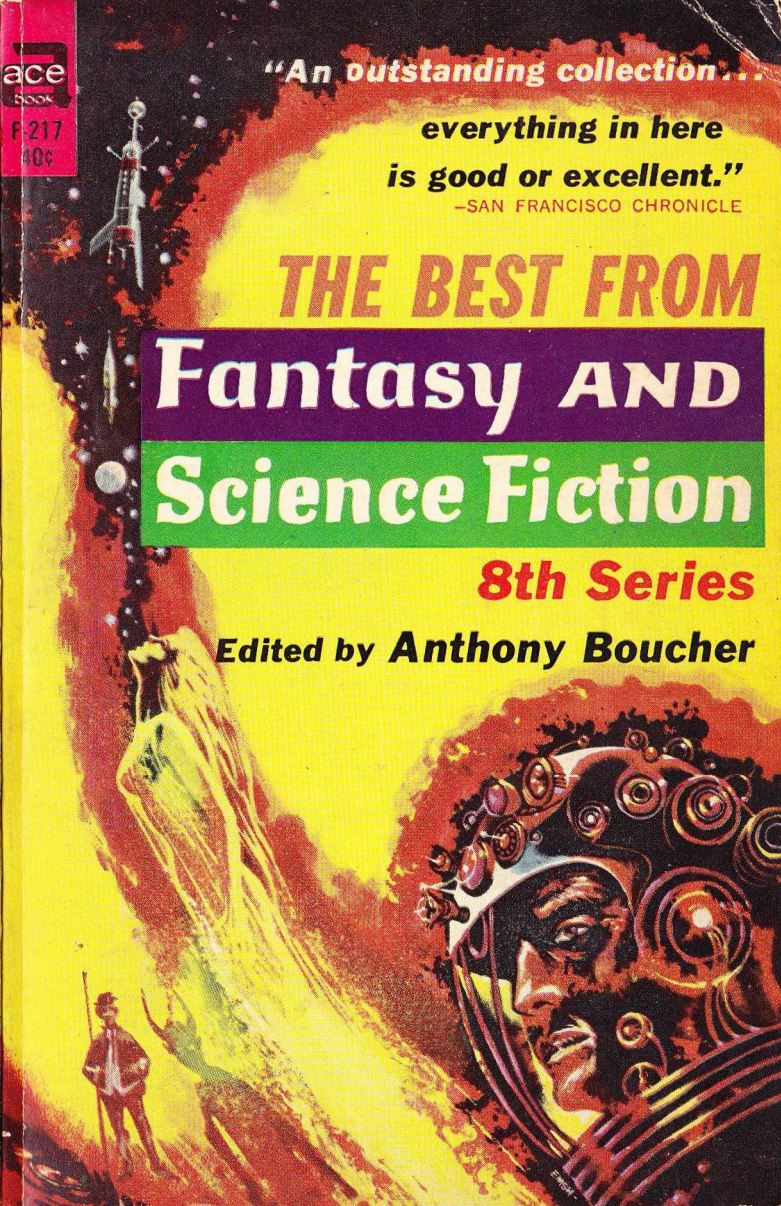
ace
book
F-217
40¢

"An outstanding collection . . . everything in here is good or excellent."
—SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE

THE BEST FROM Fantasy AND Science Fiction

8th Series

Edited by **Anthony Boucher**



THE LEADING FANTASY ANTHOLOGY SERIES

"Science-fiction, frowned upon by the literati until the dawn of the atomic age, is by now quite respectable. Those who once considered it trash, now are willing to concede the true literary merit in many of its writers.

"Among the outstanding magazines in the s-f field is *Fantasy and Science Fiction.* From time to time an anthology of stories selected from its pages is published. This is the eighth such edition.

"Editing the book is Anthony Boucher, a successful science-fiction writer in his own right. Among the authors represented are such names as Poul Anderson, C. S. Lewis, Issac Asimov, Fritz Leiber, C. M. Kornbluth and—Jules Verne.

"Practically without exception, all the stories are entertaining. If you haven't yet sampled science-fiction, this is a good opportunity."

—*Albuquerque Tribune*

The Best From FANTASY and SCIENCE FICTION

Eighth Series

Edited by
ANTHONY BOUCHER

ACE BOOKS, INC.
1120 Avenue of the Americas
New York 36, N.Y.

THE BEST FROM FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION: 8TH SERIES

An Ace Book, by arrangement with Doubleday & Co., Inc.

All of the characters in this book are fictitious, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

For
ROBERT P. MILLS
with gratitude and sympathy

Printed in U.S.A.

Contents

INTRODUCTION

I SHOULD LIKE, in the name of science fiction, to challenge the claim of the Beat Generation (and their transatlantic colleagues, the Angry Young Men) to speak with the voice of today.

To be sure, there are some resemblances between science-fictioneers and the Beatniks. We also speak an argot of our own; we sometimes tend toward a sort of exclusive gregariousness; and a possibly undue proportion of us are bearded. (Of the authors in this volume, Jules Verne possessed a Beard of Beards, one of the great facial outcroppings of all time; Alfred Bester and Avram Davidson are more modestly adorned—and I even happen at the moment to be enjoying a small beard myself, though it won't last long if my wife has anything to say about it, and I fear she has.)

But the differences outweigh any superficial smiliarities. For one thing, we are not A Generation, but something more like a genealogy. The authors here presented have birth dates ranging from 1828 (Verne, from whom we all descend) to 1933 (Reed). To Speak For Today's Generation is often to seem eccentric today and démodé tomorrow; to speak for tomorrow, as we have tried to do for most of a century, seems frequently more meaningful for today—and holds up surprisingly well tomorrow: science fiction that has been outdated by fact is often conceptually valid and still stimulating.

It is in these basic concepts that the contrast is sharpest between us and the Beat. As best one can make out from the shreds of Kierkegaard, Sartre, and Zen that seem to make up the Beat evangel, the sole concern of the individual should

be his own individual existence, and indeed primarily the sensations of this very instant of that existence.

Now this is, for the individual, a tenable and even a tempting (if hardly a novel) philosophy. For a generation (and a many-generationed world) which possesses space travel and atomic fission and fusion, it is a luxury, and quite conceivably a suicidal one.

If a single theme can be said to run through all of science fiction, it is that man and his world affect each other. S.f. is essentially the story both of the impact of the scientific future upon man, and of the impact of man upon that future. This, I submit, is not a "literature of escape" as it has often been labeled (unless by "escape" one means a velocity of seven miles per second), but an imaginative literature firmly grounded in the harshest realism—a realism notably lacking in fiction obsessed with personal woes *in vacuo*.

But please do not let the unwontedly serious tone of this introduction put you off. Science fiction (and fantasy too) usually has a substratum of serious meaning; but its surface remains entertainment, ranging from adventure to melodrama to satire to parable to horror tale to— But the list is too long: almost every story in this collection belongs to a different category from all the others. And sometimes the story most serious in intention may be the liveliest and funniest, as in the case of C. S. Lewis' *Ministering Angels*—which you should start in on now.

ANTHONY BOUCHER

Berkeley, California

C. S. LEWIS

Dr. Robert S. Richardson's controversial article, The Day after We Land on Mars—*first published in the* Saturday Review *and later expanded for F & SF (December 1955)—contained the provocative prediction that "we may be forced into first tolerating and finally openly accepting an attitude toward sex that is taboo in our present social framework. . . . To put it bluntly, may it not be necessary for the success of the project to send some nice girls to Mars at regular intervals to relieve tensions and promote morale?" C. S. Lewis takes it from there in his first short story of space travel—a tale of the First Martian Expedition which is perceptive, human, and warmly comic.*

MINISTERING ANGELS

THE MONK, as they called him, settled himself on the camp chair beside his bunk and stared through the window at the harsh sand and black-blue sky of Mars. He did not mean to begin his "work" for ten minutes yet. Not, of course, the work he had been brought there to do. He was the meteorologist of the party, and his work in that capacity was largely done; he had found out whatever could be found out. There was nothing more, within the limited radius he could investigate, to be observed for at least twenty-five days. And meteorology had not been his real motive. He had chosen three years on Mars as the nearest modern equivalent to a hermitage in the desert. He had come there to meditate: to continue the slow, perpetual rebuilding of that inner structure which, in his view, it was the main purpose of life to rebuild. And now his ten minutes' rest was over. He began with his well-used formula. "Gentle and patient Master, teach me to need men less and to love thee more." Then to it. There was no time to waste. There were barely six months of this lifeless, sinless, unsuffering wilderness ahead of him. Three

years were short . . . but when the shout came he rose out of his chair with the practised alertness of a sailor.

The Botanist in the next cabin responded to the same shout with a curse. His eye had been at the microscope when it came. It was maddening. Constant interruption. A man might as well try to work in the middle of Piccadilly as in this infernal camp. And his work was already a race against time. Six months more . . . and he had hardly begun. The flora of Mars, these tiny, miraculously hardy organisms, the ingenuity of their contrivances to live under all but impossible conditions—it was a feast for a lifetime. He would ignore the shout. But then came the bell. All hands to the main room.

The only person who was doing, so to speak, nothing when the shout came was the Captain. To be more exact, he was (as usual) trying to stop thinking about Clare, and get on with his official journal. Clare kept on interrupting from forty million miles away. It was preposterous. "*Would have needed all hands,*" he wrote . . . hands . . . his own hands . . . his own hands, hands, he felt, with eyes in them, travelling over all the warm-cool, soft-firm, smooth, yielding, resisting aliveness of her. "Shut up, there's a dear," he said to the photo on his desk. And so back to the journal, until the fatal words "*had been causing me some anxiety.*" Anxiety—oh God, what might be happening to Clare now? How did he know there was a Clare by this time? Anything could happen. He'd been a fool ever to accept this job. What other newly married man in the world would have done it? But it had seemed so sensible. Three years of horrid separation but then . . . oh, they were made for life. He had been promised the post that, only a few months before, he would not have dared to dream of. He'd never need to go to Space again. And all the by-products; the lectures, the book, probably a title. Plenty of children. He knew she wanted that, and so in a queer way (as he began to find) did he. But damn it, the journal. Begin a new paragraph . . . And then the shout came.

It was one of the two youngsters, technicians both, who had given it. They had been together since dinner. At least Paterson had been standing at the open door of Dickson's

cabin, shifting from foot to foot and swinging the door, and Dickson had been sitting on his berth and waiting for Paterson to go away.

"What are you talking about, Paterson?" he said. "Who ever said anything about a quarrel?"

"That's all very well, Bobby," said the other, "but we're not friends like we used to be. You know we're not. Oh, *I'm* not blind. I *did* ask you to call me Clifford. And you're always so stand-offish."

"Oh, get to Hell out of this!" cried Dickson. "I'm perfectly ready to be good friends with you and everyone else in an ordinary way, but all this gas—like a pair of school girls—I will not stand. Once and for all—"

"Oh look, look, look," said Paterson. And it was then that Dickson shouted and the Captain came and rang the bell and within twenty seconds they were all crowded behind the biggest of the windows. A spaceship had just made a beautiful landing about a hundred and fifty yards from camp.

"Oh boy!" exclaimed Dickson. They're relieving us before our time."

"Damn their eyes. Just what they would do," said the Botanist.

Five figures were descending from the ship. Even in space suits it was clear that one of them was enormously fat; they were in no other way remarkable.

"Man the air lock," said the Captain.

Drinks from their limited store were going round. The Captain had recognised in the leader of the strangers an old acquaintance, Ferguson. Two were ordinary young men, not unpleasant. But the remaining two?

"I don't understand," said the Captain, "who exactly—I mean, we're delighted to see you all of course—but what exactly . . . ?"

"Where are the rest of your party?" said Ferguson.

"We've had two casualties, I'm afraid," said the Captain. "Sackville and Dr. Burton. It was a most wretched business. Sackville tried eating the stuff we call Martian cress. It drove him fighting mad in a matter of minutes. He knocked Burton down and by sheer bad luck Burton fell in just the

wrong position: across that table there. Broke his neck. We got Sackville tied down on a bunk but he was dead before the evening."

"Hadna he even the gumption to try it on the guinea pig first?" said Ferguson.

"Yes," said the Botanist. "That was the whole trouble. The funny thing is that the guinea pig lived. But its behaviour was remarkable. Sackville wrongly concluded that the stuff was alcoholic. Thought he'd invent a new drink. The nuisance is that once Burton was dead, none of us could do a reliable post-mortem on Sackville. Under analysis this vegetable shows—"

"A-a-a-h," interrupted one of those who had not yet spoken. "We must beware of oversimplifications. I doubt if the vegetable substance is the real explanation. There are stresses and strains. You are all, without knowing it, in a highly unstable condition, for reasons which are no mystery to a trained psychologist."

Some of those present had doubted the sex of this creature. Its hair was very short, its nose very long, its mouth very prim, its chin sharp, and its manner authoritative. The voice revealed it as, scientifically speaking, a woman. But no one had had any doubt about the sex of her nearest neighbour, the fat person.

"Oh, dearie," she wheezed. "Not now. I tell you straight I'm that flustered and faint, I'll scream if you go on so. Suppose there ain't such a thing as a port and lemon handy? No? Well, a little drop more gin would settle me. It's me stomach reelly."

The speaker was infinitely female and perhaps in her seventies. Her hair had been not very successfully dyed to a colour not unlike that of mustard. The powder (scented strongly enough to throw a train off the rails) lay like snow drifts in the complex valleys of her creased, many-chinned face.

"Stop," roared Ferguson. "Whatever ye do, dinna give her a drap mair to drink."

" 'E's no 'art, ye see," said the old woman with a whimper and an affectionate leer directed at Dickson.

"Excuse me," said the Captain. "Who are these—ah—ladies and what is this all about?"

"I have been waiting to explain," said the Thin Woman, and cleared her throat. "Anyone who has been following World-Opinion-Trends on the problems arising out of the psychological welfare aspect of interplanetary communication will be conscious of the growing agreement that such a remarkable advance inevitably demands of us far-reaching ideological adjustments. Psychologists are now well aware that a forcible inhibition of powerful biological urges over a protracted period is likely to have unforeseeable results. The pioneers of space travel are exposed to this danger. It would be unenlightened if a supposed ethicality were allowed to stand in the way of their protection. We must therefore nerve ourselves to face the view that immorality, as it has hitherto been called, must no longer be regarded as unethical—"

"I don't understand that," said the Monk.

"She means," said the Captain, who was a good linguist, "that what you call fornication must no longer be regarded as immoral."

"That's right, dearie," said the Fat Woman to Dickson, "she only means a poor boy needs a woman now and then. It's only natural."

"What was required, therefore," continued the Thin Woman, "was a band of devoted females who would take the first step. This would expose them, no doubt, to obloquy from many ignorant persons. They would be sustained by the consciousness that they were performing an indispensable function in the history of human progress."

"She means you're to have tarts, duckie," said the Fat Woman to Dickson.

"Now you're talking," said he with enthusiasm. "Bit late in the day, but better late than never. But you can't have brought many girls in that ship. And why didn't you bring them in? Or are they following?"

"We cannot indeed claim," continued the Thin Woman, who had apparently not noticed the interruption, "that the response to our appeal was such as we had hoped. The personnel of the first unit of the Woman's Higher Aphrodisio-

Therapeutic Humane Organisation (abbreviated WHAT-HO) is not perhaps . . . well. Many excellent women, university colleagues of my own, even senior colleagues, to whom I applied, showed themselves curiously conventional. But at least a start has been made. And here," she concluded brightly, "we are."

And there, for forty seconds of appalling silence, they were. Then Dickson's face, which had already undergone certain contortions, became very red; he applied his handkerchief and spluttered like a man trying to stifle a sneeze, rose abruptly, turned his back on the company, and hid his face. He stood slightly stooped and you could see his shoulders shaking.

Paterson jumped up and ran towards him; but the Fat Woman, though with infinite gruntings and upheavals, had risen too.

"Get art of it, Pansy," she snarled at Paterson. "Lot o' good your sort ever did." A moment later her vast arms were round Dickson; all the warm, wobbling maternalism of her engulfed him.

"There, sonny," she said, "it's goin' to be OK. Don't cry, honey. Don't cry. Poor boy, then. Poor boy. I'll give you a good time."

"I think," said the Captain, "the young man is laughing, not crying."

It was the Monk who at this point mildly suggested a meal.

Some hours later the party had temporarily broken up.

Dickson (despite all his efforts the Fat Woman had contrived to sit next to him; she had more than once mistaken his glass for hers) hardly finished his last mouthful when he said to the newly arrived technicians:

"I'd love to see over your ship, if I could."

You might expect that two men who had been cooped up in that ship so long, and had only taken off their space suits a few minutes ago, would have been reluctant to re-assume the one and return to the other. That was certainly the Fat Woman's View. "Nar, nar," she said. "Don't you go fidgeting, sonny. They seen enough of that ruddy ship for a bit, same

as me. 'Tain't good for you to go rushing about, not on a full stomach, like." But the two young men were marvellously obliging.

"Certainly. Just what I was going to suggest," said the first. "OK by me, chum," said the second. They were all three of them out of the air lock in record time.

Across the sand, up the ladder, helmets off, and then:

"What in the name of thunder have you dumped those two bitches on us for?" said Dickson.

"Don't fancy 'em?" said the Cockney stranger. "The people at 'ome thought as 'ow you'd be a bit sharp set by now. Ungrateful of you, I call it."

"Very funny to be sure," said Dickson. "But it's no laughing matter for us."

"It hasn't been for us either, you know," said the Oxford stranger. "Cheek by jowl with them for eighty-five days. They palled a bit after the first month."

"You're telling me," said the Cockney.

There was a disgusted pause.

"Can anyone tell me," said Dickson at last, "who in the world, and why in the world, out of all possible women, selected those two horrors to send to Mars?"

"Can't expect a star London show at the back of beyond," said the Cockney.

"My dear fellow," said his colleague, "isn't the thing perfectly obvious? What kind of woman, without force, is going to come and live in this ghastly place—on rations—and play doxy to half a dozen men she's never seen? The Good Time Girls won't come because they know you can't have a good time on Mars. An ordinary professional prostitute won't come as long as she has the slightest chance of being picked up in the cheapest quarter of Liverpool or Los Angeles. And you've got one who hasn't. The only other who'd come would be a crank who believes all that blah about the new ethicality. And you've got one of that too."

"Simple, ain't it?" said the Cockney.

"Anyone," said the other, "except the Fools at the Top could of course have foreseen it from the word go."

"The only hope now is the Captain," said Dickson.

"Look, mate," said the Cockney, "if you think there's

any question of our taking back returned goods, you've 'ad it. Nothing doin'. Our Captain'll 'ave a munity to settle if he tries that. Also 'e won't. 'E's 'ad 'is turn. So've we. It's up to you now."

"Fair's fair, you know," said the other. "We've stood all we can."

"Well," said Dickson. "We must leave the two chiefs to fight it out. But discipline or not, there are some things a man can't stand. That bloody schoolmarm—"

"She's a lecturer at a Redbrick university, actually."

"Well," said Dickson after a long pause, "you were going to show me over the ship. It might take my mind off it a bit."

The Fat Woman was talking to the Monk. ". . . and oh, Father dear, I know you'll think that's the worst of all. I didn't give it up when I could. After me brother's wife died . . . 'e'd 'av 'ad me 'ome with 'im, and money wasn't that short. But I went on, Gawd 'elp me, I went on."

"Why did you do that, daughter?" said the Monk. "Did you *like* it?"

"Well not all that, Father. I was never partikler. But you see—oh, Father, I was the goods in those days, though you wouldn't think it now . . . and the poor gentlemen, they did so enjoy it."

"Daughter," he said, "you are not far from the Kingdom. But you were wrong. The desire to give is blessed. But you can't turn bad bank notes into good ones just by giving them away."

The Captain had also left the table pretty quickly, asking Ferguson to accompany him to his cabin. The Botanist had leaped after them.

"One moment, sir, one moment," he said excitedly. "I am a scientist. I'm working at very high pressure already. I hope there is no complaint to be made about my discharge of all those other duties which so incessantly interrupt my work. But if I am going to be expected to waste any more time entertaining those abominable females—"

"When I give you any orders which can be considered

ultra vires," said the Captain, "it will be time to make your protest."

Paterson stayed with the Thin Woman. The only part of any woman that interested him was her ears. He liked telling women about his troubles; especially about the unfairness and unkindness of other men. Unfortunately the lady's idea was that the interview should be devoted either to Aphrodisio-Therapy or to instruction in psychology. She saw, indeed, no reason why the two operations should not be carried out simultaneously; it is only untrained minds that cannot hold more than one idea. The difference between these two conceptions of the conversation was well on its way to impairing its success. Paterson was becoming ill-tempered; the lady remained bright and patient as an iceberg.

"But as I was saying," grumbled Paterson, "what I do think so rotten is a fellow being quite fairly decent one day and then—"

"Which just illustrates my point. These tensions and maladjustments are bound, under the unnatural conditions, to arise. And provided we disinfect the obvious remedy of all those sentimental or—which is quite as bad—prurient associations which the Victorian Age attached to it—"

"But I haven't yet told you. Listen. Only two days ago—"

"One moment. This ought to be regarded like any other injection. If once we can persuade—"

"How any fellow can take a pleasure—"

"I agree. The association of it with pleasure (that is purely an adolescent fixation) may have done incalculable harm. Rationally viewed—"

"I say, you're getting off the point!"

"One moment—"

The dialogue continued.

They had finished looking over the spaceship. It was certainly a beauty. No one afterwards remembered who had first said, "Anyone could manage a ship like this."

Ferguson sat quietly smoking while the Captain read the letter he had brought him. He didn't even look in the Cap-

tain's direction. When at last conversation began there was so much circumambient happiness in the cabin that they took a long time to get down to the difficult part of their business. The Captain seemed at first wholly occupied with its comic side.

"Still," he said at last, "it has its serious side too. The impertinence of it, for one thing! Do they think—"

"Ye maun recall," said Fergson, "they're dealing with an absolutely new situation."

"Oh, *new* be damned! How does it differ from men on whalers, or even on windjammers in the old days? Or on the North West Frontier? It's about as new as people being hungry when food was short."

"Eh mon, but ye're forgettin' the new light of modern psychology."

"I think those two ghastly women have already learned some newer psychology since they arrived. Do they really suppose every man in the world is so combustible that he'll jump into the arms of any woman whatever?"

"Aye, they do. They'll be sayin' you and your party are verra abnormal. I wadna put it past them to be sending you out wee packets of hormones next."

"Well, if it comes to that, do they suppose men would volunteer for a job like this unless they could, or thought they could, or wanted to try if they could, do without women?"

"Then there's the new ethics, forbye."

"Oh stow it, you old rascal. What is new there either? Who ever tried to live clean except a minority who had a religion or were in love? They'll try it still on Mars, as they did on Earth. As for the majority, did they ever hesitate to take their pleasures wherever they could get them? The ladies of the profession know better. Did you ever see a port or a garrison town without plenty of brothels? Who are the idiots on the Advisory Council who started all this nonsense?"

"Och, a pack o' daft auld women (in trousers for the maist part) who like onything sexy, and onything scientific, and onything that makes them feel important. And this gives them all three pleasures at once, ye ken."

"Well, there's only one thing for it, Ferguson. I'm not going to have either your Mistress Overdone or your Extension lecturer here. You can just—"

"Now there's no manner of use talkin' that way. I did my job. Another voyage with sic a cargo o' livestock I will not face. And my two lads the same. There'd be mutiny and murder."

"But you must, I'm—"

At that moment a blinding flash came from without and the earth shook.

"Ma ship! Ma ship!" cried Ferguson. Both men peered out on empty sand. The spaceship had obviously made an excellent take-off.

"But what's happened?" said the Captain. "They haven't—"

"Mutiny, desertion, and theft of a government ship, that's what's happened," said Ferguson. "Ma twa lads and your Dickson are awa' hame."

"But good Lord, they'll get Hell for this. They've ruined their careers. They'll be—"

"Aye. Nae dout. And they think it cheap at the price. Ye'll be seeing why, maybe, before ye are a fortnight older."

A gleam of hope came into the Captain's eyes. "They couldn't have taken the women with them?"

"Talk sense, mon, talk sense. Or if ye hanna ony sense, use your ears."

In the buzz of excited conversation which became every moment more audible from the main room, female voices could be intolerably distinguished.

As he composed himself for his evening meditation the Monk thought that perhaps he had been concentrating too much on "needing less" and that must be why he was going to have a course (advanced) in "loving more." Then his face twitched into a smile that was not all mirth. He was thinking of the Fat Woman. Four things made an exquisite chord. First the horror of all she had done and suffered. Secondly, the pity—thirdly, the comicality—of her belief that she could still excite desire; fourthly, her bless'd ignorance of that utterly different loveliness which already existed within her and which, under grace, and with such poor direction as even

he could supply, might one day set her, bright in the land of brightness, beside the Magdalene.

But wait! There was yet a fifth note in the chord. "Oh, Master," he murmured, "forgive—or can you enjoy?—my absurdity also. I had been supposing you sent me on a voyage of forty million miles merely for my own spiritual convenience."

POUL ANDERSON

As you know by now from many stories, it's impossible for the lively speculative intellect of Poul Anderson to touch the most familiar theme without transmuting it into a new and provocative notion. This time the theme is the patronizing admission of a retarded Earth into a million-year-old Galactic civilization. . . .

BACKWARDNESS

As a small boy he had wanted to be a rocket pilot—and what boy didn't in those days?—but learned early that he lacked the aptitudes. Later he decided on psychology, and even took a bachelor's degree *cum laude*. Then one thing led to another, and Joe Husting ended up as a confidence man. It wasn't such a bad life; it had challenge and variety as he hunted in New York, and the spoils of a big killing were devoured in Florida, Greenland Resort, or Luna City.

The bar was empty of prospects just now, but he dawdled over his beer and felt no hurry. Spring had reached in and touched even the East Forties. The door stood open to a mild breeze, the long room was cool and dim, a few other men lazed over midafternoon drinks and the TV was tuned low. Idly, through cigaret smoke, Joe Husting watched the program.

The Galactics, of course. Their giant spaceship flashed in the screen against wet brown fields a hundred miles from here. Copter view . . . now we pan to a close-up, inside the ring of UN guards, and then back to the sightseers in their

thousands. The announcer was talking about how the captain of the ship was at this moment in conference with the Secretary-General, and the crewmen were at liberty on Earth. "They are friendly, folks. I repeat, they are friendly. They will do no harm. They have already exchanged their cargo of U-235 for billions of our own dollars, and they plan to spend those dollars like any friendly tourist. But both the UN Secretariat and the President of the United States have asked us all to remember that these people come from the stars. They have been civilized for a million years. They have powers we haven't dreamed of. Anyone who harms a Galactic can ruin the greatest—"

Husting's mind wandered off. A big thing, yes, maybe the biggest thing in all history. Earth a member planet of the Galactic Federation! All the stars open to us! It was good to be alive in this year when anything could happen . . . hm. To start with, you could have some rhinestones put in fancy settings and peddle them as gen-yu-wine Tardenoisian sacred flame-rocks, but that was only the beginning—

He grew aware that the muted swish of electrocars and hammering of shoes in the street had intensified. From several blocks away came a positive roar of excitement. What the devil? He left his beer and sauntered to the door and looked out. A shabby man was hurrying toward the crowd. Husting buttonholed him. "What's going on, pal?"

"Ain't yuh heard? Galactics! Half a dozen of 'em. Landed in duh street uptown, some kinda flying belt dey got, and went inna Macy's and bought a million bucks' wortha stuff! Now dey're strolling down dis-a-way. Lemme go!"

Husting stood for a while, drawing hard on his cigaret. There was a tingle along his spine. Wanderers from the stars, a million-year-old civilization embracing the whole Milky Way! For him actually to see the high ones, maybe even talk to them . . . it would be something to tell his grandchildren about if he ever had any.

He waited, though, till the outer edge of the throng was on him, then pushed with skill and ruthlessness. It took a few sweaty minutes to reach the barrier.

An invisible force-field, holding off New York's myriads—

wise precaution. You could be trampled to death by the best-intentioned mob.

There were seven crewmen from the Galactic ship. They were tall, powerful, as handsome as expected: a mixed breed, with dark hair and full lips and thin aristocratic noses. In a million years you'd expect all the human races to blend into one. They wore shimmering blue tunics and buskins, webby metallic belts in which starlike points of light glittered—and jewelry! My God, they must have bought all the gaudiest junk jewelry Macy's had to offer, and hung it on muscular necks and thick wrists. Mink and ermine burdened their shoulders, a young fortune in fur. One of them was carefully counting the money he had left, enough to choke an elephant. The others beamed affably into Earth's milling folk.

Joe Husting hunched his narrow frame against the pressure that was about to flatten him on the force screen. He licked suddenly dry lips, and his heart hammered. Was it possible—could it really happen that *he*, insignificant he, might speak to the gods from the stars?

Elsewhere in the huge building, politicians, specialists, and vips buzzed like angry bees. They should have been conferring with their opposite numbers from the Galactic mission—clearly, the sole proper way to meet the unprecedented is to set up committees and spend six months deciding on an agenda. But the Secretary-General of the United Nations owned certain prerogatives, and this time he had used them. A private face-to-face conference with Captain Hurdgo could accomplish more in half an hour than the councils of the world in a year.

He leaned forward and offered a box of cigars. "I don't know if I should," he added. "Perhaps tobacco doesn't suit your metabolism?"

"My what?" asked the visitor pleasantly. He was a big man, running a little to fat, with distinguished gray at the temples. It was not so odd that the Galactics should shave their chins and cut their hair in the manner of civilized Earth. That was the most convenient style.

"I mean, we smoke this weed, but it may poison you," said Larson. "After all, you're from another planet."

"Oh, that's OK," replied Hurdgo. "Same plants grow on every Earth-like planet, just like the same people and animals. Not much difference. Thanks." He took a cigar and rolled it between his fingers. "Smells nice."

"To me, that is the most astonishing thing about it all. I never expected evolution to work identically throughout the universe. *Why?*"

"Well, it just does." Captain Hurdo bit the end off his cigar and spat it out onto the carpet. "Not on different-type planets from this, of course, but on Earth-type it's all the same."

"But why? I mean, what process—it can't be coincidence!"

Hurdgo shrugged. "I don't know. I'm just a practical spaceman. Never worried about it." He put the cigar in his mouth and touched the bezel of an ornate finger ring to it. Smoke followed the brief, intense spark.

"That's a . . . a most ingenious development," said Larson. Humility, yes, there was the line for a simple Earthman to take. Earth had come late into the cosmos and might as well admit the fact.

"A what?"

"Your ring. That lighter."

"Oh, that. Yep. Little atomic-energy gizmo inside." Hurdgo waved a magnanimous hand. "We'll send some people to show you how to make our stuff. Lend you machinery till you can start your own factories. We'll bring you up to date."

"It—you're incredibly generous," said Larson, happy and incredulous.

"Not much trouble to us, and we can trade with you once you're all set up. The more planets, the better for us."

"But . . . excuse me, sir, but I bear a heavy responsibility. We have to know the legal requirements for membership in the Galactic Federation. We don't know anything about your laws, your customs, your—"

"Nothing much to tell," said Hurdgo. "Every planet can pretty well take care of itself. How the hell you think we could police fifty million Earth-type planets? If you got a gripe, you can take it to the, uh, I dunno what the word would be in English. A board of experts with a computer that handles these things. They'll charge you for the service—

no Galactic taxes, you just pay for what you get, and out of the profits they finance free services like this mission of mine."

"I see," nodded Larson. "A Coordinating Council."

"Yeh, I guess that's it."

The Secretary-General shook his head in bewilderment. He had sometimes wondered what civilization would come to be, a million years hence. Now he knew, and it staggered him. An ultimate simplicity, superman disdaining the whole cumbersome apparatus of interstellar government, freed of all restraints save the superman morality, free to think his giant thoughts between the stars!

Hurdgo looked out the window to the arrogant towers of New York. "Biggest city I ever saw," he remarked, "and I seen a lot of planets. I don't see how you run it. Must be complicated."

"It is, sir." Larson smiled wryly. Of course the Galactics would long ago have passed the stage of needing such a human ant hill. They would have forgotten the skills required to govern one, just as Larson's people had forgotten how to chip flint.

"Well, let's get down to business." Hurdgo sucked on his cigar and smacked his lips. "Here's how it works. We found out a big while back that we can't go letting any new planet bust its way into space with no warning to anybody. Too much danger. So we set up detectors all over the Galaxy. When they spot the, uh, what-you-call-'ems—vibrations, yes, that's it, vibrations—the vibrations of a new star drive, they alert the, uh, Coordinating Council and it sends out a ship to contact the new people and tell 'em the score."

"Ah, indeed. I suspected as much. We have just invented a faster-than-light engine . . . very primitive, of course, compared to yours. It was being tested when—"

"Uh-huh. So me and my boys are supposed to give you the once-over and see if you're all right. Don't want warlike peoples running around loose, you know. Too much danger."

"I assure you—"

"Yes, yes, pal, it's OK. You got a good strong world setup and the computer says you've stopped making war." Hurdgo frowned. "I got to admit, you got some funny habits. I don't really understand everything you do . . . you seem to think

funny, not like any other planet I ever heard of. But it's all right. Everybody to his own ways. You get a clean bill of health."

"Suppose . . ." Larson spoke very slowly. "Just suppose we had not been . . . approved—what then? Would you have reformed us?"

"Reformed? Huh? What d'you mean? We'd have sent a police ship and blown every planet in this system to smithereens. Can't have people running loose who might start a war."

Sweat formed under Larson's arms and trickled down his ribs. His mouth felt dry. *Whole planets—*

But in a million years you would learnt to think *sub specie aeternitatis.* Five billion warlike Earthlings could annihilate fifty billion peaceful Galactics before they were overcome. It was not for him to judge a superman.

"Hello, there!"

Husting had to yell to be heard above the racket. But the nearest of the spacemen looked at him and smiled.

"Hi," he said.

Incredible! He had greeted little Joe Husting as a friend. Why—? Wait a minute! Perhaps the sheer brass of it had pleased him. Perhaps no one else had dared speak first to the strangers. And when you only said, "Yes, sir," to a man, even to a Galactic, you removed him—you might actually make him feel lonely.

"Uh, like it here?" Husting cursed his tongue, that its glibness should have failed him at this moment of all moments.

"Sure, sure. Biggest city I ever seen. And *draxna,* look at what I got!" The spaceman lifted a necklace of red glass sparklers. "Won't their eyes just bug out when I get home!"

Someone shoved Husting against the barrier so the wind went from him. He gasped and tried to squirm free.

"Say, cut that out. You're hurting the poor guy." One of the Galactics touched a stud on his belt. Gently but inexorably, the field widened, pushing the crowd back . . . and somehow, somehow Husting was inside it with the seven from the stars.

"You OK, pal?" Anxious hands lifted him to his feet.

"I, yeah, sure. Sure, I'm fine!" Husting stood up and grinned at the envious faces ringing him in. "Thanks a lot."

"Glad to help you. My name's Gilgrath. Call me Gil." Strong fingers squeezed Husting's shoulder. "And this here is Bronni, and here's Col, and Jordo, and—"

"Pleased to meet you," whispered Husting inadequately. "I'm Joe."

"Say, this is all right!" said Gil enthusiastically. "I was wondering what was wrong with you folks."

"Wrong?" Husting shook a dazed head, wondering if They were peering into his mind and reading thoughts of which he himself was unaware. Vague memories came back, grave-eyed Anubis weighing the heart of a man.

"You know," said Gil. "Stand-offish, like."

"Yeh," added Bronni. "Every other new planet we been to, everybody was coming up and saying hello and buying us drinks and—"

"Parties," reminded Jordo.

"Yeh. Man, remember that wing-ding on Alphaz? Remember those girls?" Col rolled his eyes lickerishly.

"You got a lot of good-looking girls here in New York," complained Gil. "But we got orders not to offend nobody. Say, do you think one of those girls would mind if I said hello to her?"

Husting was scarcely able to think; it was the reflex of many years which now spoke for him, rapidly:

"You have us all wrong. We're just scared to talk to you. We thought maybe you didn't want to be bothered."

"And *we* thought *you*—Say!" Gil slapped his thigh and broke into a guffaw. "Now ain't that something? They don't want to bother us and we don't want to bother them!"

"I'll be *rixt!*" bellowed Col. "Well, what do you know about that?"

"Hey, in that case—" began Jordo.

"Wait, wait!" Husting waved his hands. It was still habit which guided him; his mind was only slowly getting back into gear. "Let me get this straight. You want to do the town, right?"

"We sure do," said Col. "It's mighty lonesome out in space."

"Well, look," chattered Husting, "you'll never be free of all

these crowds, reporters—" (A flashbulb, the tenth or twelfth in these few minutes, dazzled his eyes.) "You won't be able to let yourselves go while everybody knows you're Galactics."

"On Alphaz—" protested Bronni.

"This isn't Alphaz. Now I've got an idea. Listen." Seven dark heads bent down to hear an urgent whisper. "Can you get us away from here? Fly off invisible or something?"

"Sure," said Gil. "Hey, how'd you know we can do that?"

"Never mind. OK, we'll sneak off to my apartment and send out for some Earth-style clothes for you, and then—"

John Joseph O'Reilly, Cardinal Archbishop of New York, had friends in high places as well as in low. He thought it no shame to pull wires and arrange an interview with the chaplain of the spaceship. What he could learn might be of vital importance to the Faith. The priest from the stars arrived, light-screened to evade the curious, and was received in the living room.

Visible again, Thyrkna proved to be a stocky white-haired man in the usual blue-kirtled uniform. He smiled and shook hands in quite an ordinary manner. At least, thought O'Reilly, these Galactics had during a million years conquered overweening Pride.

"It is an honor to meet you," he said.

"Thanks," nodded Thyrkna. He looked around the room. "Nice place you got."

"Please be seated. May I offer you a drink?"

"Don't mind if I do."

O'Reilly set forth glasses and a bottle. In a modest way, the Cardinal was a connoisseur, and had chosen the Chambertin-Clos carefully. He tasted the ritual few drops. Whatever minor saint, if any, was concerned with these things had been gracious; the wine was superb. He filled his guest's glass and then his own.

"Welcome to Earth," he smiled.

"Thanks." The Galactic tossed his drink off at one gulp. "Aaah! That goes good."

The Cardinal winced, but poured again. You couldn't expect another civilization to have the same tastes. Chinese liked aged eggs while despising cheese. . . .

He sat down and crossed his legs. "I'm not sure what title to use," he said diffidently.

"Title? What's that?"

"I mean, what does your flock call you?"

"My *flock*? Oh, you mean the boys on board? Plain Thyrkna. That's good enough for me." The visitor finished his second glass and belched. Well, so would a cultivated Eskimo.

"I understand there was some difficulty in conveying my request," said O'Reilly. "Apparently you did not know what our word *chaplain* means."

"We don't know every word in your lingo," admitted Thyrkna. "It works like this. When we come in toward a new planet, we pick up its radio, see?"

"Oh, yes. Such of it as gets through the ionosphere."

Thyrkna blinked. "Huh? I don't know all the *de*-tails. You'll have to talk to one of our tech . . . technicians. Anyway, we got a machine that analyzes the different languages, figures 'em out. Does it in just a few hours, too. Then it puts us all to sleep and teaches us the languages. When we wake up, we're ready to come down and talk."

The Cardinal laughed. "Pardon me, sir. Frankly, I was wondering why the people of your incredibly high civilization should use our worst street dialects. Now I see the reason. I am afraid our programs are not on a very high level. They aim at mass taste, the lowest common denominator—and please excuse my metaphors. Naturally you— But I assure you, we aren't all that bad. We have hopes for the future. This electronic educator of yours, for instance . . . what it could do to raise the cultural level of the average man surpasses imagination."

Thyrkna looked a trifle dazed. "I never seen anybody what talks like you Earthlings. Don't you ever run out of breath?"

O'Reilly felt himself reproved. Among the Great Galactics, a silence must be as meaningful as a hundred words, and there were a million years of dignity behind them. "I'm sorry," he said.

"Oh, it's all right. I suppose a lot of our ways must look

just as funny to you." Thyrkna picked up the bottle and poured himself another glassful.

"What I asked you here for . . . there are many wonderful things you can tell me, but I would like to put you some religious questions."

"Sure, go ahead," said Thyrkna amiably.

"My Church has long speculated about this eventuality. The fact that you, too, are human, albeit more advanced than we, is a miraculous revelation of God's will. But I would like to know something about the precise form of your belief in Him."

"What do you mean?" Thyrkna sounded confused. "I'm a, uh, quartermaster. It's part of my job to kill the rabbits—we can't afford the space for cattle on board a ship. I feed the gods, that's all."

"The *gods!*" The Cardinal's glass crashed on the floor.

"By the way, what's the names of your top gods?" inquired Thyrkna. "Be a good idea to kill them a cow or two, as long as we're here on their planet. Don't wanna take chances on bad luck."

"But . . . you . . . *heathen—*"

Thyrkna looked at the clock. "Say, do you have TV?" he asked. "It's almost time for *John's Other Life.* You got some real good TV on this planet."

By the dawn's early light, Joe Husting opened a bleary eye and wished he hadn't. The apartment was a mess. What happened, anyway?"

Oh, yeah . . . those girls they picked up . . . but had they really emptied all those bottles lying on the floor?

He groaned and hung onto his head lest it split open. *Why* had he mixed scotch and stout?

Thunder lanced through his eardrums. He turned on the sofa and saw Gil emerging from the bedroom. The spaceman was thumping his chest and booming out a song learned last night. *"Oh, roly poly—"*

"Cut it out, will you?" groaned Husting.

"Huh? Man, you've had it, ain't you?" Gil clicked his tongue sympathetically. "Here, just a minute." He took a vial from his belt. "Take a few drops of this. It'll fix you up."

Somehow Husting got it down. There was a moment of fire and pinwheels, then—

—he was whole again. It was as if he had just slept ten hours without touching alcohol for the past week.

Gil returned to the bedroom and started pummeling his companions awake. Husting sat by the window, thinking hard. That hangover cure was worth a hundred million if he could only get the exclusive rights. But no, the technical envoys would show Earth how to make it, along with star ships and invisibility screens and so on. Maybe, though, he could hit the Galactics for what they had with them, and peddle it for a hundred dollars a drop before the full-dress mission arrived.

Bronni came in, full of cheer. "Say, you're all right, Joe," he trumpeted. "Ain't had such a good time since I was on Alphaz. What's next, old pal, old pal, old pal?" A meaty hand landed stunningly between Husting's shoulderblades.

"I'll see what I can do," said the Earthman cautiously. "But I'm busy, you know. Got some big deals cooking."

"I know," said Bronni. He winked. "Smart fellow like you. How the *hell* did you talk that bouncer around? I thought sure he was gonna call the cops."

"Oh, I buttered him up and slipped him a ten-spot. Wasn't hard."

"Man!" Bronnie whistled in admiration. "I never heard anybody sling the words like you was doing."

Gil herded the others out and said he wanted breakfast. Husting led them all to the elevator and out into the street. He was rather short-spoken, having much to think about. They were in a ham-and-eggery before he said:

"You spacemen must be pretty smart. Smarter than average, right?"

"Right," said Jordo. He winked at the approaching waitress.

"Lotta things a spaceman's got to know," said Col. "The ships do just about run themselves, but still, you can't let just any knucklehead into the crew."

"I see," murmured Husting. "I thought so."

A college education helps the understanding, especially when one is not too blinkered by preconceptions.

Consider one example: Sir Isaac Newton discovered (*a*) the three laws of motion, (*b*) the law of gravitation, (*c*) the differential calculus, (*d*) the elements of spectroscopy, (*e*) a good deal about acoustics, and (*f*) miscellaneous, besides finding time to serve in half a dozen official and honorary positions. A single man! And for a genius, he was not too exceptional; most gifted Earthmen have contributed to several fields.

And yet . . . such supreme intellect is not necessary. The most fundamental advances, fire- and tool-making, language and clothing and social organization, were made by apish dim-bulbs. It simply took a long time between discoveries.

Given a million years, much can happen. Newton founded modern physics in one lifespan. A hundred less talented men, over a thousand-year period, could slowly and painfully have accomplished the same thing.

The IQ of Earth humanity averages about 100. Our highest geniuses may have rated 200; our lowest morons, as stupid as possible without needing institutional care, may go down to 60. It is only some freak of mutation which has made the Earthman so intelligent; he never actually *needed* all that brain.

Now if the Galactic average was around IQ 75, with their very brightest boys going up to, say, 150—

The waitress yipped and jumped into the air. Bronni grinned shamelessly as she turned to confront him.

Joe Husting pacified her. After breakfast he took the Galactic emissaries out and sold them the Brooklyn Bridge.

KIT REED

F&SF prides itself on the quality of its discoveries. Of the authors in this volume, Avram Davidson, Ron Goulart, and Zenna Henderson all published their first fiction in F&SF, as did such stars of earlier series as Mildred Clingerman, Richard Matheson, and Chad Oliver. But accustomed though I am to noteworthy debutants, I'm still unusually impressed by young Kit Reed of New Haven. We've bought and published a number of her stories during the past year; but what

sticks in my memory is the extraordinary authority of this, her very first—a memorably uneasy story of a strange cultural enclave just off Highway 301.

THE WAIT

PENETRATING a windshield blotched with decalcomanias of every tourist attraction from Luray Caverns to Silver Springs, Miriam read the road sign.

"It's Babylon, Georgia, Momma. Can't we stop?"

"Sure, sweetie. Anything you want to do." The little, round, brindle woman took off her sunglasses. "After all, it's your trip."

"I know, Momma, I know. All I want is a popsicle, not the Grand Tour."

"Don't be fresh."

They were on their way home again, after Miriam's graduation trip through the South. (Momma had planned it for years, and had taken two months off, right in the middle of the summer, too, and they'd left right after high school commencement ceremonies. "Mr. Margulies said I could have the whole summer, because I've been with him and Mr. Kent for so long," she had said. "Isn't it wonderful to be going somewhere together, dear?" Miriam had sighed, thinking of her crowd meeting in drugstores and in movies and eating melted ice cream in the park all through the good, hot summer. "Yes," she'd said.)

Today they'd gotten off 301, somehow, and had driven dusty Georgia miles without seeing another car or another person, except for a Negro driving a tractor down the softening asphalt road, and two kids walking into a seemingly deserted country store. Now they drove slowly into a town, empty because it was two o'clock and the sun was shimmering in the streets. They *had* to stop, Miriam knew, on the pretext of wanting something cold to drink. They had to reassure themselves that there were other people in the town, in Georgia, in the world.

In the sleeping square, a man lay. He raised himself on his elbows when he saw the car, and beckoned to Miriam, grinning.

"Momma, see *that* place? Would you mind if I worked in a place like *that*?" They drove past the drugstore, a chrome palace with big front windows.

"Oh, Miriam, don't start that again. How many times do I have to tell you, I don't *want* you working in a drugstore when we get back." Her mother made a pass at a parking place, drove once again around the square. "What do you think I sent you to high school for? I want you to go to Katie Gibbs this summer, and get a good job in the fall. What kind of boyfriends do you think you can meet jerking sodas? You know, I don't want you to work for the rest of your life. All you have to do is get a good job, and you'll meet some nice boy, maybe from your office, and get married, and never have to work again." She parked the car and got out, fanning herself. They stood under the trees, arguing.

"Momma, even if I *did* want to meet your nice people, I wouldn't have a thing to wear." The girl settled into the groove of the old argument. "I want some pretty clothes and I want to get a car. I know a place where you only have to pay forty dollars a month. I'll be getting thirty-five a week at the drugstore—"

"And spending it all on yourself, I suppose. How many times do I have to explain, nice people don't work in places like that. Here I've supported you, fed you, dressed you, ever since your father died, and now, when I want you to have a *nice* future, you want to throw it out of the window for a couple of fancy dresses." Her lips quivered. "Here I am practically dead on my feet, giving you a nice trip, and a chance to learn typing and shorthand and have a nice future—"

"Oh, Momma." The girl kicked at the sidewalk and sighed. She said the thing that would stop the argument. "I'm sorry. I'll like it, I guess, when I get started."

Round, soft, jiggling and determined, her mother moved ahead of her, trotting in too-high heels, skirting the square. "The main thing, sweetie, is to be a *good* girl. If boys see you behind a soda fountain, they're liable to get the wrong idea. They may think they can get away with something, and try to take advantage. . . ."

In the square across the street, lying on a pallet in the sun, a young boy watched them. He called out.

". . . Don't pay any attention to him," the mother said. ". . . and if boys know you're a *good* girl, one day you'll meet one who will want to marry you. Maybe a big businessman, or a banker, if you have a good steno job. But if he thinks he can take advantage," her eyes were suddenly crafty, "he'll never marry you. You just pay attention. Don't ever let boys get away with anything. Like when you're on a date, do you ever—"

"Oh, Momma," Miriam cried, insulted.

"I'm sorry, sweetie, but I do so want you to be a *good* girl. Are you listening to me, Miriam?"

"Momma, that lady seems to be calling me. That one lying over there in the park. What do you suppose she wants?"

"I don't know. Well, don't just stand there. She looks like a *nice* woman. Go over and see if you can help her. Guess she's sunbathing, but it *does* look funny, almost like she's in bed. Ask her, Mirry. Go *on!*"

"Will you move me into the shade?" The woman, obviously one of the leading matrons of the town, was lying on a thin mattress. The shadow of the tree she was under had shifted with the sun, leaving her in the heat.

Awkwardly, Miriam tugged at the ends of the thin mattress, got it into the shade.

"And my water and medicine bottle too, please?"

"Yes ma'am. Is there anything the matter, ma'am?"

"Well." The woman ticked the familiar recital off on her fingers: "It started with cramps and—you know—lady-trouble. Thing is, now my head burns all the time and I've got a pain in my left side, not burning, you know, but just sort of tingling."

"Oh, that's too bad."

"Well, has your mother there ever had that kind of trouble? What did the doctor prescribe? What would *you* do for my kind of trouble? Do you know anybody who's had anything like it? That pain, it starts up around my ribs, and goes down, sort of zig-zag . . ."

Miriam bolted.

"Momma, I've changed my mind. I don't want a popsicle. Let's get out of here, please. Momma?"

"If you don't mind, sweetie, I want a coke." Her mother dropped on a bench. "I don't feel so good. My head . . ."

They went into the drugstore. Behind the chrome and plate glass, it was like every drugstore they'd seen in every small town along the east coast, cool and dim and a little dingy in the back. They sat at one of the small, round wooden tables, and a dispirited waitress brought them their order.

"What did Stanny and Bernice say when you told them you were going on a big tour?" Miriam's mother slupped at her coke, breathing hard.

"Oh, they thought it was all right."

"Well, I certainly hope you tell them all about it when we get back. It's not every young girl gets a chance to see all the historical monuments. I bet Bernice has never been to Manassas."

"I guess not, Momma."

"I guess Stanny and that Mrs. Fyle will be pretty impressed when you get back and tell 'em where all we've been. I bet that Mrs. Fyle could never get Toby to go anywhere with her. Of course, they've never been as close as we've been."

"I guess not, Momma." The girl sucked and sucked at the bottom half of her popsicle, to keep it from dripping on her dress.

In the back of the store, a young woman in dirty white shorts held onto her little son's hand and talked to the waitress. The baby, about two, sat on the floor in gray, dusty diapers.

"Your birthday's coming pretty soon, isn't it?" She dropped the baby's hand.

"Yeah. Oh, you ought to see my white dress. Golly, Anne, hope I won't have to Wait too long. Anne, what was it like?"

The young woman looked away from her, with the veiled face of the married, who do not talk about such things.

"Myla went last week, and she only had to stay for a couple of days. Don't tell anybody, because of course she's

going to marry Harry next week, but she wishes she could see Him again. . . ."

The young woman moved a foot, accidentally hit the baby. He snuffled and she helped him onto her lap, gurgling at him. In the front of the store, Miriam heard the baby and jumped. "Momma, come *on*. We'll never get to Richmond by night. We've already lost our way twice!" Her mother, dabbling her straws in the ice at the bottom of her paper cup, roused herself. They dropped two nickels on the counter and left.

They skirted the square again, ignoring the three people who lay on the grass motioning and calling to them with a sudden urgency. Miriam got into the car.

"Momma, come *on!* Momma!" Her mother was still standing at the door by the driver's seat, hanging onto the handle. Miriam slid across the front seat to open the door for her. She gave the handle an impatient twist and then started as she saw her mother's upper body and face slip past the window in a slow fall to the pavement. "Oh, I *knew* we never should have come!" It was an agonized, vexed groan. Red-faced and furious, she got out of the car, ran around to help her mother.

On their pallets in the park, the sick people perked up. Men and women were coming from everywhere. Cars pulled up and stopped and more people came. Kneeling on the pavement, Miriam managed to tug her mother into a prone position. She fanned her, and talked to her, and when she saw she wasn't going to wake up or move, she looked at the faces above her in sudden terror.

"Oh, please help me. We're alone here. She'll be all right, I think, once we get her inside. She's never fainted before. Please, someone get a doctor." The faces looked interested, but nobody moved. Almost crying, Miriam said, "Oh, no, never mind. Just help me get her to the car. If she isn't all right in a few miles, I'll take her to a doctor." Then, frantically, "I just want to get out of here!"

"Why, honey, you don't need to do that. Don't you worry." A shambling, balding, pleasant man in his forties knelt beside her and put his hand on her shoulder. "We'll

have her diagnosed and started on a cure in no time. Can you tell me what's been her trouble?"

"Not so far, Doctor."

"I'm not a doctor, honey."

"Not so far," she said dazedly, "except she's been awfully hot." (Two women in the background nodded at each other knowingly.) "I thought it was the weather, but I guess it's fever." (The crowd was waiting.) "And she has an open place on her foot—got it while we were sight-seeing in Tallahassee."

"Well, honey, maybe we'd better look at it." The shoe came off and when it did, the men and women moved even closer, clucking and whispering about the wet, raw sore.

"If we could just get back to Queens," Miriam said. "If we could just get home, I know everything would be all right."

"Why, we'll have her diagnosed before you know it." The shambling man got up from his knees. "Anybody here had anything like this recently?" The men and women conferred in whispers.

"Well," one man said, "Harry Parkins' daughter had a fever like that; turned out to be pneumonia, but she never had nothin' like that on her foot. I reckon she ought to have antibiotics for that fever."

"Why, I had somethin' like that on my arm." A woman amputee was talking. "Wouldn't go away and wouldn't go away. Said I woulda died, if they hadn't of done this." She waved the stump.

"We don't want to do anything like that yet. Might not even be the same thing," the bald man said. "Anybody else?"

"Might be tetanus."

"Could be typhoid, but I don't think so."

"Bet it's some sort of staflococcus infection."

"Well," the bald man said, "since we don't seem to be able to prescribe just now, guess we'd better put her on the square. Call your friends when you get home tonight, folks, and see if any of them know about it; if not, we'll just have to depend on tourists."

"All right, Herman."

"B'by, Herman."

"See ya, Herman."

"G'by."

The mother, who had come to during the dialogue and listened with terrified fascination, gulped a potion and a glass of water the druggist had brought from across the street. From the furniture store came the messenger boy with a thin mattress. Someone else brought a couple of sheets, and the remainder of the crowd carried her into the square and put her down not far from the woman who had the lady-trouble.

When Miriam last saw her mother, she was talking drowsily to the woman, almost ready to let the drug take her completely.

Frightened but glad to be away from the smell of sickness, Miriam followed Herman Clark down a side street. "You can come home with me, honey," he said. "I've got a daughter just about your age, and you'll be well taken care of until that mother of yours gets well." Miriam smiled, reassured, used to following her elders. "Guess you're wondering about our little system," Clark said, hustling her into his car. "What with specialization and all, doctors got so they were knowin' so little, askin' so much, chargin' so much. Here in Babylon, we found we don't really need 'em. Practically everybody in this town has been sick one way or another, and what with the way women like to talk about their operations, we've learned a lot about treatment. We don't need doctors any more. We just benefit by other people's experience."

"Experience?" None of this was real, Miriam was sure, but Clark had the authoritative air of a long-time parent, and she knew parents were always right.

"Why, yes. If you had chicken pox, and were out where everybody in town could see you, pretty soon somebody'd come along who had had it. They'd tell you what you had, and tell you what they did to get rid of it. Wouldn't even have to pay a doctor to write the prescription. Why, I used Silas Lapham's old nerve tonic on my wife when she had her bad spell. She's fine now; didn't cost us a cent except for the tonic. This way, if you're sick, we put you in the square, and you stay there until somebody happens by who's had your symptoms; then you just try his cure. Usually works fine. If not, somebody else'll be by. Course, we can't let any

of the sick folks leave the square until they're well; don't want anybody else catchin' it."

"How long will it take?"

"Well, we'll try some of the stuff Maysie Campbell used—and Gilyard Pinckney's penicillin prescription. If that doesn't work, we may have to wait till a tourist happens through."

"But what makes the tourists ask and suggest?"

"Have to. It's the law. You come on home with me, honey, and we'll try to get your mother well."

Miriam met Clark's wife and Clark's family. For the first week, she wouldn't unpack her suitcases. She was sure they'd be leaving soon, if she could just hold out. They tried Asa Whitleaf's tonic on her mother, and doctored her foot with the salve Harmon Johnson gave his youngest when she had boils. They gave her Gilyard Pinckney's penicillin prescription.

"She doesn't seem much better," Miriam said to Clark one day. "Maybe if I could get her to Richmond or Atlanta to the hospital—"

"We couldn't let her out of Babylon until she's well, honey. Might carry it to other cities. Besides, if we cure her, she won't send county health nurses back, trying to change our methods. And it might be bad for her to travel. You'll get to like it here, hon."

That night Miriam unpacked. Monday she got a job clerking in the dime store.

"You're the new one, huh?" The girl behind the jewelry counter moved over to her, friendly, interested. "You Waited yet? No, I guess not. You look too young yet."

"No, I've never waited on people. This is my first job," Miriam said confidentially.

"I didn't mean *that* kind of wait," the girl said with some scorn. Then, seemingly irrelevantly, "You're from a pretty big town, I hear. Probably already laid with boys and everything. Won't have to Wait."

"What do you mean? I never have. Never! I'm a *good* girl!" Almost sobbing, Miriam ran back to the manager's office. She was put in the candy department, several counters away. That night she stayed up late with a road map and a flashlight, figuring, figuring.

The next day, the NO VISITORS sign was taken down from the tree in the park, and Miriam went to see her mother.

"I feel terrible, sweetie, you having to work in the dime store while I'm out here under these nice trees. Now you just remember all I told you, and don't let any of these town boys get fresh with you. Just because you have to work in the dime store doesn't mean you aren't a nice girl, and as soon as I can, I'm going to get you out of that job. Oh, I *wish* I was up and around."

"Poor Momma." Miriam smoothed the sheets and put a pile of movie magazines down by her mother's pillow. "How can you stand lying out here all day?"

"It isn't so bad, really. And y'know, that Whitleaf woman seems to know a little something about my trouble. I haven't really felt right since you were nine."

"Momma, I think we ought to get out of here. Things aren't right—"

"People certainly are being nice. Why, two of the ladies brought me some broth this morning."

Miriam felt like grabbing her mother and shaking her until she was willing to pick up her bedclothes and run with her. She kissed her goodby and went back to the dime store. Over their lunch, two of the counter girls were talking.

"I go next week. I want to marry Harry Phibbs soon, so I sure hope I won't be there too long. Sometimes it's three years."

"Oh, you're pretty, Donna. You won't have too long to Wait."

"I'm kind of scared. Wonder what it'll be like."

"Yeah, wonder what it's like. I envy you."

Chilled for some reason, Miriam hurried past them to her counter, and began carefully rearranging marshmallow candies in the counter display.

That night, she walked to the edge of the town, along the road she and her mother had come in on. Ahead in the road, she saw two gaunt men standing, just where the dusty sign marked the city limits. She was afraid to go near them, and almost ran back to town, frightened, thinking. She loitered outside the bus station for some time, wondering how much a ticket out of the place would cost her. But of course she

couldn't desert her mother. She was investigating the family car, still parked by the square, when Tommy Clark came up to her. "Time to go home, isn't it?" he asked, and they walked together back to his father's house.

"Momma, did you know it's almost impossible to get out of this town?" Miriam was at her mother's side, a week later.

"Don't get upset, sweetie. I know it's tough on you, having to work in the dime store, but that won't be forever. Why don't you look around for a little nicer job, dear?"

"Momma, I don't *mean* that. I want to go home! Look, I've got an idea. I'll get the car keys from your bag here, and tonight, just before they move you all into the courthouse to sleep, we'll run for the car and get away."

"Dear," her mother sighed gently. "You know I can't move."

"Oh, Mother, can't you *try*?"

"When I'm a little stronger, dear, then maybe we'll try. The Pinckney woman is coming tomorrow with her daughter's herb tea. That should pep me up a lot. Listen, why don't you arrange to be down here? She has the best-looking son!—Miriam, you come right back here and kiss me goodby."

Tommy Clark had started meeting Miriam for lunch. They'd taken in one movie together, walking home hand in hand in an incredible pink dusk. On the second date, Tommy had tried to kiss her, but she'd said, "Oh, Tommy, I don't know the Babylon rules," because she knew it wasn't good to kiss a boy she didn't know very well. Handing Tommy half her peanut-butter sandwich, Miriam said, "Can we go to the ball game tonight? The American Legion's playing."

"Not tonight, kid. It's Margy's turn to go."

"What do you mean, turn to go?"

"Oh." Tommy blushed. "You know."

That afternoon, right after she finished work, Tommy picked her up and they went to the party given for Herman Clark's oldest daughter. Radiant, Margy was dressed in white. It was her eighteenth birthday. At the end of the party, just when it began to get dark, Margy and her mother left the house. "I'll bring some stuff out in the truck tomorrow morning, honey," Clark said. "Take care of yourself." "Goodby." "G'by." "Happy Waitin', Margy!"

"Tommy, where is Margy going?" Something about the party and something in Margy's eyes frightened Miriam.

"Oh, you know. Where they all go. But don't worry." Tommy took her hand. "She'll be back soon. She's pretty."

In the park the next day, Miriam whispered in her mother's ear, "Momma, it's been almost a month now. Please, please, we *have* to go! Won't you please try to go with me?" She knelt next to her, talking urgently. "The car's been taken. I went back to check it over last night, and it was gone. But I sort of think, if we could get out on the highway, we could get a ride. Momma, we've got to get out of here." Her mother sighed a little, and stretched. "You always said you never wanted me to be a bad girl, didn't you, Momma?"

The older woman's eyes narrowed.

"You aren't letting that Clark boy take advantage—"

"No, Momma. No. That's not it at all. I just think I've heard something horrible. I don't even want to talk about it. It's some sort of law. Oh, Momma, please. I'm scared."

"Now, sweetie, you know there's nothing to worry about. Pour me a little water, won't you, dear? You know, I think they're going to cure me yet. Helva Smythe and Margaret Box have been coming in to see me every day, and they've brought some penicillin pills in hot milk that I think are really doing me some good."

"But Momma, I'm scared."

"Now, dear, I've seen you going past with that nice Clark boy. The Clarks are a good family, and you're lucky to be staying with them. You just play your cards right, and remember: be a good girl."

"Momma, we've got to get out."

"You just calm down, young lady. Now go back and be nice to that Tommy Clark. Helva Smythe says he's going to own his daddy's business some day. You might bring him out here to see me tomorrow."

"Momma!"

"I've decided. They're making me better, and we're going to stay here until I'm well. People may not pay you much attention in a big city, but you're really somebody in a small town." She smoothed her blankets complacently, and settled down to sleep.

That night, Miriam sat with Tommy Clark in his front porch swing. They'd started talking a lot to each other, about everything. ". . . so I guess I'll have to go into the business," Tommy was saying. "I'd kind of like to go to Wesleyan or Clemson or something, but Dad says I'll be better off right here, in business with him. Why won't they ever let us do what we want to do?"

"I don't know, Tommy. Mine wants me to go to Katharine Gibbs—that's a secretarial school in New York—and get a typing job this fall."

"You won't like that much, will you?"

"Uh-uh. Except now, I'm kind of anxious to get back up there—you know, get out of this town."

"You don't like it here?" Tommy's face clouded. "You don't like me?"

"Oh, Tommy, I like you fine. But I'm pretty grown up now, and I'd like to get back to New York and start in on a job. Why, I got out of high school last month."

"No kidding. You only look about fifteen."

"Aw, I do not. I'll be eighteen next week—Oh, I didn't want to tell you. I don't want your folks to have to do anything about my birthday. Promise you won't tell them."

"You'll be eighteen, huh. Ready for the Wait yourself. Boy, I sure wish *I* didn't know you!"

"Tommy! What do you mean? Don't you like me?"

"That's just the point. I *do* like you. A lot. If I were a stranger, I could break your Wait."

"Wait? What kind of wait?"

"Oh"—he blushed—"you know."

A week later, after a frustrating visit with her mother in the park, Miriam came home to the Clarks' and dragged herself up to her room. Even her mother had forgotten her birthday. She wanted to fling herself on her pillow and sob until supper. She dropped on the bed, got up uneasily. A white, filmy, full-skirted dress hung on the closet door. She was frightened. Herman Clark and his wife bustled into the room, wishing her happy birthday. "The dress is for you." "You shouldn't have," she cried. Clark's wife shooed him out, and helped Miriam dress. She started downstairs, with the

yards of white chiffon whispering and billowing about her ankles.

Nobody else at her birthday party was particularly dressed up. Some of the older women in the neighborhood watched Tommy help Miriam cut the cake, moist-eyed. "She hardly seems old enough—" "Doubt if she'll have long to Wait." "Pretty little thing, wonder if Tommy likes her?" "Bet Herman Clark's son wished *he* didn't know her," they said. Uneasily, Miriam talked to them all, tried to laugh, choked down a little ice cream and cake.

"G'by, kid," Tommy said, and squeezed her hand. It was just beginning to get dark out.

"Where are you going, Tommy?"

"Nowhere, silly. I'll see you in a couple of weeks. May want to talk to you about something, if things turn out."

The men had slipped, one by one, from the room. Shadows were getting longer, but nobody in the birthday-party room had thought to turn on the lights. The women gathered around Miriam. Mrs. Clark, eyes shining, came close to her. "And here's the best birthday present of all," she said, holding out a big ball of brilliant blue string. Miriam looked at her, not understanding. She tried to stammer a thank-you. "Now, dear, come with me," Clark's wife said. Frightened, Miriam tried to bolt from the room. Clark's wife and Helva Smythe caught her by the arms, and gently led her out of the house, down the gray street. "I'm going to see if we can get you staked out near Margy," she said. They started off into the August twilight.

When they came to the field, Miriam first thought the women were still busy at a late harvest, but she saw that the maidens, scores of them, were just sitting on little boxes at intervals in the seemingly endless field. There were people in the bushes at the field's edge— Miriam saw them. Every one in a while one of the men would start off, following one of the brilliantly colored strings toward the woman who sat at the end of it, in a white dress, waiting. Frightened, Miriam turned to Mrs. Clark. "Why am I here? Why? Mrs. Clark, explain!"

"Poor child's a little nervous. I guess we all were,

when it happened to us," Clark's wife said to Helva Smythe. "It's all right, dear, you just stand here at the edge and watch for a little while, until you get used to the idea. Remember, the man must be a stranger. We'll be out with the truck with food for you and Margy during visitors' time Sunday. That's right. And when you go out there, try to stake out near Margy. It'll make the Wait nicer for you."

"*What* wait?"

"The Wait of the Virgins, dear. Goodby."

Dazed, Miriam stood at the edge of the great, domed field, watching the little world criss-crossed by hundreds of colored cords. She moved a little closer, trying to hide her cord under her skirts, trying not to look like one of them. Two men started toward her, one handsome, one unshaven and hideous, but when they saw she had not yet entered the field, they dropped back, waiting. Sitting near her, she saw one of the dime-store clerks, who had quit her job two weeks back and had suddenly disappeared. She was fidgeting nervously, casting hot eyes at a young man ranging the edge of the field. As Miriam watched, the young man strode up her cord, without speaking, threw money into her lap. Smiling, the dime-store girl stood up, and the two went off into the bushes. The girl nearest Miriam, a harelip with incredibly ugly skin, looked up from the half-finished sweater she was knitting.

"Well, there goes another one," she said to Miriam. "Pretty ones always go first. I reckon one day there won't be any pretty ones here, and then I'll go." She shook out her yarn. "This is my fortieth sweater." Not understanding, Miriam shrank away from the ugly girl. "I'd even be glad for old Fats there," she was saying. She pointed to a lewd-eyed old man hovering near. "Trouble is, even old Fats goes for the pretty ones. Heh! You ought to see it, when he goes up to one of them high-school queens. Heh! Law says they can't say no!" Choking with curiosity, stiff, trembling, Miriam edged up to the girl.

"Where . . . where do they go?"

The harelip looked at her suspiciously. Her white dress, tattered and white no longer, stank. "Why, you really don't

know, do you?" She pointed to a place near them, where the bushes swayed. "To lay with them. It's the law."

"Momma! Mommamommamomma!" With her dress whipping at her legs, Miriam ran into the square. It was just before the time when the sick were taken to sleep in the hall of the courthouse.

"Why, dear, how pretty you look!" the mother said. Then, archly, "They always say, wear white when you want a man to propose."

"Momma, we've got to get out of here." Miriam was crying for breath.

"I thought we went all over that."

"Momma, you always said you wanted me to be a good girl. Not ever to let any man take advan—"

"Why, dear, of course I did."

"Momma, don't you see! You've got to help me—we've got to get out of here, or somebody *I don't even know* . . . Oh, Momma, please. I'll help you walk. I saw you practicing the other day, with Mrs. Pinckney helping you."

"Now, dear, you just sit down here and explain to me. Be calm."

"Momma, *listen!* There's something every girl here has to do when she's eighteen. You know how they don't use doctors here, for anything?" Embarrassed, she hesitated. "Well, you remember when Violet got married, and she went to Dr. Dix for a checkup?"

"Yes, dear—now calm down, and tell Momma."

"Well, it's sort of a *checkup,* don't you see, only it's like graduating from high school too, and it's how they . . . see whether you're any good."

"What on earth are you trying to tell me?"

"Momma, you have to go to this field, and sit there, and sit there until a man throws money in your lap. *Then you have to go into the bushes and lie with a stranger!*" Hysterical, Miriam got to her feet, started tugging at the mattress.

"You just calm down. Calm down!"

"But, Mother, I want to do like you told me. I want to be good!"

Vaguely, her mother started talking. "You said you were dating that nice Clark boy? His father is a real-estate salesman. Good business, dear. Just think, you might not even have to work—"

"Oh, Momma!"

"And when I get well, I could come live with you. They're very good to me here—it's the first time I've found people who really *cared* what was wrong with me. And if you were married to that nice, solid boy, who seems to have such a *good* job with his father, why we could have a lovely house together, the three of us."

"Momma, we've got to get *out* of here. I can't do it. I just *can't.*" The girl had thrown herself on the grass again.

Furious, her mother lashed out at her. "Miriam. Miriam Elise Holland. I've fed you and dressed you and paid for you and taken care of you ever since your father died. And you've always been selfish, selfish, selfish. Can't you ever do anything for me? First I want you to go to secretarial school, to get a nice opening, and meet nice people, and you don't want to do that. Then you get a chance to settle in a good town, with a *nice* family, but you don't even want that. You only think about yourself. Here I have a chance to get well at last, and settle down in a really nice town, where good families live, and see you married to the right kind of boy." Rising on her elbows, she glared at the girl. "Can't you ever do anything for *me*?"

"Momma, Momma, you don't *understand!*"

"I've known about the Wait since the first week we came here." The woman leaned back on her pillow. "Now pour me a glass of water and go back and do whatever Mrs. Clark tells you."

"*Mother!*"

Sobbing, stumbling, Miriam ran out of the square. First she started toward the edge of town, running. She got to the edge of the highway, where the road signs were, and saw the two shabby, shambling men, apparently in quiet evening conversation by the street post. She doubled back and started across a neatly plowed field. Behind her, she saw the Pinckney boys. In front of her, the Campbells and the Dodges started across the field. When she turned back toward town,

trembling, they walked past her, ignoring her, on some business of their own. It was getting dark.

She wandered the fields for most of the night. Each one was blocked by a Campbell or a Smythe or a Pinckney; the big men carried rifles and flashlights, and called out cheerfully to each other when they met, and talked about a wild fox hunt. She crept into the Clarks' place when it was just beginning to get light out, and locked herself in her room. No one in the family paid attention to her storming and crying as she paced the length and width of the room.

That night, still in the bedraggled, torn white dress, Miriam came out of the bedroom and down the stairs. She stopped in front of the hall mirror to put on lipstick and repair her hair. She tugged at the raveled sleeves of the white chiffon top. She started for the place where the virgins Wait. At the field's edge, Miriam stopped, shuddered as she saw the man called old Fats watching her. A few yards away she saw another man, young, lithe, with bright hair, waiting. She sighed as she watched one woman, with a tall, loose boy in jeans, leave the field and start for the woods.

She tied her string to a stake at the edge of the great, domed field. Threading her way among the many bright-colored strings, past waiting girls in white, she came to a stop in a likely-looking place and took her seat.

ISAAC ASIMOV

Isaac Asimov and I have a number of passions in common: We are both addicted to girls & science to gags & spoofs & specters, to gyneolatry & speculation . . . Those of you who share yet another similarly initialed enthusiasm with us will take particular delight in the following story; but even readers without such special tastes will relish a delightful departure in Osimov style and humor, and the ingenious solution of a riddle which has gone unanswered for over 80 years.

THE UP-TO-DATE SORCERER

IT ALWAYS *puzzled me that Nicholas Nitely, although a*

Justice of the Peace, was a bachelor. The atmosphere of his profession, so to speak, seemed so conducive to matrimony that surely he could scarcely avoid the gentle bond of wedlock.

When I said as much over a gin and tonic at the Club recently, he said, "Ah, but I had a narrow escape some time ago," and he sighed.

"Oh, really?"

"A fair young girl, sweet, intelligent, pure yet desperately ardent, and withal most alluring to the physical senses for even such an old fogy as myself."

I said, "How did you come to let her go?"

"I had no choice." He smiled gently at me and his smooth, ruddy complexion, his smooth gray hair, his smooth blue eyes, all combined to give him an expression of near-saintliness. He said, "You see, it was really the fault of her fiancé—"

"Ah, she was engaged to someone else."

"—and of Professor Wellington Johns, who was, although an endocrinologist, by way of being an up-to-date sorcerer. In fact, it was just that—" He sighed, sipped at his drink, and turned on me the bland and cheerful face of one who is about to change the subject.

I said firmly, "Now, then, Nitely, old man, you cannot leave it so. I want to know about your beautiful girl—the flesh that got away."

He winced at the pun (one, I must admit, of my more abominable efforts) and settled down by ordering his glass refilled. "You understand," he said, "I learned some of the details later on."

Professor Wellington Johns had a large and prominent nose, two sincere eyes and a distinct talent for making clothes appear too large for him. He said, "My dear children, love is a matter of chemistry."

His dear children, who were really students of his, and not his children at all, were named Alexander Dexter and Alice Sanger. They looked perfectly full of chemicals as they sat there holding hands. Together, their age amounted to per-

haps 45, evenly split between them, and Alexander said, fairly inevitably, *"Vive la chémie!"*

Professor Johns smiled reprovingly. "Or rather endocrinology. Hormones, after all, affect our emotions and it is not surprising that one should, specifically, stimulate that feeling we call love."

"But that's so unromantic," murmured Alice. "I'm sure I don't need any." She looked up at Alexander with a yearning glance.

"My dear," said the professor, "your blood stream was crawling with it at that moment you, as the saying is, fell in love. Its secretion had been stimulated by"—for a moment he considered his words carefully, being a highly moral man—"by some environmental factor involving your young man, and once the hormonal action had taken place, inertia carried you on. I could duplicate the effect easily."

"Why, Professor," said Alice, with gentle affection. "It would be delightful to have you try," and she squeezed Alexander's hand shyly.

"I do not mean," said the professor, coughing to hide his embarrassment, "that I would personally attempt to reproduce—or, rather, to duplicate—the conditions that created the natural secretion of the hormone. I mean, instead, that I could inject the hormone itself by hypodermic or even by oral ingestion, since it is a steroid hormone. I have, you see," and here he removed his glasses and polished them proudly, "isolated and purfied the hormone."

Alexander sat erect. "Professor! And you have said nothing?"

"I must know more about it first."

"Do you mean to say," said Alice, her lovely brown eyes shimmering with delight, "that you can make people feel the wonderful delight and heaven-surpassing tenderness of true love by means of a . . . a pill?"

The professor said, "I can indeed duplicate the emotion to which you refer in those rather cloying terms."

"Then why don't you?"

Alexander raised a protesting hand. "Now, darling, your ardor leads you astray. Our own happiness and forthcoming

nuptials make you forget certain facts of life. If a married person were, by mistake, to accept this hormone—"

Professor Johns said, with a trace of hauteur, "Let me explain right now that my hormone, or my amatogenic principle, as I call it—" (for he, in common with many practical scientiests, enjoyed a proper scorn for the rarefied niceties of classical philology).

"Call it a love-philtre, Professor," said Alice, with a melting sigh.

"My amatogenic cortical principle," said Professor Johns, sternly, "has no affect on married individuals. The hormone cannot work if inhibited by other factors, and being married is certainly a factor that inhibits love."

"Why, so I have heard," said Alexander, gravely, "but I intend to disprove that callous belief in the case of my own Alice."

"Alexander," said Alice. "My love."

The professor said, "I mean that marriage inhibits extra-marital love."

Alexander said, "Why, it has come to my ears that sometimes it does not."

Alice said, shocked, "Alexander!"

"Only in rare instances, my dear, among those who have not gone to college."

The professor said, "Marriage may not inhibit a certain paltry sexual attraction, or tendencies toward minor trifling, but true love, as Miss Sanger expressed the emotion, is something which cannot blossom when the memory of a stern wife and various unattractive children hobbles the subconscious."

"Do you mean to say," said Alexander, "that if you were to feed your love-philtre—beg pardon, your amatogenic principle—to a number of people indiscriminately, only the *un*married individuals would be affected?"

"That is right. I have experimented on certain animals which, though not going through the conscious marriage rite, do form monogamous attachments. Those with the attachments already formed are not affected."

"Then, Professor, I have a perfectly splendid idea. Tomorrow night is the night of the Senior Dance here at college.

There will be at least fifty couples present, mostly unmarried. Put your philtre in the punch."

"What? Are you mad?"

But Alice had caught fire. "Why, it's a heavenly idea, Professor. To think that all my friends will feel as I feel! Professor, you would be an angel from heaven.—But oh, Alexander, do you suppose the feelings might be a trifle uncontrolled? Some of our college chums are a little wild and if, in the heat of the discovery of love, they should, well, kiss—"

Professor Johns said, indignantly, "My dear Miss Sanger. You must not allow your imagination to become overheated. My hormone induces only those feelings which lead to marriage and not to the expression of anything that might be considered indecorous."

"I'm sorry," murmured Alice, in confusion. "I should remember, Professor, that you are the most highly moral man I know—excepting always dear Alexander—and that no scientific discovery of yours could possibly lead to immorality."

She looked so woebegone that the professor forgave her at once.

"Then you'll do it, Professor?" urged Alexander. "After all, assuming there will be a sudden urge for mass marriage afterward, I can take care of that by having Nicholas Nitely, an old and valued friend of the family, present on some pretext. He is a Justice of the Peace and can easily arrange for such things as licenses and so on."

"I could scarcely agree," said the professor, obviously weakening, "to perform an experiment without the consent of those experimented upon. It would be unethical."

"But you would be bringing only joy to them. You would be contributing to the moral atmosphere of the college. For surely, in the absence of overwhelming pressure toward marriage, it sometimes happens even in college that the pressure of continuous propinquity breeds a certain danger of—of—"

"Yes, there is that," said the professor. "Well, I shall try a dilute solution. After all, the results may advance scientific

knowledge tremendously and, as you say, it will also advance morality."

Alexander said, "And, of course, Alice and I will drink the punch, too."

Alice said, "Oh, Alexander, surely such love as ours needs no artificial aid."

"But it would not be artificial, my soul's own. According to the professor, your love began as a result of just such a hormonal effect, induced, I admit, by more customary methods."

Alice blushed rosily. "But then, my only love, why the need for the repetition?"

"To place us beyond all vicissitudes of Fate, my cherished one."

"Surely, my adored, you don't doubt my love."

"No, my heart's charmer, but—"

"*But?* Is it that you do not trust me, Alexander?"

"Of course I trust you, Alice, but—"

"*But?* Again but!" Alice rose, furious. "If you cannot trust me, sir, perhaps I had better leave—" And she did leave indeed, while the two men stared after her, stunned.

Professor Johns said, "I am afraid my hormone has, quite indirectly, been the occasion of spoiling a marriage rather than of causing one."

Alexander swallowed miserably, but his pride upheld him. "She will come back," he said, hollowly. "A love such as ours is not so easily broken."

The Senior Dance was, of course, the event of the year. The young men shone and the young ladies glittered. The music lilted and the dancing feet touched the ground only at intervals. Joy was unrestrained.

Or, rather, it was unrestrained in most cases. Alexander Dexter stood in one corner, eyes hard, expression icily bleak. Straight and handsome he might be, but no young woman approached him. He was known to belong to Alice Sanger, and under such circumstances, no college girl would dream of poaching. Yet where was Alice?

She had not come with Alexander and Alexander's pride prevented him from searching for her. From under grim

eyelids, he could only watch the circulating couples cautiously.

Professor Johns, in formal clothes that did not fit although made to measure, approached him. He said, "I will add my hormone to the punch shortly before the midnight toast. Is Mr. Nitely still here?"

"I saw him a moment ago. In his capacity as chaperon he was busily engaged in making certain that the proper distance between dancing couple was maintained. Four fingers, I believe, at the point of closest approach. Mr. Nitely was most diligently making the necessary measurements."

"Very good. Oh, I had neglected to ask: Is the punch alcoholic? Alcohol would affect the workings of the amatogenic principle adversely."

Alexander, despite his sore heart, found spirit to deny the unintended slur upon his class. "Alcoholic, Professor? This punch is made along those principles firmly adhered to by all young college students. It contains only the purest of fruit juices, refined sugar, and a certain quantity of lemon peel—enough to stimulate but not inebriate."

"Good," said the professor. "Now I have added to the hormone a sedative designed to put our experimental subjects to sleep for a short time while the hormone works. Once they awaken, the first individual each sees—that is, of course, of the opposite sex—will inspire that individual with a pure and noble ardor that can end only in marriage."

Then, since it was nearly midnight, he made his way through the happy couples, all dancing at four-fingers distance, to the punch bowl.

Alexander, depressed nearly to tears, stepped out to the balcony. In doing so, he just missed Alice, who entered the ballroom from the balcony by another door.

"Midnight," called out a happy voice. "Toast! Toast! Toast to the life ahead of us."

They crowded about the punch bowl; the little glasses were passed round.

"To the life ahead of us," they cried out and, with all the enthusiasm of young college students, downed the fiery mixture of pure fruit juices, sugar, and lemon peel, with—of course—the professor's sedated amatogenic principle.

As the fumes rose to their brains, they slowly crumpled to the floor.

Alice stood there alone, still holding her drink, eyes wet with unshed tears. "Oh, Alexander, Alexander, though you doubt, yet are you my only love. You wish me to drink and I shall drink." Then she, too, sank gracefully downward.

Nicholas Nitely had gone in search of Alexander, for whom his warm heart was concerned. He had seen him arrive without Alice and he could only assume that a lovers' quarrel had taken place. Nor did he feel any dismay at leaving the party to its own devices. These were not wild youngsters, but college boys and girls of good family and gentle upbringing. They could be trusted to the full to observe the four-finger limit, as he well knew.

He found Alexander on the balcony, staring moodily out at a star-riddled sky.

"Alexander, my boy." He put his hand on the young man's shoulder. "This is not like you. To give way so to depression. Chut, my young friend, chut."

Alexander's head bowed at the sound of the good old man's voice. "It is unmanly, I know, but I yearn for Alice. I have been cruel to her and I am justly treated now. And yet, Mr. Nitely, if you could but know—" He placed his clenched fist on his chest, next his heart. He could say no more.

Nitely said, sorrowfully, "Do you think because I am unmarried that I am unacquainted with the softer emotions? Be undeceived. Time was when I, too, knew love and heartbreak. But do not do as I did once and allow pride to prevent your reunion. Seek her out, my boy, seek her out and apologize. Do not allow yourself to become a solitary old bachelor such as I, myself.—But, tush, I am puling."

Alexander's back had straightened. "I will be guided by you, Mr. Nitely. I will seek her out."

"Then go on in. For shortly before I came out, I believe I saw her there."

Alexander's heart leaped. "Perhaps she searches for me even now. I will go— But, no. Go you first, Mr. Nitely, while

I stay behind to recover myself. I would not have her see me a prey to womanish tears."

"Of course, my boy."

Nitely stopped at the door into the ballroom in astonishment. Had a universal catasrophe struck all low? Fifty couples were lying on the floor, some heaped together most indecorously.

But before he could make up his mind to see if the nearest were dead, to sound the fire alarm, to call the police, to anything, they were rousing and struggling to their feet.

Only one still remained. A lonely girl in white, one arm outstretched gracefully beneath her fair head. It was Alice Sanger and Nitely hastened to her, oblivious to the rising clamor about him.

He sank to his knees. "Miss Sanger. My dear Miss Sanger. Are you hurt?"

She opened her beautiful eyes slowly, and said, "Mr. Nitely! I never realized you were such a vision of loveliness."

"I?" Nitely started back with horror, but she had now risen to her feet and there was a light in her eyes such as Nitely had not seen in a maiden's eyes for thirty years—and then only weakly.

-She said, "Mr. Nitely, surely you will not leave me?"

"No, no," said Nitely, confused. "If you need me, I shall stay."

"I need you. I need you with all my heart and soul. I need you as a thirsty flower needs the morning dew. I need you as Thisbe of old needed Pyramus."

Nitely, still backing away, looked about hastily, to see if anyone could be hearing this unusual declaration, but no one seemed to be paying any attention. As nearly as he could make out, the air was filled with other declarations of similar sort, some being even more forceful and direct.

His back was up against a wall, and Alice approached him so closely as to break the four-finger rule to smithereens. She broke, in fact, the no-finger rule, and at the resulting mutual pressure, a certain indefinable something seemed to thud away within Nitely.

"Miss Sanger. Please."

"Miss Sanger? Am I Miss Sanger to you?" exclaimed Alice, passionately. "Mr. Nitely! Nicholas! Make me your Alice, your own. Marry me. Marry me!"

All around there was the cry of "Marry me. Marry me!" and young men and women crowded around Nitely, for they knew well that he was a Justice of the Peace. They creid out, "Marry us, Mr. Nitely. Marry us!"

He could only cry in return, "I must get you all licenses."

They parted to let him leave on that errand of mercy. Only Alice followed him.

Nitely met Alexander at the door of the balcony and turned him back toward the open and fresh air. Professor Johns came at that moment to join them all.

Nitely said, "Alexander. Professor Johns. The most extraordinary thing has occurred—"

"Yes," said the professor, his mild face beaming with joy. "The experiment has been a success. The principle is far more effective on the human being, in fact, than on any of my experimental animals." Noting Nitely's confusion, he explained what had occurred in brief sentences.

Nitely listened and muttered, "Strange, strange. There is a certain elusive familiarity about this." He pressed his forehead with the knuckles of both hands, but it did not help.

Alexander approached Alice gently, yearning to clasp her to his strong bosom, yet knowing that no gently nurtured girl could consent to such an expression of emotion from one who had not yet been forgiven.

He said, "Alice, my lost love, if in your heart you could find—"

But she shrank from him, avoiding his arms though they were outstretched only in supplication. She said, "Alexander, I drank the punch. It was your wish."

"You needn't have. I was wrong, wrong."

"But I did, and oh, Alexander, I can never be yours."

"Never be mine? But what does this mean?"

And Alice, seizing Nitely's arm, clutched it avidly. "My soul is intertwined indissolubly with that of Mr. Nitely, of Nicholas, I mean. My passion for him—that is, my passion

for marriage with him—cannot be withstood. It racks my being."

"You are false?" cried Alexander, unbelieving.

"You are cruel to say 'false,' " said Alice, sobbing. "I cannot help it."

"No, indeed," said Professor Johns, who had been listening to this in the greatest consternation, after having made his explanation to Nitely. "She could scarcely help it. It is simply an endocrinological manifestation."

"Indeed that is so," said Nitely, who was struggling with endocrinological manifestations of his own. "There, there, my—my dear." He patted Alice's head in a most fatherly way and when she held her enticing face up toward his, swooningly, he considered whether it might not be a fatherly thing—nay, even a neighborly thing—to press those lips with his own, in pure fashion.

But Alexander, out of his heart's despair, cried, "You are false, false—false as Cressid," and rushed from the room.

And Nitely would have gone after him, but that Alice had seized him about the neck and bestowed upon his slowly melting lips a kiss that was not daughterly in the least.

It was not even neighborly.

They arrived at Nitely's small bachelor cottage with its chaste sign of JUSTICE OF THE PEACE in Old English letters, its air of melancholy peace, its neat serenity, its small stove on which the small kettle was quickly placed by Nitely's left hand (his right arm being firmly in the clutch of Alice, who, with a shrewdness beyond her years, chose that as one sure method of rendering impossible a sudden bolt through the door on his part).

Nitely's study could be seen through the open door of the dining room, its walls lined with gentle books of scholarship and joy.

Again Nitely's hand (his left hand) went to his brow. "My dear," he said to Alice, "it is amazing the way—if you would release your hold the merest trifle, my child, so that circulation might be restored—the way in which I persist in imagining that all this has taken place before."

"Surely never before, my dear Nicholas," said Alice,

bending her fair head upon his shoulder, and smiling at him with a shy tenderness that made her beauty as bewitching as moonlight upon still waters, "could there have been so wonderful a modern-day magician as our wise Professor Johns, so up-to-date a sorcerer."

"So up-to-date a—" Nitely had started so violently as to lift the fair Alice a full inch from the floor. "Why, surely that must be it. Dickens take me, if that's not it." (For on rare occasions, and under the stress of overpowering emotions, Nitely used strong language.)

"Nicholas. What is it? You frighten me, my cherubic one."

But Nitely walked rapidly into his study, and she was forced to run with him. His face was white, his lips firm, as he reached for a volume from the shelves and reverently blew the dust from it.

"Ah," he said with contrition, "how I have neglected the innocent joys of my younger days. My child, in view of this continuing incapacity of my right arm, would you be so kind as to turn the pages until I tell you to stop?"

Together they managed, in such a tableau of preconnubial bliss as is rarely seen, he holding the book with his left hand, she turning the pages slowly with her right.

"I am right!" Nitely said with sudden force. "Professor Johns, my dear fellow, do come here. This is the most amazing coincidence—a frightening example of the mysterious unfelt power that must sport with us on occasion for some hidden purpose."

Professor Johns, who had prepared his own tea and was sipping it patiently, as befitted a discreet gentleman of intellectual habit in the presence of two ardent lovers who had suddenly retired to the next room, called out, "Surely you do not wish my presence?"

"But I do, sir. I would fain consult one of your scientific attainments."

"But you are in a position—"

Alice screamed, faintly, "Professor!"

"A thousand pardons, my dear," said Professor Johns, entering. "My cobwebby old mind is filled with ridiculous fancies. It is long since I—" and he pulled mightily at his tea (which he had made strong) and was himself again at once.

"Professor," said Nitely. "This dear child referred to you as an up-to-date sorcerer and that turned my mind instantly to Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Sorcerer.*"

"What," asked Professor Johns, mildly, "are Gilbert and Sullivan?"

Nitely cast a devout glance upward, as though with the intention of gaging the direction of the inevitable thunderbolt and dodging. He said in a hoarse whisper, "Sir William Schwenck Gilbert and Sir Arthur Sullivan wrote, respectively, the words and music of the greatest musical comedies the world has ever seen. One of these is entitled *The Sorcerer.* In it, too, a philtre was used: a highly moral one which did not affect married people, but which did manage to deflect the young heroine away from her handsome young lover and into the arms of an elderly man."

"And," asked Professor Johns, "were matters allowed to remain so?"

"Well, no.—Really, my dear, the movements of your fingers in the region of the nape of my neck, while giving rise to undeniably pleasurable sensations, *do* rather distract me.—There is a reunion of the young lovers, Professor."

"Ah," said Professor Johns. "Then in view of the close resemblance of the fictional plot to real life, perhaps the solution in the play will help point the way to the reunion of Alice and Alexander. At least, I presume you do not wish to go through life with one arm permanently useless."

Alice said, "I have no wish to be reunited. I want only my own Nicholas."

"There is something," said Nitely, "to be said for that refreshing point of view, but tush—youth must be served. There *is* a solution in the play, Professor Johns, and it is for that reason that I most particularly wanted to talk to you." He smiled with a gentle benevolence. "In the play, the effects of the potion were completely neutralized by the actions of the gentleman who administered the potion in the first place: the gentleman, in other words, analogous to yourself."

"And those actions were?"

"Suicide! Simply that! In some manner unexplained by the authors, the effect of this suicide was to break the sp—"

But by now Professor Johns had recovered his equilibrium and said in the most sepulchrally forceful tone that could be imagined, "My dear sir, may I state instantly that, despite my affection for the young persons involved in this sad dilemma, I cannot under any circumstances consent to self-immolation. Such a procedure might be extremely efficacious in connection with love potions of ordinary vintage, but my amatogenic principle, I assure you, would be completely unaffected by my death."

Nitely sighed. "I feared that. As a matter of fact, between ourselves, it was a very poor ending for the play, perhaps the poorest in the canon," and he looked up briefly in mute apology to the spirit of William S. Gilbert. "It was pulled out of a hat. It had not been properly foreshadowed earlier in the play. It punished an individual who did not deserve the punishment. In short, it was, alas, completely unworthy of Gilbert's powerful genius."

Professor Johns said, "Perhaps it was not Gilbert. Perhaps some bungler had interfered and botched the job."

"There is no record of that."

But Professor Johns, his scientific mind keenly aroused by an unsolved puzzle, said at once, "We can test this. Let us study the mind of this—this Gilbert. He wrote other plays, did he?"

"Fourteen, in collaboration with Sullivan."

"Were there endings that resolved analogous situations in ways which were more appropriate?"

Nitely nodded. "One, certainly. There was *Ruddigore.*"

"Who was he?"

"Ruddigore is a place. The main character is revealed as the true bad baronet of Ruddigore and is, of course, under a curse."

"To be sure," muttered Professor Johns, who realized that such an eventuality frequently befell bad baronets and was even inclined to think it served them right.

Nitely said, "The curse compelled him to commit one crime or more each day. Were one day to pass without a crime, he would inevitably die in agonizing torture."

"How horrible," murmured the soft-hearted Alice.

"Naturally," said Nitely, "no one can think up a crime

each day, so our hero was forced to use his ingenuity to circumvent the curse."

"How?"

"He reasoned thus: If he deliberately refused to commit a crime, he was courting death by his own act. In other words, he was attempting suicide, and attempting suicide is, of course, a crime—and so he fulfills the conditions of the curse."

"I see. I see," said Professor Johns. "Gilbert obviously believes in solving matters by carrying them forward to their logical conclusions." He closed his eyes, and his noble brow clearly bulged with the numerous intense thought waves it contained.

He opened them. "Nitely, old chap, when was *The Sorcerer* first produced?"

"In eighteen hundred and seventy-seven."

"Then that is it, my dear fellow. In eighteen seventy-seven, we were faced with the Victorian age. The institution of marriage was not to be made sport of on the stage. It could not be made a comic matter for the sake of the plot. Marriage was holy, spiritual, a sacrament—"

"Enough," said Nitely, "of this apostrophe. What is in your mind?"

"Marriage. Marry the girl, Nitely. Have all your couples marry, and that at once. I'm sure that was Gilbert's original intention."

"But that," said Nitely, who was strangely attracted by the notion, "is precisely what we are trying to avoid."

"I am not," said Alice, stoutly (though she was not stout, but, on the contrary, enchantingly lithe and slender).

Professor Johns said, "Don't you see? Once each couple is married, the amatogenic principle—which does not affect married people—loses its power over them. Those who would have been in love without the aid of the principle remain in love; those who would not are no longer in love—and consequently apply for an annulment."

"Good heavens," said Nitely. "How admirably simple. Of course! Gilbert must have intended that until a shocked producer or theater manager—a bungler, as you say—forced the change."

"And did it work?" I asked. "After all, you said quite distinctly that the professor had said its effect on married couple was only to inhibit extra-marital re—"

"It worked," said Nitely, ignoring my comment. A tear trembled on his eyelid, but whether it was induced by memories or by the fact that he was on his fourth gin and tonic, I could not tell.

"It worked," he said. "Alice and I were married, and our marriage was almost instantly annulled by mutual consent on the grounds of the use of undue pressure. And yet, because of the incessant chaperoning to which we were subjected, the incidence of undue pressure between ourselves was, unfortunately, virtually nil." He sighed again. "At any rate, Alice and Alexander were married soon after and she is now, I understand, as a result of various concomittant events, expecting a child."

He withdrew his eyes from the deep recesses of what was left of his drink and gasped with sudden alarm. "Dear me! She again."

I looked up, startled. A vision in pastel blue was in the doorway. Imagine, if you will, a charming face made for kissing; a lovely body made for loving.

She called, "Nicholas! Wait!"

"Is that Alice?" I asked.

"No, no. This is someone else entirely: a completely different story.—But I must not remain here."

He rose and, with an agility remarkable in one so advanced in years and weight, made his way through a window. The feminine vision of desirability, with an agility only slightly less remarkable, followed.

I shook my head in pity and sympathy. Obviously, the poor man was continually plagued by these wondrous things of beauty who, for one reason or another, were enamored of him. At the thought of this horrible fate, I downed my own drink at a gulp and considered the odd fact that no such difficulties had ever troubled me.

And at that thought, strange to tell, I ordered another drink savagely, and a scatological exclamation rose, unbidden, to my lips.

FRITZ LEIBER

Although by profession a writer and editor, Fritz Leiber has many connections with show business. Back in the days when he signed his stories "Fritz Leiber, Jr.," his father was a noted Shakespearean actor (whose reading of Lear's curse upon his daughters is one of the most exciting memories in my four decades of theater-going) and later a distinguished interpreter of character roles in films. Young Leiber played minor parts in his father's company, and only a few years ago starred in a Chicago production of OTHELLO. *And if (like me) you stay up late to watch old horror movies, you may come across something called* WEIRD WOMAN *that derives remotely from Leiber's magnificent novel* CONJURE WIFE. *Now Leiber examines one of the strangest phenomena of the entertainment business: the sex goddess—in a terrifyingly vivid story of a psychologist with a craving for power, a weakness for occultism, and a unique office fixture:*

A DESKFUL OF GIRLS

YES, I SAID ghostgirls, sexy ones. Personally I never in my life saw any ghosts except the sexy kind, though I saw enough of those, I'll tell you, but only for one evening, in the dark of course, with the assistance of an eminent (I should also say notorious) psychologist. It was an interesting experience, to put it mildly, and it introduced me to an unknown field of psycho-physiology, but under no circumstances would I want to repeat it.

But ghosts are supposed to be frightening? Well, who ever said that sex isn't? It is to the neophyte, female or male, and don't let any of the latter try to kid you. For one thing, sex opens up the unconscious mind, which isn't exactly a picnic area. Sex is a force, a rite that is basic, primal; and the caveman or cavewoman in each of us is a truth bigger than the jokes and cartoons about it. Sex was behind the witchcraft religion, the sabbats were sexual orgies. The witch was a sexual creature. So is the ghost.

After all, what is a ghost, according to all traditional views, but the shell of a human being—an animated skin? And the skin is all sex—its touch, the boundary, the mask of flesh.

I got that notion about skin from my eminent-notorious psychologist, Dr. Emil Slyker, the first and the last evening I met him, at the Countersign Club, though he wasn't talking about ghosts to begin with. He was pretty drunk and drawing signs in the puddle spilled from his triple martini.

He grinned at me and said, "Look here, What's-Your-Name—oh yes, Carr Mackay, Mister *Justine* himself. Well, look here, Carr, I got a deskful of girls at my office in this building and they're needing attention. Let's shoot up and have a look."

Right away my hopelessly naïve imagination flashed me a vivid picture of a desk swarming inside with girls about five or six inches high. They weren't dressed—my imagination never dresses girls except for special effects after long thought—but these looked as if they had been modeled from the drawings of Heinrich Kley or Mahlon Blaine. Literal vest-pocket Venuses, saucy and active. Right now they were attempting a mass escape from the desk, using a couple of nail files for saws, and they'd already cut some trap doors between the drawers so they could circulate around. One group was improvising a blowtorch from an atomizer and lighter fluid. Another was trying to turn a key from the inside, using tweezers for a wrench. And they were tearing down and defacing small signs, big to them, which read: YOU BELONG TO DR. EMIL SLYKER.

My mind which looks down at my imagination and refuses to associate with it, was studying Dr. Slyker and also making sure that I behaved outwardly like a worshipful fan, a would-be Devil's apprentice. This approach, helped by the alcohol, seemed to be relaxing him into the frame of mind I wanted him to have—one of boastful condescension. Slyker was a plump gut of a man with a perpetually sucking mouth, in his early fifties, fair-complexioned, blond, balding, with the powerlines around his eyes and at the corners of the nostrils. Over it all he wore the ready-for-photographers mask that is a sure sign its wearer is on

the Big Time. Eyes weak, as shown by the dark glasses, but forever peering for someone to strip or cow. His hearing bad too, for that matter, as he didn't catch the barman approaching and started a little when he saw the white rag reaching out toward the spill from his drink. Emil Slyker, "doctor" courtesy of some European universities and a crust like blued steel, movie columnist, pumper of the last ounce of prestige out of that ashcan word "psychologist," psychic researcher several mysterious rumored jumps ahead of Wilhelm Reich with his orgone and Rhine with his ESP, psychological consultant to starlets blazing into stars and other ladies in the bucks, and a particularly expert disher-out of that goulash of psychoanalysis, mysticism, and magic that is the *chef-d'oeuvre* of our era. *And,* I was assuming, a particularly successful blackmailer. A stinker to be taken very seriously.

My real purpose in contacting Slyker, of which I hoped he hadn't got an inkling yet, was to offer him enough money to sink a small luxury liner in exchange for a sheaf of documents he was using to blackmail Evelyn Cordew, current pick-of-the-pantheon among our sex goddesses. I was working for another film star, Jeff Crain, Evelyn's ex-husband, but not "ex" when it came to the protective urge. Jeff said that Slyker refused to bite on the direct approach, that he was so paranoid in his suspiciousness as to be psychotic, and that I would have to make friends with him first. Friends with a paranoid!

So in pursuit of this doubtful and dangerous distinction, there I was at the Countersign Club, nodding respectfully happy acquiescence to the Master's suggestion and asking tentatively, "Girls needing attention?"

He gave me his whoremaster, keeper-of-the-keys grin and said, "Sure, women need attention whatever form they're in. They're like pearls in a vault, they grow dull and fade unless they have regular contact with warm human flesh. Drink up."

He gulped half of what was left of his martini—the puddle had been blotted up meantime and the black surface reburnished—and we made off without any fuss over checks or tabs; I had expected him to stick me with the former

at least, but evidently I wasn't enough of an acolyte yet to be granted that honor.

It fitted that I had caught up with Emil Slyker at the Countersign Club. It is to a key club what the latter is to a topcrust bar. Strictly Big Time, set up to provide those in it with luxury, privacy, and security. Especially security: I had heard that the Countersign Club bodyguarded even their sober patrons home late of an evening with or without their pickups, but I hadn't believed it until this well-dressed and doubtless well-heeled silent husky rode the elevator up the dead midnight office building with us and only turned back at Dr. Slyker's door. Of course I couldn't have got into the Countersign Club on my own—Jeff had provided me with my entree: an illustrated edition of the Marquis de Sade's *Justine,* its margins annotated by a world-famous recently-deceased psychoanalyst. I had sent it in to Slyker with a note full of flowery expression of "my admiration for your work in the psycho-physiology of sex."

The door to Slyker's office was something. No glass, just a dark expanse—teak or ironwood, I guessed—with EMIL SLYKER, CONSULTING PSYCHOLOGIST burnt into it. No Yale lock, but a large keyhole with a curious silver valve that the key pressed aside. Slyker showed me the key with a deprecating smile; the gleaming castellations of its web were the most complicated I'd ever seen, its stem depicted Pasiphaë and the bull. He certainly was willing to pay for atmosphere.

There were three sounds: first the soft grating of the turning key, then the solid snap of the bolts retracting, then a faint creak from the hinges.

Open, the door showed itself four inches thick, more like that of a safe or vault, with a whole cluster of bolts that the key controlled. Just before it closed, something very odd happened: a filmy plastic sheet whipped across the bolts from the outer edge of the doorway and conformed itself to them so perfectly that I suspected static electrical attraction of some sort. Once in place, it barely clouded the silvery surface of the bolts and would have taken a close look to spot. It didn't interfere in any way with the door closing or the bolts snapping back into their channels.

The Doctor sensed or took for granted my interest in the door and explained over his shoulder in the dark, "My Siegfried Line. More than one ambitious crook or inspired murderer has tried to smash or think his or her way through that door. They've had no luck. They can't. At this moment there is literally no one in the world who could come through that door without using explosives—and they'd have to be well placed. Cozy."

I privately disagreed with the last remark. Not to make a thing of it, I would have preferred to feel in a bit closer touch with the silent corridors outside, even though they held nothing but the ghosts of unhappy stenographers and neurotic dames my imagination had raised on the way up.

"Is the plastic film part of an alarm system?" I asked. The Doctor didn't answer. His back was to me. I remembered that he'd shown himself a shade deaf. But I didn't get a chance to repeat my question, for just then some indirect lighting came on, although Slyker wasn't near any switch ("Our talk triggers it," he said), and the office absorbed me.

Naturally the desk was the first thing I looked for, though I felt foolish doing it. It was a big deep job with a dark soft gleam that might have been that of fine-grained wood or metal. The drawers were file size, not the shallow ones my imagination had played with, and there were three tiers of them to the right of the kneehole—space enough for a couple of life-size girls if they were doubled up according to one of the formulas for the hidden operator of Maelzel's chess-playing automaton. My imagination, which never learns, listened hard for the patter of tiny bare feet and the clatter of little tools. There wasn't even the scurry of mice, which would have done something to my nerves, I'm sure.

The office was an **L** with the door at the end of this leg. The walls I could see were mostly lined with books, though a few line drawings had been hung—my imagination had been right about Heinrich Kley, though I didn't recognize these pen-and-ink originals, and there were some Fuselis you won't ever see reproduced in books handled over the counter.

The desk was in the corner of the **L** with the components of a hi fi spaced along the bookshelves this side of it. All I could see yet of the other leg of the **L** was a big sur-

realist armchair facing the desk but separated from it by a wide low bare table. I took a dislike to that armchair on first sight, though it looked extremely comfortable. Slyker had reached the desk now and had one hand on it as he turned back toward me, and I got the impression that the armchair had changed shape since I had entered the office—that it had been more like a couch to start with, although now the back was almost straight.

But the Doctor's left thumb indicated I was to sit in it and I couldn't see another chair in the place except the padded button on which he was now settling himself—one of those stenographer deals with a boxing-glove back placed to catch you low in the spine like the hand of a knowledgeable masseur. In the other leg of the L besides the armchair, were more books, a heavy concertina blind sealing off the window, two narrow doors that I supposed were those of a closet and a lavatory, and what looked like a slightly scaled-down and windowless telephone booth until I guessed it must be an orgone box of the sort Reich had invented to restore the libido when the patient occupies it. I quickly settled myself in the chair, not to be gingerly about it. It was rather incredibly comfortable, almost as if it had adjusted its dimensions a bit at the last instant to conform to mine. The back was narrow at the base but widened and then curled in and over to almost a canopy around my head and shoulders. The seat too widened a lot toward the front, where the stubby legs were far apart. The bulky arms sprang unsupported from the back and took my own just right, though curving inward with the barest suggestion of a hug. The leather or unfamiliar plastic was as firm and cool as young flesh and its texture as mat under my fingertips.

"An historic chair," the Doctor observed, "designed and built for me by von Helmholtz of the Bauhaus. It has been occupied by all my best mediums during their so-called trance states. It was in that chair that I established to my entire satisfaction the real existence of ectoplasm—that elaboration of the mucous membrane and occasionally the entire epidermis that is distantly analogous to the birth envelope and is the fact behind the persistent legends of the snake-shedding of filmy live skins by human beings, and

which the spiritualist quacks are forever trying to fake with their fluorescent cheesecloth and doctored negatives. Orgone, the primal sexual energy?—Reich makes a persuasive case, still . . . But ectoplasm?—Yes! Angna went into trance sitting just where you are, her entire body dusted with a special powder, the tracks and distant smudges of which later revealed the ectoplasm's movements and origin—chiefly in the genital area. The test was conclusive and led to further researches, very interesting and quite revolutionary, none of which I have published; my professional colleagues froth at the mouth, elaborating an opposite sort of foam, whenever I mix the psychic with psychoanalysis—they seem to forget that hypnotism gave Freud his start and that for a time the man was keen on cocaine. Yes indeed, an historic chair."

I naturally looked down at it and for a moment I thought I had vanished, because I couldn't see my legs. Then I realized that the upholstery had changed to a dark gray exactly matching my suit except for the ends of the arms, which merged by fine gradations into a sallow hue which blotted out my hands.

"I should have warned you that it's now upholstered in chameleon plastic," Slyker said with a grin. "It changes color to suit the sitter. The fabric was supplied me over a year ago by Henri Artois, the French dilettante chemist. So the chair has been many shades: dead black when Mrs. Fairlee—you recall the case?—came to tell me she had just put on mourning and then shot her bandleader husband, a charming Florida tan during the later experiments with Angna. It helps my patients forget themselves when they're free-associating and it amuses some people."

I wasn't one of them, but I managed a smile I hoped wasn't too sour. I told myself to stick to business—Evelyn Cordew's and Jeff Crain's business. I must forget the chair and other incidentals, and concentrate on Dr. Emil Slyker and what he was saying—for I have by no means given all of his remarks, only the more important asides. He had turned out to be the sort of conversationalist who will talk for two hours solid, then when you have barely started your reply, give you a hurt look and say, "Excuse me, but if I

can get a word in edgewise—" and talk for two hours more. The liquor may have been helping, but I doubt it. When we had left the Countersign Club he had started to tell me the stories of three of his female clients—a surgeon's wife, an aging star scared by a comeback opportunity, and a college girl in trouble—and the presence of the bodyguard hadn't made him hold back on gory details.

Now, sitting at his desk and playing with the catch of a file drawer as if wondering whether to open it, he had got to the point where the surgeon's wife had arrived at the operating theater early one morning to publish her infidelities, the star had stabbed her press agent with the wardrobe mistress' scissors, and the college girl had fallen in love with her abortionist. He had the conversation-hogger's trick of keeping a half dozen topics in the air at once and weaving back and forth between them without finishing any.

And of course he was a male tantalizer. Now he whipped open the file drawer and scooped out some folders and then held them against his belly and watched me as if to ask himself, "Should I?"

After a maximum pause to build suspense he decided he should, and so I began to hear the story of Dr. Emil Slyker's girls, not the first three, of course—they had to stay frozen at their climaxes unless their folders turned up—but others.

I wouldn't be telling the truth if I didn't admit it was a let-down. Here I was expecting I don't know what from his desk and all I got was the usual glimpses into childhood's garden of father-fixation and sibling rivalry and the bed-changing *Sturm und Drang* of later adolescence. The folders seemed to hold nothing but conventional medico-psychiatric case histories, along with physical measurements and other details of appearance, unusually penetrating *précis* of each client's financial resources, occasional notes on possible psychic gifts and other extrasensory talents, and maybe some candid snapshots, judging from the way he'd sometimes pause to study appreciatvely and then raise his eyebrows at me with a smile.

Yet after a while I couldn't help starting to be impressed, if only by the sheer numbers. Here was this stream, this

freshet, this flood of females, young and not-so-young, but all thinking of themselves as girls and wearing the girl's suede mask even if they didn't still have the girl's natural face, all converging on Dr. Slyker's office with money stolen from their parents or highjacked from their married lovers, or paid when they signed the six-year contract with semi-annual options, or held out on their syndicate boyfriends, or received in a lump sum in lieu of alimony, or banked for dreary years every fortnight from paychecks and then withdrawn in one grand gesture, or thrown at them by their husbands that morning like so much confetti, or, so help me, advanced them on their half-written novels. Yes, there was something very impressive about this pink stream of womankind rippling with the silver and green of cash conveyed infallibly, as if all the corridors and streets outside were concrete-walled spillways, to Dr. Slyker's office, but not to work any dynamos there except financial ones, instead to be worked over by a one-man dynamo and go foaming madly or trickling depletedly away or else stagnate excitingly for months, their souls like black swamp water gleaming with mysterious lights.

Slyker stopped short with a harsh little laugh. "We ought to have music with this, don't you think?" he said. "I believe I've got the *Nutcracker Suite* on the spindle," and he touched one of an unobtrusive bank of buttons on his desk.

They came without the whisper of a turntable or the faintest preliminary susurrus of tape, those first evocative, rich, sensual, yet eery chords, but they weren't the opening of any section of the *Nutcracker* I knew—and yet, damn it, they sounded as if they should be. And then they were cut off as if the tape had been snipped and I looked at Slyker and he was white and one of his hands was just coming back from the bank of buttons and the other was clutching the file folders as if they might somehow get away from him and both hands were shaking and I felt a shiver crawling down my own neck.

"Excuse me, Carr," he said slowly, breathing heavily, "but that's high-voltage music, pyschically very dangerous, that I use only for special purposes. It *is* part of the *Nutcracker*, incidently—the 'Ghostgirls Pavan' which Chaikovsky sup-

pressed completely under orders from Madam Sesostris, the Saint Petersburg clairvoyant. It was tape-recorded for me by . . . No, I don't know you quite well enough to tell you that. However, we will shift from tape to disk and listen to the known sections of the suite, played by the same artists."

I don't know how much of this recording or the circumstances added to it, but I have never heard the "Danse Arabe" or the "Waltz of the Flowers" or the "Dance of the Flutes" so voluptuous and exquisitely menacing—those tinkling, superficially sugar-frosted bits of music that class after class of little-girl ballerinas have minced and teetered to *ad nauseam*, but underneath the glittering somber fancies of a thorough-going eroticist. As Slyker, guessing my thoughts, expressed it:"Chaikovsky shows off each instrument—the flute, the throatier woodwinds, the silver chimes, the harp bubbling gold—as if he were dressing beautiful women in jewels and feathers and furs solely to arouse desire and envy in other men."

For of course we only listened to the music as background for Dr. Slyker's zigzagging, fragmentary, cream-skimming reminiscences. The stream of girls flowed on in their smart suits and flowered dresses and bouffant blouses and toreador pants, their improbable loves and unsuspected hates and incredible ambitions, the men who gave them money, the men who gave them love, the men who took both, the paralyzing trivial fears behind their wisely chic or corn-fed fresh façades, their ravishing and infuriating mannerisms, the trick of eye or lip or hair or wrist-curve or bosom-angle that was the focus of sex in each.

For Slyker could bring his girls to life very vividly, I had to grant that, as if he had more to jog his memory than case histories and notes and even photographs, as if he had the essence of each girl stoppered up in a little bottle, like perfumes, and was opening them one by one to give me a whiff. Gradually I became certain that there *were* more than papers and pictures in the folders, though this revelation, like the earlier one about the desk, at first involved a letdown. Why should I get excited if Dr. Slyker filed away mementos of his clients?—even if they were keepsakes of

love: lace handkerchiefs and filmy scarves, faded flowers, ribbons and bows, 20-denier stockings, long locks of hair, gay little pins and combs, swatches of material that might have been torn from dresses, snippets of silk delicate as ghost dandelions—what difference did it make to me if he treasured this junk or it fed his sense of power or was part of his blackmail? Yet it did make a difference to me, for like the music, like the little fearful starts he'd kept giving ever since the business of the "Ghostgirls Pavan," it helped to make everything very real, as if in some more-than-ordinary sense he did have a deskful of girls. For now as he opened or closed the folders there'd often be a puff of powder, a pale little cloud as from a jogged compact, and the pieces of silk gave the impression of being larger than they could be, like a magician's colored handkerchiefs, only most of them were flesh-colored, and I began to get glimpses of what looked like X-ray photographs and artists' transparencies, maybe life size but cunningly folded, and other slack pale things that made me think of the ultra-fine rubber masks some aging actresses are rmored to wear, and all sorts of strange little flashes and glimmers of I don't know what, except there was that aura of femininity and I found myself remembering what he'd said about fluorescent cheesecloth and I did seem to get whiffs of very individual perfume with each new folder.

He had two file drawers open now, and I could just make out the word burnt into their fronts. The word certainly looked like PRESENT, and there were two of the closed file drawers labeled what looked like PAST and FUTURE. I didn't know what sort of hocus-pocus was supposed to be furthered by those words, but along with Slyker's darting, lingering monologue they did give me the feeling that I was afloat in a river of girls from all times and places, and the illusion that there somehow was a girl in each folder became so strong that I almost wanted to say, "Come on, Emil, trot 'em out, let me look at 'em."

He must have known exactly what feelings he was building up in me, for now he stopped in the middle of a saga of a starlet married to a Negro baseball player and looked at me with his eyes open a bit too wide and said, "All right,

Carr, let's quit fooling around. Down at the Countersign I told you I had a deskful of girls and I wasn't kidding—although the truth behind that assertion would get me certified by all the little head-shrinkers and Viennese windbags except it would scare the pants off them first. I mentioned ectoplasm earlier, and the proof of its reality. It's exuded by most properly stimulated women in deep trance, but it's not just some dimly fluorescent froth swirling around in a dark séance chamber. It takes the form of an envelope or limp balloon, closed toward the top but open toward the bottom, weighing less than a silk stocking but duplicating the person exactly down to features and hair, following the master-plan of the body's surface buried in the genetic material of the cells. It is a real shed skin but also dimly alive, a gossamer mannequin. A breath can crumple it, a breeze can whisk it away, but under some circumstances it becomes startlingly stable and resilient, a real apparition. It's invisible and almost impalpable by day, but by night, when your eyes are properly accommodated, you can just manage to see it. Despite its fragility it's almost indestructible, except by fire, and potentially immortal. Whether generated in sleep or under hypnosis, in spontaneous or induced trance, it remains connected to the source by a thin strand I call the 'umbilicus' and it returns to the source and is absorbed back into the individual again as the trance fades. But sometimes it becomes detached and then it lingers around as a shell, still dimly alive and occasionally glimpsed, forming the very real basis for the stories of hauntings we have from all centuries and cultures—in fact, I call such shells 'ghosts.' A strong emotional shock generally accounts for a ghost becoming detached from its owner, but it can also be detached artificially. Such a ghost is remarkably docile to one who understands how to handle and cherish it—for instance, it can be folded into an incredibly small compass and tucked away in an envelope, though by daylight you wouldn't notice anything in such an envelope if you looked inside. 'Detached artificially' I said, and that's what I do here in this office, and you know what I use to do it with, Carr?" He snatched up something long and daggerlike and gleaming and held it tight in his plump hand so that it pointed at the

ceiling. "Silver shears, Carr, silver for the same reason you use a silver bullet to kill a werewolf, though those words would set the little head-shrinkers howling. But would they be howling from outraged scientific attitude, Carr, or from professional jealousy or simply from fear? Just the same as it's unclear why they'd be howling, only certain they would be howling, if I told them that in every fourth or fifth folder in these files I have one or more ghostgirls."

He didn't need to mention fear—I was scared enough myself now, what with him spouting this ghost-guff, this spiritualism blather put far more precisely than any spiritualist would dare, this obviously firmly held and elaborately rationalized delusion, this perfect symbolization of a truly insane desire for power over women—filing them away in envelopes!—and then when he got bug-eyed and brandished those foot-long stiletto-shears . . . Jeff Crain had warned me Slyker was "nuts—brilliant, but completely nuts and definitely dangerous," and I hadn't believed it, hadn't really visualized myself frozen on the medium's throne, locked in ("no one without explosives") with the madman himself. It cost me a lot of effort to keep on the acolyte's mask and simper adoringly at the Master.

My attitude still seemed to be fooling him, though he was studying me in a funny way, for he went on, "All right, Carr, I'll show you the girls, or at least one, though we'll have to put out all the lights after a bit—that's why I keep the window shuttered so tightly—and wait for our eyes to accommodate. But which one should it be?—we have a large field of choice. I think since it's your first and probably your last, it should be someone out of the ordinary, don't you think, someone who's just a little bit special? Wait a second—I know." And his hand shot under the desk where it must have touched a hidden button, for a shallow drawer shot out from a place where there didn't seem to be room for one. He took from it a single fat file folder that had been stored flat and laid it on his knees.

Then he began to talk again in his reminiscing voice and damn if it wasn't so cool and knowing that it started to pull me back toward the river of girls and set me thinking that this man wasn't really crazy, only extremely eccentric, maybe

the eccentricity of genius, maybe he actually had hit on a hitherto unknown phenomenon depending on the more obscure properties of mind and matter, describing it to me in whimsically florid jargon, maybe he really had discovered something in one of the blind spots of modern science-and-psychology's picture of the universe.

"Stars, Carr. Female stars. Movie queens. Royal princesses of the gray world, the ghostly chiaroscuro. Shadow empresses. They're realer than people, Carr, realer than the great actresses or casting-couch champions they start as, for they're symbols, Carr, symbols of our deepest longings and—yes—most hidden fears and secretest dreams. Each decade has several who achieve this more-than-life and less-than-life existence, but there's generally one who's the chief symbol, the top ghost, the dream who lures men along toward fulfillment and destruction. In the Twenties it was Garbo, Garbo the Free Soul—that's my name for the symbol she became; her romantic mask heralded the Great Depression. In the late Thirties and early Forties it was Bergman the Brave Liberal; her dewiness and Swedish-Modern smile helped us accept World War Two. And now it's"—he touched the bulky folder on his knees—"now it's Evelyn Cordew the Good-Hearted Bait, the gal who accepts her troublesome sexiness with a resigned shrug and a foolish little laugh, and what general catastrophe she foreshadows we don't know yet. But here she is, and in five ghost versions. Pleased, Carr?"

I was so completely taken by surprise that I couldn't say anything for a moment. Either Slyker had guessed my real purpose in contacting him, or I was faced with a sizable coincidence. I wet my lips and then just nodded.

Slyker studied me and finally grinned. "Ah," he said, "takes you aback a bit, doesn't it? I perceive that in spite of your moderate sophistication you are one of the millions of males who have wistfully contemplated desert-islanding with Delectable Evvie. A complex cultural phenomenon, Eva-Lynn Korduplewski. The child of a coal miner, educated solely in back-street movie houses—shaped by dreams, you see, into a master dream, an empress dream-figure. A hysteric, Carr, in fact the most classic example I have ever

encountered, with unequaled mediumistic capacities and also with a hypertrophied and utterly ruthless ambition. Riddled by hypochondrias, but with more real drive than a million other avid schoolgirls tangled and trapped in the labyrinth of film ambitions. Dumb as they come, no rational mind at all, but with ten times Einstein's intuition—intuition enough, at least, to realize that the symbol our sex-exploiting culture craved was a girl who accepted like a happy martyr the incandescent sexuality men and Nature forced on her—and with the patience and malleability to let the feathersoft beating of the black-and-white light in a cheap cinema shape her into that symbol. I sometimes think of her as a girl in a cheap dress standing on the shoulder of a big throughway, her eyes almost blinded by the lights of an approaching bus. The bus stops and she climbs on, dragging a pet goat and breathlessly giggling explanations at the driver. The bus is Civilization.

"Everybody knows her life story, which has been put out in a surprisingly accurate form up to a point: her burlesque-line days, the embarrassingly faithful cartoon-series *Girl in a Fix* for which she posed, her bit parts, the amazingly timed success of the movies *Hydrogen Blonde* and *The Jean Harlow Saga,* her broken marriage to Jeff Crain—What was that, Carr? Oh, I thought you'd started to say something—and her hunger for the real stage and intellectual distinction and power. You can't imagine how hungry for brains and power that girl became *after* she hit the top.

"I've been part of the story of that hunger, Carr, and I pride myself that I've done more to satisfy it than all the culture-johnnies she's had on her payroll. Evelyn Cordew has learned a lot about herself right where you're sitting, and also threaded her way past two psychotic crack-ups. The trouble is that when her third loomed up she didn't come to me, she decided to put her trust in wheat germ and yogurt instead, so now she hates my guts—and perhaps her own, on that diet. She's made two attempts on my life, Carr, and had me trailed by gangsters . . . and by other individuals. She's talked about me to Jeff Crain, whom she still sees from time to time, and Jerry Smyslov and Nick De Grazia, telling them I've got a file of information on her

burlesque days and a few of her later escapades, including some interesting photostats and the real dope on her income and her tax returns, and that I'm using it to blackmail her white. What she actually wants is her five ghosts back, and I can't give them to her because they might kill her. Yes, kill her, Carr." He flourished the shears for emphasis. "She claims that the ghosts I've taken from her have made her lose weight permanently—'look like a skeleton' are her words—and given her fits of mental blackout, a sort of psychic fading—whereas actually the ghosts have bled off from her a lot of malignant thoughts and destructive emotions, which could literally kill her (or someone!) if reabsorbed—they're drenched with death-wish. Still, I hear she actually does look a little haggard, a trifle faded, in her last film, in spite of all Hollywood's medico-cosmetic lore, so maybe she has a sort of case against me. I haven't seen the film, I suppose you have. What do you think, Carr?"

I knew I'd been overworking the hesitation and the silent flattery, so I whipped out quickly, "I'd say it was due to her anemia. It seems to me that the anemia is quite enough to account for her loss of weight and her tired look."

"Ah! You've slipped, Carr," he lashed back, pointing at me triumphantly, except that instead of the outstretched finger there were those ridiculous, horrible shears. "Her anemia is one of the things that's been kept to-secret, known only to a very few of her intimates. Even in all the half-humorous releases about her hypochondrias that's one disease that has never been mentioned. I suspected you were from her when I got your note at the Countersign Club—the handwriting squirmed with tension and secrecy—but the *Justine* amused me—that was a fairly smart dodge—and your sorcerer's apprentice act amused me too, and I happened to feel like talking. But I've been studying you all along, especially your reactions to certain test-remarks I dropped in from time to time, and now you've really slipped." His voice was loud and clear, but he was shaking and giggling at the same time and his eyes showed white all the way around the irises. He drew back the shears a little, but clenched his fingers more tightly around them in a dagger grip, as he said with a chuckle, "Our dear little

Evvie has sent all types up against me, to bargain for her ghosts or try to scare or assassinate me, but this is the first time she's sent an idealistic fool. Carr, why didn't you have the sense not to meddle?"

"Look here, Dr. Slyker," I countered before he started answering for me, "it's true I have a special purpose in contacting you. I never denied it. But I don't know anything about ghosts or gangsters. I'm here on a simple, businesslike assignment from the same guy who lent me the *Justine* and who has no purpose whatever beyond protecting Evelyn Cordew. I'm representing Jeff Crain."

That was supposed to calm him. Well, he did stop shaking and his eyes stopped wandering, but only because they were going over me like twin searchlights, and the giggle went out of his voice.

"Jeff Crain! Evvie just wants to murder me, but that cinematic Hemingway, that hulking guardian of hers, that human Saint Bernard tonguing the dry crumbs of their marriage—he wants to set the T-men on me, and the boys in blue and the boys in white too. Evvie's agents I mostly kid along, even the gangsters, but for Jeff's agents I have only one answer."

The silver shears pointed straight at my chest and I could see his muscles tighten like a fat tiger's. I got ready for a spring of my own at the first movement this madman made toward me.

But the move he made was back across the desk with his free hand. I decided it was a good time to be on my feet in any case, but just as I sent my own muscles their orders I was hugged around the waist and ankles. By something soft but firm.

I looked down. Padded, broad, crescent-shaped clamps had sprung out of hidden traps in my chair and now held me as comfortably but firmly as a gang of competent orderlies. Even my hands were held by wide, velvet-soft cuffs that had snapped out of the bulbous arms. They were all a nondescript gray but even as I looked they began to change color to match my suit or skin, whichever they happened to border.

I wasn't scared. I was merely frightened half to death.

"Surprised, Carr? You shouldn't be." Slyker was sitting back like an amiable schoolteacher and gently wagging the shears as if they were a ruler. "Streamlined unobtrusiveness and remote control are the essence of our times, especially in medical furniture. The buttons on my desk can do more than that. Hypos might slip out—hardly hygienic, but then germs are overrated. Or electrodes for shock. You see, restraints are necessary in my business. Deep mediumistic trance can occasionally produce convulsions as violent as those of electroshock, especially when a ghost is cut. And I sometimes administer electroshock too, like any garden-variety head-shrinker. Also, to be suddenly and firmly grabbed is a profound stimulus to the unconscious and often elicits closely-guarded facts from difficult patients. So a means of making my patients hold still is absolutely necessary—something swift, sure, tasteful, and preferably without warning. You'd be surprised, Carr, at the situations in which I've been forced to activate those restraints. This time I prodded you to see just how dangerous you were. Rather to my surprise you showed yourself ready to take physical action against me. So I pushed the button. Now we'll be able to deal comfortably with Jeff Crain's problem . . . and yours. But first I've a promise to keep to you. I said I would show you one of Evelyn Cordew's ghosts. It will take a little time and after a bit it will be necessary to turn out the lights."

"Dr. Slyker," I said as evenly as I could, "I—"

"Quiet! Activiting a ghost for viewing involves certain risks. Silence is essential, though it will be necessary to use—very briefly—the suppressed Chaikovsky music which I turned off so quickly earlier this evening." He busied himself with the hi fi for a few moments. "But partly because of that it will be necessary to put away all the other folders and the four ghosts of Evvie we aren't using, and lock the file drawers. Otherwise there might be complications."

I decided to try once more. "Before you go any further, Dr. Slyker," I began, "I would really like to explain—"

He didn't say another word, merely reached back across the desk again. My eyes caught something coming over my shoulder fast and the next instant it clapped down over my mouth and nose, not quite covering my eyes, but lapping up

to them—something soft and dry and clinging and faintly crinkled-feeling. I gasped and I could feel the gag sucking in, but not a bit of air came through it. That scared me seven-eighths of the rest of the way to oblivion, of course, and I froze. Then I tried a very cautious inhalation and a little air did seep through. It was wonderfully cool coming into the furnace of my lungs, that little suck of air—I felt I hadn't breathed for a week.

Slyker looked at me with a little smile. "I never say 'Quiet' twice, Carr. The foam plastic of that gag is another of Henri Artois' inventions. It consists of millions of tiny valves. As long as you breathe softly—very, very softly, Carr—they permit ample air to pass, but if you gasp or try to shout through it, they'll close up tight. A wonderfully soothing device. Compose yourself, Carr; your life depends on it."

I have never experienced such utter helplessnesss. I found that the slightest muscular tension, even crooking a finger, made my breathing irregular enough so that the valves started to close and I was in the fringes of suffocation. I could see and hear what was going on, but I dared not react, I hardly dared think. I had to pretend that most of my body wasn't there (the chameleon plastic helped!), only a pair of lungs working constantly but with infinite caution.

Slyker had just set the Cordew folder back in its drawer, without closing it, and started to gather up the other scattered folders, when he touched the desk again and the lights went out. I have mentioned that the place was completely sealed against light. The darkness was complete.

"Don't be alarmed, Carr," Slyker's voice came chuckling through it. "In fact, as I am sure you realize, you had better not be. I can tidy up just as handily—working by touch is one of my major skills, my sight and hearing being rather worse than appears—and even your eyes must be fully accommodated if you're to see anything at all. I repeat, don't be alarmed, Carr, least of all by ghosts."

I would never have expected it, but in spite of the spot I was in (which actually did seem to have its soothing effects), I still got a little kick—a very little one—out of thinking I was going to see some sort of secret vision of Evelyn Cordew,

real in some sense or faked by a master faker. Yet at the same time, and I think beyond all my fear for myself, I felt a dispassionate disgust at the way Slyker reduced all human drives and desires to a lust for power, of which the chair imprisoning me, the "Siegfried Line" door, and the files of ghosts, real or imagined, were perfect symbols.

Among immediate worries, although I did a pretty good job of suppressing all of them, the one that nagged at me the most was that Slyker had admitted to me the inadequacy of his two major senses. I didn't think he would make that admission to someone who was going to live very long.

The black minutes dragged on. I heard from time to time the rustle of folders, but only one soft thud of a file drawer closing, so I knew he wasn't finished yet with the putting-away and locking-up job.

I concentrated the free corner of my mind—the tiny part I dared spare from breathing—on trying to hear something else, but I couldn't even catch the background noise of the city. I decided the office must be soundproofed as well as light-sealed. Not that it mattered, since I couldn't get a signal out anyway.

Then a noise did come—a solid snap that I'd heard just once before, but knew instantly. It was the sound of the bolts in the office door retracting. There was something funny about it that took me a moment to figure out: there had been no preliminary grating of the key.

For a moment too I thought Slyker had crept noiselessly to the door, but then I realized that the rustling of folders at the desk had kept up all the time.

And the rustling of folders continued. I guessed Slyker had not noticed the door. He hadn't been exaggerating about his bad hearing.

There was the faint creaking of the hinges, once, twice—as if the door were being opened and closed—then again the solid snap of the bolts. That puzzled me, for there should have been a big flash of light from the corridor—unless the lights were all out.

I couldn't hear any sound after that, except the continued rustling of the file folders, though I listened as hard as the job of breathing let me—and in a crazy kind of way the job

of cautious breathing helped my hearing, because it made me hold absolutely still yet without daring to tense up. I knew that someone was in the office with us and that Slyker didn't know it. The black moments seemed to stretch out forever, as if an edge of eternity had got hooked into our time-stream.

All of a sudden there was a *swish*, like that of a sheet being whipped through the air very fast, and a grunt of surprise from Slyker that started toward a screech and then was cut off as sharp as if he'd been gagged nose-and-mouth like me. Then there came the scuff of feet and the squeal of the casters of a chair, the sound of a struggle, not of two people struggling, but of a man struggling against restraints of some sort, a frantic confined heaving and panting. I wondered if Slyker's little lump of chair had sprouted restraints like mine, but that hardly made sense.

Then abruptly there was the whistle of breath, as if his nostrils had been uncovered, but not his mouth. He was panting through his nose. I got a mental picture of Slyker tied to his chair some way and eying the darkness just as I was doing.

Finally out of the darkness came a voice I knew very well because I'd heard it often enough in movie houses and from Jeff Crain's tape-recorder. It had the old familiar caress mixed with the old familiar giggle, the naïveté and the knowingness, the warm sympathy and cool-headedness, the high-school charmer and the sybil. It was Evelyn Cordew's voice, all right.

"Oh for goodness sake stop threshing around, Emmy. It won't help you shake off that sheet and it makes you look so funny. Yes, I said 'look', Emmy—you'd be surprised at how losing five ghosts improves your eyesight, like having veils taken away from in front of them; you get more sensitive all over.

"And don't try to appeal to me by pretending to suffocate. I tucked the sheet under your nose even if I did keep your mouth covered. Couldn't bear you talking now. The sheet's called wraparound plastic—I've got my chemical friend too, though he's not Parisian. It'll be next year's number-one packaging material, he tells me. Filmy, harder to see than

cellophane, but very tough. An electronic plastic, no less, positive one side, negative the other. Just touch it to something and it wraps around, touches itself, and clings like anything. Like I just had to touch it to you. To make it unwrap fast you can just shoot some electrons into it from a handy static battery—my friend's advertising copy, Emmy—and it flattens out *whang*. Give it enough electrons and it's stronger than steel.

"We used another bit of it that last way, Emmy, to get through your door. Fitted it outside, so it'd wrap itself against the bolts when your door opened. Then just now, after blacking out the corridor, we pumped electrons into it and it flattened out, pushing back all the bolts. Excuse me, dear, but you know how you love to lecture about your valved plastics and all your other little restraints, so you mustn't mind me giving a little talk about mine. And boasting about my friends too. I've got some you don't know about, Emmy. Ever heard the name Smyslov, or the Arain? Some of them cut ghosts themselves and weren't pleased to hear about you, especially the past-future angle."

There was a protesting little squeal of casters, as if Slyker were trying to move his chair.

"Don't go away, Emmy. I'm sure you know why I'm here. Yes, dear, I'm taking them all back as of now. All five. And I don't care how much death-wish they got, because I've got some ideas for that. So now 'scuse me, Emmy, while I get ready to slip into my ghosts."

There wasn't any noise then except Emil Slyker's wheezy breathing and the occasional rustle of silk and the whir of a zipper, followed by soft feathery falls.

"There we are, Emmy, all clear. Next step, my five lost sisters. Why, your little old secret drawer is open—you didn't think I knew about that, Emmy, did you? Let's see now, I don't think we'll need music for this—they know my touch; it should make them stand up and shine."

She stopped talking. After a bit I got the barest hint of light over by the desk, very uncertain at first, like a star at the limit of vision, where it keeps winking back and forth from utter absence to the barest dim existence, or like a lonely lake lit only by starlight and glimpsed through a

thick forest, or as if those dancing points of light that persist even in absolute darkness and indicate only a restless retina and optic nerve had fooled me for a moment into thinking they represented something real.

But then the hint of light took definite form, though staying at the dim limit of vision and crawling back and forth as I focused on it because my eyes had no other point of reference to steady it by.

It was a dim angular band making up three edges of a rectangle, the top edge longer than the two vertical edges, while the bottom edge wasn't there. As I watched it and it became a little clearer, I saw that the bands of light were brightest toward the inside—that is, toward the rectangle they partly enclosed, where they were bordered by stark blackness—while toward the outside they faded gradually away. Then as I continued to watch I saw that the two corners were rounded while up from the top edge there projected a narrow, lesser rectangle—a small tab.

The tab made me realize that I was looking at a file folder silhouetted by something dimly glowing inside it.

Then the top band darkened toward the center, as would happen if a hand were dipping into the folder, and then lightened again as if the hand were being withdrawn. Then up out of the folder, as if the invisible hand were guiding or coaxing it, swam something no brighter than the bands of light.

It was the shape of a woman, but distorted and constantly flowing, the head and arms and upper torso maintaining more of an approximation to human proportions than the lower torso and legs, which were like churning, trailing draperies or a long gauzy skirt. It was extremely dim, so I had to keep blinking my eyes, and it didn't get brighter.

It was like the figure of a woman phosphorescently painted on a long-skirted slip of the filmiest silk that had silk-stockinglike sheaths for arms and head attached—yes, and topped by some illusion of dim silver hair. And yet it was more than that. Although it looped up gracefully through the air as such a slip might when shaken out by a woman preparing to put it on, it also had a writhing life of its own.

But in spite of all the distortions, as it flowed in an arc to-

ward the ceiling and dove downward, it was seductively beautiful and the face was recognizably that of Evvie Cordew.

It checked its dive and reversed the direction of its flow, so that for a moment it floated upright high in the air, like a filmy nightgown a woman swishes above her head before she slips into it.

Then it began to settle toward the floor and I saw that there really was a woman standing under it and pulling it down over her head, though I could see her body only very dimly by the reflected glow of the ghost she was drawing down around her.

The woman on the floor shot up her hands close to her body and gave a quick wriggle and twist and ducked her head and then threw it back, as a woman does when she's getting into a tight dress, and the flowing glowing thing lost its distortions as it fitted itself around her.

Then for a moment the glow brightened a trifle as the woman and her ghost merged and I saw Evvie Cordew with her flesh gleaming by its own light—the long slim ankles, the vase-curve of hips and waist, the impudent breasts almost as you'd guess them from the Bikini shots, but with larger aureoles—saw it for an instant before the ghost-light winked out like white sparks dying, and there was utter darkness again.

Utter darkness and a voice that crooned, "Oh that was like silk, Emmy, pure silk stocking all over. Do you remember when you cut it, Emmy? I'd just got my first screen credit and I'd signed the seven-year contract and I knew I was going to have the world by the tail and I felt wonderful and I suddenly got terribly dizzy for no reason and I came to you. And you straightened me out for then by coaxing out and cutting away my happiness. You told me it would be a little like giving blood, and it was. That was my first ghost, Emmy, but only the first."

My eyes, recovering swiftly from the brighter glow of the ghost returning to its sources, again made out the three glowing sides of the file folder. And again there swam up out of it a crazily churning phosphorescent woman trailing gauzy streamers. The face was recognizably Evvie's, but

constantly distorting, now one eye big as an orange, then small as a pea, the lips twisting in impossible smiles and grimaces, the brow shrinking to that of a pinhead or swelling to that of a mongolian idiot, like a face reflected from a plate-glass window running with water. As it came down over the real Evelyn's face there was a moment when the two were together but didn't merge, like the faces of twins in such a flooded window. Then, as if a squee-gee had been wiped down it, the single face came bright and clear, and just as the darkness returned she caressed her lips with her tongue.

And I heard her say, "That one was like hot velvet, Emmy, smooth but with a burn in it. You took it two days after the sneak preview of *Hydrogen Blonde*, when we had the little party to celebrate after the big party, and the current Miss America was there and I showed her what a really valuable body looked like. That was when I realized that I'd hit the top and it hadn't changed me into a goddess or anything. I still had the same ignorances as before and the same awkwardnesses for the cameramen and cutters to hide—only they were worse because I was in the center of the show window—and I was going to have to fight for the rest of my life to keep my body like it was and then I was going to start to die, wrinkle by wrinkle, lose my juice cell by cell, like anybody else."

The third ghost arched toward the ceiling and down, waves of phosphorescence flickering it all the time. The slender arms undulated like pale serpents and the hands, the finger- and thumb-tips gently pressed together, were like the inquisitive heads of serpents—until the fingers spread so the hands resembled five-tongued creeping puddles of phosphorescent ink. Then into them as if into shoulder-length ivory silk gloves came the solid fingers and arms. For a bit the hands, first part to be merged, were brightest of the whole figure and I watched them help fit each other on and then sweep symmetrically down brow and cheeks and chin, fitting the face, with a little sidewise dip of the ring fingers as they smoothed in the eyes. Then they swept up and back and raked through both heads of hair, mixing them.

This ghost's hair was very dark and, mingling, it toned down Evelyn's blonde a little.

"That one felt slimy, Emmy, like the top crawled off of a swamp. Remember, I'd just teased the boys into fighting over me at the Troc. Jeff hurt Lester worse than they let out and even old Sammy got a black eye. I'd just discovered that when you get to the top you have all the ordinary pleasures the boobs yearn for all their lives, and they don't mean anything, and you have to work and scheme every minute to get the pleasures beyond pleasure that you've got to have to keep your life from going dry."

The fourth ghost rose toward the ceiling like a diver paddling up from the depths. Then, as if the whole room were filled with its kind of water, it seemed to surface at the ceiling and jackknife there and plunge down again with a little swoop and then reverse direction again and hover for a moment over the real Evelyn's head and then sink slowly down around her like a diver drowning. This time I watched the bright hands cupping the ghost's breasts around her own as if she were putting on a luminescent net brassiere. Then the ghost's filminess shrank suddenly to tighten over her torso like a cheap cotton dress in a cloudburst.

As the glow died to darkness a fourth time, Evelyn said softly, "Ah but that was cool, Emmy. I'm shivering. I'd just come back from my first location work in Europe and was sick to get at Broadway, and before you cut it you made me relive the yacht party where I overheard Ricco and the author laughing at how I'd messed up my first legitimate play reading, and we swam in the moonlight and Monica almost drowned. That was when I realized that nobody, even the bottom boobs in the audience, really respected you because you were their sex queen. They respected the little female boob in the seat beside them more than they did you. Because you were just something on the screen that they could handle as they pleased inside their minds. With the top folk, the Big Timers, it wasn't any better. To them you were just a challenge, a prize, something to show off to other men to drive them nuts, but never something to love. Well, that's four, Emmy, and four and one makes all."

The last ghost rose whirling and billowing like a silk robe

in the wind, like a crazy photomontage, like a surrealist painting done in a barely visible wash of pale flesh tones on a black canvas, or rather like an endless series of such surrealist paintings, each distortion melting into the next—trailing behind it a gauzy wake of draperies which I realized was the way ghosts were always pictured and described. I watched the draperies bunch as Evelyn pulled them down around her, and then they suddenly whipped tight against her thighs, like a skirt in a strong wind or like nylon clinging in the cold. The final glow was a little stronger, as if there were more life in the shining woman than there had been at first.

"Ah that was like the brush of wings, Emmy, like feathers in the wind. You cut it after the party in Sammy's plane to celebrate me being the top money star in the industry. I bothered the pilot because I wanted him to smash us in a dive. That was when I realized I was just property—something for men to make money out of (and me to make money, too, out of me), from the star who married me to prop his box-office rating to the sticks theater owner who hoped I'd sell a few extra tickets. I found that my deepest love—it was once for you, Emmy—was just something for a man to capitalize on. That any man, no matter how sweet or strong, could in the end never be anything but a pimp. Like you, Emmy."

Just darkness for a while then, darkness and silence, broken only by the faint rustling of clothing.

Finally her voice again: "So now I got my pictures back, Emmy. All the original negatives, you might say, for you can't make prints of them or second negatives—I don't think. Or is there a way of making prints of them, Emmy—duplicate women? It's not worth letting you answer—you'd be bound to say yes to scare me.

"What do we do with you now, Emmy? I know what you'd do to me if you had the chance, for you've done it already. You've kept parts of me—no, five real *me's*—tucked away in envelopes for a long time, something to take out and look at or run through your hand or twist around a finger or crumple in a ball, whenever you felt bored on a long afternoon or an endless night. Or maybe show off to special

friends or even give other girls to wear—you didn't think I knew about that trick, did you, Emmy?—I hope I poisoned them, I hope I made them burn! Remember, Emmy, I'm full of death-wish now, five ghosts of it. Yes, Emmy, what do we do with you now?"

Then, for the first time since the ghosts had shown, I heard the sound of Dr. Slyker's breath whistling through his nose and the muffled grunts and creakings as he lurched against the clinging sheet.

"Makes you think, doesn't it, Emmy? I wish I'd asked my ghosts what to do with you when I had the chance—I wish I'd known how to ask them. They'd have been the ones to decide. Now they're too mixed in

"We'll let the other girls decide—the other ghosts. I'll trust their judgment. Do your ghosts love you, Emmy?"

I heard the click of her heels followed by soft rushes ending in thuds—the file drawers being yanked open. Slyker got noisier

"You don't think they love you, Emmy? Or they do but their way of showing affection won't be exactly comfortable, or safe? We'll see."

The heels clicked again for a few steps.

"And now, music The fourth button, Emmy?"

There came again those sensual, spectral chords that opened the "Ghostgirls Pavan." and this time they led gradually into a music that seemed to twirl and spin, very slowly and with a lazy grace, the music of space, the music of free fall. It made easier the slow breathing that meant life to me

I became aware of dim fountains. Each file drawer was outlined by a phosphorescent glow shooting upward

Over the edge of one drawer a pale hand flowed It slipped back, but there was another, and another

The music strengthened, though spinning still more lazily, and out of the phosphorescence-edged parallelogram of the file drawers there began to pour, swiftly now, pale streams of womankind. Ever-changing faces that were gossamer masks of madness, drunkenness, desire, and hate; arms like a flood of serpents; bodies that writhed, convulsed, yet flowed like milk by moonlight.

They swirled out in a circle like slender clouds in a ring, a spinning circle that dipped close to me, inquisitively, a hundred strangely slitted eyes seeming to peer.

The spinning forms brightened. By their light I began to see Dr. Slyker, the lower part of his face tight with the transparent plastic, only the nostrils flaring and the bulging eyes switching their gaze about, his arms tight to his sides.

The first spiral of the ring speeded up and began to tighten around his head and neck. He was beginning to twirl slowly on his tiny chair, as if he were a fly caught in the middle of a web and being spun in a cocoon by the spider. His face was alternately obscured and illuminated by the bright smoky forms swinging past it. It looked as if he was being strangled by his own cigarette smoke in a film run backward.

His face began to darken as the glowing circle tightened against him.

Once more there was utter darkness.

Then a whirring click and a tiny shower of sparks, three times repeated, then a tiny blue flame. It moved and stopped and moved, leaving behind it more silent tiny flames, yellow ones. They grew. Evelyn was systematically setting fire to the files.

I knew it might be curtains for me, but I shouted—it came out as a kind of hiccup—and my breath was instantly cut off as the valves in the gag closed.

But Evelyn turned. She had been bending close over Emil's chest and the light from the growing flames highlighted her smile. Through the dark red mist that was closing in on my vision I saw the flames begin to leap from one drawer after another. There was a sudden low roar, like film or acetate shavings burning.

Suddenly Evelyn reached across the desk and touched a button. As I started to red out, I realized that the gag was off, the clamps were loose.

I floundered to my feet, pain stabbing my numbed muscles. The room was full of flickering brightness under a dirty cloud bulging from the ceiling. Evelyn had jerked the transparent sheet off Slyker and was crumpling it up. He started to fall forward, very slowly. Looking at me, she

said, "Tell Jeff he's dead." But before Slyker hit the floor, she was out the door. I took a step toward Slyker, felt the stinging heat of the flames. My legs were like shaky stilts as I made for the door. As I steadied myself on the jamb I took a last look back, then lurched on.

There wasn't a light in the corridor. The glow of the flames behind me helped a little.

The top of the elevator was dropping out of sight as I reached the shaft. I took the stairs. It was a painful descent. As I trotted out of the building—it was the best speed I could manage—I heard sirens coming. Evelyn must have put in a call—or one of her "friends," though not even Jeff Crain was able to tell me more about them: who her chemist was and who were the Arain—it's an old word for spider, but that leads nowhere. I don't even know how she knew I was working for Jeff; Evelyn Cordew is harder than ever to see and I haven't tried. I don't believe even Jeff's seen her; though I've sometimes wondered if I wasn't used as a cat's-paw.

I'm keeping out of it—just as I left it to the firemen to discover Dr. Emil Slyker "suffocated by smoke" from a fire in his "weird" private office, a fire which it was reported did little more than char the furniture and burn the contents of his files and the tapes of his hi fi.

I think a little more was burned. When I looked back the last time I saw the Doctor lying in a strait jacket of pale flames. It may have been scattered papers or the electronic plastic. I think it was ghostgirls burning.

DAMON KNIGHT

As writer, critic, and editor (currently of If*), Damon Knight has had much to do with formulating serious criteria for modern science fiction. He also occasionally sets up less sternly sober standards. . . .*

ERIPMAV

ON THE planet Veegl, in the Fomalhaut system, we found a curious race of cellulose vampires. The Veeglians, like all higher life on their world, are plants; the Veeglian vampire, needless to say, is a sapsucker.

One of the native clerks in our trade mission, a plant-girl named Xixl, had been complaining of lassitude and showing an unhealthy pink color for some weeks. The girl's parent stock suspected vampirism; we were skeptical, but had to admit that the two green-tinged punctures at the base of her axis were evidence of something wrong.

Accordingly, we kept watch over her sleep-box for three nights running. (The Veeglians sleep in boxes of soil, built of heavy slabs of the hardmeat tree, or *woogl;* they look rather like coffins.) On the third night, sure enough, a translator named Ffengl, a hefty, blue-petaled fellow, crept into her room and bent over the sleep-box.

We rushed out at the blackguard, but he turned quick as a wink and fairly flew up the whitemeat stairs. (The flesh of Veegl's only animal life, the "meat-trees," or *oogl,* petrifies rapidly in air and is much used for construction.) We found him in an unsuspected vault at the very top of the old building, trying to hide under the covers of an antique burial bed. It was an eery business. We sizzled him with blasts from our proton guns, and yet to the end, with unVeeglian vitality, he was struggling to reach us with his tendrils.

Afterward he seemed dead enough, but the local wiseheads advised us to take certain precautions.

So we buried him with a steak through his heart.

BRIAN W. ALDISS

The only excuse that American publishers can offer for not bringing out a volume of Brian Aldiss' short stories, already collected in England, is that every month of delay means a richer crop to choose from. For this young Englishman keeps getting even better, as he exhibits (especially in this story) a sheer zest for writing hardly matched in our field since the early days of Ray Bradbury.

POOR LITTLE WARRIOR!

CLAUDE FORD knew exactly how it was to hunt a brontosaurus. You crawled heedlessly through the mud among the willows, through the little primitive flowers with petals as green and brown as a football field, through the beauty-lotion mud. You peered out at the creature sprawling among the reeds, its body as graceful as a sock full of sand. There it lay, letting the gravity cuddle it nappy-damp to the marsh, running its big rabbit-hole nostrils a foot above the grass in a sweeping semicircle, in a snoring search for more sausagy reeds. It was beautiful: here horror had reached its limits, come full circle and finally disappeared up its own sphincter. Its eyes gleamed with the liveliness of a week-dead corpse's big toe, and its compost breath and the fur in its crude aural cavities were particularly to be recommended to anyone who might otherwise have felt inclined to speak lovingly of the work of Mother Nature.

But as you, little mammal with opposed digit and .65 self-loading, semi-automatic, dual-barrelled, digitally-computed, telescopically-sighted, rustless, high-powered rifle gripped in your otherwise-defenceless paws, snide along under the bygone willows, what primarily attracts you is the thunder lizard's hide. It gives off a smell as deeply resonant as the bass note of a piano. It makes the elephant's epidermis look like a sheet of crinkled lavatory paper. It is gray as the Viking seas, daft-deep as cathedral foundations. What contact possible to bone could allay the fever of that flesh? Over it

scamper—you can see them from here!—the little brown lice that live in those gray walls and canyons, gay as ghosts, cruel as crabs. If one of them jumped on you, it would very like break your back. And when one of those parasites stops to cock its leg against one of the bronto's vertebrae, you can see it carries in its turn its own crop of easy-livers, each as big as a lobster, for you're near now, oh, so near that you can hear the monster's primitive heart-organ knocking, as the ventricle keeps miraculous time with the auricle.

Time for listening to the oracle is past: you're beyond the stage for omens, you're now headed in for the kill, yours or his; superstition has had its little day for today, from now on only this windy nerve of yours, this shaky conglomeration of muscle entangled untraceably beneath the sweat-shiny carapace of skin, this bloody little urge to slay the dragon, is going to answer all your orisons.

You could shoot now. Just wait till that tiny steam-shovel head pauses once again to gulp down a quarry-load of bulrushes, and with one inexpressibly vulgar bang you can show the whole indifferent Jurassic world that it's standing looking down the business end of evolution's sex-shooter. You know why you pause, even as you pretend not to know why you pause; that old worm conscience, long as a baseball pitch, long-lived as a tortoise, is at work; through every sense it slides, more monstrous than the serpent. Through the passions: saying here is a sitting duck, O Englishman! Through the intelligence: whispering that boredom, the kite-hawk who never feeds, will settle again when the task is done. Through the nerves: sneering that when the adrenalin currents cease to flow the vomiting begins. Through the maestro behind the retina: plausibly forcing the beauty of the view upon you.

Spare us that poor old slipper-slopper of a word, *beauty;* holy mom, is this a travelogue, nor are we out of it? *"Perched now on this titanic creature's back, we see a round dozen—and, folks, let me stress that round—of gaudily plumaged birds, exhibiting between them all the colour you might expect to find on lovely, fabled Copacabana Beach. They're so round because they feed from the droppings that fall from the rich man's table. Watch this lovely shot now!*

See the bronto's tail lift. . . . Oh, lovely, yep, a couple of hayricks-full at least emerging from his nether end. That sure was a beauty, folks, delivered straight from consumer to consumer. The birds are fighting over it now. Hey, you, there's enough to go round, and anyhow, you're round enough already. . . . And nothing to do now but hop back up onto the old rump steak and wait for the next round. And now as the sun sinks in the Jurassic West, we say 'Fare well on that diet' . . ."

No, you're procrastinating, and that's a life work. Shoot the beast and put it out of your agony. Taking your courage in your hands, you raise it to shoulder level and squint down its sights. There is a terrible report; you are half stunned. Shakily, you look about you. The monster still munches, relieved to have broken enough wind to unbecalm the Ancient Mariner.

Angered (or is it some subtler emotion?), you now burst from the bushes and confront it, and this exposed condition is typical of the straits into which your consideration for yourself and others continually pitches you. Consideration? Or again something subtler? Why should you be confused just because you come from a confused civilisation? But that's a point to deal with later, if there is a later, as these two hog-wallow eyes pupilling you all over from spitting distance tend to dispute. Let it not be by jaws alone, O monster, but also by huge hooves and, if convenient to yourself, by mountainous rollings upon me! Let death be a saga, sagacious, Beowulfate.

Quarter of a mile distant is the sound of a dozen hippos springing boisterously in gymslips from the ancestral mud, and next second a walloping great tail as long as Sunday and as thick as Saturday night comes slicing over your head. You duck as duck you must, but the beast missed you anyway because it so happens that its coordination is no better than yours would be if you had to wave the Woolworth Building at a tarsier. This done, it seems to feel it has done its duty by itself. It forgets you. You just wish you could forget yourself as easily; that was, after all, the reason you had to come the long way here. *Get Away from It All,* said the time travel brochure, which meant for you getting

away from Claude Ford, a husbandman as futile as his name with a terrible wife called Maude. Maude and Claude Ford. Who could not adjust to themselves, to each other, or to the world they were born in. It was the best reason in the as-it-is-at-present-constituted world for coming back here to shoot giant saurians—if you were fool enough to think that one hundred and fifty million years either way made an ounce of difference to the muddle of thoughts in a man's cerebral vortex.

You try and stop your silly, slobbering thoughts, but they have never really stopped since the coca-collaborating days of your growing up; God, if adolescence did not exist it would be unnecessary to invent it! Slightly, it steadies you to look again on the enormous bulk of this tyrant vegetarian into whose presence you charged with such a mixed death-life wish, charged with all the emotion the human orga-(ni)sm is capable of. This time the bogeyman is real, Claude, just as you wanted it to be, and this time you really have to face up to it before it turns and faces you again. And so again you lift Ole Equaliser, waiting till you can spot the vulnerable spot.

The bright birds sway, the lice scamper like dogs, the marsh groans, as bronto sways over and sends his little cranium snaking down under the bile-bright water in a forage for roughage. You watch this; you have never been so jittery before in all your jittered life, and you are counting on this catharsis wringing the last drop of acid fear out of your system for ever. OK, you keep saying to yourself insanely over and over, your million-dollar twenty-second-century education going for nothing, OK, OK. And as you say it for the umpteenth time, the crazy head comes back out of the water like a renegade express and gazes in your direction.

Grazes in your direction. For as the champing jaw with its big blunt molars like concrete posts works up and down, you see the swamp water course out over rimless lips, lipless rims, splashing your feet and sousing the ground. Reed and root, stalk and stem, leaf and loam, all are intermittently visible in that masticating maw and, struggling, straggling or tossed among them, minnows, tiny crustaceans, frogs—all

destined in that awful, jaw-full movement to turn into bowel movement. And as the glump-glump-glumping takes place, above it the slime-resistant eyes again survey you.

These beasts live up to two hundred years, says the time travel brochure, and this beast has obviously tried to live up to that, for its gaze is centuries old, full of decades upon decades of wallowing in its heavyweight thoughtlessness until it has grown wise on twitterpatedness. For you it is like looking into a disturbing misty pool; it gives you a psychic shock, you fire off both barrels at your own reflection. Bang-bang, the dum-dums, big as paw-paws, go.

With no indecision, those century-old lights, dim and sacred, go out. These cloisters are closed till Judgment Day. Your reflection is torn and bloodied from them for ever. Over their ravaged panes nictitating membranes slide slowly upwards, like dirty sheets covering a cadaver. The jaw continues to munch slowly, as slowly the head sinks down. Slowly, a squeeze of cold reptile blood toothpastes down the wrinkled flank of one cheek. Everything is slow, a creepy Secondary Era slowness like the drip of water, and you know that if you had been in charge of creation you would have found some medium less heart-breaking than Time to stage it all in.

Never mind! Quaff down your beakers, lords, Claude Ford has slain a harmless creature. Long live Claude the Clawed!

You watch breathless as the head touches the ground, the long laugh of neck touches the ground, the jaws close for good. You watch and wait for something else to happen, but nothing ever does. Nothing ever would. You could stand here watching for an hundred and fifty million years, Lord Claude, and nothing would ever happen here again. Gradually your bronto's mighty carcass, picked loving clean by predators, would sink into the slime, carried by its own weight deeper; then the waters would rise, and old Conqueror Sea come in with the leisurely air of a card-sharp dealing the boys a bad hand. Silt and sediment would filter down over the mighty grave, a slow rain with centuries to rain in. Old bronto's bed might be raised up and then down again perhaps half a dozen times, gently enough not to disturb him, although by now the sedimentary rocks would be forming

thick around him. Finally, when he was wrapped in a tomb finer than any Indian rajah ever boasted, the powers of the Earth would raise him high on their shoulders until, sleeping still, bronto would lie in a brow of the Rockies high above the waters of the Pacific. But little any of that would count with you, Claude the Sword; once the midget maggot of life is dead in the creature's skull, the rest is no concern of yours.

You have no emotion now. You are just faintly put out. You expected dramatic thrashing of the ground, or bellowing; on the other hand, you are glad the thing did not appear to suffer. You are like all cruel men, sentimental; you are like all sentimental men, squeamish. You tuck the gun under your arm and walk round the dinosaur to view your victory.

You prowl past the ungainly hooves, round the septic white of the cliff of belly, beyond the glistening and how-thought-provoking cavern of the cloaca, finally posing beneath the switch-back sweep of tail-to-rump. Now your disappointment is as crisp and obvious as a visiting card: the giant is not half as big as you thought it was. It is not one half as large, for example, as the image of you and Maude is in your mind. Poor little warrior, science will never invent anything to assist the titanic death you want in the contra-terrene caverns of your fee-fi-fo fumblingly fearful id!

Nothing is left to you now but to slink back to your time-mobile with a belly full of anticlimax. See, the bright dung-consuming birds have already cottoned on to the true state of affairs; one by one, they gather up their hunched wings and fly disconsolately off across the swamp to other hosts. They know when a good thing turns bad, and do not wait for the vultures to drive them off; all hope abandon, ye who entrail here. You also turn away.

You turn, but you pause. Nothing is left but to go back, no, but 2181 A.D. is not just the home date; it is Maude. It is Claude. It is the whole awful, hopeless, endless business of trying to adjust to an overcomplex environment, of trying to turn yourself into a cog. Your escape from it into *the Grand Simplicities of the Jurassic*, to quote the brochure again, was only a partial escape, now over.

So you pause, and as you pause, something lands socko

on your back, pitching you face forward into tasty mud. You struggle and scream as lobster claws tear at your neck and throat. You try to pick up the rifle but cannot, so in agony you roll over, and next second the crab-thing is greedying it on your chest. You wrench at its shell, but it giggles and pecks your fingers off. You forgot when you killed the bronto that its parasites would leave it, and that to a little shrimp like you they would be a deal more dangerous than their host.

You do your best, kicking for at least three minutes. By the end of that time there is a whole pack of the creatures on you. Already they are picking your carcass loving clean. You're going to like it up there on top of the Rockies; you won't feel a thing.

SHIRLEY JACKSON

The last story of Miss Jackson's to appear in these annuals (One Ordinary Day, with Peanuts, *in our* FIFTH SERIES) *made a full tour of the best-of-the-year anthologies: it was also featured in Judith Merril's* S-F: THE YEAR'S GREATEST *and in Martha Foley's* THE BEST AMERICAN SHORT STORIES. *I see no reason why similar kudos should not fall to the lot of this tender, funny, and wholly delightful fantasy on the unexpected nature of omens—pure Jackson at her inimitable best.*

THE OMEN

IT WOULD be pushing truth too far to say that Grandma Williams was the finest person in the world to live with. As her daughter said sometimes, but only after the greatest professions of loyalty, "She's just the *sweetest* old lady in the world, of course, but sometimes she's *very* trying." And her son-in-law, whose patience was immense, and whose courtesy was unfailing, had been heard to say with an affectionate smile to his wife, "Granny seems to be aging rapidly these days." Even her grandchildren, of whom there were two, sometimes found themselves exasperated by her, and would

say in such cases, "Oh, *Granny,*" or "*Gosh,*" in the tone of voice used by children when words fail them.

Ordinarily, however, everyone loved Grandma Williams almost as much as she loved them, and they ate the custards she prepared so tenderly, and bore with the small surprises she invented for them, and gave her warm scarves and gloves for Christmas, and homemade valentines on Valentine's Day, and gardenias on Mother's Day, and took her out to dinner and the theater on her birthday, and saw that her glasses were found when she lost them and brought her home books from the lending library and remembered to kiss her goodnight and to be polite to the two or three old friends who still remained to her, and who came sometimes to call. And when Granny announced brightly at breakfast one morning that today she was going shopping no one criticized her, or even smiled.

"Isn't it something I can do for you, dear?" her daughter asked, looking into the coffee pot. "I may go into town today, and I'd be glad to do any errands you want."

"Happy to get you anything myself," said her son-in-law. "Easy to stop off somewhere on my way home."

Granny shook her head vehemently. "This is important shopping," she said. "I have to do it myself."

"Can I go with you?" asked her younger grandchild, who was eight years old, and who was named Ellen and was commonly supposed to resemble Granny as a girl.

"Indeed you may not," Granny said. "This is a surprise."

If a slight sigh went around the breakfast table Granny did not notice. "A surprise for everyone," she said. "You remember yesterday?"

Everyone remembered yesterday; yesterday had been an event. Yesterday Granny had received in the morning mail a check for thirteen dollars and seventy-four cents, with a covering letter saying that the sender had owed it to Granny's husband for nearly fifty years, and so was paying it now to his widow, with interest. Granny's son-in-law had figured out the interest for her, and it was quite proper. Granny, today, was rich. "A surprise for everyone," she repeated happily, "with my new money."

Her daughter opened her mouth to protest, and then

stopped. Nothing that Granny could possibly buy with thirteen dollars and seventy-four cents would give her more pleasure than surprises for everybody. "I think that's *wonderful,*" her daughter said finally, eying her family around the table.

"Very kind of you," said Granny's son-in-law.

"I want—" began Ellen.

"Dear," said her mother, "this is to be a surprise."

"But I want to *know,*" said Granny. "Robert, will you get me a pencil and paper?" Her older grandchild, who was ten, departed and returned in haste, partly because he had been carefully taught to treat his Granny courteously, and partly because surprises did not come every day.

"Now," said Granny, her pencil poised over the paper. "Margaret?"

"You mean what do I want?" said her daughter. She thought. "I don't really know," she said slowly. "A handkerchief, perhaps? Or a box of candy?"

"If I were to get you a bottle of perfume," said Granny with great cunning, "what kind would you most like?"

Her daughter considered again. "Well," she said, "I usually wear a kind called 'Carnation.' "

"*Carnation,*" Granny said. She wrote on her paper. Then she looked inquiringly at her son-in-law. "John," she said. "What for you?"

He frowned soberly. "Let me see," he said. "I suppose what I most need is a few good cigars. 'El Signo,' I generally smoke."

"Cigars," Granny said complacently. "A very good thing in a man. Your grandfather used to say that cigarettes were for women and children. What kind, again?"

"El Signo," said her son-in-law.

"I can't possibly write such an outlandish name," said Granny. "What is it in English?"

"The sign," he told her, not looking at his wife.

"*The sign,*" Granny said as she wrote. "You see," she explained, "I can always ask the man what it means, in cigars."

"Now me?" said Ellen.

"Now you, Granddaughter."

"A doll's house with real glass in the windows," said Ellen immediately, "and a bride doll, and a live kitty and—"

"Not a live kitty," said her mother hastily.

"A stuffed kitty?" said Ellen, wide-eyed. "A blue stuffed kitty?"

"Splendid," said Granny. "*Blue cat,*" she wrote. "Robert?" she said.

"Roller skates," said Robert. "Walkie-talkie."

"What?" said Granny.

"Walkie-talkie," said Robert. "It's a sort of telephone, like."

Granny stared at her son-in-law, who smiled and shrugged. "*Telephone,*" Granny said, and wrote it down. Then she leaned back and looked farsightedly at her list. "*Carnation,*" she read. "*The sign. Blue cat. Telephone.*" She smiled around the table at the family. "Now me," she said, "*I* want a ring."

"A ring?" said her daughter. "Granny, you *have* rings. You have your diamond ring, and the little one set with a cameo, and Dad's silver seal ring, and—"

"Not any of those," said Granny, shaking her head vigorously. "I saw a little ring I wanted, in the five and ten the other day. It cost twenty-nine cents, and it was silver-plated and it had on it two hearts set together. I *liked* that ring."

Her daughter and son-in-law exchanged glances. "If you'll wait till your birthday," said her daughter, "perhaps you might have the same ring in real silver; if it's something you like we could easily have it made."

"I want this one," said Granny. She rose from the table, picked up her list, and put it carefully into her pocket. "Now," she said. "Now I am going shopping."

She departed for her room to get her coat and hat, and her daughter said anxiously to her son-in-law, "Do you think it's all right? I could insist on going along."

"She's getting so much pleasure out of it," said the son-in-law, "it would be a real shame to spoil it. And of course she'll be all right."

"Everyone's always glad to help an old lady, anyway," said the daughter. "If she gets into any difficulty, that is."

Granny, stylish in her neat black coat and a small rakish hat trimmed with violets, set out at precisely ten o'clock, an hour after her son-in-law had gone off to his office, and an

hour and ten minutes after her grandchildren had climbed noisily into the school bus. Her daughter stood in the doorway and waved to her as she went down the street; Granny had insisted upon traveling into town on the bus, instead of taking a taxi, and her daughter stood in the doorway until she saw Granny reach the corner, signal competently to the bus driver with her umbrella, and climb aboard, helped, as she always was, somehow, by the driver and two friendly passengers. People would be taking care of Granny like that all day, her daughter thought, and, with an admiring smile, she turned back inside to finish off the breakfast dishes. I'll just dress later, she thought, and run into town myself. I might meet her somewhere and bring her home.

Granny sat proudly in the bus, perfectly aware of the attention she was attracting. Her son-in-law had kindly cashed her check, and Granny had thirteen dollars and seventy-four cents in her pocketbook. Her list, she thought, was safely tucked into her pocket, but, as a matter of fact, it had slipped out and lay unnoticed on the seat when Granny alighted in the center of town, assisted by the bus driver, a kind gentleman, and two schoolgirls.

Not everyone had had such a pleasant two days as Granny had. Miss Edith Webster, for instance, had put in forty-eight hours (and this the first week of her vacation!) of unpleasant and fruitless argument. Edith loved her mother quite as much as Granny's daughter loved Granny, but Edith's mother was perhaps a shade more selfish than Granny—Granny, as Edith would have pointed out if she had known about it, had at least allowed her daughter to get married. Edith's mother was explicit upon this point.

"If you marry this Jerry fellow," she told Edith—as she had gone on telling Edith, over and over, for three years—"you will be leaving your poor old mother all alone, not that I think you *care* about me—no, by now I know better than to think my only daughter *cares* about what happens to her poor old mother—but you'd always have it on your conscience, I hope, that you left your poor old mother to starve."

"You wouldn't starve," Edith had pointed out over and over for three years, although by now the words had no

meaning, from being said so often. "Aunt Martha has been wanting you to come and live with her for a long time, and Jerry and I could always give you enough money to get along."

"Aunt Martha? What would I want to live with Aunt Martha for? You certainly couldn't have much respect for my *comfort* if you tried to make me go and live with Aunt *Martha.*"

On the morning that Granny set out so blithely, Edith had finally said, with more anger than she had ever shown her mother before, "I have every right in the world to get married and have a family of my own, and it's not fair for you to try and stop me."

"You're my daughter," her mother retorted, "and you owe me all your education and all the care and love I've given you all these years. And I'm not going to let you throw yourself away on some good-for-nothing and leave your poor old mother to starve."

At that point Edith snatched up her hat and fled from the house, leaving her mother still talking, dwelling lovingly upon the symptoms of starvation, and how Edith might possibly remember to show up at her deathbed—not, however, to be forgiven.

Walking down the street, Edith, who was actually an agreeable and pleasant girl, and who did not enjoy quarreling, told herself firmly that a decision must be reached, and immediately. Her mother did not show any signs of ever changing her mind, and, no matter how hard she tried to ignore it, there was the telling fact that Jerry, who had waited patiently for three years, was beginning to remark restlessly that all his friends were married, that a man expected to settle down before he was thirty, that he personally thought that Edith's mother would never give in, and that *he* thought the thing to do was up and get married, and let the old lady gave her consent afterwards. Edith thought he was right, if she tried to be impartial about it, but still the courage required to defy her mother was more than she could muster.

Going down the street (and she was at this time approximately two miles from Granny Williams, who was just then marching boldly down her own street on her way to a differ-

ent bus), Edith, in her neat dark blue coat and red hat (as opposed to Granny, who was wearing a black coat and a hat with violets), sighed deeply, and thought: if I only had an idea of what to do; if only somebody, something, somehow, would show me the way, make up my mind for me, give me an omen.

All of which is, of course, a most dangerous way of thinking.

Edith, on her own bus, reached the center of town almost as soon as Granny did, and, by an odd coincidence, Edith even passed Granny on the street without noticing her, nor did Granny notice Edith. Perhaps, indeed, Edith thought swiftly: *look at the nice old lady in the hat with flowers;* perhaps the thought passed through Granny's mind: *look at the pretty girl with the sad frown.* These things happen daily, among the thousands of people who pass one another in crowds. At any rate Edith, whose ultimate destination was the home of a girl friend on the other side of town (someone to whom Edith could pour out her troubles, and who would give her sympathy, if no kind of help), got on the wrong bus. She was worried, and thinking about something else, and there were a lot of people waiting at the bus stop, and Edith did not look up in time to see the sign on the front of the bus, and a man in the crowd near her said loudly, "It's the Long Avenue bus," which was the one Edith wanted, so Edith got on, and paid her fare, and sat down in the first seat she came to, which was the seat vacated by Granny not long ago, and the seat where Granny's list was waiting to be an omen to Edith. Edith picked it up, and put it into her pocket without thinking any more about it than that it was something she herself had dropped, like a transfer or a scrap of envelope with an address on it, and she did not even look at it when she put it into her pocket.

Edith was not the sort of person who, realizing suddenly that she is on the wrong bus, immediately stands up and screams and reproaches the driver for taking her in the wrong direction, and insists upon being put off on a strange street corner at once. She was annoyed at herself for her mistake, but was not inclined to think that the bus company had deceived her. It was not vitally important, after all, for

her to reach her girl friend's house before lunch: she was in a strange section of town, and she knew she could easily get out of the bus, have her lunch in the first restaurant she came to, and then proceed in a leisurely manner. So, at the first stop, she got down from the bus and stood while it roared away, regarding her surroundings.

Now at this point begins the series of events which might easily have been a dream of Edith's except for its conclusion. For, as Edith stood on the corner, she knew first that she was in a part of town she had never seen before, and secondly that there was no landmark in sight, not even a sign saying RESTAURANT or COFFEE SHOPPE or EAT or DINER or LUNCHONETTE or FOUNTAIN: in other words, no place where a girl alone could ask for information about where she was without looking foolish. Then, with that enjoyable feeling of anonymity which comes when you are a little lost, with plenty of money in your pocket, and the secret feeling that you can always get home by calling for a taxi, Edith realized that for a little while anyway she had escaped the problem of her mother and Jerry, for the simple reason that neither of them could at present find her to remind her of it. The next thing that happened was her shocking discovery that she did not have any money after all. The change purse she had slipped into her pocket contained, instead of several one-dollar bills and a five—which she now recalled having spent for the hat she was wearing on her head at the moment—only four nickels and approximately seven pennies. Thus Edith, marooned.

It seemed wise, at first, to retire to a secluded spot and wonder what to do. A bus back to the center of town? Then where was the bus stop? Edith craned her neck, but could not find a familiar sign. She fumbled in her pockets and at that moment fround Granny's list. Staring at it uncomprehendingly, thinking for a minute that it was a stray dollar bill in her pocket, Edith read: *"Carnation. The sign. Blue cat. Telephone. Ring."*

"What on earth?" said Edith out loud, and a child passing stopped, stared at her, and then said, "Huh?"

"Nothing," Edith said quickly. "Just an omen."

The child stared further, and went off looking back at her.

Edith was intelligent enough to know that when she asked for an omen and got it the least she could do was obey it. Reading it again—she stopped, this time, to admire the queer, old-fashioned handwriting, so much like a voice from a sweet and simple past—it occurred to her that since her omen told her *"carnation"* a carnation was obviously indicated. Smiling at herself, although not with so much amusement as she might have felt if this omen had not arrived exactly on schedule, she started down the street, in the general direction of the center of town, looking for a carnation. At this time she made her first discovery about omens: that their requirements are usually much more difficult than they seem to be, and that fewer carnations were in evidence than one might suspect in early summer. For instance, a florist shop seemed a possible place to look, although it did seem rather like cheating until Edith, scrutinizing carefully the window display of a mangy-looking shop which advertised itself as a FLORIST SHOP, found that there were no carnations. Roses, yes. Lilies, violets, ferns, horrid-looking daisies. But not carnations. Puzzled, Edith went on. There were paper flowers in the window of a funeral parlor, and they might as well have been carnations as anything else, but Edith thought that perhaps paper flowers were not allowed, particularly since a funeral parlor seemed no place for a self-respecting omen to lead her. Then, as she had begun to despair, and had gone about four blocks, someone asid, "Pardon me, but are you Miss Murrain?"

Edith turned; the words were addressed to her. Her mind did not take in the sense of them for a minute, because the man speaking to her was wearing a white carnation in his buttonhole. Edith realized that the omen had said not *"carnations"* but *"carnation,"* and she said, "I'm sorry?"

"Are you Miss Murrain?" the man asked again, very politely.

"No, I'm afraid not," said Edith.

"Are you sure?" said the man.

"Yes," said Edith.

"Are you *positive?*" said the man.

Edith stared. "I am not the lady you are looking for," she

said as firmly as she could (Am I? she wondered suddenly.) "I'm sorry," she added, when she saw that the man was troubled.

"I wish you were," he said, and sighed.

"Don't you know the lady?" Edith asked.

He laughed. "Come and see," he said. He took her politely by the arm and led her further down the block to where a group of people were standing around a store window. The store was a grocery, and this was apparently its grand opening day, for bright-colored flags draped the doorway, and signs saying FREE SODA FOR THE LADIES stood upon the sidewalk. The crowd of people standing before the store window separated as Edith and her guide came up to the window.

"See?" said Edith's guide, and Edith's mind registered *"sign,"* the second word on her omen.

FIND MISS MURRAIN, the sign entreated. FIND HER, FIND HER, FIND HER. And, in smaller letters: "Somewhere in this neighorhood today, Murrain Brothers, fine groceries and delicatessen goods, have a lady friend who is walking alone, waiting for someone to come up to her and say: 'Are you Miss Murrain?' If you ask her this, she will answer: 'Murrain Brothers are the finest grocers in town.' If you find Miss Murrain and bring her to this store—Murrain Brothers, fine groceries and delicatessen goods—we will give you ONE HUNDRED DOLLARS in trade. Special Grand Opening Offer, today only." And, at the bottom of the sign, in very small letters, were the words: "Special hint: Miss Murrain is wearing a hat the color of the bags in which Murrain Brothers pack their special coffee."

"Red," said her guide, when he saw Edith lean forward to read the small letters on the bottom of the sign, "it means red, they pack their special coffee in red bags."

"I see," said Edith, who was of course wearing a red hat. She turned and smiled at her guide. "I wish I could help you," she said.

"So do I," he said. They made their way out of the crowd again and stood on the sidewalk. "I could use a hundred dollars' worth of groceries."

"If I see Miss Murrain I'll try to catch her for you," Edith said.

"Catch her for yourself," he said seriously. "They mean it about the groceries." Abruptly he looked at his watch. "Good lord," he said, "I'm late."

"By the way," Edith said as he turned to go, "if you don't mind my asking you, why are you wearing the carnation?"

"That?" he said, looking down. "Oh, *that*. Oh, I'm getting married in ten minutes." He was gone, hurrying madly off down the street.

"Congratulations," Edith said weakly after him. Bewildered, she stood for a minute. "*Sign,*" she told herself, "*carnation, sign, sign, carnation, carnation, sign, sign, car—*" Realizing that she was beginning to babble, she tightened her lips and reached into her pocket for the slip of paper.

"*Carnation,*" it said. "*The sign. Blue cat.*"

"Blue cat?" Edith frowned. "Blue cat? *Blue* cat? Blue *cat?*" She was babbling again. She set her shoulders firmly, and stepped positively out toward what she guessed was the nearest traffic artery to the center of town.

"Excuse me, are you Miss Murrain?"

She turned; it was a lady, and Edith was sorry for a minute that she was *not* Miss Murrain—the lady so obviously thought she had collared her hundred dollars' worth of groceries, and she looked, moreover, as though a hundred dollars' worth of groceries would not come at all amiss.

"I'm sorry," Edith said. "I wish I were," she said.

"You were wearing the hat, is why I asked," the woman said. She smiled politely, and walked on.

If I go home now, Edith was thinking, Mother will be after me again about Jerry. If I go on wandering, sooner or later I will have to go back and then the whole problem will—

"Are you Miss Murrain?"

"Sorry, I'm not."

"Just thought I'd ask."

Or else, Edith thought, if I went back and told her once and for all—

"You Miss Murrain?"

"Sorry."

"You sure?"

"Positive."

"O.K."

Probably the best way would be to put off deciding for a while yet, and maybe somehow—

"It's Miss Murrain! Are you Miss Murrain, hey?"

"No, I'm sor—"

"It's Miss Murrain—hey, I caught her, it's Miss Murrain!"

Looking around, Edith saw with dismay that she was surrounded by a crowd of people. They were mostly women, housewives out doing their morning marketing, several pushing baby carriages, and there were a few men; all of them—men, women, children—staring at her and at the stout, red-faced woman who had her by the arm.

"I got her, I got her!"

"Look," Edith said quietly to the red-faced woman, "I'm terribly sorry, but I'm *not* Miss Murrain. People have been asking me the same—"

"Hundred bucks' worth of groceries, golly!"

Edith, trying to pull away, found that the red-faced woman had hold of her much as she would have held a rebellious child. "Please," Edith said urgently, "believe me—"

"George—Maggie—Earl—I got her, look, it's me caught her, the girl with the groceries!"

"Let me *go*," Edith said, and pulled harder. "Listen," she said, to the crowd, making her voice as reasonable as she could, "if I were this Miss Murrain, I would have *had* to say so, wouldn't I? Because I'm *really* not."

"She's trying to get away, Missus," one of the men observed impartially. "If she goes, your groceries go with her."

"Look," said the red-faced woman to Edith, shaking her. "You're not going to get those groceries away from *me*, you understand?"

"But I can't *get* you any—" Common sense came back to Edith, and she relaxed and said reasonably, "why don't you take me along to the grocery? *They* can tell you I'm the wrong person."

"Take her to the grocery." The crowd took up the words; they began to move along down the block, and the red-faced woman marched in advance, almost dragging Edith, and shouting right and left, "I got her, I got her, I got the girl with the groceries."

The grocery was some two blocks away; they had gone only a block or so when they were met by a pack of children coming shrieking away from the grocery.

"Miz Eaton got it," they were howling, "Miz Eaton got all the groc'ries, Miz Eaton got the groc'ries, Miz Eaton found the girl with the red hat, Miz Eaton . . ."

The red-faced woman holding Edith stopped, stared, took one deep breath, and then turned to look at Edith, her face, if possible, redder than before.

"You mean to say," she began, in a voice obviously restrained to make her imminent wrath the more terrible, "*you mean to say* you told me you were that girl and you *aren't?*" She let go of Edith to put her hands on her hips and in that moment Edith, all dignity lost, turned and ran.

She darted down a side street, thinking for a moment that the red-faced woman was after her, but in a minute, from the sound of voices going up the street she had left, she realized that the red-faced woman had gone on with her following to the grocery, probably to dispute the decision. Breathing fast, Edith slowed down to a walk and began to look out for a place where she could spend one of her nickels on a cup of coffee and a chance to catch her breath. Ahead, she saw a dingy sign that hung over the sidewalk: it read KITTY'S LUNCH. Gratefully she hurried to it and, as she stepped inside, saw that Kitty had, with odd humor, chosen to adorn the window of Kitty's Lunch with a large painted blue cat.

"*Blue cat,*" said Edith to herself. "Kitty."

Not bothering to try to think any more, she went inside. Kitty's Lunch was nothing more than a long counter with sugar bowls and catsup bottles set at intervals along it, and Kitty herself—presumably—enthroned in vast state on a folding chair at one end of the counter. Edith sat at one of the counter stools and Kitty roused herself much as though Edith had been a mouse, and moved slowly down the counter to serve her, although it did not actually seem possible for there to be enough space behind the counter for Kitty to pass.

"Coffee," said Edith as Kitty almost reached her. "Black coffee, please."

Kitty nodded, and looked Edith up and down.

Edith tried to smile. "If you think I'm that Miss Murrain, I'm not," she said. "They've already found her."

"I'm mighty glad they did," Kitty said. "What is mismurrain?"

"Never mind," said Edith gratefully. "Do you know anything about omens?"

"Omens," said Kitty. "Mismurrain. No."

"Good," said Edith. "If you *did* find an omen, would you follow it?"

"I wouldn't follow a rainbow for a pot of gold," Kitty said obscurely.

She went with dignity to fetch Edith's coffee, which she set down before Edith with a queenly gesture.

By now, Edith thought, it had become inevitable. After Kitty had gone back to her chair at the end of the counter Edith took the slip of paper out of her pocket and consulted it, although she already knew what it said. "*Telephone,*" she said softly to herself, and then more loudly to Kitty, "Telephone?"

Kitty did not look up from her comic book, but gestured with a large thumb at the wall telephone at the end of the counter. It was not in a booth, it was not even remotely private from Kitty or from anyone else who might happen to come in, but the omen had been explicit so far, and Edith, two more of her precious nickels in her hand, hurried down to the end of the counter.

She dialed the number from memory, and waited interminably until they answered.

"Gambel's Garage."

"Is Jerry there?" said Edith timidly.

"Wait and I'll see." The voice echoed, far away. "Jerry? Jerrrrry? Lady onna phone."

After another deadly wait, during which Edith could hear her nickels washing away, he said, "Hello?"

"Jerry?" she said. "This is Edith."

"Edith?" His voice sounded surprised. "Is something wrong?"

"Jerry," she said weakly. "I'm sorry about keeping you

waiting. I mean, I know what to do now. I mean, I guess if you want me to I'll marry you."

"Yeah?" She thought hopefully that he sounded rather more pleased than not. "Good," he said, and then she realized that he had known all the time that someday she would call him like this and tell him.

"Can you come and meet me?" she asked.

"I'm off for lunch in ten minutes. Where?"

"I'm in a blue cat," she said. "I mean, what does it matter! I mean—Just a minute. Where am I?" she turned to ask Kitty. Kitty lifted her face and gave Edith one long look.

"Corner of Flower Street and East Avenue," she said. "How long'd it take you to make up your mind?"

"Three years," said Edith. "Corner of Flower Street and East Avenue," she said to Jerry.

"Right," he said. "About twenty minutes, then. Who's going to take care of your mother?"

"She'll have to take care of herself," Edith said. "*I* need someone to take care of *me*."

"I'll go along with *that*," said Kitty from the background.

"Right," Jerry said.

"And Jerry," Edith said. "Listen, will you bring—I mean—the omen says—I mean, do you have—can you get—"

"What?" said Jerry.

"*What?*" said Kitty.

"A ring," said Edith helplessly.

"I've already got it," Jerry said.

"What'd he say?" inquired Kitty with interest.

"He says he's got it," Edith told her.

"What?" Jerry said.

"Smart man," Kitty said.

"Goodby," Edith said to Jerry, and listened smiling to his answer. Then she hung up, made a face at Kitty, and said, "I'm not going to tell you."

Kitty grinned. "Three years to make up your mind," she said. "You must be crazy."

Granny Williams arrived home in style by taxi just as dinner was ready to be served, and just as her daughter had announced for the third time that she was going to call the

police right *now* and just as her son-in-law had said for the twentieth time to give Granny a chance, she had been taking care of herself for eighty-seven years and could hardly get into trouble now.

"Well," said Granny, as her son-in-law and both grandchildren ran forward to take her packages, "what a day *I've* had." She smiled happily at everyone and added, "No surprises, now, till we all sit down."

"Are you all *right?*" said her daughter. "I was so worried."

Granny stared. "Of course I'm all right," she said. "Did you think I was arrested or something?"

When everyone was sitting in comparative quiet, at the dinner table, with dessert dishes (both grandchildren, in their excitement, had almost refused chocholate pudding) cleared away, and coffee cups set out, Granny leaned back in her chair and said with relish, "Now." She waved at her grandchildren and added, "You get my packages, but be *careful.*"

Hastily the grandchildren gathered the packages, not at all carefully, and brought them to Granny's lap. "Now," she said, drawing out the suspense as long as possible. "Are we all ready?" The grandchildren signified hysterically that they were all ready. Cautiously Granny lifted one package, turned it over and over, and set it down on the table. Her grandchildren, nearly expiring with curiosity, cried at once, "For me? Granny, for me?" Granny shook her head. "You just wait," she said. Finally she selected another package, poked it experimentally, and then formally handed it to her daughter. "For you," she said.

No one breathed while her daughter opened the package, with all due care for folding the wrappings, winding pieces of string, drawing out the operation. Finally, incredibly, a box appeared.

"Candy," said her daughter. "Granny, how *nice* of you!" She showed the box around appreciatively.

"Open it, open it," shouted the grandchildren.

"After Granny is through, we will all have a piece."

Next, the son-in-law opened his present. "A tie," he said with great enthusiasm. "Look, everyone, a beautiful blue and red and orange and green tie!"

The younger grandchild, the little girl who was supposed to look like Granny as a child, received a set of dishes and set immediately to serving everyone a second portion of chocolate pudding upon them. The older grandchild received a cowboy gun.

"Gee, Granny," he said. "*Gee.*"

"You see," Granny explained, regarding her family lovingly. "I went and *lost* my *list.*"

"Too bad," said her daughter, opening the candy box.

"A shame," said her son-in-law, regarding his tie dubiously.

"And," Granny went on, "I had to try to remember what you all wanted."

"This is what *I* wanted," said her older grandchild immediately. "Hands up," he added to his father.

"*And,*" Granny said to her daughter and son-in-law, "I met the most surprising young man. Right about lunch time, when I was just going into a restaurant for a cup of tea, he rushed right past me, and nearly knocked me down. It was very rude of him, but he was in a *great* hurry." Granny stopped and laughed at the expressions on the faces of her daughter and her son-in-law. "He stopped and apologized to me," she went on, "and would you believe it? He said he was going to be married. He said," she continued, sighing romantically, "that after three years of courting his lady had finally consented."

"Amazing," said her son-in-law.

"Charming," said his wife.

"It was positively *sentimental,*" said Granny happily.

JULES VERNE

It is almost unbelievable that a Jules Verne story can have remained untranslated for 71 years; but F&SF's publication of Gil Braltar *marks the first appearance in English of one of the Master's most amusing imaginative satires. The story first came out as a makeweight to fill out the bulk of* LE CHEMIN DE FRANCE (1887), *an historical novel about the efforts of German "counter-revolutionary" troops to re-establish the monarchy after the French Revolution; when* THE FLIGHT

TO FRANCE *appeared in English, the short filler was omitted. Long out of print and unavailable even in France, this may well be the least known of all Verne's tales; but I think you'll find it a lively bit of foolishment, emphasizing the fact that Verne was as much a humorist as a prophet—and revealing for the first time the secret behind British control of the Rock of Gibraltar.*

I. O. Evans, discoverer and translator of Gil Braltar, *has recently established himself as the foremost Verne enthusiast and authority in our language. His anthology* JULES VERNE: MASTER OF SCIENCE FICTION *(Rinehart, 1957) belongs on the shelves of every scholar in s.f.; even more welcome to the general reader should be his Fitzroy edition of Verne (London: Bernard Hanison), which will bring back into print the most desirable and unobtainable of the* VOYAGES EXTRAORDINAIRES *at the rate of six a year, starting with* A FLOATING CITY, THE BEGUM'S FORTUNE, *and* FIVE WEEKS IN A BALLOON.

GIL BRALTAR

(*translated by* I. O. EVANS)

THERE WERE seven or eight hundred of them at least. Of medium height, but strong, agile, supple, framed to make prodigious bounds, they gamboled in the last rays of the sun, now setting over the mountains which formed serried ridges westward of the roadstead. Its reddish disc would soon disappear, and darkness was already falling in the midst of that basin surrounded by the distant Sierras of Sanorre and Ronda and by the desolate country of Cuervo.

Suddenly all the band became motionless. Their leader had just appeared on the crest resembling the back of a skinny mule which forms the top of the mountain. From the military post perched on the distant summit of the great Rock nothing could be seen of what was taking place under the trees.

"*Sriss. . . . Sriss*"—they heard their leader, whose lips, thrust forward like a hen's beak, gave that whistle an extraordinary intensity.

"Sriss. . . . Sriss"—the strange army repeated the call in perfect unison.

A remarkable being that leader: tall in height, clad in a monkey's skin with the fur outwards, his head shaggy with unkempt hair, his face bristling with a short beard, his feet bare, their soles as hard as a horse's hoof.

He lifted his hand and extended it towards the lower crest of the mountain. All simultaneously repeated that gesture with a military—or rather with a mechanical—precision, as though they were marionettes moved by the same spring. He lowered his arm. They lowered their arms. He bent towards the ground. They bent down in the same attitude. He picked up a stick and waved it about. They waved their sticks in windmill fashion like his.

Then the leader turned: gliding into the bushes, he crawled between the trees. The troop crawled after him.

In less than ten minutes they were descending the rain-worn mountain paths, but not even the movement of a pebble would have disclosed the presence of that army on the march.

In a quarter of an hour the leader halted: they halted as though frozen to the ground.

Two hundred yards below them appeared the town, stretched along the length of the roadstead, with numerous lights revealing the confused mass of piers, houses, villas, barracks. Beyond, the riding-lights of the warships, merchant-vessels, pontoons, anchored out at sea, were reflected from the surface of the still water. Farther beyond, the lighthouse projected its beams.

At that moment there sounded a cannon, the "first gun-fire," discharged from one of the concealed batteries. Then could also be heard the rolling of drums and the shrill sound of the fifes.

This was the hour of Retreat, the hour to go indoors: no stranger had the right thereafter to move about the town without being escorted by an officer of the garrison. It was the hour for the crews to go aboard their ships. Every quarter of an hour the patrols took to the guardroom the stragglers and the drunks. Then all was silent.

General MacKackmale could sleep with both eyes shut.

It seemed that England had nothing to fear, that night, for the Rock of Gibraltar.

II

Everybody knows that formidable Rock. It somewhat resembles an enormous crouching lion, its head towards Spain, its tail dipping into the sea. Its face discloses teeth—seven hundred cannon pointing from the casemates—"an old woman's teeth," as they are called, but those of an old woman who can bite if she is attacked.

Thus England is firmly placed here, as she is at Aden, Malta, and Hong Kong, on cliffs which, aided by the progress of mechanization, she will someday convert into revolving fortresses.

Meanwhile Gibraltar assures to the United Kingdom the incontestable domination of the fifteen miles of that Strait which the club of Hercules struck open in the depths of the Mediterranean Sea between Abyla and Calpe.

Have the Spanish given up the idea of regaining their Peninsula? Unquestionably, for it seems to be impregnable by land and by sea.

But there was someone who cherished the idea of reconquering this fragment of their Peninsula. It was the leader of the band, a strange being—or perhaps rather a madman. This hidalgo bore the name of Gil Braltar, a name which, to his mind at least, had predestined him to that patriotic conquest. His reason had not been able to resist it, and his place should have been in a mental home. He was well known, but for ten years nobody knew what had become of him. Had he happened to wander off into the outer world? In fact, he had not left his ancestral home: he lived there like a cave man in the woods, in the caverns, and especially in the unexplored depths of the Cave of San Miguel, which, it was reputed, led right down to the sea. He was thought of as dead. He was still alive, nonetheless, after the style of a savage, bereft of human reason, and obeying only his animal instincts.

III

He slept well, did General MacKackmale, with both eyes shut, though longer than was permitted by regulations. With his long arms, his round eyes deeply set under their beetling brows, his face embellished with a stubbly beard, his grimaces, his semi-human gestures, the extraordinary jutting-out of his jaw, he was remarkably ugly, even for an English general. Something of a monkey but an excellent soldier nevertheless, in spite of his ape-like appearance.

Yes, he slept in his comfortable apartments on Waterport Street, that winding road which traverses the town from the Waterport Gate to the Alameda Gate. Was he perhaps dreaming that England would seize Egypt, Turkey, Holland, Afghanistan, the Sudan, the Boer Republics—in short every part of the globe at her convenience? And this at the very moment when she was in danger of losing Gibraltar!

The door of his bedroom opened with a crash.

"What's up?" shouted the General, sitting erect with a bound.

"Sir," replied the aide-de-camp who had just burst in like a bomb-shell, "the town has been invaded!"

"The Spanish?"

"Presumably, sir."

"They have dared—"

The General did not complete his sentence. He got up, wrenched off the nightcap which adorned his head, jumped into his trousers, pulled on his cloak, slid down into his boots, clapped on his helmet, and buckled on his sword even while saying: "What's that racket I can hear?"

"It's the clatter of lumps of rock falling like an avalanche on the town."

"Then there's a lot of them?"

"Yes, sir, there must be."

"Then all the bandits of the coast must have joined forces to take us by surprise—the smugglers of Ronda, the fishermen of San Roque, the refugees who are swarming in the villages?"

"Yes, sir, I'm afraid so."

"Well, has the Governor been warned?"

"No, sir; we can't possibly get through to his residence on Europa Point. The gates have been seized, and the streets are full of the enemy."

"What about the barracks at the Waterport Gate?"

"We can't possibly get there either. The gunners must have been locked up in their barracks."

"How many men have you got with you?"

"About twenty, sir—men of the Third Regiment who have been able to get away."

"By Saint Dunstan!" shouted General MacKackmale. "Gibraltar taken from England by those—those—orange-vendors! It's not going to happen! No! It shan't!"

At that very instant the bedroom door opened, to admit a strange being who jumped onto the General's shoulders.

IV

"Surrender!" he howled in raucous tones which sounded more like the roar of a beast than like a human voice.

Several men, who had entered with the aide-de-camp, were about to throw themselves on that being when, seeing him by the light of the room, they recoiled.

"Gil Braltar!" they cried.

It was indeed that hidalgo whom nobody had seen for a long time—that savage from the Cave of San Miguel.

"Will you surrender?" he howled.

"Never!" replied General MacKackmale.

Suddenly, just as the soldiers were surrounding him, Gil Braltar emitted a prolonged and shrill "*Sriss.*" At once the courtyard of the house and then the house itself were filled with an invading army.

Could it be credible! They were monkeys, they were apes—hundreds of them! They had come to seize from the English that Rock of which they themselves are the true owners, that hill on which they had dwelt even before the

Spanish, and certainly long before Cromwell had dreamed of conquering it for Britain.*

Yes, indeed it was! And their numbers made them formidable, these tailless apes with whom one could live on good terms only by tolerating their thieving; those cunning and audacious beasts whom one took care not to molest because they revenged themselves by rolling enormous rocks on the town.

And now these apes had become an army led by a madman as fierce as themselves—by this Gil Braltar whom they knew, who shared their independent life. They were the soldiers of this four-legged William Tell whose whole existence was devoted to the one idea—to drive the foreigners from Spanish soil!

What a disgrace for the United Kingdom if the attempt succeeded! The English, conquerors of the Hindoos, of the Abysinians, of the Tasmanians, of the Australian Blackfellows, and of so many others, to be overcome by mere apes!

If such a catastrophe took place, all that General MacKackmale could do would be to blow out his brains. He could never survive such a dishonor.

However, before the apes whom their leader's whistle had summoned had entered the room, a few of the soldiers had been able to throw themselves upon Gil Braltar. The madman, endowed with superhuman strength, struggled, and only after great difficulty was he overcome. The monkey skin which he had borrowed had fallen from his head, and he was thrust into a corner almost naked, gagged, bound, unable to move or to utter a cry. A little later General MacKackmale rushed from the house resolved, in the best military tradition, to conquer or die.

The danger was no less outside. A few of the soldiers had been able to rally, probably at the Waterport Gate, and

* I have less information than M. Verne on the dreams of Cromwell, who died in 1658; but Gibraltar was conquered, in 1704, in the name of Queen Anne—much to the surprise of Charles, arch-duke of Austria, who believed that the English were fighting the War of the Spanish Succession on his behalf.—A.B.

were advancing toward the General's house, and a few shots could be heard in Waterport Street and the market-place. Nonetheless, so great was the number of apes that the garrison of Gibraltar was in danger of being forced to abandon the place. And then, if the Spaniards made common cause with the monkeys, the forts would be abandoned, the batteries deserted, and the fortifications would not have a single defender.

Suddenly the situation was completely changed.

Indeed, in the torchlight the apes could be seen beating a retreat. At their head marched their leader, brandishing his stick. And all, copying the movements of his arms and legs, were following him at the same speed.

Then had Gil Braltar been able to free himself from his bonds, to escape from that room where he had been imprisoned? It could not be doubted. But where was he going now? Was he going towards Europa Point, to the residence of the Governor, to attack him and call on him to surrender?

The madman and his army descended Waterport Street. Then, having passed the Alameda Gate, they set off obliquely across the Park and up the slopes.

An hour later, not one of the invaders of Gibraltar remained.

Then what had happened?

This was disclosed later, when General McKackmale appeared on the edge of the Park.

It was he who, taking the madman's place, had directed the retreat of that army after having wrapped himself up in the monkey skin. So much did he resemble an ape, that gallant warrior, that he had deceived the monkeys themselves. So he had only to appear for them to follow him.

It was indeed the idea of a genius, and it well merited the award to him of the Cross of the Order of St. George.

As for Gil Braltar, the United Kingdom gave him, for cash down, to a Barnum, who soon made his fortune exhibiting him in the towns of the Old and the New World. He even let it be supposed, that Barnum, that it was not the Wild Man of San Miguel whom he was exhibiting, but General MacKackmale himself.

The episode had certainly been a lesson for the government of Her Gracious Majesty. They realized that if Gibraltar could not be taken by man it was at the mercy of the apes. And that is why England, always practical, decided that in future it would send to the Rock only the ugliest of its generals, so that the monkeys could be deceived again.

This simple precaution will secure it for ever the ownership of Gibraltar.

AVRAM DAVIDSON

It's fitting that Avram Davidson should use the device of a tape-recorded interview in his latest story; for surely few writers can reproduce dialog with such tape-like fidelity. Most accounts of saucer sightings and contacts with Ufonians are patently hoaxes or frauds; but now and then one seems marked by at least subjective sincerity, like the narratives of Orfeo M. Angelucci (THE SECRET OF THE SAUCERS, *Amherst, 1955*) *and Truman Bethurum* (ABOARD A FLYING SAUCER, *DeVorss, 1954*). *Even these sincerely intentioned tales may, however, fail to reach the public in precisely factual form—as witness the fate of*

THE GRANTHA SIGHTING

THERE WERE visitors, of course—there were visitors pretty nearly every night nowadays. The side road had never had such traffic. Emma Towns threw the door open and welcomed them, beaming. Walt was there behind her, smiling in his usual shy way.

"Hello there, Emma," Joe Trobridge said. "Won't let me call her 'Mrs. Towns,' you know," he explained to his friends. They went into the warm kitchen of the farmhouse. "This is Si Haffner, this is Miss Anderson, this is Lou DelBello—all members of the Unexplained Aerial Phenomena Co-ordinators, too. And *this* gentleman," he added, when the other three had finished shaking hands, "is Mr. Tom Knuble."

"Just call me Long Tom," said Long Tom.

Emma said, "Oh, not the radio man? *Really?* Well, my goodness!"

"Tom would like to make some tape recordings from here," Joe explained. "To replay on his program. If you don't mind, that is?"

Why of *course* they didn't mind. And they made the visitors sit right down and they put hot coffee on the table, and tea and home-baked bread and some of Emma's preserves and some of Walt's scuppernong wine, and sandwiches, because they were sure their visitors must be tired and hungry after that long drive.

"This is mighty nice of you," Long Tom said. "*And* very tasty." The Townses beamed, and urged him to take more. Joe cleared his throat.

"This must be at least the fifth or sixth time *I've* been up here," he said. "As well as people I've told they could come up—"

"Any time—" said Emma.

"Any friends—" said Walt.

Joe half-smiled, half-chuckled. A slight trace of what might have been embarrassment was in the sound. "Well, from what I hear, you always put out a spread like this no matter who comes, and I . . . we . . . well . . ."

Miss Anderson came to his rescue. "We talked it over coming up," she said. "And we feel and we are agreed that you are so helpful and accommodating and in every way," she floundered.

"So we want to pay for the refreshments which is the least we can do," Lou DelBello intervened. The visitors nodded and said, Absolutely. Only Right.

Walt and Emma looked at each other. Either the idea had never occurred to them or they were excellent actors. "Oh, *no!* said Walt. "Oh, we wouldn't *think* of it," said Emma.

They were glad to, she said. It was their privilege. And nothing could induce them to take a cent.

Long Tom put down his cup. "I understand that you wouldn't take any payment for newspaper stories or posing for photographs, either," he said. The Townses shook their heads. "In short—wait a minute, let's get these tapes rolling. . . .

"Now, Mr. and Mrs. Walter F. Towns up here in Paviour's Bridge, New York," he continued after a moment, having started the recording machine, "I understand that you have both refused to commercialize in any way your experiences on the third of October, is that right? Never taken any money—AP, UP, *Life* magazine, *Journal-American*—wouldn't accept payment, is that right, Mr. and Mrs. Walter F. Towns up here in Paviour's Bridge, New York?"

Emma and Walt urged each other with nods of the head to speak first into the whizzing-rolling device, wound up saying together, "That's *No we* right *didn't.*"

"I would just like to say— Oh excuse me, Tom—" Lou began.

"No, go right ahead—"

"I would just like—"

"This is Lou DelBello, you folks out there on the party line: Lou. Del. Bello. Who is up here in Paviour's Bridge, New York, at the Walter F. Townses', along with Miss Jo Anderson, Si Haffner, and Joe Trobridge—as well as myself, Long Tom—all members of that interesting organization you've heard of before on our five-hour conversations over Station WRO, sometimes called familiarly the Flying Saucer Club, but known officially as the Unexplained Aerial Phenomena Coordinating Corps. *Well.* Quite a mouthful. And we are up here accepting the very gracious hospitality of Walt and Emma, who are going to tell us, in their own words, just exactly. what. it was. that happened on the famous night of October third, known as the October Third Sighting or the Grantha Incident; go right ahead, Lou DelBello."

Still dogged and game, Lou went ahead. "I would just like to say that in speaking of that very gracious hospitality that Walt and Emma have refused to take one red cent for so much as a sandwich or a cup of coffee. To all the visitors up here, I mean. So that certainly should take care of in advance of any charges or even the mention of, ah, com*mer*cialism."

Long Tom paused with a piece of home-baked bread and apple butter halfway into his mouth and gestured to Joe Trobridge.

"Yes, Lou," Joe leaped into the breach, "the same people

who didn't believe Columbus and are now so scornful of all the various and innumerable U.A.P. sightings, well, the same *type* people, I mean—some certain individuals who shall be nameless who have been suggesting that the Grantha Incident is just a *trick*, or maybe the Townses and myself are in business together—"

Miss Anderson said, "The Cloth-Like Substance, you mean, Joe?"

Long Tom swallowed, wiped his mouth. "Well, I didn't know they *made* apple butter like that any more, Emma," he said. "Yessir folks out there on the party line, the Townses up here in Paviour's Bridge, New York, are poultry farmers by profession but any time Emma wants to go into the preserves business she can sure count on me to—"

Joe interrupted. "I'd just like to clear up one point, Tom—"

"Why sure, Joe, go right ahead. This is the Long Tom Show, you folks out there on the party line. Five hours of talk and music on Station WRO . . ."

Si Haffner for the first time spoke up:

"I understand this Cloth-Like Substance is still refusing or rather I should say *defying* analysis in the laboratories; is that right, Joe?"

Joe said it certainly was. This Cloth-Like Substance, he reminded the listeners-to-be, was left behind at the Townses' after the October Third Sighting. It was soft, it was absorbent, it was non-inflammable; and it resembled nothing known to our terrestrial science. He had tried to analyze it in his own lab, but, failing to do so, he had turned it over to the General Chemical Company. So far even *they*, with their vastly superior facilities, were unable to say just what it was. And while in a way he was *flattered* that some people thought well maybe he was in cahoots with an outfit like GenChem, well—

"Yessir," said Long Tim; "just let me tell you folks out there on the party line that there is *nothing* like this chicken-salad sandwich that Mrs. Emma F. Towns puts up out here in Paviour's Bridge, New York. *Won*derful. But I would like you to tell us in your own words, Emma, just what exactly

did happen that certain night of October third, known to some as the Grantha Incident. Tell us in your own words."

Emma said, "Well."

"Tell us what kind of a day it was. What was the first thing you did?"

Emma said, "Well . . ."

The first thing she did was to get up and heat the mash for the chicks. Not that she minded getting up that early. Some people who'd lived in the city and talked of settling down on a little poultry farm, when it actually came *to* it, they found they didn't care for it too much. But not Emma. No; it wasn't the hours she minded.

And it wasn't the work. She *liked* work. The house was well built, it was easy to keep warm, it had a lovely view. But it was so far away from everybody. Even the mailman left his deliveries way down at the bottom of the hill. There was the radio, there was the television, but—when you came right down to it—who came to the house? The man who delivered the feed. The man who collected the eggs. And that was all.

The day passed like every other day. Scatter cracked corn. Regular feeding. Scatter sawdust. Clean out from under the wiring. Mix the oats and the clarified buttermilk. Sardine oil. Collect the eggs. Wash them. Pack them. And, of course, while the chickens had to eat, so did the Townses.

No, there was nothing unusual about the day. Until about—

"—about five o'clock, I think it was," Emma said.

"*Noth*ing unusual had happened previous to this?" Long Tom asked. "You had *no* warning?"

Emma said No, none.

"I would just like to say—" Joe Trobridge began.

"Well, now just a min—" Tom cut in.

"I just want to clear up one point," Joe said. "Now, prior to the time I arrived at your doorstep that night, had you ever seen or heard of me before, Emma?"

"No, never."

"That's all I wanted to say. I just wanted to clear up that point."

"You got that, did you, all you folks out there on the party line?" inquired Long Tom. "They. had. never. seen, *or* heard. of each other. before. And then, Emma, you were about to say, about five o'clock?"

About five o'clock, when the dark was falling, Emma first noticed the cloud. She called it to Walt's attention. It was a funny-looking cloud. For a long time it didn't move, although the other clouds did. And then—as the bright reds of the sunset turned maroon, magenta, purple—the cloud slowly came down from the sky and hovered about ten feet over the Townses' front yard.

"Walt, there is something *very* funny about that cloud," said Emma.

"I don't believe it's no cloud," Walt declared. "Listen to that noise, would you." It came from the . . . cloud—thing—whatever it was: a rattling muffled sort of noise, and an angry barking sort of noise. The air grew very dark.

"Do you think we should put on the lights?" Emma said. Walt grunted. And the—whatever it was—came down with a lurching motion and hit the sod with a clonk. It was suddenly lit up by a ring of lights, which went out again almost at once, went on, went out. Then there was a long silence.

A clatter. A rattle. And again, the barking sound.

"Sounds like someone's cussing, almost. Somehow," Walt said.

"*I* am going to put on the *light*," said Emma. And she did. The noise stopped. Emma put on her sweater. "Come out on the porch with me," she said. They opened the door and stepped out on the porch. They looked over at the . . . thing. It sat on the ground about fifty feet away.

"Is anything *wrong*?" Emma called. "Yoo-hoo! Anything wrong?"

There was a slither and a clatter. The lights went on again in the thing and there was now an opening in it and two figures in the opening. One of them started forward, the other reached out a—was that an *arm*?—but the first

figure barked angrily and it drew back. And there was another sound now, a sort of yelping noise, as the first figure walked towards the house and the second figure followed it.

"A man and his wife," said Emma. Walt observed they were dressed light, considering the time of year.

"That's really nothing but what you might call, well, bloomers, that they got on, though they *are* long and they *do* reach up high."

"Sssshh! Hello, there. My name is Mrs. Towns and this is my husband, Mr. Towns. You folks in any trouble?"

The folks halted some distance away. Even at that distance it was possible to see that they were much shorter and broader than the Townses.

"Why, you'll catch your *death* out there with no coats on!" Emma exclaimed. "You're all *blue!*" Actually, it was a sort of blue-*green,* but she didn't want to embarrass them. "Come in, come on in," she gestured. They came on in. The yelping noise began again. "There. Now isn't it warmer?" Emma closed the door.

From the crook of her—*was* it an arm? It couldn't be anything else—one of the figures lifted up the source of the yelping. Emma peered at it.

"Well, my *goodness!*" Emma said. She and Walt exchanged glances. "Isn't it just the picture of its father!" she said. An expression which might have been a smile passed over the faces of the two figures.

The first figure reached into its garment and produced an oval container, offered it, withdrew it as a petulant yelp was heard. The figure looked at Emma, barked diffidently.

"Why, don't you *know* what she's saying, Walt?" Emma asked.

Walt squirmed. "It seems like I do, but I know I couldn't, hardly," he said.

Emma was half-indignant. "Why, you can, too. She's saying: 'The car broke down and I wonder if I might warm the baby's bottle?' *That's* what she's saying.—Of *course* you may. You just come along into the kitchen."

Walt scratched his ear, looked at the second figure. It looked at him.

"Why, I guess I'd better go along back with you," Walt

said, "and take a look at your engine. That was a bad rattle you got there."

It was perhaps half an hour later that they returned. "Got it fixed all right now," Walt said. "Loose umpus on the hootenanny . . . Baby OK?"

"Sshh . . . it's asleep. All it wanted was a warm bottle and a clean diaper."

There was a silence. Then everyone was talking (or barking) at once—of course, in low tones. "Oh, glad to do it, glad to be of help," said Emma. "Any time . . . and whenever you happen to be around this way, why just you drop in and see us. Sorry you can't stay."

"Sure thing," Walt seconded. "That's right."

Emma said, "It's so lonely up here. We hardly ever have any visitors at all. . . . Goodby! Goodby, now!" And finally the visitors closed the opening in their vehicle.

"Hope the umpus stays fixed in the hootenanny . . ." There was a burst of pyrotechnic colors, a rattling noise, and a volley of muffled barks. "It didn't," Walt said. "*Hear* him cussing!" The rattling ceased, the colors faded into a white mist. "Got it now . . . look at those lights go round and round . . . there they go. Wherever it is they're going," he concluded, uncertainly. They closed the door. Emma sighed.

"It *was* nice having someone to visit with," she said. "Heaven only knows how long it will be before anyone else comes here."

It was exactly three hours and five minutes. Two automobiles came tearing up the road and screamed to a stop. People got out, ran pounding up the path, knocked at the door. Walt answered.

At first they all talked at once, then all fell silent. Finally, one man said, "I'm Joe Trobridge of the U.A.P.C.C.—the Unexplained Aerial— Listen, a *sighting* was reported in this vicinity! Did you see it? A flying saucer? Huh?"

Walt nodded slowly. "So *that's* what it was," he said. "I thought it was some kind of a airship."

Trobridge's face lit up. Everyone began to babble again. Then Trobridge said, "You *saw* it? Was it close? What?

SHUT UP, EVERYBODY! On your front lawn? What'd they look like? What—?"

Walt pursed his mouth. "I'll tell ya," he began. "They were blue."

"*Blue?*" exclaimed Trobridge.

"Well . . ." Walt's tone was that of a man willing to stretch a point. "Maybe it was green."

"*Green!*"

"Well, which was it?" someone demanded. "Blue or green?"

Walt said, in the same live-and-let live tone, "Bluish-green." Joe Trobridge opened his mouth. "Or, greenish-blue," Walt continued, cutting him off. The visitors milled around, noisily.

"How were they dressed?"

Walt pursed his mouth. "I'll tell ya," he said. "They were wearing what ya might call like bloomers . . ."

"*Bloomers!?*"

Emma glanced around nervously. The visitors didn't seem to like what Walt was telling them. Not at all.

Joe Trobridge pressed close. "Did they say what their purpose was, in visiting the Earth?" he asked, eagerness restored somewhat—but only somewhat.

Walt nodded. "Oh, sure. Told us right away. Come to see if they could warm the baby's bottle." Someone in the crowd made a scornful noise. "That was it, y'see . . ." His voice trailed off uncertainly.

The man named Joe Trobridge looked at him, his mouth twisted. "Now, *wait* a minute," he said. "Just wait a *min*ute . . ."

Emma took in the scene at a glance. No one would believe them. They'd all go away and never come back and no one would ever visit them again—except the man who delivered the feed and the man who collected the eggs. She looked at the disappointed faces around her, some beginning to show anger, and she got up.

"My husband is joking," she said, loudly and clearly. "Of *course* it wasn't like that."

Joe turned to her. "Did you see it, too, lady? What happened, then? I mean, *really* happened? Tell us in your own words. What did they look like?"

Emma considered for a moment. "They were very tall," she said. "And they had on spacesuits. And their leader spoke to us. He looked just like us, only maybe his head was a bit bigger. He didn't have no hair. He didn't really speak English—it was more like tleppathy—"

The people gathered around her closely, their eyes aglow, their faces eager. "Go on," the said; "go on—"

"His name was . . . Grantha—"

"*Grantha,*" the people breathed.

"And he said we shouldn't be afraid, because he came in peace. 'Earth people,' he said, 'we have observed you for a long time and now we feel the time has come to make ourselves known to you. . . .' "

Long Tom nodded. "So that's the way it was."

"That's the way it was," she said. "More coffee, anybody?"

"You brew a mighty fine cup of coffee, Mrs. Emma Towns up here in Paviour's Bridge, New York, let me tell the folks on the party line," Long Tom said. "No sugar, thanks, just cream. . Well, say, about this piece of Cloth-Like Substance. It's absorbent—it's soft—it doesn't burn—and. it can't be analyzed. Now, about how big is this wonderful item which Grantha and his people left behind as a sample of their superior technicology and peaceful intentions and which continues to baffle scientists? About how big is it? Just tell us in your own words. . . ."

Emma considered. Joe pursed his lips.

Lou DelBello smiled. "Well, I've had the good fortune to see it," he said, "and—speaking as the father of three—the, uh, best comparison of its size which I could give you, I'd say it's just about as big as a diaper!"

He guffawed. Joe burst out laughing, as did Si Haffner. Miss Anderson giggled. Long Tom chuckled. Emma and Walt looked nervously at each other, looked anxiously at their oh, so very welcome guests—but only for a moment. Then, reassured, they leaned back and joined in the merriment.

C. M. KORNBLUTH

Shortly after he wrote Theory of Rocketry, *Cyril Kornbluth died of a sudden heart attack. Kornbluth was still a young man, although he had been writing successfully for most of two decades. As an eager teen-ager, he sold innumerable stories (often of astonishingly high quality) to various magazines under assorted by-lines. In his mid-twenties he felt (one guesses) that he had advanced enough as a writer to use his own name, and immediately established his status by signing it to three classics which every enthusiast of s.f. must know almost by heart*: The Little Black Bag (Astounding, *July 1950*) *The Silly Season* (*F&SF, Fall 1950*) *and* The Mind-worm (Worlds Beyond, *December 1950*). *He went on from distinguished shorts to distinguished novels (by himself and in collaboration) and became unquestionably one of s.f.'s top creators in the 1950's, almost uniquely able (perhaps his closest rival was the late Henry Kuttner) to combine scientific and sociological extrapolation, perceptive character study, highly literate prose, and rousing adventurous storytelling, in so perfect a fusion that all of these qualities were present in every paragraph.*

In his shorter works, Kornbluth was particularly noted for what might be called not so much future-fiction as fiction of the future. That is, the stories which might appear in a quality magazine twenty years from now, dealing (apparently) only with people, their characters and problems, and not at all with scientific thinking and extrapolation—and yet, by the very nature of character and problem, brilliantly illuminating that segment of the future . . . and a few crannies of the present as well. Among the most notable of these have been The Goodly Creatures (*F&SF, December 1952*), The Altar at Midnight (Galaxy, *November 1952*), *and now this last story.*

(NOTE: *All of the stories mentioned above may be found in Kornbluth's collection* THE MIND-WORM.)

THEORY OF ROCKETRY

MR. EDEL taught six English classes that year at Richard M. Nixon High School, and the classes averaged 75 pupils each. That was 450 boys and girls, but Mr. Edel still tried to have the names down cold by at least the third week of the semester. As English 308 stormed into his room he was aware that he was not succeeding, and that next year he would even stop trying, for in 1978 the classes would average 82 pupils instead of 75.

One seat was empty when the chime sounded; Mr. Edel was pleased to notice that he remembered whose it was. The absent pupil was a Miss Kahn, keyed into his memory by "Kahnstipaded," which perhaps she was, with her small pinched features centered in a tallow acre of face. Miss Kahn slipped in some three seconds late; Edel nodded at his intern, Mrs. Giovino, and Mrs. Giovino coursed down the aisle to question, berate and possibly to demerit Miss Kahn. Edel stood up, the Modern Revised Old Testament already open before him.

"You're blessed," he read, *"if you're excused for your wrong-doing and your sin is forgiven. You're blessed if God knows that you're not evil and sly any more. I, King David, used to hide my sins from God while I grew old and blustered proudly all day. But all day and all night too your hand was heavy on me, God. . . "*

It would be the flat, crystal-clear, crystal-blank M.R.O.T. all this week; next week he'd read (with more pleasure) from the Roman Catholic Knox translation; the week after that, from the American Rabbinical Council's crabbed version heavy with footnotes; and the week after that, back to M.R.O.T. Thrice blessed was he this semester that there were no Moslems, Buddhists, militant atheists or miscellaneous cultists to sit and glower through the reading or exercise their legal right to wait it out in the corridor. This semester the classes were All-American: Protestant, Catholic, Jewish—choice of one.

"Amen," chorused the class and they sat down; two minutes of his fifty-minute hour were gone forever.

Soft spring was outside the windows, and they were restless. Mr. Edel "projected" a little as he told them: "This is the dreaded three-minute impromptu speech for which English Three Oh Eight is notorious, young ladies and gentlemen. The importance of being able to speak clearly on short notice should be obvious to everybody. You'll get nowhere in your military service if you can't give instructions and verbal orders. You'll get less than nowhere in business if you can't convey your ideas crisply and accurately." A happy thought struck him: great chance to implement the Spiritual Values Directive. He added: "You may be asked to lead in prayer or say grace on short notice." (He'd add *that* one to his permanent repertoire; it was a natural.) "We are not asking the impossible. Anybody can talk interestingly, easily and naturally for three minutes if they try. Miss Gerber, will you begin with a little talk on your career plans?"

Miss Gerber ("Grapefruit" was the mnemonic) rose coolly and driveled about the joys of motherhood until Mrs. Giovino passed her card to Edel and called time.

"You spoke freely, Miss Gerber, but perhaps not enough to the point," said Edel. "I'm pleased, though, that you weren't bothered by any foolish shyness. I'm sure everybody I call on will be able to talk right up like you did." (He liked that *"like"* the way you like biting on a tooth that aches; *he'd* give them Artificial Grammar De-emphasis . . .) "Foster, may we hear from you on the subject of your coming summer vacation?" He jotted down a *C* for the Grapefruit.

Foster ("Fireball") rose and paused an expert moment. Then, in a firm and manly voice he started with a little joke ("if I survive English Three Oh Eight"), stated his theme ("a vacation is not a time for idling and wasted opportunity"), developed it ("harvest crew during the day for *physical*—my Science Search project during the evenings for *mental*"), elevated it ("no excuse for neglecting one's regular attendance at one's place of worship") and concluded with a little joke ("should be darned glad to get back to schooll").

The speech clocked 2:59, it was masterly; none of the other impromptus heard that morning came close to it.

"And," said Mr. Edel at lunch to his semi-crony Dr. Fuqua, Biology, "between classes I riffled through the grade cards again and found I'd marked him *F*. Of course I changed it to *A*. The question is, *why*?"

"Because you'd made a mistake," said Fuqua absently. Something was on his mind, thought Edel.

"No, no. Why did I make the mistake?"

Well, Fured, in *The Psychology of Everyday—*"

"Roland, please, I know all that. Assume I do. Why do I unconsciously dislike Foster? I should get down on my knees and thank God for Foster."

Fuqua shook his head and began to pay attention. "Foster?" he said. "You don't know the half of it. I'm his faculty adviser. Quite a boy, Foster."

"To me, just a name, a face, a good recitation every time. You know: seventy-five to a class. What's he up to here at dear old Tricky Dicky?"

"Watch the funny jokes, Edel," said Fuqua, alarmed.

"Sorry. It slipped out. But Foster?"

"Well, he's taking an inhuman pre-engineering schedule. Carrying it with ease. Going out for all the extra-curricular stuff the law allows. R.O.T.C. Drill Team, Boxing Squad, Math Club, and there I had to draw the line. He wanted on the Debating Team too. I've seen him upset just once. He came to me last year when the school dentist wanted to pull a bad wisdom tooth he had. He made me make the dentist wait until he had a chance to check the dental requirements of the Air Force Academy. They allow four extractions, so he let the dentist yank it. Fly boy. Off we go into the whatsit. He wants it bad."

"I see. Just a boy with motivation. How long since you've seen one, Roland?"

Dr. Fuqua leaned forward, his voice low and urgent. "To hell with Foster, Dave. I'm in trouble. Will you help me?"

"Why, of course, Roland. How much do you need?" Mr. Edel was a bachelor, and had found one of the minor joys of that state to be "tiding over" his familied friends.

"Not that kind of trouble, Dave. Not yet. They're sharpening the ax for me. I get a hearing this afternoon."

"Good God! What are you supposed to have done?"

"Everything. Nothing. It's one of those 'best interests' things. Am I taking the Spiritual Values Directive *seriously* enough? Am I *thinking* about patting any adolescent fannies? Exactly *why* am I in the lowest quarter for my seniority-group with respect to voluntary hours of refresher summer courses? Am I *happy* here?"

Edel said: "These things always start somewhere. Who's out to get you?"

Fuqua took a deep breath and said in a surprisingly small voice: "Me, I suppose."

"Oh?"

Then it came out with a rush. "It was the semester psychometrics. I'd been up all night almost fighting with Beth. She does *not* understand how to handle a fifteen-year-old boy—never mind. I felt sardonic so I did something sardonic. And stupid. Don't ever get to feeling sardonic, Dave. I took the psychometric and I checked their little boxes and I told the god-damned truth right down the line. I checked them where I felt like checking them and not where a prudent biology teacher *ought* to check them."

"You're dead," Mr. Edel said after a pause.

"I thought I could get a bunch of the teachers to say they lie their way through the psychometrics. Start a real stink."

"I'd make a poor ditch digger, Roland, but—if you can get nine others, I'll speak up. No, make that six others. I don't think they could ignore eight of us."

"You're a good man," Dr. Fuqua said. "I'll let you know. There's old McGivern—near retirement. I want to try him." He gulped his coffee and headed across the cafeteria.

Edel sat there, mildly thunderstruck at Fuqua's folly and his own daring. Fuqua had told them the kind of bird he was by checking YES or NO on the silly-clever statements. He had told them that he liked a drink, that he thought most people were stupider than he, that he talked without thinking first, that he ate too much, that he was lazy, that he had an eye for a pretty ankle—that he was a human being not much better or worse than any other human being. But that wasn't the way to do it, and damned well Fuqua had known it. You simply told yourself firmly, for the duration

of the test: *"I am a yuk. I have never had an independent thought in my life; independent thinking scares me. I am utterly monogamous and heterosexual. I go bowling with the boys. Television is the greatest of the art forms. I believe in installment purchasing. I am a yuk."*

That these parlor games were taken seriously by some people was an inexplicable, but inexorable, fact of life in the twentieth century. Edel had yukked his way through scholarships, college admissions, faculty appointment and promotions and had never thought the examinations worse than a bad cold. Before maturity set in, in the frat house, they had eased his qualms about psychometric testing with the ancient gag: "You ain't a man until you've had it three times."

Brave of him, pretty brave at that, to back up Fuqua . . . if Roland could find six others.

Roland came to him at four o'clock to say he had not even found one other. "I don't suppose—no. I'm not asking you to, Dave. Two, it wouldn't be any good."

He went into the principal's office.

The next day a bright young substitute was teaching biology in his place and his student advisees had been parceled out among other teachers. Mr. Edel found that young Foster had now become his charge.

The 72 pupils in his English 114 class sat fascinated and watched the television screen. Dr. Henley Ragen was teaching them *Macbeth,* was teaching about nine hundred English 114 classes throughout the state *Macbeth,* and making them like it. The classroom rapport was thick enough to cut and spread with a shingle. The man's good, Edel thought, but *that* good? How much is feedback from their knowing he's famous for his rapport, how much is awe of his stupendous salary, still nowhere equal to nine hundred teachers' salaries?

Dr. Henley Ragen, *el magnífico,* portentously turned a page; there was grim poetry in the gesture. He transfixed the classroom (nine hundred classrooms) with Those Eyes. Abruptly he became Macbeth at the Banquet prepar'd. With nervous hilarity he shouted at his guests: *"You know your own degrees; sit down! At first and last, the hearty welcome!"* Stockstill at a lectern he darted around the table,

bluffly rallying the company, slipped off to chat, grimly-merry, with the first Murtherer at the door, returned to the banquet, stood in chilled horror at the Ghost in the chair, croaked: *"The table's full."*

Mr. Edel studied the faces of his 72 English 114ers. They were in hypnotic states of varying depths, except Foster. The Fireball was listening and learning, his good mind giving as well as taking. The intelligent face was alive, the jaw firm, and around him eyes were dull and jaws went slack. Foster could speak and write an English sentence, which perhaps was the great distinguishing mark between him and the rest of English 114. Blurted fragments of thought came from them, and the thoughts were clichés a hundred times out of a hundred.

Dr. Henley Ragen growled at them: *"We are yet but young in deed . . ."* and his eyes said the rest, promising horrors to come. He snapped the book shut like a pistol's bang; the 114ers popped out of their trances into dazed attentiveness. "Notebooks!" said Ragen (*qua* Ragen) and, 72 gun-fighters quick on the draw, they snapped out books and poised their pens. Ragen spoke for ten minutes about the scene; every so often Those Eyes and an intensification of That Voice cued them to write a word or a phrase, almost without glancing at the paper. (Later each would look at his notes and not be surprised to find them lucid, orderly, even masterful summations of the brief lecture.)

As Dr. Henley Ragen bluffly delivered a sort of benediction from the altar of learning, Mr. Edel thought: well, they've got the Banquet Scene now; they'll own it forever. The way they own the Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales*, the *Ode to the West Wind*, *Arrowsmith*. A good deal better than nothing; *pauca sed matura*. Or so he supposed.

That afternoon from three to five Mr. Edel was available to his advisees; it was a period usually devoted to catching up on his paper work. Beyond making out the student's assignment schedule, a task traditionally considered beyond the capacity of the young, he had done no advising in years. And Foster appeared.

His handshake was manly, his grin was modest but com-

pelling. He got to the point. "Mr. Edel, do you think I could swing an Enrichment Project in English?"

The teacher hardly knew what he meant. "Enrichment? Well, we haven't been doing that lately, Foster. I suppose it's still in the optional curriculum—"

"Yes sir, form sixty-eight, English, paragraph forty-five, section seven. *'Opportunities shall be afforded to students believed qualified by advisers to undertake projects equivalent to College Freshman English term papers and the grades therefor shall be entered on the students' records and weighed as evidence in assigning students' positions in the graduating class.'*"

Mr. Edel had found Foster's card by then and was studying it. The boy's schedule was brutal, but his grade average was somewhere between B+ and A. "Foster," he told him, "there's such a thing as a breaking point. I—I understand you want very much to go to Colorado Springs." (Poor Fuqua! What had become of . . . ?)

"Very much, sir. They expect the best—they have a right to expect the best. I'm not complaining, Mr. Edel, but there are girls with straight-A averages who aren't working as hard as I am. Well, I've just got to beat them at their own game."

Mr. Edel understood. It wasn't just girls, though mostly it was. There was a type of student who was no trouble, who did the work, every smidgen of it, who read every word of every assigned page, who turned in accurate, curiously dead, echoless, unresonant papers which you could not in decency fault though you wanted to tear them up and throw them in their authors' bland faces. You had a curious certainty that the adeptly-memorized data they reeled back on demand vanished forever once the need for a grade was gone, that it never by any chance became bone of their bone to strengthen them against future trials. Often enough when you asked them what they hoped to be they smilingly said: "I am going to teach. . . ."

Foster, now. A boy who *fought* with the material and whipped it. He said: "Why so strong, Foster? What's it about?"

The boy said: "Space, partly. And my father. Two big challenges, Mr. Edel. I think I'm a very lucky fellow. Here

I am with a new frontier opening up, but there are lots of fellows my age who don't see it. I see it because of my father. It's wonderful to have a challenge like that—can I be the man he is? Can I learn even more, be a better leader, a better engineer?"

Mr. Edel was moved deeply. "Your father just missed space-flight, is that it?"

"By a whisker," Foster said regretfully. "Nothing can be done about it except what I'm doing."

"He's an aero-engineer?"

"He can do *anything*," Foster said positively. "And he has!"

A picture of the elder Foster was forming in Mr. Edel's mind—young Fireball grown taller, solider and grizzled, the jaw firmed and controlled, the voice more powerful and sure. And, unquestionably, leather puttees.

Foster's card said he had no mother, which made it more understandable. This fine boy was hard material honed to an edge, single-purposed. Did he have a young Hap Arnold here in his office? A Curtis LeMay? They had to come from somewhere, those driving, wide-ranging leaders and directors of millions. The slow-rolling conquest of space needed such men, first to navigate and pilot so no navigator or pilot would ever be able to snow them, then to move up step by step through research to command, then to great command.

"I'll bet on you, Foster," he said abruptly. "We can't let the—the future *English* teachers outpoint you with their snap courses. You'll do me a term paper on . . . on *Henry V*. First, read it. Read *hell* out of it and take notes. Get in touch with me when you think you're ready to talk it over. I happen to be a bachelor; I have time in the evenings. And talk it over with your father, if you can persuade him to read along with you."

Foster laughed. "I'm afraid Dad's much too busy for Shakespeare, but I'll try. Thanks, Mr. Edel." He left.

Mr. Edel, with considerable trouble, found a pad of forms in his desk which covered Enrichment Projects, English, Adviser's Permission for. He filled one out for Foster, looked it over and said, surprised: "Again, damn it!" He had checked the box for Permission Denied. He tore up the form—it was discolored anyway from being so long on the top of the

pad—and meticulously made out another, checking the various boxes with exquisite care.

That night after dinner he tried to telephone Roland Fuqua, but service to his number had been discontinued. Alarmed, he buzzed over on his scooter to Fuqua's apartment, one of a quarter-million in the Dearborn Village Development of Metropolitan Life & Medical. Roland's hulking, spoiled and sullen boy Edward (who had unilaterally changed his name last year to Rocky) was the only person there, and he was on his way out: "to an orgy with some pigs," if you believed him. He said "Little Rollo" was now a night-shift lab assistant in a pet-food company's Quality Control Department and this was his mother's Bingo night. "You want I should give a message?" he asked satirically, overplaying the role of intolerably burdened youth.

"If it won't break your back," Mr. Edel said, "please ask your father to give me a ring sometime."

Again in his own small apartment Mr. Edel thought of many things. Of the ancient papyrus which, when decoded, moaned: "*Children are not now as respectful and diligent as they were in the old days.*" Of *Henry V*. Of Dr. Fuqua drudging away on pet-food protein determinations and lucky to be doing that. Of his own selfish, miserable, lonely comfort in his castle. Of Foster, the hero-king to be, and of himself, Aristotle to the young Alexander. Had there been a dozen such in his twenty years? There had not. Marie Perrone still sent him her novels, and they were almost popular and very bad. Jim Folwell had gone to Princeton and into the foreign service and that was that. Janice Reeves and Ward Dreiman were married and both teaching at Cornell. What had happened to the hundred thousand others he had taught only God and themselves knew. If they all dropped dead at this instant, tomorrow morning some trucks would not roll for an hour or two, some advertising agencies would come near to missing a few deadlines, some milk would sour and some housewives would bang, perplexed, on the doors of shops that should be open, a few sales would languish unclosed, a few machines would growl for lack of oil. But Foster might land on the moons of Jupiter.

Therefore let him learn, make him learn, how to be great.

He would meet his Pistols, Bardolphs, Fluellens, a few Exeters, and without doubt his Cambridges and Scroops: clowns, fuss-budgets, friends and traitors. It could matter to nobody except herself if her agent ripped poor arty Marie Perrone up her back; it might matter a great deal to—he shied at the alternatives—to, let us say, Man, if Foster trusted a Pistol to do his work, or passed over a Fluellen for his mannerisms, or failed to know a Scroop when he saw one.

We will arm the young hero-king, he thought comfortably just before sleep claimed him.

Roland Fuqua had been transferred to Toledo by the pet-food company. He wrote to Edel:

Instinct tells me not to queer my luck by talking about it, but anyway—I really believe I'm moving up in the organization. The other day a party from Sales came through the QC labs and one of them, just an ordinary-looking Joe, stopped to talk to me about the test I was running—asked very intelligent questions. You could have knocked me over with a Folin-Wu pipette when they told me who he was afterwards: just John McVey himself, Assistant Vice-President in Charge of Sales! Unaccustomed as I am to pipe dreams, it can't be a coincidence that it was me he talked to instead of half-a-dozen other lab men with seniority; I don't know what he has in mind exactly, maybe some kind of liaison job between QC and Sales, which would put me on Staff level instead of Hourly-Rated. . . .

Mr. Edel felt sick for him. He would have to answer the letter at once; if he put it off he would put it off again and their correspondence would peter out and Fuqua would be betrayed. But what could he tell him—that he *was* pipe-dreaming, that "coincidences" like that happen to everybody a hundred times a day, that Roland Fuqua, Ph.D., would never, at 45, move from the Quality Control lab to the glittering world of Sales?

He stalled for time by stamping and addressing the envelope first, then hung over the typewriter for five minutes of misery. It was Wednesday night; Foster was due for the twelfth and last of his Enrichment sessions. Mr. Edel tried

not to cause Fuqua pain by dwelling on the world of teaching he had lost—but *what* else was there to write about?

I'm sure you remember Foster—the fly boy? I've been taking him, on one of those Enrichment things, through Henry V. *This is supposed to win him .001 of a place higher on the graduating class list and get him into the Academy, and I suppose it will. Things are very simple for Foster, enviably so. He has a titan of engineering for a father who appears to commute between the Minas Geraes power station in Brazil, his consulting service in the city and trouble spots in the I.T.&T. network—maybe I should say commutate. I honestly do not believe that Foster has to lie his way through the personality profiles like the rest of us mortals—*

Now there was a hell of a thing to put down. He was going to rip the page out and start again, then angrily changed his mind. Fuqua wasn't a cripple; it wasn't Bad Form to mention his folly; it would be merely stupid to pretend that nothing had happened. He finished out the page with a gush of trivia. Sexy little Mrs. Dickman who taught Spanish was very visibly expecting. New dietician in the cafeteria, food cheaper, but worse than ever. Rumored retirement of old man Thelusson again and one step up for History teachers if true. Best wishes good luck regards to Beth and the youngster, Dave. He whipped the page into folds, slipped it into the envelope and sealed the flap fast, before he could change his mind again. It was time to stop treating Fuqua like a basket case; if convalescence had not begun by now it never would.

His bell rang: Foster was on time, to the minute.

They shook hands rather formally. "Like a cup of coffee, Foster?" Mr. Edel asked.

"No thank you, sir."

"I'll make one for myself then. Brought your paper? Good. Read it to me."

While he compounded coffee Foster began to read. After much discussion they had settled on "Propaganda and Reality in *Henry V*" as his topic. The boy had read Holinshed where relevant, articles in the *Dictionary of National*

Biography and appropriate history texts. Beyond suggesting these, Mr. Edel had left him alone in the actual treatment of his paper. He did not quite know what to expect from Foster beyond careful organization and an absence of gross blunders; he waited with interest.

The paper was a short one—1500 words, by request. Nevertheless it gave Mr. Edel a few painful shocks. There were two sneers at "deluded groundlings," much reveling in the irony of the fictional Henry's affection for his Welsh captain as against the real Henry who had helped to crush Glendower and extinguish the Welsh as a nation, and fun with the Irishman Macmorris who came loyally from Shakespeare's pen in 1599 while "the general of our gracious empress" was doing his best to extinguish the Irish as a nation. Henry's *"we have now no thoughts in us but France (save those to God)"* was evaluated as "the poet's afterthought." The massacre of the French prisoners at Agincourt, Henry's brutal practical joke with the pretended glove of a French nobleman, his impossibly compressed and eloquent courtship of Katharine, were all somehow made to testify to a cynical Shakespeare manipulating his audience's passions.

The great shock was that Foster approved of all this. *"I was a time of troubles and England was besieged from without and threatened from within. The need of the time was a call to unity, and this Shakespeare provided in good measure. The London mob and the brotherhood of apprentices, always a potential danger to the Peace, no doubt were inspired and pacified for a time by the Shakespearean version of a successful aggressor's early career."*

Modestly Foster folded his typescript.

It was ground into Mr. Edel that you start by saying whatever words of praise are possible and then go on to criticize. Mechanically he said warm things about the paper's organization, its style, its scholarly apparatus. "But—aren't you taking a rather too utilitarian view of the play? It is propaganda to some extent, but should you stop short with the propaganda function of the play? I'm aware that you're limited by your topic and length, but I wish there had been some recognition of the play's existence as a work of art."

Foster said, smiling: "Well, I'm new at this, Mr. Edel. I didn't know I was supposed to stray. Should I revise it?"

"Oh, no," Mr. Edel said quickly. "I didn't mean to imply that you're unarguably mistaken in anything you said. I don't know why I'm fussing at you about it at all. I suppose you've taken a sort of engineering approach to literature, which is natural enough. Did you ever succeed in engaging your father in the project?"

"I'm afraid not, Mr. Edel. You can imagine."

"He's been away?"

"Why, no." Foster was surprised. But *didn't* his father go away now and then? He thought Foster had said—or *almost* said—

He took the paper from him and leafed through it. "This is quite good enough for a pass, Foster. It'll be read by somebody in the English Chairman's office, but that's a formality. Let's say you've completed your Enrichment Option." He stuck out his hand and Foster took it warmly. "That, then, is that. Do you have to run now?"

"With all rods out," Foster said. "I've got to prepare for the Math Team Meet, a hundred things. Can I mail that for you?"

It was the letter to Fuqua on his desk. "Why, thanks."

"Thank *you,* Mr. Edel, for the time you've taken with me."

Well worth it, son, Mr. Edel thought after the door closed. There aren't many like you. The paper was a little cold and cynical, but you'll learn. Criticism's heady stuff. Speaking quite objectively, you've done a piece thoroughly consistent with College Freshman English work, and that's what you were supposed to do. If it helps get you into Colorado Springs, I've done my job.

He turned in the paper the next day to the English Chairman's office and the Assistant Chairman read it while he waited, mumbled "Seems quite competent" and entered a Completed on Foster's grade card. He let his eyes run over the other grades and whistled. "A beaver," he said.

"All rods out," Mr. Edel smugly corrected him, and went to the door. A freshman girl who knew him, on messenger duty with the Principal's Office, intercepted him in the corridor. The message: he would please report at once to the

Principal; Mrs. Giovino would be advised to take such classes as he might be obliged to miss.

"*Classes?*" he asked the girl, unbelievingly.

She knew nothing.

The Assistant Principal for Teaching Personnel received him at once, alone in his two-window office. He was a gray man named Sturgis whose pride was getting to the point. "Edel," he asked, "are you sure you're *happy* here?"

Mr. Edel said, recognizing a sheet of typing on Sturgis' desk: "May I ask how you got that letter of mine?"

"Surely. Your young friend Foster turned it in."

"But why? Why?"

"I shall quote: '*I honestly do not believe that Foster has to lie his way through the personality profiles like the rest of us mortals.*' If you believed this, Edel, why did you counsel him to lie? Why did you show him this letter as proof that you lied yourself?"

"Counsel him to lie? I never. I never."

His stammering was guilt; his sweating was guilt. Sturgis pitied him and shook his head. "He kept a little record," Sturgis said. "Ha, a 'log' he called it—he's quite space-minded; did you know?"

"I know. I demand a hearing, God damn it!"

Sturgis was surprised. "Oh, you'll get a hearing, Edel. We always give hearings; you know that."

"I know that. Can I get back to my classes now?"

"Better not. If you're not *happy* here . . ."

Mr. Edel and Foster met that afternoon in the soda shop two blocks from the school. Mr. Edel had been waiting for him, and Foster saw the teacher staring at him from a booth. He excused himself politely from the Math Team crowd around him and joined Mr. Edel.

"I feel I owe you an explanation, sir," Foster said.

"I agree. How could you—why—?"

Foster said apologetically: "They like you to be a little ruthless at the Academy. This will stand out on my record as a sign of moral fiber. No, Mr. Edel, don't try to hit me. It'll make things look that much worse at the hearing. Goodby, sir."

He rejoined his handsome, quiet crowd at the counter; in a moment they were talking busily about elliptic functions and Fourier series. Mr. Edel slunk from the place knowing that there was only one court of appeal.

3379 Seneca Avenue turned out to be a shocking slum tenement back of a municipal bus garage. The apartment, Mr. Edel thought, after his initial surprise, would be one of those "hideaways"—probably a whole floor run together, equipped with its own heating and air-conditioning, plumbing replaced . . . after all, would Foster Senior give a damn about a fancy address? Not that engineer.

But the Foster apartment, or so said a card tacked to a rust-stiffened bell-pull, was only one of a dozen like it on the cabbage-reeking fifth floor. And the paunchy, unshaven, undershirted man who came to the door and stood reeling in the doorway said: "Yah, I'm Ole Foster. Yah, I got a boy in Nixon High. What the crazy kid do now? He's crazy, that kid. Maybe I get a little drunk sometime, I got a little pension from I hurt my back driving the buses, people don't appreciate, don't realize. You wanna drink? What you say you come for?"

"About your son . . ."

"So I beat him up!" the man yelled, suddenly belligerent. "Ain't I his father? He talks smart to me, I got a right to beat him some, ain't I? People don't appreciate . . ."

Old Foster lost interest and, mumbling, closed the door.

Mr. Edel walked slowly down the stairs, not able to forgive, but feeling at least the beginnings of eventual ease from the knowledge of why he was being destroyed.

RON GOULART

S.f. has its parodists and satirists and farceurs aplenty, but Ron Goulart is something much scarcer: a genuine s.f. humorist—*a writer of gently hilarious not-quite-fiction in the tradition of Benchley and Thurber and Perelman. You'll remember* Letters to the Editor (THE BEST FROM F&SF: SECOND SERIES); *now Goulart casts his penetrating young*

eye upon the mysterious phenomena collected by the late Charles Fort.

A NEW LO!

I HAVE BEEN *waiting for Charles Fort to become topical again. See, I have quite a collection of clippings about odd happenings that I've been thinking of getting up into a book.*

It's sort of singular how I came across most of these items. Some little boy came to the door saying he was working his way through Miskatonic and would I like to subscribe to a newspaper. From the moment I agreed, somebody has left a little bundle of clippings on my porch each morning. If I were trying to make this a real research piece I suppose some morning I should get up early enough to get a look at the delivery boy.

Anyway, as a feeler, a trial balloon, this little essay is intended to share some of my oddities with you. Then maybe enough acclaim will work up to warrant a whole book. I have an awful lot of these clippings.

In Budapest in 1874 a stableboy named Oscar Dunkel walked under a horse and was never seen again. Yet today the New York phone directory lists fourteen people named Oscar Dunkel. Teleportation? Or multiplication?

Or does Oscar Dunkel have fourteen telephones? Who does he talk to? He is 143 years old.

In Scarsdale, New York, a neck-tie salesman explodes in the fourteenth row of a motion picture theater. A small California town is shocked when a prominent dentist floats away during a windstorm.

And four years later three small boys in Vermont turn into one tall man during a Kiwanis picnic.

Your scholar will not give an answer, nor an explanation. Vague shakings of the head, mumblings about mass hallucination.

Why then did all the people I have just noted have overdue copies of *Helen's Babies* in their possession when these so-called hallucinations affected them?

I add merely that in 1947 Warner Binns, the tall man,

vanished shortly after being walked on by a horse in Little Rock.

And why at this very moment is it raining frogs outside my kitchen window?

In 1912 Earl Moonfry, who took subscriptions for *The Century Magazine* and was learning soft-shoe dancing from one of Chicago's largest mail order houses, decided to go to Mexico and fight Pancho Villa. Earl Moonfry disappeared and to this day has not been found.

And so the happenings fall in line and two by two they go marching through. Earl Moonfry, who had to have soft shoes especially made for his own purposes, vanished. In 1925 in Detroit Earl Lumbard, an unemployed ventriloquist, walked around a horse and was never seen again. Strange. And what if I were to tell you that the horse was named Earl, too? That in 1926 when a delegation of 4-H Club members visited him he vanished?

An explanation? I say somebody was collecting Earls.

Still, in 1936 Georgia Moonfry, who operated her own hem-stitching business, was never seen after October 23.

Is somebody collecting Moonfrys?

In early May of 1932, near St. Paul, the St. Paul *Post-Clarion* reports, a man named Oscar Dunkel fell out of a clear, unclouded sky and landed on a horse. This Dunkel spoke nothing but Norwegian. Do passenger ships with strange cargoes traverse unseen beyond our sky? Did someone shout "Man overboard!" that day in 1932 on the deck of a phantom craft?

And why, when Norman Conover, the owner of the horse, walked behind it to check for damages, did he disappear with a popping sort of sound?

Laugh at teleportation, you scientists. I have my clippings.

Poltergeists, as we all know, do not exist. A clipping from the August 14, 1897, issue of the San Rafael *Register-Star* tells of a twelve-year-old girl who had graduated a year ahead of her class because four schoolhouses had burnt to the ground.

Two boys in Bristol, R.I., are arrested because all the furniture in their paternal grandmother's summer home vanished during a thunderstorm.

The furniture, except for a wind-up Victrola, appeared six weeks later at the graduation exercises of the Bristol Speed Short-Hand School. It was sold to a junk man, who, when he got back on his wagon behind his horse, caught on fire. When they finally put him out three others had caught fire.

A young man named Ambrose Rheenes rented a canoe at the headwaters of the Mississippi in March of 1934. Two months later in Jackson, Tennessee, he caught fire while tap dancing at a social gathering. When his canoe was located it contained three small boys who claimed to be on their way to a Kiwanis picnic in Vermont.

I think there is something messing things up someplace.

Somewhere in New York, over twenty years ago, someone named Benchley wrote a piece very much like this one. In academic groves they scoff at teleportation. How else can you explain this?

JOHN SHEPLEY

All I've been able to learn about John Shepley is that he was born in 1925 in Minnesota, was once a silk-screen artist in New York, and is now a writer in Rome; that his work has appeared in various "little magazines" and in Martha Foley's THE BEST AMERICAN SHORT STORIES: 1956; *and that this is his first published fantasy. Delightful in both its thinking and its writing, this hitherto unchronicled episode in the career of the great Toto should make you, like me, hungry for more Shepley soon.*

GORILLA SUIT

Man with gorilla suit or gorilla to help publicize newest Bing Crosby–Bob Hope–Dorothy Lamour Tech-

nicolor Comedy "Road to Bali." 1 day's employment. Apply Bali-Bally Dept., Paramount Pictures, 11th floor, 1501 Broadway, Monday AM.

—Classified Advertisement in the New York *Times*
Sunday, January 25, 1953.

TOTO JUDGED IT a very dull issue of the Sunday *Times.* He had read the theater section, admitting himself reluctantly in agreement with the critics: Broadway was having another disappointing season. He had not been impressed by any of the book reviews; the news was the usual alternating succession of horrors and trivia; the articles in the magazine section had left him cold. Finally, glumly, he had begun the crossword puzzle, much to the amusement of the crowd on the other side of the bars. They always distracted and irritated him particularly, these familial Sunday crowds, the mournful dutiful fathers, the stout women in hats, the noisy children with candy-smeared faces and sticky pointing fingers, but nevertheless he had become fairly absorbed . . . until he came to 143 Across: *"U.S. experimental $4 gold pieces, 1879-80."* A seven-letter word, the sixth "A." But who but a financial historian could be expected to know what it was? Specialization was creeping even into the simplest Sunday pastimes—it was unfair. Standing to the front of the crowd and holding the string of a pink balloon was a kind-looking lady with dim blue eyes. Perhaps *she* was a financial historian—Toto earnestly approached her. She shrieked, letting go of the balloon, and as it floated upwards, the children twittered in chorus and some cried. Toto gave up, threw down pencil and puzzle, and took refuge on the topmost perch of the cage, where he clung sulkily until the crowd, bored by his inactivity, moved away. Then he dropped back to the floor, and, consumed by a sense of futility, began leafing through the Classified Advertisements.

And there he came across it. Incredulous, he blinked his eyes, scratched his head and sides, read it through a second, then a third, time . . . but no, it was no mistake: there in cold print was a job opening for a man with a gorilla suit

or a gorilla to help publicize Dorothy Lamour's latest picture. Toto pulled himself up, reflecting that he didn't need a job, that in a sense he had one already, but the implications contained in the little boxed announcement would not be silenced, the fun it would be, the glory (he might even be photographed with Dorothy Lamour!), though only for one day. He found himself skipping and swinging all over the cage.

But when, with a certain critical caution, he returned to peruse the ad for a fourth time, subtle qualms began to arise in his mind. Perhaps what they wanted was a man with a gorilla suit or *a man with* a gorilla—in which case, there was no point in *his* applying. It was really rather obscure, just what they thought they wanted, and Toto, trying to figure it out, scratched himself for a long time. Yet, if the idea was to have a gorilla, simulated or otherwise, why shouldn't one apply? And indeed, there was a simple solution: if they insisted that the gorilla be humanly escorted, why not show the ad to his keeper, Mr. McCready, while pointing with especial emphasis to *"11th floor, 1501 Broadway, Monday AM"*?

But no, that wouldn't do, he immediately recognized the impracticality of it. It wasn't that Mr. McCready would refuse—he wouldn't—but he wouldn't agree either. He would be doubtful; he would give a pompous little laugh, a nervous cough; he would look puzzled and hurt; until Toto, feeling guilty, would withdraw his request altogether. Or, on the off-chance that Mr. McCready did agree, it would be only with the understanding that he must first ask the directors, and he would so procrastinate in doing so that (even assuming that the directors ultimately gave their approval) it would then be too late to apply for the job. Someone else would already have enjoyed the brief, glorious limelight with Dorothy Lamour. No, the only thing to do, Toto decided, was to present Mr. McCready and the zoo authorities with a *fait accompli.*

He could hardly wait for closing time, when the visitors would vanish and the doors be locked, so that he might have a little quiet in which to think out a plan. Surely, he reasoned, as he watched the attendants sweeping up the

trash left by the departed crowd, surely he would be hired in preference to any man dressed up like a gorilla. It shouldn't be difficult to beat out *that* kind of competition. But suppose *other gorillas* applied, ones with previous experience in the theater or public relations? This prospect so frightened him that he decided to abandon the whole idea. He curled himself up in a fetid darkness, sadly caressing his toes and listening to familiar noises, metal somewhere scraping against cement, mechanical rumblings in an underground distance, the nightly asthmatic wheezing of his neighbor, an old prowling mandrill. Toto closed his eyes, covered his ears, went on arguing to himself . . . what was there to lose? Nothing, really. It wasn't even as though he were risking anything, for the worst that could happen was that he simply wouldn't get the job. All the same, it wouldn't be easy to get out of the cage.

Nothing ventured, nothing gained. It was tiresome having to bolster oneself with truisms—still, cheerfully enough, he set about testing the bars, one by one. He went all over the cage, without finding a single loose bar. He groaned, realizing how much time he had already wasted, for not only must he be out of the cage and away from the zoo before Mr. McCready arrived in the morning, but he must be at 1501 Broadway in time to be among the first in line. Now, painfully, he tried to squeeze himself between the bars, aware that the mandrill had stopped his prowling, was crouching there on his haunches, his eyes a phosphorescent green, watching it all with the bemused curiosity of the senile. Toto went on pushing and lunging, but all he succeeded in doing was to scrape some patches of fur from his forearms and sides. And it was so important to look his best!

It was useless, the space between the bars was too small. In a final, despairing, almost whimsical gesture, he tried the door—it opened easily. But that showed that they *trusted* him! Astonished, he could only stand there holding the catch of the door, wondering if it would not be ungrateful to take advantage of such trust. Ah, but if he got the job, how proud Mr. McCready would be! Or would he? Toto wavered . . . the mandrill resumed wheezing . . . familiar

sounds. And then he heard an unfamiliar sound, a rustling of jungle leaves, and the bright image of Dorothy Lamour stepped out into the sunlight. Toto leapt confidently out of the cage.

But he had forgotten that the door of the building itself would be locked. He kicked it, pulled it, beat on it with his fists, which only awoke the spider monkeys, spiteful little creatures who tumbled and gibbered and pointed their fingers at him. Then the most fearful racket broke out—the chimpanzees woke up and began screaming, a chorus of baboons howled, even the mandrill joined in. *"What's going on in there?"*—and the door opened, pressing Toto behind it, as the night guard came in, cursing softly and flashing his light about the cages. Everybody, blinking, became silent, and Toto had just enough time to slip around the door and hide himself behind a low cement wall before the guard re-emerged and turned the lock. Toto held his breath, but the guard merely went away whistling, swinging his extinguished light.

He rested, until the pounding of his heart subsided and the guard was out of sight. Then, happily, cutting a little caper, he set out across the park.

It was quarter to nine when he took the elevator to the eleventh floor at 1501 Broadway. Again he was feeling worried and uncomfortable. For one thing, he was hungry, and he was afraid he had caught cold during two hours of furtive slumber in some bushes near the skating rink. And all the way from the park, down Broadway to 44th Street, he had reproached himself for forgetting to bring along the Classified Advertisements Section of the *Times*. It would have been most helpful in explaining his presence on the streets had a policeman or anyone else stopped him. But fortunately no one had stopped him. The people in the street had all passed him by with Monday-morning expressions on their faces.

In the crowded elevator, he tried to spruce himself up, brushing from his shoulders and legs the bits of dried grass that clung there from his sleeping in the park. But a murmur of protest arose—"Hey, quit y'r shovin', Mac," said a man on

his right, who, Toto suddenly saw, had a rolled-up gorilla suit under his arm. He resigned himself to standing quietly, fervently hoping that he had got rid of most of the grass.

The elevator emptied itself at the eleventh floor, they all streamed out together, and to Toto's amazement, each of his fellow passengers was carrying a gorilla suit—some in a neat bundle with the jaws gaping out from under the owner's arm, some draped across human shoulders with a gorilla head bobbing along ludicrously a few inches from the floor, some apparent only by the patches of fur sticking out from the apertures of shabby cardboard suitcases or corrugated boxes. He had not expected so much competition, but there was at least one cause for relief—neither getting out of the elevator nor in the crowd already waiting at the door of the Bali-Bally Department was there a single other real gorilla. He joined the increasing throng milling about the unopened office.

Although he knew it was not quite fair to do so, he could not help feeling a little contemptuous. Not only were they not gorillas, they were a sorry lot of men—wan, and thin, and old. He overheard a bit of conversation, one man saying to another, "Hey, I seen you before! Wasn't you a Santa Claus in Herald Square last Christmas?"

"Yeah. But I don't remember seein' you."

"I was there awright, Mac, you shoulda looked. I tried to get into Macy's, Gimbel's, anyplace warm, but the best I could get was one of them street jobs. It's a tough racket."

"Sure is," the other agreed. "I got an Easter Bunny job lined up maybe, but I don't know what I'll do till then if I don't get this thing." And he patted his gorilla suit, while the first man eyed him jealously. "Even if it *is* just one day."

And now Toto began to feel sorry for them, wondering if it was not grasping and presumptous of him to be there at all. He, for whom food and shelter had been generously provided, who had even a recognized social function, had descended to trying to take work away from individuals who really needed it. Perhaps he should turn back . . . but at that point the elevator opened again, another mob of men with gorilla suits poured out, and they were followed by

a young woman, who, after fumbling in her puse, produced a key and unlocked the door of the Bali-Bally Department.

"Come in, all of you," she said. "Take seats along the wall. Mr. Phineas will be here any minute to conduct the interviews."

Toto thought her very attractive, in her hard blond way, though by no means so beautiful as Dorothy Lamour. Even so, it occurred to him, it might be fun to whisk her away for a weekend atop the Empire State Building while crowds gathered and the police hovered in helicopters; but he quickly suppressed this whimsical idea, and filed respectfully into the office along with the other applicants.

There were not enough chairs for all of them. Toto joined a nervous little group standing by the wall, while the blond secretary busied herself at her desk. "I might as well start the ball rolling," she announced, "while we're waiting for Mr. Phineas. I certainly didn't expect so many. Let me make it clear at the beginning that we want somebody experienced and responsible, preferably with references. There's every chance that Miss Lamour will ask to be photographed with the successful applicant."

Toto's heart trembled, beat faster. He had no experience to offer, and no references, but he took pride in thinking he was responsible. And how could they possibly not prefer *him* over these wretched fakes? And to be photographed with . . . with . . . "I'll take your names," he heard the secretary saying. "You first." The man next to him started forward. "No, no, the other one. The one that's already got his suit on." Slowly, fearfully, Toto approached the desk.

"Name?" she said, pencil poised.

. . .

"Speak up. Don't mumble so. What is it?"

. . .

She threw down the pencil. "Oh, never mind! I can't take everybody's name anyway—there are too many. Why the hell didn't that stupid Phineas do all this through an employment agency?"

Toto, ashamed of his failure to communicate with her, desperately racked his brain. He might, of course, establish for her his authenticity by performing some of the indelicate

little antics that so unfailingly delighted visitors to the zoo . . . But no, that would probably do more harm than good, would, in fact, quite ruin his chances of being thought responsible. It was better to retire and wait for Mr. Phineas.

"I can't say your costume is very convincing," she called after him as he backed away from the desk. "Still, it's up to Phineas to decide—Oh, *Mr. Phineas!*"

A little bowlegged man had bounded in, breathlessly throwing off his hat and overcoat. "I'm terribly sorry, Eloise honey," he cried, "to have dumped all this on you. Honestly, I didn't *realize*. Next time, sweetie, I'll do it all through an employment agency and let *them* screen people first."

"Oh, I don't mind, Mr. Phineas," she said, with a brave smile.

"That's the spirit, girl!" He patted her on the shoulder. "All right, all you Tarzans, let's have a look at you! Into the monkey suits and make it snappy!" And glancing at Toto, he added aside to Eloise, "A-ha, a real eager beaver!"

A real eager *gorilla*. But he stood patiently, waiting while all the men clambered into their suits. "Line up!" commanded Mr. Phineas, and they all took their places, as he walked along examining them with a shrewd, suspicious eye.

"Just look at *this* one!" he shrieked, pointing to an especially seedy individual standing next to Toto. "The *buttons* even show. He might as well have turned up in his long winter underwear! I'll bet there's not a *zipper* in the whole crowd." Toto was on the point of stepping forward to demonstrate that he had neither buttons nor zippers—most important of all, didn't need them—but before he could think of a decorous approach, Mr. Phineas had moved on.

"*Honest,* Eloise," he was saying, sauntering up and down with his hands on his hips, "did you *ever* in your life see such a bunch of mangy, moth-eaten gorillas? That one there"—he flipped a hand in Toto's direction—"isn't *too* bad, I suppose. What do *you* think, honey?"

"Gee, Mr. Phineas, I *just* don't know," she said, gazing at them all in bewildered disappointment. "Would you like me to call up one of the employment agencies after all?"

"No, we haven't got time. It'll have to be one of these." And he gave Toto a long critical look.

Toto's heart was bursting with hope and joy, but he made every effort to contain himself. And then it happened, in all its horror—the door opened, and in came another *real gorilla,* an arrogant creature carrying a shining aluminum suitcase.

"I'm sorry, sir, I think we have *enough* applicants already—" Eloise began, but the newcomer, grinning, merely slavered at her lecherously. He set down his suitcase, opened it, and—to Toto's stunned mortification—took out a lustrous gorilla suit, into which he deftly proceeded to zipper himself. This process completed, he made a little bow to Mr. Phineas and Eloise, offering his arm for their inspection.

"Why, it's not gorilla fur at all," said Mr. Phineas, feeling the suit. "It's *genuine,* fine-spun, combed, nylon-acetate!"

"It's beautiful," breathed the secretary. "It's perfectly divine."

"And so *chic,*" marveled Mr. Phineas. "Well, that settles it. He's definitely hired. All the rest of you can go now. Leave by the side door, please."

The men, grumbling and disconsolate, took off their gorilla suits and trooped out. Toto heard Eloise saying to the successful applicant, "It's just for one day, but you'll still have to fill out a withholding statement. What's your social security—" And then he was in the hallway, shuffling sadly towards the elevator. "Too bad, eh, Mac?" said the man next to him. "That's what always happens." But Toto had no idea whom he might be addressing.

He reached the street and began walking dejectedly up Broadway. Hurrying pedestrians brushed against him, but he hardly noticed them. He tried to take comfort in the knowledge that he hadn't really needed a job, and he only hoped that Mr. McCready wouldn't be too angry when he presented himself back at the zoo. At a corner newsstand he suddenly stopped, his attention caught by a screaming headline in the *Daily News*:

DRAGNET OUT FOR ESCAPED GORILLA

And the *Journal-American* announced in bold red letters:

TERROR GRIPS CITY AS KILLER
APE PROWLS!

while underneath was a photograph, *his*, Toto's, with the caption, "Have You Seen This Gorilla?" and the telephone number to call in case you had. People milled about the newsstand trying to get a look at the picture, a few women clutched their bosoms, and one of them stepped on Toto's foot. "Oh, excuse me," she said, looking him right in the face.

Still, someone soon would recognize him—it was only a matter of time. He wondered whether to strike out boldly along Broadway or try to hide in some side-street, and as he stood, hesitating on the corner, a squad car stopped, and a policeman got out and tapped him on the shoulder.

ZENNA HENDERSON

No series of stories in F&SF has been more popular than Zenna Henderson's novelets of The People, those tragic yet triumphant exiles from the stars. I hope that soon the complete chronicles of The People will be available in book form; meanwhile here is the longest story in the series, and one of the most meaty and moving.

CAPTIVITY

By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"

How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?

—PSALM 137

I SUPPOSE many lonely souls have sat at their windows many nights looking out into the flood of moonlight, sad with a sadness that knows no comfort, a sadness underlined by a

beauty that is in itself a pleasant kind of sorrow—but very few ever have seen what I saw that night.

I leaned against the window frame, close enough to the inflooding light so that it washed across my bare feet and the hem of my gown and splashed whitely against the foot of my bed, but picked up none of my features to identify me as a person, separate from the night. I was enjoying hastily, briefly, the magic of the loveliness before the moon would lose itself behind the heavy grove of cottonwoods that lined the creek below the curve of the backyard garden. The first cluster of leaves had patterned itself against the edge of the moon when I saw him—the Francher kid. I felt a momentary surge of disappointment and annoyance that this perfect beauty should be marred by any person at all, let alone the Francher kid, but my annoyance passed as my interest sharpened.

What was he doing—half black and half white in the edge of the moonlight? In the higgledy-piggledy haphazardness of the town, Groman's Grocery sidled in at an angle to the backyard of Somansen's house where I boarded—not farther than twenty feet away. The tiny high-up windows under the eaves of the store blinked in the full light. The Francher kid was standing, back to the moon, staring up at the windows. I leaned closer to watch. There was a waitingness about his shoulders, a prelude to movement, a beginning of something. Then there he was—up at the windows, pushing softly against the panes, opening a dark rectangle against the white side of the store. And then he was gone. I blinked and looked again. Store. Windows. One opened blankly. No Francher kid. Little windows. High up under the eaves. One opened blankly. No Francher kid.

Then the blank opening had movement inside it and the Francher kid emerged with both hands full of something and slid down the moonlight to the ground outside.

Now looky here! I said to myself. *Hey! Lookit now!*

The Francher kid sat down on one end of a 12-by-12 timber that lay half in our garden and half behind the store. Carefully and neatly he arranged his booty along the plank. Three cokes, a box of candy bars, and a huge harmonica that had been in the store for years. He sat and studied

the items, touching each one with a fingertip. Then he picked up a coke and studied the cap on it. He opened the box of candy and closed it again. He ran a finger down the harmonica and then lifted it between the pointer fingers of his two hands. Holding it away from him in the moonlight, he looked at it, his head swinging slowly down its length. And, as his head swung, faintly, faintly, I heard a musical scale run up, then down. Careful note by careful note singing softly but clearly in the quiet night.

The moon was burning holes through the cottonwood tops by now and the yard was slipping into shadow. I heard notes riff rapidly up and cascade back down, gleefully, happily, and I saw the glint and chromium glitter of the harmonica, dancing from shadow to light and back again, singing untouched in the air. Then the moon reached an opening in the trees and spot-lighted the Francher kid almost violently. He was sitting on the plank, looking up at the harmonica, a small smile on his usually sullen face. And the harmonica sang its quiet song to him as he watched it. His face shadowed suddenly as he looked down at the things laid out on the plank. He gathered them up abruptly and walked up the moonlight to the little window and slid through, head first. Behind him, alone, unattended, the harmonica danced and played, hovering and darting like a dragon fly. Then the kid reappeared, sliding head first out the window. He sat himself crosslegged in the air beside the harmonica and watched and listened. The gay dance slowed and changed. The harmonica cried softly in the moonlight, an aching, asking cry as it spiraled up and around until it slid through the open window and lost its voice in the darkness. The window clicked shut and the Francher kid thudded to the ground. He slouched off through the shadows, his elbows winging sharply backward as he jammed his fists in his pockets.

I let go of the curtain where my clenched fingers had cut four nail-sized holes through the age-fragile lace, and released a breath I couldn't remember holding. I stared at the empty plank and wet my lips. I took a deep breath of the mountain air that was supposed to do me so much good and turned away from the window. For the thousandth time I

muttered *I won't* and groped for the bed. For the thousandth time I finally reached for my crutches and swung myself over to the edge of the bed. I dragged the unresponsive half of me up onto the bed, arranging myself for sleep. I leaned against the pillow and put my hands in back of my head, my elbows fanning out on either side. I stared at the light square that was the window until it wavered and rippled before my sleepy eyes. Still my mind was only nibbling at what had happened and showed no inclination to set its teeth into any sort of explanation. I awakened with a start to find the moonlight gone, my arms asleep and my prayers unsaid.

Tucked in bed and ringed about with the familiar comfort of my prayers, I slid away from awareness into sleep, following the dance and gleam of a harmonica that cried in the moonlight.

Morning sunlight slid across the boarding house breakfast table, casting alpine shadows behind the spilled cornflakes that lay beyond the sugar bowl. I squinted against the brightness and felt aggrieved that anything should be alive and active and so—so—hopeful so early in the morning. I leaned on my elbows over my coffee cup and contemplated a mood as black as the coffee.

". . . Francher kid."

I rotated my head upwards on the axis of my two supporting hands, my interest caught. *Last night,* I half remembered, *last night—*

"I give up." Anna Semper put a third spoonful of sugar in her coffee and stirred morosely. "Every child has a something—I mean there's *some* way to reach every child . . . all but the Francher kid. I can't reach him at all. If he'd even be aggressive or actively mean or actively *anything* maybe I could do something, but he just sits there being a vegetable. And then I get so spittin' mad when he finally *does* do something, just enough to keep him from flunking, that I could bust a gusset. I can't abide a child who can and won't." She frowned darkly and added two more spoonfuls of sugar to her coffee. "I'd rather have an eager moron than a won't-do genius!" She tasted the coffee and grimaced. "Can't even get

a decent cup of coffee to arm me for my struggle with the little monster."

I laughed. "Five spoonfuls of sugar would spoil almost anything. And don't give up hope. Have you tried music? Remember, music hath charms—"

Anna reddened to the tip of her ears. I couldn't tell if it was anger or embarrassment. "Music!" Her spoon clished against her saucer sharply. She groped for words. "This is ridiculous, but I have had to send that Francher kid out of the room during music appreciation."

"Out of the room? Whyever for? I thought he was a vegetable."

Anna reddened still further. "He is," she said stubbornly, "but—" She fumbled with her spoon then burst forth, "But sometimes the record player won't work when he's in the room."

I put my cup down slowly. "Oh, come now!" I said. "This coffee is awfully strong, I'll admit, but it's not *that* strong."

"No, really!" Anna twisted her spoon between her two hands. "When he's in the room that darned player goes too fast or too slow or even backwards. I swear it. And one time . . ." Anna looked around furtively and lowered her voice. "One time it played a whole record and it wasn't even plugged in!"

"You ought to patent that!" I said. "That'd be a real money-maker."

"Go on, laugh!" Anna gulped coffee again and grimaced. "I'm beginning to believe in poltergeists—you know, the kind that are supposed to work through or because of adolescent kids. If you had that kid to deal with in class—"

"Yes." I fingered my cold toast. "If only I did."

And for a minute I hated Anna fiercely for the sympathy on her open face and for the studied-unlooking at my leaning crutches. She opened her mouth, closed it, then leaned across the table.

"Polio?" she blurted, reddening.

"No," I said. "Car wreck."

"Oh." She hesitated. "Well, maybe someday—"

"No," I said. "No." Denying the faint possibility that was just enough to keep me nagged out of resignation.

"Oh," she said. "How long ago?"

"How long?" For a minute I was suspended in wonder at the distortion of time. How long? Recent enough to be a shock each time of immobility when I expected motion. Long enough ago that eternity was between me and the last time I moved unthinkingly.

"Almost a year," I said, my memory aching to *this time last year I could—*

"You were a teacher?" Anna gave her watch a quick appraising look.

"Yes," I said. I didn't automatically verify the time. The immediacy of watches had died for me. Then I smiled. "That's why I can sympathize with you about the Francher kid. I've had them before."

"There's always one," sighed Anna, getting up. "Well, it's time for my pilgrimage up the hill. I'll see you." And the swinging door to the hall repeated her departure again and again with diminishing enthusiasm. I struggled to my feet and swung myself to the window.

"Hey!" I shouted. She turned at the gate, peering back as she rested her load of work books on the gate post.

"Yes?"

"If he gives you too much trouble, send him over here with a note for me. It'll take him off your hands for a while at least."

"Hey, that's an idea. Thanks. That's swell! Straighten your halo!" And she waved an elbow at me as she disappeared beyond the box elder outside the gate.

I didn't think she would, but she did.

It was only a couple of days later that I looked up from my book at the creak of the old gate. The heavy old gear that served as a weight to pull it shut thudded dully behind the Francher kid. He walked up the porch steps under my close scrutiny with none of the hesitant embarrassment that most people would feel. He mounted the three steps and wordlessly handed me an envelope. I opened it. It said:

Dust off your halo! I've reached the II stage. Wouldn't you like to keep him permanent-like?

"Won't you sit down?" I gestured to the porch swing, wondering how I was going to handle this deal.

He looked at the swing and sank down on the top porch step.

"What's your name?"

He looked at me incuriously. "Francher." His voice was husky and unused-sounding.

"Is that your first name?"

"That's my name."

"What's your other name?" I asked patiently, falling into a first-grade dialog in spite of his age.

"They put down Clement," he said.

"Clement Francher," I said. "A good-sounding name, but what do people call you?"

His eyebrows slanted subtly upwards and a tiny bitter smile lifted the corners of his mouth.

"With their eyes—juvenile delinquent, lazy trash, no-good off-scouring, potential criminal, burden—"

I winced away from the icy malice of his voice.

"But mostly they call me a whole sentence, like—'well, what can you expect from a background like that?' "

His knuckles were white against his faded levis. Then as I watched them, the color crept back and, without visible relaxation, the tension was gone. But his eyes were the eyes of a boy too big to cry and too young for any other comfort.

"What *is* your background?" I asked quietly, as though I had the right to ask. He answered as simply as though he owed me an answer.

"We were with the carnival. We went to all the fairs around the country. Mother—" His words nearly died. "Mother had a mind-reading act. She was good. She was better than anyone knew—better than she wanted to be. It hurt and scared her sometimes to walk through people's minds. Sometimes she would come back to the trailer and cry and cry and take a long, long shower and wash herself until her hands were all water-soaked and her hair hung in dripping strings. They curled at the end. She couldn't get all the fear and hate and—and tired dirt off even that way. Only if she could find a Good to read, or a dark church with tall candles."

"And where is she now?" I asked, holding a small warm picture in my mind of narrow, fragile shoulders, thin and defenseless under a flimsy moist robe, with one wet strand of hair dampening one shoulder of it.

"Gone." His eyes were over my head but empty of the vision of the weather-worn siding of the house. "She died. Three years ago. This is a foster home. To try to make a decent citizen of me."

There was no inflection in his words. They lay as flat as paper between us in our silence.

"You like music," I said, curling Anna's note around my forefinger, remembering what I had seen the other night.

"Yes." His eyes were on the note. "Miss Semper doesn't think so, though. I hate that scratchy wrapped-up music."

"You sing?"

"No. I make music."

"You mean you play an instrument?"

He frowned a little impatiently. "No. I make music with instruments."

"Oh," I said. "There's a difference?"

"Yes." He turned his head away. I had disappointed him or failed him in some way.

"Wait," I said. "I want to show you something." I struggled to my feet. Oh, deftly and quickly enough under the circumstances, I suppose, but it seemed an endless, aching effort in front of the Francher kid's eyes. But finally I was up and swinging in through the front door. When I got back with my key chain, the kid was still staring at my empty chair and I had to struggle myself back into it under his unwavering eyes.

"Can't you stand alone?" he asked, as though he had a right to.

"Very little, very briefly," I answered, as though I owed him an answer.

"You don't walk without those braces," he said.

"I can't walk without those braces," I said. "Here." I held out my key chain. There was a charm on it: a harmonica with four notes, so small that I had never managed to blow one by itself. The four together made a tiny breathy chord, like a small hesitant wind.

He took the chain between his fingers and swung the charm back and forth, his head bent so that the sunlight flickered across its tousledness. The chain stilled. For a long moment there wasn't a sound. Then clearly, sharply, came the musical notes, one after another. There was a slight pause and then four notes poured their separateness together to make a clear, sweet chord.

"You make music," I said, barely audibly.

"Yes." He gave me back my key chain and stood up. "I guess she's cooled down now. I'll go on back."

"To work?"

"To work." He smiled wryly. "For a while, anyway." He started down the walk.

"What if I tell?" I called after him.

"I told once," he called back over his shoulder. "Try it if you want to."

I sat for a long time on the porch after he left. My fingers were closed over the harmonica as I watched the sun creep up my skirts and into my lap. Finally I turned Anna's envelope over. The seal was still secure. The end was jagged where I had torn it. The paper was opaque. I blew a tiny breathy chord on the harmonica. Then I shivered as cold crept across my shoulders. The chill was chased away by a tiny hot wave of excitement. So his mother could walk through the minds of others. So he knew what was in a sealed letter—or had he got his knowledge from Anna before the letter? So he could make music with harmonicas. So the Francher kid was— My hurried thoughts caught and came to a full stop. What *was* the Francher kid?

II

After school that day, Anna toiled up the four front steps and rested against the railing, half sitting and half leaning. "I'm too tired to sit down," she said. "I'm wound up like a clock and I'm going to strike something pretty darned quick." She half laughed and grimaced a little. "Probably my laundry. I'm fresh out of clothes." She caught a long ragged breath. "You must have built a fire under that Francher kid," she said. "He came back and piled into his

math book and did the whole week's assignments that he hadn't bothered with before. Did them in less than an hour, too. Makes me mad, though—" She grimaced again and pressed her hand to her chest. "Darn that chalk dust, anyway. Thanks a million for your assist. I wish I were optimistic enough to believe it would last." She leaned and breathed, her eyes closing with the effort. "Awful shortage of air around here." Her hands fretted with her collar. "Anyway the Francher kid said you'd substitute for me until my pneumonia is over." She laughed, a little soundless laugh. "He doesn't know that it's just chalk dust and that I'm never sick." She buried her face in her two hands and burst into tears. "I'm not sick, am I? It's only that darn Francher kid!"

She was still blaming him when Mrs. Somansen came out and led her in to her bedroom and when the doctor arrived to shake his head over her chest.

So that's how it was that the first-floor First Grade was hastily moved upstairs and the Junior High was hastily moved downstairs and I once more found myself facing the challenge of a class, telling myself that the Francher kid needed no special knowledge to say that I'd substitute. After all, I liked Anna, I was the only substitute available, and besides, any slight—substitute's pay!—addition to the exchequer was most welcome. You *can* live on those monthly checks, but it's pleasant to have a couple of extra coins to clink together.

By mid-morning I knew a little of what Anna was sweating over. His absolutely dead-weight presence in the room was a drag on everything we did. Recitations paused, limped and halted when they came to him. Activities swirled around his inactivity, creating distracting eddies. It wasn't only a negative sort of non-participation on his part but an aggressively positive not-doingness. It wasn't just a hindrance, but an active opposition—without any overt action for any sort of proof of his attitude. This, coupled with my disappointment in not having the same comfortable rapport with him that I'd had before, and the bone-weariness of having to be vertical all day instead of collapsing horizontally at intervals, and the strain of getting back into harness, cold, with a

roomful of teeners and sub-teeners, had me worn down to a nubbin by early afternoon.

So I fell back on the perennial refuge of harried teachers and opened a discussion of "What I want to be when I grow up." We had gone through the usual nurses and airplane hostesses and pilots and bridge builders and the usual unexpected ballet dancer and CPA (and he still can't add 6 and 9!) until the discussion frothed like a breaking wave against the Francher kid and stilled there.

He was lounging down in his seat, his weight supported by the back of his neck and the remote end of his spine. The class sighed collectively though inaudibly and waited for his contribution.

"And you, Clement?" I prompted, shifting vainly, trying to ease the taut cry of aching muscles.

"An outlaw," he said huskily, not bothering to straighten up. "I'm going to keep a list and break every law there is—and get away with it, too."

"Whatever for?" I asked, trying to reassure the sick pang inside me. "An outlaw is no use at all to society."

"Who wants to be of use?" he asked. "I'll use society—and I can do it."

"Perhaps," I said, knowing full well it was so. "But that's not the way to happiness."

"Who's happy?" he asked. "The bad are unhappy because they are bad. The good are unhappy because they're afraid to be bad—"

"Clement," I said gently. "I think you are—"

"I think he's crazy," said Rigo, his black eyes flashing. "Don't pay him no never mind, Miss Carolle. He's a screwball. He's all the time saying crazy things."

I saw the heavy world globe on the top shelf of the book case behind Rigo shift and slide towards the edge. I saw it lift clear of the shelf and I cried out, "Clement!" The whole class started at the loud urgency of my voice, the Francher kid included, and Rigo moved just far enough out of line that the falling globe missed him and cracked itself apart at his feet.

Someone screamed and several gasped and a babble of voices broke out. I caught the Francher kid's eyes and he

flushed hotly and ducked his head. Then he straightened up proudly and defiantly returned my look. He wet his forefinger in his mouth and drew an invisible tally mark in the air before him. I shook my head at him, slowly, regretfully. What could I do with a child like this?

Well, I had to do something; so I told him to stay in after school, though the kids wondered why. He slouched against the door, defiance in every awkward angle of his body and in the hooking of his thumbs into his front pockets. I let the parting noises fade and die, the last hurried clang of lunch pail, the last flurry of feet, the last reverberant slam of the outside door. The Francher kid shifted several times, easing the tension of his shoulders as he waited. Finally, I said, "Sit down."

"No." His word was flat and uncompromising. I looked at him, the gaunt young planes of his face, the unhappy mouth, thinned to stubbornness, the eyes that blinded themselves with dogged defiance. I leaned across the desk, my hands clasped, and wondered what I could say. Argument would do no good. A kid of that age has an answer for everything.

"We all have violences," I said, tightening my hands, "but we can't always let them out. Think what a mess things would be if we did." I smiled wryly into his unresponsive face. "If we gave in to every violent impulse, I'd probably have slapped you with an encyclopedia before now." His eyelids flicked startled, and he looked straight at me for the first time.

"Sometimes we can just hold our breath until the violence swirls away from us. Other times it's too big and it swells inside us like a balloon until it chokes our lungs and aches our jaw hinges." His lids flickered down over his watching eyes. "But it can be put to use. Then's when we stir up a cake by hand or chop wood or kick cans across the back yard or"—I faltered—"or run until our knees bend both ways from tiredness."

There was a small silence while I held my breath until my violent rebellion against unresponsive knees swirled away from me.

"There are bigger violences, I guess," I went on. "From them come assault and murder, vandalism and war, but even

those can be used. If you want to smash things, there are worthless things that need to be smashed, and things that ought to be destroyed, ripped apart and ruined. But you have no way of knowing what those things are, yet. You must keep your violences small until you learn how to tell the difference."

"I can smash." His voice was thick.

"Yes," I said. "But smash to build. You have no right to hurt other people with your own hurt."

"People!" The word was profanity.

I drew a long breath. If he were younger . . . You can melt stiff rebellious arms and legs with warm hugs or a hand across a wind-ruffled head or a long look that flickers into a smile, but what can you do with a creature that's neither adult nor child, but puzzlingly both? I leaned forward.

"Francher," I said softly. "If your mother could walk through your mind now—"

He reddened, then paled. His mouth opened. He swallowed tightly. Then he jerked himself upright in the doorway.

"Leave my mother alone." His voice was shaken and muffled. "You leave her alone. She's dead."

I listened to his footsteps and the crashing slam of the outside door. For some sudden reason I felt my heart follow him down the hill to town. I sighed, almost with exasperation. So this was to be a My Child. We teacher-types sometimes find them. They aren't our pets—often they aren't even in our classes. But they are the children who move unasked into our hearts and make claims upon them over-and-above-the-call-of-duty. And this My Child I had to reach. Somehow I had to keep him from sliding on over the borderline to lawlessness as he so surely was doing—this My Child who, even more than the usual My Child, was different.

I put my head down on the desk and let weariness ripple up over me. After a minute I began to straighten up my papers. I made the desk-top tidy and took my purse out of the bottom drawer. I struggled to my feet and glared at my crutches. Then I grinned weakly.

"Come, friends," I said. "Leave us help one another depart."

Anna was out for a week. After she returned, I was surprised at my reluctance to let go of the class. The sniff of chalk dust was in my nostrils and I ached to be busy again. So I started helping out with the school programs and teenage dances, which led naturally to the day my committee and I stood in the town recreation hall and looked about us despairingly.

"How long have those decorations been up?" I craned my neck to get a better view of the wilderness of sooty cobwebby crepe paper that clotted the whole of the high ceiling and the upper reaches of the walls of the ramshackle old hall that leaned wearily against the back of the saloon. Twyla stopped chewing the end of one of her heavy braids of hair. "About four years, I guess. At least the newest. Pea-Green put it all up."

"Pea-Green?"

"Yeah. He was a screwball. He used up every piece of crepe paper in town and used nails to put the stuff up—big nails. He's gone now. He got silicosis and went down to Hot Springs."

"Well, nails or no nails, we can't have a Halloween dance with that stuff up."

"Going to miss the old junk. How we going to get it down?" asked Janniset.

"Pea-Green used an extension ladder he borrowed from a power crew that was stringing some wires up to the Bluebell mine," said Rigo. "But we'll have to find some other way to get it down, now."

I felt a flick of something at my elbow. It might have been the Francher kid shifting from one foot to the other, or it might have been just a thought slipping by. I glanced sideways, but caught only the lean line of his cheek and the shaggy back of his neck.

"I think I can get a ladder." Rigo snapped his thumbnail loudly with his white front teeth. "It won't reach clear up, but it'll help."

"We could take rakes and just drag it down," suggested Twyla.

We all laughed until I sobered us all with, "It might come to that yet, bless the buttons of whoever thought up

twenty-foot ceilings. Well, tomorrow's Saturday. Everybody be here about nine and we'll get with it."

"Can't." The Francher kid cast anchor unequivocally, snagging all our willingness up short.

"Oh?" I shifted my crutches and, as usual, his eyes fastened on them, almost hypnotically. "That's too bad."

"How come?" Rigo was belligerent. "If the rest of us can, you oughta be able to. Ever'body's s'posed to do this together. Ever'body does the dirty work and ever'body has the fun. You're nobody special. You're on this committee, aren't you?"

I restrained myself from a sudden impulse to clap my hand over Rigo's mouth midway in his protest. I didn't like the quietness of the Francher kid's hands, but he only looked slantwise up at Rigo and said, "I got volunteered on this committee. I didn't ask to. And to fix this joint up today. I gotta work tomorrow."

"Work? Where?" Rigo frankly disbelieved.

"Sorting ore at the Absolom."

Rigo snapped his thumbnail again derisively. "That penny-picking stuff? They pay peanuts."

"Yes." And the Francher kid slouched off around the corner of the building without a glance or a goodby.

"Well, he's working!" Twyla thoughtfully spit out a stray hair and pointed the wet end of her braid with her fingers. "The Francher kid's doing something. I wonder how come?"

"Trying to figure that dopy dill-dock out?" asked Janiset. "Don't waste your time. I bet he's just goofing off."

"You kids run on," I said. "We can't do anything tonight. I'll lock up. See you in the morning."

I waited inside the dusty, echoing hall until the sound of their going died down the rocky alley that edged around the rim of the railroad cut and dissolved into the street of the town. I still couldn't reconcile myself to slowing their steps to match my uncertain feet. Maybe someday I would be able to accept my braces as others accept glasses; but not yet—oh, not yet!

I left the hall and snapped the dime-store padlock shut. I struggled precariously along through the sliding shale and loose rocks until suddenly one piece of shale shattered under

the pressure of one of my crutches and I stumbled off balance. I saw with shake-making clarity in the accelerated speed of the moment that the only place my groping crutch could reach was the smooth curving of a small boulder, and, in that same instant, I visualized myself sprawling helplessly, hopelessly, in the clutter of the alley, a useless, non-functioning piece of humanity, a drag and a hindrance on everyone again. And then, at the last possible instant, the smooth boulder slid aside and my crutch caught and steadied on the solid damp hollow beneath it. I caught my breath with relief and unclenched my spasmed hands a little—Lucky!

Then all at once there was the Francher kid at my elbow again, quietly waiting.

"Oh!" I hoped he hadn't seen me floundering in my awkwardness. "Hi! I thought you'd gone."

"I really will be working." His voice had lost its flatness. "I'm not making much, but I'm saving to buy me a musical instrument."

"Well, good!" I said, smiling into the unusualness of his straightforward look. "What kind of instrument?"

"I don't know," he said. "Something that will sing like this—"

And there on the rocky trail with the long light slanting through the trees for late afternoon, I heard soft, tentative notes that stumbled at first and then began to sing: *Oh Danny Boy, the pipes, the pipes are calling* . . . Each note of this, my favorite, was like a white flower opening inside me in ascending order like steps—steps that I could climb freely, lightly—

"What kind of instrument am I saving for?" The Francher kid's voice pulled me back down to earth.

"You'll have to settle for less." My voice shook a little. "There isn't one like that."

"But I've heard it—" He was bewildered.

"Maybe you have," I said. "But was anyone playing it?"

"Why yes—no," he said. "I used to hear it from Mom. She thought it to me."

"Where did your mom come from?" I asked impulsively.

"From Terror and from Panic Places. From Hunger and from Hiding—to live midway between madness and The

Dream—" He looked at me, his mouth drooping a little. "She promised me I'd understand someday, but this is someday and she's gone."

"Yes," I sighed, remembering how once I had dreamed that someday I'd run again. "But there are other somedays ahead—for you."

"Yes," he said. "And time hasn't stopped for you, either." And he was gone.

I looked after him. "Doggone!" I thought. "There I go again, talking to him as though he made sense!" I poked the end of my crutch in the damp earth three times, making interlacing circles. Then with quickened interest, I poked the boulder that had rolled *up* out of the slight hollow before the crutch tip had landed there.

"Son-a-gun!" I cried aloud. "Well, son-a-gun!"

Next morning at five of nine the kids were waiting for me at the door to the hall, huddled against the October chill that the milky sun hadn't had time to disperse yet. Rigo had a shaky old ladder with two broken rungs and splashes of old paint gumming it liberally.

"That looks awfully rickety," I said. "We don't want any blood spilled on our dance floor. It's bad for the wax."

Rigo grinned. "It'll hold me up," he said. "I used it last night to pick apples. You just have to be kinda careful."

"Well, be so then," I smiled, unlocking the door. "Better safe than—" My words faltered and died as I gaped in at the open door. The others pushed in around me, round-eyed and momentarily silenced. My first wild impression was that the ceiling had fallen in.

"My gorsh!" gasped Janniset. "What hit this place?"

"Just look at it!" shrilled Twyla. "Hey! Just look at it!"

We looked as we scuffled forward. Every single piece of paper was gone from the ceiling and walls. Every scrap of paper was on the floor, in tiny twisted confetti-sized pieces like a tattered, faded snowfall, all over the floor. There must have been an incredible amount of paper tangled in the decorations, because we waded wonderingly almost ankle-deep through it.

"Looky here!" Rigo was staring at the front of the band-

stand. Lined up neatly across the front stood all the nails that had been pulled out of the decorations, each balanced precisely on its head.

Twyla frowned and bit her lip. "It scares me," she said. "It doesn't feel right. It looks like somebody was mad or crazy—like they tore up the paper wishing they was killing something. And then to put all those nails so—so even and careful, like they had been put down gently—that looks madder than the paper." She reached over and swept her finger sideways, wincing as though she expected a shock. A section of the nails toppled with faint pings on the bare boards of the stand. In a sudden flurry, Twyla swept all the nails over. "There!" she said, wiping her finger on her dress. "Now it's all crazy."

"Well," I said, "crazy or not, somebody's saved us a lot of trouble. Rigo, we won't need your ladder. Get the brooms and let's get this mess swept out."

While they were gone for the brooms, I picked up two nails and clicked them together in a metrical cadence: *Oh Danny Boy, the pipes, the pipes are calling . . .*

By noon we had the place scrubbed out and fairly glistening through its shabby paint. By evening we had the crisp new orange-and-black decorations up, low down and with thumb tacks, and all sighed with tired satisfaction at how good the place looked. As we locked up Twyla suddenly said in a small voice, "What if it happens again before the dance Friday? All our work—"

"It won't," I promised. "It won't."

In spite of my hanging back and trying the lock a couple of times, Twyla was still waiting when I turned away from the door. She was examining the end of her braid carefully as she said, "It was him, wasn't it?"

"Yes, I suppose so," I said.

"How did he do it?" she asked.

"You've known him longer than I have," I said. "How did he do it?"

"Nobody knows the Francher kid," she said. Then softly, "He looked at me once, really looked at me. He's funny—but not to laugh," she hastened. "When he looked at me it—"

Her hand tightened on her braid until her head tilted and she glanced up slantingly at me. "It made music in me.

"You know," she said quickly into the echo of her unorthodox words, "you're kinda like him. He makes me think things and believe things I wouldn't ever by myself. You make me say things I wouldn't ever by myself—no, that's not quite right. You *let* me say things I wouldn't dare to say to anyone else."

"Thank you," I said. "Thank you, Twyla."

III

I had forgotten the trembling glamor of a teen-age dance. I had forgotten the cautious stilted gait of high heels on loafer-type feet. I had forgotten how the look of maturity could be put on with a tie and sports jacket and how—how *people-like* teen-agers could look when divorced for a while from levis and flannel shirts. Janniset could hardly contain himself for his own splendor and turned not a hair of his incredibly polished head when I smiled my "Good evening, Mr. Janniset." But in his pleased satisfaction at my formality, he forgot himself as he turned away and hoisted up his sharply creased trousers as though they were his old levis.

Rigo was stunning in his Latin handsomeness and he and Angie so drowned in one another's dark eyes that I could see why our Mexican youngsters usually marry so young. And Angie! Well, she didn't look like any eighth grader—her strapless gown, her dangly earrings, her laughing flirtatious eyes—but taken out of the context and custom and tradition, she was breathtakingly lovely. Of course it was on her "unsuitable for her age" dress and jewelry and makeup that the long line of mothers and aunts and grandmothers fixed disapproving eyes, but I'd be willing to bet that there were plenty who wished their own child could look as lovely.

In this small community, the girls always dressed up to the hilt at the least provocation, and the Halloween dance was usually the first event of the fall that could serve as an excuse. Crinolined skirts belled like blossoms across the floor above the glitter of high heels, but it was only a matter of a

few minutes before the shoes were kicked off, to toe in together forlornly under a chair or dangle from some motherly forefinger while unprotected toes braved the brogans of the boys.

Twyla was bright-cheeked and laughing, dance after dance, until the first intermission. She and Janniset brought me punch where I sat among the other spectators, then Janniset skidded off across the floor, balancing his paper cup precariously as he went to take another look at Marty, who, at school, was only a girl, but here, all dressed up, was the dawn of woman-wonder for him. Twyla gulped her punch hastily and then licked the corners of her mouth.

"He isn't here," she said huskily.

"I'm sorry," I said. "I wanted him to have fun with the rest of you. Maybe he'll come yet."

"Maybe." She twisted her cup slowly, then hastily shoved it under the chair as it threatened to drip on her dress.

"That's a beautiful dress," I said. "I love the way your petticoat shows red against the blue when you whirl."

"Thank you." She smoothed the billowing of her skirt. "I feel funny with sleeves. None of the others have them. That's why he didn't come, I bet. Not having any dress-up clothes like the others, I mean. Nothing but levis."

"Oh, that's a shame," I said. "If I had known—"

"No," she said. "Mrs. McVey is supposed to buy his clothes. She gets money for them. All she does is sit around and talk about how much she sacrifices to take care of the Francher kid and she doesn't take care of him at all. It's her fault—"

"Let's not be too critical of others," I said. "There may be circumstances we know nothing of—and besides"—I nodded my head—"he's here now."

Almost I could see the leap of her heart under the close-fitting blue as she turned to look.

The Francher kid was lounging against the door, his face closed and impassive. I noted with a flame of anger at Mrs. McVey that he was dressed in his levis, faded almost white from many washings, and a flannel shirt, the plaid of which was nearly indistinguishable except along the seams. It wasn't fair to keep him from being like the other kids even

in this minor way—or maybe especially in this way because clothes can't be hidden the way a mind or soul can.

I tried to catch his eye and beckon him in, but he looked only at the bandstand where the band members were preparing to resume playing. It was almost tragic that the Francher kid had only this handful of inexpertly played instruments to feed his hunger on. He winced back into the darkness at their first blare and I felt Twyla's tenseness as she turned to me.

"He won't come in," she half shouted against the take-a-melody-tear-it-to-pieces-stick-it-back-together-bleeding type of music that was going on.

I shook my head regretfully. "I guess not," I mouthed and then was drawn into a half-audible, completely incomprehensible conversation with Mrs. Frisney. It wasn't until the next dance started and she was towed away by Grampa Griggs that I could turn back to Twyla. She was gone. I glanced around the room. Nowhere the swirl of blue echoing the heavy brown-gold swing of her pony tail.

There was no reason for me to feel apprehensive. There were any number of places she might have gone and quite legitimately, but I suddenly felt an overwhelming need for fresh air, and swung myself past the romping dancers and out into the gasping chill of the night. I huddled closer inside my jacket, wishing it were on right instead of merely flung around my shoulders. But the air tasted clean and fresh. I don't know what we'd been breathing in the dance hall, but it wasn't air. By the time I'd got the whatever-it-was out of my lungs and filled them with the freshness of the night, I found myself halfway down the path over the edge of the railroad cut. There hadn't been a train over the single track since nineteen-ought-something and just across it was a thicket of willows and cottonwoods and a few scraggly piñon trees. As I moved into the shadow of the trees, I glanced up at the sky ablaze with a skrillion stars that dissolved into light near the lopsided moon and perforated the darker horizon with brilliance. I was startled out of my absorption by the sound of movement and music. I took an uncertain step into the dark. A few yards away, I saw the flick of skirts and started to call out to Twyla. But instead

I rounded the brush in front of me and saw what she was intent upon.

The Francher kid was dancing—dancing all alone in the quiet night. No, not alone, because a column of yellow leaves had swirled up from the ground around him and danced with him to a melody so exactly their movement that I couldn't be sure there was music. Fascinated, I watched the drift and sway, the swirl and turn, the treetop-high rise and the hesitant drifting fall of the Francher kid and the autumn leaves. But somehow I couldn't see the kid as a separate levi'd, flannel-shirted entity. He and the leaves blended so together that the sudden sharp definition of a hand or of a turning head was startling. The kid was just a larger leaf borne along with the smaller in the chilly winds of fall. On a final minor glissade of the music, the Francher kid slid to the ground.

He stood for a moment, head bent, crumbling a crisp leaf in his fingers, then he turned swiftly defensive to the rustle of movement. Twyla stepped out into the clearing. For a moment they stood looking at each other without a word. Then Twyla's voice came so softly I could barely hear it.

"I would have danced with you."

"With me like this?" He gestured at his clothes.

"Sure," she said. "It doesn't matter."

"In front of everyone?"

"If you wanted to," she said. "I wouldn't mind."

"Not there," he said. "It's too tight and hard."

"Then here," she said, holding out her hands.

"The music—" But his hands were reaching for hers.

"Your music," she said.

"My mother's music," he corrected.

And the music began, a haunting, lilting waltz-time melody. As lightly as the leaves that stirred at their feet, the two circled the clearing.

I have the picture yet, but when I return to it, my heart is emptied of adjectives because there are none for such enchantment. The music quickened and swelled, softly, richly full—the lost music that a mother bequeathed to her child.

Twyla was so completely engrossed in the magic of the moment that I'm sure she didn't even know when their feet

no longer rustled in the fallen leaves. She couldn't have known when the treetops brushed their shoes—when the long turning of the tune brought them back, spiraling down into the clearing. Her scarlet petticoat caught on a branch as they passed and left a bright shred to trail the wind, but even that did not distract her.

Before my heart completely broke with wonder, the music faded softly away and left the two standing on the ragged grass. After a breathless pause, Twyla's hand went softly, wonderingly to Francher's cheek. The kid turned his face slowly and pressed his mouth to her palm. Then they turned and left each other, without a word.

Twyla passed so close to me that her skirts brushed mine. I let her cross the tracks back to the dance before I followed. I got there just in time to catch the whisper on apparently the second round: ". . . alone out there with the Francher kid!" and the gleefully malicious shock of ". . . and her petticoat is torn—"

It was like pigsty muck clotting an Easter dress.

IV

Anna said, "Hi!" and flung herself into my one armchair. As the front leg collapsed, she caught herself with the dexterity of long practice, tilted the chair, re-inserted the leg and then eased herself back into its dusty depths.

"From the vagaries of the small town, good Lord deliver me!" she moaned.

"What now?" I asked, shifting gears on my crochet hook as I finished another row of my rug.

"You mean you haven't heard the latest scandal?" Her eyes widened in mock horror and her voice sank conspiratorially. "They were out there in the dark—alone—doing Nobody Knows What. Imagine!" Her voice shook with avid outrage. "With the Francher kid!

"Honestly!" Her voice returned to normal. "You'd think the Francher kid was leprosy or something. What a to-do about a little nocturnal smooching. I'd give you odds that most of the other kids are being shocked to ease their own

consciences of the same kind of carryings-on. But just because it is the Francher kid—"

"They weren't alone," I said casually, holding a tight rein on my indignation. "I was there."

"You were?" Anna's eyebrows bumped her crisp bangs. "Well, well. This complexions things different. What did happen? Not," she hastened, "that I credit these wild tales about, my golly, Twyla, but what did happen?"

"They danced," I said. "The Francher kid was ashamed of his clothes and wouldn't come in the hall. So they danced down in the clearing."

"Without music?"

"The Francher kid . . . hummed," I said, my eyes intent on my work.

There was a brief silence. "Well," said Anna. "That's interesting, especially that vacant spot I feel in there. But you *were* there?"

"Yes," I said.

"And they just danced?"

"Yes." I apologized mentally for making so pedestrian the magic I had seen. "And Twyla caught her petticoat on a branch and it tore before she knew it."

"Hmmm." Anna was suddenly sober. "You ought to take your rug up to the Sew-Sew Club."

"But I—" I was bewildered.

"They're serving nice heaping portions of Twyla's reputation for refreshments and Mrs. McVey is contributing the dessert—the unplumbed depravity of foster children."

I stuffed my rug back into its bag. "Is my face on?" I asked.

Well, I got back to the Somansen's that evening considerably wider of eye than I had left it. Anna took my things from me at the door.

"How did it go?" she asked.

"My gorsh!" I said, easing myself into a chair. "If they ever got started on me, what would I have left?"

"Bare bones," said Anna promptly. "With plenty of tooth marks on them. Well, did you get them told?"

"Yes," I said, "but they didn't want to believe me. It was

too tame. And of course Mrs. McVey didn't like being pushed out on a limb about the Francher kid's clothes. Her delicate hint about the high cost of clothes didn't impress Mrs. Holmes much, not with her six boys. I guess I've got me an enemy for life. She got a good-sized look at herself through my eyes and she didn't like it at all, but I'll bet the Francher kid won't turn up levi'd for a dance again."

"Heaven send he'll never do anything worse," Anna intoned piously.

That's what I hoped fervently for a while, but lightning hit Willow Creek anyway, a subtle slow lightning—a calculated, coldly angry lightning. I held my breath as report after report came in. Turbows' old shed exploded without a sound on the stroke of nine o'clock Tuesday night and scattered itself as kindling wood over the whole barnyard. Of course Turbows had talked for years of tearing the shaky old thing down but—I began to wonder how you went about bailing a juvenile out of the clink.

Then the last sound timber on the old railroad bridge below Thurman's house shuddered and dissolved loudly into sawdust at eleven o'clock Tuesday night. The rails, deprived of their support, trembled briefly, then curled tightly *up* into two absurd rosettes. The bridge being gone meant an hour's brisk walk to town for Thurman instead of a fifteen-minute stroll. It also meant safety for the toddlers too young to understand why the rotting timbers weren't a wonderful kind of jungle-gym.

Wednesday evening at five, all the water in Holmes' pond geysered up and crashed down again, pureeing what few catfish were still left in it and breaking a spillway over into the creek, thereby draining the stagnant old mosquito-bearing spot with a conclusive slurp. As the neighbors had nagged at Holmes to do for years—but . . .

I was awestruck at this simple, literal translation of my words, and searched my memory with wary apprehensiveness. Almost I could have relaxed by now if I could have drawn a line through the last two names on my mental roll of the club.

But Thursday night there was a crash and a roar and I

huddled in my bed, praying a wordless prayer against I didn't know what, and Friday morning I listened to the shrill wide-eyed recitals at the breakfast table.

"–since the devil was an imp and now there it is–"

"–right in the middle, big as life and twice as natural–"

"What is?" I asked, braving the battery of eyes that pinned me like a moth in a covey of searchlights.

There was a stir around the table. Everyone was aching to speak, but there's always a certain rough protocol to be observed, even in a boarding house.

Ol' Charlie cleared his throat, took a huge mouthful of coffee and sloshed it thoughtfully and noisily around his teeth before swallowing it.

"Balance Rock," he choked, spraying his vicinity finely, "came plumb unbalanced last night. Came a-crashing down, bouncing like a dang pin-pong ball an'nen it hopped over half a dozen fences an'nen *whammo!* it lit on a couple of Scudder's pigs an'nen tore out a section of Leland's stone fence and now it's settin' there in the middle of their alfalfa field as big as a house. He'll have a helk of a time mowing that field now." He slurped largely of his coffee.

"Strange things going on around here." Blue Nor's porchy eyebrows rose and fell portentously. "Never heard of a balance rock falling before. And all them other funny things. The devil's walking our land, sure enough!"

I left on the wave of violent argument between proponents of the devil theory and the atom bomb testing theory as the prime cause. Now I could draw another line through the list. But what of the last name? What of it?

That afternoon the Francher kid materialized on the bottom step at the boarding house, his eyes intent on my braces. We sat there in silence for a while, mostly I suppose because I could think of nothing rational to say. Finally I decided to be irrational.

"What about Mrs. McVey?"

He shrugged. "She feeds me," he said.

"And what's with the Scudders' pigs?"

Color rose blotchily to his cheeks. "I goofed," he said. "I was aiming for the fence and let it go too soon."

"I told all those ladies the truth Monday," I said. "They

knew they had been wrong about you and Twyla. There was no need—"

"No need!" His eyes flashed and I blinked away from the impact of this straight, indignant glare. "They're dern lucky I didn't smash them all flat."

"I know," I said hastily. "I know how you feel, but I can't congratulate you on your restraint because however little you did compared to what you might have done, it was still more than you had a right to do. Especially the pigs and the wall."

"I didn't mean the pigs," he muttered as he fingered a patch on his knee. "Old man Scudder's a pretty right guy."

"Yes," I said. "So what are you going to do about it?"

"I don't know," he said. "I could swipe some pigs from somewhere else for him, but I suppose that wouldn't fix things."

"No, it wouldn't," I said. "You should buy— Do you have any money?"

"Not for pigs!" he flared. "All I have is what I'm saving for my musical instrument and not one penny of that'll ever go for pigs!"

"All right, all right," I said. "You figure out something."

He ducked his head again, fingering the patch, and I watched the late sun run across the curve of his cheek, thinking what an odd conversation this was.

"Francher," I said, leaning forward impulsively. "Do you ever wonder how come you can do the things you do?"

His eyes were quick on my face. "Do you ever wonder why you *can't* do what you can't do?"

I flushed and shifted my crutches. "I *know* why," I said.

"No, you don't," he said. "You only know when your Can't began. You don't know the real why. Even your doctors don't know all of it. Well, I don't know the why of my Cans. I don't even know the beginning of them, only that sometimes I feel a wave of something inside me that hollers to get out of all the Can'ts that are around me like you can't do this, you can't do that, and then I *remember* that I can."

He flicked his fingers and my crutches stirred. They lifted and thudded softly down the steps and then up again to lean back in their accustomed place.

"Crutches *can't* walk," said the Francher kid. "But you—Something besides your body musta got smashed in that wreck."

"Everything got smashed," I said bitterly, the cold horror of that night and all that followed choking my chest. "Everything ended—everything."

"There aren't any endings," said the Francher kid. "Only new beginnings. When you going to get started?" Then he slouched away, his hands in his pockets, his head bent as he kicked a rock along the path. Bleakly I watched him go, trying to keep alive my flame of anger at him.

Well, Leland's wall had to be rebuilt and it was the Francher kid that got the job. He toiled mightily, lifting the heavy stones and cracking his hands with the dehydrating effect of the mortar he used. Maybe the fence wasn't as straight as it had been, but it was repaired and perhaps, I hoped, a stone had been set strongly somewhere in the Francher kid by this act of atonement. That he received pay for it didn't detract too much from the act itself—especially considering the amount of pay, and the fact that it all went in on the other reparation.

The appearance of two strange pigs in Scudder's east field created quite a stir, but the wonder of it was dulled by all the odd events proceeding it. Mr. Scudder made inquiries but nothing ever came of them so he kept the pigs, and I made no inquiries but relaxed for a while about the Francher kid.

V

It was along about this time that a Dr. Curtis came to town briefly. Well, came to town is a euphemism. His car broke down on his way up into the hills and he had to accept our hospitality until Bill Thurman could get around to finding a necessary part. He stayed at Somansen's in a room opposite mine after Mrs. Somansen had frantically cleared it out, mostly by the simple expedient of shoving all the boxes and crates and odds and ends to the end of the hall and draping a tarp over them. Then she splashed water

across the barely settled dust and mopped out the resultant mud, put a brick under one corner of the bed, made it up with two army surplus mattresses, one sheet edged with crocheted lace, and one of heavy unbleached muslin. She unearthed a pillow that fluffed beautifully but sighed itself to a wafer-thin odor of damp feathers at a touch, and topped the splendid whole with two hand-pieced, hand-quilted quilts and a chenille spread with a technicolor peacock flamboyantly dominating it.

"There," she sighed, using her apron to dust the edge of the dresser where it showed along the edge of the dresser scarf, "I guess that'll hold him."

"I should hope so," I smiled. "It's probably the quickest room he's ever had."

"He's lucky to have this at such short notice," she said, turning the rag rug over so the burned place wouldn't show. "If it wasn't that I had my eye on that new winter coat—"

Dr. Curtis was a very relaxing, comfortable sort of fellow and it seemed so good to have someone to talk to who cared to use words of more than two syllables. It wasn't that the people in Willow Creek were ignorant, they just didn't usually care to discuss three-syllable matters. I guess, besides the conversation, I was drawn to Dr. Curtis because he neither looked at my crutches nor not looked at them. It was pleasant except for the twinge of here's-someone-who-has-never-known-me-without-them.

After supper that night, we all sat around the massive oil burner in the front room and talked against the monotone background of the radio turned low. Of course the late shake-making events in the area were brought up. Dr. Curtis was most interested—especially in the rails that curled up into rosettes. Because he was a doctor and a stranger, the group expected an explanation of these goings-on from him, or at least an educated guess.

"What do I think?" He leaned forward in the old rocker and rested his arms on his knees. "I think a lot of things happen that can't be explained by our usual thought patterns, and once we get accustomed to certain patterns we find it very uncomfortable to break over into others. So maybe it's just as well not to want an explanation."

"Hmmm." Ol' Charlie knocked the ashes out of his pipe into his hand and looked around for the waste basket. "Neat way of saying you don't know either. Think I'll remember that. It might come in handy sometime. Well, g'night all." He glanced around hastily, dumped the ashes in the geranium pot, and left, sucking on his empty pipe.

His departure was a signal for the others to drift off to bed at the wise hour of ten, but I was in no mood for wisdom, not of the early-to-bed type, anyway.

"Then there *is* room in this life for inexplicables." I pleated my skirt between my fingers and straightened it out again.

"It would be a poor, lackluster sort of world if there weren't," the doctor said. "I used to rule out anything that I couldn't explain, but I got cured of that good one time." He smiled reminiscently. "Sometimes I wish I hadn't. As I said, it can be mighty uncomfortable."

"Yes," I said impulsively. "Like hearing impossible music and sliding down moonbeams—" I felt my heart sink at the sudden blankness of his face. Oh, gee! Goofed again. He could talk glibly of inexplicables, but he didn't really believe in them. "And crutches that walk by themselves," I rushed on rashly, "and autumn leaves that dance in the windless clearing—" I grasped my crutches and started blindly for the door. "And maybe someday if I'm a good girl and disbelieve enough, I'll walk again—"

" 'And disbelieve enough'?" His words followed me. "Don't you mean believe enough?"

"Don't strain your pattern," I called back. "It's 'disbelieve.' "

Of course I felt silly the next morning at the breakfast table, but Dr. Curtis didn't refer to the conversation so I didn't either. He was discussing renting a jeep for his hunting trip and leaving his car to be fixed.

"Tell Bill you'll be back a week before you plan to," said Ol' Charlie. "Then your car will be ready when you do get back."

The Francher kid was in the group of people who gathered to watch Bill transfer Dr. Curtis' gear from the car to the jeep. As usual he was a little removed from the rest,

lounging against a tree. Dr. Curtis finally came out, his 30-06 under one arm and his heavy hunting jacket under the other. Anna and I leaned over our side fence watching the whole procedure.

I saw the Francher kid straighten slowly, his hands leaving his pockets as he stared at Dr. Curtis. One hand went out tentatively and then faltered. Dr. Curtis inserted himself in the seat of the jeep and fumbled at the knobs on the dashboard. "Which one's the radio?" he asked Bill.

"Radio? In this jeep?" Bill laughed.

"But the music—" Dr. Curtis paused for a split second, then turned on the ignition. "Have to make my own, I guess," he laughed.

The jeep roared into life and the small group scattered as he wheeled it in reverse across the yard. In the pause as he shifted gears, he glanced sideways at me and our eyes met. It was a very brief encounter, but he asked questions and I answered with my unknowing and he exploded in a kind of wonderment—all in the moment between reverse and low.

We watched the dust boil up behind the jeep as it growled its way down to the highway.

"Well," said Anna, "a-hunting we do go indeed!"

"Who's he?" The Francher kid's hands were tight on the top of the fence, a blind sort of look on his face.

"I don't know," I said. "His name is Dr. Curtis."

"He's heard music before."

"I should hope so," said Anna.

"*That* music?" I asked the Francher kid.

"Yes," he nearly sobbed. "Yes!"

"He'll be back," I said. "He has to get his car."

"Well," sighed Anna. "The words are the words of English, but the sense is the sense of confusion. Coffee, anybody?"

That afternoon the Francher kid joined me, wordlessly, as I struggled up the rise above the boarding house for a little wideness of horizon to counteract the day's shut-in-ness. I would rather have walked alone, partly because of a need for silence and partly because he just couldn't ever keep his—accusing?—eyes off my crutches. But he didn't trespass upon my attention as so many people would have, so I didn't

mind too much. I leaned, panting, against a gray granite boulder and let the fresh-from-distant-snow breeze lift my hair as I caught my breath. Then I huddled down into my coat, warming my ears. The Francher kid had a handful of pebbles and was lobbing them at the scattered rusty tin cans that dotted the hillside. After one pebble turned a square corner to hit a can, he spoke.

"If he knows the name of the instrument, then—" He lost his words.

"What is the name?" I asked, rubbing my nose where my coat collar had tickled it.

"It really isn't a word," he said. "It's just two sounds it makes."

"Well, then, make me a word," I said. " 'Musical instrument' is mighty unmusical and unhandy."

The Francher kid listened, his head tilted, his lips moving. "I suppose you could call it a *rappoor*," he said, softening the *a*. "But it isn't that."

"*Rappoor*," I said. "Of course you know by now we don't have any such instrument." I was intrigued at having been drawn into another Francher-type conversation. I was developing quite a taste for them. "It's probably just something your mother dreamed up for you."

"And for that doctor?" he asked.

"Ummm." My mental wheels spun, tractionless. "What do you think?"

"I almost know," he said, "that there are some more like mother. Some who know 'the madness and The Dream' too."

"Dr. Curtis?" I asked.

"No," he said slowly, rubbing his hand along the boulder. "No. I could feel a far-away, strange-to-me feeling with him. He's like you. He—he knows someone who knows, but he doesn't know."

"Well, thanks," I said. "He's a nice bird to be a feather of. Then it's all very simple. When he comes back, you ask him who he knows."

"Yes . . ." The Francher kid drew a tremulous breath. "Yes!"

We eased down the hillside, talking money and music. The Francher kid had enough saved up to buy a good instru-

ment of some kind . . . but what kind? He was immersed in tones and timbres and ranges and keys and the possibility of sometime finding a something that would sound like a *rappoor.*

We paused at the foot of the hill. Impulsively I spoke.

"Francher, why do you talk with me?" I wished the words back before I finished them. Words have a ghastly way of shattering delicate situations and snapping tenuous bonds.

He lobbed a couple more stones against the bank and turned away, hands in his pockets. His words came back to me after I had given them up.

"You don't hate me—yet."

I was jarred. I suppose I had imagined all the people around the Francher kid were getting acquainted with him as I was, but his words made me realize differently. After that I caught at every conversation that included the Francher kid, and alerted at every mention of his name. It shook me to find that to practically everyone he was still juvenile delinquent, lazy trash, no-good off-scouring, potention criminal, burden. By some devious means it had been decided that he was responsible for all the odd happenings in town. I asked a number of people how the kid could possibly have done it. The only answer I got was "The Francher kid can do anything—bad."

Even Anna still found him an unwelcome burden in her classroom despite the fact that he was finally functioning on a fairly acceptable level academically.

Here I'd been thinking—Heaven knows why!—that he was establishing himself in the community. Instead he was doing well to hold his own. I reviewed to myself all that had happened since first I met him and found hardly a thing that would be positive in the eyes of the general public.

"Why," I thought to myself, "I'm darned lucky he's kept out of the hands of the law!" And my stomach knotted coldly at what might happen if the Francher kid ever did step over into out-and-out lawlessness. There's something insidiously sweet to the adolescent in flouting authority and I wanted no such appetite for any My Child of mine.

Well, the next few days after Dr. Curtis left were typical

hunting weather days. Minutes of sunshine and shouting autumn colors—hours of cloud and rain and near snow and raw, aching winds. Reports came of heavy snow across Mingus Mountain and Dogietown was snowed in for the winter, a trifle earlier than usual. We watched our own first flakes idle down, then whip themselves to tears against the huddled houses. It looked as though all excitement and activity were about to be squeezed out of Willow Creek by the drab grayness of winter.

Then the unexpected, which sometimes splashes our grayness with scarlet, happened. The big dude-ranch school, the Half Circle Star, that occupied the choicest of the range land in our area, invited all the school kids out to a musical splurge. They had imported an orchestra that played concerts as well as being a very good dance band, and they planned a gala weekend with a concert Friday evening followed by a dance for the teeners Saturday night. The Ranch students were usually kept aloof from the town kids, poor little tikes. They were mostly unwanted or maladjusted children whose parents could afford to get rid of them with a flourish under the guise of giving them the advantage of growing up in healthful surroundings.

Of course the whole town was flung into a tizzy. There were the children of millionaires out there and famous people's kids too, but about the only glimpse we ever got of them was as they swept grandly through the town in the Ranch station wagons. On such occasions, we collectively blinked our eyes at the chromium glitter, and sighed—though perhaps for different reasons. I sighed for thin, unhappy faces pressed to windows and sad eyes yearning back at houses where families lived who wanted *their* kids.

Anyway, the concensus was that it would be worth suffering through a "music concert" to get to go to a dance with a real orchestra—because only those who attended the concert were eligible for the dance.

There was much discussion and much heart-burning over what to wear to the two so divergent affairs. The boys were complacent after they found out that their one good outfit was right for both. The girls discussed endlessly, and embarked upon a wild lend-borrow spree when they found that

fathers positively refused to spend largely even for this so special occasion.

I was very pleased for the Francher kid. Now he'd have a chance to hear live music—a considerable cut above what snarled in on our staticky wave lengths from the available radio stations. Now maybe he'd hear a faint echo of his *rappoor* and in style too, because Mrs. McVey had finally broken down and bought him a new suit, a really nice one by the local standards. I was as anxious as Twyla to see how the Francher kid would look in such splendor.

So it was with a distinct shock that I saw the kid at the concert, lounging, thumbs in pockets, against the door of the room where the crowd gathered. His face was shut and dark and his patched, faded levis made a blotch in the dimness of the room.

"Look!" whispered Twyla. "He's in levis!"

"How come?" I breathed. "Where's his new suit?"

"I don't know," she answered. "And those levis aren't even clean!" And she hunched down in her seat, feeling the accusing eyes of the whole world searing her through the Francher kid.

The concert was splendid. Even our rockin'est rollers were caught up in the wonderful web of music. Even I lost myself for long, lovely moments in the bright melodic trails that led me out of the gray lanes of familiarity. But I also felt the bite of tears behind my eyes. Music is made to be moved to and my unresponsive feet wouldn't even tap a tempo. I let the brasses and drums smash my rebellion into bearable-sized pieces again and joined joyfully in the enthusiastic applause.

"Hey!" said Rigo behind me as the departing stir of the crowd began. "I didn't know anything could sound like that. Man! Did you hear that horn! I'd like to get me one of them things and blow it!"

"You'd sound like a sick cow," said Janniset. "Them's hard to play."

Their discussion moved on down the aisle.

"He's gone." Twyla's voice was a breath in my ear.

"Yes," I said. "But we'll probably see him out at the bus."

But we didn't. He wasn't at the bus. He hadn't come out

on the bus. No one knew how he got out to the ranch or where he had gone.

Anna and Twyla and I piled into Anna's car and headed back for Willow Creek, my heart thudding with apprehension, my thoughts busy. When we pulled up at Somansen's, there was a car parked in front.

"The McVey!" Anna sizzled in my ear. "Ah ha! Methinks I smell trouble."

I didn't even have time to take my coat off in the smothery warmth of the front room before I was confronted by the monumental violence of Mrs. McVey's wrath.

"Dress him!" she hissed, her chin thrust out as she lunged forward in the chair. "Dress him so's he'll feel equal to the others!" Her hands flashed out and I dodged instinctively and blinked as a bunch of white rags fluttered to my feet. "His new shirt!" she half screamed. Another shower of tatters—dark one this time. "His new suit! Not a piece in it as big as your hand!" There was a spatter like muffled hail. "His shoes!" Her voice caught on the edge of her violence and she repeated raggedly, "His *shoes!*" Fear was battling with anger now. "Look at those pieces—as big as stamps—*shoes!*" Her voice broke. "Anybody who can tear up *shoes!*"

She sank back in her chair, spent and breahless, fishing for a crumpled kleenex to wipe the spittle from her chin. I eased into a chair after Anna helped me shrug out of my coat. Twyla huddled, frightened, near the door, her eyes big with fascinated terror.

"Let him be like the others," McVey half whispered. "That limb of Satan ever be like anyone decent?"

"But why?" My voice sounded thin and high in the calm after the hurricane.

"For no reason at all," she gasped, pressing her hand to her panting ribs. "I gave all them brand-new clothes to him to try on, thinking he'd be pleased. Thinking"—her voice slipped to a whining tremolo—"thinking he'd see how I had his best interest at heart." She paused and sniffed lugubriously. No ready sympathy for her poured into the hiatus, so she went on, angrily aggrieved. "And he took them and went into his room and came out with them like that!" Her finger jabbed at the pile of rags. "He—he *threw* them

at me! You and your big ideas about him wanting to be like other kids!" Her lips curled away from the venomous spate of words. "He don't want to be like nobody 'cepting hisself. And he's a devil!" Her voice sank to a whisper and her breath drew in on the last word, her eyes wide.

"But why did he do it?" I asked. "He must have said *something.*"

Mrs. McVey folded her hands across her ample middle and pinched her lips together. "There are some things a lady don't repeat," she said prissily, tossing her head.

"Oh, cut it out!" I was suddenly dreadfully weary of trying to be polite to the McVeys of this world. "Stop tying on that kind of an act. You could teach a stevedore—" I bit my lips and swallowed hard. "I'm sorry, Mrs. McVey, but this is no time to hold back. What did he say? What excuse did he give?"

"He didn't give any excuse," she snapped. "He just—just—" Her heavy cheeks mottled with color. "He called names."

"Oh." Anna and I exchanged glances.

"But what on earth got into him?" I asked. "There must be some reason—"

"Well." Anna squirmed a little. "After all, what can you expect—"

"From a background like that?" I snapped. "Well, Anna, I certainly expected something different from a background like yours!"

Anna's face hardened and she gathered up her things. "I've known him longer than you have," she said quietly.

"Longer," I admitted, "but not better. Anna," I pleaded, leaning towards her. "Don't condemn him unheard."

"Condemn?" She looked up brightly. "I didn't know he was on trial."

"Oh, Anna." I sank back in my chair. "The poor kid's been on trial, presumed guilty of anything and everything ever since he arrived in town and you know it."

"I don't want to quarrel with you," Anna said. "I'd better say good night."

The door clicked to behind her. Mrs. McVey and I measured each other with our eyes. I had opened my

mouth to say something when I felt a whisper of a motion at my elbow. Twyla stood under the naked flood of the overhead light, her hands clasped in front of her, her eyes shadowed by the droop of her lashes as she narrowed her glance against the glare.

"What did you buy his clothes with?" Her voice was very quiet.

"None of your business, young lady," snapped Mrs. McVey, reddening.

"This is almost the end of the month," said Twyla. "Your check doesn't come till the first. Where did you get the money?"

"*Well!*" Mrs. McVey began to hoist her bulk out of the chair. "I don't have to stay here and have a sassy snip like this—"

Twyla swept in closer—so close that Mrs. McVey shrank back, her hands gripping the dusty, overstuffed arms of the chair.

"You never have any of the check left after the first week," said Twyla. "And you bought a purple nylon night gown this month. It took a week's pay—"

Mrs. McVey lunged forward again, her mouth agape with horrified outrage.

"You took *his* money," said Twyla, her eyes steely in her tight young face. "You stole the money he was saving!" She whirled away from the chair, her skirts and hair flaring. "Someday," she said with clenched teeth, "someday I'll probably be old and fat and ugly, but Heaven save me from being old and fat and ugly and a *thief!*"

"Twyla!" I warned, truly afraid that Mrs. McVey would have a stroke then and there.

"Well, she *is* a thief!" cried Twyla. "The Francher kid has been working and saving almost a year to buy—" She faltered, palpably feeling the thin ice of betraying a confidence. "To buy something. And he had almost enough! And she must have gone snooping around—"

"Twyla!" I had to stop her.

"It's true! It's true!" Her hands clenched rebelliously.

"Twyla." My voice was quiet, but it silenced her.

"Goodby, Mrs. McVey," I said. "I'm sorry this happened."

"Sorry!" she snorted, rearing up out of her chair. "Sour old maids with never a chick or child of their own sticking their noses into decent people's affairs—" She waddled hastily to the door. She reached for the doorknob, her eyes narrow and venomous over her shoulder. "I got connections," she said. "I'll get even with you." The door shuddered as it emphasized her departure.

I let the McVey sweep out of my mind.

"Twyla." I took her cold hands in mine. "You'd better go on home. I've got to figure out how to find the Francher kid."

The swift movement of her hands protested. "But *I* want—"

"I'm sorry, Twyla," I said. "I think it's be better."

"OK." Her shoulders relaxed in acquiescence.

Just as she left, Mrs. Somansen bustled in. "Y' better come on out to the table and have a caup of coffee," she said. I straightened wearily.

"That McVey! She'd drive the devil to drink," she said cheerfully. "Well, I guess people are like that. I've had more teachers over the years say that it wasn't the kids they minded, but the parents." She shooed me through the door and went to the kitchen for the percolator. "Now, I was always one to believe that the teacher was right—right or wrong—" Her voice faded out in a long familiar story that proved just the opposite of what she'd said, as I stared into my cup of coffee, wondering despairingly where in all this world I could find the Francher kid. After the episode of the gossip, I had my fears. Still, oftentimes people who react violently to comparatively minor troubles were seemingly unshaken by really serious ones—a sort of being at a loss for a proportionate emotional reaction.

But what would he do? Music—music—he'd planned to buy the means for music and had lost the wherewithal. Now he had nothing to make music with. What would he do first? Revenge—or find his music elsewhere? Run away? To where? Steal the money? Steal the music?—*Steal!*

I snapped to awareness, my abrupt movement slopping my cold coffee over into the saucer. Mrs. Somansen was gone. The house was quiet with the twilight pause—the indefinable transitional phase from day to night.

This time it wouldn't be only a harmonica! I groped for my crutches, my mind scrabbling for some means of transportation. I was reaching for the doorknob when the door flew open and nearly bowled me over.

"Coffee! Coffee!" croaked Dr. Curtis, to my complete bewilderment. He staggered over, all bundled in his hunting outfit, his face ragged with whiskers, his clothes odorous of campfires and all out-of-doors, to the table and clutched the coffee pot. It was very obviously cold.

"Oh, well," he said in a conversational tone. "I guess I can survive without coffee."

"Survive what?" I asked.

He looked at me a moment, smiling, then he said, "Well, if I'm going to say anything about it to anyone it might as well be you, though I hope that I've got sense enough not to go around babbling indiscriminately. Of course, it might be a slight visual hangover from this hunting trip—you should hunt with these friends of mine sometime—but it kinda shook me."

"Shook you?" I repeated stupidly, my mind racing around the idea of asking him for help in finding the Francher kid.

"A somewhatly," he admitted. "After all, there I was, riding along, minding my own business, singing, lustily if not musically. 'A Life on the Ocean Wave,' when there they were, marching sedately across the road."

"They?" This story dragged in my impatient ears.

"The trombone and the big bass drum," he explained.

VI

"The what!" I had the sensation of running unexpectedly into a mad tangle of briars.

"The trombone and the big bass drum," Dr. Curtis repeated. "Keeping perfect time and no doubt in perfect step, though you couldn't thump your feet convincingly six feet off the ground. Supposing, of course, you were a trombone with feet, which this wasn't."

"Dr. Curtis." I grabbed a corner of his hunting coat. "Please, *please!* What happened? Tell me! I've got to know."

He looked at me and sobered. "You are taking this seriously, aren't you?" he said wonderingly.

I gulped and nodded.

"Well, it was about five miles above the Half Circle Star Ranch, where the heavy pine growth begins. And so help me, a trombone and a bass drum marched in the air across the road, the bass drum marking the time—though come to think of it, the drum sticks just lay on top. I stopped the jeep and ran over to where they had disappeared. I couldn't see anything in the heavy growth there, but I swear I heard a faint Bronx cheer from the trombone. I have no doubt that the two of them were hiding behind a tree, snickering at me." He rubbed his hand across his fuzzy chin. "Maybe I'd better drink that coffee, cold or not."

"Dr. Curtis," I said urgently. "Can you help me? Without waiting for questions? Can you take me out there? Right now?" I reached for my coat. Wordlessly, he helped me on with it and opened the door for me. The day was gone and the sky was a clear aqua around the horizon, shading into rose where the sun had dropped behind the hills. It was only a matter of minutes before we were roaring up the hill to the junction. I shouted over the jolting rattle.

"It's the Francher kid," I yelled. "I've got to find him and make him put them back before they find out."

"Put who back where?" shouted Dr. Curtis into the sudden diminution of noise as we topped the rise, much to the astonishment of Mrs. Frisney, who was pattering across the intersection with her black umbrella protecting her from the early starshine.

"It's too long to explain," I screamed as we accelerated down the highway. "But he must be stealing the whole orchestra because Mrs. McVey bought him a new suit, and I've got to make him take them back or they'll arrest him, then Heaven help us all."

"You mean the Francher kid had that bass drum and trombone?" he yelled.

"Yes!" My chest was aching from the tension of speech. "And probably all the rest."

I caught myself with barked knuckles as Dr. Curtis braked to a sudden stop.

"Now look," he said, "let's get this straight. You're talking wilder than I am. Do you mean to say that that kid is swiping a whole orchestra?"

"Yes," I said. "Don't ask me how. I don't know how, but he can do it—" I grabbed his sleeve. "But he said you knew! The day you left on your trip, I mean, he said you knew someone who would know. We were waiting for you!"

"Well, I'll be blowed!" he said in slow wonder. "Well, dang me!" He ran his hand over his face. "So now it's *my* turn!" He reached for the ignition key. "Gangway, Jemmy!" he shouted. "Here I come with Another! Yours or mine, Jemmy? Yours or mine?"

It was as though his outlandish words had tripped a trigger. Suddenly all this strangeness, this out-of-stepness became a mad foolishness. Despairingly I wished I'd never seen Willow Creek or the Francher kid or a harmonica that danced alone or Twyla's tilted side-glance, or Dr. Curtis or the white road dimming in the rapid coming of night. I huddled down in my coat, my eyes stinging with weary, hopeless tears, and the only comfort I could find was in visualizing me twisting my hated braces into rigid confetti and spattering the road with it.

I roused as Dr. Curtis braked the jeep to a stop.

"It was about there," he said, peering through the dusk. "It's mighty deserted up here—the raw end of isolation. The kid's probably scared by now and plenty willing to come home."

"Not the Francher kid," I said. "He's not the run-of-the-mill-type kid."

"Oh, so!" said Dr. Curtis. "I'd forgotten."

Then there it was. At first I thought it the evening wind in the pines, but it deepened and swelled and grew into a thunderous, magnificent, shaking chord—a whole orchestra giving tongue. Then, one by one, the instruments soloed, running their scales, displaying their intervals, parading their possibilities. Somewhere between the strings and woodwinds, I eased out of the jeep.

"You stay here," I whispered. "I'll go find him. You wait."

It was like walking through a rainstorm, the notes spatter-

ing all around me, the shrill lightning of the piccolos and the muttering thunder of the drums. There was no melody, only a child running gleefully through a candy store, snatching greedily at everything, gathering delight by the handful and throwing it away for the sheer pleasure of having enough to be able to throw it.

I struggled up the rise above the road, forgetting in my preoccupation to be wary of unfamiliar territory in the half dark. There they were—in the sand hollow beyond the rise—all the instruments ranged in orderly precise rows as though at the recital, each one wrapped in a sudden, shadowy silence, broken only by the shivery giggle of the cymbals which hastily stilled themselves against the sand.

"Who's there?" He was a rigid figure, poised atop a boulder, arms half lifted.

"Francher," I said.

"Oh." He slid through the air to me. "I'm not hiding any more," he said. "I'm going to be me all the time now."

"Francher," I said bluntly, "you're a thief."

He jerked in protest. "I'm not either—"

"If this is being you," I said, "you're a thief. You stole these instruments."

He groped for words, then burst out, "They stole my money! They stole all my music."

"They?" I asked. "Francher, you can't lump people together and call them *'they.'* Did I steal your money? Or Twyla—or Mrs. Frisney—or Rigo?"

"Maybe you didn't put your hands on it," said the Francher kid. "But you stood around and let McVey take it."

"That's a guilt humanity has shared since the beginning," I said. "Standing around and letting wrong things happen. But even Mrs. McVey felt she was helping you. She didn't sit down and decide to rob you. Some people have the idea that children don't have any exclusive possessions, but what they have belongs to the adults who care for them. Mrs. McVey thinks that way. Which is quite a different thing from deliberately stealing from strangers. What about the owners of all these instruments? What have they done to deserve your ill-will?"

"They're people," he said stubbornly. "And I'm not going

to be people any more." Slowly he lifted himself into the air and turned himself upside down. "See," he said, hanging above the hillside. "People can't do things like this."

"No," I said. "But apparently whatever kind of creature you have decided to be can't keep their shirt tails in either."

Hastily he scrabbled his shirt back over his bare midriff and righted himself. There was an awkward silence in the shadowy hollow; then I asked:

"What are you going to do about the instruments?"

"Oh, they can have them back when I'm through with them—if they can find them," he said contemptuously. "I'm going to play them to pieces tonight." The trumpet jabbed brightly through the dusk and the violins shimmered a silver obbligato.

"And every downbeat will say *'thief,'* " I said, "and every roll of the drums will growl *'stolen.'* "

"I don't care, I don't care!" he almost yelled. " *'Thief'* and *'stolen'* are words for people and I'm not going to be people any more, I told you!"

"What are you going to be?" I asked, leaning wearily against a tree trunk. "An animal?"

"No sir." He was having trouble deciding what to do with his hands. "I'm going to be *more* than just a human."

"Well, for a more-than-human, this kind of behavior doesn't show very many smarts," I said. "If you're going to be more than human, you have to be thoroughly a human first. If you're going to be better than a human, you have to be the best a human can be, first—then go on from there. Being entirely different is no way to make a big impression on people. You have to be able to outdo them at their own game first and then go beyond them. It won't matter to them that you can fly like a bird unless you can walk straight like a man, first. To most people 'different' is 'wrong.' Oh, they'd probably say, 'My goodness! How wonderfull' when you first pulled some fancy trick, but"—I hesitated, wondering if I were being wise—"but they'd forget you pretty quick, just as they would any cheap carnival attraction."

He jerked at my words, his fists clenched.

"You're as bad as the rest." His words were tight and bitter. "You think I'm just a freak—"

"I think you're an unhappy person," I said, "because you're not sure who you are or what you are, but you'll have a much worse time trying to make an identity for yourself if you tangle with the law."

"The law doesn't apply to me," he said coldly. "Because I know who I am—"

"Do you, Francher?" I asked softly. "Where did your mother come from? Why could she walk through the minds of others? Who are you, Francher? Are you going to cut yourself off from people before you even try to find out just what wonders you are capable of? Not these little sideshow deals, but maybe miracles that really count." I swallowed hard as I looked at his averted face, shadowy in the dusk. My own face was congealing from the cold wind that had risen, but he didn't even shiver in its iciness, though he had no jacket on. My lips moved stiffly. "Both of us know you could get away with this lawlessness, but you know as well as I do that if you take this first step, you won't ever be able to untake it. And, how do we know, it might make it impossible for you to be accepted by your own kind—if you're right in saying there are others. Surely they're above common theft. And Dr. Curtis is due back from his hunting trip. So close to knowing—maybe—

"I didn't know your mother, Francher, but I do know this is not The Dream she had for you. This is not why she endured Hunger and Hiding, Terror and Panic Places—"

I turned and stumbled away from him, making my way back to the road. It was dark—horribly dark around me and in me as I wailed soundlessly for this My Child. Somewhere before I got back, Dr. Curtis was helping me. He got me back into the jeep and pried my frozen fingers from my crutches and warmed my hands between his broad-gloved palms.

"He *isn't* of this world, you know," he said. "At least his parents or grandparents weren't. There are others like him. I've been hunting with some of them. He doesn't know, evidently, nor did his mother, but he *can* find his People. I wanted to tell you to help you persuade him—"

I started to reach for my crutches, peering through the dark, then I relaxed. "No," I said with tingling lips. "It wouldn't be any good if he only responded to bribes. He has to decide now, with the scales weighted against him. He's got to *push* into his new world. He can't just slide in limply. You kill a chick if you help it hatch."

I dabbled all the way home at tears for a My Child, lost in a wilderness I couldn't chart, bound in a captivity from which I couldn't free him.

Dr. Curtis saw me to the door of my room. He lifted my averted face and wiped it.

"Don't worry," he said. "I promise you the Francher kid will be taken care of."

"Yes," I said, closing my eyes against the nearness of his. "By the Sheriff if they catch him. They'll discover the loss of the orchestra any minute now, if they haven't already."

"You made him think," he said. "He wouldn't have stood still for all that if you hadn't."

"Too late," I said. "A thought too late."

Alone in my room, I huddled on my bed, trying not to think of anything. I lay there until I was stiff with the cold, then I crept into my night clothes and buttoned my warm woolly robe up to my chin. I sat in the darkness there by the window, looking out at the lacy ghosts of the cottonwood trees, in the dim moonlight. How long would it be before some kindly soul would come blundering in to regale me with the latest about the Francher kid?

I put my elbows on the window sill and leaned my face on my hands, the heels of my palms pressing against my eyes. *Oh Francher, My Child, My lonely lost Child . . .*

"I'm not lost."

I lifted a startled face. The voice was so soft. Maybe I had imagined—

"No, I'm here." The Francher kid stepped out into the milky glow of the moon, moving with a strange new strength and assurance, quite divorced from his usual teen-age gangling.

"Oh, Francher—" I couldn't let myself sob, but my voice caught on the last of his name.

"It's OK," he said. "I took them all back."

My shoulders ached as the tension ran out of them.

"I didn't have time to get them all back in the hall, but I stacked them carefully on the front porch." A glimmer of a smile crossed his face. "I guess they'll wonder how they got out there."

"I'm so sorry about your money," I said awkwardly.

He looked at me soberly. "I can save again. I'll get it yet. Someday I'll have my music. It doesn't *have* to be now."

Suddenly a warm bubble seemed to be pressing up against my lungs. I felt excitement tingle clear out to my fingertips. I leaned across the sill. "Francher," I cried softly. "You *have* your music. Now. Remember the harmonica? Remember when you danced with Twyla? Oh, Francher. All sound is, is vibration. You can vibrate the air without an instrument. Remember the chord you played with the orchestra? Play it again, Francher!"

He looked at me blankly and then it was as if a candle had been lighted behind his face. "Yes!" he cried. "Yes!"

Softly—oh, softly—because miracles come that way, I heard the chord begin. It swelled richly, fully, softly, until the whole backyard vibrated to it—a whole orchestra crying out in a whisper in the pale moonlight.

"But the tunes!" he cried, taking this miracle at one stride and leaping beyond it. "I don't know any of the tunes for an orchestra!"

"There are books," I said. "Whole books of scores for symphonies and operas and—"

"And when I know the instruments better!" Here was the eager, alive voice of the-Francher-kid-who-should-be. "Anything I hear—" The backyard ripped rauciously to a couple of bars of the latest rock'n'roll, then blossomed softly to an "Adoramus Te" and skipped to "The Farmer in the Dell." "Then someday I'll make my own—" Tremulously a *rappoor* threaded through a melodic phrase and stilled itself.

In the silence that followed, the Francher kid looked at me—not at my face, but deep inside me somewhere.

"Miss Carolle!" I felt my eyes tingle to tears at his voice. "You've given me my music!" I could hear him swallow. "I

want to give you something." My hand moved in protest, but he went on quickly, "Please come outside."

"Like this?" I asked. "I'm in my robe and slippers."

"They're warm enough," he said. "Here, I'll help you through the window."

And before I knew it, I was over the low sill and clinging dizzily to it from the outside.

"My braces," I said, loathing the words with a horrible loathing. "My crutches."

"No," said the Francher kid. "You don't need them. Walk across the yard, Miss Carolle, all alone."

"I can't!" I cried through my shock. "Oh, Francher, don't tease me!"

"Yes, you can," he said. "That's what I'm giving you. I can't mend you, but I can give you that much. Walk."

I clung frantically to the sill. Then I saw again Francher and Twyla spiraling down from the treetops, Francher upside down in the air with his midriff showing, Francher bouncing Balance Rock from field to field.

I let go of the sill. I took a step. And another, and another. I held my hands far out from my sides. Glorious freedom from clenched hands and aching elbows! Across the yard I went, every step in the milky moonlight a paean of praise. I turned at the fence and looked back. The Francher kid was crouched by the window in a tight huddle of concentration. I lifted onto tiptoe and half skipped, half ran back to the window, feeling the wind of my going lift my hair back from my cheeks. Oh it was like a drink after thirst! Like food after famine! Like gates swinging open!

I fell forward and caught at the window sill. And cried out inarticulately as I felt the old bonds clamp down again, the old half-death seize hold of me. I crumpled to the ground beside the Francher kid. His tormented eyes looked into mine, his face pale and haggard. His forearm went up to wipe his sweat-drenched face. "I'm sorry," he panted. "That's all I can do now."

My hands reached for him. There was a sudden movement, so quick and so close that I drew my foot back out of the way. I looked up, startled. Dr. Curtis and a shadowy someone else were standing over us. But the surprise of their

being there was drowned in the sudden up-surge of wonderment.

"It moved!" I cried. "My foot moved. Look! Look! It moved!" And I concentrated on it again—hard, hard! After laborious seconds, my left big toe wiggled.

My hysterical laugh was half a shout. "One toe is better than none!" I sobbed. "Isn't it, Dr. Curtis? Doesn't that mean that someday—that maybe—"

He had dropped to his knees and he gathered my frantic hands into his two big quiet ones.

"It might well be," he said. "Jemmy will help us find out."

The other figure knelt beside Dr. Curtis. There was a curious, waiting kind of silence—but it wasn't me he was looking at. It wasn't my hands he reached for. It wasn't my voice that cried out softly.

But it was the Francher kid that suddenly launched himself into the arms of the stranger and began to wail, the wild, noisy crying of a child—a child who could be brave as long as he was completely lost, but who had to dissolve into tears when rescue came.

The stranger looked over the Francher kid's head at Dr. Curtis. "He's mine," he said. "But she's almost one of yours."

It could all have been a dream—or a mad explosion of imagination of some sort; but they don't come any less imaginative than Mrs. McVey, and I know she will never forget the Francher kid. She has another foster child now, a placid, plump little girl who loves to sit and listen to woman talk—but the Francher kid is indelible in the McVey memory. Unborn generations will probably hear of him and his shoes.

And Twyla . . . she will carry his magic to her grave, unless (and I know she sometimes hopes prayerfully) Francher someday comes back for her. Because he's gone.

Jemmy, the stranger, took him to Cougar Canyon up in the hills where the others of his kind are gathered—star children, children of The People, the People who came last century to Earth, refugees from a shattered world, scattered over ours by their near-disastrous arrival here. And there at Cougar Canyon they are helping the Francher kid

sort out all his many gifts and capabilities—some of which are unique to him—so that he will be able, finally, to fit into his most effective slot in their scheme of things which is so wonderfully, brightly above ours. They tell me that there are those of this world who are developing even now in the footsteps of The People. That's what Jemmy meant when he told Dr. Curtis I was almost one of his.

And I shall walk again. Dr. Curtis brought Bethie, a Sensitive of The People. She only touched me softly with her hands and Read me to Dr. Curtis. And I *had* to accept it then—that it was mostly myself that stood in my own way. That my doctor had been right: that time, patience and believing will make me whole again.

The more I think about The People, about Jemmy and Bethie and the Francher kid, the more I think that those three words are the key to them and to what they hope to do on our earth.

Time, patience and believing—and the greatest of these is believing.

ALFRED BESTER

Alfred Bester's STARBURST *(Signet, 1958) may well be, in average of dazzling quality, the finest collection yet published of science-fantasy shorts by a single author. Mostly (I'm proud to say) they're from F&SF, during the early 1950's—after which brilliant burst Mr. Bester settled down to other matters, such as writing novels, both future* (THE STARS MY DESTINATION) *and contemporary* ("WHO HE?"), *and a witty and pointed monthly commentary on TV and allied arts for* Holiday. *Now here's the first new Bester short story in over four years, concerning (as Bob Mills accurately described it) a crime that mulishly refuses to allow itself to be committed, a time-travel paradox that (crowning Besterian paradox!) blithely contains no paradox, and a mad professor who gets saner and saner as the story gets madder and madder.*

THE MEN WHO MURDERED MOHAMMED

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

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

Everyone ought to know that the electrical ampere was so named in honor of Ampère. Ludwig Boltzmann was a distinguished Austrian physicist, as famous for his research on blackbody radiation as Ideal Gases. You can look him up in Volume 3 of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, BALT to BRAI. Jacques Alexandre César Charles was the first mathematician to be come interested in flight, and he invented the hydrogen balloon. These were real men.

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

Anyway, the cab arrived at the Académie. Ampère jumped out, paid the driver, and rushed into the meeting to tell everybody about his idea. Then he realized he didn't have

the note on him, remembered where he'd left it, and had to chase through the streets of Paris after the taxi to recover his runaway equation. Sometimes I imagine that's how Fermat lost his famous "Last Theorem," although Fermat wasn't at the meeting either, having died some two hundred years earlier.

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

Boltzmann apologized and promised to be more helpful in the future. At the next lecture he began: "Gentlemen, combining Boyle's Law with the Law of Charles, we arrive at the equation $pv = p_0v_0(1 + at)$. Now obviously if ${}_aS^b = f(x)\,dx\varnothing(a)$, then $pv = RT$ and ${}_vS\,f(x,y,z)\,dV = O$. It's as simple as two plus two equals four." At this point Boltzmann remembered his promise. He turned to the blackboard, conscientiously chalked $2 + 2 = 4$, and then breezed on, casually doing the complicated calculus in his head.

Jacques Charles, the brilliant mathematician who discovered Charles's Law (sometimes known as Gay-Lussac's Law) which Boltzmann mentioned in his lecture, had a lunatic passion to become a famous paleographer—that is, a discoverer of ancient manuscripts. I think that being foced to share credit with Gay-Lussac may have unhinged him.

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

Now these men weren't idiots. They were geniuses who paid a high price for their genius because the rest of their thinking was other-world. A genius is someone who travels

to truth by an unexpected path. Unfortunately, unexpected paths lead to disaster in everyday life. This is what happened to Henry Hassel, professor of Applied Compulsion at Unknown University in the year 1980.

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

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

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

Now remember Ampère and Charles and Boltzmann. Hassel weighed one hundred and ninety pounds. He was muscular and uninhibited. It would have been child's play for him to have dismembered his wife and her lover, and thus simply and directly achieve the goal he desired—the

end of his wife's life. But Henry Hassel was in the genius class; his mind just didn't operate that way.

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

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

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

"Yes?"

"You are Mr. Jessup?"

"I am."

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

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

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

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

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

Hassel was thunderstruck.

"So that's it," he growled. "A family tradition of faithlessness. Well, we'll see about that. We have ways and means." He permitted himself a hollow laugh, returned to his laboratory, and sent himself back to the year 1901, where he shot

and killed Emma Hotchkiss, his wife's maternal grandmother-to-be. He returned to his own home in his own time. There was his redheaded wife, still in the arms of another man.

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

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

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

"Who?"

"Henry."

"You'll have to speak up."

"Henry Hassell"

"Oh, good afternoon, Henry."

"Tell me all about time."

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

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

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

"What are you trying to do, Henry?"

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

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

Hassel went back to the year 1775, visited a Virginia farm and shot a young colonel in the brisket. The colonel's name was George Washington, and Hassel made sure he was dead.

He returned to his own time and his own home. There was his redheaded wife, still in the arms of another.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Maybe I slipped up somehow," Hassel muttered. "I'd better find out." He fought with the telephone, which seemed

to weigh a hundred tons, and at last managed to get through to the library.

"Hello, Library? This is Henry."

"Who?"

"Henry Hassel."

"Speak up, please."

"HENRY HASSEL!"

"Oh. Good afternoon, Henry."

"What have you got on George Washington?"

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

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

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

"Doesn't anybody know he was shot?"

"By whom?"

"Me."

"When?"

"In 1775."

"How did you manage to do that?"

"I've got a revolver."

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

"I've got a time machine."

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

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

"But he discovered the New World in 1492."

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

"How?"

"With a .45 slug in the gizzard."

"You again, Henry?"

"Yes."

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

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

"Why not, Henry?"

"Because it's lost already," he shouted. "All right! What

about Marie Curie? Did she or did she not discover the fission bomb which destroyed Paris at the turn of the century?"

"She did not. Enrico Fermi—"

"She did."

"She didn't."

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

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

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

"Why?"

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

"You really have a time machine?"

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

"Then go back and check."

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

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

"Oh, a freshwater school you never heard of."

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

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

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

"When did he die?"

"Year 1500 some-odd, near as I remember."

"He did not. He died in 1489."

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

Cabot discovered America. Sebastian Cabot."

"Nope. Cabot came a mite later."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"State."

"State Department?"

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

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

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

Hassel was too agitated to wait for the automatic recall of the time machine. Instead he returned at once to Unknown University under his own power. This should have given him a clue, but he was too possessed to notice. It was at this time that I (1913-75) first saw him . . . a dim figure tramping through parked cars, closed doors and brick walls, with the light of lunatic determination on his face.

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

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

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

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

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

"How do I get in touch with him?"

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

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

"Wiley Murphy."

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

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

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

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

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

"Murphy!" Hassel exclaimed. "The very man I'm looking for. I've had the most extraordinary experience." Hassel at once launched into a lucid description of his extraordinary experience which went something like this: "Murphy, $u - v = (u^{\frac{1}{2}} - v^{\frac{1}{4}})\ (u^{a} + u^{x}v^{y} + v^{b})$ but when George Washington F (x) $y^{2}\varnothing dx$ and Enrico Fermi F ($u^{\frac{1}{2}}$) dxdt one-half of Marie Curie, then what about Christopher Columbus times the square root of minus one?"

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

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

Hassel tried to separate the couple. He could no more touch them than make them hear him. His face turned red again and he became quite choleric as he beat at Mrs. Hassel and Murphy. It was like beating an Ideal Gas. I thought it best to interfere.

"Hassel!"

"Who's that?"

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

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

"Over here."

"So are you."

"So are you.""

"Who are you?"

"My name's Lennox. Israel Lennox."

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

"The same."

"But you died in '75."

"I disappeared in '75."

"What d'you mean?"

"I invented a time machine."

"By God! So did I," Hassel said. "This afternoon. The idea came to me in a flash . . . I don't know why . . .

and I've had the most extraordinary experience. Lennox, time is not a continuum."

"No?"

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

"Yes?"

"Each pearl is a 'Now.' Each 'Now' has its own past and future. But none of them relate to any others. You see? If a = $a_1 + a_2 i + \varnothing ax(b_1)$——"

"Never mind the mathematics, Henry."

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

"Wrong," I said sorrowfully.

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

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

"Oh, go ahead," he said.

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

"Yes?"

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

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

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

"Never mind the LVS scale," he said.

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

"Ah-ha!" said Hassel.

"I was terrified by the incident. I had visions of returning to my world to find it completely changed as a result of

this single death. Imagine my surprise when I returned to my world to find that nothing had changed."

"Oh-hol" said Hassel.

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

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

"Not odd at all."

"I got Columbus."

"I got Marco Polo."

"I got Napoleon."

"I thought Einstein was more important."

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

"I know. I got him, too."

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

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

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

"I believe you."

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

"We both killed him."

"That's impossible."

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

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

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

"But we're meeting each other now."

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

"Spagetti sauce?"

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

"I don't understand."

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

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

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

"THE BEST FROM THE BEST..."

—MADISON CAPITAL-TIMES

THE BEST FROM FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION

"Will take you delightfully out of this world and let you catch a glimpse of yourself as others may see you a thousand years hence."

—NEW HAVEN JOURNAL-COURIER

POUL ANDERSON

BRIAN W. ALDISS

SHIRLEY JACKSON

C. M. KORNBLUTH

ALFRED BESTER

ISAAC ASIMOV

FRITZ LEIBER

AVRAM DAVIDSON

C. S. LEWIS

Etc., Etc.