talk about that later, if you'll stick around. And I'll teach you how to drive, and we can move in the piano, and there're a few other things that I—but that can wait. Afterward you can drive south."

"Gee, Linda, I don't know . . ."

She took Mayo's hands. "Come on, Jim, be a sport. You can stay with me. I'm a wonderful cook, and I've got a lovely guest room . . ."

"What for? I mean, thinking you was the last man on earth."

"That's a silly question. A proper house has to have a guest room. You'll love my place. I turned the lawns into a farm and gardens, and you can swim in the pond, and we'll get you a new Jag . . . I know where there's a beauty up on blocks."

"I think I'd rather have a Caddy."

"You can have anything you like. So what do you say, Jim? Is it a deal?"

"All right, Linda," he muttered reluctantly. "You've a deal."

It was indeed a lovely house with its pagoda roof of copper weathered to verdigris green, fieldstone walls, and deep recessed windows. The oval pond before it glittered blue in the soft June sunlight, and Mallard ducks paddled and quacked busily. The sloping lawns that formed a bowl around the pond were terraced and cultivated. The house faced west, and Central Park stretched out beyond like an unkempt estate.

Mayo looked at the pond wistfully. "It ought to have boats."

"The house was full of them when I moved in," Linda said.

"I always wanted a model boat when I was a kid. Once I even—" Mayo broke off. A penetrating pounding sounded somewhere; an irregular sequence of heavy knocks that sounded like the dint of stones under water. It stopped as suddenly as it had begun. "What was that?" Mayo asked.

Linda shrugged. "I don't know for sure. I think it's the city falling apart. You'll see buildings coming down every now and then. You get used to it." Her enthusiasm rekindled. "Now come inside. I want to show you everything."

She was bursting with pride and overflowing with decorating details that bewildered Mayo, but he was im-

pressed by her Victorian living room, *Empire* bedroom, and Country Kitchen with a working kerosene cooking stove. The Colonial guest room, with four-poster bed, hooked rug, and Tole lamps, worried him.

"This is kind of girlie-girlie, huh?"

"Naturally. I'm a girl."

"Yeah. Sure. I mean . . ." Mayo looked around doubtfully. "Well, a guy is used to stuff that ain't so delicate. No offense."

"Don't worry, that bed's strong enough. Now remember, Jim, no feet on the spread, and remove it at night. If your shoes are dirty, take them off before you come in. I got that rug from the museum and I don't want it messed up. Have you got a change of clothes?"

"Only what I got on."

"We'll have to get you new things tomorrow. What you're wearing is so filthy it's not worth laundering."

"Listen," he said desperately, "I think maybe I better camp out in the park."

"Why on earth?"

"Well, I'm like more used to it than houses. But you don't have to worry, Linda. I'll be around in case you need me."

"Why should I need you?"

"All you have to do is holler."

"Nonsense," Linda said firmly. "You're my guest and you're staying here. Now get cleaned up; I'm going to start dinner. Oh damn! I forgot to pick up the lobster bisque."

She gave him a dinner cleverly contrived from canned goods and served on exquisite Fornisetti china with Danish silver flatware. It was a typical girl's meal, and Mayo was still hungry when it was finished, but too polite to mention it. He was too tired to fabricate an excuse to go out and forage for something substantial. He lurched off to bed, remembering to remove his shoes but forgetting all about the spread.

He was awakened next morning by a loud honking and clattering of wings. He rolled out of bed and went to the windows just in time to see the Mallards dispossessed from the pond by what appeared to be a red bal-



loon. When he got his eyes working properly, he saw that it was a bathing cap. He wandered out to the pond, stretching and groaning. Linda yelled cheerfully and swam toward him. She heaved herself up out of the pond onto the curbing. The bathing cap was all that she wore. Mayo backed away from the splash and spatter.

"Good morning," Linda said. "Sleep well?"

"Good morning," Mayo said. "I don't know. The bed put kinks in my back. Gee, that water must be cold. You're all gooseflesh."

"No, it's marvelous." She pulled off the cap and shook her hair down. "Where's that towel? Oh, here. Go on in, Jim. You'll feel wonderful."

"I don't like it when it's cold."

"Don't be a sissy."

A crack of thunder split the quiet morning. Mayo looked up at the clear sky in astonishment. "What the hell was that?" he exclaimed.

"Watch," Linda ordered.

"It sounded like a sonic boom."

"There!" she cried, pointing west. "See?"

One of the West Side skyscrapers crumbled majestically, sinking into itself like a collapsible cup and raining masses of cornice and brick. The flayed girders twisted and contorted. Moments later they could hear the roar of the collapse.

"Man, that's a sight," Mayo muttered in awe.

"The decline and fall of the Empire City. You get used to it. Now take a dip, Jim. I'll get you a towel."

She ran into the house. He dropped his shorts and took off his socks, but was still standing on the curb, unhappily dipping his toe into the water when she returned with a huge bath towel.

"It's awful cold, Linda," he complained.

"Didn't you take cold showers when you were a wrestler?"

"Not me. Boiling hot."

"Jim, if you just stand there, you'll never go in. Look at you, you're starting to shiver. Is that a tattoo around your waist?"

"What? Oh, yeah. It's a python, in five colors. It goes

all the way around. See?" He revolved proudly. "Got it when I was with the Army in Saigon back in '64. It's a Oriental-type python. Elegant, huh?"

"Did it hurt?"

"To tell the truth, no. Some guys try to make out like it's Chinese torture to get tattooed, but they're just showin' off. It itches more than anything else."

"You were a soldier in '64?"

"That's right."

"How old were you?"

"Twenty."

"You're thirty-seven now?"

"Thirty-six going on thirty-seven."

"Then you're prematurely gray?"

"I guess so."

She contemplated him thoughtfully. "I tell you what, if you do go in, don't get your head wet."

She ran back into the house. Mayo, ashamed of his vacillation, forced himself to jump feet first into the pond. He was standing, chest deep, splashing his face and shoulders with water when Linda returned. She carried a stool, a pair of scissors, and a comb.

"Doesn't it feel wonderful?" she called.

"No."

She laughed. "Well, come out. I'm going to give you a haircut."

He climbed out of the pond, dried himself, and obediently sat on the stool while she cut his hair. "The beard, too," Linda insisted. "I want to see what you really look like." She trimmed him close enough for shaving, inspected him, and nodded with satisfaction. "Very handsome."

"Aw, go on," he blushed.

"There's a bucket of hot water on the stove. Go and shave. Don't bother to dress. We're going to get you new clothes after breakfast, and then . . . the Piano."

"I couldn't walk around the streets naked," he said, shocked.

"Don't be silly. Who's to see? Now hurry."

They drove down to Abercrombie & Fitch on Madison and 45th Street, Mayo wrapped modestly in his towel.

Linda told him she'd been a customer for years, and showed him the pile of sales slips she had accumulated. Mayo examined them curiously while she took his measurements and went off in search of clothes. He was almost indignant when she returned with her arms laden.

"Jim, I've got some lovely elk moccasins, and a Safari suit, and wool socks, and Shipboard shirts, and——"

"Listen," he interrupted, "do you know what your whole tab comes to? Nearly fourteen hundred dollars."

"Really? Put on the shorts first. They're drip-dry."

"You must have been out of your mind, Linda. What'd you want all that junk for?"

"Are the socks big enough? What junk? I needed everything."

"Yeah? Like . . ." He shuffled the signed sales slips.

"Like one Underwater Viewer with Plexiglass Lens, nine ninety-five? What for?"

"So I could see to clean the bottom of the pond."

"What about this Stainless Steel Service for Four, thirty-nine fifty?"

"For when I'm lazy and don't feel like heating water. You can wash stainless steel in cold water." She admired him. "Oh, Jim, come look in the mirror. You're real romantic, like the big-game hunter in that Hemingway story."

He shook his head. "I don't see how you're ever going to get out of hock. You got to watch your spending, Linda. Maybe we better forget about that piano, huh?"

"Never," Linda said adamantly. "I don't care how much it costs. A piano is a lifetime investment, and it's worth it."

She was frantic with excitement as they drove uptown to the Steinway showroom, and helpful and underfoot by turns. After a long afternoon of muscle-cracking and critical engineering involving makeshift gantries and an agonizing dollie-haul up Fifth Avenue, they had the piano in place in Linda's living room. Mayo gave it one last shake to make sure it was firmly on its legs and then sank down, exhausted. "Je-zuz!" he groaned. "Hiking south would've been easier."

"Jim!" Linda ran to him and threw herself on him

with a fervent hug. "Jim, you're an angel. Are you all right?"

"I'm okay." He grunted. "Get off me, Linda. I can't breathe."

"I just can't thank you enough. I've been dreaming about this for ages. I don't know what I can do to repay you. Anything you want, just name it."

"Aw," he said, "you already cut my hair."

"I'm serious."

"Ain't you teaching me how to drive?"

"Of course. As quickly as possible. That's the least I can do." Linda backed to a chair and sat down, her eyes fixed on the piano.

"Don't make such a fuss over nothing," he said, climbing to his feet. He sat down before the keyboard, shot an embarrassed grin at her over his shoulder, then reached out and began stumbling through *The Minuet in G*.

Linda gasped and sat bolt upright. "You play," she whispered.

"Naw. I took piano when I was a kid."

"Can you read music?"

"I used to."

"Could you teach me?"

"I guess so; it's kind of hard. Hey, here's another piece I had to take." He began mutilating *The Rustle of Spring*. What with the piano out of tune and his mistakes, it was ghastly.

"Beautiful," Linda breathed. "Just beautiful!" She stared at his back while an expression of decision and determination stole across her face. She arose, slowly crossed to Mayo, and put her hands on his shoulders.

He glanced up. "Something?" he asked.

"Nothing," she answered. "You practice the piano. I'll get dinner."

But she was so preoccupied for the rest of the evening that she made Mayo nervous. He stole off to bed early.

It wasn't until three o'clock the following afternoon that they finally got a car working, and it wasn't a

Caddy, but a Chevy—a hardtop because Mayo didn't like the idea of being exposed to the weather in a convertible. They drove out of the Tenth Avenue garage and back to the East Side, where Linda felt more at home. She confessed that the boundaries of her world were from Fifth Avenue to Third, and from 42nd Street to 86th. She was uncomfortable outside this pale.

She turned the wheel over to Mayo and let him creep up and down Fifth and Madison, practicing starts and stops. He sideswiped five wrecks, stalled eleven times, and reversed through a storefront which, fortunately, was devoid of glass. He was trembling with nervousness.

"It's real hard," he complained.

"It's just a question of practice," she reassured him. "Don't worry. I promise you'll be an expert if it takes us a month."

"A whole month!"

"You said you were a slow learner, didn't you? Don't blame me. Stop here a minute."

He jolted the Chevy to a halt. Linda got out.

"Wait for me."

"What's up?"

"A surprise."

She ran into a shop and was gone for half an hour. When she reappeared she was wearing a pencil-thin black sheath, pearls, and high heeled opera pumps. She had twisted her hair into a coronet. Mayo regarded her with amazement as she got into the car.

"What's all this?" he asked.

"Part of the surprise. Turn east on Fifty-second Street."

He labored, started the car, and drove east. "Why'd you get all dressed up in an evening gown?"

"It's a cocktail dress."

"What for?"

"So I'll be dressed for where we're going. Watch out, Jim!" Linda wrenched the wheel and sheered off the stern of a shattered sanitation truck. "I'm taking you to a famous restaurant."

"To eat?"

"No, silly, for drinks. You're my visiting fireman, and

I have to entertain you. That's it on the left. See if you can park somewhere."

He parked abominably. As they got out of the car, Mayo stopped and began to sniff curiously.

"Smell that?" he asked.

"Smell what?"

"That sort of sweet smell."

"It's my perfume."

"No, it's something in the air, kind of sweet and chokey. I know that smell from somewhere, but I can't remember."

"Never mind. Come inside." She led him into the restaurant. "You ought to be wearing a tie," she whispered, "but maybe we can get away with it."

Mayo was not impressed by the restaurant decor, but was fascinated by the portraits of celebrities hung in the bar. He spent rapt minutes burning his fingers with matches, gazing at Mel Allen, Red Barber, Casey Stengel, Frank Gifford, and Rocky Marciano. When Linda finally came back from the kitchen with a lighted candle, he turned to her eagerly.

"You ever see any of them TV stars in here?" he asked.

"I suppose so. How about a drink?"

"Sure. Sure. But I want to talk more about them TV stars."

He escorted her to a bar stool, blew the dust off, and helped her up most gallantly. Then he vaulted over the bar, whipped out his handkerchief, and polished the mahogany professionally. "This is my specialty," he grinned. He assumed the impersonally friendly attitude of the bartender. "Evening, ma'am. Nice night. What's your pleasure?"

"God, I had a rough day in the shop! Dry martini on the rocks. Better make it a double."

"Certainly, ma'am. Twist or olive?"

"Onion."

"Double-dry Gibson on the rocks. Right." Mayo searched behind the bar and finally produced whiskey, gin, and several bottles of soda, as yet only partially evaporated through their sealed caps. "Afraid we're fresh

out of martinis, ma'am. What's your second pleasure?"

"Oh, I like that. Scotch, please."

"This soda'll be flat," he warned, "and there's no ice."

"Never mind."

He rinsed a glass with soda and poured her a drink.

"Thank you. Have one on me, bartender. What's your name?"

"They call me Jim, ma'am. No thanks. Never drink on duty."

"Then come off duty and join me."

"Never drink off duty, ma'am."

"You can call me Linda."

"Thank you, Miss Linda."

"Are you serious about never drinking, Jim?"

"Yeah."

"Well, Happy Days."

"And Long Nights."

"I like that, too. Is it your own?"

"Gee, I don't know. It's sort of the usual bartender's routine, a specialty with guys. You know? Suggestive. No offense."

"None taken."

"Bees!" Mayo burst out.

Linda was startled. "Bees what?"

"That smell. Like inside beehives."

"Oh? I wouldn't know," she said indifferently. "I'll have another, please."

"Coming right up. Now listen, about them TV celebrities, you actually saw them here? In person?"

"Why of course. Happy Days, Jim."

"May they all be Saturdays."

Linda pondered. "Why Saturdays?"

"Day off."

"Oh."

"Which TV stars did you see?"

"You name 'em, I saw 'em." She laughed. "You remind me of the kid next door. I always had to tell him the celebrities I'd seen. One day I told him I saw Jean Arthur in here, and he said, 'With his horse?' "

Mayo couldn't see the point, but was wounded nevertheless. Just as Linda was about to soothe his feelings,

the bar began a gentle quivering, and at the same time a faint subterranean rumbling commenced. It came from a distance, seemed to approach slowly, and then faded away. The vibration stopped. Mayo stared at Linda.

"Je-zus! You think maybe this building's going to go?"

She shook her head. "No. When they go, it's always with that boom. You know what that sounded like? The Lexington Avenue subway."

"The subway?"

"Uh-huh. The local train."

"That's crazy. How could the subway be running?"

"I didn't say it *was*. I said it *sounded* like. I'll have another, please."

"We need more soda." Mayo explored and reappeared with bottles and a large menu. He was pale. "You better take it easy, Linda," he said. "You know what they're charging per drink? A dollar seventy-five. Look."

"To hell with expense. Let's live a little. Make it a double, bartender. You know something, Jim? If you stayed in town, I could show you where all your heroes lived. Thank you. Happy Days. I could take you up to BBDO and show you their tapes and films. How about that? Stars like . . . like Red . . . Who?"

"Barber."

"Red Barber, and Rocky Gifford, and Rocky Casey, and Rocky, the Flying Squirrel."

"You're putting me on," Mayo said, offended again.

"Me, sir? Putting you on?" Linda said with dignity. "Why would I do a thing like that? Just trying to be pleasant. Just trying to give you a good time. My mother told me, Linda, she told me, just remember this about a man, wear what he wants and say what he likes, is what she told me. You want this dress?" she demanded.

"I like it, if that's what you mean."

"Know what I paid for it? Ninety-nine fifty."

"What? A hundred dollars for a skinny black thing like that?"

"It is not a skinny black thing like that. It is a basic black cocktail frock. And I paid twenty dollars for the pearls. Simulated," she explained. "And sixty for the opera pumps. And forty for the perfume. Two hundred



and twenty dollars to give you a good time. You having a good time?"

"Sure."

"Want to smell me?"

"I already have."

"Bartender, give me another."

"Afraid I can't serve you, ma'am."

"Why not?"

"You've had enough already."

"I have not had enough already," Linda said indignantly. "Where's your manners?" She grabbed the whiskey bottle. "Come on, let's have a few drinks and talk up a storm about TV stars. Happy Days. I could take you up to BBDO and show you their tapes and films. How about that?"

"You just asked me."

"You didn't answer. I could show you movies, too. You like movies? I hate 'em, but I can't knock 'em anymore. Movies saved my life when the big bang came."

"How was that?"

"This is a secret, understand? Just between you and me. If any other agency ever found out . . ." Linda looked around and then lowered her voice. "BBDO located this big cache of silent films. Lost films, see? Nobody knew the prints were around. Make a great TV series. So they sent me to this abandoned mine in Jersey to take inventory."

"In a mine?"

"That's right. Happy Days."

"Why were they in a mine?"

"Old prints. Nitrate. Catch fire. Also rot. Have to be stored like wine. That's why. So took two of my assistants with me to spend weekend down there, checking."

"You stayed in the mine a whole weekend?"

"Uh-huh. Three girls. Friday to Monday. That was the plan. Thought it would be a fun deal. Happy Days. So. . . . Where was I? Oh. So, took lights, blankets, linen, plenty of picnic, the whole schmeer, and went to work. I remember exact moment when blast came. Was looking for third reel of an UFA film, *Gekronter Blume-*

*norden an der Pegnitz.* Had reel one, two, four, five, six. No three. Bang! Happy Days."

"Jesus. Then what?"

"My girls panicked. Couldn't keep 'em down there. Never saw them again. But I knew. I knew. Stretched that picnic forever. Then starved even longer. Finally came up, and for what? For who? Whom?" She began to weep. "For nobody. Nobody left. Nothing." She took Mayo's hands. "Why won't you stay?"

"Stay? Where?"

"Here."

"I am staying."

"I mean for a long time. Why not? Haven't I got lovely home? And there's all New York for supplies. And farm for flowers and vegetables. We could keep cows and chickens. Go fishing. Drive cars. Go to museums. Art galleries. Entertain . . ."

"You're doing all that right now. You don't need me."

"But I do. I do."

"For what?"

"For piano lessons."

After a long pause he said, "You're drunk."

"Not wounded, sire, but dead."

She lay her head on the bar, beamed up at him roguishly, and then closed her eyes. An instant later, Mayo knew she had passed out. He compressed his lips. Then he climbed out of the bar, computed the tab, and left fifteen dollars under the whiskey bottle.

He took Linda's shoulder and shook her gently. She collapsed into his arms, and her hair came tumbling down. He blew out the candle, picked Linda up, and carried her to the Chevy. Then, with anguished concentration, he drove through the dark to the boat pond. It took him forty minutes.

He carried Linda into her bedroom and sat her down on the bed, which was decorated with an elaborate arrangement of dolls. Immediately she rolled over and curled up with a doll in her arms, crooning to it. Mayo lit a lamp and tried to prop her upright. She went over again, giggling.

"Linda," he said, "you got to get that dress off."

"Mf."

"You can't sleep in it. It cost a hundred dollars."

"Nine'nine-fif'y."

"Now come on, honey."

"Fm."

He rolled his eyes in exasperation and then undressed her, carefully hanging up the basic black cocktail frock, and standing the sixty-dollar pumps in a corner. He could not manage the clasp of the pearls (simulated), so he put her to bed still wearing them. Lying on the pale blue sheets, nude except for the necklace, she looked like a Nordic odalisque.

"Did you muss my dolls?" she mumbled.

"No. They're all around you."

"Tha's right. Never sleep without 'em." She reached out and petted them lovingly. "Happy Days. Long Nights."

"Women!" Mayo snorted. He extinguished the lamp and tramped out, slamming the door behind him.

Next morning Mayo was again awakened by the clatter of dispossessed ducks. The red balloon was sailing on the surface of the pond, bright in the warm June sunshine. Mayo wished it was a model boat instead of the kind of girl who got drunk in bars. He stalked out and jumped into the water as far from Linda as possible. He was sluicing his chest when something seized his ankle and nipped him. He let out a yell, and was confronted by Linda's beaming face bursting out of the water before him.

"Good morning," she laughed.

"Very funny," he muttered.

"You look mad this morning."

He grunted.

"And I don't blame you. I did an awful thing last night. I didn't give you any dinner, and I want to apologize."

"I wasn't thinking about dinner," he said with baleful dignity.

"No? Then what on earth are you mad about?"

"I can't stand women who get drunk."

"Who was drunk?"

"You."

"I was not," she said indignantly.

"No? Who had to be undressed and put to bed like a kid?"

"Who was too dumb to take off my pearls?" she countered. "They broke and I slept on pebbles all night. I'm covered with black and blue marks. Look. Here and here and——"

"Linda," he interrupted sternly, "I'm just a plain guy from New Haven. I got no use for spoiled girls who run up charge accounts and all the time decorate themselves and hang around society-type saloons getting loaded."

"If you don't like my company, why do you stay?"

"I'm going," he said. He climbed out and began drying himself. "I'm starting south this morning."

"Enjoy your hike."

"I'm driving."

"What? A kiddie-kar?"

"The Chevy."

"Jim, you're not serious?" She climbed out of the pond, looking alarmed. "You really don't know how to drive yet."

"No? Didn't I drive you home falling-down drunk last night?"

"You'll get into awful trouble."

"Nothing I can't get out of. Anyway, I can't hang around here forever. You're a party girl; you just want to play. I got serious things on my mind. I got to go south and find guys who know about TV."

"Jim, you've got me wrong. I'm not like that at all. Why, look at the way I fixed up my house. Could I have done that if I'd been going to parties all the time?"

"You done a nice job," he admitted.

"Please don't leave today. You're not ready yet."

"Aw, you just want me to hang around and teach you music."

"Who said that?"

"You did. Last night."

She frowned, pulled off her cap, then picked up her towel and began drying herself. At last she said, "Jim, I'll be honest with you. Sure, I want you to stay a while. I won't deny it. But I wouldn't want you around permanently. After all, what have we got in common?"

"You're so damn uptown," he growled.

"No, no, it's nothing like that. It's simply that you're a guy and I'm a girl, and we've got nothing to offer each other. We're different. We've got different tastes and interests. Fact?"

"Absolutely."

"But you're not ready to leave yet. So I tell you what; we'll spend the whole morning practicing driving, and then we'll have some fun. What would you like to do? Go window-shopping? Buy more clothes? Visit the Modern Museum? Have a picnic?"

His face brightened. "Gee, you know something? I was never to a picnic in my whole life. Once I was bartender at a clambake, but that's not the same thing; not like when you're a kid."

She was delighted. "Then we'll have a real kid-type picnic."

And she brought her dolls. She carried them in her arms while Mayo toted the picnic basket to the Alice in Wonderland monument. The statue perplexed Mayo, who had never heard of Lewis Carroll. While Linda seated her pets and unpacked the picnic, she gave Mayo a summary of the story, and described how the bronze heads of Alice, the Mad Hatter, and the March Hare had been polished bright by the swarms of kids playing King of the Mountain.

"Funny, I never heard of that story," he said.

"I don't think you had much of a childhood, Jim."

"Why would you say a——" He stopped, cocked his head, and listened intently.

"What's the matter?" Linda asked.

"You hear that bluejay?"

"No."

"Listen. He's making a funny sound; like steel."

"Steel?"

"Yeah. Like . . . like swords in a duel."

"You're kidding."

"No. Honest."

"But birds sing; they don't make noises."

"Not always. Bluejays imitate noises a lot. Starlings, too. And parrots. Now why would he be imitating a sword fight? Where'd he hear it?"

"You're a real country boy, aren't you, Jim? Bees and bluejays and starlings and all that . . ."

"I guess so. I was going to ask; why would you say a thing like that, me not having any childhood?"

"Oh, things like not knowing Alice, and never going on a picnic, and always wanting a model yacht." Linda opened a dark bottle. "Like to try some wine?"

"You better go easy," he warned.

"Now stop it, Jim. I'm not a drunk."

"Did you or didn't you get smashed last night?"

She capitulated. "All right, I did; but only because it was my first drink in years."

He was pleased by her surrender. "Sure. Sure. That figures."

"So? Join me?"

"What the hell, why not?" He grinned. "Let's live a little. Say, this is one swingin' picnic, and I like the plates, too. Where'd you get them?"

"Abercrombie & Fitch," Linda said, deadpan. "Stainless Steel Service for Four, thirty-nine fifty. Skoal."

Mayo burst out laughing. "I sure goofed, didn't I, kicking up all that fuss? Here's looking at you."

"Here's looking right back."

They drank and continued eating in warm silence, smiling companionably at each other. Linda removed her Madras silk shirt in order to tan in the blazing afternoon sun, and Mayo politely hung it up on a branch. Suddenly Linda asked, "Why didn't you have a childhood, Jim?"

"Gee, I don't know." He thought it over. "I guess because my mother died when I was a kid. And something else, too; I had to work a lot."

"Why?"

"My father was a schoolteacher. You know how they get paid."

"Oh, so that's why you're anti-egghead."

"I am?"

"Of course. No offense."

"Maybe I am," he conceded. "It sure was a letdown for my old man, me playing fullback in high school and him wanting like an Einstein in the house."

"Was football fun?"

"Not like playing games. Football's a business. Hey, remember when we were kids how we used to choose up sides? *Ibbety, bibbety, zibbety, zab?*"

"We used to say, *Eenie, meenie, miney, mo.*"

"Remember: *April Fool, go to school, tell your teacher you're a fool?*"

"*I love coffee, I love tea, I love the boys, and the boys love me.*"

"I bet they did at that," Mayo said solemnly.

"Not me."

"Why not?"

"I was always too big."

He was astonished. "But you're not big," he assured her. "You're just the right size. Perfect. And really built. I noticed when we moved the piano in. You got muscle, for a girl. A specially in the legs, and that's where it counts."

She blushed. "Stop it, Jim."

"No. Honest."

"More wine?"

"Thanks. You have some, too."

"All right."

A crack of thunder split the sky with its sonic boom, and was followed by the roar of collapsing masonry.

"There goes another skyscraper," Linda said. "What were we talking about?"

"Games," Mayo said promptly. "Excuse me for talking with my mouth full."

"Oh yes. Jim did you play *Drop the Handkerchief* up in New Haven?" Linda sang. "*A tisket, a tasket, a green and yellow basket. I sent a letter to my love, and on the way I dropped it . . .*"

"Gee," he said, much impressed. "You sing real good."

"Oh, go on!"

"Yes you do. You got a swell voice. Now don't argue with me. Keep quiet a minute. I got to figure something out." He thought intently for a long time, finishing his wine and absently accepting another glass. Finally he delivered himself of a decision. "You got to learn music."

"You know I'm dying to, Jim."

"So I'm going to stay a while and teach you; as much

as I know. Now hold it! Hold it!" he added hastily, cutting off her excitement. "I'm not going to stay in your house. I want a place of my own."

"Of course, Jim. Anything you say."

"And I'm still headed south."

"I'll teach you to drive, Jim. I'll keep my word."

"And no strings, Linda."

"Of course not. What kind of strings?"

"You know. Like the last minute you all of a sudden got a Looey Cans couch you want me to move in."

"*Louis Quinzel*" Linda's jaw dropped. "Wherever did you learn that?"

"Not in the Army, that's for sure."

They laughed, clinked glasses, and finished their wine. Suddenly Mayo leaped up, pulled Linda's hair, and ran to the Wonderland monument. In an instant he had climbed to the top of Alice's head.

"I'm King of the Mountain," he shouted, looking around in imperial survey. "I'm King of the——" He cut himself off and stared down behind the statue.

"Jim, what's the matter?"

Without a word, Mayo climbed down and strode to a pile of debris half-hidden inside overgrown Forsythia bushes. He knelt and began turning over the wreckage with gentle hands. Linda ran to him.

"Jim, what's wrong?"

"These used to be model boats," he muttered.

"That's right. My God, is that all? I thought you were sick or something."

"How come they're here?"

"Why, I dumped them, of course."

"You?"

"Yes. I told you. I had to clear out the boathouse when I moved in. That was ages ago."

"You did this?"

"Yes. I——"

"You're a murderer," he growled. He stood up and glared at her. "You're a killer. You're like all women, you got no heart and soul. To do a thing like this!"

He turned and stalked toward the boat pond. Linda followed him, completely bewildered.



"Jim, I don't understand. Why are you so mad?"

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"But I had to have house room. You wouldn't expect me to live with a lot of model boats."

"Just forget everything I said. I'm going to pack and go south, I wouldn't stay with you if you was the last person on earth."

Linda gathered herself and suddenly darted ahead of Mayo. When he tramped into the boathouse, she was standing before the door of the guest room. She held up a heavy iron key.

"I found it," she panted. "Your door's locked."

"Gimmie that key, Linda."

"No."

He stepped toward her, but she faced him defiantly and stood her ground.

"Go ahead," she challenged. "Hit me."

He stopped. "Aw, I wouldn't pick on anybody that wasn't my own size."

They continued to face each other, at a complete impasse.

"I don't need my gear," Mayo muttered at last. "I can get more stuff somewheres."

"Oh, go ahead and pack," Linda answered. She tossed him the key and stood aside. Then Mayo discovered there was no lock in the bedroom door. He opened the door, looked inside, closed it, and looked at Linda. She kept her face straight but began to sputter. He grinned. Then they both burst out laughing.

"Gee," Mayo said, "you sure made a monkey out of me. I'd hate to play poker against you."

"You're a pretty good bluffer yourself, Jim. I was scared to death you were going to knock me down."

"You ought to know I wouldn't hurt nobody."

"I guess I do. Now, let's sit down and talk this over sensibly."

"Aw, forget it, Linda. I kind of lost my head over them boats, and I——"

"I don't mean the boats; I mean going south. Every time you get mad you start south again. Why?"

"I told you, to find guys who know about TV."

"Why?"

"You wouldn't understand."

"I can try. Why don't you explain what you're after—specifically? Maybe I can help you."

"You can't do nothing for me; you're a girl."

"We have our uses. At least I can listen. You can trust me, Jim. Aren't we chums? Tell me about it."

Well, when the blast come (Mayo said) I was up in the Berkshires with Gil Watkins. Gil was my buddy, a real nice guy and a real bright guy. He took two years from M.I.T. before he quit college. He was like chief engineer or something at WNHA, the TV station in New Haven. Gil had a million hobbies. One of them was spee—speel—I can't remember. It meant exploring caves.

So anyway we were up in this flume in the Berkshires, spending the weekend inside, exploring and trying to map everything and figure out where the underground river come from. We brought food and stuff along, and bed rolls. The compass we were using went crazy for like twenty minutes, and that should have give us a clue, but Gil talked about magnetic ores and stuff. Only when we come out Sunday night, I tell you it was pretty scarey. Gil knew right off what happened.

"By Christ, Jim," he said, "they up and done it like everybody always knew they would. They've blew and gassed and poisoned and radiated themselves straight to hell, and we're going gack to that goddam cave until it all blows over."

So me and Gil went back and rationed the food and stayed as long as we could. Finally we come out again and drove back to New Haven. It was dead like all the rest. Gil put together some radio stuff and tried to pick up broadcasts. Nothing. Then we packed some canned goods and drove all around; Bridgeport, Waterbury, Hartford, Springfield, Providence, New London . . . a big circle. Nobody. Nothing. So we come back to New Haven and settled down, and it was a pretty good life.

Daytime, we'd get in supplies and stuff, and tinker with the house to keep it working right. Nights, after

supper, Gil would go off to WNHA around seven o'clock and start the station. He was running it on the emergency generators. I'd go down to "The Body Slam," open it up, sweep it out, and then start the bar TV set. Gil fixed me a generator for it to run on.

It was a lot of fun watching the shows Gil was broadcasting. He'd start with the news and weather, which he always got wrong. All he had was some Farmer's Almanacs and a sort of antique barometer that looked like that clock you got there on the wall. I don't think it worked so good, or maybe Gil never took weather at M.I.T. Then he'd broadcast the evening show.

I had my shotgun in the bar in case of holdups. Anytime I saw something that bugged me, I just up with the gun and let loose at the set. Then I'd take it and throw it out the front door and put another one in its place. I must have had hundreds waiting in the back. I spent two days a week just collecting reserves.

Midnight, Gil would turn off WNHA, I'd lock up the restaurant, and we'd meet home for coffee. Gil would ask how many sets I shot, and laugh when I told him. He said I was the most accurate TV poll ever invented. I'd ask him about what shows were coming up next week and argue with him about . . . oh . . . about like what movies or football games WNHA was scheduling. I didn't like Westerns much, and I hated them high-minded panel discussions.

But the luck had to turn lousy; it's the story of my life. After a couple of years, I found out I was down to my last set, and then I was in trouble. This night Gil run one of them icky commercials where this smart-aleck woman saves a marriage with the right laundry soap. Naturally I reached for my gun, and only at the last minute remembered not to shoot. Then he run an awful movie about a misunderstood composer, and the same thing happened. When we met back at the house, I was all shook up.

"What's the matter?" Gil asked.

I told him.

"I thought you liked watching the shows," he said.

"Only when I could shoot 'em."

"You poor bastard," he laughed, "you're a captive audience now."

"Gil, could you maybe change the programs, seeing the spot I'm in?"

"Be reasonable, Jim. WNHA has to broadcast variety. We operate on the cafeteria basis; something for everybody. If you don't like a show, why don't you switch channels?"

"Now that's silly. You know damn well we only got one channel in New Haven."

"Then turn your set off."

"I can't turn the bar set off, it's part of the entertainment. I'd lose my whole clientele. Gil, do you *have* to show them awful movies, like that army musical last night, singing and dancing and kissing on top of Sherman tanks, for Jesus sake!"

"The women love uniform pictures."

"And those commercials; women always sneering at somebody's girdle, and fairies smoking cigarettes, and——"

"Aw," Gil said, "write a letter to the station."

So I did, and a week later I got an answer. It said: *Dear Mr. Mayo: We are very glad to learn that you are a regular viewer of WNHA, and thank you for your interest in our programming. We hope you will continue to enjoy our broadcasts. Sincerely yours, Gilbert O. Watkins, Station Manager.* A couple of tickets for an interview show were enclosed. I showed the letter to Gil, and he just shrugged.

"You see what you're up against, Jim," he said. "They don't care about what you like or don't like. All they want to know is if you are watching."

I tell you, the next couple of months were hell for me. I couldn't keep the set turned off, and I couldn't watch it without reaching for my gun a dozen times a night. It took all my willpower to keep from pulling the trigger. I got so nervous and jumpy that I knew I had to do something about it before I went off my rocker. So one night I brought the gun home and shot Gil.

Next day I felt a lot better, and when I went down to "The Body Slam" at seven o'clock to clean up, I

was whistling kind of cheerful. I swept out the restaurant, polished the bar, and then turned on the TV to get the news and weather. You wouldn't believe it, but the set was busted. I couldn't get a picture. I couldn't even get a sound. My last set, busted.

So you see, that's why I have to head south (Mayo explained)—I got to locate a TV repairman.

There was a long pause after Mayo finished his story. Linda examined him keenly, trying to conceal the gleam in her eye. At last she asked with studied carelessness, "Where did he get the barometer?"

"Who? What?"

"Your friend, Gil. His antique barometer. Where did he get it?"

"Gee, I don't know. Antiquing was another one of his hobbies."

"And it looked like that clock?"

"Just like it."

"French?"

"I couldn't say."

"Bronze?"

"I guess so. Like your clock. Is that bronze?"

"Yes. Shaped like a sunburst?"

"No, just like yours."

"That's a sunburst. The same size?"

"Exactly."

"Where was it?"

"Didn't I tell you? In our house."

"Where's the house?"

"On Grant Street."

"What number?"

"Three fifteen. Say, what is all this?"

"Nothing, Jim. Just curious. No offense. Now I think I'd better get our picnic things."

"You wouldn't mind if I took a walk by myself?"

She cocked an eye at him. "Don't try driving alone. Garage mechanics are scarcer than TV repairmen."

He grinned and disappeared; but after dinner the true purpose of his disappearance was revealed when he

cases. The door of one jewel mart had sagged open, and Mayo tiptoed in. When he emerged it was with a strand of genuine matched pearls which had cost him an I.O.U. worth a year's rent on "The Body Slam."

His tour took him to Madison Avenue where he found himself before Abercrombie & Fitch. He went in to explore and came at last to the gun racks. There he lost all sense of time, and when he recovered his senses, he was walking up Fifth Avenue toward the boat pond. An Italian Cosmi automatic rifle was cradled in his arms, guilt was in his heart, and a sales slip in the store read: *I.O.U. 1 Cosmi Rifle, \$750.00. 6 Boxes Ammo. \$18.00. James Mayo.*

It was past three o'clock when he got back to the boathouse. He eased in, trying to appear casual, hoping the extra gun he was carrying would go unnoticed. Linda was sitting on the piano bench with her back to him.

"Hi," Mayo said nervously. "Sorry I'm late. I . . . I brought you a present. They're real." He pulled the pearls from his pocket and held them out. Then he saw she was crying.

"Hey, what's the matter?"

She didn't answer.

"You wasn't scared I'd run out on you? I mean, well, all my gear is here. The car, too. You only had to look."

She turned. "I hate you!" she cried.

He dropped the pearls and recoiled, startled by her vehemence. "What's the matter?"

"You're a lousy, rotten liar!"

"Who? Me?"

"I drove up to New Haven this morning." Her voice trembled with passion. "There's no house standing on Grant Street. It's all wiped out. There's no Station WNHA. The whole building's gone."

"No."

"Yes. And I went to your restaurant. There's no pile of TV sets out in the street. There's only one set, over the bar. It's rusted to pieces. The rest of the restaurant is a pigsty. You were living there all the time. Alone. There was only one bed in back. It was lies! All lies!"

"Why would I lie about a thing like that?"

"You never shot any Gil Watkins."

"I sure did. Both barrels. He had it coming."

"And you haven't got any TV set to repair."

"Yes I do."

"And even if it is repaired, there's no station to broadcast."

"Talk sense," he said angrily. "Why would I shoot Gil if there wasn't any broadcast."

"If he's dead, how can he broadcast?"

"See? And you just now said I didn't shoot him."

"Oh, you're mad! You're insane!" she sobbed. "You just described that barometer because you happened to be looking at my clock. And I believed your crazy lies. I had my heart set on a barometer to match my clock. I've been looking for years." She ran to the wall arrangement and hammered her fist alongside the clock. "It belongs right here. Here. But you lied, you lunatic. There never was a barometer."

"If there's a lunatic around here, it's you," he shouted. "You're so crazy to get this house decorated that nothing's real for you anymore."

She ran across the room, snatched up his old shotgun, and pointed it at him. "You get out of here. Right this minute. Get out or I'll kill you. I never want to see you again."

The shotgun kicked off in her hands, knocking her backward, and spraying shot over Mayo's head into a corner bracket. China shattered and clattered down. Linda's face went white.

"Jim! My God, are you all right? I didn't mean to . . . it just went off . . ."

He stepped forward, too furious to speak. Then, as he raised his hand to cuff her, the sound of distant reports came, BLAM-BLAM-BLAM. Mayo froze.

"Did you hear that?" he whispered.

Linda nodded.

"That wasn't any accident. It was a signal."

Mayo grabbed the shotgun, ran outside, and fired the second barrel into the air. There was a pause. Then again came the distant explosions in a stately triplet, BLAM-BLAM-BLAM. They had an odd sucking

produced a sheaf of sheet music, placed it on the piano rack, and led Linda to the piano bench. She was delighted and touched.

"Jim, you angel! Wherever did you find it?"

"In the apartment house across the street. Fourth floor, rear. Name of Horowitz. They got a lot of records, too. Boy, I can tell you it was pretty spooky snooping around in the dark with only matches. You know something funny, the whole top of the house is full of glop."

"Glop?"

"Yeah. Sort of white jelly, only it's hard. Like clear concrete. Now look, see this note? It's C. Middle C. It stands for this white key here. We better sit together. Move over . . ."

The lesson continued for two hours of painful concentration and left them both so exhausted that they tottered to their rooms with only perfunctory good nights.

"Jim," Linda called.

"Yeah?" he yawned.

"Would you like one of my dolls for your bed?"

"Gee, no. Thanks a lot, Linda, but guys really ain't interested in dolls."

"I suppose not. Never mind. Tomorrow I'll have something for you that really interests guys."

Mayo was awakened next morning by a rap on his door. He heaved up in bed and tried to open his eyes.

"Yeah? Who is it?" he called.

"It's me. Linda. May I come in?"

He glanced around hastily. The room was neat. The hooked rug was clean. The precious candlewick bedspread was neatly folded on top of the dresser.

"Okay. Come on in."

Linda entered, wearing a crisp seersucker dress. She sat down on the edge of the four-poster and gave Mayo a friendly pat. "Good morning," she said. "Now listen. I'll have to leave you alone for a few hours. I've got things to do. There's breakfast on the table, but I'll be back in time for lunch. All right?"

"Sure."



"You won't be lonesome?"

"Where you going?"

"Tell you when I get back." She reached out and tousled his head. "Be a good boy and don't get into mischief. Oh, one other thing. Don't go into my bedroom."

"Why should I?"

"Just don't anyway."

She smiled and was gone. Moments later, Mayo heard the jeep start and drive off. He got up at once, went into Linda's bedroom, and looked around. The room was neat, as ever. The bed was made, and her pet dolls were lovingly arranged on the coverlet. Then he saw it.

"Gee," he breathed.

It was a model of a full-rigged clipper ship. The spars and rigging were intact, but the hull was peeling, and the sails were shredded. It stood before Linda's closet, and alongside it was her sewing basket. She had already cut out a fresh set of white linen sails. Mayo knelt down before the model and touched it tenderly.

"I'll paint her black with a gold line around her," he murmured, "and I'll name her the *Linda N.*"

He was so deeply moved that he hardly touched his breakfast. He bathed, dressed, took his shotgun and a handful of shells, and went out to wander through the park. He circled south, passed the playing fields, the decaying carousel, and the crumbling skating rink, and at last left the park and loafed down Seventh Avenue.

He turned east on Fiftieth Street and spent a long time trying to decipher the tattered posters advertising the last performance at Radio City Music Hall. Then he turned south again. He was jolted to a halt by the sudden clash of steel. It sounded like giant sword blades in a titanic duel. A small herd of stunted horses burst out of a side street, terrified by the clangor. Their shoeless hooves thudded bluntly on the pavement. The sound of steel stopped.

"That's where that bluejay got it from," Mayo muttered. "But what the hell is it?"

He drifted eastward to investigate, but forgot the mystery when he came to the diamond center. He was dazzled by the blue-white stones glittering in the show-

sound, as though they were implosions rather than explosions. Far up the park, a canopy of frightened birds mounted into the sky.

"There's somebody," Mayo exulted. "By God, I told you I'd find somebody. Come on."

They ran north, Mayo digging into his pockets for more shells to reload and signal again.

"I got to thank you for taking that shot at me, Linda."

"I didn't shoot at you," she protested. "It was an accident."

"The luckiest accident in the world. They could be passing through and never know about us. But what the hell kind of guns are they using? I never heard no shots like that before, and I heard 'em all. Wait a minute."

On the little piazza before the Wonderland monument, Mayo halted and raised the shotgun to fire. Then he slowly lowered it. He took a deep breath. In a harsh voice he said, "Turn around. We're going back to the house." He pulled her around and faced her south.

Linda stared at him. In an instant he had become transformed from a gentle teddy bear into a panther.

"Jim, what's wrong?"

"I'm scared," he growled. "I'm goddam scared, and I don't want you to be, too." The triple salvo sounded again. "Don't pay any attention," he ordered. "We're going back to the house. Come on!"

She refused to move. "But why? Why?"

"We don't want any part of them. Take my word for it."

"How do you know? You've got to tell me."

"Christ! You won't let it alone until you find out, huh? All right. You want the explanation for that bee smell, and them buildings falling down, and all the rest?" He turned Linda around with a hand on her neck, and directed her gaze at the Wonderland monument. "Go ahead. Look."

A consummate craftsman had removed the heads of Alice, the Mad Hatter, and the March Hare, and replaced them with towering mantis heads, all saber mandibles, antenna, and faceted eyes. They were of a burnished steel and gleamed with unspeakable ferocity. Linda let out a

sick whimper and sagged against Mayo. The triple report signaled once more.

Mayo caught Linda, heaved her over his shoulder, and loped back toward the pond. She recovered consciousness in a moment and began to moan. "Shut up," he growled. "Whining won't help." He set her on her feet before the boathouse. She was shaking but trying to control herself. "Did this place have shutters when you moved in? Where are they?"

"Stacked." She had to squeeze the words out. "Behind the trellis."

"I'll put 'em up. You fill buckets with water and stash 'em in the kitchen. Go!"

"Is it going to be a siege?"

"We'll talk later. Go!"

She filled buckets and then helped Mayo jam the last of the shutters into the window embrasures. "All right, inside," he ordered. They went into the house and shut and barred the door. Faint shafts of the late afternoon sun filtered through the louvers of the shutters. Mayo began unpacking the cartridges for the Cosmi rifle. "You got any kind of gun?"

"A .22 revolver somewhere."

"Ammo?"

"I think so."

"Get it ready."

"Is is going to be a siege?" she repeated.

"I don't know. I don't know who they are, or what they are, or where they come from. All I know is, we got to be prepared for the worst."

The distant implosions sounded. Mayo looked up alertly, listening. Linda could make him out in the dimness now. His face looked carved. His chest gleamed with sweat. He exuded the musky odor of caged lions. Linda had an overpowering impulse to touch him. Mayo loaded the rifle, stood it alongside the shotgun, and began padding from shutter to shutter, peering out vigilantly, waiting with massive patience.

"Will they find us?" Linda asked.

"Maybe."

"Could they be friendly?"

"Maybe."

"Those heads looked so horrible."

"Yeah."

"Jim, I'm scared. I've never been so scared in my life."

"I don't blame you."

"How long before we know?"

"An hour, if they're friendly; two or three, if they're not."

"W-Why longer?"

"If they're looking for trouble, they'll be more cautious."

"Jim, what do you really think?"

"About what?"

"Our chances."

"You really want to know?"

"Please."

"We're dead."

She began to sob. He shook her savagely. "Stop that. Go get your gun ready."

She lurched across the living room, noticed the pearls Mayo had dropped, and picked them up. She was so dazed that she put them on automatically. Then she went into her darkened bedroom and pulled Mayo's model yacht away from the closet door. She located the .22 in a hatbox on the closet floor and removed it along with a small carton of cartridges.

She realized that a dress was unsuited to this emergency. She got a turtleneck sweater, jodhpurs, and boots from the closet. Then she stripped naked to change. Just as she raised her arms to unclasp the pearls, Mayo entered, paced to the shuttered south window, and peered out. When he turned back from the window, he saw her.

He stopped short. She couldn't move. Their eyes locked, and she began to tremble, trying to conceal herself with her arms. He stepped forward, stumbled on the model yacht, and kicked it out of the way. The next instant he had taken possession of her body, and the pearls went flying, too. As she pulled him down on the bed, fiercely tearing the shirt from his back, her pet dolls also went into the discard heap along with the yacht, the pearls, and the rest of the world.

2

1

2

3

4

5



## ALFRED BESTER

writes fiction that is offbeat and intensely imaginative. In **THE DARK SIDE OF THE EARTH**, a volume that includes his new novella and five short stories, Mr. Bester is at his most inventive.

"The pyrotechnic virtuoso of science fiction. Bester blends the **avant garde** techniques to produce stories that may be read on any number of levels...excitement, or significance, or simply literature."

—NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE

Winner of three science-fiction novel-of-the-year awards, ALFRED BESTER is a native New Yorker whose undergraduate days were spent at the University of Pennsylvania and Columbia. Married to a well-known radio and television actress, he lives with his wife in a brownstone in mid-Manhattan.

PUBLISHED BY THE NEW AMERICAN LIBRARY