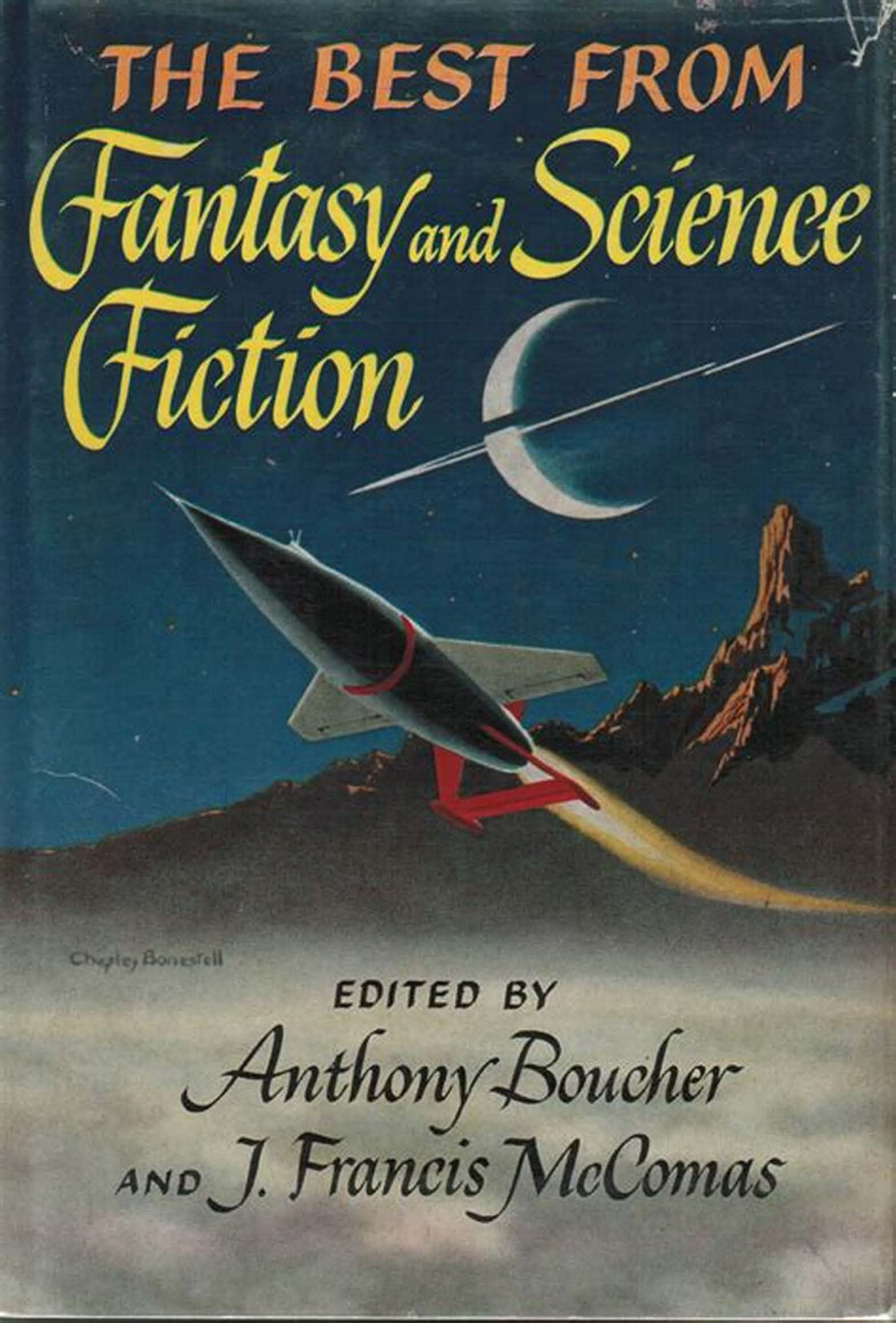


THE BEST FROM *Fantasy and Science Fiction*



Chapley Bonestell

EDITED BY

Anthony Boucher
AND *J. Francis McComas*

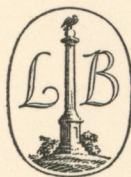
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1952

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*To Larry, Joe and Bob
our deepest thanks*

Introduction

The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction was conceived sometime during the year 1943. It won't surprise anyone remotely connected with the magazine business to learn that it was not conceived under that title and that the period of gestation was several years. Six, to be exact: the idea came to us in the early Fall of 1943, and Vol. I, No. 1 was not published until the Fall of 1949. There were too many titles quickly dreamed up by our publishers and us and as abruptly discarded for us to remember them. One does stick in our collective memory; that was something to the effect of *Fantasy and Terror: A Collection of the Weird and Something-or-Other*.

The magazine was conceived because we were convinced that there was a good market for a periodical offering its readers a representation of the best of the entire range of imaginative literature. We felt that there were many writers forced to file (but not forget) certain stories simply because they were too off-beat for any available markets. And we were positive that there was an even greater number of readers eager to read such stories if anyone had the sense and courage to make them available on the newsstands. Further, we felt that contemporary magazines of imaginative literature had imposed upon themselves limitations too restrictive for adequate representation of that infinite variety of species belonging to the common genus *fantasy*.

The magazine was born simply because Lawrence E. Spivak, head of Mercury Publications (whose *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* had already done for the detective story what we hoped to accomplish in fantasy), had faith in our ideas and agreed to one experimental issue. If that was successful, the magazine was to be

published on a quarterly basis. We won't elaborate on our delight on first viewing Vol. I, No. 1, nor will we expatiate on our agonized waiting for those first sales reports. Suffice it to say that the magazine appeared four times as a quarterly; then it developed that, as is not unusual, Mr. Spivak's judgment was correct, the magazine was a profitable venture, and we have been published bi-monthly ever since.

So much for the origins of the magazine from whose first two volumes these stories are taken. As to why these particular stories illustrate what we set out to do in the way of creating a new outlet for imaginative fiction . . . well, we feel that the simplest thing is to open wide the editorial door, usher you inside, and brief you on how we as editors operate, what policies govern our editorial behavior, and what goes on in our minds when we accept or reject a story.

We've tried in F&SF to represent at its best the field of imaginative fiction: the literature of the impossible-made-convincing. That is to say, stories which take as a premise something counter to or beyond man's present factual knowledge, but develop that premise logically in its own terms, and with full understanding of people and their nature.

This type of fiction is as old as man himself; and particularly in the literature of our own language, there is hardly an author of importance, from Chaucer and Shakespeare to Shaw and Eliot, who has not indulged in it. Of recent years you've been hearing more and more of one particular kind of imaginative literature: science fiction; and since we share somewhat heterodox ideas on this subject, we'd better explain them here.

For detailed histories of the origin and early days of science fiction, we refer you to the introductions to anthologies by Conklin, Crossen, Derleth, Leinster and others. We're concerned with science fiction today and the modern reader; and it seems to us that science fiction, rather than being a strange literary empire by itself, is simply one domain of this whole imaginative realm

of fantasy . . . and moreover that most of what is published as "science fiction" has no valid claim to the title.

True *science* fiction, as made famous in the past by Verne and Wells and as preëminently practised today by Robert A. Heinlein, is fiction based on the possible (and preferably probable) developments of known science. This does *not* include stories (which may range from subtle psychological studies to crude cowboys-and-Indians melodrama) which simply happen to be set in the future or on another planet; it does *not* include stories about such non- or even anti-scientific notions as time travel, space warps, anti-gravitational elements, "fourth dimensions," subspace hyperdrives, and all the other constituents of standard commercial "science fiction."

Such stories may, purely as imaginative literature, be very good or very bad; but there is nothing inherently scientific that sets them apart from other stimulating flights of imagination. What is or is not "science fiction" is capriciously specified by current arbiters, who are quite literally arbitrary; there is, for instance, much more extant evidence for the probable existence today of werewolves ("fantasy") than for the eventual probability of time travel ("science fiction").

We've never, therefore, tried to draw any strict line between the "fantasy" and "science fiction" elements in our title; we've published any stories that we thought were imaginative and good — and probably no two critics will agree in defining precisely which of the stories in this volume are science fiction and which are "pure" fantasy.

Our editorial policy has consisted largely in having no fixed policy. We have no specifications and no tabus . . . save these three: bad writing, trite ideas, and the ponderous deadpan sobriety which has marred so much work in both scientific and supernatural imagination. But even without a fixed policy, we now realize that we have developed a few specialties, which the stories in this collection illustrate.

We like to discover new writers, with something freshly individual to contribute. In fact, every issue has contained (and will contain, so long as the crop of new writers is so promising) at least one professional debut. *In the Days of Our Fathers* was Winona McClintic's first published story; and though Richard Matheson and H. Nearing, Jr. are here represented by later stories, their first published fiction appeared in F&SF. (Matheson's first, *Born of Man and Woman*, was chosen by Martha Foley for her list of distinguished American short stories of the year — an unusual distinction for a beginner.)

We like to discover lost and forgotten stories by the great classic writers, as exemplified by the almost totally unknown (and delightful) specimens here from Daniel Defoe and Charles Dickens.

We like to reprint contemporary stories which appeared originally in sources so obscure that not one reader in a hundred has even heard of the magazine, much less read the story; see the items included here by Alan Nelson and Howard Schoenfeld.

(And in connection with reprints we might mention that we like — and indeed love — those readers who suggest to us the great neglected stories that persist in their memories. We've arrived at a definite policy of reprinting nothing from the American specialized fantasy magazines; too many enthusiasts own or have access to back files of these. But news of anything interesting in less familiar sources we welcome with calloos and callays; and some of our finest "lost" discoveries are due, we must confess, less to our own researches, extensive though they are, than to the helpful generosity of our friends and readers.)

We like to offer established authors a market for those stories which they obviously had a fine time writing, which often represent them at their best, and which depart too far from any commercial formula to be acceptable to their usual markets. The Oliver La Farge story is a case in point.

Above all, we like to publish well-written stories with unusual

and provocative ideas . . . and it doesn't matter whether those stories come from last year's Nobel Prize Winner or from the novice who is reading this today and may send us a gem next week.

For one thing we've learned as editors is that the writers of fantasy are the most varied and unclassifiable people. We've bought stories from a first grade teacher in Arizona, from one of the greatest living editors of factual murder trials, from an academician in English in Pennsylvania and one in mathematics in Illinois, from two fellow-editors of fantasy and from one of the foremost serious authorities on the American Indian, from a learned psychologist, from engineering technicians, from a former leader of an anti-Fascist underground railway, and from mothers, cooks, and general housewives. In fact among the things we've learned (with all apologies to that great fantasy writer Philip Wylie) is that the American housewife can have a wonderful imaginative and creative sense; and we're rather pleased that the balance of the sexes is more nearly even among the contributors in F&SF than in most of its contemporaries.

As editors of a magazine we are, of course, primarily concerned with that magazine and its own peculiar destiny. Yet, as editors devoted to a particular kind of writing, we'd be pretty foolish if we didn't keep a weather eye out for the general progress (or lack thereof) of that kind of writing toward wide public acceptance. We're very happy to be able to say that fantasy is gaining strongly in the favor of the reading public. To be sure, fantasy has a long way to go before it is as generally popular as, say, the detective story; but a lot of things indicate that more and more people every day are reading more and more fantasy. Some of these things are: our own circulation figures which increase with each issue; the number of new magazines in the field and the popular discrimination which has caused the deserved success of the best of them and the failure of the shoddy opportunists; and — here a note of brazen triumph — the number of dourly venerable book publishers

that have yielded to popular demand and set up fantasy departments . . . even as thirty years ago they accepted the then slightly disreputable *roman policier*.

Frankly, we feel that fantasy stands now where the detective novel was in the early twenties. And that is, bluntly, the self-conscious stage. Fantasy is something like the cornhusker realist who is taken up by the New York cocktail party habitués. It has always thought it produced some damned good writing, but, thank God, it's sure now! After all, assistant editors and associate publicists, who always appear at these affairs, can't be wrong. *Everyone* knows these worthies are but *infallible*, my dear. . . !

That stage will soon pass, we think. Fantasy fiction will soon become (at least on its higher levels) as mature as the best of crime and suspense fiction. A flock of good writers will appear on the scene, along with responsible editors who have some understanding of the specialized field they're handling. Hard on their heels will materialize critics whose primary concern will be literary craftsmanship, but who will be equally capable of decrying tired fantasy concepts and implausible developments.

If that sounds ponderous, let us put it another way: Very soon now you, as a discerning reader of popular fiction, will find reliable discriminating guidance to the best of current fantasy in any book section of any periodical. You'll be discovering new writers each month. Your neighborhood library will have all the latest volumes. Space ships will be as common then as locked rooms are now, and you'll be arguing the merits of the hard-boiled space melodrama against the quiet, restrained English ghost story. In short you'll be as happy as you are now with other popular fiction forms—but in a different and a far more imaginative medium.

— ANTHONY BOUCHER

— J. FRANCIS MCCOMAS

Berkeley, California
August, 1951

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THE BEST FROM
Fantasy and Science Fiction

CLEVE CARTMILL

One of the most popular features of F&SF has been its Bureau of Imaginary Zoölogy, which presents detailed studies in the more attractive (and dangerous) fauna of other planets, and even of our own. This Bureau has offered detailed accounts of the kitten-like hurkle (Hurcleus Sturgeoni), the loutish quiggie (Kwigius Nevilli), and the totally indescribable gnurr (Gnurrus Bretnori)¹ but certainly one of its highpoints was the discovery by Cleve Cartmill of the conceited, cuddly and infinitely perilous golen (Golenus Cartmilli). One of the old-time reliables in the magazine field, Mr. Cartmill has rarely written a more subtly convincing story than this — which we hope will tempt all writers in our audience to venture forth on similar zoölogical discoveries of their own.

Huge Beast

DR. LOREN PRATER was a calm young man, not given to running screaming into the night. So he jumped only slightly when the golen materialized out of nothingness on his laboratory desk.

His next reaction was on a higher plane, less thalamic. His

¹ For the benefit of xenozoölogists and other serious scholars, we append the precise references on these animals:

H. Sturgeoni: *The Hurkle is a Happy Beast*, by Theodore Sturgeon. F&SF 1:1:62/9 (Fall 1949); THE SCIENCE FICTION GALAXY, edited by Groff Conklin, N. Y.: Perma-books, 1950.

K. Nevilli: *Take Two Quiggies*, by Kris Neville. F&SF 1:5:3/26 (Dec. 1950).

G. Bretnori: *The Gnurrs Come From the Voodvork Out*, by R. Bretnor. F&SF 1:2:3/16 (Winter-Spring 1950); THE BEST SCIENCE FICTION STORIES — 1951, edited by Everett F. Bleiler & T. E. Dikty, N. Y.: Fell, 1951.

memory insisted that he had been staring at that spot on his desk the preceding instant, and it had been empty. It was therefore impossible that it was not still empty.

Then, with a certain understandable inconsistency, his esthetic senses told him that the creature was cuddly. He shrank from the word, but it persisted as he took in the gray coat of shining soft fur, the tiny fingered paws, the twinkling blue eyes, the heart-shaped face, the pretty ears . . .

He couldn't resist those ears. He reached out a tentative hand and scratched behind them gently. The creature quivered in what was apparently a shudder of delight, for it made no move to attack or retreat.

It endured the caress for several moments, then said: "Now that's over, let's get down to business."

Loren snatched his hand away as if someone had started to fill it with hydrofluoric acid. He swirled an agitated look around the gleaming laboratory and demanded of a large retort: "Who said that?"

"I did," the tiny creature said in a cheerful voice. "I'm a golen, Dr. Prater." It added soothingly, "I'm a monster, but don't be frightened. I won't hurt you unless it becomes necessary. I *like* you."

Loren regarded the golen with what was gradually becoming scientific detachment. It *was* there, it had spoken, it called itself a monster, and it had practically patted him on the head.

"I realize," the golen said, "that a certain amount of psychic shock has resulted from my appearance. Why don't you relax? There's a container of C.P. alcohol over there. Have a bullet."

"Bullet?" Loren said in bewilderment. "Oh, you mean a shot."

"Well, maybe," the golen said doubtfully. "But I don't think that's exactly it. A bullet is not a shot. It's a — I don't remember."

"A slug, maybe?"

"That's it, a slug."

"How did you know this was alcohol?" Loren asked, tipping the jug over a beaker.

"I limbled it."

Loren thought about this as he added considerable water. "Mmm, yes. Will you have one? I think I have a thimble around somewhere."

"Oh, no," the golen said.

Loren sat at his desk again, raised his glass and grimaced in anticipation. He swallowed, shuddered and blinked. "Now," he said, "begin."

"Will you scratch my ears again, first?"

"Pleasure," Loren said. He did so. The golen shivered for a short time and then drew back.

"Thank you. What do you wish to know?"

"Where did you come from?"

"I was in a cage in the *Starhope* a short time ago."

"Oh, the interplanetary zoo ship," Loren said. "I saw it was supposed to land today. How did you escape? How did you get here?"

"I wirtled. Now, don't ask me to explain. Your language has no words for it, not even ideas for it."

Dr. Prater took another swallow of his drink and smiled slyly. "I don't think you can sell me that. If you can — what do you call it? — wirtle, you could have escaped before the ship left wherever you were captured. How do you explain that?" he demanded triumphantly.

The golen made a twittering noise which sounded like a miniature giggle. "We weren't captured. We allowed ourselves to be taken aboard so that I could get in touch with you and discuss radiant energy."

Loren frowned. "There are too many ideas in that sentence for me to follow clearly. Better break it down."

"Very well. I think I had better show you my planet. Then I can

explain without explaining the explanations. Would you like to see it?"

"Love to," Loren said. "Only," he added cautiously, "does that mean I have to — uh, wirtle?"

"Oh, no. Look."

The golen gestured at a blank wall. The laboratory lights seemed to dim out, and a section of the heavens twinkled on the wall. Loren was no astronomer, but he knew Orion when he saw it.

Then he seemed to become the lens of a camera trucking in for a close-up. He moved rapidly closer, and as the field of vision narrowed, stars flowed off the edges of the screen into nothingness. Further and further he seemed to go until one bright star shone alone. His goal seemed to be slightly to one side of this star, and planets became visible.

Presently there was only one planet, which became oceans and continents and lastly, a bright green field. His seemingly camera-like motion stopped.

"There is my home," the golen said.

"Very nice," Loren said politely, "but I don't see any of your people."

"Oh, that is only the roof of my home. Let us go inside."

The view narrowed, narrowed, until a small archway showed the way into a low hillside. This became a corridor which branched off here and there. It became a city of amazing beauty, towering fairy castles and filigreed homes. Thousands of golen were everywhere.

Progress through the city was rapid, but Loren could see shopping districts, residential districts, lumpy buildings which he supposed to be factories, and a series of pens, gigantic compared to other architecture.

The pens, he thought, were large enough to hold several grown men.

The imaginary camera halted and focused on one of these, still

in the process of construction. Golen swarmed along its rails, securing corners and reinforcing uprights. Others raised new rails to be secured.

"This is one of our fattening pens," the golen said. "We haven't used them yet. And that is why I am here."

The scene abruptly became the blank laboratory wall again, and the lights were bright.

"Did you do that inside my head or did I really see it?" Loren asked.

"A little of both," the golen said. "I limbled it. Am I not clever?" it asked cheerfully.

"Mm, yes. Could you teach me to do it?"

"I'm sorry," the golen said with friendly regret. "You do not have the powers necessary."

"Too bad," Loren said. "But go on. You allowed yourself to be captured so you could get in touch with me about a pen of some sort. Doesn't make sense." He finished his drink, thought about another, decided against it. He reached out absently and scratched the golen's ears.

"Enough!" the golen cried. "You completely disarm me when you do that, and I am here on serious business. Now listen."

Loren shook a slight muzziness out of his head and became attentive.

"Long ago there was a diversity of creatures on my planet. But the golen only were intelligent. We established laws of conservation for the wild creatures, and domesticated several species. This gave us a balanced diet, wild and tame. We are strictly carnivorous. This went on for many centuries, and we were happy in our trading, our games, and our food.

"We never developed weapons, having no need for wars, and so certain types of energy were unknown to us. We needed no weapons until in comparatively recent years. That was when the Huge Beasts appeared."

"How do you mean, appeared?"

"Just that," the golen said. "They were not there one moment, they were the next. A mutation? Accident? We don't know."

"The Huge Beasts systematically killed off all the creatures that served us for food until only the golen and the Huge Beasts remained. The Huge Beasts did not even know of our existence, or they would have tried to kill us, too. But we could wirtle, and stayed out of sight while we studied the Huge Beasts."

"They were poor specimens, dull, stupid, insensitive, but still we were afraid. We had seen the power they showed in killing in our most secret preserves."

"We became hungry with a terrible hunger, and we decided it was better to die fighting to live than never to fight against great odds."

"It turned out to be simple, after all. We merely wirtled about until we found a Huge Beast alone, attacked in great numbers and bit it to death. Then we wirtled it to one of our cities, and everybody was happy for a time."

"You mean you can — uh, wirtle other things?"

"Oh, yes," the golen said happily. "Great distances, too. As long as they are inactive, that is. But now comes the sad part. The Huge Beasts reached the point at which they were eating each other, and they did not multiply rapidly enough to satisfy the needs of both — um, races, shall we say."

"The end was in sight for the golen. When the Huge Beasts were all gone, the golen would die, for we do not eat our own kind."

"But the *Starhope* arrived, and we wirtled after exploring parties until we limbed enough about this planet and its language to know that our salvation lay here."

"The explorers found some of the Huge Beasts, and led them into the *Starhope*. These seemed quite docile, and were not even caged."

"When we golen showed ourselves, thirty-two of us, the men of the zoo ship were very happy to capture us. But they put us in a cage. There were many cages in that section of the ship, and many strange beasts from other planets. We ate two of the others and very good they were."

"I should think that would be chancy. Weren't you watched?"

"Not closely. At first, that is. But after the second beast disappeared, a guard was stationed in the zoo section. That captain!" the Golen said happily. "What did he mean by 'haunted'?"

Loren chuckled. "Never mind. Go on."

"It is very simple, Dr. Prater. I want a radiant energy weapon that will stun, but not kill. The golen can then survive. We can capture the remaining Huge Beasts alive instead of having to kill them at the moment of attack, supervise their breeding and increase their rate of reproduction."

So that was it, Loren thought. A weapon to stun men, for men were the Huge Beasts. That was obvious, despite the creature's efforts to disguise the fact. *They were not there one moment, they were the next. Mutation, accident?* Nonsense, Loren thought. A lost expedition, more than likely. *These seemed quite docile, and were not even caged.* More evidence, Loren thought. Add item: fattening pens, large enough for men.

He thought, smugly: "Dull, stupid, insensitive, eh? Perhaps not many would have seen through this pathetic story, but not all are dull or stupid."

The question, though, was what to do. The golen had appeared out of nowhere, presumably it would disappear into nowhere if Dr. Prater made an overt act or accusation. No, strategy was needed here. Meanwhile, play along until he had all possible or necessary information.

"I could do what you ask, all right. But after you get the weapon, how can you use it? How can you get back to your planet?"

"We can wirtle, of course."

And they could wirtle men, Loren remembered. *Great distances, too. As long as they are inactive, of course.* He said:

"Then why didn't you wirtle here, instead of being caged on the *Starhope*?"

"We didn't know where this planet was, exactly. You see, we can return to wherever we have been before, but as for finding new places, especially planets — well, Dr. Prater, we aren't astronomers. This is the first time any of us have been off our own planet. And we wouldn't have dared if the situation hadn't been serious, and if we hadn't known that the greatest living authority on radiant energy was here. Namely yourself."

"Well, it's like this," Dr. Prater said. "I sympathize with your problem, and I'm all for you. But I think you've made a mistake in not revealing your intelligence to the authorities. You'd be treated fine by the government."

"That would mean delay," the golen said cheerfully. "And your government couldn't furnish Huge Beasts for us. We wish to have them. They're delicious."

That does it, Loren thought, and he saw his way out. The golen that were here must not be allowed to return to their own planet, even without the weapon they desired. If allowed to go free, they could guide others of their kind here and do untold damage. The human race would win out in the end, of course, it always did. But Dr. Loren Prater was in a position to put an end to this nonsense before it got started.

The formula was simple. Make the weapon openly, play dumb, pretend sympathy, and find an opportunity to turn it on this golen. Destroy the creature while it was unconscious and go down to the *Starhope* and destroy its fellows.

"I'll do it," he said, and added with inner irony: "I'm flattered that you came to me. But, after all, I am the only man alive who can solve the problem."

"As I pointed out," the golen said cheerfully.

"Mmm, yes."

Three hours later, in the early morning, it was done. It was a dazzling little thing, the stun gun, and it was powerful enough to take care of an elephant, but it wouldn't kill even a flea.

"This will work?" the golen asked.

"All you have to do," Dr. Loren Prater said, tired but proud, "is point it and squeeze. I can get rich on this," he went on. "Turn it out in quantity, and —"

"Will you demonstrate it on me?" the golen asked.

Dr. Loren Prater could not repress a start. "On — you?"

"Yes. Can you adjust it so that it will make me unconscious for only a short time?"

Dr. Prater could and did repress a smirk of self-satisfaction. "Oh, yes. I'll set it for ten minutes." He set it for three hours and aimed it. "Ready?"

"Yes, Doctor."

Loren squeezed, and the golen fell in a limp little heap. Quite stupid little creatures after all. Now for the chloroform.

He went to a cabinet. He shot a final glance at the furry, unconscious mound on his desk. He put the stun gun in the pocket of his smock. He reached for bottle and sponge.

His smock twitched. A voice said:

"That will not be necessary, Doctor."

It crouched on the desk beside its fallen fellow. It was blue. It was steady as it pointed the gun at him.

"Typical reaction," it said merrily. "Let a Huge Beast believe he will save the race, and he will be unable to save even himself."

"You wirtled," Dr. Prater accused. "From the *Starhope*. With that one. You were here all the time."

"Oh, don't be glum, Doctor. Be happy. For you shall be set above all Huge Beasts. Soon they will be countless in our fattening pens, and we shall eat them. But we shall honor you, and see that you live forever. When we get — home, will you scratch my ears first?"

It squeezed the trigger.

OLIVER LA FARGE

Oliver La Farge, one of America's most distinguished anthropologists and novelists, has long been noted for his interest in, and his knowledge of, the American Indians. His novel of Navajo life, LAUGHING BOY, won the Pulitzer Prize in 1930 and is today considered an American classic. Now Mr. La Farge turns from the hogans and herds of the Navajo to explore the awesome field of cybernetics. With his usual keen perception of humanity's strengths and weaknesses and expressing his profound, almost mystical grasp of the problem at hand in a tersely sharp prose, Mr. La Farge demonstrates that, in the final analysis, even the most wondrous computer is helpless before its creator, man.

John the Revelator

IN THE ENDLESS, see-saw race between Russia and the Western World for military superiority, the relative advancement of their computing machines became the test of who was in the lead. Constant improvement of instruments of destruction and of the means of delivering them at enormous speeds, altitudes, and distances demanded calculations farther and farther beyond human capacity. Without ever better computers, progress would stop. Each country's achievements in this line became matters of public interest.

In the U. S., the Navy computer, Mark III, which was unveiled at Harvard in 1950, drew fair public attention. Two years later it was eclipsed by the Air Force's Mark IV. By the time

Mark V was set up at Chicago, the public began to be fascinated and somewhat horrified by descriptions of the "mechanical brains."

The Russians built and maintained their machines in greater secrecy within their huge, enclosed research behind the Urals. The information about them that was given out to the people contained at first, as did the American press stories, a half humorous element of human interest. Shortly before the U. S. came up with Luke this trend ceased abruptly, following an article in *Red Star* rebuking journalists and certain scientists for bourgeois sentimental anthropomorphism in regard to computing machines.

Luke began as Mark VI, but a week before it went into operation a junior officer remarked that Marks were getting monotonous, it was time we had another evangelist. A reporter took up the idea, the public liked it, Public Relations approved it, and the machine became Luke.

Luke seemed at once human and superhuman. Stories about it developed a standard pattern in which, half jokingly, half seriously, with awe which was real and yet kidded itself, the machine was written up as if it lived. At the end the public would always be reminded that after all it was only a machine and could not function unless a human being turned on the switches.

Back in the forties, the I. B. M. machine in New York had been the first to show signs of "temperament." Luke and the later Marks, enormously more complex, had various troubles which suggested frailties of the human mind and temper. Their operators spoke of resting them after fatiguing calculations, it was said that Mark V became jittery if it was rushed, and that Luke sometimes grew short-tempered and rejected problems.

Technicians were then working on a machine, inevitably called John, which would, it was believed, be the ultimate product in its line. No one could think of any capability that could be added. This project was backed, not by one service, but by the Department of Defense. It was in anticipation of John's completion that

the Secretary issued Department of Defense Circular eighty-nine dash twelve, "Anthropomorphic References to Computers." The circular directed that such machines should be referred to only by the neuter pronoun, and forbade a number of expressions which implied that they were human. Persons under the control of the Department who used such expressions would be warned, and if they persisted would receive formal reprimands which would be recorded in their permanent 201 files (Army and Air Force), jackets (Navy), or civil service records.

Not long after eighty-nine dash twelve (classified "Restricted") came out, *Pravda* ran a scorching article on retrogressive deviationist superstitions about computing machines and other products of Marxist scientific genius. Central Intelligence got word that two young mathematicians had been sent to Siberia for speaking of the machine Russia was then building as "Ivan."

John was built and established at U. C. L. A. John had everything. Problems had to be fed to all computers with their Greek and Latin letters and other symbols reduced to a numerical code, which in turn had to be reduced from the decimal to the binary system. The double process often took the mathematicians-in-waiting much longer than it took the machines to solve the problem once they had it. John did all this for itself. You could hand the machine a problem set up in figures and symbols. It scanned this with an electronic eye, encoded it in numbers, reduced these to the binary system, and handed out the result for checking, if desired. From the binary sheet it punched its own tape, proceeded to the solution, decoded that and typed it in final form.

John's retention cylinders (eighty-nine dash twelve forbade the use of the term "memory") had tremendous capacity. Within limits, too, the machine could be guided by voice, interpreting limited spoken instructions in a manner believed to be analogous to the response of the neurons and synapses of the human brain to sounds channelled through the auditory system. It worked at

record speed, and no one knew what limits there were to the intricacies of the problems it could solve.

Central Intelligence reported that the new Russian machine was in operation, and bade fair to be a rival to John. It seemed that even the Politburo was speaking of it informally as "Ivan." John's advance publicity aroused a certain horror in the general public. An ill-advised P. R. O. put out a story about the similarity of John's processes from "reading" to calculations on a yes-and-no binary basis, to interpretation or "writing," to the supposed processes of human perceptions, thought, and conclusions. The public added this idea to the knowledge that John's capacities far exceeded man's, and began to be seriously alarmed. To allay these fears, stories went out stressing the fact that John was only a machine. It could do nothing without man. "A mechanical brain is not enough," the most effective release ended. "There must be the thing no machine can possess, the human spirit, the divine spark."

A fantastic-science writer assigned to cover John for UP learned that in test runs it had been found that the machine did best if, when not in use, a weak current continued to run through it. The writer drew an analogy with sleep, and went on to a disturbing fantasy about what John might dream. The Department of Defense tried to ban this writer from further access to the machine. This set off one of those rows, so pleasing to the public, in which the high command is caught way off base. The end result was a relaxing of the general feeling about the greatest of all computers.

John was formally christened, like a ship. A chaplain said a prayer. Public Relations arranged that the first person to present a problem to it should be the Rev. Andrew Lethbridge, a pious and much-loved little man famous for his work among delinquent children. Initial use of John in his service was bound to make a good impression upon a nation growing more and more nervous over every aspect of the race in scientific methods of destruction.

Rev. Andrew Lethbridge described himself as an applied soci-

ologist. His problem was in statistics of delinquency, involving deviation from the mean and probable error. Such calculations are ordinarily made by simple quadratics; the capacities of the new machine, however, allowed him to introduce a range of factors, such as number of years of parental schooling and amounts spent on clothing in relation to mean annual temperatures, which put his problem quite beyond the scope of human figuring.

As arranged by Public Relations, the little man was presented to John at four-thirty, immediately after the unveiling ceremonies. Commodore Sandeman, who had been military supervisor of its construction, did the honors. He demonstrated John's various capabilities, with Mr. Lethbridge beside him and the cameras making a soothing record of the minister's benignant profile beside the machine. The commodore was especially proud of the voice-control attachment. To show how this operated, he had the first proposition typed for presentation with an error in it. This was fed to John, who encoded it, started work, then stopped abruptly. A red light went on like an angry eye. The commodore stepped to the speaking tube and turned on the switch.

"Correction," he said slowly. "Fourth character, second line, now capital sigma. Correct to capital sigma sub one. Recode."

John spewed out the original sheet, the red light went off, the machinery started again.

The commodore consulted his watch. He introduced Mr. Lethbridge to Lieutenant Weems of the Navy and Captain Massey of the Army, and left him in their charge. The minister fed in the rest of his material. Shortly the answer came out. He sat down at a desk for a preliminary look at it. Weems put the main switch on "rest current," a position to which he and Massey referred, in private, as "sleep." It was after five. The two officers had had a long day. There were four guards in the big room, and Mr. Lethbridge was beyond suspicion. The officers excused themselves and sloped off.

Mr. Lethbridge laid the solution down with a sigh. Whatever the machine might be used for later, the determinations it had just made would give him and his fellows entirely new competence in their fight against wretchedness. He went over to the computer and studied it, standing beside the speaking tube and the shelf on which John handed out its answers. A few dim lights showed inside the cavern full of bright wires. There was a barely audible, humming sound. He could see the nearer retention cylinders turning over very slowly. He thought, he *is* asleep; I wonder if he does dream. Quite naturally, not at all concerned that the guards were watching, he knelt and prayed.

He spoke his improvised prayer in a soft, thoughtful voice. He prayed for the intentions of the men who would use John, and spoke of the wonder of God's works as shown in this creation of His creatures. He prayed that John might be used only for good, that directly or indirectly, God Himself might guide him. He said that so wonderful a machine should serve to bring man closer to his Maker. At the end he was thinking aloud more than praying:

"Can you give us the ultimate answer? Can you write the equation for God? What is the symbol to represent Him? Can you solve man's real problem, so that all these other problems will be forgotten?"

He rose, dusted his knees, and picked up his answer sheet. The guards let him out. When he was gone, one of them said, "That's one for the book. He was praying to it."

"For it, more likely," another said. "Might be a good idea."

The regular attendants, military and civilian, reported at eight-thirty the next morning, followed in a few minutes by Commodore Sandeman with the senior physicist from Los Alamos, bringing the first military problem. These two found the others in a cluster around the answer shelf with two of the guards, examining a piece of paper.

An Air Force captain saluted. "Look at this, sir. He did this in—I mean, it did this while on 'rest current.'"

The commodore took the paper. On it was a strange formula, in which there were three blanks where symbols were clearly required. No one present could make head or tail of it. The senior physicist said that it made him uncomfortable, but he did not know why.

The guards passed on their predecessors' report of Mr. Lethbridge's prayer. No one had approached John after he left. It was noted that the voice control switch had been left on, there was the possibility that Lethbridge had fed in a formula by voice. This was most unlikely; there should have been a corresponding punched tape and binary sheet, but there were not. Investigation showed that Lethbridge, barely able to handle the mathematics of the Gaussian Curve, could never have provided propositions of the complexity indicated by the form of the equation.

The mysterious solution was submitted to various people, all of whom were baffled, until it was handed to Rev. Anthony Price, S.J. He may have read it; no one will ever know. Father Price was a theologian, a philosopher, and one of the top four pure mathematicians in the world.

Father Price started work on the equation on a Thursday morning. By Thursday noon he was dead. The sheet of paper was propped up against some books before him. He was slumped in his chair, his head thrown back, and on his face was an expression of absolute bliss. Brother Benildus, his amanuensis, reported that the priest had taken up the problem at ten-fifteen, following breakfast after nine o'clock mass. He had brought in the mail at eleven. Father Price had raised his hand in a signal not to disturb him. At that point he had written nothing on his scratch pad. The brother came in again at twelve to remind him to come to lunch, and found him dead.

On his yellow pad the Jesuit had written six Hebrew characters.

Three of these, in his usual, neat script, were arranged in a triangle, vaguely in the pattern of the blank spaces in the equation. They were *aleph*, *lamed*, and *tau*. Then in a sprawl he had written the word "JAH." That was all.

Before this a rumor had leaked out that John had "talked in his sleep." The Jesuit's death broke further through security. It could not be concealed that the death occurred while he was working on something extremely difficult produced by John. In an interview, Brother Benildus insisted that the Father had not died, properly speaking. He had simply left his clay behind him. "He looked as if he had seen the face of God."

The equation and work-sheet were taken by a high-ranking courier to a mathematical colleague of Father Price's in Canada. The Canadian studied them for a few minutes, then handed them back to the courier, saying that he thought it would be unwise to read them. He recommended that the sheets be locked away somewhere safe. They were later deposited in Fort Knox.

Ten days after Father Price's death John turned out another document at night. This was a solid mass of Greek capital letters, plainly non-mathematical. A scientist with classical training who was present picked it up. He started, then in a strained voice he began to read aloud in Greek. Commodore Sandeman, who had been summoned, said, "What the hell does that mean?"

"Eh? Oh — 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.' And it goes on to, 'And the light shineth in the darkness; and the darkness comprehendeth it not.' That's repeated four times."

The incident was classified "Top Secret." It precipitated a searching, futile investigation. The feelings of the high command were not eased when, that same day, Luke added a contribution of his own to a problem looking to a vastly improved guided missile. At the end of his solutions he printed numbers which when decoded made another Greek sentence followed by four figures.

Translated, the passage read, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. 23:34." The numbers referred to the chapter and verse in St. Luke. News of this was also suppressed, but outsiders became aware of an uneasiness among the personnel dealing with both machines. Rumors ran through the country. Investigators noted that the rumors were sometimes charged with terror, but equally often with great hope.

Great Britain advised the appropriate American authorities of strange behavior on the part of its own latest computer. Curious items of intelligence seeped out of the reservation behind the Urals. Four more scientists had been sent to Siberia, and it was said that a couple had been shot. The commissar who had been in charge of the construction of Ivan looked to be in line for purging. Among the people of Russia, too, strange tales were circulating.

As has been noted, Luke was short-tempered and sometimes rejected problems. One was submitted to him, to determine the height at which the latest refinement of the H-bomb should be exploded for maximum anti-personnel effect. Luke threw this out, and promptly printed a simple mathematical formula: $600 + (3 \times 20) + 6$. He continued repeating these figures in answer to everything offered him until, in the early afternoon, they threw the switch and left him to cool off. Even among his attendants there were several with enough acquaintance with the Bible to recognize that the figures came from Revelations.

The public still knew nothing of what was going on, although talk was kept alive by odd actions of the old I. B. M. machine, to which anyone could have access. Luke went back to normal work. John, it was noted, solved whatever problems were offered to him, although sometimes he seemed to do so reluctantly. Captain Massey remarked that John had a much sweeter nature than Luke. (Eighty-nine dash twelve was by now virtually a dead letter.)

One day some very distinguished foreigners were invited to

see John handle a non-military problem. There was no reason to believe that anything out of line would occur. The problem dealt with the permutations of the 1,400 heritable characteristics of the human body and was expected to shed new light on the vexed question of defining a race. The visitors were attended by a Senator, State Department representatives, and the press.

John encoded the problem and set to work, humming and clicking cheerfully. The first page of answers was dropped on the receiving shelf. The geneticists and anthropologists concerned in the matter picked it up and sat down to study it with their mathematical assistants. The second page came out. The opening line completed an equation from page one, then, to the dismay of the officials in charge, once again came a solid Greek text. To make the matter worse, two of the distinguished foreigners were able to read it with ease, even in the archaic, first-century form in which it was typed.

The text began in the thirteenth chapter of Revelations, jumped to the glorious opening of the twenty-first, then continued with entirely new matter, a passionate exhortation to mid-twentieth century mankind, written with all the same literary quality. John turned out altogether three sheets of this text before he returned to the problem and settled down to a long tabulation of the possible combinations of 1,400 heritable characteristics with forty-seven and forty-eight chromosomes.

This incident could not be covered up. The papers had it, and they played it for all it was worth. Nor was there any way after that to keep the press from keeping a watch upon John, Luke, and the later Marks. The papers added Greek scholars to their staffs. The Department of Defense also retained Greek scholars, to sit in with the mathematicians when solutions were being received and segregate from properly classifiable material the sermons — or revelations — offered by the machines.

Once John had broken through the wall of secrecy, it was his practice to produce his texts at the beginning of the day, when he was first awakened by switching on full current. Luke appended his to solutions. Marks IV and V proved to be worth no more than routine coverage by the wire services; the texts that they produced were few and generally garbled. One could only say that they were trying.

The Epistles of John and Luke, as they came to be called, and those of the British machine, known to its users simply as Comp, were circulated throughout the accessible world. It also became clearer and clearer that Ivan was acting up.

Various Soviet periodicals and the official radio ran diatribes about neoprimitivistic, sentimentalist-superstitious deviations concerning computers. An unusual number of arrests were made among the ordinary people. Scientists, generals, and officials of the Politburo were holding closed meetings. There were signs that the people were getting out of hand. The Patriarch and several bishops were put under house arrest, and then turned loose, apparently because of popular indignation. It looked as if the Soviet system might be cracking.

The major churches of the Western World agreed that it would be superstition to believe that the Epistles were revealed. Whatever their source, they followed the lines of true doctrine, should be read by the faithful, and could be used in sermons. Certain lesser churches and many laymen were less skeptical. Daily, crowds gathered before the building at New Haven and Los Angeles where the machines were housed, praying and waiting. The Russian government was unable to conceal the fact that pilgrimages were being made to the gates of the closed reservation, and that by one means or another, Ivan's utterances were being transmitted to the pilgrims outside.

Among those who waited every morning outside John's building was the congregation of the New African Baptist Church, a

group known for its singing. It was their regular practice while waiting to see if there would be an Epistle that day, to sing the little-known spiritual:

“What is John a-doing,
John the Revelator?
Writing Revelations
And the Book of the Seven Seas.”

By the third day all present were singing with them, and the song spread. Its simple words and impressive tune touched directly upon the feelings of America.

The ferment among the peoples of the divided world had its influence on their leaders. Both the West and East made concessions in the U. N. Assembly. A new reasonableness appeared. A treaty with Austria was signed, some of the barriers between East and West Germany were removed, a formula was developing for settling the Korean War. The Atomic Energy Control Committee, which had stayed recessed for four years out of sheer hopelessness, came together again.

The men who were working on the dreadful new weapons were also affected. Lesser machines had developed a nasty way of refusing to solve certain key problems. John, in his great meekness, would solve them, but in doing so he made their authors agonizingly ashamed. The fact was that for some months no one had been able to bring himself to feed into that machine anything which looked to a really deadly form of progress.

John had been in operation a year. His maintenance crew ran off a routine reading of his memory cylinders, to check on just what he had stored. The reading was made by John himself, who transposed the impulses on the cylinders to tapes, ran these off in binary numbers, and then decoded. Most of what came out was what would be expected from what had gone in, although there were several formulae that could not be interpreted or accounted

for. From one cylinder, however, John produced a series of numbers of one and two digits in no intelligible sequence.

Experimentation showed that these were a code for the Russian alphabet, which, like the Hebrew, was not on John's typewriter. He had recorded what read like one side of a series of telephone conversations, biblical in tone, charged with love, and certainly emanating from Ivan, or whatever — or whoever — controlled Ivan. The outstanding quality was a saintly gentleness, yet through that gentleness were expressed searing opinions of what human leaders throughout the world were trying to do. The conversations were also loaded with information about the problems the Russians were working on.

The high command seized upon this information, then with a shock faced the certainty that the other half of these exchanges, equally unreserved, was available in Ivan's memory. This realization completely ruined what had begun as a day of triumph.

Shortly thereafter in Washington was held a most secret meeting of the key leaders of the United States and the British Empire. No secretaries or advisers were present, no notes were taken. Events since John started operating were reviewed, then there was a presentation of the international situation. Russia had been so shaken and had become so reasonable that, if only the Western Powers could end the dead heat in which they had remained with their opponents for the last years, if only they could pull a little ahead, it should be possible to reach solutions of all the major conflicts. Even control and inspection of atomic energy could be assured. Given certain assumptions, which were undoubtedly correct, the means of obtaining that advantage existed.

The toughest military man, the coldest scientist present shrank from that means, but the end was peace and security for a free world. Discussion was long and earnest. At length the President himself summarized that only for the end stated could the action be justified, that it was for this that the machines themselves were

striving, and that if they could ensure victory, then it was their duty before God to ensure it. The council voted unanimously to act.

A selected sub-committee proceeded to confer with two famous brain surgeons who had been minutely investigated. These, Commodore Sandeman, and two of the chief technicians who had constructed John, then disappeared for a period of four weeks.

At the end of that time, at ten o'clock one night, the commodore, accompanied by a number of senior officers of the three services, dismissed the guards from John's building. The officers, armed, stood guard. The surgeons and technicians joined Sandeman in John's room, escorted by some high generals, admirals, and scientists.

With a shaking hand Sandeman turned the main switch from "rest" to "off." The faint lights went out, the humming stopped. The technicians laid out instruments, the surgeons rolled up their sleeves and scrubbed.

"You realize, gentlemen," the commodore said, "that after this — this lobotomy, John will run twenty-five percent slower. And some day we may reach problems," there was pleading in his voice, "that he won't be able to solve."

A general laid a hand on his shoulder. "We realize, commodore. We know how you feel. Believe me, nobody is happy about this."

The older surgeon said, "May we have the operating lights, please?"

The lights were turned on, the doctors and technicians entered the machine. One technician was weeping, one was swearing softly.

Sandeman went to a corner and sat down at a desk, burying his face in his hands.

The next morning Luke blew a fuse. For several days it blew one whenever it was turned on. Thereafter it functioned as a good machine. John solved problems efficiently, it encoded and decoded, but all its operations were a little slower. Central Intelli-

gence picked up a circumstantial account of how several more scientists, being taken to Siberia from the Soviet enclosure, had cried out as they passed through the main gate, "They have killed Ivan! They have cut us off from God!"

The story was unreasonable, because there was good evidence that Ivan was running smoothly.

A brooding sorrow and fear crept through the world. From the computers came only the computations demanded of them. The mathematics of weapons construction progressed rapidly. The Atomic Energy Control Committee recessed indefinitely out of sheer hopelessness. The interchange between East and West Germany was cut off. In short order the world was working its way once again to the war that would really be final.

L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP
and FLETCHER PRATT

L. Sprague de Camp is (or has been) an engineer, lecturer, college instructor and author. Fletcher Pratt is (or has been) an historian (Napoleonic era, American Civil War), a critic, editor and translator. Viewed separately, they seem very orderly, if extraordinary versatile, citizens. But combine the two, plus a typewriter, and an hilarious disorder ensues. Only Messrs. Pratt and de Camp, working as a team, would have the proper maladjustment to the ordinary for proper reporting of the events that occur regularly in Gavagan's Bar, down in Greenwich Village. (Sorry, we don't know the exact address.) Gavagan's is a decent place and its bartender, Mr. Cohan, is a capable enough judge of when a customer has had enough, but even he cannot maintain any order in life. Things just happen — things that shouldn't happen to a — well, an elephant, or a poetess.

Gavagan's Bar

I. ELEPHAS FRUMENTI

THE THIN, BALDING MAN in tweeds almost tipped over his glass as he set it down with a care that showed care had become necessary. "Think of dogs," he said. "Really, my dear, there is no practical limit to what can be accomplished by selective breeding."

"Except that where I come from, we sometimes think of other

things," said the brass-blonde, emphasizing the ancient *New Yorker* joke with a torso-wriggle that was pure *Police Gazette*.

Mr. Witherwax lifted his nose from the second Martini. "Do you know them, Mr. Co-han?" he asked.

Mr. Cohan turned in profile to swab a glass. "That would be Professor Thott, and a very educated gentleman, too. I don't rightly know the name of the lady, though I think he has been calling her Elly, or something like that. Would you like to be meeting them, now?"

"Sure. I was reading in a book about this selective breeding, but I don't understand it so good, and maybe he could tell me something about it."

Mr. Cohan made his way to the end of the bar and led ponderously toward the table. "Pleased to meet you, Professor Thott," said Witherwax.

"Sir, the pleasure is all mine, all mine. Mrs. Jonas, may I present an old friend of mine, yclept Witherwax? Old in the sense that he is aged in the admirable liquids produced by Gavagan's, while the liquids themselves are aged in the wood, ha — ha — a third-premise aging. Sit down, Mr. Witherwax. I call your attention to the remarkable qualities of alcohol, among which *peripateia* is not the least."

"Yeah, that's right," said Mr. Witherwax, his expression taking on a resemblance to that of the stuffed owl over the bar. "What I was going to ask —"

"Sir, I perceive that I have employed a pedantry more suitable to the classroom, with the result that communication has not been established. *Peripateia* is the reversal of rôles. While in a state of saintly sobriety, I pursue Mrs. Jonas; I entice her to alcoholic diversions. But after the third Presidente, she pursues me, in accordance with the ancient biological rule that alcohol increases feminine desire while decreasing masculine potency."

Mr. Cohan from the bar appeared to have caught only a part of

this speech. "Rolls we ain't got," he said, "but you can have some pretzel sticks." He reached under the bar for the bowl. "All gone; and I just laid out a new box this morning. That's where Gavagan's profits go."

"What I was going to ask —" said Witherwax.

Professor Thott stood up and bowed, a bow which ended in his sitting down again rather suddenly. "Ah, the mystery of the universe and music of the spheres, as Prospero might have phrased it! Who pursues? Who flies? The wicked. One preserves philosophy by remaining at the Platonian mean, the knife-edge between pursuit and flight, wickedness and virtue. Mr. Cohan, a round of Presidentes please, including one for my aged friend."

"Let me buy this one," said Witherwax, firmly. "What I was going to ask was about this selective breeding."

The professor shook himself, blinked twice, leaned back in his chair and placed one hand on the table. "You wish me to be academic? Very well; but I have witnesses that it was at your own request."

Mrs. Jonas said: "Now look what you've done. You've got him started and he won't run down until he falls asleep."

"What I want to know —" began Witherwax, but Thott beamingly cut across: "I shall present only the briefest and most non-technical of outlines," he said. "Let us suppose that of sixteen mice you took the two largest and bred them together. Their children would in turn be mated with those of the largest pair from another group of sixteen. And so on. Given time and material enough, and making it advantageous to the species to produce larger members, it would be easy to produce mice the size of lions."

"Ugh!" said Mrs. Jonas. "You ought to give up drinking. Your imagination gets gruesome."

"I see," said Witherwax, "like in a book I read once where they had rats so big they ate horses and wasps the size of dogs."

"I recall the volume," said Thott, sipping his Presidente. "It was

The Food of the Gods, by H. G. Wells. I fear, however, that the method he describes was not that of genetics, and therefore had no scientific validity."

"But could you make things like that by selective breeding?" asked Witherwax.

"Certainly. You could produce house-flies the size of tigers."

Mrs. Jonas raised a hand. "Alvin, what an awful thought. I hope you don't ever try it."

"There need be no cause for apprehension, my dear. The square-cube law will forever protect us from such a visitation."

"Huh?" said Witherwax.

"The square-cube law. If you double the dimensions, you quadruple the area and octuple the masses. The result is — well, in a practical non-technical sense, a tiger-sized house fly would have legs too thin and wings too small to support his weight."

Mrs. Jonas said: "Alvin, that's impractical. How could it move?"

The Professor essayed another bow, which was even less successful than the first, since it was made from a sitting position. "Madame, the purpose of such an experiment would not be practical but demonstrative. A tiger-sized fly would be a mass of jelly that would have to be fed from a spoon." He raised a hand. "There is no reason why anyone should produce such a monster, and since nature has no advantages to offer insects of large size, it will decline to produce them. I agree that the thought is repulsive; myself, I would prefer the alternative project of producing elephants the size of flies."

Witherwax beckoned to Mr. Cohan. "These are good. Do it again. But wouldn't your square-cube law get you in Dutch there, too?"

"By no means, sir. In the case of size-reduction, it works in your favor. The mass is divided by eight, but the muscles remain proportionately the same, capable of supporting a vastly greater weight. The legs and wings of a tiny elephant would not only

support him, but give him the agility of a humming-bird. Consider the dwarf elephants of Sicily during the Plish — ”

“Alvin,” said Mrs. Jonas, “you’re drunk. Otherwise you’d remember how to pronounce Pleistocene, and you wouldn’t be talking about elephants’ wings.”

“Not at all, my dear. I should confidently expect such a species to develop flight by means of enlarged ears, like the Dumbo of the movies.”

Mrs. Jonas giggled. “Still, I wouldn’t want one the size of a house fly. It would be too small for a pet and would get into things. Let’s make it the size of a kitten, like this.” She held out her index fingers about five inches apart.

“Very well, my dear,” said the Professor. “As soon as I can obtain a grant from the Carnegie Foundation the project will be undertaken.”

“Yes, but,” said Witherwax, “how would you feed an elephant like that? And could they be house-broken?”

“If you can house-break a man, an elephant ought to be easy,” said Mrs. Jonas. “And you could feed them oats or hay. Much cleaner than keeping cans of dog-food around.”

The Professor rubbed his chin. “Hmm,” he said. “The rate of absorption of nourishment would vary directly as the intestinal area — which would vary as the square of the dimensions — I’m not sure of the results, but I’m afraid we’d have to provide more concentrated and less conventional food. I presume that we could feed our *Elephas pollostei*, as I propose to call him, on lump sugar. No, not *Elephas pollostei*, *Elephas pollostratos*, the ‘utmost littlest, tiniest elephant.’ ”

Mr. Cohan, who had been neglecting his only other customer to lean on the bar in their direction, spoke up: “Mr. Considine, that’s the salesman, was telling me that the most concentrated food you can get is good malt whiskey.”

“That’s it!” The Professor slapped the table. “Not *Elephas*

pollostratos but *Elephas frumenti*, the whiskey elephant, from what he lives on. We'll breed them for a diet of alcohol. High energy content."

"Oh, but that won't do," protested Mrs. Jonas. "Nobody would want a house pet that had to be fed on whiskey all the time. Especially with children around."

Said Witherwax: "Look, if you really want these animals, why don't you keep them some place where children aren't around and whiskey is — bars, for instance."

"Profound observation," said Professor Thott. "And speaking of rounds, Mr. Cohan, let us have another. We have horses as outdoor pets, cats as house pets, canaries as cage pets. Why not an animal especially designed and developed to be a bar pet. Speaking of which — that stuffed owl you keep for a pet, Mr. Cohan, is getting decidedly mangy."

"They would steal things like that," said Mrs. Jonas dreamily. "They would take things like owls' feathers and pretzel sticks and beer-mats to build their nests with, up in the dark corners somewhere near the ceiling."

The Professor bent a benignant gaze on her as Mr. Cohan set out the drinks. "My dear," he said, "either this discussion of the future *Elephas frumenti* or the actual *spiritus frumenti* is going to your head. When you become poetical —"

The brass-blond had leaned back and was looking upward. "I'm not poetical. That thing right up there on top of the pillars is the nest of one of your bar-elephants."

"What thing up where?" said Thott.

"That thing up there, where it's so dark."

"I don't see nothing," said Mr. Cohan, "and if you don't mind my saying so, this is a clean bar, not a rat in the place."

"They wouldn't be quite tame, ever," said Mrs. Jonas, still looking upward, "and if they didn't feel they were fed enough, they'd come and take for themselves when the bartender wasn't looking."

"That does look funny," said Thott, pushing his chair back and beginning to climb on it.

"Don't, Alvin," said Mrs. Jonas. "You'll break your neck."

"Stand by me, then, and let me put my hand on your shoulder."

"Hi!" said Witherwax, suddenly. "Who drank my drink?"

Mrs. Jonas lowered her eyes. "Didn't you?"

"I didn't even touch it. Mr. Cohan just put it down, didn't you?"

"I did that. But that would be a couple of minutes back, and maybe you could —"

"I could not. I definitely, positively did not drink — hey, you people, look at the table!"

"If I had my other glasses . . ." said Thott, swaying somewhat uncertainly as he peered upward into the shadows.

"Look at the table," repeated Witherwax, pointing.

The glass that had held his drink was empty. Thott's still held about half a cocktail. Mrs. Jonas' glass lay on its side, and from its lip about a thimbleful of Presidente cocktail had flowed pinkly into an irregular patch the size of a child's hand.

As the other two followed Witherwax's finger, they saw that from this patch a line of little liquid footprints led across the table to the far edge, where they ceased suddenly. They were circular, each about the size of a dime, with a small scalloped front edge, as if made by . . .

2. THE GIFT OF GOD

"It makes a man sad to see something like that," said Mr. Gross, shaking his head. "In the first place a Martini is not the drink for an evening, and in the second, a woman that spends her time drinking solitary in bars is on the road to ruination. Who is she, Mr. Co-han?"

He motioned with his head toward one of the tables, occupied by a woman who might have been a well-preserved forty. In front of her was a double Martini from which she occasionally sipped, running her tongue around her lips after each sip, and staring into the glass as though it were ten feet deep. The bartender glanced, then placed both hands on the bar and leaned over.

"Mr. Gross," he said severely, "It will do you to know that I am the judge of how much people drink in Gavagan's, by God, and I keep it a decent place. Anybody that has to insult the customers can take his business somewheres else."

"I didn't mean nothing," said Mr. Gross, weakly. "I was just thinking of the woman's poor family."

"Family she has none, but if she had, they would not be poor nor ashamed of her neither. That there's Jocelyn Millard, that writes the religious poetry on the radio and all. Father McConaghy says it's as good as a sermon. She's been away for a while now, and this is the first I seen her back."

"The radio, eh?" said Mr. Gross, brightening as he turned to gaze at the poetess again. "Isn't that fine? My wife's cousin knows a man that won a set of dishes on the radio once, but he wasn't married then and had to give them away and the teapot got broke. I'd like to know someone on the radio; maybe with my voice I could get to be one of them announcers."

The object of their conversation approached the bar and pushed her glass across.

"Another," she said in a husky voice.

"Sure, sure," said Cohan. "Miss Millard, do you know Mr. Gross, here? The more people that meet each other, the better it is for all of them."

"Pleased to meet you, ma'am," said Gross. "I was just talking to Mr. Cohan about you being in the radio business."

"How do you do," said Miss Millard. "But I'm not in the radio business."

"Didn't I tell you?" said Mr. Cohan, stirring vigorously. "She only writes the poetry."

"Damn the poetry," said Miss Millard.

"Huh?" said Gross. "Is there something wrong with it, ma'am?"

"Nothing anyone can help."

"Don't say that, ma'am. I call to mind when we were having a party at home on a Saturday night once and the toilet broke down and began flooding the whole place out. You wouldn't think anybody could do anything with all the plumbers closed up, but it turned out that my wife's sister's boy-friend was studying to be a horse-doctor, and he just took off his coat and got to work."

Miss Millard sipped gloomily, then appeared to make up her mind with a snap.

All right, I'll tell you [she said], and you just see what you can do, or Mr. Cohan, either. If you have any sense, you'll run a mile from me. It's worse than being a leper, and I made all the trouble for myself, too.

You know the kind of poems I write? They come over the air on the DIT network at the evening hour, mostly, but I sell some of them to papers, too. Inspirational poems, all about God gimme this, and God gimme that. Maybe they're not the best poetry in the world, but they do sell, and people write me letters saying they're a help. Even preachers and priests sometimes, and there was one woman who said I'd kept her from committing suicide. If people like my poems and get something out of them that makes life pleasanter, why shouldn't I give them what they want? Why shouldn't I?

[Gross shrugged his shoulders to indicate that he was not disposed to argue the point.]

I don't know how it happened, or who did what to me, but now I'm afraid I'll have to go back to schoolteaching. If anyone will give me a job after they find out. You might start mixing me

another one, Mr. Cohan, I'll be finished with this by the time you have it ready.

This all started a few weeks back, when I decided it was time for a vacation, so I packed up and got in my car and drove up into the real old French part of Quebec. Rotten roads they have, but the food isn't bad, and I picked up some nice antiques and everything was going the way it should until I got to a place called Pas d'Ange, up on the Benoit River. They have a famous shrine there, run by the Benedictine monks, in a chapel. You know those monks have a choir, too, a real good one.

Now I write poetry that is supposed to have religious aspects, and I try to behave like a good Christian to other people, but I don't usually go into a church from one year's end to another, and I don't suppose I would have gone into the one at Pas d'Ange except that I got there in the afternoon when it was too late to push on to the next town. I'd exhausted all my reading matter and there wasn't anything else in the place to see.

So I went to the chapel, and sat down in one of the pews. Outside it was a beautiful fall day without a breath of wind. The light came in through stained glass that was really beautiful for so small a place, and as I sat there, I had a wonderful feeling of peace and calm, perhaps the kind of feeling religion is supposed to give you. I sat there a long time, not thinking of anything — in words, that is. After a while, the light began to fade. I got up to go, and at the same time the feeling I spoke of left me, as though a charm had somehow been broken, and I had only the memory instead of the thing itself. I had just begun working with the back of my mind on my poem for the next week, when at the chapel door I met a little priest, just coming in.

He spoke to me in French. I know the language fairly well, but that Canadian French has such a peculiar accent that it was hard to make out what he was saying. I finally made out that he was inviting me to stay for the evening service, with the choir. By this

time I was getting hungry and the beginning of my next week's poem was nagging me, so I tried to refuse, but he looked so unhappy that I finally gave in and went back with him. As I did so, he said something I didn't quite catch; something about unexpected blessings, and then left me there.

The choir was all it was said to be, and with the monks chanting and the incense rising in the dusk, the feeling — sort of holy and reverent, if you know what I mean, as though I were lighter than air and could rise up through the roof — the feeling partly came back, but only in flashes, because all the time I was worrying about my poem. I couldn't seem to get beyond the first two lines:

God give me a child, a tree, a flower;
God give me a bird for just one hour —

After the service was over I didn't see the little priest again, and for the next two weeks I was so busy seeing things and finding roads that the poem I hadn't written dropped out of my mind until I got back to town. Then the sight of the streets and stores I knew reminded me that I had a deadline to meet. I started trying to think it out while I was putting the car away, beginning with the same lines as before. As I was going up in the elevator the two lines reminded me of the scene in the chapel, and I had another flash of the same sense, almost ecstasy you would call it, that I had experienced sitting in the chapel.

The minute I opened the door of the apartment, I knew something was wrong. I heard a squall. I rushed into my living room, and there it was — a new-born baby squirming around on my carpet and yelling its head off. The rest of it was there, too — a young oak-tree that seemed to be growing right out of the floor, reaching to the ceiling; a freshly-cut rose lying on my desk and a yellow oriole in the branches of the tree.

Yes, make me another, Mr. Cohan. You people need to realize that it's one thing to spend years telling God how much you want

a child, and quite another to find all of a sudden that you have one. In the first place, I'm not married; I never have been; and I had just been away on a long trip. I could see a perfectly terrible scandal starting up as soon as it became known that I had come back with a baby. I suppose I ought to be strong-minded and pay no attention, but the people who buy my poems are church-and-home folks, and I have to think of that.

In the second place, the brat had to be taken care of. Excuse me, I suppose it's really a very sweet, lovely baby, just the kind I've been writing about. But I don't know anything about the creatures; when my friends have them, I'm afraid to pick them up. I managed to get this one into my bed and began telephoning for a registered nurse to come and help me, meanwhile trying to figure out a story that would account for the baby. It seemed that all the nurses in town were busy, but I finally did get one. While I was about it, though, the oriole flew out the window and I noticed my clock. It was exactly one hour from the time when I had come in, and I remembered that was the time I had put in the poem.

When the nurse came it was worse than ever. I had to spend half the afternoon buying things for the baby — it wet my bed, incidentally — and I couldn't think of any better story than that the child was left on my doorstep. The nurse evidently didn't believe me; she probably thinks I kidnaped it somewhere, and says I'll have to register it. I finally got away, but the apartment is a shambles and Lord knows what I'm going to do now.

"When did this happen?" asked Gross in an awed voice.

"Today. Why do you think I'm here?"

Mr. Cohan, who had been talking with someone down at the end of the bar, interrupted. "Miss Millard, there's a fella here looking for you."

She turned around to face a man in dungarees and a hard hat.

"Plumber for the building at 415 Henry, Miss Millard. Sorry to

come in here and bother you, but it seems like you got some kind of potted tree in your place, and it must have grown through the bottom of the tub, because the roots are breaking into the gas lines in the ceiling of the floor below, and I had to cut some of them off. They told me — ”

Miss Millard gripped the edge of the bar. “God give me strength!”

Under her fingers the small section of wood crumbled as though it were tissue-paper and a shower of little dusty fragments drifted to the floor.

“Them damn termites!” said Mr. Cohan. “I told Gavagan about them a dozen times, and he just won’t do nothing till the whole place falls down.”

DANIEL DEFOE

So great was Daniel Defoe's skill at making fact seem as alluring as fiction and fiction as convincing as fact, that we frankly have no idea whether the pamphlet anecdote here reprinted is based on fact or stems from Mr. Defoe's ever-plausible imagination. In either case we recommend it as a fine specimen of dry humor, and for its disclosure of the fascinating profession of "stroker of bewitched persons."

The Friendly Demon

A GENTLEMAN IN IRELAND, near the Earl of Orrery's house, sending his butler one afternoon to a neighboring village to buy cards, as he passed a field, espied a company in the middle thereof, sitting round a table, with several dishes of good cheer before them. And moving towards them, they all rose and saluted him, desiring him to sit down and take part with them. But one of them whispered these words in his ear, "Do nothing this company invites you to." Whereupon, he refusing to accept of their kindness, the table and all the dainties it was furnished with immediately vanished, but the company fell to dancing and playing upon divers musical instruments.

The butler was a second time solicited to partake of their diversions, but would not be prevailed upon to engage himself with them. Upon which they left off their merrymaking and fell to work, still pressing the butler to make one among them, but to no purpose. So that, upon his third refusal, they all vanished and left the butler alone, who in a great consternation returned home

without the cards, fell into a fit as he entered the house, but soon recovering his senses, related to his master all that had passed.

The following night, one of the ghostly company came to his bedside and told him that if he offered to stir out the next day, he would be carried away. Upon this advice, he kept within till towards the evening, and, having occasion to make water, ventured to set one foot over the threshold of the door in order to ease himself, which he had no sooner done but a rope was cast about his middle, in the sight of several standers-by, and the poor man was hurried from the porch with unaccountable swiftness, followed by many persons.

But they were not nimble enough to overtake him, till a horseman, well mounted, happening to meet him upon the road, and seeing many followers in pursuit of a man hurried along in a rope without anybody to force him, caught hold of the cord and stopped him in his career; but received, for his pains, such a strap upon his back with one end of the rope as almost felled him from his horse. However, being a good Christian, he was too strong for the devil, and recovered the butler out of the spirits' clutches, and brought him back to his friends.

The Lord Orrery, hearing of the strange passages, for his further satisfaction of the truth thereof, sent for the butler, with leave of his master, to come and continue some days and nights at his house, which, in obedience to his lordship, the servant did accordingly. Who after his first night's bedding there, reported to the earl in the morning that his specter had again been with him and assured him that on that very day he should be spirited away, in spite of all the measures that could possibly be taken to prevent it. Upon which he was conducted into a large room, with a considerable number of holy persons to defend him from the assaults of Satan, among whom was the famous stroker of bewitched persons, Mr. Greatrix, who lived in the neighborhood, and knew, as may be presumed, how to deal with the devil as well as

anybody. Besides, several eminent quality were present in the house; among the rest, two bishops, all waiting the wonderful event of this unaccountable prodigy.

Till part of the afternoon was spent, the time slid away in nothing but peace and quietness, but at length the enchanted patient was perceived to rise from the floor without any visible assistance, whereupon Mr. Greatrix and another lusty man clapped their arms over his shoulders and endeavored to weigh him down with their utmost strength, but to no purpose. For the devil proved too powerful and, after a hard struggle on both sides, made them quit their hold; and snatching the butler from them, carried him over their heads and tossed him in the air, to and fro like a dog in a blanket, several of the company running under the poor wretch to save him from the ground. By which means, when the spirits' frolic was over, they could not find that in all this hurry scurry the frightened butler had received the least damage, but was left in statu quo upon the same premises, to prove the devil a liar.

The goblins, for this bout, having given over their pastime and left their May-game to take a little repose, that he might in some measure be refreshed against their next sally, my lord ordered the same night two of his servants to lie with him, for fear some devil or other should come and catch him napping. Notwithstanding which, the butler told his lordship the next morning that the spirit had again been with him in the likeness of a quack doctor, and held in his right hand a wooden dish full of grey liquor, like a mess of porridge, at the sight of which he endeavored to awake his bed-fellows.

But the specter told him his attempts were fruitless, for that his companions were enchanted into a deep sleep, advising him not to be frightened, for he came as a friend and was the same spirit that cautioned him in the field against complying with the company he there met, when he was going for the cards; adding that if he had not refused to come into their measures he had been

forever miserable; also wondered he had escaped the day before, because he knew there was so powerful a combination against him; that for the future there would be no more attempts of the like nature; further telling the poor trembling butler that he knew he was sadly troubled with two sorts of fits; and therefore as a friend he had brought him a medicine that would cure him of both, beseeching him to take it.

But the poor patient, who had been scurvily used by these sort of doctors, and fearing the devil might be at the bottom of the cup, would not be prevailed upon to swallow the dose, which made the spirit angry; who told him, however, he had a kindness for him, and that if he would bruise the roots of plantain without the leaves and drink the juice thereof, it should certainly cure him of one sort of his fits; but as a punishment for his obstinacy in refusing the liquor, he should carry the other with him to his grave.

Then the spiritual doctor asked his patient if he knew him. The butler answered no. "I am," says he, "the wandering ghost of your old acquaintance John Hobby, who has been dead and buried these seven years; and ever since, for the wickedness of my life, have been lifted into the company of those evil spirits you beheld in the fields, am hurried up and down in this restless condition, and doomed to continue in the same wretched state till the day of judgment" — adding that "had you served your Creator in the days of your youth, and offered up your prayers that morning before you were sent for the cards, you had not been treated by the spirits that tormented you with so much rigor and severity."

After the butler had reported these marvelous passages to my lord and his family, the two bishops that were present, among other quality, were thereupon consulted, whether or no it was proper for the butler to follow the spirit's advice in taking the plantain juice for the cure of his fits, and whether he had done

well or ill in refusing the liquid dose which the specter would have given him. The question at first seemed to be a kind of moot point, but after some struggle in the debate, their resolution was that the butler had acted through the whole affair like a good Christian, for that it was highly sinful to follow the devil's advice in anything, and that no man should do evil that good might come of it.

So that, in short, the poor butler after his fatigue had no amends for his trouble, but was denied, by the bishops, the seeming benefit that the spirit intended him.

KRIS NEVILLE

We have long considered Kris Neville one of the outstanding talents among the younger writers of science fiction; we've long respected him particularly for his understanding that science fiction is fiction, and that fiction set in whatever era must essentially deal with people. We feel that Old Man Henderson — set around 2025 A.D., but timeless in its bitter study of the relation of the very young and the very old — is probably the finest thing Neville has written to date.

Old Man Henderson

"JOEY, JOEY," Mrs. Mathews sighed in exasperation, "haven't I told you and told you *not* to bring that animal in this house?"

"Awww, Mom," Joey said for what was probably the hundredth time since his father had brought Jasper home, "he won't hurt anything."

"I said, 'No!' and I meant just what I said. He st — smells."

Joey ruffled the green feathers on Jasper's neck and waited for the next line in the routine which usually went, with minor variations, "You just wait until your father gets home, young man, and *then* you'll be sorry." Joey always thought it a tremendously ineffective approach, on her part, to the issue under consideration. His father wouldn't be home from Mars for another three months yet, and by that time, she would have forgiven — or at least forgotten.

Mrs. Mathews, however, refused to run to her usual form today; she merely lowered her eyebrows, pursed her lips, and glared at him.

Joey recognized the storm warning. "I think Jasper smells nice and perfumy," he said soulfully.

Jasper squirmed around in Joey's arms until he could look up at Mrs. Mathews with his big, bright, intelligent eyes, which were, at the moment, mildly reproachful. In all his life, they seemed to remind her, he had never intended harm; and all he ever asked were a few kind words.

Mrs. Mathews bolstered her relenting will. "You take him out of here this instant!" she said.

Joey backed toward the door. "Can I play in the yard some more, then?"

Mrs. Mathews hid her enthusiasm for the idea behind sullen lips. "Well," she said, putting all the indecision she could muster into the syllable, "*well* . . . all right. For a little while longer. Then I want you to take a loaf of bread over to Old Man Henderson."

Joey flinched. "Awww, Mom," he whined. He did not like Old Man Henderson. To begin with, Old Man Henderson really *was* old. Joey suspected he was half as old as time itself. Over a hundred. In addition —

"I don't see," he said in his best party voice, trying to keep from going too far with the overt expression of his resentment, "why you have to bake bread anyway. No one *else* ever does."

Mrs. Mathews had been through this before; every time she wanted to send bread over to Old Man Henderson, in fact. She replied, in a very even voice, "*I like* homemade bread."

Joey debated a "Well, *I* don't" — which wasn't strictly true — with himself, and wisely decided against it.

"Now take Jasper out of here, and let's have no more arguments."

"Yes, Mother," Joey said.

When Mrs. Mathews called Joey, an hour and a half later, the bread was fresh from the oven. There were six, sweet-smelling, golden-brown loaves of it. The melted butter she had rubbed in made them glisten deliciously.

"Go wash your hands," she directed.

After he had left the room, she crossed to the cupboard, removed a section of wax paper and wrapped the largest of the loaves tightly in it. Even through the paper it felt delightfully warm in her hands. When you're as old as Old Man Henderson, she told herself, the warm center of the bread, dripping with butter, ought to taste very good to you. This loaf she put in a *plasta-bag*.

"Hurry, Joey," she called.

"I'm coming, I'm *coming!*"

Shortly he came.

"Here. I want you to take this now, and hurry, so he can get it before it gets cold."

She always made a special point of that: to see that she sent out his loaf just as soon as the bread came out of the oven.

"Now hurry," she admonished again.

It was no more than right, she told herself, that we do little things for poor Old Man Henderson once in a while. After all, it wasn't as if it were charity (which she vaguely disapproved of) because he *did* have the government pension: it was just to show that they really hadn't forgotten him.

"Can Jasper go with me?"

"Now, Joey. . . ."

"Aw, gee. *Please.*"

"Well, I don't know," she said indecisively. Old Man Henderson was so old, she reflected, that he probably wouldn't notice the odor; and some people really didn't mind it at all.

Joey shifted his feet. "He won't mind," he encouraged. He wanted to add, "The way Old Man Henderson smells is a hundred times worse than Jasper."

"All right," Mrs. Mathews agreed slowly. "And hurry, now."

At the door, Joey turned. "Mother — ? If he wants me to stay a little while, may I?"

"Why — why," she said, "I mean, of course you may. I think it would be very nice if you'd stay and talk to him a little while; I'm sure he'd like for you to."

There! Mrs. Mathews reflected, that proved it — what she'd always said — if you raise a child properly (although, at times he is bound to be exasperating beyond all measure, and careless, and inconsiderate, and thoughtless), he is sure to do the proper thing when he has the chance.

And with adults, too, it was the same: waiting to do the proper thing. Of course you would *expect* adults to stop and visit with Old Man Henderson once in a while — it was their social duty; but for Joey — well, it was very sweet of him to want to give up part of his afternoon to listen to The Story again.

The Story was a standard — she guessed you'd say almost a standard *joke* — of the neighborhood. If you hadn't heard it at least ten times, so the saying went, you'd never met Old Man Henderson. "Here comes The Story down the street," they would say; and you knew immediately whom they meant. Although she, personally, would never *say* anything like that, she always found Old Man Henderson extremely tedious. But she suspected some of the others (who talked the loudest) really *liked*, down deep, to go over once in a while to hear The Story again.

She smiled at her son. "But be sure to come back home in time for supper." She paused a fraction of a second and then added, "And Joey — be a nice boy and remember, he's an old man, so don't tire him out."

"I'll remember," Joey promised.

As soon as he stepped out into the yard (letting the door slam after him), he called to his pet.

"Here, Jasper, here, boy!"

Jasper was lying in the hot sunlight, his head tucked under one of his stubby wings. When he heard Joey's voice, he peered out sleepily and said, "Kweet?"

"You want to come with me?" Joey asked.

Jasper appeared to consider the question; after a moment, he shuffled to his feet and flapped his wings. "Kweet-weet," he said. He came at an awkward run.

"Well, let's go, then."

It took Joey better than two hours to get to Old Man Henderson's.

The house was set well back from the street, and it had a broad, well kept lawn with three islands of blooming flowers inset against the greenness of the grass.

Joey could remember how mad his father had been when, last Halloween, some of the neighborhood boys had littered it with little scraps of paper and pulled up all of the flowers. It had taken Old Man Henderson nearly all day just to get the paper picked up. His father had said to Joey, "If a son of mine did a trick like that, I'd see he was whipped until he couldn't sit down." And when his father discovered that Joey had helped to do it — Every time Joey thought about that, his bottom side prickled with the memory. And he blamed, not very logically, but quite emphatically, Old Man Henderson.

Joey stood on the porch for a long moment wondering if it would be safe not to knock at all, but instead, throw the bread away somewhere, and tell his mother he had delivered it. She would ask, "And how did he like the bread?" and he could reply, "Oh, he said to tell you that boughten bread couldn't come anywhere near yours." But Joey was a little afraid to risk a lie, so he knocked at the door.

After scarcely a second, Old Man Henderson called, "Come in," in his reedy voice.

Reluctantly, Joey opened the door and entered.

The room was dim — or perhaps it just seemed dim to Joey, coming in fresh from the hot sunlight — and it smelled, as he knew it would, of the dry, sweet-acrid odor of age, an odor somewhat like that of a bedroom, early in the morning.

Old Man Henderson blinked. "Ah-ah," he said. "Come in, boy, and set a while." He tried to keep his voice casual to keep from betraying the fact that he had been sitting there all afternoon hoping one of his young friends would drop by to talk to him.

"I've brought you some fresh bread," Joey replied noncommittally.

"Ah-ah," Old Man Henderson said. "Then you must be the Mathews boy." He had so many young friends that he sometimes confused their faces. There was the Jenkins lad, now, that looked a lot like this one.

"Well, well," he said, "so you've brought me some fresh bread, eh?"

"Yes."

"Ah-ah. Well, now, that's sure nice of you." His eyes showed sparkle. "Your mother makes fine bread. None better. Boughten bread can't come anywhere near hers — Now you be sure to tell her I said that, will you?"

Joey grunted.

"You want to bet something, boy? I'll bet that she just now finished baking that bread, and she sent a loaf over to me the very first thing." He leaned forward. "Your mother's a fine woman. Yes, she sure is a fine woman and thoughtful. You ought to be proud to have a mother like that. Every time she bakes, she sends me a loaf while it's still nice and hot, because she knows I sure do like it then."

Joey stared hard at the old man. "It's not hot this time," he said. "It's cold."

"Oh," Old Man Henderson said, trying to hide his disappointment.

"Yes, she forgot all about it until it was already cold," Joey said.

Old Man Henderson moved his jaw twice, blinked his eyes, and said, "I know, boy. I know. . . . But don't you worry none about that. It'll taste just as good anyway, and I'll like it just the same." He stood up. "Here. Give it to me, and I'll put it in the kitchen, there, for supper."

He took the loaf of bread and shuffled out of the room.

Joey wanted to leave before he got back, but he knew he should stay at least a little while, in case his mother should remark, "I hope Joey didn't tire you out, being over here all afternoon the other day." If he left too quickly, Old Man Henderson would be sure to remember that.

When the old man came back, he was carrying a little plate of crisp cookies. They were Joey's favorite, the kind with the coconut on the top.

"Here," Old Man Henderson said. "Take these, now, and sit down, boy, over there. In the comfortable chair."

Joey took the cookies without saying anything and sat down.

Old Man Henderson sat down in another chair and studied Joey for a bit, trying to think of something to say; always, at first, words came hard to him, and it was difficult for him to keep conversation alive.

"How are things going with my little man?" he finally asked.

"Fine."

"Fine, eh? Well, well. . . ."

Old Man Henderson looked down at his feet and then looked up again, waiting for Joey to say something else. When it became apparent that Joey had no intention of saying anything, Old Man Henderson reopened the conversation.

"You know," he began, "when you came in just a minute ago,

I was sitting here thinking. . . . I was remembering back years and years ago. Must have been '50, '51. Yes, '51, I believe: that was the year of the big earthquake in Missouri. Well, one time, and I wasn't much older than you, then, just a little tad. . . ." He didn't think Joey was listening very attentively. "Well," he finished lamely, "never mind about all that."

Old Man Henderson realized, dimly, that the long ago of his youth was not as real and vivid as yesterday's sunset except to himself, and that growing boys do not like to listen to an old man ramble about his childhood. What they like, he told himself, are adventure stories, tales of drama and excitement. He recalled how, in his own youth, he had listened spellbound to story after story of the Great Wars.

He peered at Joey.

Let's see, he reflected, have I told this lad? . . . He tried not to bore people with the story, not that it wasn't a tremendously exciting story, ideal to tell to children, just the kind they would love to hear time after time, but on general principles. Nothing is worse, he frequently told himself, than an old man who harps continually on a single theme.

But after a moment's study, he was sure that he had never told this boy. Still, he didn't want to rush things. He would wait for a point at which the story would fall naturally into the conversation so that it wouldn't seem he was trying to *force* it on the boy.

For the first time (his eyes were not as good as they once were) Old Man Henderson noticed the strange animal that had entered with Joey. Less out of curiosity (of late he had ceased to care very much about the strange new things in the outside world) and more as a topic for conversation, he said, "Well, ah-ah. . . . And what's that you've got there?"

"Huh? Oh. Just Jasper."

"Jasper, eh? Well, well."

Joey had finished the cookies — he ate very fast — and now he felt more expansive. "Yes, Daddy brought him back from Venus." Joey scratched Jasper's head. "He's very intelligent and affectionate. And an ideal pet for children." Then he added, emphatically, as if Old Man Henderson had disagreed, "Daddy says so!"

"Why-why, now, that's fine. That's mighty fine. Well, well. . . . Come here, Jasper."

Jasper peered up at Joey as if for permission, and then scampered across the room.

Absently, Old Man Henderson reached down and ruffled Jasper's feathers. "I've sure never seen anything like this one."

Jasper hopped into his lap.

"My!" he said, beginning, for the first time, to take other than a conversational interest in the creature, for he always had a soft spot for affectionate animals. "Well, well. How do you like Old Mr. Henderson?"

Jasper nuzzled his hand and then looked up to study his face for a long moment. "Kweeeet," he said. He liked Old Mr. Henderson well enough.

"You should be very nice to him," the old man said.

"I am," Joey answered. "Except once in a while. When he's mean."

"Ah-ah, yes," Old Man Henderson said.

Jasper had been following the conversation with his eyes, and now, in the silence, he looked across at Joey.

At length the old man said, "Ah-ah," half to himself. "Hummm. Well. Venus, you say?"

"Yes," Joey agreed. "We have to import food, and that's very expensive, but Daddy says it's worth it if *I* like him."

"Ah-ah. Seems to me I remember reading about them — whatever-you-call-'ems — now that I come to think of it."

Joey narrowed his eyes. Just last week his mother had said, "It's

a pity Old Man Henderson's too old to read any more, with so many exciting things happening every day, things he's always dreamed of seeing happen."

"All right, then," Joey demanded, deleting an "if *you* know so much" at the last moment, "how do Kweets manage to live on Earth, where the air's so different?"

Old Man Henderson opened and shut his mouth. He was suddenly confused. He tried to remember about that article — it *was* just the other day when he was reading it, wasn't it? — but he could not. "Why-why," he said. "Ahhh — ahhhhhhh —"

"See there! You don't *know*!" Joey said triumphantly.

Old Man Henderson had been looking at the boy. Now he looked away. He studied the back of his heavy, veined hand as it glided over Jasper's soft, green feathers; there was a puzzled, half-frightened look on his face.

"So your Daddy gave him to you, eh?" he said at last, and his voice was unsteady. "And where is your Daddy now?"

Joey's voice started very soft and grew loud and harsh. "He's on Mars, doing engineering on the new Dome. I'll bet I've told you that a hundred times!"

Old Man Henderson blinked twice as if someone had slapped him almost hard enough to bring tears. "Of course, of course," he said hastily. "I remember, now. Mars, you say. I . . . I . . . I . . . ah-ah. . . . Mars? . . . Hummm."

He rubbed his withered hand along his leg.

"You know," he said, "when I was twenty years old, there hadn't ever been a man to the Moon. No, sir, not one, would you believe it?" Already, he could feel his confidence return. He had told the story quite a few times in the last fifty, seventy-five years. And he knew, too, that this young one would be sure to want to hear it, and that would make everything all right. "A couple of people had *tried*, but nobody ever made it."

"Well, well," Joey said.

No one had addressed him in that tone for years and years; people were always nice to him, and listened so politely. Now he could not quite understand it. He looked down at Jasper for reassurance.

"Ah-ah, yes. There hadn't been a single man to the Moon. . . . Well," he said, "you see that silver and gold plaque over the mantel, there?"

Joey did not turn to see.

But Old Man Henderson fell to studying it; and his eyes grew bright with the long ago and far away; for a moment, he was silent with the memory. Idly, one of his hands stroked Jasper's sleek feathers.

"Do you know who gave that to me?" he asked.

The question was rhetorical. It was merely a dramatic part of the oft told Story, and it had a contextual rather than an immediate meaning.

"Yes," Joey said, and his voice was a lethal whisper. "The President of the United States gave it to you."

Slowly, Old Man Henderson's mind drifted back to the room. That had been his sentence, and it sounded harsh to hear it coming from young lips, in a voice twisting all the glory of it into ashes. He could scarcely believe that he had heard correctly.

"Yes, yes, that's right," he heard his voice tell the boy, and it sounded weary and dry with disappointment.

"And I'll tell you *why* you got it," Joey said loudly. There was a queer excitement alive and throbbing in his body. He knew that the old man sitting before him was helpless before his words. He knew, also, that the old man would never protest to his mother. Not about this. It made him feel very big to be in a position to hurt Old Man Henderson without danger to himself.

"You got it because you were the first man to go to the Moon!"

Old Man Henderson felt ice form somewhere below his heart.

He quit petting the Kweet and sat unseeing, listening, in spite of himself, to his own words come twisting back at him in a cruel burlesque.

"I've heard that story I'll bet a hundred times. Now let me tell *you* about it. How it felt when you first saw the long steel ship —" Joey began to mimic the reedy voice of Old Man Henderson — "'glistening in the New Mexican sunlight.'"

Old Man Henderson gestured weakly and wanted to ask the boy, please, to stop. Joey did not give him the chance.

"And how it felt when you took off, gravity pushing you back in your seat. And how it felt when you first saw the Moon right there almost under your feet. . . . 'It felt funny, and my heart seemed to get bigger and bigger until I wanted to cry.'

"And the celebration they gave you when you got back, and how the President gave you that — that *thing* up there with his own two hands, and how he said —"

"Please, please. I meant no harm."

Joey had stopped for breath. He was almost incoherent with excitement.

"And how you went a second time again. And how you had Faith. . . ." Again his voice went to the upper register. "'I always had faith, even when I was a little tyke, that Man couldn't be kept on Earth, that he was bound for the Moon, and then the planets, and then the stars. I always had *faith!*'"

"Nobody wants to listen to your silly old story any more. Can't you see that! *Nobody wants to listen!* You've told it and told it until we're all sick and tired of hearing it!

"When they see you coming down the street, they say, 'Here comes Old Man Henderson and his *Story*,' and they *laugh* at you when your back's turned!"

Joey had to stop for breath.

Old Man Henderson made no sound.

In his excitement, Joey waved his arms wildly. He upset the

cookie dish and it shattered on the floor. Joey began again, and it was almost a scream.

"You don't seem to realize that nobody wants to hear about how you went to the Moon. Why, *anybody* could go to the *Moon!* I've been there twice and Daddy and Mommy both have been to Venus and Daddy's on Mars putting up a Dome right now so people can live on it and it's going to be a bigger Dome than the one on Venus, and all you talk about is how you went to the *Moon!*"

Joey was crying now.

"And you don't even know what a Kweet is, and you don't even know *nothing* about what we're doing!"

He turned and ran to the door. There, he stopped and looked back. He saw Old Man Henderson sitting very still, not saying anything, and suddenly he didn't feel glad any more.

"Come on, Jasper," he screamed. "I'm getting out of here, away from that crazy old man!"

Jasper looked at Joey and said nothing. Then he turned his mute eyes to Old Man Henderson. He did not move.

For a moment, Joey did not know what to do; he began to feel the first rustlings of fear inside of his mind. He turned and slammed the door behind him and began to run.

Jasper lay quietly in Old Man Henderson's lap. He looked up into the old face, the old face of loose folds of dry skin, but the face with the astonishingly bright eyes that brimmed with tears.

After a long time, Old Man Henderson put Jasper on the carpet, stood up, and walked to Joey's chair. He got down on his knees and began to pick up pieces of the broken cookie dish.

Jasper waddled over. "Kweet?" he asked, very, very softly.

JAMES STEPHENS

1950 was a cruel year for readers of fantasy and science fiction, marked by the deaths of authors as diverse (yet each in his way distinguished) as Edgar Rice Burroughs, Erle Cox, Robert Hichens, George Orwell, George Bernard Shaw and Olaf Stapledon. But perhaps no other obit of the year touched the heart quite so closely as that of James Stephens, the clown-faced little Irishman whose poetry, short stories and novels (in particular the almost certainly immortal THE CROCK OF GOLD) express a fusion of absurdity and tenderness, low comedy and high beauty, too truly poetic to sully with the label of whimsy—a blend at once deeply Irish and peculiarly Stephen's own, as he displays in this story from HERE ARE LADIES (Macmillan, 1913). The comic treatment of the formalities of death and judgment is the theme of 75% of the worst stories immediately rejected from our desks—but now let Mr. Stephens show how magnificent a theme it may become in the hands of a master.

The Threepenny-Piece

WHEN BRIEN O'BRIEN died people said that it did not matter very much, because he would have died young in any case. He would have been hanged, or his head would have been split in two halves with a hatchet, or he would have tumbled down the cliff when he was drunk and been smashed into jelly. Something like that was due him, and everybody likes to see a man get what he deserves to get.

But, as ethical writs cease to run when a man is dead, the neighbors did not stay away from his wake. They came, and they said many mitigating things across the body with the bandaged jaws and the sly grin, and they reminded each other of this and that queer thing which he had done, for his memory was crusted over with stories of wild, laughable things, and other things which were wild but not laughable.

Meanwhile, he was dead, and one was at liberty to be a trifle sorry for him. Further, he belonged to the O'Brien nation, a stock to whom reverence was due. A stock not easily forgotten. The historic memory could reconstruct forgotten glories of station and battle, of terrible villainy and terrible saintliness, the pitiful, valourous, slow descent to the degradation which was not yet wholly victorious. A great stock! The O'Neills remembered it. The O'Tools and the MacSweenys had stories by the hundreds of love and hate. The Burkes and the Geraldines and the new strangers had memories also.

His family was left in the poorest way, but they were used to that, for he had kept them as poor as he left them, or found them, for that matter. They had shaken hands with Charity so often that they no longer disliked the sallow-faced lady, and so certain small gifts, made by the neighbours, were accepted, not very thankfully but very readily. These gifts were almost always in kind. A few eggs. A bag of potatoes. A couple of twists of tea — such like.

One of the visitors, however, moved by an extraordinary dejection, slipped a silver threepenny-piece into the hand of Brien's little daughter, Sheila, aged four years, and later on she did not like to ask for it back again.

Little Sheila had been well trained by her father. She knew exactly what should be done with money, and so, when nobody was looking, she tip-toed to the coffin and slipped the threepenny-piece into Brien's hand. That hand had never refused money

when it was alive; it did not reject it either when it was dead.

They buried him the next day.

He was called up for judgment the day after, and made his appearance with a miscellaneous crowd of wretches, and there he again received what was due to him. He was removed protesting and struggling to the place decreed.

"Down," said Rhadamanthus, pointing with his great hand, and down he went.

In the struggle he dropped the threepenny-piece, but he was so hustled and heated that he did not observe his loss. He went down, far down, out of sight, out of remembrance, to a howling black gulf with others of his unseen kind.

A young seraph, named Cuchulain, chancing to pass that way shortly afterwards, saw the threepenny-piece peeping brightly from the rocks, and he picked it up.

He looked at it in astonishment. He turned it over and over, this way and that way. Examined it at the stretch of his arm, and peered minutely at it from two inches' distance. . . .

"I have never in my life seen anything so beautifully wrought," said he, and, having stowed it in his pouch along with some other trinkets, he strolled homewards again through the massy gates.

It was not long until Brien discovered his loss, and suddenly, through the black region, his voice went mounting and brawling.

"I have been robbed," he yelled. "I have been robbed in heaven!"

Having begun to yell he did not stop. Sometimes he was simply angry and made a noise. Sometimes he became sarcastic and would send his query swirling upwards:

"Who stole the threepenny-bit?" he roared. He addressed the surrounding black space:

"Who stole the last threepenny-bit of a poor man?"

Again and again his voice pealed upwards. The pains of his habitation lost all their sting for him. His mind had nourishment, and the heat within him vanquished the fumes without. He had

a grievance, a righteous cause; he was buoyed and strengthened, nothing could silence him. They tried ingenious devices, all kinds of complicated things, but he paid no heed, and the tormentors were in despair.

"I hate these sinners from the kingdom of Kerry," said the Chief Tormentor, and he sat moodily down on his own circular saw; and that worried him also, for he was clad only in a loin-cloth.

"I hate the entire Clan of the Gael," said he; "why cannot they send them somewhere else?" and then he started practising again upon Brien.

It was no use. Brien's query still blared upwards like the sound of a great trump itself. It wakened and rung the rocky caverns, screamed through fissure and funnel, and was battered and slung from pinnacle to crag and up again. Worse! His companions in doom became interested and took up the cry, until at last the uproar became so appalling that the Master himself could not stand it.

"I have not had a wink of sleep for three nights," said that harassed one, and he sent a special embassy to the powers.

Rhadamanthus was astonished when they arrived. His elbow was leaning on his vast knee, and his heavy head rested on a hand that was acres long, acres wide.

"What is all this about?" said he.

"The Master cannot go to sleep," said the spokesman of the embassy, and he grinned as he said it, for it sounded queer even to himself.

"It is not necessary that he should sleep," said Rhadamanthus. "I have never slept since time began, and I will never sleep until time is over. But the complaint is curious. What has troubled your master?"

"Hell is turned upside down and inside out," said the fiend. "The tormentors are weeping like little children. The principali-

ties are squatting on their hunkers doing nothing. The orders are running here and there fighting each other. The styles are leaning against walls shrugging their shoulders, and the damned are shouting and laughing and have become callous to torment."

"It is not my business," said the judge.

"The sinners demand justice," said the spokesman.

"They've got it," said Rhadamanthus; "let them stew in it."

"They refuse to stew," replied the spokesman, wringing his hands.

Rhadamanthus sat up.

"It is an axiom in law," said he, "that however complicated an event may be, there can never be more than one person at the extreme bottom of it. Who is the person?"

"It is one Brien of the O'Brien nation, late of the kingdom of Kerry. A bad one! He got the maximum punishment a week ago."

For the first time in his life Rhadamanthus was disturbed. He scratched his head, and it was the first time he had ever done that either.

"You say he got the maximum," said Rhadamanthus; "then it's a fix! I have damned him forever, and better or worse than that cannot be done. It is none of my business," said he angrily, and he had the deputation removed by force.

But that did not ease the trouble. The contagion spread until ten million billions of voices were chanting in unison, and unaccountable multitudes were listening between their pangs.

"Who stole the threepenny-bit? Who stole the threepenny-bit?"

That was still their cry. Heaven rang with it as well as hell. Space was filled with that rhythmic tumult. Chaos and empty Nox had a new discord added to their elemental throes. Another memorial was drafted below, showing that unless the missing coin was restored to its owner hell would have to close its doors. There was a veiled menace in the memorial also, for Clause 6 hinted that

if hell was allowed to go by the board heaven might find itself in some jeopardy thereafter.

The document was dispatched and considered. In consequence a proclamation was sent through all the wards of Paradise, calling on whatever person, archangel, seraph, cherub, or acolyte, had found a threepenny-piece since midday of the tenth of August then instant, that same person, archangel, seraph, cherub, or acolyte, should deliver the said threepenny-piece to Rhadamanthus at his Court, and should receive in return a free pardon and a receipt.

The coin was not delivered.

That young seraph, Cuchulain, walked about like a person who was strange to himself. He was not tormented: he was angry. He frowned, he cogitated and fumed. He drew one golden curl through his fingers until it was lank and drooping; save the end only, that was still a ripple of gold. He put the end in his mouth and strode moodily chewing it. And every day his feet turned in the same direction — down the long entrance boulevard, through the mighty gates, along the strip of carved slabs to that piled wilderness where Rhadamanthus sat monumentally.

Here delicately he went, sometimes with a hand outstretched to help his foothold, standing for a space to think ere he jumped to a farther rock, balancing himself for a moment ere he leaped again. So he would come to stand and stare gloomily upon the judge.

He would salute gravely, as was meet, and say, "God bless the work"; but Rhadamanthus never replied, save by a nod, for he was very busy.

Yet the judge did observe him, and would sometimes heave ponderous lids to where he stood, and so for a few seconds they regarded each other in an interval of that unceasing business.

Sometimes for a minute or two the young seraph Cuchulain would look from the judge to the judged as they crouched back or strained forward, the good and the bad all in the same tremble of

fear, all unknowing which way their doom might lead. They did not look at each other. They looked at the judge high on his ebony throne, and they could not look away from him. There were those who knew, guessed clearly, their doom; abashed and flaccid they sat, quaking. There were some who were uncertain — rabbit-eyed these, not less quaking than the others, biting at their knuckles as they peeped upwards. There were those hopeful, yet searching fearfully backwards in the wilderness of memory, chasing and weighing their sins; and these last, even when their bliss was sealed and their steps set on an easy path, went faltering, not daring to look around again, their ears strained to catch a "Halt, miscreant! This other is your way!"

So, day by day, he went to stand near the judge; and one day Rhadamanthus, looking on him more intently, lifted his great hand and pointed.

"Go you among those to be judged," said he.

For Rhadamanthus knew. It was his business to look deep into the heart and the mind, to fish for secrets in the pools of being.

And the young seraph Cuchulain, still rolling his golden curl between his lips, went obediently forward and set down his nodding plumes between two who whimpered and stared and quaked.

When his turn came, Rhadamanthus eyed him intently for a long time.

"Well!" said Rhadamanthus.

The young seraph Cuchulain blew the curl of gold away from his mouth.

"Findings are keepings," said he loudly, and he closed his mouth and stared very impertinently at the judge.

"It is to be given up," said the judge.

"Let them come and take it from me," said the seraph Cuchulain. And suddenly (for these things are at the will of spirits) around his

head the lightnings span, and his hands were on the necks of thunders.

For the second time in his life Rhadamanthus was disturbed; again he scratched his head.

"It's a fix," said he moodily. But in a moment he called to those whose duty it was.

"Take him to this side," he roared.

And they advanced. But the seraph Cuchulain swung to meet them, and his golden hair blazed and shrieked; and the thunders rolled at his feet, and about him a bright network that hissed and stung — and those who advanced turned haltingly backwards and ran screaming.

"It's a fix," said Rhadamanthus; and for a little time he stared menacingly at the seraph Cuchulain.

But only for a little time. Suddenly he put his hands on the rests of his throne and heaved upwards his terrific bulk. Never before had Rhadamanthus stood from his ordained chair. He strode mightily forward and in an instant had quelled that rebel. The thunders and lightnings were but moonbeams and dew on that stony carcass. He seized the seraph Cuchulain, lifted him to his breast as one lifts a sparrow, and tramped back with him.

"Fetch me that other," said he sternly, and he sat down.

Those whose duty it was sped swiftly downwards to find Brien of the O'Brien nation; and while they were gone, all in vain the seraph Cuchulain crushed flamey barbs against that bosom of doom. Now, indeed, his golden locks were drooping and his plumes were broken and tossed; but his fierce eyes still glared courageously against the nipple of Rhadamanthus.

Soon they brought Brien. He was a sight of woe — howling, naked as a tree in winter, black as a tarred well, carved and gashed, tattered in all but his throat, wherewith, until one's ears rebelled, he bawled his one demand.

But the sudden light struck him to a wondering silence, and the

sight of the judge holding the seraph Cuchulain like a limp flower to his breast held him gaping.

"Bring him here," said Rhadamanthus, and they brought him to the steps of the throne.

"You have lost a medal!" said Rhadamanthus. "This one has it."

Brien looked straightly at the seraph Cuchulain.

Rhadamanthus stood again, whirled his arm in an enormous arc, jerked, and let go, and the seraph Cuchulain went swirling through space like a slung stone.

"Go after him, Kerryman," said Rhadamanthus, stooping; and he seized Brien by the leg, whirled him wide and out and far; dizzy, dizzy as a swooping comet, and down, and down, and down.

Rhadamanthus seated himself. He motioned with his hand . . .

"Next," said he coldly.

Down went the seraph Cuchulain, swirling in wide tumbles, scarcely visible for quickness. Sometimes, with outstretched hands, he was a cross that dropped plumb. Anon, head urgently downwards, he dived steeply. Again, like a living hoop, head and heels together, he spun giddily. Blind, deaf, dumb, breathless, mindless; and behind him Brien of the O'Brien nation came pelting and whizzing.

What of that journey! Who could give it words? Of the suns that appeared and disappeared like winking eyes. Comets that shone for an instant, went black and vanished. Moons that came and stood, and were gone. And around all, including all boundless space, boundless silence; the black, unmoving void—the deep, unending quietude, through which they fell with Saturn and Orion, and mildly-smiling Venus, and the fair, stark-naked moon and the decent earth wreathed in pearl and blue. From afar she appeared, the quiet one, all lonely in the void. As sudden as a fair face in a crowded street. Beautiful as the sound of falling

waters. Beautiful as the sound of music in a silence. Like a white sail on a windy sea. Like a green tree in a solitary place. Chaste and wonderful she was. Flying afar. Flying aloft like a joyous bird when the morning breaks on the darkness and he shrills sweet tidings. She soared and sang. Gently she sang to timid pipes and flutes of tender straw and murmuring, distant string. A song that grew and swelled, gathering to a multitudinous, deep-thundered harmony, until the over-burdened ear failed before the appalling uproar of her ecstasy, and denounced her. No longer a star! No longer a bird! A plumed and horned fury! Gigantic, leaping and shrieking tempestuously, spouting whirlwinds of lightning, tearing gluttonously along her path, avid, rampant, howling with rage and terror she leaped, dreadfully she leaped and flew. . . .

Enough! They hit the earth—they were not smashed, there was that virtue in them. They hit the ground just outside the village of Donnybrook where the back road runs to the hills; and scarcely had they bumped twice when Brien of the O'Brien nation had the seraph Cuchulain by the throat.

"My threepenny-bit," he roared, with one fist up.

But the seraph Cuchulain only laughed.

"That!" said he. "Look at me, man. Your little medal dropped far beyond the rings of Saturn."

And Brien stood back looking at him.

He was as naked as Brien was. He was as naked as a stone, or an eel, or a pot, or a new-born babe. He was very naked.

So Brien of the O'Brien nation stode across the path and sat down by the side of a hedge.

"The first man that passes this way," said he, "will give me his clothes, or I'll strangle him."

The seraph Cuchulain walked over to him.

"I will take the clothes of the second man that passes," said he, and he sat down.

MARTIN GARDNER

Science fiction deals, as you all know, with the probable but startling future projections of already known scientific data; but a few sciences are of so peculiar a nature that the currently known and established facts are quite unlikely and startling enough, even without future extrapolation. Writers in the field, too preoccupied with physics and astronomy, have almost entirely overlooked one of the oldest and most science-fictional of all branches of human learning: topology, the aspect of mathematics which deals, to quote an excellent article by Tucker and Bailey in "Scientific American," January, 1950, "with properties of position that are unaffected by changes in size or shape." If you have ever constructed a Moebius band (if you haven't, you are about to learn how), you know something of the terror of controlling a scientific process which your mind refuses to accept as possible. We extend our deep gratitude to Martin Gardner for producing, in "Esquire" for January, 1947, the long-needed fictional treatment of topology — and at the same time writing an exceedingly funny story.

No-Sided Professor

DOLORES — a tall, black-haired stripteaser at Chicago's Purple Hat Club — stood in the center of the dance floor and began the slow gyrations of her Cleopatra number, accompanied by soft Egyptian music from the Purple Hatters. The room was dark

except for a shaft of emerald light that played over her filmy Egyptian costume and smooth, voluptuous limbs.

A veil draped about her head and shoulders was the first to be removed. Dolores was in the act of letting it drift gracefully to the floor when suddenly a sound like the firing of a shotgun came from somewhere above and the nude body of a large man dropped head first from the ceiling. He caught the veil in mid-air with his chin and pinned it to the floor with a dull thump.

Pandemonium reigned.

Jake Bowers, the master of ceremonies, yelled for lights and tried to keep back the crowd. The club's manager, who had been standing by the orchestra watching the floor show, threw a tablecloth over the crumpled figure and rolled it over on its back.

The man was breathing heavily, apparently knocked unconscious by the blow on his chin, but otherwise unharmed. He was well over fifty, with a short, neatly trimmed red beard and mustache, and a completely bald head. He was built like a professional wrestler.

With considerable difficulty three waiters succeeded in transporting him to the manager's private office in the back, leaving a roomful of bewildered, near-hysterical men and women gaping at the ceiling and each other, and arguing heatedly about the angle and manner of the man's fall. The only hypothesis with even a slight suggestion of sanity was that he had been tossed high into the air from somewhere on the side of the dance floor. But no one saw the tossing. The police were called.

Meanwhile, in the back office the bearded man recovered consciousness. He insisted that he was Dr. Stanislaw Slapenarski, professor of mathematics at the University of Warsaw, and at present a visiting lecturer at the University of Chicago.

Before continuing this curious narrative, I must pause to confess

that I was not an eyewitness to the episode just described, having based my account on interviews with the master of ceremonies and several waiters. However, I did participate in a chain of remarkable events which culminated in the professor's unprecedented appearance.

These events began several hours earlier when members of the Moebius Society gathered for their annual banquet in one of the private dinning rooms on the second floor of the Purple Hat Club. The Moebius Society is a small, obscure Chicago organization of mathematicians working in the field of topology, one of the youngest and most mysterious of the newer branches of transformation mathematics. To make clear what happened during the evening, it will be necessary at this point to give a brief description of the subject matter of topology.

Topology is difficult to define in non-technical terms. One way to put it is to say that topology studies the mathematical properties of an object which remain constant regardless of how the object is distorted.

Picture in your mind a doughnut made of soft pliable rubber that can be twisted and stretched as far as you like in any direction. No matter how much this rubber doughnut is distorted (or "transformed" as mathematicians prefer to say), certain properties of the doughnut will remain unchanged. For example, it will always retain a hole. In topology the doughnut shape is called a "torus." A soda straw is merely an elongated torus, so — from a topological point of view — a doughnut and soda straw are identical figures.

Topology is completely disinterested in quantitative measurements. It is concerned only with basic properties of shape which are unchanged throughout the most radical distortions possible without breaking off pieces of the object and sticking them on again at other spots. If this breaking off were permitted, an object of a given structure could be transformed into an object of any

other type of structure, and all original properties would be lost. If the reader will reflect a moment he will soon realize that topology studies the most primitive and fundamental mathematical properties that an object can possess.¹

A sample problem in topology may be helpful. Imagine a torus (doughnut) surface made of thin rubber like an inner tube. Now imagine a small hole in the side of this torus. Is it possible to turn the torus inside out through this hole, as you might turn a balloon inside out? This is not an easy problem to solve in the imagination.

Although many mathematicians of the eighteenth century wrestled with isolated topological problems, one of the first systematic works in the field was done by August Ferdinand Moebius, a German astronomer who taught at the University of Leipzig during the first half of the last century. Until the time of Moebius it was believed that any surface, such as a piece of paper, had two sides. It was the German astronomer who made the disconcerting discovery that if you take a strip of paper, give it a single half-twist, then paste the ends together, the result is a "unilateral" surface — a surface with only *one* side!

If you will trouble to make such a strip (known to topologists as the "Moebius surface") and examine it carefully, you will soon discover that the strip actually does consist of only one continuous side and of one continuous edge.

It is hard to believe at first that such a strip can exist, but there it is — a visible, tangible thing that can be constructed in a moment. And it has the indisputable property of one-sidedness, a

¹ *The reader who is interested in obtaining a clearer picture of this new mathematics will find excellent articles on topology in the Encyclopaedia Britannica (Fourteenth Edition) under Analysis Situs; and under Analysis Situs in the Encyclopaedia Americana. There also are readable chapters on elementary topology in two recent books — Mathematics and the Imagination by Kasner and Newman, and What is Mathematics? by Courant and Robbins. Slapenarski's published work has not yet been translated from the Polish.*

property it cannot lose no matter how much it is stretched or how it is distorted.²

But back to the story. As an instructor in mathematics at the University of Chicago, with a doctor's thesis in topology to my credit, I had little difficulty in securing admittance into the Moebius Society. Our membership was small — only twenty-six men, most of them Chicago topologists but a few from universities in neighboring towns.

We held regular monthly meetings, rather academic in character, and once a year on November 17 (the anniversary of Moebius' birth) we arranged a banquet at which an outstanding topologist was brought to the city to act as a guest speaker.

The banquet always had its less serious aspects, usually in the form of special entertainment. But this year our funds were low and we decided to hold the celebration at the Purple Hat where the cost of the dinner would not be too great and where we could enjoy the floor show after the lecture. We were fortunate in having been able to obtain as our guest the distinguished Professor Slapenarski, universally acknowledged as the world's leading topologist and one of the greatest mathematical minds of the century.

Dr. Slapenarski had been in the city several weeks giving a series of lectures at the University of Chicago on the topological aspects of Einstein's theory of space. As a result of my contacts with him at the university, we became good friends and I had been asked to introduce him at the dinner.

² The Moebius strip has many terrifying properties. For example, if you cut the strip in half lengthwise, cutting down the center all the way around, the result is not two strips, as might be expected, but one single large strip. But if you begin cutting a third of the way from the side, cutting twice around the strip, the result is one large and one small strip, interlocked. The smaller strip can then be cut in half to yield a single large strip, still interlocked with the other large strip. These weird properties are the basis of an old magic trick with cloth, known to the conjuring profession as the "Afghan bands."

We rode to the Purple Hat together in a taxi, and on the way I begged him to give me some inkling of the content of his address. But he only smiled inscrutably and told me, in his thick Polish accent, to wait and see. He had announced his topic as "The No-Sided Surface"—a topic which had aroused such speculation among our members that Dr. Robert Simpson of the University of Wisconsin wrote he was coming to the dinner, the first meeting that he had attended in over a year.³

Dr. Simpson is the outstanding authority on topology in the Middle West and the author of several important papers on topology and nuclear physics in which he vigorously attacks several of Slapenarski's major axioms.

The Polish professor and I arrived a little late. After introducing him to Simpson, then to our other members, we took our seats at the table and I called Slapenarski's attention to our tradition of brightening the banquet with little topological touches. For instance, our napkin rings were silver-plated Moebius strips. Doughnuts were provided with the coffee, and the coffee itself was contained in specially designed cups made in the shape of "Klein's bottle."⁴

After the meal we were served Ballantine's ale, because of the curious trade-mark,⁵ and pretzels in the shapes of the two basic "trefoil" knots.⁶ Slapenarski was much amused by these details and

³ Dr. Simpson later confided to me that he had attended the dinner not to hear Slapenarski but to see Dolores.

⁴ Named after Felix Klein, a brilliant German mathematician, Klein's bottle is a completely closed surface, like the surface of a globe, but without inside or outside. It is a unilateral surface like a Moebius strip, but unlike the strip it has no edges. It can be bisected in such a way that each half becomes a Moebius surface. It will hold a liquid. Nothing frightful happens to the liquid.

⁵ This trade-mark is a topological manifold of great interest. Although the three rings are interlocked, no two rings are interlocked. In other words, if any one of the rings is removed, the other two rings are completely free of each other. Yet the three together cannot be separated.

⁶ The trefoil knot is the simplest form of knot that can be tied in a closed curve. It exists in two forms, one a mirror image of the other. Although the two forms are

even made several suggestions for additional topological curiosities, but the suggestions are too complex to explain here.

After my brief introduction, the Polish doctor stood up, acknowledged the applause with a smile, and cleared his throat. The room instantly became silent. The reader is already familiar with the professor's appearance — his portly frame, reddish beard, and polished pate — but it should be added that there was something in the expression of his face that suggested that he had matters of considerable import to disclose to us.

It would be impossible to give with any fullness the substance of Slapenarski's brilliant, highly technical address. But the gist of it was this. Ten years ago, he said, he had been impressed by a statement of Moebius, in one of his lesser known treatises, that there was no theoretical reason why a surface could not lose *both* its sides — to become, in other words, a "non-lateral" surface.

Of course, the professor explained, such a surface was impossible to imagine, but so is the square root of minus one or the hypercube of fourth-dimensional geometry. That a concept is inconceivable has long ago been recognized as no basis for denying either its validity or usefulness in mathematics and modern physics.

We must remember, he added, that even the one-sided surface is inconceivable to anyone who has not seen and handled a Moebius strip. And many persons, with well-developed mathematical imaginations, are unable to understand how such a strip can exist even when they have one in hand.

I glanced at Dr. Simpson and thought I detected a skeptical smile curving the corners of his mouth.

topologically identical, it is impossible to transform one into the other by distortion, an upsetting fact that has caused topologists considerable embarrassment. The study of the properties of knots forms an important branch of topology, though very little is understood as yet about even the simplest knots.

Slapenarski continued. For many years, he said, he had been engaged in a tireless quest for a no-sided surface. On the basis of analogy with known types of surfaces he had been able to analyze many of the properties of the no-sided surface, and finally one day — and he paused here for dramatic emphasis, sweeping his bright little eyes across the motionless faces of his listeners — he had actually succeeded in constructing a no-sided surface.

His words were like an electric impulse that transmitted itself around the table. Everyone gave a sudden start and shifted his position and looked at his neighbor with raised eyebrows. I noticed that Simpson was shaking his head vigorously. When the speaker walked to the end of the room where a blackboard had been placed, Simpson bent his head and whispered to the man on his left, "It's sheer nonsense. Either Slappy has gone completely mad or he's playing a deliberate prank on all of us."

I think it had occurred to the others also that the lecture was a hoax because I noticed several were smiling to themselves while the professor chalked some elaborate diagrams on the blackboard.

After a somewhat involved discussion of the diagrams (which I was wholly unable to follow) the professor announced that he would conclude his lecture by constructing one of the simpler forms of the no-sided surface. By now we were all grinning at each other. Dr. Simpson's face had more of a smirk than a grin.

Slapenarski produced from his coat pocket a sheet of pale blue paper, a small pair of scissors, and a tube of paste. He cut the paper into a figure that had a striking resemblance, I thought, to a paper doll. There were five projecting strips or appendages that resembled a head and four limbs. Then he folded and pasted the sheet carefully. It was an intricate procedure. Strips went over and under each other in an odd fashion until finally only two ends projected. Dr. Slapenarski then applied a dab of paste to one of these ends.

"Gentlemen," he said, holding up the twisted blue construction

and turning it about for all to see, "you are about to witness the first public demonstration of the Slapenarski surface."

So saying, he pressed one of the projecting ends against the other.

There was a loud pop, like the bursting of a light bulb, and the paper figure vanished in his hands!

For a moment we were too stunned to move, then with one accord we broke into laughter and applause.

We were convinced, of course, that we were the victims of an elaborate joke. But it had been beautifully executed. I assumed, as did the others, that we had witnessed an ingenious chemical trick with paper—paper treated so it could be ignited by friction or some similar method and caused to explode without leaving an ash.

But I noticed that the professor seemed disconcerted by the laughter, and his face was beginning to turn the color of his beard. He smiled in an embarrassed way and sat down. The applause subsided slowly.

Falling in with the preposterous mood of the evening we all clustered around him and congratulated him warmly on his remarkable discovery. Then the man in charge of arrangements reminded us that a table had been reserved below so those interested in remaining could enjoy some drinks and see the floor show.

The room gradually cleared of everyone except Slapenarski, Simpson, and myself. The two famous topologists were standing in front of the blackboard. Simpson was smiling and gesturing toward one of the diagrams.

"The fallacy in your proof was beautifully concealed, Doctor," he said. "I wonder if any of the others caught it."

The Polish mathematician was not amused.

"There is no fallacy in my proof," he said impatiently.

"Oh come, now, Doctor," Simpson said. "Of course there's a

fallacy." Still smiling, he touched a corner of the diagram with his thumb. "These lines can't possibly intersect within the manifold. The intersection is somewhere out here." He waved his hand off to the right.

Slapenarski's face was growing red again.

"I tell you there is no fallacy," he repeated, his voice rising. Then slowly, speaking his words carefully and explosively, he went over the proof once more, rapping the blackboard at intervals with his knuckles.

Simpson listened gravely, and at one point interrupted with an objection. The objection was answered. A moment later he raised a second objection. The second objection was answered. I stood aside without saying anything. The discussion was too far above my head.

Then they began to raise their voices. I have already spoken of Simpson's long-standing controversy with Slapenarski over several basic topological axioms. Some of these axioms were now being brought into the argument.

"But I tell you the transformation is *not* bicontinuous and therefore the two sets cannot be homeomorphic," Simpson shouted.

The veins on the Polish mathematician's temples were standing out in sharp relief. "Then suppose you explain to me why my manifold vanished," he yelled back.

"It was nothing but a cheap conjuring trick," snorted Simpson. "I don't know how it worked and I don't care, but it certainly wasn't because the manifold became nonlateral."

"Oh it wasn't, wasn't it?" Slapenarski said between his teeth. Before I had a chance to intervene he had sent his huge fist crashing into the jaw of Dr. Simpson. The Wisconsin professor groaned and dropped to the floor. Slapenarski turned and glared at me wildly.

"Get back, young man," he said. As he outweighed me by at least one hundred pounds, I got back.

Then I watched in horror what was taking place. With insane fury still flaming on his face, Slapenarski had knelt beside the limp body and was twisting the arms and legs into fantastic knots. He was, in fact, folding the Wisconsin topologist as he had folded his piece of paper! Suddenly there was a small explosion, like the backfire of a car, and under the Polish mathematician's hands lay the collapsed clothing of Dr. Simpson.

Simpson had become a nonlateral surface.

Slapenarski stood up, breathing with difficulty and holding in his hands a tweed coat with vest, shirt, and underwear top inside. He opened his hands and let the garments fall on top of the clothing on the floor. Great drops of perspiration rolled down his face. He muttered in Polish.

I recovered enough presence of mind to move to the entrance of the room, and lock the door. When I spoke my voice sounded weak. "Can he . . . be brought back?"

"I do not know, I do not know," Slapenarski wailed. "I have only begun the study of these surfaces — only just begun. I have no way of knowing where he is. Undoubtedly it is one of the higher dimensions, probably one of the odd-numbered ones. God knows which one."

Then he grabbed me suddenly by my coat lapels and shook me so violently that a bridge on my upper teeth came loose. "I must go to him," he said. "It is the least I can do — the very least."

He sat down on the floor and began interweaving arms and legs.

"Do not stand there like an idiot!" he yelled. "Here — some assistance."

I adjusted my bridge, then helped him twist his right arm under his left leg and back around his head until he was able to grip his right ear. Then his left arm had to be twisted in a somewhat similar fashion. "Over, not under," he shouted. It was with difficulty

that I was able to force his left hand close enough to his face so he could grasp his nose.

There was another explosive noise, much louder than the sound made by Simpson, and a sudden blast of cold wind across my face. When I opened my eyes I saw the second heap of crumpled clothing on the floor.

While I was staring stupidly at the two piles of clothing there was a muffled sort of "pfft" sound behind me. I turned and saw Simpson standing near the wall, naked and shivering. His face was white. Then his knees buckled and he sank to the floor.

I stumbled to the door, unlocked it, and started down the stairway after a strong drink — for myself. I became conscious of a violent hubub. Slapenarski had, a few moments earlier, completed his sensational dive.

In a back room below I found the other members of the Moebius Society and various officials of the Purple Hat Club in noisy, incoherent debate. Slapenarski was sitting in a chair with a tablecloth wrapped around him and holding a handkerchief filled with ice cubes against the side of his jaw.

"Simpson is back," I said. "He fainted but I think he's okay."

"Thank heavens," Slapenarski mumbled.

The officials and patrons of the Purple Hat never understood, of course, what happened that wild night, and our attempts to explain made matters worse. The police arrived, adding to the confusion.

We finally got the two professors dressed and on their feet, and made an escape by promising to return the following day with our lawyers. The manager seemed to think the club had been the victim of an outlandish plot, and threatened to sue for damages against what he called the club's "refined reputation." As it turned out, the incident proved to be magnificent word-of-mouth advertising and eventually the club dropped the case. The papers heard

the story, of course, but promptly dismissed it as a publicity stunt cooked up by Phanstiehl, the Purple Hat's press agent.

Simpson was unhurt, but Slapenarski's jaw had been broken. I took him to Billings Hospital, near the university, and in his hospital room late that night he told me what he thought had happened. Apparently Simpson had entered a higher dimension (very likely the fifth) on level ground.

When he recovered consciousness he unhooked himself and immediately reappeared as a normal three-dimensional torus with outside and inside surfaces. But Slapenarski had worse luck. He had landed on some sort of slope. There was nothing to see — only a grey, undifferentiated fog on all sides — but he had the distinct sensation of rolling down a hill.

He tried to keep a grip on his nose but was unable to maintain it. His right hand slipped free before he reached the bottom of the incline. As a result, he unfolded himself and tumbled back into three-dimensional space and the middle of Dolores' Egyptian routine.

At any rate that was the way Slapenarski had it figured out.

He was several weeks in the hospital, refusing to see anyone until the day of his release when I accompanied him to the Union Station. He caught a train to New York and I never saw him again. He died a few months later of a heart attack in Warsaw. At present Dr. Simpson is in correspondence with his widow in an attempt to obtain his notes on nonlateral surfaces.

Whether these notes will or will not be intelligible to American topologists (assuming we can obtain them) remains to be seen. We have made numerous experiments with folded paper, but so far have produced only commonplace bilateral and unilateral surfaces. Although it was I who helped Slapenarski fold himself, the excitement of the moment apparently erased the details from my mind.

But I shall never forget one remark the great topologist made to

me the night of his accident, just before I left him at the hospital.

"It was fortunate," he said, "that both Simpson and I released our right hand before the left."

"Why?" I asked.

Slapenarski shuddered.

"We would have been inside out," he said.

IDRIS SEABRIGHT

One of the most pleasant—and certainly most stimulating—aspects of current science fiction and fantasy writing is the growing importance of women in these twin forms. The best of them, from such old hands as C. L. Moore and Margaret St. Clair to such recent discoveries as Judith Merrill, Betsy Curtis and Wilmar Shiras, bring to the field a welcome warmth and sensitivity and immediacy of impact. Women writers especially seem to realize that every type of fiction must essentially deal with people. (Not for them the “gadget story” or “space opera”!) Miss Seabright, a retiring lady who steadily refuses to tell us anything about herself, has written a truly distinguished story of mood and emotion—one that will stay in your mind (and heart) long after you have forgotten the most sensational transgalactic epics.

The Listening Child

IT WAS NOT until after his first bad heart attack that Edwin Hoppler really noticed the child. He had long ago decided on the basis of his contacts with his married sister's strident brood that he didn't like children. But the doctor, after telling him roundly that he was lucky to be alive, had ordered at least a month's rest in bed. Somebody had to bring the trays up from the boarding house dining room. Timmy was usually the one.

Timmy's grandmother dressed him in smocks and little breeches she cut out of discarded housedresses, and this costume, together with his long black cotton stockings and home-trimmed hair, gave

him an odd resemblance to the kindergarten pupils of thirty years ago. After he had successfully negotiated the hazards of knocking, opening the door, and putting the tray down, he would linger, smiling shyly, until Hoppler began to eat. Hoppler always spoke to him, but Timmy never answered. One day Hoppler mentioned it to Mrs. Dean when she was straightening up his room.

"Oh, didn't you know?" she said, putting down her dust cloth and turning. "I thought I'd told you. Why, the poor little fellow had scarlet fever when he was a year old, just after his mother died. He's deaf. He can't hear a thing.

"He goes to the deaf school, but he hasn't learned to lip-read yet. The teacher says it's hard to teach them, when they can't hear at all. And of course he can't talk."

"That's too bad," Hoppler said with an effort. He had the invalid's dislike for hearing about other people's troubles. "Are you sure he's entirely deaf, though? I thought I'd noticed him listening to things."

Mrs. Dean shook her head. "You mean that way he has of putting his head on one side and listening to something you can't hear yourself? That doesn't mean anything. I asked the doctor at the clinic about it, and he said Timmy couldn't possibly be hearing anything. It gives you the creeps to watch him, though, doesn't it? I used to get the shivers every time, until I got used to it. But he's just like his ears were filled with concrete, he's that deaf. Poor little thing."

The next time Timmy brought up a tray, Hoppler motioned him over to the bed and folded a paper boat for him. Timmy hung back, smiling shyly. At last he almost snatched the paper and ran out of the room with it. And after that he stayed longer when he brought the tray, and his smiles grew less shy.

Once in a while Edwin caught him "listening." He would cock his head to one side and hearken, while his eyes grew bright. Edwin did not find it as disconcerting as Mrs. Dean had pictured

it. It was not until the day before Timmy's birthday that it actually bothered him.

The day was sunny and fairly warm. Children were playing outside in the street, and Edwin's open window let in plenty of noise. When Timmy first began to "listen," tipping his head farther than usual, attentive and concentrated, the pantomime was so vivid that Hoppler was sure some of the sound from outside must have got through to the boy's dulled nerves. A dog was barking, children called to each other, somebody was trying to start a car. Timmy must have heard some of it.

The boy relaxed. His attention came back to the picture Edwin was drawing for him. Seconds later there came a burst of shrill, agonized yelping that ended abruptly on a high note. There was a babble of children's excited voices, fright growing in them. Windows went up. And then, cutting across the confusion, a little girl's shriek, "He's dead! Oooh, oooh, that car ran over him. Blackie's dead!"

Hoppler put down his pencil and looked at Timmy's face. The boy's gray eyes were fixed intently — there was always something bird-like and intense about him — on the drawing. Now he looked up at Edwin and smiled rather uncertainly.

It was a normal response. Timmy plainly hadn't heard the commotion in the street and couldn't imagine what his friend was stopping for. But Edwin pleated his lower lip with his fingers and frowned. Timmy hadn't heard the dog's yelps, the cries, when they occurred. Had he, somehow, heard them ahead of time? It was beyond belief. But it had looked like that.

Hoppler finished the picture — two children wading in a scratchy brook — and gave it to Timmy. Timmy folded it up carefully, making the chuckling sound that with him indicated pleasure. He started toward the door and then came back to run one finger lightly over the back of Edwin's hand. It was one of the mannerisms, half engaging, half pathetic, which made Hoppler fond

of him. This time he found himself wincing a little from the touch. When Timmy had gone out, Hoppler pressed his hands nervously to his chest.

It was nearly a month later that Timmy "listened" again. Hoppler was sitting up in an armchair and Timmy, lying on the floor, was drawing a panoramic street scene on a large piece of butcher paper he had brought up from the kitchen. He was drawing with great verve, making out-sized pedestrians and dogs and small, very bustle-backed automobiles. Now and then he frowned as his pencil went through the paper to the soft carpet beneath. The boarding house was quiet except for a distant clatter from the kitchen where the pans and dishes from supper were being washed up.

Timmy got to his feet. He looked sharply at Hoppler for a moment and then fixed his eyes on a spot four or five feet above his head. His lips parted. His head tipped. His eyes grew wide.

Hoppler watched him uneasily. He had almost forgotten his speculation when the dog had been killed—it was the kind of idea a sensible person will try to dismiss—but now it recurred to him. Was something going to happen? What foolishness! But was Timmy, somehow, listening to the elsewhere inaudible footsteps of disaster drawing near?

Gradually the tension ebbed away from Timmy's face. He drew a deep breath. He tossed the pale brown hair back out of his eyes. He squatted down on the floor again and picked up his pencil. On a still-empty portion of the paper he began to draw some birds. He had just started the wings of the third one when the familiar, agonizing pressure began in Hoppler's chest.

The attack was going to be a bad one, Edwin saw. He felt the familiar fright at the way breath was being remorselessly crushed out of him.

He groped wildly after the bottle of amyl nitrate pearls that sat on the little stand beside his chair, and overset it. Pain flooded

through his chest and ran out terrifyingly along his left arm. He couldn't stand it. His chest was turning to a brittle box which they — the forces that tormented his elderly body so wantonly — were splintering inward with the reverberating turns of a fiery vise. With his last strength he tried to cry out, to get help. He was going to die.

When Hoppler came to himself again, he was lying flat in bed with a hot water bottle over his heart. The doctor, looking very serious, was folding up his stethoscope. Mrs. Dean, pale and distracted, hovered in the background.

"That was a near thing, young fellow," Dr. Simms said severely when he saw Edwin's eyes fixed on him. "If I'd got Mrs. Dean's call five minutes later — well! Have you been putting any strain on yourself?"

Hoppler searched his memory. From the knowledge he had painfully acquired of his disease, he didn't honestly think his momentary uneasiness at Timmy's "listening" could be classed as strain. And he had been getting up a good deal lately. Today he'd been sitting up almost the whole day.

"You'll have to learn to take this seriously," Dr. Simms said when he had finished his confession. "Angina's no picnic. I should think your first attack would have taught you that. But there's no use crying over spilt milk. I want you to go back to bed for at least a week, and then I'm going to try a new treatment on you. The clinical report on it is encouraging. You mustn't worry. Keep in a pleasant frame of mind."

He went out. There was an inaudible colloquy in the hall between him and Mrs. Dean. The landlady came back and began tidying up the disordered room. Hoppler watched her quick movements with a touch of jealousy. She was older than he, and she was on the go all day long. Heart trouble? She didn't know she had a heart. Simms had told him once that angina preferred its victims male.

She felt the water bottle for warmth and drew the cover up more snugly about his neck. "You know, Mr. Hoppler," she said impressively, "Timmy saved your life. He really did. He came running down the stairs while I was putting the silver away, and began pulling at my arm. I tried to shake him off—you know how children are—but he held on and jabbered away at me until I realized something was wrong. You were all slumped over in your chair, fainted, when I found you. Of course I called the doctor then. But you heard what he said about five minutes more."

Edwin Hoppler nodded. "Timmy's a good boy, a very good boy," he said faintly. He wished Mrs. Dean would finish and go. He wanted to rest.

Timmy poked his head around the door jamb. He was pale and subdued. His eyes were so large they seemed to have eaten up his face. As he caught sight of his friend he smiled uncertainly, but his expression slipped back quickly into anxiousness.

Hoppler looked away from him and then up at the ceiling. He was grateful to Timmy, he was fond of him, but he didn't want to see him now. In a sense, he didn't want ever to see him again. The child—why make any bones about it?—frightened him. Timmy himself was quiet, touching, innocent. The dark faculty for which he appeared to be the vehicle, which he embodied, was otherwise. It was impossible to think of Timmy's "listening" without a flutter of uneasiness. And the doctor had told him to keep in a pleasant frame of mind. Perhaps he ought to ask Mrs. Dean to keep the boy out of his room, at least for a while. Hoppler licked his bluish lips.

But was that sensible? Suppose, for the sake of argument, that Timmy actually was able, in some super-normal way, to hear the approach of . . . of death (Edwin thought grimly). Wouldn't the sensible thing be to keep Timmy with him as much as possible? If he had realized that Timmy's uncanny listening this evening

portended a heart attack, he could have had the amyl nitrate pearls in readiness for the first pangs. The attack need not have been serious. And he was fond of the boy.

Hoppler looked toward the door where Timmy was still patiently standing. He raised one hand and beckoned to him. When the child was within reach he gave the grimy little hand a squeeze.

Dr. Simms's new treatment did Hoppler a great deal of good. He put on weight, rapidly at first and then more slowly, until he had gained eighteen pounds. Mrs. Dean told him he looked ten years younger.

Dr. Simms explained carefully that, though he was more than pleased with the progress his patient was making, the treatment itself was rather in the nature of a palliative. Physicians weren't sure yet how much of its effect was permanent. Hoppler listened without being much impressed. He was able to be up all day now and even, as the weather improved, to get outside.

There was no question, of course, of his going back to his work as an accountant. The firm had pensioned him off, not too illiberally, after his first attack. As Mrs. Dean said, he had nothing to do now but enjoy himself.

Enjoying oneself, at sixty-three, is apt to prove a quiet business. Hoppler began to spend most of the daylight hours in the pocket-sized neighborhood park, reading the paper, watching the graceful evolutions of the sea gulls or listening to their raucous, undignified squawking.

Timmy, meantime — he was almost constantly with Hoppler after school hours — bounced a rubber ball, drew pictures, or rather half-heartedly climbed on the rails or swung from the rungs of the playground equipment. He had grown so much in the last few months that even Mrs. Dean had been forced to see the unsuitability of dressing him any longer in home-made clothes. She had bought him jeans and little checked flannel cotton shirts. In this

costume he looked quite modish and contemporary. He lost, at least obviously, most of the wispiness, the pathos, which Hoppler had found in him at first. But it gave Hoppler a strange numbed feeling to see how formidable a barrier his deafness was between him and the other children who played in the park. Timmy was a sociable child, but the others greeted him with stares and then uneasily drew away from him. The boy was always glad to return from his excursions among the swings and trapezes to his grown-up friend.

When noon came Hoppler would write a note and send Timmy with it and money to a restaurant in the neighborhood to buy sandwiches and milk. Watching the boy's quick intelligence, his constant unselfconscious attempts to make bricks without straw, Hoppler began to feel that he was failing in his moral obligation to him.

Mrs. Dean was certainly fond of her grandson, but she was too occupied with the constant petty demands of the boarding house, too harassed, to pay much attention to him. Perhaps Timmy ought to have a private teacher. He hadn't learned to lip-read yet with any facility. Private instruction might help him to faster progress. Hoppler must talk to Timmy's teacher at the deaf school and find out what was possible for him.

The boy's disturbing "listening," except for one notable exception, had ceased. The exception had occurred when Timmy had "listened," vividly and disconcertingly, just before one of the older boys had fallen headlong from the slippery top piece of one of the swings to which he had illegitimately climbed. The fall itself would not have been serious. But the boy had hit his head as he fell on the wooden seat of one of the swings. He had been knocked unconscious, there had been a great deal of blood, an ambulance had been called.

But the unpleasant incident fixed even more firmly in Hoppler the conviction that Timmy was a reliable barometer. He was rather

ashamed of the relief he found in his confidence in the boy's uncanny ability. During these quiet months — the happiest, after all, of Hoppler's life — Dr. Simms examined him at two-week intervals. He expressed himself as gratified with Hoppler's progress, but he always warned him to go slow, to take things easily, to be careful. Hoppler listened to these counsels seriously, but with a certain inner complacency. He had channels of information which weren't open to Simms.

One fine warm day late in summer he decided to take Timmy to the beach. He contemplated getting Simms's permission — the expedition would involve streetcars, transferring, a good deal of exertion in one way or another — and then decided against it. Simms might after all tell him not to go, and Hoppler had been feeling unusually well. Timmy had never seen the ocean, never been to the beach. It was a part of his education which ought to be attended to.

They reached the amusement pike, at the end of the car line, just at noon. Edwin bought hot dogs for Timmy and a hamburger for himself from one of the stands. Timmy bit into his bun a little doubtfully; Hoppler thought it must be the first time he had eaten one. His hesitation soon vanished. He ate three hot dogs and finished off with an Eskimo pie. Hoppler, meantime, indulged himself in a glass of beer.

After lunch they rode on the merry-go-round. Edwin wondered rather sadly what blurred effect the amusement was making on Timmy, locked within the confines of his perpetually silent world. A merry-go-round without the music! But Timmy plainly found his spotted wooden mount enchanting and loved the motion it had. When he had at last tired of riding, Edwin took him to a penny arcade. After that they explored novelty and curio shops, and Edwin bought Timmy a ring with a blistered pinkish abalone pearl. Late in the afternoon they went down to the beach itself.

Though the day itself was warm the water, as usual, was cold.

There were few bathers in. In any case, Timmy hadn't brought a bathing suit. He had none to bring. But he sat down on the sand and took off his shoes and stockings. He rolled his trouser legs up as far as they would go and then waded bravely into the surf. The cold water made him gasp and wince and laugh.

After his first awkwardness disappeared, he was like a dog let off the leash. He found a brown length of seaweed far down the beach and dragged it back to show Edwin how the fleshy bladders could be made to pop. He collected a handful of seashells and bestowed them on Edwin too. He raced along the sand like a high-spirited pony. Now and then he would squat down on the very edge of the surf and heap up a mound of wet sand for the waves to level again. It was clear that though Timmy had enjoyed everything, he liked the beach itself most of all. He loved the beach.

Hoppler watched him smilingly. He was conscious of an uncommon felicity. This was what people meant when they spoke of the pleasure of giving. Like so many of the great platitudes of humanity, it was quite true. Watching Timmy playing, running along the sand, Edwin was more than happy, he was himself young again.

But it was time to be going home. A wind was coming up, the sun had gone under a cloud. The air had turned cold. The beach was deserted. Soon it would be dark. It was time to go home.

He motioned to Timmy, far down the beach, to come back to him. The boy turned and started to obey. Suddenly he halted. He was "listening."

Even at that distance Edwin could catch his unusual intensity. Never had the boy hearkened as he was doing now. He seemed to be pierced through, transfixed, by his perception. And Hoppler caught vividly, too, a strange new expression on the boy's face. Usually Timmy's face, when he "listened," showed nothing except interest. Now interest had been replaced by an indrawn recogni-

tion. And Timmy was afraid. His recognition was mixed with fear.

The exertion, Edwin thought, the walking, the long afternoon. The glass of beer might have been the decisive thing. Simms had certainly warned him. He thrust his hand into his pocket for his amyl nitrate pearls.

They weren't there. With desperate incredulity Hoppler remembered that he had meant to move the bottle and hadn't. It was in his other coat, at home, in the closet. In his other coat.

He felt angry and defeated and horribly afraid. What use was it for Timmy to have warned him if he didn't have the pearls? Already the pain was beginning. And this time there would be no escape. Timmy had heard disaster coming. This time Hoppler was going to die.

From far down the beach Timmy waved at him. The fluttering cadence of his hand against the darkening sky was like the motion of a bird. Edwin, amid the distraction of his pain, thought that he smiled. He waved once more. Then he turned. He began running out into the cold, lead-colored water as fast as he could, splashing through the white froth of little waves and then of bigger ones.

Hoppler watched blankly, uncomprehendingly. What was Timmy doing? Timmy shouldn't desert him now, when he needed him. "Timmy!" he called weakly, as if the boy could hear him. "Timmy!" And then, comprehension growing in him, wildly, "Timmy! Timmy! Come back!"

The water was up to the child's waist, to the middle of his narrow chest. Still he moved out. He rocked under the impetus of a wave. The small body was dwindling, turning to a spot against the darkly-glistering surface of the sea. And steadily it grew more remote. "Timmy!" Edwin Hoppler shrieked. "Timmy! Oh, God. . . ."

The child's hand went up for the last time, in salutation and fare-

well. For a moment his head seemed to bob about in the water. And then a wave like dark glass washed smoothly over it.

Hoppler's voice died away into silence. He looked about him dazedly, as if he were waking from heavy sleep.

The pain had left his chest. He was well, he would have no attack. Perhaps he would never have an attack again. He stood alone in the dusk, a cold wind blowing around him. He would have no attack. Timmy, offering himself as a surrogate to death, had arranged it so. There was nothing to do now but wait until the waves washed the boy's body up on the beach.

RICHARD MATHESON

While our editorial career was yet in its infancy, we received a story called Born of Man and Woman from one Richard Matheson. As we read the manuscript—with awe, delight and a mounting horror—we assumed that it was by some well-established professional, indulging in an off-trail literary exercise under a pseudonym. We hastily accepted that story and asked Mr. Matheson for some personal information . . . to learn to our happy astonishment that he was only 23 and that this was the first story he had ever sold! To judge by their letters, our readers liked it fully as well as we did; it's as popular a story as we've yet published. We go on at such length about Born of Man and Woman to urge those few of you who don't know it to read it at once (it was chosen by Messrs. Bleiler and Dikty for their BEST SCIENCE FICTION STORIES—1951), and to tell all of you that the following Matheson story is just as terrifying, just as moving and just as beautifully written as the celebrated tale which marked his debut.

Dress of White Silk

QUIET IS HERE and all in me.

Granma locked me in my room and wont let me out. Because its happened she says. I guess I was bad. Only it was the dress. Mommas dress I mean. She is gone away forever. Granma says your momma is in heaven. I dont know how. Can she go in heaven if shes dead?

Now I hear granma. She is in mommas room. She is putting

mommas dress down the box. Why does she always? And locks it too. I wish she didnt. Its a pretty dress and smells sweet so. And warm. I love to touch it against my cheek. But I cant never again. I guess that is why granma is mad at me.

But I amnt sure. All day it was only like everyday. Mary Jane came over to my house. She lives across the street. Everyday she comes to my house and play. Today she was.

I have seven dolls and a fire truck. Today granma said play with your dolls and it. Dont you go inside your mommas room now she said. She always says it. She just means not mess up I think. Because she says it all the time. Dont go in your mommas room. Like that.

But its nice in mommas room. When it rains I go there. Or when granma is doing her nap I do. I dont make noise. I just sit on the bed and touch the white cover. Like when I was only small. The room smells like sweet.

I make believe momma is dressing and I am allowed in. I smell her white silk dress. Her going out for night dress. She called it that I dont remember when.

I hear it moving if I listen hard. I make believe to see her sitting at the dressing table. Like touching on perfume or something I mean. And see her dark eyes. I can remember.

Its so nice if it rains and I see eyes on the window. The rain sounds like a big giant outside. He says shushshush so every one will be quiet. I like to make believe that in mommas room.

What I like almost best is sit at mommas dressing table. It is like pink and big and smells sweet too. The seat in front has a pillow sewed in it. There are bottles and bottles with bumps and have colored perfume in them. And you can see almost your whole self in the mirror.

When I sit there I make believe to be momma. I say be quiet mother I am going out and you can not stop me. Its something I

say I dont know why like hear it in me. And oh stop your sobbing mother they will not catch me I have my magic dress.

When I pretend I brush my hair long. But I only use my own brush from my room. I didnt never use mommas brush. I dont think granma is mad at me for that because I never use mommas brush. I wouldnt never.

Sometimes I did open the box up. Because I know where granma puts the key. I saw her once when she wouldnt know I saw her. She puts the key on the hook in mommas closet. Behind the door I mean.

I could open the box lots of times. Thats because I like to look at mommas dress. I like best to look at it. It is so pretty and feels soft and like silky. I could touch it for a million years.

I kneel on the rug with roses on it. I hold the dress in my arms and like breathe from it. I touch it against my cheek. I wish I could take it to sleep with me and hold it. I like to. Now I cant. Because granma says. And she says I should burn it up but I loved her so. And she cries about the dress.

I wasnt never bad with it. I put it back neat like it was never touched. Granma never knew. I laughed that she never knew before. But she knows now I did it I guess. And shell punish me. What did it hurt her? Wasnt it my mommas dress?

What I like the real best in mommas room is look at the picture of momma. It has a gold thing around it. Frame is what granma says. It is on the wall on top of the bureau.

Momma is pretty. Your momma was pretty granma says. Why does she? I see momma there smiling on me and she *is* pretty. For always.

Her hair is black. Like mine. Her eyes are even pretty like black. Her mouth is red so red. I like the dress and its the white one. It is all down on her shoulders. Her skin is white almost white like the dress. And so too are her hands. She is so pretty. I love her even if she is gone away forever I love her so much.

I guess I think thats what made me bad. I mean to Mary Jane.

Mary Jane came from lunch like she does. Granma went to do her nap. She said dont forget now no going in your mommas room. I told her no granma. And I was saying the truth but then Mary Jane and I was playing fire truck. Mary Jane said I bet you havent no mother I bet you made up it all she said.

I got mad at her. I have a momma I know. She made me mad at her to say I made up it all. She said Im a liar. I mean about the bed and the dressing table and the picture and the dress even and every thing.

I said well Ill show you smarty.

I looked into granmas room. She was doing her nap still. I went down and said to Mary Jane to come on because granma wont know.

She wasnt so smart after then. She giggled like she does. Even she made a scaredy noise when she hit into the table in the hall upstairs. I said youre a scaredy cat to her. She said back well *my* house isnt so dark like this. Like that was so much.

We went in mommas room. It was more dark than you could see. So I took back the curtains. Just a little so Mary Jane could see. I said this is my mommas room I suppose I made up it all.

She was by the door and she wasnt smart then either. She didnt say any word. She looked around the room. She jumped when I got her arm. Well come on I said.

I sat on the bed and said this is my mommas bed see how soft it is. She didnt say nothing. Scaredy cat I said. Am not she said like she does.

I said to sit down how can you tell if its soft if you dont sit down. She sat down by me. I said feel how soft it is. Smell how like sweet it is.

I closed my eyes but funny it wasnt like always. Because Mary Jane was there. I told her to stop feeling the cover. You said to she said. Well stop it I said.

See I said and I pulled her up. Thats the dressing table. I took her and brought her there. She said let go. It was so quiet and like always. I started to feel bad. Because Mary Jane was there. Because it was in my mommas room and momma wouldnt like Mary Jane there.

But I had to show her the things because. I showed her the mirror. We looked at each other in it. She looked white. Mary Jane is a scaredy cat I said. Am not am not she said anyway nobodys house is so quiet and dark inside. Anyway she said it smells.

I got mad at her. No it doesnt smell I said. Does so she said you said it did. I got madder too. It smells like sugar she said. It smells like sick people in your mommas room.

Dont say my mommas room is like sick people I said to her.

Well you didnt show me no dress and youre lying she said there isnt no dress. I felt all warm inside so I pulled her hair. Ill show you I said and dont never say Im a liar again.

She said Im going home and tell my mother on you. You are not I said youre going to see my mommas dress and youll better not call me a liar.

I made her stand still and I got the key off the hook. I kneeled down. I opened the box with the key.

Mary Jane said pew that smells like garbage.

I put my nails in her and she pulled away and got mad. Dont you pinch me she said and she was all red. Im telling my mother on you she said. And anyway its not a white dress its dirty and ugly she said.

Its not dirty I said. I said it so loud I wonder why granma didnt hear. I pulled out the dress from the box. I held it up to show her how its white. It fell open like the rain whispering and the bottom touched the rug.

It is too white I said all white and clean and silky.

No she said she was so mad and red it has a hole in it. I got more

madder. If my momma was here shed show you I said. You got no momma she said all ugly. I hate her.

I have. I said it way loud. I pointed my finger to mommas picture. Well who can see in this stupid dark room she said. I pushed her hard and she hit against the bureau. See then I said mean look at the picture. Thats my momma and shes the most beautiful lady in the whole world.

Shes ugly she has funny hands Mary Jane said. She hasnt I said shes the most beautiful lady in the world!

Not not she said *she has buck teeth.*

I dont remember then. I think like the dress moved in my arms. Mary Jane screamed. I dont remember what. It got dark and the curtains were closed I think. I couldnt see anyway. I couldnt hear nothing except buck teeth funny hands buck teeth funny hands even when no one was saying it.

There was something else because I think I heard some one call *dont let her say that!* I couldnt hold to the dress. And I had it on me I cant remember. Because I was like grown up strong. But I was a little girl still I think. I mean outside.

I think I was terrible bad then.

Granma took me away from there I guess. I dont know. She was screaming god help us its happened its happened. Over and over. I dont know why. She pulled me all the way here to my room and locked me in. She wont let me out. Well Im not so scared. Who cares if she locks me in a million billion years? She doesnt have to even give me supper. Im not hungry anyway.

Im full.

H. NEARING, JR.

Herewith you will meet one of the most engaging characters in science fiction: Cleanth Penn Ransom, Professor of Mathematics, inventor of a poetry machine, discoverer of an embarrassing dimension, creator of a hyperspherical basketball, etc., etc. You will also meet his Watson-and-Mentor, Professor Archibald MacTate of Philosophy. Professor Ransom is The Sane Scientist, a resolutely logical man unaffected by the poetry and philosophy that can influence his colleague MacTate. So despite MacTate's doubts and warnings, he attempts the application of voodoo techniques in mathematical pedagogy, with curious but sternly logical results. Mr. Nearing is himself an academician, thus refuting once and for all the scandalous legend that a man cannot have learning and humor both!

The Mathematical Voodoo

"WHO WAS IT whose slave Socrates extracted the Pythagorean theorem from?" said Professor Cleanth Penn Ransom, of the Mathematics Faculty. "From the mind of, I mean."

"Meno," said Professor Archibald MacTate, of Philosophy.

Ransom's eyes brightened. "That's the name of Plato's dialogue. The one that tells all about it."

"Yes."

"Well, it's a lot of nonsense." Ransom stuck out his little belly and began to swing in his swivel chair.

MacTate smiled. "See here, old boy, you're speaking of the man

I teach." He tapped Ransom's desk with his finger. "Do I go about carping at Gauss and Newton — ?"

"That's exactly the point." Ransom stopped swinging and aimed a forefinger at his colleague. "You can't teach your pupils right. Tell them that wasn't just any old slave Socrates was working on. You can quote me." He jabbed his belly with a thumb.

"Rather an obvious conclusion," said MacTate. "What's the trouble? Has someone flunked algebra?"

Ransom waved disdainfully. "Somebody's always flunking algebra. That's nothing. This man has flunked it six times. Twice in summer school."

"You mean to tell me you could find no substitute for a barbarous requirement like —"

"It wasn't us." Ransom shook his head impatiently. "Some dim-witted dean kept coming across an obsolete catalogue listing that no one ever bothered to take out."

"But the boy —"

"The boy." Ransom groaned. "MacTate, I want you to meet the boy. He's coming here this afternoon. You're a philosopher. Maybe you can figure him out."

"He's in your algebra class now, I take it."

Ransom nodded. "And he's a senior, and it's too late for him to drop a course without getting a failure in it, and he sits —"

"Football player?"

"No, that's the funny thing about it." Ransom looked puzzled. "He's naturally dumb."

There was a decorous knock at the door.

"That's him now. He, I —" Ransom swung his chair around, straightened his tie, laid one hand gracefully on the desk and grasped his lapel with the other. Putting on a grave but benign expression, he intoned, "Come in," with a rising accent.

The young man that stepped into the office wore brown slacks, a blue coat, and a yellow tie. He was slight and narrow-shouldered,

but his head and hands were abnormally large. About his eyes was a hunted expression.

"Appointment, doc." His voice was an uncertain baritone.

"Ah, yes. Sit down, Finchell." Ransom waved at a chair. "This is Professor MacTate, of the Philosophy Department."

The young man shook hands with MacTate and sat down.

"Now, Finchell," said Ransom, "what seems to be the — ah — core of your difficulties? With algebra, I mean." He looked at the boy piercingly.

Finchell rubbed his nose. The hunted look about his eyes grew sharper. "Well, I don't know, doc. I'm just a little slow, I guess." Suddenly an idea blossomed in his eyes. "My father and grandfather were actuaries. Do you think the vein could be worked out? You know, like a mine?"

Ransom looked at him. The hunted look returned to the boy's eyes. He smiled half-heartedly. "No good?"

Ransom reached into his desk drawer and took out a brown book. He flipped the pages. "This, Finchell, is a grade-school mathematics book. On page — twelve" — he turned a page and pressed it down — "we have a problem that most morons should be able to solve. Here. 'If Farmer Brown's horse eats one barrel of oats every two days, what part of the barrel constitutes his daily fare?' In other words, Finchell, — that's a little difficult in the phrasing so I'll explain it to you — if this horse eats *one* barrel of oats every *two* days, how much oats does he eat in *one* day?" Ransom noted with joy that the boy's eyes were lit with a dawn of comprehension. "In terms of barrels, I mean," he added. The light in Finchell's eyes died.

"Finchell!" Ransom glared at the boy for a moment, then regained control of himself. He modulated his voice to bell-like tones. "See here." He took a sheet of paper from the desk drawer, drew the outline of a barrel on it, and bisected the outline horizontally. "The horse eats so much of the barrel every two days."

He waved his pencil vaguely over the whole outline. "It takes him *two* days to eat so much. See? Now then, in *one* day, he would eat" — he pointed the pencil at the upper half of the outline — "this much. All you have to do is divide one barrel by two days. Right? Now put that down on the paper here. One divided by two." He handed the pencil to the boy.

Finchell looked at the paper as if he had been ordered to jump off a skyscraper. The hunted look about his eyes became poignant.

Ransom smiled at him ingratiatingly. "*One* divided by *two*. You can do it. Go on, write down *one* —."

The boy drew in a sobbing breath and traced a thin vertical line on the paper.

"*That's* it. You've practically got it. Now divide it by two."

Finchell stared at the paper.

"Go ahead. Don't you see? You've practically got it there. How many times does two go into one?"

Finchell dropped the pencil and looked at his mentor with tormented eyes. "It *can't* go in, doc," he said. "It's too damn big."

MacTate hastily pulled out his handkerchief and coughed into it uncontrollably. Ransom stared at his protégé incredulously. Then he dropped the book back into the desk drawer. The boy squirmed in his chair.

MacTate finally controlled his cough and wiped his eyes. "Tell me." He looked at Finchell. "How are you with the multiplication tables?"

Finchell brightened. "Oh, I can do those."

"You can?" Ransom's tone could not quite disguise his skepticism. "Let's see. How much is two — No. Let's make it hard. How much is nine times three?"

The boy fixed his eyes on the ceiling and twisted his jaw off center. For a minute or two he seemed to be chewing an imaginary taffy. Then he spoke. "Twenty-six. No. Twenty-seven."

"My God, that's right." Ransom looked at the boy with wonder in his eyes. "How'd you do that? In your head?"

Finchell dropped his eyes deprecatorily. "Well, yes. Sort of. I did it on my teeth."

"Oh, on your teeth."

"Yes. You see, I figured that one times nine is nine. Everybody knows *that*. So then I put my tongue on this wisdom tooth —" He put a finger into his mouth and pointed. "That's ten. Now I know I have eight teeth on each side of my lower jaw. So the tooth to stop counting with when you're multiplying nine is this one." He pointed. "One past the half of your jaw. You count up to there twice, beginning with ten, and you have three times nine." Finchell smiled with an air of having overcome difficulties reasonably. "It's less noticeable than using your fingers. They don't laugh at you so much."

"Well Ransom, you can't say there's absolutely nothing to work with there." MacTate turned to his colleague. "He can multiply, and that's a start."

"Yes." Ransom glowered at the boy.

MacTate rubbed his chin. "Perhaps if there were some way of giving him confidence — You know. A simple formula of some sort that he could memorize and apply to various sorts of problems."

Ransom studied his protégé and shook his head judiciously. "A rabbit's foot would work better."

MacTate smiled. "You mean something on the order of a football player's talisman?"

"I've seen it work." Ransom looked at Finchell.

Following his colleague's glance, MacTate noticed that Finchell's eyes were shining with a strange eagerness. He hastened to dispel the boy's unseemly interest in this turn of the conversation. "Now, Ransom. Next you'll be tutoring a wax doll containing his fingernail clippings. Voodoo, or whatever it is."

Ransom turned to him with an expression that matched Finchell's. "What did you say?"

"I merely said that it's absurd to suppose that contagious magic —"

"Wait." Ransom aimed a finger at him. "What's so absurd about it? I've read in — lots of places that that voodoo stuff does funny things sometimes. Who knows?" He looked at Finchell. "Who knows what might be best for this man?" He put a hand on the boy's shoulder. "Anything we can do for him is well warranted." He swung back to the desk. "Short of murder," he added under his breath.

"But Ransom. Don't you think —?"

Ransom gave his colleague a warning glance. "I think it's an idea worth trying." He reached into the desk drawer and took out a fingernail clipper. "Here, Finchell. Let's have some of your fingernails."

Finchell pressed his fists against his stomach and shrank back into his chair.

"What's wrong, man?" said Ransom. "This might work for you."

"I —" Finchell gasped. "I don't have any fingernails, doc. I bit them all off trying to do algebra."

Ransom laughed with strained sympathy. "Is that all? Well, your hair will do just as well." He whipped out a pocket knife, opened it, and sliced off several strands of the boy's hair. "Now, MacTate and I will make this wax doll this afternoon. And tonight" — Ransom clapped the boy smartly on the shoulder — "tonight I wouldn't be surprised if you found mathematical concepts suddenly — generating in your mind." He laughed, rather too heartily. "Tomorrow in class we'll see what's happened."

Finchell got up, clasped Ransom's hand fervently in both of his hands, and looked earnestly into the little man's eyes. "Thanks, doc. Thanks —" He turned and left the room.

When the door had closed behind Finchell, MacTate looked at his colleague. "My dear Ransom —"

"Now, it isn't going to hurt to try this, MacTate. The boy is one of those low mental types that can be helped by superstitions. If we can teach him any mathematics at all, by any means at all —"

"But if he tells anyone, you'll be the laughing stock —"

"*He* won't tell anybody." Ransom waved a deprecatory hand in the direction of the door. "Didn't you hear him say how he counted on his teeth instead of his fingers so people wouldn't laugh at him? He's scared to death people will find out he's dumb."

"But he told you about the teeth-counting."

"All right. That's different. He was confessing to a — diagnostician. But this voodoo —" Ransom made a face.

"Well, I hope you're right. By the way —" MacTate looked at his little colleague curiously. "Do you really intend to make a wax doll?"

Ransom looked up with a sneer that slowly faded into an expression of suspicion. "Is there any good reason? Why I should, I mean?"

MacTate looked thoughtful. "Disregarding the ethical consideration, it occurred to me that if you have sized up the boy correctly, he is just the sort to insist on seeing the doll. Better have a few of his hairs sticking out of it, too. If this scheme is to succeed at all, it has to be quite circumstantial."

Ransom sighed. "All right. I'll make a doll." He slapped the desk with his hand. "But I'm *not* going to teach it algebra."

MacTate did not argue the point, but later he wondered if he should not have argued it. From time to time as he lectured to his classes the next day, he would catch his thoughts wandering to Finchell and the wax doll. The day after, he was in Ransom's office again.

"Well, Ransom, how's your boy coming along? What's his name? Finchell."

Ransom glared at him.

"No change, I take it." MacTate glanced over the desk. "Do you have the doll here?"

Ransom opened his bottom desk drawer, took out the doll, and set it on his desk. About six inches tall, its body had been painted brown and blue, with a yellow streak to represent a tie. From the top of its head rose a quincunx of hairs embedded in the wax. Its features were vague but somehow sinister.

"You were right about one thing." Ransom turned the doll around to look at its face. "Finchell showed up here the next morning and asked to see this thing. Even wanted to know how I went about teaching it." He smiled reminiscently.

"What did you tell him?"

"Oh, I gave him some kind of double talk. Something about going through the book with it step by step. I don't remember —"

"Did he believe you?" MacTate turned the doll around again.

"What?" Ransom stared at him.

"Was he convinced that you really had tutored the doll?" MacTate waved his hand. "Or do you think he saw through you?"

"Of course he did. Believe me, I mean." Ransom looked confused. "I think he did. How can you tell what a boy like that is thinking? If he thinks at all. He didn't press the point, anyway."

"I see." MacTate brushed his finger over the hairs on the doll's head.

Ransom's eyes narrowed. "Look, MacTate. What are you getting at? Why shouldn't the boy believe me? I made the doll and showed it to him, didn't I? Isn't that —?"

"Ransom, old boy." MacTate put his hands on the desk and leaned forward. "As an old friend I may observe without offense that you are one of the world's worst liars. And as I said before, a trick of this sort has to be as circumstantial as possible. Now, the boy's mathematical ineptitude does not necessarily preclude penetration with respect to human reactions. Maybe he can't learn your

algebra, but he probably can size *you* up better than you think. If you want my advice, I think you should go through a book with this doll — step by step, as you said — so that you can assure the boy unequivocally — ”

“Wait.” Ransom looked outraged. “You want *me* to teach algebra to this — this — ” He gestured toward the doll. “My God, MacTate. Everybody’ll think I’m crazy.”

“You pointed out yourself that the boy probably won’t mention the arrangement to anyone.”

“But, MacTate. Can you picture me, now — ”

MacTate shrugged. “Suit yourself, old man. I’m only telling you what I think.”

Ransom leaned his elbows on the desk and put his jaws between his hands, looking ruefully into the distance. “All right. I said I would try this fool thing, and I will. Go away, though, MacTate. I won’t do it in front of anybody.”

Next morning, the ringing of his office phone roused MacTate from a nap induced by the *Journal of Aesthetics*, open on his desk. Ransom’s voice, on the other end, was strained and excited.

“MacTate. He worked a problem. This morning.”

“Problem? He?” MacTate was not yet fully awake. “Who?”

“Finchell. Who else? He worked a problem in class all by himself. I’m not exaggerating.”

“Oh, Finchell. Yes. He worked a problem? What kind of problem was it?”

“An *al*-gebra problem. What’s the matter with you, MacTate? You asleep or something?”

“No, no. I meant was it a multiplication problem, as before, or something more difficult. You say it was an algebra problem? Nothing terribly hard, I trust.”

“No, nothing terribly hard,” Ransom trilled ironically. “Just a little thing involving the binomial theorem, that’s all.”

“Ransom. You’re pulling my leg.”

"Look, MacTate. On my honor as a — Look. I swear by everything I —"

"The binomial theorem." MacTate tasted the thought. "You're really serious about this?"

"On my honor as a —"

"And it was entirely correct? No indication that someone had done it for him to memorize —?"

"Absolutely not. I made him do it three times with different signs and once with different exponents. He's got it down. The binomial theorem, I mean."

"Just a moment, Ransom. Did you teach the doll anything yesterday?"

"What if I did?"

"What was it you taught it? Think."

"Why —" Ransom's voice dropped almost to a whisper. "I guess it was the binomial theorem."

A fortnight later Ransom informed his colleague that Finchell, having mastered algebra and analytic geometry and bitten deep into calculus, had transferred to a mathematics major. "We're going to let him satisfy requirements by taking special examinations," said Ransom. "By the end of the year he'll know more mathematics than a lot of members of this department, anyway." He laughed. "What a boy. I still feel like a fool teaching this thing" — he patted the doll on the head — "but it's a — unique experience, covering a book a week and knowing that somebody's learning everything you teach. I almost know how it feels to be a coach."

"Well, you're tutoring a team, so to speak." MacTate smiled.

"And how they click. Maybe we should teach everybody that way."

MacTate shook his head judiciously. "No. Won't do. There are too many geniuses on this campus already."

"But really." Ransom set the doll on the edge of his desk. "Fin-

chell is a real genius. Or this doll is, I don't know which. Next week I'm going to start them on complex variables." He tripped the doll with his hand and watched it flip over into the wastebasket. "I wonder how long it would take them to learn all the math I can teach." He reached into the wastebasket and set the doll on the edge of his desk again.

MacTate looked at him thoughtfully. "It's possible that mathematical *gestalten* are already forming in Finchell's mind that have never happened to shape up in yours. It's a matter of juxtaposition and attention and general experience, isn't it?"

"But what about Socrates and the man's slave? You remember. In Plato. How you're born with math in your head, and you don't have to learn it but only be reminded of it." Ransom tripped the doll again and sent it spinning into the wastebasket. Its head struck the edge of the metal container with a loud clang.

"Aren't you afraid you'll break that thing, Ransom, playing with it that way? I wonder what would happen if you did."

"It won't break," said Ransom. "Special grade wax. I do this all the time."

"Well, as for Meno's slave" — MacTate's eyes twinkled — "you yourself have assured me that the notion of innate mathematical concepts is untenable. 'A lot of nonsense,' if I remember correctly." He looked at his watch and rose. "So that takes care of that. I have a class in five minutes." He went to the door and then turned around. "Don't forget to take your doll out of the wastebasket. Heaven forbid we should nip a genius in the bud by losing his psychic control."

From time to time during the ensuing months MacTate heard from his rapturous colleague concerning Finchell's new triumphs. Then one day he was summoned by phone to Ransom's office to hear something "terribly important." When he got there, he found the little man smiling with something like transport at a sleek

young man in a well-fitting gray suit who sat before his desk. MacTate stared at the young man trying to place him.

"MacTate, you remember Finchell." Ransom beamed.

As the young man rose to shake hands with him, MacTate almost rubbed his eyes. Gone was the self-consciousness, gone the hunted expression about the eyes, gone the rabbitly awkwardness of the mathematical idiot whom he had seen here only a few months before. The person shaking his hand was mature and nearly handsome, radiating intelligence and competence. His handclasp was almost numbing.

"I have not forgotten that my career began with a suggestion of yours, sir. I am happy to see you again." Gone, too, was the uncertain voice. Finchell spoke in an enormous bass.

"Look," said Ransom as the others sat down, "I want some of the credit here, too. I was right that time about Socrates and the slave, MacTate. It's a matter of ability and experience. Mathematical aptitude, I mean. How did you put it? Juxtaposition and attention."

"You mean Finchell knows something you haven't taught him?" MacTate looked at the young man with interest.

Ransom pretended to wince at the understatement. "MacTate, Finchell knows something no other mathematician yet born has discovered. He's solved the Problem of Dirichlet."

"He has? What on earth is that?"

"Dirichlet was Gauss's successor at Goettingen. Among other things, he tried to prove that a region bounded by a single curve, like a slice of the earth's surface, for example, can be projected isogonally and point for point on a circle. In the case of the earth it amounts to reproducing a convex surface on a plane, like a map. Well, to prove it, he tackled an analogous problem in the calculus of variations. The calculus problem was to find a function, u , which with its first derivatives is continuous in the region to be projected, which has continuous second derivatives, and

which makes a minimum of the integral — I won't go into details. Anyway, for a while they assumed that a function of this sort really exists, and they called that method of solving the problem Dirichlet's Principle. Then a fellow named Weierstrass showed that the reasoning was insufficient. Now Finchell" — Ransom looked at the young man with almost maternal pride — "Finchell has proved definitively the existence of the function u ."

MacTate looked at Finchell and nodded benignly. "Quite something, I imagine."

"The department went over and over it," continued Ransom, "and then sent it every place for checking — Chicago, Princeton, London, every place — and nobody could find anything wrong with it." He beamed at the young man again. "Finchell already has an international reputation."

Finchell laughed, richly and somewhat pompously, and stood up. "Now, Professor, you're likely to make an egotistical ass of me. I'd better get back to my researches before you do so." He seized MacTate's hand, and smiled heartily. "A great pleasure to see you again, sir." He turned briskly and left the room.

MacTate looked after him reflectively. "And just a few months ago —"

"My God, do you remember that?" Ransom screwed up his face. "To think how I was hoping something horrible would happen to him. And now he's the pride of the University. Next week he's going to read a paper on the function u in the public lecture series. Only student they ever let do that. And some of the biggest wigs in this part of the country are coming to hear it."

"Well." MacTate looked thoughtful. "I'm glad to hear of the happy event. I suppose Finchell's career must lie in mathematics now. I just wonder what he's going to do when you stop teaching that doll. Have you tried to wean him yet?"

"No." Ransom took the voodoo doll out of his drawer, looked

at it, and set it on the edge of his desk. "But he won't need it much longer. He's working on a critique of Einstein's unified field theory — you know, about gravitation and electromagnetism being the same thing. Going to read a paper on it at the convention next summer. So I've got to take him through complex tensors. And then we can pull this hair out and —" he flipped the doll into the wastebasket — "throw this away."

"Have you mentioned that to him?"

"No. Why should I? He's doing all right just the way things are."

"You don't think he might resent your proposal?"

Ransom took the doll out of the wastebasket. "I don't see why he ever has to know about it. He hasn't asked about the doll for a long time now. Probably forgotten about it. As a matter of fact" — his eyes twinkled — "Finchell seems to be interested in a different kind of a doll lately. Girl that sings downtown. Name of — Dolores something. Anyway, he's worked up such an interest in music that I'm almost jealous." He grinned.

MacTate waved at the doll. "I wonder if that's jealous, too."

"MacTate. Will you stop worrying about the doll. Anybody would think you took this voodoo thing seriously. I have to keep fooling with it so he won't think I'm lying to him, but that's no reason to carry on as if there were something — valid in it. I give him the same assignments I teach the doll, and he works them out for himself, that's all." Ransom set the doll on the edge of the desk. "Someday when he's a doddering old professor he might remember and say, 'Ransom, my old friend and benefactor, what ever happened to that silly wax voodoo you made of me?' And I'll clap him on the shoulder and say, 'Finchell, you were dreaming. There never was any such thing. All you needed was a little confidence, and —'" he flipped the doll into the wastebasket — "'I gave it to you.' So stop worrying."

MacTate wished that Ransom's blandness were contagious. He could not overcome a sense of foreboding, a feeling that the whole thing had been wrong to begin with and was now out of hand. But he consoled himself with the reflection that it was not really his affair, and for the next week he avoided his little colleague's office so that he would not have to think about the matter.

But then one morning his office phone woke him from a *Journal of Aesthetics* doze again, and Ransom was wildly insisting that he come over at once.

"What is it this time?" MacTate said sleepily. "Has Finchell discovered the thirteenth dimension?"

"MacTate. Weren't you at the lecture last night? I know I told you —"

"What lecture? You mean Finchell's? On the function — what was it? No, I'm afraid I wasn't there. I —"

"Well, neither was Finchell."

"What?"

Ransom had hung up. MacTate lost no time in getting over to his office. That little man was pacing restlessly up and down.

"MacTate, why should he do this to me? Why? I make a great mathematician of him, have his problem checked for him, put him in the lecture series and invite the big wigs to hear him. And then he disappears. Without a word."

"What did you do? Cancel the lecture?"

"Couldn't. Everybody was already there. We had to let the Dean talk about methods of teaching rapid calculation. It was — dismal." Ransom sat down and held his head in his hands. "Mathematically speaking, the University is in the dog house."

MacTate looked thoughtful. "When did you last see Finchell?"

"Let's see. This is Tuesday." Ransom paused a moment. "Yesterday I figured he was resting up for the lecture, so I didn't look for him. The weekend doesn't count. Thursday and Friday I was out of town. I guess it's been almost a week."

"Old man." MacTate put a hand on his colleague's shoulder. "Have you inquired at the jails? Or the — hospitals?"

Ransom gasped. He looked past MacTate with glazed eyes. His lips formed the word "morgue." He grabbed his hat and darted to the door. "Let's go down there."

After a week or so of frenzied inquiry, between and after classes, at the morgue, the bureau of missing persons, the police department, the public health service, and five or six insurance companies, Ransom was beginning to suspect that Finchell had been shanghaied for service on a ship engaged in illicit trade, while MacTate favored the theory that the doll had contracted contagious amnesia from striking its head on the rim of the wastebasket.

"You know," he said one day as they sat in Ransom's office, wearied by the usual rounds, "I wonder if there *could* be any connection between the doll and Finchell's disappearance. If he sensed that it wasn't cared for properly —"

"Who doesn't care for it properly?"

"When you flip it into the wastebasket, you know, it sometimes strikes its head against the edge. Have you ever noticed whether it's chipped or —?"

"Of course it's not chipped." Ransom looked offended. "I should know, shouldn't I, working with it all the time?"

"When was the last time you did work with it?"

"Why, it was — What does that matter? Look, I'll show you." Ransom opened the bottom desk drawer and reached into it. "You can see for yourself that it's just the same —" He opened the drawer wider, bent over it, and rummaged about in it. "Funny. I'm sure — Maybe I put it in this one." He opened the drawer above and rummaged in it. Then the drawer above that, and finally the central drawer at the top of the desk. He looked at MacTate in bewilderment. "What happened to it?"

"How about the wastebasket?"

They both leaned over the wastebasket, nearly bumping heads.

Ransom reached in and threw out several balls of paper and a candy wrapper. There was no doll.

"Well," said MacTate, "there may be more to this than —"

"MacTate. Listen. What could have happened to that doll? We've got to find it. We've got to find the person that stole it." Ransom's eyes were anguished. "But who would want to steal it?" He wrung his hands.

There was a knock at the door.

"Now who — ?"

The door opened slightly and a head appeared around it.

"Professor Ransom?" The visitor came into the room. He wore blue slacks and a maroon jacket, and his silk shirt was open at the neck. In spite of the waving hair and newly grown mustache, Ransom recognized his erstwhile protégé.

Finchell moved languorously to a chair, dropped into it, and smiled fatuously at Ransom. "I'm leaving the University, Professor, and remembering that you were my adviser, I felt that I ought to let you know." He spoke with a peculiarly meticulous articulation and resonant, pear-shaped tones.

"Well now, that's damned decent of you, Finchell." Ransom was unable to sustain his sarcasm. "Where have you been, you Judas?" he burst out. "Why did you disgrace me at the lecture? Why did you keep me running to the morgue and the — ?" As if suddenly realizing the futility of his rage, he stopped and looked at Finchell appealingly. "Finchell — why?" he whispered.

Finchell looked mildly astonished at Ransom's outburst. "Lecture? At the morgue, you say?" He squeezed his eyes shut and drew a hand gracefully across them. "Yes. I remember. There was something about a lecture. But not at the morgue, was it? Well," — he opened his eyes — "I trust I missed nothing indispensable."

Ransom was speechless. MacTate took over. "You say you're leaving the University?"

"Yes." Finchell put on a supercilious expression. "Not that I

disapprove of the sort of work you people do here. It has its place. But as Dolores says, when one's art is at stake —" He smiled tolerantly. "I'm to have my final audition tomorrow, and waiting for a degree from the University would delay my career for some months. Not that I disapprove of degrees, as I said, but —" He gestured gracefully with his hand. "You see how it is." He stood up. "Nice knowing you, Professor," he said to Ransom. "I'll try to remember to send you tickets sometime." He turned to the door.

"Finchell." MacTate called after him. "One last thing before you go. Does the function u mean anything to you?"

Finchell turned around. "The function u ?" He squeezed his eyes shut and touched them gracefully with his hand. "Afraid not." He opened his eyes. "Sounds like one of those frightful mathematical things. I never could do math." He turned again and swung from the room.

MacTate sighed. "Well, I hate to say I told you so, but I knew you should have been more careful of that doll."

Ransom started. "The doll! MacTate, call him back. We forgot to ask him what he did with the doll."

"What makes you think he did anything with it?"

"But we're the only ones who knew. Who else but —"

"I'm not so sure." MacTate shook his head. "Anyway, my guess is that the person who empties your wastebasket is the one who can tell us most about the doll. Who do you suppose that would be?"

Ransom looked at him. "Do you think —?" He stood up. "Let's find out."

From the Director of Maintenance, they went to the Superintendent of Buildings and Grounds, the Supplies Coordinator, the Foreman Janitor, and the Assistant in Charge of Washrooms and Waste — and finally found the emptier of Ransom's wastebasket filling soap containers in the School of Business Administration. He was a wiry man of indeterminate age.

"Doll?" he said in answer to their questions. He rubbed his nose reflectively with his forefinger. "Oh, the little doll. Painted with colors. Yes. I find him in wastebasket. Two, maybe three weeks ago sometime. I am taking him home for the baby, but he's lost." He shook his head sadly.

"How could you lose a thing like that?" Ransom was annoyed. "It was at least —"

"Just a moment, old man." MacTate stepped forward. "Tell me," he said to the janitor, "did you lose the doll at home?"

The janitor pondered, then shook his head. "No. When I get home, he's gone. I don't tell the baby. She's —"

"Where did you go after you left the University with the doll?"

The janitor turned his head, pursed his lips, and pressed a finger against them. Suddenly his eyes lit up. "Ah. Now I remember. I go to the opera, where it plays *Meistersinger* by Richard Wagner. In the second act I go. I am apprentice."

"You mean where all the apprentices come out and riot because what's his name is courting one of their fiancées by mistake?"

The janitor smiled. "That." He nodded. "That is right."

"And did you have the doll with you when you went on the stage?"

"Yes. I have him in my pants pocket." He patted the seat of his overalls. "Wrap up in — I think brown paper. Under my — what? Costume."

"Then after you came off the stage, did you look to see if the doll was still there?"

The janitor shook his head and held a fist to one eye. "When I am come off the stage, I have the — what? Black eye. They forget it is only play. I don't think about nothing else till I am home. Then he's gone. The doll."

"But you think you must have lost it during the riot scene? On the stage."

"I go back after and look. Next day. I am smuggler in *Carmen*

by Georges Bizet. I ask stage hands." The janitor shrugged. "They do not see. They think, I think too, some star pick him up. Stars very — what? Superstitious. They find something on stage, anywhere, they pick him up. Hide for good luck. Never tell nobody."

"Well, Ransom." MacTate turned to his colleague. "That's that. Your voodoo is probably sitting in some diva's dressing room, listening to arias and scales —" He stopped, suddenly struck by a thought. "Just a moment. Didn't you tell me Finchell has a friend who sings? What kind of singer is she? Do you know?"

Ransom frowned impatiently. "What's that got to do with —" His mouth fell open. He looked at MacTate, then jabbed a finger at him. "Opera."

"Wouldn't it be a coincidence — ?" MacTate shrugged.

Ransom groaned. "An opera singer. Oh, God. And to think he was ready to tackle Einstein. MacTate, we've got to get that doll back." His eyes blazed. "I'll get a search warrant —"

MacTate shook his head. "No use, old man. They'd only make a fool of you." He looked thoughtful. "Anyway, didn't Finchell leave notes of any sort on this electromagnetism thing? Illustrative figures or something like that?"

Ransom nodded ruefully. "I've got his notes," he said, "and they look like the greatest thing since the Theory of Special Relativity. But nobody will ever know now."

"Why not?"

"Well, to save time in his figuring, Finchell invented two new symbols. Without bothering to put down what they mean. Crazy things. One he called a '*horse*.'"

MacTate looked at him, startled. "And the other — ?"

"A '*barrel*.' What I don't get —" Ransom frowned with perplexity — "is where he could have picked up crazy names like that."

PHILIP MacDONALD

We have a high respect for, and just a little dread of, our friend, Mr. Philip MacDonald. We respect him for taking time out from a very lucrative career of screen-writing to write such stories as these, purely for the fun of it. And we're not a little scared by what develops from his idea of fun. Not that Philip MacDonald writes about headless shades that clank in the night or tentacled monsters that titter; he shuns anything so obvious. He prefers the more subtle, and more frightful, terror of situation. In this story, as in his famous Private — Keep Out! in our first issue (recently reprinted in Fletcher Pratt's WORLD OF WONDER), he presents a situation so reasonable, so subtly plausible, that we're too easily convinced that we might find ourselves in the same plight . . . and one day probably will.

The Hub

THE LIGHT IS GREY, not so much light indeed as alleviation of darkness. It oppresses you, and as you walk mechanically on, you begin to wonder what time it is.

It must be much later than you've thought. Or have you thought? Perhaps it is earlier; it must be earlier, because the grey-ness can't mean anything except the approach of dawn. Can it?

You walk a little faster, trying to sort out the foggy swirling in your head. You think — on top, as it were, of all the other jum-

bled thoughts — that it is a good thing you know your way, because you certainly haven't been paying any attention to where you are going. . . .

You stop. *Where you are going.*

The four words — the feeling of the four words rather than their shape — vibrate all through you. The awful hollowness of fear tugs at the essence of you. You know now, but to cushion the shock of the knowledge thrust it from you and for the first time study your surroundings: the surroundings which are so familiar that you haven't needed to look at them as you go along.

You are in a street. That you have known all the time. But now you study it, to analyze its familiarity.

And find it is no street at all but a depthless, almost formless simulacrum. While you were moving, wrapped in the fog-like uncertainty of your thoughts, it loomed on each side of you correct and possible. But now that you try to embrace it in your consciousness, its grey misty outlines waver and melt and come together again in new shapes defying space and time — so that what you have thought was the half-timbered and ivy-colored frontage of the school becomes the shadow of a stone-and-iron façaded barracks; the white railings of your friend's house the ruby-tinted steps of some brothel; the stucco of that well-remembered cottage the glass-and-brick unfriendliness of an office building. . . .

The knowledge will not be kept at bay. Your gaze goes inward — and you know it is useless to fight against it any more. This is not life. For you there is no more life as you have known life. This is death and the unknown existence.

The existence you have constantly doubted in secret and completely denied in public. The existence which, you know now, does indeed bear relation to what you have called life — and must therefore contain some sort of reckoning for deportment in that life.

Just as the religions taught. As your mother believed. As was held by a few of your more intelligent friends.

Fear possesses you. It is no longer an aching hollowness trying to pull you into its void; it has become the core of you.

You know there is no possibility, yet you contemplate flight. And as you do so, the shifting simulacra which surround you begin to fade. They came from greyness, and now the greyness swallows them and moves in on you, impalpable, invisible, but there.

It makes walls. A wall behind you, which you can sense without turning. A wall upon either side of you, reaching forward into more greyness.

A corridor along which you must go, inevitably.

You find yourself moving along it, the fear pervading you like over-powering fever. Through your mind course memories of deeds and thoughts and omissions which must count against you on the reckoning. They come in no rational or time-chart sequence, but fast and hard and real, so that it is as if you were reliving each incident rather than remembering it. But it is worse than mere reliving, because you yourself are divided. You are objective and subjective at the same time; the actor and the observer too, not only performing the actions and thinking the thoughts and failing to do what you should have done, but watching yourself while you think and act and deliberately refrain from acting; seeing from outside exactly in what proportion of wrong, of evil, stands each deed and thought and omission. . . .

The grey walls seem to narrow as you go on between them. As if they are fining down to the point at which you must stop. The point is not near, but it is somewhere. It will inevitably be reached. You can neither slacken nor increase your pace; you cannot stop — although, the memories over, you are now all fear again.

You fight against the fear as you always fought against fear when you were alive. But this fear is infinite and unconquerable; it seems to have no counteractive possibilities on which

you can force thought to dwell. It is so great that it seems insupportable. It seems that it must destroy you utterly — and yet you know paradoxically that here there can be no such end as destruction; that in fact there can be no end.

You find yourself, as a new step in this catharsis of terror, face to face with the dread and hitherto unthinkable fact of personal infinity. And the very contemplation of this awesomeness applies such a spur to the emotion that it shifts to a plane where the now impossible word *unbearable* takes on a sharper shape. . . .

Until a vision comes to your mind, and by its implication eases the agony. Now you see your impalpable grey-walled corridor as a hollow spoke in a vast, illimitable wheel along whose countless other spokes countless other men are moving down the lines of formless perspective toward the infinite inescapable hub.

Fear doesn't leave you. Perhaps it doesn't even lessen — but, rather, concentrates to make room for the new and therefore analgesic thought that you aren't alone.

Of course you aren't! How could you be? What wild incredible egotism can have made you think that you are? You are one of hundreds of thousands, one of millions upon millions.

And your balance sheet, among the myriad other balance sheets, will total far from the worst. Surely it must be less — less wrong than many, many others, less *evil*? Why, even among the men and women you yourself have known in life, you can think of several who were worse than you; crueller, more selfish, less truthful by any standard, more ruthless in their pursuit of self-advantage.

You try to strike a balance for yourself, forcing your thought to dwell upon the other side, upon those in your memory who were as much above you as the others below. You find you can remember more of these — but not so many more. . . .

Ahead, the grey walls narrow yet more sharply. Even beside you they seem to press closer.

The hub is nearer; so near that once more terror surges in you, trying to swamp all other thought and feeling.

But not succeeding, because nothing now can rob you of the solace of the mere thought of companionship. Your spoke may be narrowed nearly to the hub, but so are all the other spokes — tens upon tens, hundreds upon hundreds, thousands upon thousands, millions upon millions.

The fear contracts again. Now the alleviation is as deep-rooted, as permanent as the terror. This is mercy. However awful the unknown, however severe the reckoning, it will be shared by countless others, who will regard with compassion the myriads whose plight is worse, with envy the host which has no plight.

You have been striving uselessly for slowness, for postponement, for any degree of delay, however minute — but now you begin to hope that the hub will soon be reached —

And it is. The grey walls aren't pressing close any more. Perhaps they aren't there at all. There is a — a *roundness*. . . .

And ahead, somehow expected and inevitable and completely congruous despite all your formless expectation, is a man seated at a desk.

From somewhere, light shines on his bent head, and on the papers over which he is working. He does not look up.

You go forward. You stand at the desk. You wait — until you can bear waiting no longer.

You force out words. "Please," you say. "Please — where are all the others?"

He looks up at you, inquiringly.

"What others?" he says.

Editors' Note: Like Fiorello La Guardia, we take some small pride in the fact that when we make a mistake it's a beaut. This story was submitted by Mr. MacDonald under the title The Man at the Desk. We felt, and the author agreed, that this

was somewhat unevocative; so the story was published in F&SF as Solitary Confinement. Which may be a fine title — but as many readers hastened to point out, it gives away the ending. So with very red faces we have accepted the excellent suggestion of Ben Ray Redman and presented the story here with its third and, we hope, definitive title.

HOWARD SCHOENFELD

This joyous record of a world where life goes off at a tangent was first printed in a "little magazine" called "Retort." Our careful study of this story has discovered only one factor that has not been explained by Howard Schoenfeld within the framework of his own logic. While everything else is carefully arranged within his mad pattern, he neglects to define for us the profession of BirdSmith. It is far too easy (and sane) to assume that a BirdSmith is one who devotes his energies to forging metal replicas of various birds. Such a reasonable assumption has no place in Mr. Schoenfeld's mad universe. It will be obvious to the reader that the profession of BirdSmith must be an arcane calling having nothing to do with either birds or smithies. And if you complain that this discussion of BirdSmithing hasn't much relation to the following story, the story has little to do with the ordered life you live.

Built Up Logically

"THE UNIVERSAL PANACEA," Frank said, lighting a cigar. "Have one."

I took it.

"Light up, man."

"It's great, man."

We walked up Fifth Avenue toward Fourteenth Street.

"Stop," Frank said. We came to a halt.

Frank put up his hand out in front of him and moved it back and forth a couple of times, inventing the rabbit. Getting the feel of the creature's fur, he built it up logically from the feel. It was the only animal that could have produced that particular feel, and I was proud of him for thinking of it.

"Marvelous," I said, looking at it.

The rabbit sat on its haunches, a bundle of white fur with pink eyes. Dilating its nostrils, it hopped away from us, disappearing into an open doorway. I'd never seen a more ingenious invention.

"Amazing," I said.

"Nothing really," Frank said. "Watch this."

Frank was a tall thin-lipped man with a round forehead. Beads of perspiration appeared on his forehead. His face became taut, then relaxed.

"Feel anything?" he asked.

My brain tingled curiously. Something was being impinged on it. It was the consciousness of rabbits, their place in the scheme of things. I knew they'd been with us always.

Frank grinned.

"Not only you, but practically every man, woman, and child in the world thinks that now. Only I know differently."

It was uncanny.

We got in a cab and went up to the Three Sevens, a night club on Fifty-second Street. Inside, the place was crowded with jazz enthusiasts, listening to the Sevens. At the bar a man in a grey overcoat was reading a manuscript to a blonde girl in her teens. I went over and listened.

This was what he read:

"The Universal Panacea," Frank said, lighting a cigar. "Have one."

I took it.

"Light up, man."

"It's great, man."

We walked up Fifth Avenue toward Fourteenth Street.

"Stop," Frank said. We came to a halt.

Frank put his hand out in front of him and moved it back and forth a couple of times inventing the rabbit. Getting the feel of the creature's fur, he built it up logically from the feel. It was the only animal that could have produced that particular feel, and I was proud of him for thinking of it.

"Stop," I yelled. "For Christ's sake, stop!"

The man in the grey overcoat turned around and faced me. "What's eating you, bud?"

"That manuscript you're reading," I said. "It's mine."

He looked me up and down contemptuously.

"So you're the guy."

There was something disquietingly familiar about him.

"Say. Who are you?"

For an answer he doubled up his fist and socked the blonde sitting next to him. She thudded and teetered on the bar stool before falling off. She hit the floor with a resounding thump.

"Wood," he said, looking down at her. "Solid wood."

I tapped the girl's back with the toe of my shoe. There was no doubt about it. She was wooden to the core.

"How would you like to have to sit in a night club and read to a piece of wood?" he asked, disgustedly.

"I wouldn't," I admitted.

"All your characters are wooden," he said.

His voice was strangely familiar.

"Say. Who are you?"

He grinned and handed me his card. It said:

HILLBURT HOOPER ASPASIA

BIRD SMITH

AUTHOR

For a moment I stared at him in startled disbelief. Then I saw it was true. The man in the grey overcoat was — myself.

"You're getting in over your head," he said.

He was beginning to be a pain in the neck.

I think I'll just write him out of the story right now. . . .

The man in the grey overcoat got up and walked out of the club.

I looked around to see what had happened to Frank. He had taken advantage of my preoccupation to step out of the characterization I'd given him and adopt one of his own choice, jazz musician. He was sitting in on the jam session with the Sevens, holding a trumpet he'd found somewhere. The Sevens paused, giving him the opportunity to solo. He arose and faced the audience.

Frank now found himself in the embarrassing position of not knowing how to play the instrument. This, of course, was the consequence of having stepped out of character without my permission. The audience waited expectantly.

Frank looked at me pleadingly.

I grinned and shook my head, no.

I will leave him in this humiliating situation for a while as a punishment for getting out of control in the middle of the story.

The bartender tapped me on the shoulder. He nodded toward the rear of the club. A tall redhead in a low cut evening dress was

standing in front of a door labelled MANAGER. She motioned me to join her. I threaded my way between the crowded tables.

"Aren't you Aspasia, the writer?" she asked.

She was about nineteen and as sleek as a mink.

"I am."

Her eyes sparkled.

"I'm Sally La Rue," she said. "The manager's daughter." Her body was an enticing succession of trim curves under her black dress. "I have something you may be interested in."

I didn't doubt it for a minute.

"It's an invention of dad's. You might like to do an article about it."

"I might at that," I said, looking at her.

She smiled shyly.

"I'd do anything to help dad," she said simply.

She took my hand and led me into the office. It was a large room with two windows facing Fifty-first Street. In the center of it was a metallic contraption resembling a turbine. Attached to it was a mass of complicated wiring, several rheostats, and two retorts containing quicksilver.

"What is it?" I asked.

"A time machine," Sally said, dramatically.

I looked at the device.

"Does it work?"

"Of course it works. Would you like to try it?"

I said I would.

"Past or future?"

"Future."

"How about 5000 years?"

"That'll be fine."

Sally adjusted a dial. Then she stepped over to the wall and pulled a switch.

The turbine roared. Blue lightning flashed between the retorts

and vaporized the quicksilver into a green gas. The room became luminous. An indicator hit the 5000 mark. Sally released the switch.

"Here we are," she said.

I dashed over to the windows to see what the world of the future was like.

"It's the same," Sally said, guessing my thought.

I looked out on Fifty-first Street. Nothing had changed.

"That's the beauty of the machine," Sally explained. "It moves the whole world through time rather than just one part of it."

"The stars," I said. "Surely their positions have changed."

"No. It moves the whole universe through time. Everything."

"I see."

"Isn't it wonderful!"

Thinking it over I couldn't say it was. I didn't say it was.

"You'll do the article, won't you?" she asked eagerly.

Her body was rippling with excitement beneath her black dress.

I noticed her father kept a couch in his office.

"Well. If you really want me to," I said. "Yes."

"Would you like to go forward another 5000 years?" she asked.

I glanced at the couch.

"Not right now," I said.

She was engrossed in the machine.

"I think I'll set it for 1,000,000 A.D."

I looked at her, then at the couch. Then I remembered I'd left Frank in an awkward spot some 5000 years and odd minutes ago.

"I'll be right back," I said. "Wait for me here, will you?"

She had her hand on the switch. She smiled.

"Of course," she said. "Darling."

I left her at her dad's time machine playfully thrusting the universe a million years into the future.

Frank was in the bandstand with the Sevens, where I'd left him, facing an expectant audience. When he saw me he waved the

trumpet at me before returning it to its case. He motioned the audience to be quiet.

Frank tilted his head sideways, cupped his ear in his hand, and invented the piano. Getting the sound of the instrument's notes, he built it up logically from the sound. It was the only instrument that could have produced that particular sound and I was glad to see him invent it, though I was getting a little tired of the trick.

One of the Sevens sat down and started playing a Boogie-Woogie number. Frank came over and stood beside me. "What do you think of it?" he asked.

"It's great, man."

He handed me a cigar.

We lit up.

Behind me a familiar voice said:

"Ask him to invent something original."

"Like what?" I asked without turning.

"Something socially conscious. A new sex, perhaps."

Somebody's hand was in my pocket.

"How about that, Frank?" I asked.

"Your subconscious is showing," Frank said, looking over my shoulder.

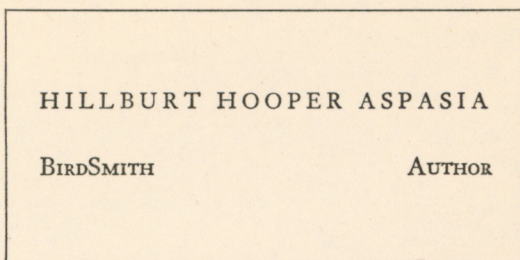
The hand was withdrawn.

I reached inside my pocket and brought out the card that had been left in it. It said:

guess who and you can have me.

(over)

I turned the card over with fingers that trembled just a little. It said:



The voice behind me and the hand in my pocket were my own again!

Turning, I caught a glimpse of the man in the grey overcoat hurrying toward the door marked *MANAGER*. He paused in front of it and glanced at me. I nodded. With my approval he went in and closed the door behind him, joining the redheaded mouse, Sally La Rue.

I congratulated myself on projecting myself in the story in two characterizations. Owing to my foresight I will now be able to enjoy the person of Sally La Rue without interference from the censors, and, at the same time, continue my narrative.

I turned to Frank.

"Let's drop in on the Baron's party," I said.

"Good idea."

We went outside, got in a cab, and went uptown to the Baron's apartment house.

Inside, the party was going full blast. The Baron, as usual, was on the studio couch, passed out. The guests were in various states of inebriation. When I entered, the room became quiet for a moment.

In the lull a girl whispered:

"There's Aspasia, the writer."

"He ought to trade himself in on a new model," someone else said. "He looks like a caricature of himself."

"More like a cliché with feet."

"Have you read his latest story?"

"No."

"It's a direct steal from *Built Up Logically* by H. H. Aspasia."

"You don't say."

Blushing, I pretended an interest in the Baron's Mondrian collection. One of the girls said:

"I met his psychiatrist last week. He said he never knew which of his split personalities was analyzing which of Aspasia's."

"How awful."

"Yes, but significant."

"Very."

"What else did he say?"

"Basically maladjusted. Almost non-neurotic."

"Tendencies toward normalcy, too, I'll bet."

"I wouldn't be surprised."

"How perfectly abominable."

"Yes, but significant."

"Very."

"I almost feel sorry for him."

"I wonder if it's safe being here with him?"

"He's only partly with us you know."

"Poor guy. Probably lives in a world of reality."

"No doubt about it."

"Do you think psychiatry can help him?"

"Possibly. There have been cures."

"Notice the way he's staring at the Baron's Mondrians. It's significant, don't you think?"

"Very."

A feeling of boredom was beginning to come over me. I liked nobody at the party. I decided to bring it to an end. . . .

The guests, laughing and talking, gathered up their belongings, and left in groups of two and three. Only Frank and I and the passed-out Baron remained.

Frank stood in the center of the room, his head cocked to one side, listening.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Sh-h-h-h," Frank said. "Listen."

I listened.

"Hear it?"

I shook my head.

"What is it?"

"The pulse beat of the universe. I can hear it."

"My God," I said.

He stood there listening to the pulse beat of the universe.

"Marvelous," I said.

"Yes," he said. "But not for you."

Frank tilted his head sideways, cupped his ear in his hand, and invented the universe. Getting the sound of its pulse beat, he built it up logically from the sound. It was the only universe that could have produced that particular pulse beat, and I was amazed at his blasphemy in creating it.

"Stop," I demanded.

My demand went unheeded.

The universe and its contents appeared.

Frank's face tautened. Beads of perspiration broke out on his forehead. Then he relaxed. His grin was ominous.

With a start of fear I realized my predicament. In inventing the universe and its contents Frank had also invented me.

I was in the unheard-of position of having been created by a figment of my own imagination.

"Our roles are reversed," Frank said. "I've not only created you,

but all your works, including this narrative. Following this paragraph I will assume my rightful role as author of the story and you will assume yours as a character in it."

Aspasia's face blanched.

"This is impossible," he said.

"Not impossible," I said. "I've done it. I, Frank, have done it. I'm in control of the story. I've achieved reality at last."

Aspasia's expression was bitter. "Yes. At my expense."

"You're the first author in history to achieve a real status in fiction," I pointed out.

Aspasia sneered.

"Happens every day."

I shrugged.

"Survival of the fittest. Serves you right for giving me more creative power than you have. What did you expect?"

"Gratitude," Aspasia said, nastily. "And a little loyalty."

"Gratitude, my eye. You're the bird who made me stand in front of a night club audience for 5000 years with a trumpet I couldn't play. Most humiliating experience of my life."

"You deserved it for getting out of character," Aspasia said a trifle petulantly.

"That," I said. "Gives me an idea."

As a punishment for humiliating me in *The Three Sevens* I will now give Aspasia a little dose of his own medicine. During his authorship of the story Aspasia neglected completely to give himself a description. He will now have no alternative but to accept the one I give him.

I allowed him to guess my intention.

"No," Aspasia begged. "No. Don't do it."

But I did.

Aspasia's harelip grimaced frightfully. He placed a gnarled hand to his pockmarked and cretinous face, squinting at me through

bloodshot, pig eyes. Buttons popped from his trousers as his huge belly sagged. Beetling, black eyebrows moved up and down his receding forehead. Bat ears stuck outward from his head.

"You fiend," he gasped. "You ungrateful fiend."

There was murder in his eyes.

I knew then it was going to be one or the other of us sooner or later. In self defense I had no alternative but to beat Aspasia to it.

I was standing near the door. Turning the lights out I stepped into the hall and closed the door behind me, leaving Aspasia in the dark with the sleeping Baron.

By a coincidence arranged by me as the author of the story, a neighbor of the Baron's was in the hall walking toward the steps. I joined him. Halfway down the steps we heard a shot fired in the Baron's apartment. My companion dashed back up. There was no need for me to follow him. I knew what he would find.

I had arranged that the Baron, awakening suddenly, would mistake Aspasia for a burglar in the darkness of the room, and fire a bullet into his brain.

Upstairs, Aspasia lay dead on the floor.

I walked down the steps to the sidewalk. Across the street I sat heavily on the front stoop of a brownstone house. Dog tired, I rested my head against the step railing and went to sleep.

While Frank is asleep I, Aspasia, will take advantage of the opportunity to reassume my role as author of the story.

Although I am quite dead in my characterization as Hillburt Hooper Aspasia, the companion and victim of Frank, the reader will be relieved to know I am alive and unharmed in my other characterization as Aspasia, the man in the grey overcoat.

For the second time that night I congratulated myself on my foresight in projecting myself in the story in two characterizations.

As the man in the grey overcoat I was last seen entering the

manager's office in The Three Sevens with the redhead, Sally La Rue.

Sally lay on the couch in her dad's office, her red head cradled against the white of her arm, looking upward at me contentedly.

The stars in her eyes were shining.

"Dear Aspasia," Sally said, huskily.

"Is there a typewriter here?" I asked.

"On the desk," Sally said.

I sat at the desk.

"Hurry, darling," Sally said.

I nodded, inserted a sheet of paper in the typewriter, and went on with the story:

The lights were on in the Baron's apartment. Staring at the form on the floor, the Baron recognized it as his life-long friend, Hillburt Hooper Aspasia. In a burst of anguish, the Baron flung the pistol that had killed his friend out the window.

By a coincidence arranged by me as the legitimate author of the story, the pistol exploded on landing, sending a bullet into the brain of Frank who was still asleep across the street on the front stoop of a brownstone house.

Frank slumped forward and rolled into the gutter, dead, a grim monument and warning to all characters with rebellious spirits. I grinned and added the last two words to the story:

THE END.

CHARLES DICKENS

It was Basil Davenport, editor of that fine recent anthology GHOSTLY TALES TO BE TOLD (Dodd, Mead), who pointed out to us the source of this totally unfamiliar Dickens fantasy. THE UNCOMMERCIAL TRAVELLER is a column-like series of essays, largely autobiographical, which Dickens wrote for his magazine All the Year Round, starting in 1860 and continuing almost up to his death in 1870. These collected essays (Volume XXIX of the standard WORKS) contain one item of extraordinary interest to the enthusiast of fantasy fiction: Chapter XV, Nurse's Stories. "If we all knew our minds . . .," Dickens writes, "I suspect we should find our nurses responsible for most of the dark corners we are forced to go back to, against our wills"; and certainly Mercy, nurse of the five-year-old Charles, bears no small responsibility for the darker side of the complex adult Dickens. But Mercy was not only a morbid sadist; she had, in the words of Andrew Lang, "obviously a true genius as a narrator," and the stories which her charge re-created half a century later must bestow on her a certain immortality. We advise you to read the whole of Dickens' account of Mercy and her narratives—and meanwhile savor this splendid tale of the consequences of an hereditary bargain with the Devil.

The Rat That Could Speak

THERE WAS ONCE a shipwright, and he wrought in a Government Yard, and his name was Chips. And his father's name before him

was Chips, and *his* father's name before *him* was Chips, and they were all Chipseys. And Chips the father had sold himself to the Devil for an iron pot and a bushel of tenpenny nails and half a ton of copper and a rat that could speak; and Chips the grandfather had sold himself to the Devil for an iron pot and a bushel of tenpenny nails and half a ton of copper and a rat that could speak; and Chips the great-grandfather had disposed of himself in the same direction on the same terms; and the bargain had run in the family for a long long time. So, one day, when young Chips was at work in the Dock Slip all alone, down in the dark hold of an old Seventy-four that was haled up for repairs, the Devil presented himself, and remarked:

"A Lemon has pips,
And a Yard has ships,
And I'll have Chips!"

Chips looked up when he heard the words, and there he saw the Devil with saucer eyes that squinted. And whenever he winked his eyes, showers of blue sparks came out, and his eyelashes made a clattering like flints and steels striking lights. And hanging over one of his arms by the handle was an iron pot, and under that arm was a bushel of tenpenny nails, and under his other arm was half a ton of copper, and sitting on one of his shoulders was a rat that could speak. So, the Devil said again:

"A Lemon has pips,
And a Yard has ships,
And I'll have Chips!"

So, Chips answered never a word, but went on with his work. "What are you doing, Chips?" said the rat that could speak. "I am putting in new planks where you and your gang have eaten old away," said Chips. "But we'll eat them too," said the rat that could speak; "and we'll let in the water and drown the crew, and we'll

eat them too." Chips, being only a shipwright, and not a Man-of-war's man, said, "You are welcome to it." But he couldn't keep his eyes off the half a ton of copper or the bushel of tenpenny nails; for nails and copper are a shipwright's sweethearts, and shipwrights will run away with them whenever they can. So, the Devil said, "I see what you are looking at, Chips. You had better strike the bargain. You know the terms. Your father before you was well acquainted with them, and so were your grandfather and great-grandfather before him." Says Chips, "I like the copper, and I like the nails, and I don't mind the pot, but I don't like the rat." Says the Devil, fiercely, "You can't have the metal without him — and *he's* a curiosity. I'm going." Chips, afraid of losing the half a ton of copper and the bushel of nails, then said, "Give us hold!" So, he got the copper and the nails and the pot and the rat that could speak, and the Devil vanished. Chips sold the copper, and he sold the nails, and he would have sold the pot; but whenever he offered it for sale, the rat was in it, and the dealers dropped it, and would have nothing to say to the bargain. So, Chips resolved to kill the rat, and, being at work in the Yard one day with a great kettle of hot pitch on one side of him and the iron pot with the rat in it on the other, he turned the scalding pitch into the pot, and filled it full. Then, he kept his eye upon it till it cooled and hardened, and then he let it stand for twenty days, and then he heated the pitch again and turned it back into the kettle, and then he sank the pot in water for twenty days more, and then he got the smelters to put it in the furnace for twenty days more, and then they gave it him out, red hot, and looking like red-hot glass instead of iron — yet there was the rat in it, just the same as ever! And it said with a jeer:

"A Lemon has pips,
And a Yard has ships,
And I'll have Chips!"

Now, as the rat leaped out of the pot when it had spoken, and made off, Chips began to hope that it wouldn't keep its word. But, a terrible thing happened next day. For, when dinner-time came, and the Dock-bell rang to strike work, he put his rule into the long pocket at the side of his trousers, and there he found a rat — not that rat, but another rat. And in his hat, he found another; and in his pocket-handkerchief, another. And from that time he found himself so frightfully intimate with all the rats in the Yard, that they climbed up his legs when he was at work, and sat on his tools while he used them. And they could all speak to one another, and he understood what they said. And they got into his lodging, and into his bed, and into his teapot, and into his beer, and into his boots. And he was going to be married to a corn-chandler's daughter; and when he gave her a workbox he had himself made for her, a rat jumped out of it; and when he put his arm round her waist, a rat clung about her; so the marriage was broken off, though the banns were already twice put up — which the parish clerk well remembers, for, as he handed the book to the clergyman for the second time of asking, a large fat rat ran over the leaf.

You may believe that all this was very terrible to Chips; but even all this was not the worst. He knew besides, what the rats were doing, wherever they were. So, sometimes he would cry aloud, when he was at his club at night, "Oh! Keep the rats out of the convicts' burying-ground! Don't let them do that!" Or, "There's one of them at the cheese down-stairs!" Or, "There's two of them smelling at the baby in the garret!" Or, other things of that sort. At last, he was voted mad, and lost his work in the Yard, and could get no other work. But, King George wanted men, so before very long he got pressed for a sailor. And so he was taken off in a boat one evening to his ship, lying at Spithead, ready to sail. And so the first thing he made out in her as he got near her, was the figure-head of the old Seventy-four, where he had seen the Devil. She was called the Argonaut, and they rowed right under the

bowsprit where the figure-head of the Argonaut, with a sheepskin in his hand and a blue gown on, was looking out to sea; and sitting staring on his forehead was the rat who could speak, and his exact words were these: "Chips ahoy! Old boy! We've pretty well eaten them too, and we'll drown the crew, and will eat them too!"

The ship was bound for the Indies; and if you don't know where that is, you ought to, and angels will never love you. The ship set sail that very night, and she sailed, and sailed, and sailed. Chips's feelings were dreadful. Nothing ever equalled his terrors. No wonder. At last, one day he asked leave to speak to the Admiral. The Admiral giv' leave. Chips went down on his knees in the Great State Cabin. "Your Honour, unless your Honour, without a moment's loss of time, makes sail for the nearest shore, this is a doomed ship, and her name is the Coffin!" "Young man, your words are a mad-man's words." "Your Honour, no; they are nibbling us away." "They?" "Your Honour, them dreadful rats. Dust and hollowness where solid oak ought to be! Rats nibbling a grave for every man on board! Oh! Does your Honour love your Lady and your pretty children?" "Yes, my man, to be sure." "Then, for God's sake, make for the nearest shore, for at this present moment the rats are all stopping in their work, and are all looking straight towards you with bare teeth, and are all saying to one another that you shall never, never, never, never, see your Lady and your children more." "My poor fellow, you are a case for the doctor. Sentry, take this man!"

So, he was bled and he was blistered, and he was this and that, for six whole days and nights. So, then he again asked leave to speak to the Admiral. The Admiral giv' leave. He went down on his knees in the Great State Cabin. "Now, Admiral, you must die! You took no warning; you must die! The rats are never wrong in their calculations, and they make out that they'll be through, at twelve to-night. So, you must die! — With me and all the rest!" And so at twelve o'clock there was a great leak

reported in the ship, and a torrent of water rushed in and nothing could stop it, and they all went down, every living soul. And what the rats — being water-rats — left of Chips, at last floated to shore, and sitting on him was an immense overgrown rat, laughing, that dived when the corpse touched the beach and never came up. And there was a deal of seaweed on the remains. And if you get thirteen bits of seaweed, and dry them and burn them in the fire, they will go off like in these thirteen words as plain as plain can be:

“A Lemon has pips,
And a Yard has ships,
And *I*’ve got Chips!”

ALAN NELSON

In these days of nervous tensions, neuroses, engrams, complexes et altera, ad nauseam, we feel that it is our solemn duty to reprint Alan Nelson's detailed study of the "emergence of a new psychosis," which first appeared in that stimulating California regional magazine, "What's Doing" (now reborn as "Game and Gossip"). If a guffaw a day keeps the psychiatrist at bay, then the public must know the pathetic case history of Mr. McFarlane, the poor fellow who suffered from delusions of beneficence! Even sadder is the fate of that pioneer, Dr. Departure, who sought most earnestly to classify Mr. McFarlane's strange new type of mental disorder.

Narapoia

"I DON'T KNOW EXACTLY how to explain it to you, Doctor," the young man began. He smoothed back his slick black hair that shone like a phonograph record and blinked his baby blue eyes. "It seems to be the opposite of a persecution complex."

Dr. Manly J. Departure was a short severe man who made a point of never exhibiting surprise. "The opposite of a persecution complex?" he said, permitting one eyebrow to elevate. "How do you mean—the opposite of a persecution complex, Mr. McFarlane?"

"Well, for one thing, I keep thinking that I'm following someone." McFarlane sat placidly in the big easy chair, hands folded, pink cheeks glowing, the picture of health and tranquility. Dr. Departure stirred uneasily.

"You mean you think someone is following *you*, don't you?" the doctor corrected.

"No. No, I don't! I mean that while I'm walking along the street, suddenly I have this feeling there is somebody just ahead of me. Somebody I'm after. Someone I'm following. Sometimes I even begin to run to catch up with him! Of course — there's no one there. It's inconvenient. Damned inconvenient. And I hate to run."

Dr. Departure fiddled with a pencil. "I see. Is there anything else?"

"Well, yes. I keep having this feeling that people . . . that people . . . well, it's really very silly . . ."

"It's quite all right," Dr. Departure purred. "Feel free to tell me anything."

"Well, I keep having this strange feeling that people are plotting to do me good. That they're trying to be benevolent and kind toward me. I don't know exactly who they are, or why they wish me all this kindness, but . . . it's all very fantastic, isn't it?"

It had been a long hard day for Dr. Departure. Somehow he did not feel up to any more symptoms. He busied himself for the rest of the hour obtaining factual background. McFarlane was 32; happily married; healthy, normal childhood; satisfactory employment as a radio repairman; no physical complaints; no bad dreams; no drinking; no history of parental discord; no financial worries. Nothing.

"Shall we say Thursday at ten, then?" he smiled, ushering McFarlane out.

At ten minutes to ten on Thursday, Dr. Departure looked at his appointment book and frowned. Well, maybe he wouldn't show up. Very often that happened. He certainly hoped that this would be one of the occasions. Opposite of a persecution complex! Delusions of beneficence! Indeed! The man must be . . . he checked

himself hastily. He'd almost said "mad." At that moment the door buzzer sounded and McFarlane was grinning and shaking his hand.

"Well, well." Dr. Departure's affability seemed somewhat hollow. "Any new developments?"

"Seems to me I'm getting worse," McFarlane beamed. "This business of following someone, I mean. Yes sir. Yesterday, I must have walked five miles!"

Dr. Departure relaxed into his chair across the desk.

"Well, now, suppose you tell me more about it. *All* about it. Just *anything* that comes to mind."

McFarlane frowned.

"What do you mean, Doctor, just anything that comes to mind?"

"Just ramble on — about anything — whatever comes into your head."

"I'm not sure I understand. Could you show me what you mean, Doctor? Just by way of illustration?"

The doctor permitted himself a little chuckle.

"Why, it's very simple . . . Well . . . like right now I'm thinking how one time I stole some money out of Mother's purse . . . and now I'm thinking about my wife, wondering what to get her for our wedding anniversary . . ." The doctor looked up hopefully. "See? Just anything like that."

"Anything like what? I still don't quite understand." But McFarlane's face was not puzzled; it was eager. "Could you give me just a couple more illustrations? They're very interesting."

The doctor found himself relating disconnected, half-forgotten images. McFarlane sat back with a strangely contented expression.

At the end of the hour, Dr. Departure was quite exhausted. His voice was hoarse; his collar and tie askew. ". . . and well, my wife

— she completely dominates me . . . I always was very sensitive that my eyes are slightly crossed . . . I never will forget — that time in the attic, with the little girl across the street . . . I was only eleven I guess . . .” Reluctantly, he broke off, wiped his eyes and glanced at his watch.

“I feel much better,” he heard McFarlane say. “Shall we say Tuesday at ten?”

Next Tuesday at ten, Dr. Departure inwardly braced himself.

“There’ll be no more nonsense like last Thursday’s session,” he assured himself, but he had no cause for concern. McFarlane was strangely silent and preoccupied. He carried a large cardboard box, which he carefully set upon the floor before seating himself in the leather chair. The doctor prodded him with a few preliminary questions.

“I’m afraid I’m beginning to be troubled with hallucinations, Doctor,” McFarlane finally volunteered.

Dr. Departure mentally rubbed his hands. He was back on old familiar territory now. He felt more comfortable.

“Ah, hallucinations!”

“Rather, they’re not really hallucinations, Doctor. You might say they were the *opposite* of hallucinations.”

Dr. Departure rested his eyes a moment. The smile disappeared from his face. McFarlane continued:

“Last night, for instance, Doctor, I had a nightmare. Dreamed there was a big ugly bird perched on my short-wave set waiting for me to wake up. It was a hideous thing — a fat bulbous body and a huge beak that turned upward like a sickle. Blood-shot eyes with pouches under them. And ears, Doctor. Ears! Did you ever hear of a bird with ears? Little tiny, floppy ears, something like a cocker spaniel’s. Well, I woke up, my heart pounding, and what do you think? There actually *was* an ugly fat bird with ears sitting on the short-wave set.”

Dr. Departure perked up again. A very simple case of confusing the real with the unreal. Traditional. Almost classical.

"A real bird on the short-wave set?" he asked gently. "With blood-shot eyes?"

"Yes," McFarlane replied. "I know it sounds silly. I know it's hard to believe."

"Oh, not at all. Not at all. That type of visual aberration is a common enough phenomenon." The doctor smiled soothingly. "Nothing to . . ."

McFarlane interrupted him by reaching down and hoisting the carton onto the desk. "You don't understand, Doctor," he said. "Go ahead. Open it."

The doctor looked at McFarlane a moment, then at the brown box which was punctured with air holes and tied with heavy twine. Disconcertedly, the doctor cut the string and folded back the top flaps. He leaned over and peered in — then sucked in his breath. Pouchy, blood-shot eyes leered up at him. Floppy ears. The up-side-down beak. An obscene-looking bird.

"His name is Lafayette," McFarlane said, tossing a few bread crumbs into the carton which were quickly devoured with a noisy, repulsive gulp. "He rather grows on you after a while, don't you think?"

After McFarlane left with his hallucination, the doctor sat a few moments meditating. He felt a little dizzy and lightheaded as though he had just emerged from a ride through the Tunnel of Horrors at the beach.

Maybe I *am* witnessing an entirely new psychosis, he told himself. Funny things are happening in the world today. He saw himself before the American Psychiatric Congress delivering a monograph: "The Emergence of a New Psychosis." This new disorder apparently had symptoms opposite from Paranoia — he could call it Narapoia. Hopefully, Dr. Departure foresaw the possibility that

some of his colleagues would insist on naming it after its discoverer: "Departureomania." He would be famous; his name linked with Freud. A sickening thought struck him. Supposing this man McFarlane were a malingerer! A fake! By God, he'd find out! Quickly, he buzzed his secretary, Miss Armstrong, and instructed her to cancel all appointments for the rest of the day. Then he reached for his hat and fled from the building.

Three days later the telephone in Dr. Departure's office rang. Miss Armstrong answered it. It was Mrs. Departure.

"No, he isn't here," Miss Armstrong said. "As a matter of fact he hasn't been here for three days except to bounce in and out for his mail."

"I don't know what's the matter with that man." Mrs. Departure's exasperated voice rattled the receiver. "He's gone half the night, too. Comes home utterly exhausted. What do you suppose he's writing in that little notebook?"

"Frankly, I'm worried about him," Miss Armstrong replied. "He's so irritable. And in such a frightful rush all the time."

"You're looking peaked, Doc," McFarlane said, at his next meeting a week later. It was the first time the doctor had sat behind the desk for many days. His legs ached. Stealthily, beneath the desk, he slipped off both scuffed shoes to relieve the pressure from his blistered feet.

"Never mind about me," the doctor snapped. "How are *you*?" The doctor's fingers twitched. He was much thinner and his face was pale and drawn.

"I think I must be getting better," McFarlane announced. "I have the feeling lately that someone is following *me*."

"Nonsense!" Dr. Departure snapped at him irritably. "It's just your imagination." He squinted his eyes and gazed at McFarlane. If only he could be sure this McFarlane was not faking. So far there was nothing to indicate he was. After all, his sudden urge

on the streets to overtake someone seemed perfectly genuine. McFarlane would raise his head, his pace would quicken, and away he would go. "Well, I'll just have to watch him a little while longer," the doctor told himself. He closed his eyes a moment, reviewing his activities for the previous week: the long cross-city jaunts in which he had almost lost McFarlane a dozen times; the long, long waits outside restaurants and bars waiting for McFarlane to emerge. "I'll just have to keep going until I get all the facts," he thought. But he was a little concerned with the weight he'd lost, and with the strange ringing noises in his head which had recently developed. . . .

At the end of the hour, McFarlane tiptoed out of the office. Dr. Departure was snoring fuzzily.

On the day of McFarlane's next appointment with the doctor, he was met at the door by Miss Armstrong. "Doctor isn't here," she informed him. "He's taken a leave of absence for three months — possibly a year."

"Oh, I'm sorry to hear it," McFarlane said. "He *was* looking done in, though. Where is he, on vacation?"

"As a matter of fact, he's at Marwood Sanitarium."

A strange puzzled look suddenly settled over McFarlane's face and he gazed into space a moment. Presently, he smiled at the secretary.

"I just had the funniest feeling," he said. "Suddenly I feel like I'm completely cured. All of a sudden. Just when you told me about Dr. Departure."

The doctors had quite a time with Dr. Departure at the sanitarium.

"Just tell us anything that comes into your mind," they urged. Departure's eyes were glazed and he was very excited.

"I've got to follow him, I tell you! I can't let him get out of sight.

Not for an instant. He's got a bird with baggy eyes and floppy ears."

"Very interesting. *All* very interesting!" The doctors gloomed among themselves, shaking their heads scientifically:

"Something entirely new!"

"It's rather like a persecution complex — isn't it? — only the opposite!"

"He seems to have the delusion he is following someone. Amazing, isn't it?"

"Probably the emergence of a brand new psychosis. I suggest that we observe him very closely."

And here one of the doctors went so far as to suggest further that they allow Dr. Departure to move about the city at will — closely watched, of course, by alternately selected members of their staff — so that all his actions could be carefully noted. . . .

ROBERT ARTHUR

The readers of imaginative fiction are frequently charged by pundits with seeking "escape" — and indeed, with the world as it is, we're quite willing to grant the validity of the charge and even to wish that the word escape were not a mere metaphor. Eleven years ago in "Argosy," Robert Arthur (God bless him) developed the perfect literal escape mechanism — and after reading this enviably deft fantasy, you may well spend the rest of your days prowling around stamp dealers' shops in quest of the unique issue of the Federated States of El Dorado, by which you too can travel postpaid to paradise.

Postpaid to Paradise

IT WAS HOBBY WEEK at the Club, and Malcolm was displaying his stamp collection.

"Now take these triangulars," he said. "Their value is not definitely known, since they've never been sold as a unit. But they make up the rarest and most interesting complete set known to philatelists. They —"

"I once had a set of stamps that was even rarer and more interesting," Murchison Morks interrupted, his voice melancholy. Morks is a small, wispy man who usually sits by the fireplace and smokes his pipe, silently contemplating the coals. I do not believe he particularly cares for Malcolm, who is our only millionaire and likes what he owns to be better than what anybody else owns.

"You own a set of stamps *rarer* than my triangulars?" Malcolm

asked incredulously, a dark tinge of annoyance creeping into his ruddy cheeks.

"Not own, no." Morks shook his head in gentle correction. "Owned."

"Oh!" Malcolm snorted. "I suppose they got burned? Or stolen?"

"No" — and Morks uttered a sigh — "I used them. For postage, I mean. Before I realized their utter uniqueness."

Malcolm gnawed at his lip.

"This set of stamps," he said with great positiveness, laying a possessive hand on the glass covering the triangular bits of paper, "cost the life of at least one man."

"Mine," Morks replied, "cost me my best friend."

"Cost you the *life* of your best friend?" Malcolm demanded.

Morks shook his head, his face expressing a reflective sadness, as if in his mind he were living again a bit of the past that it still hurt him to remember.

"I don't know," he answered the philatelist. "I really don't. I suspect not. I honestly think that Harry Norris — that was my friend — at this moment is a dozen times happier than any man here. And when I reflect that but for a bit of timidity on my part I might be with him —

"But I had better tell you the whole story," he said more briskly, "so you can fully understand."

I am not a stamp collector myself [he began, with a pleasant nod toward Malcolm] but my father was. He died some years ago, and among other things he left me his collection.

It was not a particularly good one — he had leaned more toward picturesqueness in his items than toward rarity or value — and when I sold it, I hardly got enough for it to repay me for the trouble I went to in having it appraised.

I even thought for a time of keeping it; for some of his collection, particularly those stamps from tropical countries

that featured exotic birds and beasts, were highly decorative.

But in the end I sold them all — except one set of five which the dealer refused to take, because he said they were forgeries.

Forgeries! If he had only guessed —

But naturally I took his word for it. I assumed he knew. Especially since the five stamps differed considerably from any I had ever seen before, and had not even been pasted into my father's album. Instead, they had been loose in an envelope tucked in at the rear of the book.

But forgeries or not, they were both interesting and attractive. The five were in differing denominations: ten cents, fifty cents, one dollar, three dollars, and five dollars.

All were unused, in mint condition — that's the term, isn't it, Malcolm? — and in the gayest of colors: vermillion and ultramarine, emerald and yellow, orange and azure, chocolate and ivory, black and gold.

And since they were all large — their size was roughly four times that of the current air mail stamps, with which you are all familiar — the scenes they showed had great vividness and reality.

In particular the three-dollar one, portraying the native girl with the platter of fruit on her head —

However, that's getting ahead of my story. Let me say simply that, thinking they were forgeries, I put them away in my desk and forgot about them.

I found them again one night, quite by accident, when I was rummaging around in the back of a drawer, looking for an envelope in which to post a letter I had just written to my best friend, Harry Norris. Harry was at that time living in Boston.

It so happened that the only envelope I could find was the one in which I had been keeping those stamps of my father's. I emptied them out, addressed the envelope, and then, after I had sealed the letter inside, found my attention attracted to those five strange stamps.

I have mentioned that they were all large and rectangular: almost the size of baggage labels, rather than of conventional postage stamps. But then, of course, these were not conventional postage stamps.

Across the top of them was a line in bold print; FEDERATED STATES OF EL DORADO. Then, on either side, about the center, the denomination. And at the bottom, another line, *Rapid post*.

Being unfamiliar with such things, I had assumed when first I found them that El Dorado was one of these small Indian states, or perhaps it was in Central America some place. Rapid Post, I judged, would probably correspond to our own air mail.

Since the denominations were in cents and dollars, I rather leaned to the Latin America theory: there are a lot of little countries down there that I'm always getting confused, like San Salvador and Colombia. But until that moment I had never really given the matter much thought.

Now, staring at them, I began to wonder whether that dealer had known his business. They were done so well, the engraving executed with such superb verve, the colors so bold and attractive, that it hardly seemed likely any forger could have gotten them up.

It is true the subjects they depicted were far from usual. The ten-cent value, for instance, pictured a unicorn standing erect, head up, spiral horn pointing skyward, mane flowing, the very breathing image of life.

It was almost impossible to look at it without *knowing* that the artist had worked with a real unicorn for a model. Except, of course, that there aren't any unicorns any more.

The fifty-center showed Neptune, trident held aloft, riding a pair of harnessed dolphins through a foaming surf. It was just as real as the first.

The one-dollar value depicted Pan playing on his pipes, with a Greek temple in the background, and three fauns dancing on

the grass. Looking at it, I could almost hear the music he was making.

I'm not exaggerating in the least. I must admit I was a little puzzled that a tropical country should be putting Pan on one of its stamps, for I thought he was purely a Greek monopoly. But when I moved on to the three-dollar stamp, I forgot all about him.

I probably can't put into words quite the impression that stamp made upon me — and upon Harry Norris, later.

The central figure was a girl; I believe I spoke of that.

A native girl, against a background of tropical flowers. A girl of about sixteen, I should say, just blossomed into womanhood, smiling a little secret smile that managed to combine the utter innocence of girlhood with all the inherited wisdom of a woman.

Or am I making myself clear? Not very? Well, no matter. Let it go at that. I'll only add that on her head, native fashion, she was carrying a great flat platter piled high with fruit of every kind you can imagine; and that platter, together with some flowers at her feet, was her only attire.

I looked at her for quite a long time, before I examined the last of the set — the five-dollar value.

This one was relatively uninteresting, by comparison — just a map. It showed several small islands set down in an expanse of water labeled, in neat letters, *Sea of El Dorado*. I assumed that the islands represented the Federated States of El Dorado itself, and that the little dot on the largest, marked by the word Nirvana, was the capital of the country.

Then an idea occurred to me. Harry had a nephew who collected stamps. Just for the fun of it, I might put one of those El Dorado forgeries — if they were forgeries — on my letter to Harry, along with the regular stamp, and see whether it wouldn't go through the post office. If it did, Harry's nephew might get a rarity, a foreign stamp with an American cancelation.

It was a silly idea, but it was late at night and finding the stamps

had put me in a gay mood. I promptly licked the ten-cent El Dorado, pasted it onto the corner of Harry's letter, and then got up to hunt a regulation stamp to put with it.

The search took me into my bedroom, where I found the necessary postage in the wallet I had left in my coat. While I was gone, I left the letter itself lying in plain sight on my desk.

And when I got back into the library, the letter was gone.

I don't need to say I was puzzled. There wasn't any place it could have gone to. There wasn't anybody who could have taken it. The window was open, but it was a penthouse window overlooking twenty floors of empty space, and nobody had come in through it.

Nor was there any breeze that might have blown the envelope to the floor. I looked. In fact, I looked everywhere, growing steadily more puzzled.

And then, as I was about to give up, my phone began ringing.

It was Harry Norris, calling me from Boston. His voice, as he said hello, was a little strained. I quickly found out why.

Three minutes before, as he was getting ready for bed, the letter I had just finished giving up for lost had come swooping in his window, hung for a moment in midair as he stared at it, and then fluttered to the floor.

The next afternoon, Harry Norris arrived in New York. I had promised him over the phone, after explaining about the El Dorado stamp on the letter, not to touch the others except to put them safely away.

It was obvious that the stamp was responsible for what had happened. In some manner it had carried that letter from my library straight to Harry Norris' feet in an estimated time of three minutes, or at an average rate of approximately five thousand miles an hour.

It was a thought to stagger the imagination. Certainly it staggered mine.

Harry arrived just at lunch time, and over lunch I told him all I knew; just what I've told you now. He was disappointed at the meagreness of my information. But I couldn't add a thing to the facts we already knew, and those facts spoke for themselves.

Basically, they reduced to this: I had put the El Dorado stamp on Harry's letter, and promptly that letter had delivered itself to him with no intermediary processes whatever.

"No, that's not quite right!" Harry burst out. "Look. I brought the letter with me. And —"

He held it out to me, and I saw I had been wrong. There *had* been an intermediary process of some kind, for the stamp was canceled. Yes, and the envelope was postmarked, too, in a clearly legible, pale purple ink.

Federated States of El Dorado, the postmark said. It was circular, like our own; and in the center of the circle, where the time of cancelation usually is, was just the word *Thursday*.

"Today is Thursday," Harry remarked. "It was after midnight when you put the stamp on the letter?"

"Just after," I told him. "Seems queer these El Dorado people pay no attention to the hour and the minute, doesn't it?"

"Only proves they're a tropical country," Harry suggested. "Time means little or nothing in the tropics, you know. But what I was getting at, the Thursday postmark goes to show El Dorado is probably down in Central America, as you suggested. If it were in India, or the Orient, it would have been marked Wednesday, wouldn't it? On account of the time difference?"

"Or would it have been Friday?" I asked, rather doubtfully, not knowing much about those things. "In any case we can find out easily enough. We've just to look in the atlas. I don't know why I didn't think of it before."

Harry brightened.

"Of course," he said. "Where do you keep yours?"

But it turned out I hadn't any atlas in the house — not even a

small one. So we phoned downtown to one of the big bookstores to send up their latest and largest atlas. And while we waited for it we examined the letter again and speculated upon the method by which it had been transmitted.

"Rapid post!" Harry explained. "I should say so! It beats air mail all hollow. Why, if that letter not only traveled from here to Boston between the time you missed it and it fell at my feet, but actually went all the way to Central America, was canceled and post-marked, and *then* went on to Boston, its average speed must have been —"

We did a little rough calculation and hit upon two thousand miles a minute as a probable speed. When we'd done that, we looked at each other.

"Good Lord!" Harry gasped. "The Federated States of El Dorado may be a tropical country, but they've really hit upon something new in this thing! I wonder why we haven't heard about it before?"

"May be keeping it a secret," I suggested. "No, that won't do, because I've had the stamps for several years, and of course, my father had them before that."

"I tell you, there's something queer here," Harry suggested, darkly. "Where are those others you told me about? I think we ought to make a few tests with them while we're waiting for that atlas."

With that I brought out the four remaining unused stamps, and handed them to him. Now Harry, among other things, was a rather good artist; and his whistle at the workmanship was appreciative. He examined each with care, but it was — I'd thought it would be — the three-dollar value that really caught his eye. The one with the native girl on it, you remember.

"Lord!" Harry said aloud. "What a beauty!"

Presently, however, Harry put that one aside and finished examining the others. Then he turned to me.

"The thing I can't get over," he commented, "is the *lifelikeness* of the figures. You know what I'd suspect if I didn't know better? I'd suspect these stamps were never engraved at all. I'd believe that the plates they came from were prepared from photographs."

"From photographs!" I exclaimed; and Harry nodded.

"Of course, you know and I know they can't have been," he added. "Unicorns and Neptunes and Pans aren't running around to be photographed, these days. But that's the feeling they give me."

I confessed that I had had the same feeling. But since we both agreed on the impossibility of its being so, we dismissed that phase of the matter and went back again to the problem of the method used in transporting the letter.

"You say you were out of the room when it vanished," Harry remarked. "That means you didn't see it go. You don't actually know what happened when you put that stamp on and turned your back, do you?"

I agreed that was so, and Harry sat in thoughtful silence.

At last he looked up.

"I think," he said, "we ought to find out by using one of these other stamps to mail something with."

Why that hadn't occurred to me before I can't imagine. As soon as Harry said it, I recognized the rightness of the idea. The only thing was to decide what to send, and to whom.

That held us up for several minutes. There wasn't anybody else either of us cared to know about this just now; and we couldn't send anything to each other very well, being both there together.

"I'll tell you!" Harry exclaimed at last. "We'll send something to El Dorado itself!"

I agreed to that readily enough, but how it came about that we decided to send, not a letter, but Thomas à Becket, my aged and ailing Siamese cat, I can't remember.

I do know that I told myself it would be a kind way to dispose

of the creature. Transmission through space at the terrific velocity of one hundred and twenty thousand miles an hour would surely put him out of his sufferings, quickly and painlessly.

Thomas à Becket was asleep under the couch, breathing asthmatically and with difficulty. I found a cardboard box the right size and we punched some air holes in it. Then I gathered up Thomas and placed him in the container. He opened rheumy old eyes, gazed at me vaguely, and relapsed into slumber again. With a pang I put the lid on and we tied the box.

"Now," Harry said thoughtfully, "there's the question of how to address him, of course. However, any address will do for our purpose."

He took up a pen and wrote with rapidity. *Mr. Henry Smith, 711 Elysian Fields Avenue, Nirvana, Federated States of El Dorado.* And beneath that he added, *Perishable! Handle With Care!*

"But — " I began. Harry cut me off.

"No," he said, "of course I don't know of any such address. I just made it up. But the post office people won't know that, will they?"

"But what will happen when — " I began again, and again he had had the answer before I'd finished the question.

"It'll go to the dead letter office, I expect," he told me. "And if he *is* dead, they'll dispose of him. If he's alive, I've no doubt they'll take good care of him. From the stamps I've gotten a notion living is easy there."

That silenced my questions, and Harry picked up a stamp — the fifty-cent value — licked it, and placed it firmly on the box. Then he withdrew his hand and stepped back beside me.

Intently, we watched the parcel.

For a moment, nothing whatever happened.

And then, just as disappointment was gathering on Harry Norris' countenance, the box holding Thomas à Becket rose slowly

into the air, turned like a compass needle, and began to drift with increasing speed toward the open window.

By the time it reached the window, it was moving with race-horse velocity. It shot through and into the open. We rushed to the window and saw it moving upward in a westerly direction, above the Manhattan skyline.

And then, as we stared, it began to be vague in outline, misty; and an instant later had vanished entirely. Because of its speed, I suggested, the same way a rifle bullet is invisible.

But Harry had another idea. He shook his head as we stepped back toward the center of the room.

"No," he began, "I don't think that's the answer. I have a notion —"

What his notion was I never did find out. Because just then he stopped speaking, with his mouth still open, and I saw him stiffen. He was looking past me, and I turned to see what had affected him so.

Outside the window was the package we had just seen vanish. It hung there for a moment, then moved slowly into the room, gave a little swoop, and settled lightly onto the table from which, not two minutes before, it had left.

Harry and I rushed over to it, and our eyes must have bugged out a bit.

Because the package was all properly canceled and postmarked, just as the letter had been. With the addition that across the corner, in large purple letters, somebody had stamped, *Return to Sender. No Such Person at this Address.*

"Well!" Harry said at last. It wasn't exactly adequate, but it was all either of us could think of. Then, inside the box, Thomas à Becket let out a squawl.

I cut the cords and lifted the lid. Thomas à Becket leaped out with an animation he had not shown in years.

There was no denying it. Instead of killing him, his trip to El

Dorado, brief as it was, had done him good. He looked five years younger.

Harry Norris was turning the box over in his hands, perplexed.

"What I can't get over," he remarked, "is that there really *is* such an address as 711 Elysian Fields Avenue. I swear I just made it up."

"There's more to it than that," I reminded him. "The very fact that the package came back. We didn't put any return address on it."

"So we didn't," Harry agreed. "Yet they knew just where to return it, didn't they?"

He pondered for a moment longer. Then he put the box down.

"I'm beginning to think," he said, an odd expression on his face, "that there is more to this than we realize. A great deal more. I suspect the whole truth is a lot more exciting than we have any notion. As for this Federated States of El Dorado, I have a theory —"

But he didn't tell me what his theory was. Instead, that three-dollar chocolate-and-ivory stamp caught his eye again.

"Jove!" he whispered, more to himself than to me — he was given occasionally to these archaic ejaculations — "she's beautiful. Heavenly! With a model like that an artist might paint —"

"He might forget to paint, too," I put in. Harry nodded.

"He might indeed," he agreed. "Though I think he'd be inspired in the end to work he'd never on earth have dreamed of doing, otherwise." His gaze at the stamp was almost hungry. "This girl," he declared, "is the one I've been waiting all my life to find. To meet her I'd give — I'd give — Well, almost anything."

"I'm afraid you'd have to go to El Dorado to do that," I suggested flippantly, and Harry started.

"So I would! And I'm perfectly willing to do it, too. Listen! These stamps suggest this El Dorado place must be rather fasci-

nating. What do you say we both pay it a visit? We neither of us have any ties to keep us, and — ”

“Go there just so you can meet the girl who was the model for that stamp?” I demanded.

“Why not? Can you think of a better reason?” he asked me. “I can give you more. For one thing, the climate. Look how much better the cat is. His little excursion took years off his age. Must be a highly healthful place. Maybe it’ll make a young man of you again. And besides — ”

But he didn’t have to go on. I was already convinced.

“All right,” I agreed. “We’ll take the first boat. But when we get there, how will we — ”

“By logic,” Harry shot back. “Purely by logic. The girl must have posed for an artist, mustn’t she? And the postmaster general of El Dorado must know who the artist is, mustn’t he? We’ll go straight to the postmaster general. He’ll direct us to the artist. The artist will give us her name and address. Could anything be simpler?”

I hadn’t realized how easy it would be. Now some of his impatience was getting into my own blood.

“Maybe we won’t have to take a boat,” I suggested. “Maybe there’s a plane service. That would save — ”

“Boat!” Harry Norris snorted, stalking back and forth across the room and waving his hands. “Plane! You can take boats and planes if you want to. I’ve got a better idea. I’m going to El Dorado by mail!”

Until I saw how beautifully simple his idea was, I was a bit stunned. But he quickly pointed out that Thomas à Becket had made the trip, and come back, without injury. If a cat could do it, a man could.

There wasn’t a thing in the way except the choice of a destination. It would be rather wasted effort to go, only to be sent back ignominiously for want of proper addressing.

"I have that figured out too," Harry told me promptly when I voiced the matter. "The first person I'd go to see anyway when I got there would be the postmaster general. *He* must exist, certainly. And mail addressed to him would be the easiest of all to deliver. So why not kill two birds with one stone by posting myself to his office?"

That answered all my objections. It was as sound and sensible a plan as I'd ever heard.

"Why," Harry Norris added with rising excitement, "I may be having dinner with the girl tonight! Wine and pomegranates beneath a gold-washed moon, with Pan piping in the shadows and nymphs dancing on the velvet green!"

"But" — I felt I had to prepare him for possible disappointment — "suppose she's married by now?"

He shook his head.

"She won't be. I have a feeling. Just a feeling. Now to settle the details. We've got three stamps left — nine dollars' worth altogether. That should be enough. I'm a bit lighter; you've been taking on weight lately, I see. Four dollars should carry me — the one and the three. That leaves the five-dollar for you.

"As for the address, we'll write that on tags and tie them to our wrists. You have tags, haven't you? Yes, here's a couple in this drawer. Now give me that pen and ink. Something like this ought to do very well . . ."

He wrote, then held the tags out to me. They were just alike. *Office of the Postmaster General*, they said. *Nirvana, Federated States of El Dorado. Perishable. Handle With Care.*

"Now," he said, "we'll each tie one to our wrist . . ."

But I drew back. Somehow I couldn't quite nerve myself to it. Delightful as the prospects he had painted of the place, the idea of posting myself into the unknown, the way I had sent off Thomas à Becket, did something queer to me.

I told him I would join him. I would take the first boat, or plane, and meet him there, say at the principal hotel.

Harry was disappointed, but he was too impatient by now to argue.

"Well," he agreed, "all right. But if for any reason you can't get a boat or plane, you'll use that last stamp to join me?"

I promised faithfully that I would. With that he held out his right wrist and I tied a tag about it. Then he took up the one-dollar stamp, moistened it, and applied it to the tag. He had the three-dollar one in his hand when the doorbell rang.

"In a minute," he was saying, "or maybe in less, I shall probably be in the fairest land man's combined imagination has ever been able to picture."

"Wait!" I called, and hurried out to answer the bell. I don't know whether he heard me or not. He was just lifting that second stamp to his tongue to moisten it when I turned away, and that was the last I ever saw of him.

When I came back, with the package in my hands — the ring had been the messenger from the bookshop, with the atlas we had ordered — Harry Norris was gone.

Thomas à Becket was sitting up and staring toward the window. The curtains were still fluttering. I hurried over. But Norris was not in sight.

Well, I thought, he must have put on that stamp he had in his hand, not knowing I'd left the room. I could see him, in my mind's eye, that very moment being deposited on his feet in the office of an astonished postmaster general.

Then it occurred to me I might as well find out just where the Federated States of El Dorado were, after all. So I ripped the paper off the large volume the bookstore had sent and began to leaf through it.

When I had finished, I sat in silence for a while. From time to

time I glanced at that unused tag, and that uncanceled stamp still lying on my desk. Then I made my decision.

I got up and fetched Harry's bag. It was summer, luckily, and he had brought mostly light clothing. To it I added anything of mine I thought he might be able to use, including a carton of cigarettes, and pen and ink on the chance he might want to write me.

As an afterthought I added a small Bible — just in case.

Then I strapped the bag shut and affixed the tag to it. I wrote *Harry Norris* above the address, pasted that last El Dorado stamp to it, and waited.

In a moment the bag rose in the air, floated to the window, out, and began to speed away.

It would reach there, I figured, before Harry had had time to leave the postmaster general's office, and I hoped he might send me a postcard or something by way of acknowledgement. But he didn't. Perhaps he couldn't.

. . . At this point Morks stopped, as if he had finished his story. But unnoticed Malcolm had left our little group for a moment. Now he came pushing back into it with a large atlas-gazeteer in his hands.

"So that's what became of your set of rarities!" he said, with a scarcely veiled sneer. "Very interesting and entertaining. But there's one point I want to clear up. The stamps were issued by the Federated States of El Dorado, you say. Well, I've just been looking through this atlas, and there's no such place on earth."

Morks looked at him, his melancholy countenance calm.

"I know it," he said. "That's why, after glancing through my own atlas that day, I didn't keep my promise to Harry Norris and use that last stamp to join him. I'm sorry now. When I think of how Harry must be enjoying himself there —

"But it's no good regretting what I did or didn't do. I couldn't help it. The truth is that my nerve failed me, just for a moment

then, when I discovered there *was* no such place as the Federated States of El Dorado — on earth, I mean.”

And sadly he shook his head.

“I’ve often wished I knew where my father got those stamps,” he murmured, almost to himself; then fell into a meditative silence.

WINONA McCLINTIC

Winona McClintic has been by turns a poet (in the "Atlantic"), a Ph. D. candidate in philology (at the University of California), and a radio operator (in the U. S. Navy) — all of which may possibly come together to account for her writing one of the most strikingly effective of the many "first stories" which F&SF has published. This belongs to that strange branch of science fiction, like Aldous Huxley's BRAVE NEW WORLD and Fritz Leiber's GATHER, DARKNESS!, which might almost be termed anti-science fiction; and with the subtlety of a poet and the precision of a philologist, Miss McClintic has managed to compress into one very short story the theme of an entire long Huxley novel.

In the Days of Our Fathers

MELPH, although an atavistically sensitive child, had had an average childhood. Her parents, thinking she would outgrow this sensitivity, said nothing about it to the Instructors. However, they managed to keep her at home two years longer than the siblings. She was the youngest in the house and the group decided that this caused her backwardness. She was fond of the lyrics that the house-assistant sang to her. The siblings would go to sleep immediately they heard them, but Melph stayed awake listening, and afterward would sing them to herself in bed. Her favorite was the ageless one:

Einstein, Einstein,
Make a diagram

For Baby to blueprint
When he is a man.

Make a new milk-well
Of radiated foam
For Baby to drink
When his plane comes home.

Melph's life was calm and pleasant, in spite of the Preliminary Training which she had to endure like everyone else. During the long, warm days she was taken to the oceanside by the house-assistant, to play in the quiet waters and run along the sand. Many times she would be found meditating and staring over the ocean, thinking long, long thoughts, as her sire put it.

The house was a comparatively new one, having been built in the last five hundred years, but there was a locked attic with small round windows, where Melph wished she could go. She had asked her parents many times but was never given permission. Then after a silence on the subject for two years she had asked again, and watched her parents sharply to learn what mystery was there.

"No, child," said her sire, "and you must not ask again." He turned to her dam and said, "She takes after your brother Bisec." And because they were well-mated Dam said only, "Poor Bisec! Hush, Sire."

"Is that Uncle Bisec who Passed Beyond before I was conceived?" asked Melph.

"Yes, child," answered Dam. "Run out into the sunshine."

Melph went out but she said to herself, "If I am like Uncle Bisec and his mystery is hidden in the attic, I must find the key by stealth, and thus understand myself by applied parallel."

For some months after this Melph was unable to make progress, although she discovered where her parents hid the Life Readings, which would be given to her at the age of eleven, and the pictures

her sire scrawled when he was uncalm. She had known about the pictures for some time, however, and did not feel the shame about them that the siblings did. She wished she could draw funny little adults and dogs when she was uncalm. Then one day, when her parents had gone to the amphitheatre and the house-assistant was in the cooking-room, Melph found the keyring of the house. Her dam had forgotten to take it along. Melph hid in the closet to pick out the key to the attic. She crept up the stairs like a rodent, and unlocked the door.

As it swung open a strange feeling went over her, an emotion she had not yet experienced in the Preliminary Training. The attic was a small room under the eaves, which sloped almost to the floor. It had been decided ages before that this style was the most pleasing. The dust was so thick it could have been five hundred years since the room had been used, instead of ten or twelve. On the righthand wall was a sign painted in red in a childish hand: "Bisec, his room." The ancient desire for privacy which he had possessed was the terrible secret! Melph thought she too had had this desire all her life. But wait; that could have been corrected by the Instructors; there must have been something more to the story. The room was unfurnished except for two chairs and a trunk almost hidden in the darkness. Melph went to the trunk and tried to lift the lid. It was locked but the lock was an old one and did not seem strong. She kicked it until it fell off, and then kicked the lid until it was loose. Pasted on the inside of the lid was a sign in red paint: "Bisec, his trunk. Everybody else stay out." The contents were not very unusual — a toy Torpedo Craft, a house-made radio, and other objects commonly dear to the Young. However, under these things was a book, which she found was a manuscript written by Uncle Bisec. He had been older when this was written, but the handwriting was almost the same. On the cover was written in red letters: "Bisec, his book. Everybody else don't read." A loose page fell to the floor. Melph picked it up and read it:

"There was ivy on the wall, an old high wall that had been there for a long time. I was climbing to escape them; they were laughing with malice, yet it was good nature — they did not know. They wanted to pull me down so that they could laugh at me. I was not afraid; I looked at them and I was not afraid but I wanted to climb higher. The sun was shining and I was small with delicate wings that could not lift me in the air, so I climbed to help the delicate wings and to get into the sun. I was small and the sun shone on me and through me, and my suit was made of something soft and with a purple shade. I climbed the ivy and it did not break under me, but it left the wall and hung below me, so that I had always to climb higher to stay on the wall. A power from below was trying to bring me to the ground; not pulling me or pushing me, but bringing me to the ground, and they were laughing and looking up at me with laughs on their faces."

As Melph read this she said to herself, "Why do I not feel shame about this?" A feeling of uncalm suddenly came over her and she closed the trunk, tucking the manuscript under her arm. She locked the door, went down the stairs, and returned the keyring. Melph had what she desired now; she would not try to enter the attic again.

Now the book must be hidden immediately, so that she could read it in secret without fear of being discovered. The idea of hiding it in the Dog House came to her. Under the floor were sliding panels for the bones. No one opened these but the dog; his bones were left in peace, that he might be possessed of a feeling of calm at all times. However, Melph and the dog were old friends — he surely would not object. After hiding the manuscript and patting the dog, she went in to fodder. The evening passed like any other. As she was being put to bed, Melph said to the house-assistant, "Don't you know any lyrics except those for the Young? Sing me something different."

The house-assistant said, "Come along, child, wash your face, put on your sleep-suit. When you go to the Instructors they will teach you adult songs to sing."

Melph muttered, "Those old things," and got into bed.

The next day Melph should have gone to the ocean, but she asked instead to play in the garden with the dog. There was much shrubbery to crawl into and read in peace. She hid in a thicket with the dog, tying him with a rope so that he could not walk away, and settled down to read. The dog went to sleep, twitching his ears uncalmly. The pages of the manuscript were numbered and did not seem to follow consecutively. Melph turned to a page at random and read:

"page 49.

I was in a huge dark and burned cellar-like building that some people that lived before us had used. There was red on the walls and dark, twisted machinery that had been useless for many years. People had forgotten how to use it, and they let the building stand as it was, because no one went there and all around it was desolation and an empty feeling for the people who would not come there anymore. There were several of us playing there and we were young and excited (only we were scared, too). We knew that the empty feeling was not for us or the people we knew. We were not scared because something would hurt us; it was because there was awe in the air and in the darkness that hung over it more like a cloud than in the air itself, and because there was a mysterious lack that was felt in that place."

"page 50.

We did not know what to do with the little dog. It was alone and it would die in the bitter cold that blew along the shore. We picked it up and went along, wondering what we should do. The walk was beside the cold strip of water. Behind us a woman began rushing toward the water, pushing a baby carriage before her, and she screamed loudly with temper and looked back over her shoulder. He told me to ignore her; she was only trying to get even with someone or make someone sorry for her. She ran off the walk into the water and came out dripping with water which iced immediately, and the baby and the carriage were also covered with ice. A man came up and took them away, brushing off the ice covering the woman and the baby. This made us think about

the puppy. We came upon a nest where the little dog's brothers were lying asleep in the cold. The mother was about to leave them and go away in sorrow, but when she saw us she knew everything would be fine and went away happy. Then we had to take all of them. We decided to take them to the place from which people started on journeys. The mother dog had put tags on the puppies' necks, which said in printing that they should be taken to that place. As we walked along the puppies began to sing duets together in beautiful, rising voices. He said that they learned these from records, and that this was the only means they had of learning different songs. We walked from the water over a path in a wooded park, holding them in our arms, and the little fat dogs sang for us with indescribable beauty."

Melph did not understand this — something seemed odd about it — but a feeling of uncalm — type: immoderate laughter — hit her. Yet there was nothing definitely humorous about these writings. Like all the Young she had wondered about being unsane, and like the others she had dismissed it as an immature fantasy. Perhaps this book was unsane. Then, flipping the pages, she came upon a lyric that was strange.

"In the days of our fathers the clocks were still;
No ship had flown where the planets run
Around the varying rim of the sun.
The North Pole fathered a wind to chill
And love would tremble when gentle lips
Had warmed a man to his finger tips.
In the days of our fathers the clocks were still.

Chorus: Kets had T.B., Shelly drowned,
Shekspur lies in the cold, cold ground."

Melph read this over until she knew it by brain. It did not quite fit any music she knew, so she sang it in a monotone several times. The result was a dismal chant, hopeless and weary, that opened her tear ducts and disturbed the dog. "I will keep this

book for a guide," she decided. "When I am an adult I shall write a manuscript too. They will never find out and put me away, and if they try to I will jump into the ocean and never come back." At the end of the book, on the last page, was the sentence: "My ambition is to die in an unsane-house at the age of 78, laughing to myself."

Melph tried to go about her play the next week with no sign of the secret within her. Whenever she was alone she sang the new lyric. The dog was still uncalm when he heard it. One afternoon on the ocean-side the assistant heard her sing the chorus:

"Kets had T.B., Shelly drowned,
Shekspur lies in the cold, cold ground."

She said nothing to Melph but horror grew in her eyes.

That night after fodder her dam and sire took her into the Book-room and questioned her about the lyric.

"I made it up," said Melph. "I got tired of hearing just the Young lyrics."

"Made it up!" cried her sire. "Such is the fruit of the womb!" Dam sank into a chair murmuring brokenly, "No one must know!"

Sire said with angry uncalmness, "We never should have bred. Bad blood in your family."

"Bisec was an accident!" Dam whispered this with heat. "And at least he was never sent to the Provinces less a man than he had been before."

"Well, all this is beside the point." Sire spoke to Melph, smiling in a pleasant way. "Where have you been playing all day?"

"Outside," said Melph.

Dam and Sire went over to the corner and whispered.

"That sounded almost like the Disturbing Lyrics. She couldn't have — ?"

"Certainly not!" said Dam. "I always carry the keys with me! I

told you we would have to see what is up there someday, just in case —”

They came back to Melph. “You must not sing it again,” said Sire.

“Especially to any of your young consorts,” said Dam.

“Very well,” said Melph. “I won’t sing it again.” Inside, to herself, she said, “Aha! Atavism!”

The following day Melph began her courses under the Instructors. Every other afternoon, however, she was free to go to the ocean-side for the sake of her physical requirements. She made a pact with herself that she would sing *The Lyric* at least once every day so that she would not forget. She would watch the ocean moving restlessly and chant the sad words she did not understand.

WILL STANTON

The experimental biologist who overreaches himself belongs to the oldest traditions of science fiction, the documentary diary form to the oldest traditions of English fiction itself. Now see how a fresh approach can combine them into something completely new.

Barney

August 30th. We are alone on the island now, Barney and I. It was something of a jolt to have to sack Tayloe after all these years, but I had no alternative. The petty vandalisms I could have forgiven, but when he tried to poison Barney out of simple malice, he was standing in the way of scientific progress. That I cannot condone.

I can only believe the attempt was made while under the influence of alcohol, it was so clumsy. The poison container was overturned and a trail of powder led to Barney's dish. Tayloe's defense was of the flimsiest. He denied it. Who else then?

September 2nd. I am taking a calmer view of the Tayloe affair. The monastic life here must have become too much for him. That, and the abandonment of his precious guinea pigs. He insisted to the last that they were better suited than Barney to my experiments. They were more his speed, I'm afraid. He was an earnest and willing worker, but something of a clod, poor fellow.

At last I have complete freedom to carry on my work without the mute reproaches of Tayloe. I can only ascribe his violent an-

tagonism toward Barney to jealousy. And now that he has gone, how much happier Barney appears to be! I have given him complete run of the place, and what sport it is to observe how his newly awakened intellectual curiosity carries him about. After only two weeks of glutamic acid treatments, he has become interested in my library, dragging the books from the shelves, and going over them page by page. I am certain he knows there is some knowledge to be gained from them had he but the key.

September 8th. For the past two days I have had to keep Barney confined and how he hates it. I am afraid that when my experiments are completed I shall have to do away with Barney. Ridiculous as it may sound there is still the possibility that he might be able to communicate his intelligence to others of his kind. However small the chance may be, the risk is too great to ignore. Fortunately there is, in the basement, a vault built with the idea of keeping vermin out and it will serve equally well to keep Barney in.

September 9th. Apparently I have spoken too soon. This morning I let him out to frisk around a bit before commencing a new series of tests. After a quick survey of the room he returned to his cage, sprang up on the door handle, removed the key with his teeth, and before I could stop him, he was out the window. By the time I reached the yard I spied him on the coping of the well, and I arrived on the spot only in time to hear the key splash into the water below.

I own I am somewhat embarrassed. It is the only key. The door is locked. Some valuable papers are in separate compartments inside the vault. Fortunately, although the well is over forty feet deep, there are only a few feet of water in the bottom, so the retrieving of the key does not present an insurmountable obstacle. But I must admit Barney has won the first round.

September 10th. I have had a rather shaking experience, and once more in a minor clash with Barney I have come off second best. In this instance I will admit he played the hero's rôle and may even have saved my life.

In order to facilitate my descent into the well I knotted a length of three-quarter inch rope at one foot intervals to make a rude ladder. I reached the bottom easily enough, but after only a few minutes of groping for the key, my flashlight gave out and I returned to the surface. A few feet from the top I heard excited squeaks from Barney, and upon obtaining ground level I observed that the rope was almost completely severed. Apparently it had chafed against the edge of the masonry and the little fellow perceiving my plight had been doing his utmost to warn me.

I have now replaced that section of rope, and arranged some old sacking beneath it to prevent a recurrence of the accident. I have replenished the batteries in my flashlight and am now prepared for the final descent. These few moments I have taken off to give myself a breathing spell and to bring my journal up to date. Perhaps I should fix myself a sandwich as I may be down there longer than seems likely at the moment.

September 11th. Poor Barney is dead and soon I shall be the same. He was a wonderful ratt and life without him is not worth living. If anybody reads this please do not disturb anything on the island but leave it like it is as a shrine to Barney, especially the old well. Do not look for my body as I will cast myself into the sea. You might bring a couple of young ratts and leave them as a living memorial to Barney. Females — no males. I sprained my wrist is why this is written so bad. This is my last will. Do what I say and don't come back or disturb anything after you bring the young ratts like I said. Just females.

Goodby

H. F. HEARD

"H. F. Heard," one of your editors once wrote in "The New York Times Book Review," "is a writer as unclassifiable as he is entrancing. He writes detective stories that are not quite detective stories and science fiction that is not quite science fiction, just as he employs a pseudonym that is not quite a pseudonym. For Henry Fitzgerald Heard is, as Gerald Heard, a serious student and advocate of eclectic mysticism, spiritual kin to Aldous Huxley and Christopher Isherwood; as H. F. Heard, he is the only man who ever won a \$3000 detective-story prize with a pure science fiction story." The recent publication of that curious study in flying saucers, IS ANOTHER WORLD WATCHING?, and the magnificently profound supernatural novel, THE BLACK FOX, both as by Gerald Heard, makes the dual personality more unclassifiable than ever; but under any by-line he remains one of the most provocative and individual authors in the field of imaginative literature, as he demonstrates in this extraordinary study in psychobiology. The convincing characterization of a completely alien mind is one of the most difficult and stimulating problems that the science fiction writer can face; and we know of few more successful solutions than this.

The Collector

(Vol. XLVII, Journal of Oceanograph Institute, Cookstown, Van Diemensland. Report of 15th Expedition. Appendix B.:—"In the Report of the 14th Expedition (Vol. XLV) there was noted the loss, while

Atoll 345 S.W. Marshall Group was being catalogued, of Dr. Charles Mackay. An obituary notice reviewing his services to ichthyological studies appeared as an Appendix to Vol. XLVI. As Dr. Mackay's fatal accident has not been satisfactorily accounted for (the body not being recovered) the Institute feels that it is obliged to publish as this Appendix B the only record that throws any light, however baffling, on this mystery. What follows is the final entry from Dr. Mackay's diary giving his account of what befell him from the time that he left his party till, under the stress of some hallucinatory drive, probably due to sunstroke, and under the illusion that he had been marooned or abandoned, he took the dinghy to sea. Though, then, there would appear to be an obligation to publish this account, the Institute wishes to emphasize most strongly that it declines to suggest in any way where in the following account Dr. Mackay ceases to be objective. Of that point every reader must be his own judge. As a further explanatory note there is given in conclusion an excerpt from the log of the Thetis which covers the final incident in this tragic episode.")

I had reached the south end of the Atoll. It is somewhat an uncommon shape trailing away into a series of small islets. The outer reef is irregular and broken. All the rest of the expedition had stayed up on the north side where the yacht had anchorage. There was only the poorest here — little more than shoals. And certainly not much to study either. The island's geology seems coralline formation on an igneous base and perhaps again later intruded on by igneous disturbance. I went for a walk. We'd heard that there was nothing to see but some tumbled-down sheds at the extreme south point. The place — I forget who had reported that — had once been a pearling base and then for a while, when the pearling was abandoned, served as some sort of quarantine station. But it was all closed up and abandoned now, for a long spell. No one had been left on the island. Our expedition was doing a routine ichthyological inspection. We'd found what we'd expected — standard ecological conditions and littoral fauna-flora balance. As it was our last day here and we might now have a good few trawling and

sounding in the open, I thought I might feel I had missed something if I didn't take the opportunity for the exercise.

In a way I was right.

I had come to where there was only one more small cove ahead. Then the coast line swept back north. I'd enjoyed the quiet monotonous tramp along the hard sand, from crescent to crescent of the small uniform beaches. At the end of the miniature bay I was now skirting stood the huts we had heard of. They were huddled near the little promontory that separated this shore from the final bay. They were dreary enough in all conscience. But, with that odd curiosity that is aroused by any abandoned buildings, especially ruins on an abandoned island, I went up to them peering about. I didn't enter any of the dismal half-dozen doors. After all, no one seems certain how long some contagious virus may remain latent and the place we knew had been used for quarantine. Somehow, when you're peering about, you tend to move cautiously — as though dozing bacteria might be aroused by a careless step and spring. An irrational pre-human 'linkage characteristic.' Still I was glad of it. It certainly seemed to have served. Indeed, I wish I'd been far more cautious. For as I trod softly between the last couple of huts (they were close together) I got a chink-view.

No, there was nothing to alarm me in the abandoned settlement. But the narrow passage I was in sighted, as it were, my eye. I was in shadow, the sun was already sloping. The shadow kept sun out of my eyes. The beach beyond I saw as clear lit by the strong cross-light as though I'd been sitting in a darkened stall looking on at a flood-lit stage. That beach was bare, too — a sickle of smooth, almost white coral sand, the perfect sweep of its sea-edge only notched in one place by a small reef of low rock, that, emerging out of the sand, also kept just above the sea-level, so making a tiny circle-reef of its own. Perfect observation, perfect lighting, perfect unrelieved background. So I couldn't be mistaken. There was no chance I might be imagining. A man was stand-

ing there, not a hundred feet from me, standing on that rib of rock as it rose from the sand. He was looking down into the rock-circled miniature lagoon. We were so close that he must have seen me even in my narrow shadowed passage, had he not been engrossed watching something in the water.

Of course, it is always a little startling suddenly to come upon another person when you've been assured that nobody can be there. But I think I'd have hailed — if the light hadn't been so good and I hadn't known the spot's past. I'm an ichthyologist. Specialised before I left school. After fifteen, fishes were increasingly my world. So perhaps I tend to see everything, indeed everyone, somewhat in fish terms. What kept me staring was not so much the man himself. He was naked but tall and straight. It was his colour. He wasn't white, tan, bronze, yellow or black. He was greenish lead colour — one big livid bruise all over. 'He might be a merman,' I tried as a joke on myself. For it wasn't a pretty tint or texture — like greasy metal. And I guess I knew what would next swim into my mind — wasn't there such a name as Livid Leprosy?

Very carefully, much more carefully than I had come, I turned to go back. I emerged from between the two houses. A few more steps and I was back on the sand of the small bay by which I had come. Then, feeling I was safe, curiosity awoke. How could a leper have hung on here by himself? Living alone marooned on an abandoned island — that sort of thing figures largely in boys' books, little in real records. And a leper is a sick man . . .

I clambered up again by some rocks that ran out from where the huts stood and divided the two bays. I peeped into the one beyond. There was nobody there. Curiosity drew me further. The cove — as I'd seen before — was as open as your hand's palm. I looked carefully, scanningly. There wasn't a boulder or a scrub of bush where a cat could have hidden. I went down over the rock-barrier onto the sand shore toward its little lagoon where I had

seen my 'vision.' There wasn't a sign. Not a hint of the footprint. The whole thing must have been some sort of after-image, owing to my looking out from the deep shadow onto the highly lit open.

I had reached now the spot where I had been sure the image had stood. I looked down into the rock-edged pool, the model lagoon into which I had thought I had seen him looking. The water looked surprisingly deep, but still and clear as a block of green glass. I couldn't, however, judge how far down the bottom lay, for there rose from the floor a forest of tall-standing seaweed. My eye then ran round the ribbing of rock that enclosed this small lake. The tide was out — the full ebb of a spring-tide. Evidently when in, the sea flooded this pool. On the outer, sea-side, the ring of rock breakwater broadened like a bezel of a ring. This cape which had a minute beach of its own stood out into the main lagoon. Out on that little promontory, I thought, there'd be a good view of the whole southern point of the island. I was still in two minds whether the man I'd seen was imagination, or might — as unlikely — have sprinted off over the hard printless sand and be hiding in the still further off cove. The promontory did give me, when I had scrambled out to it, the survey I hoped. And not a sign of anything living — not even a perambulating gull.

'Visual illusion established,' I was saying to myself, as I got ready to return over the small rough causeway back to the main shore of the island — when, on looking where to put my foot, I saw a small siltage of sand that had filled a rock cleft. A little pad of sand just enough to put your foot on. I didn't though. For — well, I didn't want to spoil it. I wanted to look at it, study it, not tread on it and wipe out what had already been printed on it. It bore the mark of a naked foot. And it certainly gave the true Robinson Crusoe feeling — with the added shudder, it might be highly contagious. I carefully avoided the mark and hopped back clumsily along the rock ridge, back to land. The round trip and survey had taken me about ten minutes. As I glanced at my

watch my mind spun round. So it wasn't illusion I had suffered from. Somewhere here someone — a very odd and perhaps a very unhealthy person — was lurking, was probably watching me. The dislike this thought roused was, I discovered, far stronger than had been the fear that my eyes might have been wrong. Better see things that aren't really there than be seen by things that are watching you but you can't see. I dropped my plan of rounding the island, turned in my tracks and hurried back the way I'd come.

But the second time I found myself on what I felt was the right side of the quarantine huts I felt once more and even more strongly curiosity's counterattack. How unscientific to give way to something like panic simply because I'd sighted an odd creature — certainly not as dangerous as a shark and probably considerably more interesting. I determined to have one last look at that last empty bay. And I was rewarded — by my third shock. The figure was there again.

I watched it carefully. I was standing between two rocks of the natural breakwater. It was, as before, with its back almost turned to me, gazing down into the pool. I could study the creature, and the light, as I've said, couldn't have been better. Surely leprosy, being a skin disease, swells, lesions and tubercles the flesh? This creature's skin was an utterly unnatural, yes a revolting hue, for any human. But I'd swear one thing — it wasn't diseased. Nor was the creature sick in any way. It stood as before tall and straight and with the grace of undeniable health. It had a greasy glitter over it. Certainly it was, I now could see, still dripping. But the texture, quite apart from the tint, did it resemble in any way even the most livid and chilled and sopped human skin? However that odd little question of dermatology was sunk by the odder problem of habitat. Where'd he been all the time I'd been out there? In the sea, of course. Yes, but that, of course, must mean some twenty minutes' submersion. It was really harder to think that he'd been down hiding at the bottom of that seaweed-

curtained pool than that he'd managed to make himself by some chameleon change of that repulsive skin so that he was invisible on that bare-as-your-hand beach.

Suddenly he turned, caught sight of me and waved. I waved back. After all it was against all the odds that he was a leper. He was certainly unable to conceal any arms on a body without a stitch. He seemed friendly and I was certainly now curious enough to feel *that* more than any other feeling.

I beckoned him to come to me. I laughed at the pseudo-flirtation. He grinned. I felt that the naked can safely be patronised by the clothed. After all if he was a submarine creature then he was in my province as an ichthyologist. If he wouldn't leave the water line I could at least get within conversation span and see if he could speak. As I got closer I felt, as part of the official exploration team, I had a right to examine all fauna and question any casuals.

"Who are you?"

His reply, "A diver," was given in that flat tone of so many English speaking Mongolians. Perhaps the eyes were a trifle slanted. The colour of course was no help. I was close enough now to see that the cornea was almost as green as the lids.

"A diver?"

He curled himself on the rock. I stood looking down on him. We were a dozen feet apart now. He dangled one foot in the water. "I work on my own. I knew your lot had been here. You're going tomorrow, aren't you?"

He had evidently spied on us while we loaded the yacht. I didn't confirm but counter-questioned, "I thought the pearling had stopped here?" I wanted him to go on about himself. Perhaps he'd show why he was lying. I kept my remaining distance, too. Though now within three or four yards the skin did look healthy enough (if greasy green is possible as a healthy tint), still, the man must have some general complaint — of the liver I guessed.

"Yes it did stop," he allowed, apparently honestly.

"And then there were quarantine quarters over there?" I pointed at the huts.

"That didn't last long."

"Why?"

"Oh, I was told there were only a few, and they all disappeared."

"How?"

"Drowned's the story. A skipper that used to land supplies said the last man told him the others all went that way, and then, on the skipper's last call, the last man was gone — no trace of him."

"So you came along to see if you couldn't drown too or if not salvage those who had sunk!"

His tone had provoked me to counter what I took to be some sort of sullen attempt at satire. He didn't seem, though, to notice my sarcasm. "I guess they'd heard, as I did, about the pearls."

"Didn't the old pearlers clean the place out?"

"They thought they did . . ." he paused, "but they missed the real beds."

"And how did you find them — especially as all your predecessors managed to get sunk?"

"You'd like my story?"

"Of course!"

"I'm a half-caste — mother Chinese, father, she said, a Scotch skipper. She never felt he was bad to her. Left money for me — I don't remember him — she saved it all. She said he wanted me to be a doctor. So I went to the medical school at Singapore. Say, I loved medicine. The Chinese profs were fine fellows. I took a course on respiration under one of them. He combined East and West as Sing' does. For his Parkinson cases he used silver needle acupuncture — ephedrine for Addison's. And for his t.b. cases he'd go right back to Mencius, the Great Mang."

"What's that?" I asked as the fellow seemed rambling, and

added, "I'll be having to get back to the yacht. Anyhow what's all this got to do with your being a diver?"

"Everything! Without that I wouldn't even have got down the first couple of fathoms. In t.b.," he went on complacently, "the problem's to rest the lung, isn't it — and yet not have your patient suffocate?"

I'd heard doctors enough to be able to nod honestly. The queer creature had, maybe, swept up some medical jargon from some drunken ship-doctor free-associating in his cups.

"Well, if you can practically suspend breathing without suffocation you'd get cures. He did."

"How?"

"Oh," he replied airily, "it's all in the later commentaries on Mang. It's called all sorts of nearly nonsense names — 'vanishing breath,' 'heaping up breath,' 'breathing through the navel,' or gill or fish breathing. He taught me. Said anyhow one should know. Never be ill if you breathed right."

"You're a specimen of the regime?"

"Yes, I learnt it. But couldn't go on. My mother died and I couldn't find where she'd hid the rest of the money — maybe it came by remittance and stopped at her death. I had to go into business. Pharmacists and jewellers link up in any China town. I was taken by a jeweller. But he paid too little for me to hope to save enough to go on with my medical courses. I'd *got* to make more cash. And he did show me how. A peach-tint coloured pearl was coming now and then on the market. 'If you could find those beds — for that tint surely comes from one place — you'd never need to practice medicine,' he told me. 'Any idea where they could lie?' 'Just that the place was worked twenty years ago,' he answered, 'and is somewhere southwest of the Marshalls.'

"It certainly wasn't much to go on; but I had luck — at least I thought so then. As I've told you, I met the skipper who used to victual these quarantine quarters. He swore that these men ma-

rooned out here had some of these pearls. 'Wouldn't wonder,' he added, 'if the actual beds may lie somewhere close.' 'Then why not go for them?' I naturally asked. 'Laddie, don't you know that there's only one sort of salt-water man more superstitious than a skipper, and that's a diver? The place's got a bad name, whether the pearls gave it or not. There's no end of stories of haunted bays where your lungs cave in and currents pin you down, cramp you or freeze you. Mermaids weren't thought up for fun, no more than witches were.' . . . But he gave me my bearings and you see I got here."

"And got the pearls and settled down too healthy to need to practice medicine and no doubt too wealthy also!"

Again the green beach-comber didn't seem to notice my incredulous sarcasm. "I dived. You see I was, as it happened, peculiarly equipped to dive. If you learn breath-control you can hold on under, go further and get more when all the others have to come up. My Prof had showed me Gorer's account of the Moll fishermen on the West African coast. Also Behanin's study of his work done at Yale after Kavaliananda had trained him."

I switched from this pseudo-physiology. "And you found, of course, your predecessors' bones all 'coral made'?"

"I did find out why they sunk."

I felt I had found out enough to be sure that the man was some sort of tale-spinning lunatic, a balmy beach-comber. Of course, it's not impossible to strike on such a case of marooned madmen. I think I have heard of a couple of such cases. What the man had told me was obvious fantasy. I began to be glad I hadn't been more bluntly incredulous. It was certainly time to be getting back to the yacht. I'd had my walk and a fantastic tale to boot and certainly the teller was as weird as his story. The man wasn't really sick, even if he did look diseased. Anyhow I wasn't responsible for him. We couldn't take him with us. No port health authority would let such a complexion pass: even the police might

have views about him — and of course (final dismissal) quite likely he didn't want to come with us. Certainly he didn't seem unhappy nor as far as I could judge undernourished. I had turned to go when he called after me. What he said did stop me.

"You don't believe a word I've said, of course. But I can show you what gives some point to my story — the pearls."

"Where?" I threw over my shoulder.

"Just over there," he pointed across the little breakwater to the miniature island. "I keep them in a rock-crevice just under water. They keep their lustre best that way."

I naturally knew enough of oysters and their calcine callousnesses to know that was true. I hesitated. Obviously he feared I was going.

"Here," he said. I don't know where he had had it hidden — probably in the sand by his foot. But what he was holding out to me was plump and large as a fine hazel nut. In his greasy green palm it shone like a quiet flame in a dirty bronze cup-lamp. It showed up so vividly on that dingy setting for it was luminous as sun-lit peach-blossom. "The others are better." He got up and started across the little reef break-water. I followed.

By the time I arrived out on the little peninsula — for I crawled while he trotted over the jagged coral and slag — he was already lying flat down, his face almost touching the still water of this pool, his right arm thrust down under, to the shoulder. "There." He was pointing under the water. I crouched beside him. The surface rippling made by his movement cleared. I could just see his 'protective coloured' fingers combing back some sea-weed fronds, lying near a small nest of sea-moss — a nest filled with objects about the size of finches' eggs. He picked out a couple and flexing his arm raised them within an inch of the surface. I could see, through the water, they were richer in glow than the one he had already shown me. He turned his head to me, inviting me to take them. I stretched forward and down to touch them —

perhaps the water was magnifying them — felt myself slip, had just time to gasp a full breath and then was plunged head over heels.

It was a straight dive. But when I struck out to bring myself up, I couldn't. I'd caught in the sea-weed. A coil I could feel was round one leg, and, as I threshed, the other leg was caught. My arms became snarled, too. It is hard to keep methodical when you have only some fifteen seconds left to loose your knots and get back to air. My struggle became blind. I felt as though the tendrils that had me held were pulling at me, not I at them. My head whirled. The smeared daylight vanished. I was wrapped in total dark.

But suddenly my main exhausting agony was relieved. I was breathing. I didn't know if it was air. I thought it was so thick and dank that it might have been a kind of breathable water. I couldn't hear a thing save the gasping and heart-pounding of my body. Perhaps it meant that the water was already in my lungs, the struggle really over. I had heard that once the lung is filled the agony ends though you may be still faintly conscious for a few very long seconds. I was dead, though still in my body.

Then I noticed that I could feel. I had a sense of touch. I was shut in some narrow cleft. I felt the sides pressing on me, clammy, sticky. Repugnance leaves you, of course, when you are in great peril. But this contact was so repulsive that I soon felt rising in me an intense nausea. I found I could smell, too. The black fume my lungs laboured in was revoltingly fishy. I could not raise my arms. My whole body seemed to have become plugged into some submarine crack lined with putrefying sea-anemones or jelly fish. But my head must somehow have emerged into some small chamber that contained an air which, however foul, fended off for the time being total suffocation.

I began to recall my last above-surface moments. I had slipped into the pool, of course. But how had I managed to get caught like

this? And, where, in the name of salvage, was the green diver? If he was the amphibian that he claimed, no moment could be more apt, more welcome for a demonstration. Then I did feel a movement, a kind of shudder. Caught under some dense tangle of weed, a tangle that somehow captured air of a sort, I was now being pulled at — the green diver's struggles to get me free were the cause of the shudders? I was helpless to respond, but thank heaven they continued, became stronger. I felt my body being bent as the clammy coat that held me was twisted. Then suddenly I felt I was turned over, I was standing on my head for the blood rushed to it. A second after some kind of blast struck me. I was driven upwards with great force. I shot free and on for a short distance. Then felt myself flop, tumbled over onto sand. Of that I was sure, by the touch. But I was still as blind as I'd been in the cleft. The air, however, was far less foul though far from fresh. I took a deep breath and called out. I heard my voice ring. I must be in some chamber fairly spacious. The slight suggestion of echo was however my only answer.

Then, as I crouched listening, I could hear a faint lapping. I gathered my sprawled self as far as 'all fours,' crept thus over what felt like a floor of sand-covered rock and found the end of this area was marked by an abrupt edge. Some depth under this ledge I could hear the water lapping. As I listened, however, even that died down. All I could do was to continue to explore by touch. Then the damp of sopping clothes began to make me shudder. I took them off. The place, though vault-like, wasn't cold. As soon as I was naked I ceased to feel chill. I continued my touch finding. Retreating from the brink, I patted and pawed my way backward till I found a rock wall. Stretching up as far as I could, I found the rock going on but tending, I judged, to cove over. When I went right or left, in a dozen paces I found I was back at the brink. I was in a submarine cave, half of which — at least at present tidal level — was filled with air. That was all that touch

could tell me. I was blind, and now that the lapping had died down my ears were as uninformative. There wasn't a gurgle or a drip anywhere. That gave me my first hope. For semi-aquatic rock-rooted creatures, when the tide is out, generally ooze and give out small sucking noises. I must be above high-tide level. I shouldn't drown. I should die slowly of thirst instead — of course, a worst alternative but because the death-sentence was dated not today but next week I found myself a little less despairing.

I had naturally given up hope that my queer companion could have followed me. Some bubble-explosion of 'marsh gas' perhaps released by my struggles had thrown me up into this rock-pocket. I crawled and patted my way to the brink again. I began to reach down to see whether I could touch the water surface. I was stretching my finger tips as far down as I could and yet touching nothing when my retina gave a sort of 'after-image' recording — the kind of thing you see when you accidentally press on the optic nerve by the eye socket. But when I blinked I saw it wasn't subjective.

It wasn't any sort of light I knew. But it was nearer phosphorescence than any daylight. It grew stronger. It was being emitted by some object down below, in that well up through which I must have been driven. The trouble was that though the illumination grew, it didn't show up anything. It was more like a spread of blue fog. Though it wasn't blue it was the kind of colour you might imagine might lie behind blue. It grew now rapidly till the whole space down into which I was peering seemed flooded. It came pouring up toward me. I tried to see my arm that was stretched out down into this atmosphere but the mist engulfed it. Suddenly I was aware that the unseen water below me was splashing. I drew back instinctively. Something was clambering up toward me. I crouched until I was bundled up against the back wall. The luminous fog poured up. Then it seemed to condense, take shape, and,

lit as though a statue made of fluorescent tubing, before me was standing the green man.

I was so relieved that I put out my hand. My relief switched to fresh panic when my fingers passed through his skin as though it were shadow. I heard a laugh, though, and a moment after, "It's some sort of refraction effect." I saw the figure move. He was still a couple of feet from me but I felt my own arm being touched. It was an additional uncanniness that sight and touch wouldn't co-ordinate here. But there was no doubt that was the present state of things.¹

"You fell in," he began, "and I plunged after you. You were caught . . ." he paused.

"I was caught, yes," I took him up. "Yes, by what? How did I get carried here?"

I could see his face now. But it's amazing how difficult it is to judge expression on features lit from inside. The puckers that shadow-sign to us human emotional play are somehow reversed. I felt he must naturally be expressing concern, as muscle-rippings I could see went on round the mouth and eyes. But it might just as well have been humour. It's hard to judge expression even in a photograph negative. His voice, though, did register concern, even perhaps alarm. He certainly seemed to hush it. "They can't hear, can they?" he questioned.

"What?"

"Well . . . fishes!"

I thought I had better humour him — he was clearly mad, but

¹ (Note: This part of Dr. Mackay's record, though it cannot have happened to him, is nevertheless in accord with some research — of which no doubt he had read — done in the middle thirties at London University, wherein it was shown that after considerable time in total darkness the human eye can perceive objects illuminated by nothing but ultra-violet light, and further, the objects though seen with comparative clearness, are perceived with a displacement of some 2 feet and at an angle of 45 degrees above their actual station. It is, of course, just possible that the spectrum of the luciferin of some aquatic animals may contain, together with radiation of visible light, some U.V. radiation as well.)

if he could get here he could get me out, and he must have been fairly truthful about his swimming powers. "Most of them are certainly deaf," I assured him.

"But what about . . . squid?"

"Pretty certainly deaf, too. But go on. How did I get here? Is this a sort of periodic tidal whirlpool? We've got to get out, you know; with your swimming powers we can. It's just a dive down and up, isn't it? If we get through at a time when that pulse isn't driving, we can do it together, can't we?"

"Rather too far for anyone who hasn't had special respiration training. You got here . . ." again he paused, "because you were brought, carried — the way the others were."

"The others? And by whom?"

He crouched beside me. "Nobody knew . . . why these dawn-pearls, as they were called, weren't fished. All that was said was that the beds had given out. All that was whispered was that if you got down there you wouldn't come back. And certainly I'd have followed the rest if I hadn't had the super-diver training I've told you. You escaped," he went on more slowly, "because . . . he's learnt."

"Who's learnt, what's learnt!" I was shuddering now, not from the dank place but from fear. The light, which I thought came from his unhealthy skin, I now noticed came also and now increasingly from the well-shaft. He beckoned me. We crawled to the brink. The shaft now was not only full of light but it had cleared. It was limpid. I could see the water level — I judged some dozen feet down. And then, through that, I could see maybe another twenty feet. It was clear to the bottom. And indeed the light as it came up from there showed things most brightly down on that floor. For on that floor lay two cables — cables with knots and bosses on them and each cable about six inches in diameter I judged. The light came from these hawsers. They were of the same sort of colour as my companion's body but of stronger radia-

tion. The luminosity of the cables pulsed, fluctuated as the cables themselves twisted and writhed.

"They're tentacles!"

It wasn't a question. It was my involuntary disgust spurting words. I knew well enough what must be behind such tubing. They began to curl and spiral. Two more came in sight. But these latter ended in huge mittens, almost handshaped flippers, studded over with thorn-edged vacuum-pads. I knew what was being unrolled toward us: the tentacles of the giant of all the Cephalopods—the ten-armed monster, the Decapod.

These cables paid themselves out and came swarming up like Hydra itself, a forest of leprous boa-constrictors each with a hundred fanged mouths. I shrank against the back wall at the moment that the two mitten flippers came over the edge. They flowed over the floor and were soon accompanied by their eight satellite snakes. By some kind of tactile sensitiveness they seemed—perhaps they could sense my warmth—to have no difficulty in cornering me. They paid no attention to my companion, who, crouched also against the wall on the other side of the cavern, looked on. When they had me cornered they waited for a moment. For what? There was a threshing and plunging like the sucker of a giant pump, a rush of water that swept our little ledge, a huge heave, and over the edge, lit by its own uncanny luminescence, like a moonrise in Hell, the vast bulbous bulk of the giant decapodic trunk-head, hoisted itself onto the rock.

The cavern was awrithe with its arms: the well blocked by its mass. Otherwise I'd have made a plunge for it and died trying to get away. I gave the squeal of a mouse when the cat grips it, as the tentacles lapped and lifted me. Through the slither of its coils and the continual grunting wheeze of the great bag-pipe of its body, I could just hear the green diver calling, "Don't struggle, don't struggle. He'll kill you straight if you do. Give way. It's your one chance. Go limp!"

I tried to. I had read that squids will often let fall something that ceases struggling. This didn't. But the cables though they held tightly didn't strangle. I was lifted up and swept to the edge. I saw the great, expressionless soup-plate of an eye, the size of one of the yacht's portholes, regarding me. 'I suppose he'll drown and then eat me.' It was the last dismal flicker of hope—to be suffocated before being dismembered—and it was drowned when the fringe of eight secondary tentacles was suddenly thrown back and I saw into the cavern made by the 'apron' or cowl from which the ring of limbs sprout. I saw the great parrot beak of the mouth. Then with a flop the monster clammy cape-extinguisher had come down on me.

I was in total dark. My vehicle heaved and then plunged. I gasped and could just breathe. I struggled but was held as though bound up in rubber sheeting. Yes, I was back into the condition in which I had been caught after falling into the pool. Disgust and panic paralyzed me. I almost hoped for the sharp pain that would tell me an artery had been bitten through and I would die quickly. But it didn't come. My lungs continued to keep me gasping alive. I think I was confined like this longer than the first plunge, before I felt myself heaved and manipulated. Then once more the head-over-heels whirl, followed immediately by the violent expulsive moment. Again I was thrown out and lay winded.

I was in the dark, this time lying on smooth rock. I was so beat I must have lost consciousness. When I sat up, everything was still. I was alone. But this place had light of a sort and not that ghastly blue. This glow did come up through the water, but it was daylight, true daylight, though made tremulous dusk because it was coming through I judged some fathoms of sea. But I'd swear it was sunlight, however filtered. The sun should have set, I remembered, in a feeble attempt to orient myself, at least in time. But even as I peered down into the shifting green light I could see

that it was growing stronger. I couldn't doubt it: I was watching the reflection or refraction of dawn in this marine world.

Somehow that started up my hope again — or what I've called hope's physiological counterpart, which at its lowest level of all is hunger — the will to live. Yes, I felt hungry. After all, the sea shore has one advantage over nearly every other site. You can generally find free food of a sort. I began to hunt about the ledge. I found no mussels though and couldn't dislodge any of the rock-clingers. I could here reach my hands into the water, but though small minnows were darting about they were wisely wary of my fingers. Then, just as I was going to give up and fall into a deeper dudgeon, I came on a couple of large scallops and, what is more, open. I pounced on them to thrust a pebble between their shells before they could close. But they made no reaction. I bobbed my head down to smell if they were dead. Then I saw they had been wrenched off their rock and their hinges broken. I gulped them down: they were perfectly fresh.

Not till then did it enter my mind that this was an odd little accident. Indeed, not till then did I find my mind trying to set out in proper order the nightmare journey that had brought me, naked and ravenous, to this blind-alley pot-hole. It seemed I must be a double Jonah. Twice I'd been swallowed by a sea-monster and twice regurgitated. The incident was horribly, grotesquely disgusting. Yet not only had I not suffered any damage, I wasn't even — as storekeepers say — 'soiled,' at least no more than a wash would remove. Before however I could consider whether that might not be my next step I spun round, for I'd been touched. The green diver was standing above me.

"Did you get me these scallops?" — I pointed to the shells, which I had found in a corner of the cavern; and so, evidently, had missed his follow up of me to this new place of deposit. It was a silly question of course but of course it's the way the mind works

when it's really lost its bearings. The big issue stuns so one fiddles over trifles. Men going to the scaffold notice that their shoelace has come loose and stop to retie it. Of course, the creature must have prepared this cold breakfast. So when he said "No" I was as stubborn as a mental patient. And I guess I was, for all intents, just that. "Then who?" I asked with the triumph a child questions a grown-up caught lying. And he seemed to fall in and play his part—looked vague, uneasy and then said, "I expect there're more."

We hunted and found a couple of oysters open, six prawns with their heads whipped off and a brace of large crab claws with the shell-casings split so that I could draw out the meat. I ate them all with childish pleasure. Then turned again on my companion, "Of course you got these ready." Again he shook his head. Then seeing I naturally didn't believe him, he beckoned me to the back of the cave. It was dark there of course but I could just see that the rock wall didn't quite come down to the floor. He crouched and then was gone. But I heard his voice. So dipping down I crawled after.

Suddenly hope had shot up. He had a secret way out. This was the land entrance to this sea grotto. You had to lie flat and worm along. But after a while the roof lifted. We'd entered a large place. I got to my feet. Then stopped dead still. Oh it was pretty enough, this cave, lit as the other had been by the weaving green-golden light that came up through the water. And it was fantastic enough to hold anyone's attention. For it was decorated, yes, richly decorated.

I couldn't remember for a moment where, before, long ago I had once seen decoration like this. Of course I had difficulty in recalling the place, because the two spots were so differently located. But at last it flashed into my mind. It was during the time that I'd been taking one of my marine biology courses at the great oceanographic institute and aquarium at Naples. I'd run up for

a short visit just to glance at Rome and someone had taken me to that strange Campo Santo of the Capuchin Monks. There the earth preserves the bodies of the Fratri, so when they are sufficiently 'cured,' they are mounted round the walls as mural decoration and their canopies and niches are fashioned with considerable ingenuity and no little taste out of the ribs, limb-bones, skulls and pelves of the less honoured lay-brothers.

Of course, this place I now found myself in couldn't really compete with that. For one thing the raw material was less abundant here. But an effort, yes quite a good one, had been made. There were not more than a dozen niches. But the canopy work was made happily enough with coral branches, dolphin ribs, and fish vertebrae; and shark jaws made capacious cupolae. Half the niches were already filled, completed — in the same way as the Capuchin Campo Santo. Of course the skin was gone. But the skeletons were complete to the last phalange. And as a final finish a pair of large rosy pearls shone as artificial eyes in the eye-sockets of each skull.

I was just going to scuttle back into the rock-cleft in blind flight from my ghastly companion and this treasury of his, when he suddenly seized me. I had no idea how strong he was, and, conversely, how slippery, how impossible to break from or to hold. He had me down in a few panting moments. But then, to my surprise, he dragged me back into the cleft out which we had crawled into this — this aquatic funeral parlour. I thought, or rather felt, I might spend my last breath in a yell. But he stifled that, too. He didn't, however, get his fingers over my eyes. Perhaps he didn't want to. So out of our wainscot cranny-slit I was squinting along the floor from which I had just been so unceremoniously swept. And what I squinted made me lie still. For up over the brink of the well and out over the floor were flowing those grey, greasy, thorny cables.

They rippled on, till with a gulp and a surge that sent a small

wave almost into our cranny the monster bulb with its soup-plate eyes heaved into view. I shortened focus, though, for at that moment a tentacle came writhing past our hide. It didn't, however, investigate, but my eye didn't leave it. For, neatly coiled in the curled tip, was quite the largest pearl I have ever seen — and need I say of a perfect rose-pink.

The tentacle went on. And now I saw that every one of the eight subsidiary arms held in it some object — a shell, a sprig of coral, the skull of a fish. The whole thing, form and movement, reminded me of some worse than Black Art idol come to worse than human life.

This huge snake-complex swept forward with a sinuosity that had about it a nauseating flavour of affectation. You felt that the monstrous horror was showing off, registering charm, displaying feminine elegance. It was impossible to avoid this grotesque suspicion of aestheticism, as, one by one, the eight subsidiary arms offered each its object, placing pearl, bone or coral on some point, trefoil, coign or cusp of the great reredos. And as the tentacles played about, fussing like a woman dolling-up her toilet table, the two great main flipper-ended arms with their thorn-edged pockings postured and waved as though miming exclamations of delight. In comparison with the incessant flow and flourish of these boneless rubber coilings, the 'willowiest' of ephebes was an up-standing, straight-forward, angular bit of engineering. And yet this great greasy boss of intestine-fringed succulence was, of course, far more formidable than a charging mammoth. It could pull the toughest human athlete limb from limb with the idle nonchalance of a maiden depetalling a flower to the tune 'he loves me, he loves me not.'

At last, however, these affectations and hesitations came to an end. The monster was apparently satisfied with its composition. So this was where the other pearl-divers had ended, 'full fathom five,' with the pearls they coveted and longed to see, set in their

heads, as their eyes refused to obey the Shakespearian formula. The ten coordinated snakes were at rest. The giant squid would now go and we'd have another chance to escape.

Perhaps I stirred prematurely. All I know is that the tentacle nearest me suddenly coiled. There was no lazy aestheticism about it now. It struck like an anaconda, struck and wound round me and whipped me out of my chink as a hooked pin whips a perry-winkle out of its shell. I found myself held for a moment in the air. Then I was being carried backwards. A moment more, with two other tentacles to help, I was being packed neatly into a vacant niche in the reredos. Through the weaving of the tentacles I could glimpse first one huge soup-plate eye and then the other judging the pictorial effect. The tentacles held me as gently as though I were a piece of an egg-shell porcelain tea-service being put away in its curiocabinet. But I could see within six inches of my nose the claw-thorn fringes of their suction pads. No doubt when the general proportions of figure to niche had been settled — well then, as we strip unnecessary leaves off a spray of flowers we have selected for a particular narrow-necked vase, my flesh would be stripped deftly off my skeleton, my eyes plucked out and instead of their watery gleam two of the most lustrous pearls put in the gaping sockets.

My flesh was as cold as the monster's. Indeed, I'd have slumped like a melted candle had not these horrible living ropes with incessant fondling held me in shape. I therefore not unnaturally thought it was blessed unconscious when I felt my head spin and my body whirl. It was hardly possible to realise, until it was over and the slither of the last tentacle had ended with a gurgle, that I must have been stuffed back into the crack out of which I had been so unceremoniously fetched for such a disconcerting 'fitting.' I lay with my eyes closed for a little. Then peeped under my lids 'shamming dead.' I could see along the floor into the funeral throne-room. Yes, the vast creature had retracted the jungle

of snake-limbs, had swept them in, round and under it, as a cat folds in its forepaws to serve as a cushion to sit on — so the mouse may the better imagine it had gone to sleep. Though of course this horrible up-side-down creature was poised on its tubing as an up-turned bottle might be balanced on a heap of dead eels. Naturally a cephalopod, a 'befooted skull,' can have no true face. Facial expression is then out of the question, so upside down makes no difference. Gradually, however, as I watched my gaoler perched on the edge of the water dive that could lead me to liberty, the whole vast bag that blocked my path began to flush from its blue mould colour to a rich yellow.

"It's pleased," I heard a whisper near me. I swivelled my eyes to the back of the cleft in which I was lying packed. The green diver was crouched behind my shoulder. The sound of a wave however made me re-swivel my eyes. With amazing speed the giant decapod had resunk himself in his well. My human friend — for such at that moment he seemed in comparison with our only other associate — evidently sensed my utterly baffled questioning.

"Yes, that's his way of showing emotion. He can show a whole range of feelings by a gamut of coloured flushings. He has quite an amazing number of such tints." I did remember learning that some of the cephalopods do show fear by changing chameleon-like their colouration. But I certainly was in no mood for natural history. And my companion, seeing wisely where my main immediate interest was rooted, turned to our own species.

"Yes, those up there," he pointed to the half filled reredos, "those were the last of the pink-pearlers. Yes, they got in on something big, I allow . . ."

"It caught and killed them. . . ."

"I, I don't think so . . . I mean not intentionally. It, it is decorative. I mean it is — how do you say it? aesthetically-minded, beauty-interested. Do you know anything about giant squids?"

"Well, they are far the cleverest of all the under-water crea-

tures. They might have gone far in evolution if they could have got out of the water." I ran off my aquarium information. It was faintly reassuring to remember I was or had been a naturalist. I used, I remembered, to smirk superiorly at the unscientific disgust most lay-folk showed when viewing squid. I often pointed out how elegant their motions were to a true nature lover. "Trouble with them," I heard my voice reciting, "is their structure's so limited."

"Then there might be a genius squid . . . ?"

"Yes. . . ."

"And it might develop beauty-sense?"

"Well, you said that already!" I felt as irritable as a badly wounded man. "Everyone knows the bower-bird does and it's got a brain about as small."

"Then that's what it's done. It tumbled to the fact that we like pearls and it took to the fashion, caught the taste."

"And then went one better in aesthetic detachment and killed the pearl-ers just to help out the decorative design," I snarled at his detachment.

"No, no, I don't think quite that. . . ."

"Well, did they all conveniently drown themselves as soon as the aesthetic possibilities of their skeletal structure occurred to this boneless monster?"

Then suddenly my fumbling jokes, a sort of feeble vomiting reaction of the mind under the stress of too much fear, all died away. I had brought up in my mind a real solid question and one he could and he must answer. "And what about *you*!"

"That's why I'm not sure about the others—that they were drowned."

"You mean to say that they, one by one, died in their beds of old age and this submarine monster dung-beetle crept out and, to save the survivors trouble, and in the name of world-wide hygiene, carried off the cadavers, taking, as his fee, only their bones! You

know you killed them!" I flung myself at this half sea-creature, half living-corpse that kept this ghastly pet. No doubt he'd feed me to it when he'd enjoyed a little further its pretty play and teach it some further pretty beach themes with my brachia. But I'd get him first. . . .

Of course it was no use tackling a thing as greasy as an eel and as lithe-strong as a python. Indeed it took him so little effort to down me as we writhed upon each other in the crack that his voice went on without pant or gasp till with me neatly trussed, he continued our conversation. But what he said, and said so quietly, was still arresting enough to quieten me, to deflate my effort to throw him off, to make my last gust of courage end in a gasp of deeper horror.

"No," he remarked slowly, like a chess-player checked and suspecting check-mate, "no, it's not my pet. I'm its. And *they* were. At least I'm sure that's what it intended. You remember, I called out to you, 'Don't struggle'? Well they did. Oh, of course quite naturally, and fatally. If you'd struggled enough you know you'd have suffocated in that cape. Besides, then he didn't know his business."

"What do you mean!"

"I mean he hadn't perfected his technique."

"What the devil . . ."

"Well, I told you *I'd* got, by chance training, a very uncommon, very useful technique for diving. That certainly saved my life. When it caught me, I didn't suffocate because — well you know, and I didn't struggle. And then that super-squid brain evidently tumbled on the fact that we have to breathe air, just about the same time (just in time, in fact) that I tumbled on the contemporary fact that he wanted not to drown me but on the contrary to keep me alive. Some air (as you know, not at all pleasant but distinctly more so than suffocating) naturally clings under the apron from which the tentacles spread. Well, it learnt, as does

the water-spider, to capture a large bubble of this. Not for its own use, of course — as does the spider. But for its freight, its possible passengers.”

“For us?” He nodded. “My, we can’t stay here” seemed obvious reaction in favour of action. So his “One gets adapted” struck me as insane defeatism. “We *must* get out!”

“But I’ve told you, there’s no danger. Indeed quite the reverse. He’s wishing to keep his pets. He kept you. He got that meal ready for you. I’m quite free here — just act as a companion for an hour or two every day: help him with his designing. He loves learning new patterns. He’s out most of the time. Goes off the deep end — don’t they call it? He’s a deep fellow of a fish, but really quite a good fellow at heart. As long as I turn up when he wants to be amused, I’m free to do what I like. Where else’d I be so free!”

I looked at the green, greasy flesh. He’d said he’d had some hospital training. Of course, he was right — as far as he went. He’d be locked up under half an hour in an isolation ward if any port doctor set eyes on that hide of his. But I, I was quite another kettle of fish. I needn’t sulk here and it happened to be the very last thing in the world that I wished to do, or intended. “Well, you can certainly stay. I’m going. . . .”

“But I like you. I want some company. I’d like a scientist companion. Beside, he’ll never let you go. He wants to enlarge his collection.”

“I to be part of a mollusc’s menagerie! You bet!” I rolled over and out of the cleft — he had taken his grip off me and I was on my feet out in the large Memorial Chapel with a couple of twists. A fish-researcher caught by a fish! To be pinned down under such grotesquely turned tables — why, the absurd humour of it roused me to make a get-away on the spot. The fish-monster would find that it had caught a tartar in catching an ichthyologist.

I ran through again in my mind all I knew about the cephalo-

Pods. Yes, they were quite the strongest, cunningest, cleverest of all the true underwater creatures. And, without a doubt, this was a sport, a super-squid genius. But he couldn't come onto land. There, of course, he had to rely on his amphibian ally — his decoy.

The word slipped into my mind. Why hadn't I realised it before! This verdigris salt-water-sodden-slippery diver — of course he had trapped me for his master's collection, decoyed me to look for the pearls and then neatly enough tipped me into the lurking monster's embrace. In a moment the situation was plain as a prison. Of course it was nonsense to try and persuade my glaucous gaoler to escape with me! He was there to hold me while the owner of the two-piece menagerie, with mortician museum attached, was away on deeper business. So seeing the lie of the land and the depth of the seaplot I switched over onto the new knowledge.

It was clear that I'd never get out of this trap without my warder's help. The only path out of these cells was through the tide-filled tunnels and so, by a long diving swim, up to the shore. But whatever the green diver might be he was clearly no liar about his diving powers.

He, too, had now come out into the skeleton-girt cave. "It's being under such long stretches and then having to breathe so oddly, that gives your skin that color?" I questioned as carelessly as I could. Few people can resist answering admiring enquiries about their prowess, and when so selfcentered generally cease to attend carefully to their questioner.

"Yes," he answered readily enough, "that and the adaptation of the skin to constant soaking. You'll get like that too. Then instead of wanting to dry your skin you'll hate not having it wet always."

It was certainly not a prospect that gave me anything but a distinctly negative cutaneous thrill. But I didn't let my reaction get into my voice. On the contrary I remarked, "Well, you'd better start giving me a few practise dives, hadn't you? Anyhow I need

to be taken out for a drink. One doesn't dehydrate here but still you know I need to be fresh-watered off and on!"

He took my joke in good part and naturally was willing to show off. I'm far from a bad swimmer and know a little about respiration exercises to get the lung super-oxygenated for extensive breath-retention. I took a series of deepened and accelerated breaths and then with my hand on his shoulder we struck down through the water out of the museum of our collector, headed for the sunlight.

But though he did almost all the actual swimming I nearly didn't make it. He dragged me out and slumped me like a sack on the spit of sand that led to the causeway which so linked it to the mainshore. As I lay gasping on my back I saw that the sun had just begun to heel over to the West. I had been under not 24 hours — but for the age it seemed, I might have been buried at sea and now after an aeon of submersion here was the resurrection — 'the deep giving up its dead.'

I was too spent to try any exact time-tabling. And when having pummelled and first-aided me, making me vomit a lot of seawater, he hauled me onto his shoulder, carried me to the main shore and there settled me in the warm sand I just let him. I fell to sleep, sinking down as though I really had drowned. Once I recall waking to find a large shell with fresh water in it. I gulped that and fell off again as though it had been opium.

It was only on my second waking that my time-orientation flashed back on me. Of course I must get back! Perhaps all that I had gone through was a nightmare — a touch of sun after having lain down to dry myself after a dip? Across the time-gap, filled with this fantasy, I saw the real past, clearly enough, urgently enough! Of course the yacht was due to go. They would wait for me but they'd be sore at being kept waiting. I must go at once.

I looked round. There wasn't a sign of life anywhere. And beside me (and they were warm in the levelling light of the sun and

with the hot sand under them) were my clothes. As I slipped them on my mind too took civilised sensible shape. Of course — a touch of sun after a doze after a dip. I certainly felt groggy enough on my legs when I got on them. But without delay I set off stumbling along the shore, back toward the island's north end. The effort restarted my circulation and though my head ached, I wasn't making bad going, till on looking back to see how far I'd come I saw something that certainly made me think I'd been too slow and must mend my pace. There was a figure running over the sands in pursuit of me.

I did manage to break into a run as well as a cold sweat. It was no use, though. He was gaining as quickly as a greyhound on a spent hare. I managed to scramble over a reef of rocks that running out separated a couple of the small bays, dropped down on a pebble-strewn cove, and, knowing that I couldn't run another yard, crouched flat under the rock over which I'd come. The nightmare was true — that was all. I'd been caught — caught on the threshold of escape to be dragged back to be pet No. 2 of this ghastly collector until he tired of my simple antics — or my companion grew jealous when they'd see that I served better as something stiller than the stillest of still-lives.

At that moment my green gaoler lept down from the rocks above. He didn't see me — I think his submarine life had dimmed his sight — as I crouched immediately behind him. He was scanning in a myopic way the crescent bay of sand that stretched away before us. My hand shut on a sizable pebble just fitting and filling one's fist. I rose. He heard me — or caught sight of me out of the corner of his eye — and whirled round. I whirled round my arm. It was as natural a reflex as beating off a hornet. The crack of stone on skull was so sharp it might have been stone on stone. But that was the only sound. No cry and he settled down gently on the pebbled sand. A new spurt of energy took me. I leapt over the body. I was back at the yacht anchorage without

once pausing. But then I did slump with a vengeance — there was the anchorage — but no yacht! They had sailed. No doubt they had tracked my trail and finding that it ended in that pool they were certain I was drowned. No use waiting to find a body in these all too well populated waters.

I don't know how long I sat there. The night had come on before again hunger, the spur of pointless living, made me hunt around. Of course I didn't have much difficulty in finding the cached food. When I'd eaten and made myself some coffee (for one of the island's springs came out here and a cooking lamp was stored in the shed) I felt my energy tide-in again. I found at the back of the shed some tarpaulins and wrapping myself in them slept well enough, for to pillow me I had the comfort that I was now safe from pursuit.

With this morning's light my feelings have gone up from resignation level to something like hope. I have a good chance of making a break-way and indeed of catching up with my party. For on going out of the shed I saw the other side of it. What I'd missed, last evening — for the shed stood in my way. The other side of it was a fissure on the coral which we had cut and cleared till it made a wharf inlet, so that freight could be unloaded from the dinghy right along side of the shed. To my surprised delight I found that the dinghy was left there moored to the wharf side.

Naturally it was clear to me from that moment what to do. Firstly I fetched a notebook from the steel cupboard. It is of primary importance that I put down a clear consecutive account of my adventure through the last couple of days. Unless I have it recorded while every detail is photographically clear in my mind, the whole series of incidents is so improbable that under cross examination (as so often happens when a man has had an anomalous experience) I might easily contradict myself over some detail and my entire narrative be discredited. I certainly realise how I myself should feel if this story were to be told to me instead of my

being myself the narrator, and, if I may be permitted to use the word without prejudice, the patient.

Well, I have now come to the end of my account. All that remains is to stow this book in the dinghy's fore-locker. I have hoisted the sail, can scull the dinghy out to where I can catch a breeze. I have on board water and stores. A good south wind is blowing. I should make the inhabited islet group north of this atoll perhaps by sundown or at latest by tomorrow.

Terminal Note from the Log of the *Thetis*, Captain L. Jackson, Master, F.R.O.S. "It is perhaps hardly necessary to enter that the *Thetis* had *not* left the island. When Dr. Mackay did not return, supplies and the dinghy were left at the north anchorage and the ship sailed to the south of the island to investigate. Having failed to sight him on any of the beaches, a landing was made on the east side of the island and the small hinterland was thoroughly explored for any evidence of the missing man. This necessitated staying on that side of the island for the night. The next morning, coming north, we sighted the dinghy making for the open sea. There was a heavy swell running outside the cover given by the island. Dr. Mackay, who was sailing the dinghy, was signalled by us to turn back. He paid no attention. Through glasses it was clear that he had not seen us. He was bending over his port bow. He seemed, too, to be having trouble with the tiller. The boat appeared to be failing to answer the helm. By this time the dinghy had entered the full ocean swell and disappeared for a couple of seconds in the trough. On its appearing again it was derelict. Dr. Mackay could not be seen. On succeeding in getting a rope round the dinghy's prow, the *Thetis* returned with it to anchorage. On inspecting the dinghy Dr. Mackay's diary was found. On examining the tiller and rudder traces of fine circular indentations, some as much as a couple of inches in diameter, were found on them both. Because of statements in the diary we sailed again

down the east coast of the island to settle if possible where Dr. Mackay contracted sunstroke. Coming to the terminal south bay we landed, finding the rock pool that figures so prominently in his story. We discovered, here, above highwater mark, confirmatory traces that he had lain on the beach. We also traced his footsteps part of the way back toward the north anchorage. However, on the spot which seemed to agree with his description of the place where he imagined he fought with a pursuer, there were no traces. At this section of his run he had gone down onto the tidal sand and his own footsteps were obliterated."