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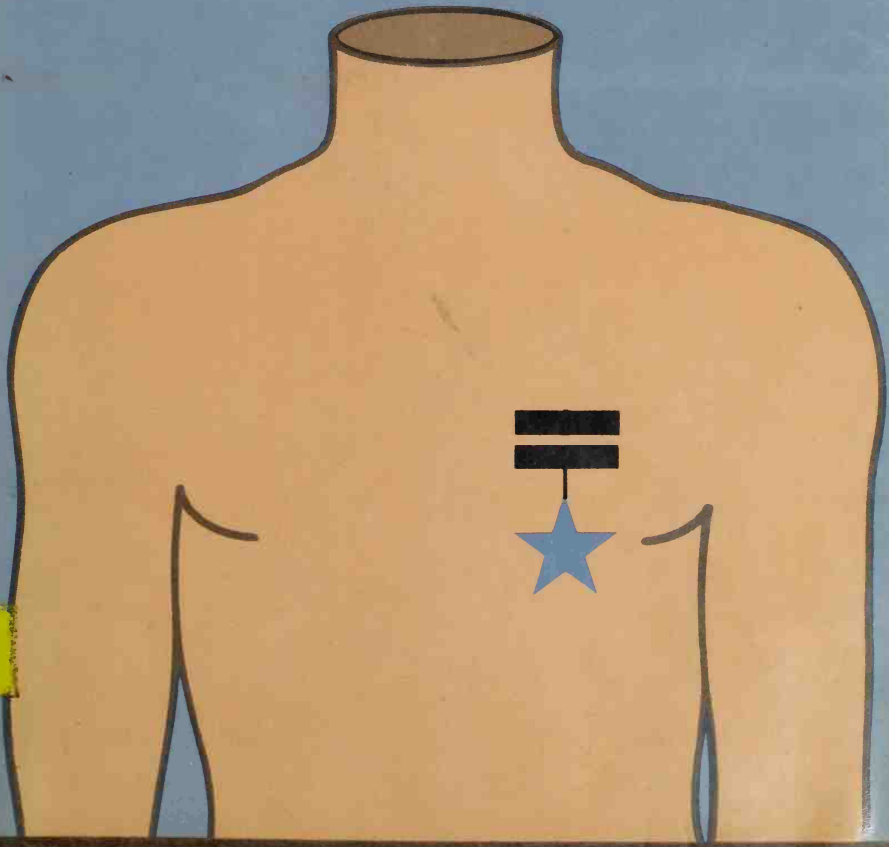
THE BEST OF AVRAM DAVIDSON

Edited by Michael Kurland



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Edited by Michael Kurland

with a Foreword by Peter Beagle

"We don't have anyone like him. Teller of tales, wandering scholar — as much at home in Roman Naples as in Georgian London, nineteenth-century Austria-Hungary, the modern Southwest of the American Indian, or the second planet of Fisher's Binary ('commonly called Fishbein Two')," says Peter Beagle of Avram Davidson in his foreword to this collection of Mr. Davidson's work.

Here are a dozen stories — the cream of the crop from one of the masters of science fiction and fantasy. Selections include "The Golem," considered a science fiction classic; "What Strange Stars and Skies"; and a chapter from his brilliant fantasy novel *The Phoenix and the Mirror.* Avram Davidson's style and

(continued on back flap)

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Foreword

By

PETER BEAGLE

The real disservice one does to an old friend in writing about his work is not that one tends to overpraise him extravagantly, but rather to take his artistry as much for granted as breathing, or any other daily wonder. I have been reading Avram Davidson's stories for twenty-five years, since I was twelve or thirteen, and I keep forgetting how good he is. From trees you expect green leaves.

Mostly, when I talk about Avram, I talk about how he knows everything in the world. I have always had what I'm used to referring to as a garbage mind, possessed by a completely disorderly fascination with scraps of information, collected magpie fashion, to play with, and to keep me company on freezing subway platforms at three in the morning. But Avram transcends garbage; he plays too, but it's different. He knows what he's playing with.

I love to remember him sitting in the front row of a classroom at U.C. Irvine (he was teaching there, and I had come to give a reading), looking impishly patriarchal in a suit he described as "early St. Vincent de Paul," and holding a beautiful young woman with one hand and a balloon with the other. When I had finished reading, he came up, embraced me, then stood back and asked seriously, "What do you know about feral camels?" Whatever the reason for the question (I *think* he was working on a story), I didn't know as much as he

did, and so we walked over to his campus apartment for refreshment, talking about feral camels. Remembering, I always imagine us as looking a bit like Pooh and Piglet. I'm sure we didn't.

At Irvine he was giving a course that he called something like An Outline of Un-History. I don't know how to describe it, except as a course in Davidsonian Speculation: things that happened, and never happened, and almost happened, and were once thought to have happened, and maybe happened, and are maybe waiting to happen—the sort of things that Avram wonders about. . . .

> May not the forms and figures of the legend of the satyrs have originated among the perpetually more-or-less ithyphallic Bushmen now confined to Southwest Africa? Why do the so-called onyx eggs of Mexico (which are not really onyx at all) appear to contain a cell-like structure reminiscent of the honeycomb? (And, for that matter, how do there come to be "onyx eggs" at all?) May there not exist more than one nexus or conjunction in space-time unknown to us which can be thought of as *people crossings*, whereat occur deaths of people as puzzling to us as the deaths of deer at *deer crossings* must be to deer? And . . .

The university didn't know whether to classify him as a member of the English, History, or Philosophy Department, which is exactly the sort of thing that upsets a university. It messes up the bookkeeping. Some of the grosser Irvine students fell asleep during these recondite lectures, except when Avram was recounting his peculiar adventures in the U. S. Navy and Marines, and as a sheepherder and fish-liver inspector. Although no one fell asleep in his writing workshop, still, he was not rehired at Irvine.

The more a fool Irvine—and yet, according to Irvine's lights, there was probably nothing else to be done, even should Avram have turned out to be a great success with mellow,

wealthy, laid-back Southern California students. What does a modern American university want with a middle-aged former fish-liver inspector from Yonkers, who attended four colleges and never graduated from any of them, who publishes books with titles like RORK!, MUTINY IN SPACE, ROGUE DRAGON, and URSUS OF ULTIMA THULE, who simply will not fill out forms, can't be bothered to keep up with the box scores and league standings of intradepartmental warfare, is never ever going to be asked to read a paper on anything at the MLA convention, and happens to know everything in the world for its own sake? Modern American universities have enough troubles.

Damon Knight considers Avram to be the best short-story writer since John Collier; and Collier is certainly the only writer to whom I can imagine comparing him. They both have the same shifty, deceptively rambling way of telling a tale, the same gallows humor (which is not at all like black humor, but almost its antithesis), and the same delight in the gravely outlandish and the menacingly silly. One might suggest Saki too, and Roald Dahl; and yet none of these, even Collier, comes near matching either Avram's gifts of language or his understated compassion. It's hard to imagine Collier, Saki, or Dahl writing *The Certificate* or *Now Let Us Sleep;* or, for that matter, the opening paragraph of a story called *The Singular Events Which Occurred in the Hovel on the Alley off of Eye Street.*

> In 1961, the year when the dragons were so bad, a young man named George Laine, an industrial alchemist by profession, attended the coronation of the new president in Washington. The guilds were in high favor with the president-select, John V (the first of that name since John IV C. Coolidge), who sent to each and every of their delegation, as a mark of his esteem, garments of virtue worthy of the occasion, viz. a silken hat, a pair of galoshes with silvern buckles, a great-coat with a collar of black samite, cuff-links enchased in gold, and a pen-and-pencil set of malachite and electrum which was guaranteed to write

under water and over butter: both, as it happened, essential to the practice of industrial alchemy.

Or this random passage from Avram's astonishing and neglected novel *The Phoenix and the Mirror,* in which a Sergeant of the Hunt patiently explains the exact difference between a forest and a deer park:

"Now, perceive, mesires," he said, "the beasts of venery, or beasts of the forests, if you prefer, they be five—are called *silvestres tantum*—the hart, the hind, the hare, the boar, the wolf. But not the buck, no mesires. Because why? Because he's entitled a beast of the field, is why. Now, the beasts of the forests, making their abode all the daytime in these great coverts, and have their secret places in the woods . . . yes. And in the nighttime coming out into the meadows and pastures and all the pleasant feeding places . . . a-hah. Mamma mine! And that's why we says about a park, 'What's a park? Vert, venison, enclosure—that's a park.' Forest, now, or chase, perhaps having venison and it perhaps has vert, or peradventure the two both, but enclosure, no. Lord indeed. Only your park has all three."

I am perfectly willing to admit that there must be living writers as knowledgeable as Avram about such things as the ancient terms and strictures of the hunt; and there are probably several people still as concerned with the rhythms of human speech, and even as joyously subtle in playing with them. But not both. Only your Davidson has both.

We don't have anyone like him. Teller of tales, wandering scholar—as much at home in Roman Naples as in Georgian London, nineteenth-century Austria-Hungary, the modern Southwest of the American Indian, or the second planet of Fisher's Binary (commonly called "Fishbein Two")—as satiably curious as the Elephant's Child about matters which are recognized as mattering by few publishers, fewer critics,

hardly any universities and no Rich Foundations, he is unlikely ever to have much money or to be officially pronounced Real by *The New York Times Book Review*. Avram just plain messes up the bookkeeping. He can't be decently categorized; he eludes all genres while playing happily with their boundaries and their textures (the man is no more a proper science-fiction writer than John Collier is, or Saki, or Roald Dahl); and there's no point in considering him seriously anyway, since you never see any full-page advertisements for his books. That's how you tell, in the end.

In James Thurber's *The Thirteen Clocks*, there is a moment when "something very much like nothing anyone had seen before" comes trotting down the stairs and crosses the room. The wicked Duke of Coffin Castle clutches his henchman and asks palely, "What is that?"

"I don't know what it is," his henchman replies, "but it's the only one there ever was."

Avram to the life.

Bless you, *effendi* sir. To paraphrase the punch line of a very old joke: by captains, who cares? By me, you're a captain.

Introduction

By

MICHAEL KURLAND

As the title of this collection is THE BEST OF AVRAM DAVIDSON, you may wish to know by whose standards these stories are the best, by what criteria they were so adjudged.

Each story was subjected to a weighted excellence scale, using criteria selected by the chairmen of the Departments of English and/or Literature of twenty-five major universities. I will describe the process:

All of Avram's published works were converted to binary code and fed into an IBM 370-Aleph by two Chinese exchange students who spoke no English (to eliminate unconscious bias in the typing), where they were sorted and rated by the following quality indicators: ratio of Latin to Anglo-Saxon word stems; alliterative sentence balancing; use of the subjunctive; literary allusions; hidden meanings; insulting references to American culture; the symbolic use of weather, fire, water, or death to represent death, water, fire, or weather; the adverb-adjective ratio; and the use of long phrases in obscure foreign languages without a gloss.

The stories that attained over five weighted points were then handed over to U.C. Berkeley freshmen, who were asked to write papers comparing and contrasting each story with *Silas Marner*.

Unfortunately this process failed to eliminate any of the

submitted material except one paper which turned out to be a page of the Op-Ed section of the New York *Times* that had been entered by mistake because it was wrapped around one of the manuscripts.

So I picked the twelve stories that I like best, and would most like to share with you, even though at least one of them has been heavily anthologized and at least one of them is in no way science fiction. After all, it says THE BEST.

And there you are.

Michael Kurland

"The Larches," August 1977

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INTRODUCTION

to

"Or the Grasses Grow"

Perhaps twenty years ago, when both *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* and *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* were published (along with one or two others) by the Davis company, I dropped into their office to have a word with Robert P. Mills, then managing editor of both. Whilst waiting (in the waiting room, where else?) I picked up one of these magazines and riffled through it. On one of the pages there must have appeared a word or phrase (it sped by too fast for me to catch it with my uppermost mind) which triggered a memory. The United States Senate had been once again engaged in breaking a treaty with an Indian tribe, a treaty presumably unbreakable since its terms declared that it was to endure (familiar words) "while the sun rises, or the grasses grow. . . ." This story at once sprang fully grown to the surface of my mind, I went to my typewriter, and the story proceeded to write itself.

The problems, of course, have refused to solve themselves.

Or the Grasses Grow

About halfway along the narrow and ill-paved county road between Crosby and Spanish Flats (all dips and hollows shimmering falsely like water in the heat till you get right up close to them), the road to Tickisall Agency branches off. No pretense of concrete or macadam—or even grading—deceives the chance or rare purposeful traveller. Federal, State, and County governments have better things to do with their money: Tickisall pays no taxes, and its handful of residents have only recently (and most grudgingly) been accorded the vote.

The sunbaked earth is cracked and riven. A few dirty sheep and a handful of scrub cows share its scanty herbage with an occasional swaybacked horse or stunted burro. Here and there a gaunt automobile rests in the thin shadow of a board shack, and a child, startled doubtless by the smooth sound of a strange motor, runs like a lizard through the dusty wastes to hide, and then to peer. Melon vines dried past all hope of fruit lie in patches next to whispery, tindery cornstalks.

And in the midst of all this, next to the only spring which never goes dry, are the only painted buildings, the only decent buildings in the area. In the middle of the green lawn is a pole with the flag, and right behind the pole, over the front door, the sign:

U. S. BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS
TICKISALL AGENCY
OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

There were already a few Indians gathering around that afternoon, the women in cotton-print dresses, the men in overalls. There would soon be more. This was scheduled as the last day for the Tickisall Agency and Reservation. Congress had passed the bill, the President had signed it, the Director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs had issued the order. It was supposed to be a great day for the Tickisall Nation—only the Tickisalls, what was left of them, didn't seem to think so. Not a man or woman of them spoke. Not a child whimpered. Not a dog barked.

Before Uncle Fox-head sat a basket with four different kinds of clay, and next to the basket was a medicine gourd full of water. The old man rolled the clay between his moistened palms, singing in a low voice. Then he washed his hands and sprinkled them with pollen. Then he took up the prayer-sticks, made of juniper—(once there had been juniper trees on the reservation, once there had been many trees)—and painted with the signs of Thunder, Sun, Moon, Rain, Lightning. There were feathers tied to the sticks—once there had been birds, too . . .

Oh, People-of-The-Hidden Places,
Oh, take our message to The Hidden Places,
Swiftly, swiftly, now . . .

the old man chanted, shaking the medicine-sticks.

Oh, you, Swift Ones, People-with-no-legs,
Take our message to The-People-with-no-bodies,
Swiftly, swiftly, now . . .

The old man's skin was like a cracked, worn moccasin. With his turkey-claw hand he took up the gourd rattle, shook it: West, South, Up, Down, East, North.

Oh, People-of-the-hollow Earth,
Take our message to the hollow Earth,
Take our song to our Fathers and Mothers,
Take our cry to the Spirit People,

Take and go, take and go,
Swiftly, swiftly, now . . .

The snakes rippled across the ground and were gone, one by one. The old man's sister's son helped him back to his sheepskin, spread in the shade, where he half-sat, half-lay, panting.

His great-nephews, Billy Cottonwood and Sam Quarterhorse, were talking together in English. "There was a fellow in my outfit," Cottonwood said, "a fellow from West Virginia, name of Corrothers. Said his grandmother claimed she could charm away warts. So I said my great-uncle claimed he could make snakes. And they all laughed fit to kill, and said, 'Chief, when you try a snow-job, it turns into a blizzard!' . . . Old Corrothers," he reflected. "We were pretty good buddies. Maybe I'll go to West Virginia and look him up. I could hitch, maybe."

Quarterhorse said, "Yeah, you can go to West Virginia, and I can go to L.A.—but what about the others? Where *they* going to go if Washington refuses to act?"

The fond smile of recollection left his cousin's lean, brown face. "I don't know," he said. "I be damned and go to Hell, if I know." And then the old pick-up came rattling and coughing up to the house, and Sam said, "Here's Newton."

Newton Quarterhorse, his brother Sam, and Billy Cottonwood, were the only three Tickisalls who had passed the physical and gone into the Army. There weren't a lot of others who were of conscripting age (or any other age, for that matter), and those whom TB didn't keep out, other ailments active or passive did. Once there had been trees on the Reservation, and birds, and deer, and healthy men.

The wash-faded Army suntans had been clean and fresh as always when Newt set out for Crosby, but they were dusty and sweaty now. He took a piece of wet burlap out and removed a few bottles from it. "Open these, Sam, will you, while

I wash," he said. "Cokes for us, strawberry pop for the old people . . . How's Uncle Fox-head?"

Billy grunted. "Playing at making medicine snakes again. Do you suppose if we believed he could, he could?"

Newt shrugged. "So. Well, maybe if the telegrams don't do any good, the snakes will. And I'm damned sure they won't do no worse. That son of a bitch at the Western Union office," he said, looking out over the drought-bitten land. "'Sending a smoke-signal to the Great White Father again, Sitting Bull?' he says, smirking and sneering. I told him, 'You just take the money and send the wire.' They looked at me like coyotes looking at a sick calf." Abruptly, he turned away and went to dip his handkerchief in the bucket. Water was hard come by.

The lip of the bottle clicked against one of Uncle Fox-head's few teeth. He drank noisily, then licked his lips. "Today we drink the white man's sweet water," he said. "What will we drink tomorrow?" No one said anything. "I will tell you, then," he continued. "Unless the white men relent, we will drink the bitter waters of The Hollow Places. They are bitter, but they are strong and good." He waved his withered hand in a semi-circle. "All this will go," he said, "and the Fathers and Mothers of The People will return and lead us to our old home inside the Earth." His sister's son, who had never learned English nor gone to school, moaned. "Unless the white men relent," said the old man.

"They never have," said Cottonwood, in Tickisall. In English, he said, "What will he do when he sees that nothing happens tomorrow except that we get kicked the Hell out of here?"

Newt said, "Die, I suppose . . . which might not be a bad idea. For all of us."

His brother turned and looked at him. "If you're planning Quarterhorse's Last Stand, forget about it. There aren't twenty rounds of ammunition on the whole reservation."

Billy Cottonwood raised his head. "We could maybe move in with the Apahoya," he suggested. "They're just as dirt-poor as we are, but there's more of them, and I guess they'll hold

on to their land awhile yet." His cousins shook their heads. "Well, not for us. But the others . . . Look, I spoke to Joe Feather Cloud that last time I was at the Apahoya Agency. If we give him the truck and the sheep, he'll take care of Uncle Fox-head."

Sam Quarterhorse said he supposed that was the best thing. "For the old man, I mean. I made up *my* mind. I'm going to L.A. and pass for Colored." He stopped.

They waited till the new shiny automobile had gone by towards the Agency in a cloud of dust. Newt said, "The buzzards are gathering." Then he asked, "How come, Sam?"

"Because I'm tired of being an Indian. It has no present and no future. I can't be a white, they won't have me—the best I could hope for would be that they laugh: 'How, Big Chief'—'Hi, Blanket-bottom.' Yeah, I *could* pass for a Mexican as far as my looks go, only the Mexes won't have me, either. But the Colored will. And there's millions and millions of them—whatever price they pay for it, they never have to feel lonely. And they've got a fine, bitter contempt for the whites that I can use a lot of. 'Pecks,' they call them. I don't know where they got the name from, but, Damn! it sure fits them. They've been pecking away at us for over a hundred years."

They talked on some more, and all the while the dust never settled in the road. They watched the whole tribe, what there was of it, go by towards the Agency—in old trucks, in buckboards, on horses, on foot. And after some time, they loaded up the pick-up and followed.

The Indians sat all over the grass in front of the Agency, and for once no one bothered to chase them off. They just sat, silent, waiting. A group of men from Crosby and Spanish Flats were talking to the Superintendent; there were maps in their hands. The cousins went up to them; the white men looked out of the corners of their eyes, confidence still tempered—but only a bit—by wariness.

"Mr. Jenkins," Newt said to one, "most of this is your doing and you know how I feel about it—"

"You better not make any trouble, Quarterhorse," said another townsman.

Jenkins said, "Let the boy have his say."

"—but I know you'll give me a straight answer. What's going to be done here?"

Jenkins was a leathery little man, burnt almost as dark as an Indian. He looked at him, not unkindly, through the spectacles which magnified his blue eyes. "Why, you know, son, there's nothing personal in all this. The land belongs to them that can hold it and use it. It was made to be used. You people've had your chance, Lord knows— Well, no speeches. You see, here on the map, where this here dotted line is? The county is putting through a new road to connect with a new highway the state's going to construct. There'll be a lot of traffic through here, and this Agency ought to make a fine motel.

"And right along *here*—" his blunt finger traced, "—there's going to be the main irrigation canal. There'll be branches all through the Reservation. I reckon we can raise some mighty fine alfalfa. Fatten some mighty fine cattle . . . I always thought, son, you'd be good with stock, if you had some good stock to work with. Not these worthless scrubs. If you want a job—"

One of the men cleared his sinus cavities with an ugly sound, and spat. "Are you out of your mind, Jenk? Here we been workin for years ta git these Indyins outa here, and you tryin ta make um stay . . ."

The Superintendent was a tall, fat, soft man with a loose smile. He said ingratiatingly, "Mr. Jenkins realizes, as I'm sure you do too, Mr. Waldo, that the policy of the United States government is, and always has been—except for the unfortunate period when John Collier was in charge of the Bureau of Indian Affairs—man may have *meant* well, but Lord! hopeless sentimentalist—well, our policy has always been: Prepare the Indian to join the general community. Get him off the reservation. Turn the tribal lands over to the *Individual.* And it's

been done with other tribes, and now, finally, it's being done with this one." He beamed.

Newt gritted his teeth. Then he said, "And the result was always the same—as soon as the tribal lands were given to the individual red man they damn quick passed into the hand of the individual white man. That's what happened with other tribes, and now, finally, it's being done with this one. Don't you *know*, Mr. Scott, that we can't adapt ourselves to the system of individual land-ownership? That we just aren't strong enough by ourselves to hold onto real estate? That—"

"Root, hog, er die," said Mr. Waldo.

"Are men *hogs?*" Newt cried.

Waldo said, at large, "*Told* ya he w's a trouble-maker." Then, bringing his long, rough, red face next to Newt's, he said, "Listen, Indyin, you and all y'r stinkin relatives are through. If Jenkins is damnfool enough ta hire ya, that's his look-out. But if he don't, you better stay far, far away, because nobody likes ya, nobody wants ya, and now that the Guvermint in Worshennon is finely come ta their sentces, nobody is goin ta protec ya—you and y'r mangy cows and y'r smutty-nosed sheep and y'r blankets—"

Newt's face showed his feelings, but before he could voice them, Billy Cottonwood broke in. "Mr. Scott," he said, "we sent a telegram to Washington, asking to halt the break-up of the Reservation."

Scott smiled his sucaryl smile. "Well, that's your privilege as a citizen."

Cottonwood spoke on. He mentioned the provisions of the bill passed by Congress, authorizing the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to liquidate, at his discretion, all reservations including less than one hundred residents, and to divide the land among them.

"Mr. Scott, when the Treaty of Juniper Butte was made between the United States and the Tickisalls," Cottonwood said, "there were thousands of us. That treaty was to be kept 'as long as the sun shall rise or the grasses grow.' The Government pledged itself to send us doctors—it didn't, and we died

like flies. It pledged to send us seed and cattle; it sent us no seed and we had to eat the few hundred head of stock-yard cast-offs they did send us, to keep from starving. The Government was to keep our land safe for us forever, in a sacred trust—and in every generation they've taken away more and more. Mr. Scott—Mr. Jenkins, Mr. Waldo, and all you other gentlemen—you knew, didn't you, when you were kind enough to loan us money—or rather, to give us credit at the stores, when this drought started—you knew that this bill was up before Congress, didn't you?"

No one answered him. "You knew that it would pass, and that turning our lands over to us wouldn't mean a darned thing, didn't you? That we already owed so much money that our creditors would take all our land? Mr. Scott, how can the Government let this happen to us? It made a treaty with us to keep our lands safe for us 'as long as the sun rises or the grasses grow.' Has the sun stopped rising? Has the grass stopped growing? We believed in you—we kept our part of the treaty. Mr. Scott, won't you wire Washington—won't you other gentlemen do the same? To stop this thing that's being done to us? It's almost a hundred years now since we made treaty, and we've always hoped. Now we've only got till midnight to hope. Unless—?"

But the Superintendent said, No, he couldn't do that. And Jenkins shook his head, and said, sorry; it was really all for the best. Waldo shrugged, produced a packet of legal papers. "I've been deppatized to serve all these," he said. "Soons the land's all passed over ta individj'l ownership—which is 12 P.M. tanight. But if you give me y'r word (whatever that's worth) not ta make no trouble, why, guess it c'n wait till morning. Yo go back ta y'r shacks and I'll be round, come morning. We'll sleep over with Scott f'r tanight."

Sam Quarterhorse said, "We won't make any trouble, no. Not much use in that. But we'll wait right here. It's still possible we'll hear from Washington before midnight."

The Superintendent's house was quite comfortable. Logs

(cut by Indian labor from the last of the Reservation's trees) blazed in the big fireplace (built by Indian labor). A wealth of rugs (woven by Indians in the Agency school) decorated walls and floor. The card-game had been on for some time when they heard the first woman start to wail. Waldo looked up nervously. Jenkins glanced at the clock. "Twelve midnight," he said. "Well, that's it. All over but the details. Took almost a hundred years, but it'll be worth it."

Another woman took up the keening. It swelled to a chorus of heartbreak, then died away. Waldo picked up his cards, then put them down again. An old man's voice had begun a chant. Someone took it up—then another. Drums joined it, and rattles. Scott said, "That was old Fox-head who started that just now. They're singing the death-song. They'll go on till morning."

Waldo swore. Then he laughed. "Let'm," he said. "It's their last morning."

Jenkins woke up first. Waldo stirred to wakefulness as he heard the other dressing. "What time is it?" he asked.

"Don't know," Jenkins said. "But it feels to me like gettin-up time. . . . You hear them go just a while back? No? Don't know how you could miss it. Singing got real loud—seemed like a whole lot of new voices joined in. Then they all got up and moved off. Wonder where they went . . . I'm going to have a look around outside." He switched on his flash-light and left the house. In another minute Waldo joined him, knocking on Scott's door as he passed.

The ashes of the fire still smoldered, making a dull red glow. It was very cold. Jenkins said, "Look here, Waldo—look." Waldo followed the flash-light's beam, said he didn't see anything. "It's the grass . . . it was green last night. It's all dead and brown now. Look at it . . ."

Waldo shivered. "Makes no difference. We'll get it green again. The land's ours now."

Scott joined them, his overcoat hugging his ears. "Why is it so cold?" he asked. "What's happened to the clock? Who was

tinkering with the clock? It's past eight by the clock—it ought to be light by now. Where did all the Tickisalls go to? What's happening? There's something in the air—I don't like the feel of it. I'm sorry I ever agreed to work with you, no matter what you paid me—"

Waldo said, roughly, nervously, "Shut up. Some damned Indyin sneaked in and must of fiddled with the clock. Hell with um. Govermint's on *our* side now. Soons it's daylight we'll clear um all out of here f'r good."

Shivering in the bitter cold, uneasy for reasons they only dimly perceived, the three white men huddled together alone in the dark by the dying fire, and waited for the sun to rise.

And waited . . . and waited . . . and waited. . . .

INTRODUCTION

to

"The Golem"

The golem is an old Jewish legend which I first heard in my childhood, not from my grandfather, from my radio. My grandfather told me instead a legend about Senator George Hearst, father of old W.R. the publisher, into whose Nob Hill mansion (the senator's) my grandfather had installed window glass (he was a glazier, like Mr. Gumbeiner), videlicet [the legend] and to wit, in its entirety: *Made his money jumping claims.* Mr. and Mrs. Gumbeiner I named and wrote about before I met the (alas) late Richard Gumbiner, the best and the least known of the Beat poets. "I liked it," he said, "but it gave me a jolt." Life was to give him many more; someone should print all his poetry: he had more in it than most. "Mr. and Mrs. Gumbeiner" are based on more than two people: about 1,757,321 other people. May I mention only one in this connection: Reb Menasha Grablowski, A.E.F., *olav ha-sholem.* The city of Los Angeles, circa 1952, of course I made up.

The Golem

The gray-faced person came along the street where old Mr. and Mrs. Gumbeiner lived. It was afternoon, it was autumn, the sun was warm and soothing to their ancient bones. Anyone who attended the movies in the twenties or the early thirties has seen that street a thousand times. Past these bungalows with their half-double roofs Edmund Lowe walked arm-in-arm with Leatrice Joy and Harold Lloyd was chased by Chinamen waving hatchets. Under these squamous palm trees Laurel kicked Hardy and Woolsey beat Wheeler upon the head with codfish. Across these pocket-handkerchief-sized lawns the juveniles of the Our Gang Comedies pursued one another and were pursued by angry fat men in golf knickers. On this same street—or perhaps on some other one of five hundred streets exactly like it.

Mrs. Gumbeiner indicated the gray-faced person to her husband.

"You think maybe he's got something the matter?" she asked. "He walks kind of funny, to me."

"Walks like a *golem*," Mr. Gumbeiner said indifferently.

The old woman was nettled.

"Oh, I don't know," she said. "*I* think he walks like your cousin Mendel.

The old man pursed his mouth angrily and chewed on his pipestem. The gray-faced person turned up the concrete path, walked up the steps to the porch, sat down in a chair. Old Mr. Gumbeiner ignored him. His wife stared at the stranger.

"Man comes in without a hello, goodbye, or howareyou, sits

himself down and right away he's at home. . . . The chair is comfortable?" she asked. "Would you like maybe a glass tea?"

She turned to her husband.

"Say something, Gumbeiner!" she demanded. "What are you, made of wood?"

The old man smiled a slow, wicked, triumphant smile.

"Why should *I* say anything?" he asked the air. "Who am I? Nothing, that's who."

The stranger spoke. His voice was harsh and monotonous.

"When you learn who—or, rather, what—I am, the flesh will melt from your bones in terror." He bared porcelain teeth.

"Never mind about my bones!" the old woman cried. "You've got a lot of nerve talking about my bones!"

"You will quake with fear," said the stranger. Old Mrs. Gumbeiner said that she hoped he would live so long. She turned to her husband once again.

"Gumbeiner, when are you going to mow the lawn?"

"All mankind—" the stranger began.

"*Shah!* I'm talking to my husband. . . . He talks *eppis* kind of funny, Gumbeiner, no?"

"Probably a foreigner," Mr. Gumbeiner said, complacently.

"You think so?" Mrs. Gumbeiner glanced fleetingly at the stranger. "He's got a very bad color in his face, *nebbich*. I suppose he came to California for his health."

"Disease, pain, sorrow, love, grief—all are naught to—"

Mr. Gumbeiner cut in on the stranger's statement.

"Gall bladder," the old man said. "Guinzburg down at the *shule* looked exactly the same before his operation. Two professors they had in for him, and a private nurse day and night."

"I am not a human being!" the stranger said loudly.

"Three thousand seven hundred fifty dollars it cost his son, Guinzburg told me. 'For you, Poppa, nothing is too expensive —only get well,' the son told him."

"*I am not a human being!*"

"Ai, is that a son for you!" the old woman said, rocking her

head. "A heart of gold, pure gold." She looked at the stranger. "All right, all right. I heard you the first time. Gumbeiner! I asked you a question. When are you going to cut the lawn?"

"On Wednesday, *odder* maybe Thursday, comes the Japaneser to the neighborhood. To cut lawns is *his* profession. *My* profession is to be a glazier—retired."

"Between me and all mankind is an inevitable hatred," the stranger said. "When I tell you what I am, the flesh will melt—"

"You said, you said already," Mr. Gumbeiner interrupted.

"In Chicago where the winters were as cold and bitter as the Czar of Russia's heart," the old woman intoned, "you had strength to carry the frames with the glass together day in and day out. But in California with the golden sun to mow the lawn when your wife asks, for this you have no strength. Do I call in the Japaneser to cook for you supper?"

"Thirty years Professor Allardyce spent perfecting his theories. Electronics, neuronics—"

"Listen, how educated he talks," Mr. Gumbeiner said, admiringly. "Maybe he goes to the University here?"

"If he goes to the University, maybe he knows Bud?" his wife suggested.

"Probably they're in the same class and he came to see him about the homework, no?"

"Certainly he must be in the same class. How many classes are there? Five *in ganzen:* Bud showed me on his program card." She counted off on her fingers. "Television Appreciation and Criticism, Small Boat Building, Social Adjustment, The American Dance . . . The American Dance—*nu,* Gumbeiner—"

"Contemporary Ceramics," her husband said, relishing the syllables. "A fine boy, Bud. A pleasure to have him for a boardner."

"After thirty years spent in these studies," the stranger, who had continued to speak unnoticed, went on, "he turned from the theoretical to the pragmatic. In ten years' time he had

made the most titanic discovery in history: he made mankind, *all* mankind, superfluous: he made *me.*"

"What did Tillie write in her last letter?" asked the old man.

The old woman shrugged.

"What should she write? The same thing. Sidney was home from the Army, Naomi has a new boy friend—"

"*He made* ME!"

"Listen, Mr. Whatever-your-name-is," the old woman said; "maybe where you came from is different, but in *this* country you don't interrupt people the while they're talking. . . . Hey. Listen—what do you mean, he *made* you? What kind of talk is that?"

The stranger bared all his teeth again, exposing the too-pink gums.

"In his library, to which I had a more complete access after his sudden and as yet undiscovered death from entirely natural causes, I found a complete collection of stories about androids, from Shelley's *Frankenstein* through Capek's *R.U.R.* to Asimov's—"

"Frankenstein?" said the old man, with interest. "There used to be Frankenstein who had the soda-*wasser* place on Halstead Street: a Litvack, *nebbich.*"

"What are you talking?" Mrs. Gumbeiner demanded. "His name was Franken*thal,* and it wasn't on Halstead, it was on Roosevelt."

"—clearly shown that all mankind has an instinctive antipathy towards androids and there will be an inevitable struggle between them—"

"Of course, of course!" Old Mr. Gumbeiner clicked his teeth against his pipe. "I am always wrong, you are always right. How could you stand to be married to such a stupid person all this time?"

"I don't know," the old woman said. "Sometimes I wonder, myself. I think it must be his good looks." She began to laugh. Old Mr. Gumbeiner blinked, then began to smile, then took his wife's hand.

"Foolish old woman," the stranger said; "why do you laugh? Do you not know I have come to destroy you?"

"What!" old Mr. Gumbeiner shouted. "Close your mouth, you!" He darted from his chair and struck the stranger with the flat of his hand. The stranger's head struck against the porch pillar and bounced back.

"When you talk to my wife, talk respectable, you hear?"

Old Mrs. Gumbeiner, cheeks very pink, pushed her husband back in his chair. Then she leaned forward and examined the stranger's head. She clicked her tongue as she pulled aside a flap of gray, skin-like material.

"Gumbeiner, look! He's all springs and wires inside!"

"I *told* you he was a *golem,* but no, you wouldn't listen," the old man said.

"You said he *walked* like a *golem.*"

"How could he walk like a *golem* unless he *was* one?"

"All right, all right. . . . You broke him, so now fix him."

"My grandfather, his light shines from Paradise, told me that when MoHaRaL—Moreynu Ha-Rav Löw—his memory for a blessing, made the *golem* in Prague, three hundred? four hundred years ago? he wrote on his forehead the Holy Name."

Smiling reminiscently, the old woman continued, "And the *golem* cut the rabbi's wood and brought his water and guarded the ghetto."

"And one time only he disobeyed the Rabbi Löw, and Rabbi Löw erased the *Shem Ha-Mephorash* from the *golem's* forehead and the *golem* fell down like a dead one. And they put him up in the attic of the *shule* and he's still there today if the Communisten haven't sent him to Moscow. . . . This is not just a story," he said.

"*Avadda* not!" said the old woman.

"I myself have seen both the *shule and* the rabbi's grave," her husband said, conclusively.

"But I think this must be a different kind *golem,* Gumbeiner. See, on his forehead: nothing written."

"What's the matter, there's a law I can't write something

there? Where is that lump clay Bud brought us from his class?"

The old man washed his hands, adjusted his little black skullcap, and slowly and carefully wrote four Hebrew letters on the gray forehead.

"Ezra the Scribe himself couldn't do better," the old woman said, admiringly. "Nothing happens," she observed, looking at the lifeless figure sprawled in the chair.

"Well, after all, am I Rabbi Löw?" her husband asked, deprecatingly. "No," he answered. He leaned over and examined the exposed mechanism. "This spring goes here . . . this wire comes with this one . . ." The figure moved. "But this one goes where? And this one?"

"Let be," said his wife. The figure sat up slowly and rolled its eyes loosely.

"Listen, Reb *Golem,*" the old man said, wagging his finger. "Pay attention to what I say—you understand?"

"Understand . . ."

"If you want to stay here, you got to do like Mr. Gumbeiner says."

"Do-like-Mr.-Gumbeiner-says . . ."

"*That's* the way I like to hear a *golem* talk. Malka, give here the mirror from the pocketbook. Look, you see your face? You see on the forehead, what's written? If you don't do like Mr. Gumbeiner says, he'll wipe out what's written and you'll be no more alive."

"No-more-alive . . ."

"*That's* right. Now, listen. Under the porch you'll find a lawnmower. Take it. And cut the lawn. Then come back. Go."

"Go . . ." The figure shambled down the stairs. Presently the sound of the lawnmower whirred through the quiet air in the street just like the street where Jackie Cooper shed huge tears on Wallace Beery's shirt and Chester Conklin rolled his eyes at Marie Dressler.

"So what will you write to Tillie?" old Mr. Gumbeiner asked.

"What should I write?" old Mrs. Gumbeiner shrugged. "I'll

write that the weather is lovely out here and that we are both, Blessed be the Name, in good health."

The old man nodded his head slowly, and they sat together on the front porch in the warm afternoon sun.

INTRODUCTION

to

"King's Evil"

The germ of this story is, I would suppose, in Mackay's *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds.* Anyway, *one* germ of it is. Another would be in the first life of Samuel Johnson I ever read, that of Macaulay, in the reference to his, Johnson's, childhood. Is that all? I think that a third germ was in a nineteenth-century anecdote, popular enough to have made the pages of *Punch.* A bishop about to confirm a group notices an old woman and asks if he has not confirmed her before: she concedes that he has. Suspicions now rising rapidly, he asks how many times she has been confirmed before: she thinks, eleven. Good heavens! *Why?* "Because, my lord," she says—and this must have *really* wowed them over the crumpets and clotted cream; "Because, my lord, *they say it is good for the rheumatism!*" Ah, the lower classes, they are so droll. —Well. It probably *was* good for the rheumatism, and nowadays I believe that almost any Anglican cleric will administer Holy Unction, but (say) a hundred years ago about the only way that the old woman could have obtained the laying on of hands was to sneak another confirmation. But—

—but perhaps I have laid enough germ onto you and it is time to read the story.

King's Evil

When I first saw the copy of *The Memoirs of Dr. Mainauduc, the Mesmerist* (bound in flaking leather, the spine in shreds, and half the title page missing: which is why I was able to buy it cheap), I assumed it to be a work of fiction. There is something extremely Gothick about "Mainauduc, the Mesmerist." It sets one in mind at once of Melmoth, the Wanderer. No one today would venture to invent such a name for such a person. (Unless, of course, he were writing for television or the movies, in which case he might venture anything.) But the times bring forth the man, and the man bears the name. Consider, for example, "the Jesuit Hell." This is not a theological conception, it was a man, a Jesuit, whose family name was Hell. Father Hell devised a system or theory of healing based on "metallic magnetism"; he passed it on to Franz Anton Mesmer, who almost at once quarreled with him, produced the countertheory of "animal magnetism." Mesmer begat (so to speak) D'Eslon, D'Eslon begat Mainauduc. Full of enthusiasm, Mainauduc came to England, and settled in, of all places, Bristol. All this, I admit, sounds most improbable. Truth so often does. Who is not familiar with the bewildered cry of the novice writer, "But that's the way it *happened!*"? Not altogether trusting to my own ability to convince the reader that there really was such a person as the Jesuit Hell or such a person as Mainauduc, the Mesmerist, I refer him to Mackay's *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds;* but should he (the reader) not be able to credit that this work exists either, then I must throw up my hands. Mackay, in my opinion, was really too hard on "The Magne-

tisers," as he called them. Himself so great a sceptic, he could have little cause for complaint if other, later, sceptics should not care to believe that any book bearing such a title ever existed. In a way, it would serve him right. . . .

In Bristol Dr. Mainauduc flourished to the degree that his reputation went on ahead of him to London. In a short time London was coming to him; he cured dukes of the dropsy and generals of the gout, he magnetized countesses into convulsions and they emerged from them free of the phthysic, while vicountesses left their vapors behind them—or so he says. At any rate he determined upon going to London and setting up practice there. He recounts in detail his plans for setting up something called "the Hygienickal Society . . . for Females of high Position . . . the fees, Fifteen Guineas" at his house in the capital. And he describes, amongst many other cases, one where he cured a longseated complaint ("pronounced beyond help") entirely by proxy.

It may be that Dr. Mainauduc's success in Bristol was perhaps not quite so dazzling as his memory in later years led him to fancy. He had come up to London, to discuss his setting up practice there, at the invitation of a Mr. Wentworth, "a Bachelor of Physick," who lived in Rosemary Lane; and despite its pretty name, Rosemary Lane was not located in a pretty district. We might consider it a depressed area. And Mr. Wentworth had arranged to meet him, not in his own quarters, but at an inn called the Mulberry Tree, where they were to dine. Mr. Wentworth had made the necessary arrangements, but Mr. Wentworth was late.

"Dr. Mainauduc? To meet Mr. Wentworth? Certainly, sir," the waiter said. "If the Doctor will only please to step in here, Mr. Wentworth will be along presently." And he led him along to a medium-sized room, with paneled walls, and a fire which seemed to beckon pleasantly from the grate, for it was the first of October, and the air was chill. He had scarcely had the time to give his full attention to the flames licking greedily at the greasy black slabs of coal when he noticed that there was someone already in the room. This person came forward

from his corner, where he had been engaged in softening the nether end of one candle in the flame of another so that it might hold fast in its sconce and not wobble, with his hand extended.

"Have I, sir," he asked, with the slightest of smiles, and an air of deference and courtesy, "the honor of beholding the author of the great treatise on the magnetical fluid?"

"You are too kind, sir," said Mainauduc, indicating to the waiter with but a flick of his eye that there was no objection taken to the stranger's presence and that the waiter might leave. "I am sensible of the compliment you pay me merely by having heard of my little pamphlet." And he bowed.

"Heard of it, Doctor?" cries the other, a smallish, slender man, clad in dark garments. He holds up his finger as if to command attention, and begins to speak.

"'The magnet attracts iron, iron is found everywhere, everything is therefore under the influence of magnetism. It is only a modification of the general principle, which establishes harmony or foments discord. It is the same agent that gives rise to sympathy, antipathy, and the passions.' Have I not the passage right, sir? My name is Blee, sir: James Blee."

"I am enchanted to meet you, Mr. Blee. I commend your memory. However—" he seated himself at right angles to the fire—"you will doubtless recall that the passage you quote is not mine. *I* was quoting from the Spaniard, Balthazar Gracian." He spread his long fingers to the blaze. "Are you a physician, sir?"

Mr. Blee perhaps did not hear the question.

"Then try my memory on this, Doctor," he said. "There is a flux and reflux, not only in the sea, but in the atmosphere, which affects in a similar manner all organized bodies through the medium of a subtile and mobile fluid, which pervades the universe, and associates all things together in mutual intercourse and harmony.' Were you . . . dare we hope . . . is it that . . . ?"

Dr. Mainauduc raised his dark brows.

"What is your question, Mr. Blee?"

"Can it be that London is destined to enjoy the great fortune which has hithertofore been Bristol's alone, Dr. Mainauduc? The reluctant tones of my voice must discover to you that I know I have no right to enquire, but . . ."

The mesmerist smiled. "It may be," he began; but at this moment the door was thrown open and two gentlemen entered, one nervously, the other laughing.

"Oh, pray, *pray* forgive me, Dr. Mainauduc—how d'ye do, Mr. Blee?—for my lateness," said the nervous gentleman, taking off his hat so hurriedly his wig came with it. He struggled to replace it, and, at the same time, gestured towards his companion, who rubbed his hands as he looked about the room and laughed. "This is Mr. Farmer, sir; Mr. Farmer—Dr. Mainauduc, Mr. Blee." He smiled faintly. His face was pale.

"Dr. Mainauduc, Mainauduc, very pleased. Mr. Blee, I hope you do well, well, well. Farmer by name, gentlemen," the other man said, "and farmer by profession, farmer by profession. What, what?" He then laughed once more at length and proceeded to repeat his remarks all over again. His face was ruddy.

Mr. Blee courteously asked if he had had good crops, and while Mr. Farmer was merrily discussing corn, hay, and wall-fruit with his questioner, Mr. Wentworth drew Dr. Mainauduc to one side, and spoke closely to his ear.

"The fact of the matter is that I never saw this gentleman in my life before, till just above an hour ago, when he came into the barber's where I was having my hair attended to, and desired to be shaved. 'Tis my belief, sir, that he is some country squire unused to London ways," Mr. Wentworth said; "for when the man was finished, the gentleman said, oh, as blandly as you please, that he had no money. I presume he'd had his pocket picked, for one can see by his clothes that he *is*——"

"Oh, quite so," murmured Dr. Mainauduc.

"Have you not often wondered," Mr. Farmer chattered to Mr. Blee, "how the people do? How they live? What their lives are like? What they think, really think? Hey, sir? What, what?"

"Oh, frequently, Mr. Farmer!"

Wentworth murmured, "And so I thought best to pay for the barber, and then I really did not know how to get rid of him."

Dr. Mainauduc saw that his fellow physician was considerably embarrassed at the introduction of two extra men to what was intended for a private meeting. He assured him that he did not mind, and said that, indeed, it was just as well, for they might get a lay opinion on the subject of introducing to London the practice of the Mesmeric therapy. And so they all four sat down to supper. There was beef and brawn and game pie and goose.

"I little thought to have this honor, Doctor," Mr. Blee said; "but, chancing to hear from Mr. Wentworth, of whose professional parts I bear the highest opinion, that *you* were to be here, I felt I must hazard it, and come to see the prophet of the new-found philosophy."

Wentworth, who had treated Blee for an amorous distemper, kept silence, but his principal guest smiled.

"Newly *re*-found philosophy, I should rather term it," Mainauduc said. "What was the laying on of hands but animal magnetism, anciently practiced? And in what other way did Elisha bring to life the dead child, but by conveyance of the magnetical fluid?" Wentworth nodded gravely.

Mr. Farmer, who had been talking with his mouth full, and smiling happily, suddenly threw down his knife. His face fell.

"Suppose—d'ye see, gentlemen—suppose a man makes mistakes—eh?—bad ones, very bad, bad, bad. Terrible losses. What? Now, now, oughtn't he have the chance, the chance, I say, to do better? Better? What, what? Well, so he must see for himself how things go. See for himself. Eh? How things go. Terrible losses. Was it not a thing to break your heart? It broke *my* heart. I never meant it to happen so—"

"*Gaming!*" Wentworth whispered to Mainauduc.

"To what losses do you refer, Mr. Farmer?" Blee asked, in a solicitous tone. "Did I not understand you to say the harvest was *good* this year?"

"The Mesmeric method——" Wentworth began, rather loudly. Abashed, he lowered his voice. "Dr. Mainauduc is desirous of opening in London an institute for the practice of the Mesmeric method of healing. In this, it is contemplated, I am to assist him." The faintest shadow of color came and went in his face. "What think you of the scheme, gentlemen? We, that is he, should like to know."

Blee rose from the table and gave the fire a poke. The gray pyramid collapsed and the coals blazed up again, making the shadows dance. Mr. Farmer laughed.

"Is not this pleasant?" he cried. "I am so very much obliged to you for the pleasure. Pleasure. We dine simply at home. At home—eh?—we dine very simply. But there is such a degree of stiffness. Strain. Stiffness and strain."

Mr. Blee tapped the poker on the iron dogs. "Such an institution, if headed by such a man as Dr. Mainauduc, can not possibly do otherwise than succeed." The two physicians looked at one another, pleased. Their faces quickened.

"You will make a deal of money," Blee told the fire.

Wentworth looked hastily at a darned place on his hose, and crossed his legs. "It is the science, not the money. The money is not of any consequence to us."

"Not of the least consequence," Mainauduc said easily. His coat and waistcoat were of French flowered silk. Blee turned from the fire. He drew up his chair and sat, facing Dr. Mainauduc.

"Gentlemen," he said in low tones, "pray give me leave to speak openly. The alchymists strove for centuries to make gold; that they succeeded, no one can say with certainty. But magnetism is the new alchymy. It *will* make gold, I *know* it. Already London is atremble with the reports of its success. People who would never go so far as Hackney to consult the best physician of the old school ever known, have gone all the way to Bristol to be magnetized by Dr. Mainauduc. You have only to throw open your doors in London, sir, to have your chambers thronged—with the richest . . . and the wealthiest . . ." His voice hissed upon the sibilants. He brought his

dark, clever face nearer. "You will need a man of business. May I serve you?"

The two physicians looked at one another. Dr. Mainauduc's lips parted. Mr. Wentworth inclined his head to the side. And, then, as abrupt as the bursting of a bubble, the mood or spell was shattered: Mr. Farmer, seemingly from nowhere, had produced a grubby child, and was patting its head and stroking its cheeks and asking what its name was and if it would like a glass of wine—all in a tone of boisterous good cheer, his eyes popping with joy.

"Now, damme, sir!" cries Blee, jumping to his feet in a rage and overturning the chair. The child begins to weep.

"Oh, pray, don't," Farmer implores. "I love children. Don't fret, poppet."

"Take care, Mr. Farmer," Wentworth warns him. "Do you not see the child is diseased? See the lesions—it is certainly scrofulous. Have done, Mr. Farmer!"

Then the waiter came, with many apologies, for it was his child, begged their pardon, took the boy away.

"Well, we shall think of your proposal, Mr. Blee." Dr. Mainauduc sat back, languid from food and fire, tired from his journey. "What, Wentworth, was the child with scrofulæ?"

"Assuredly, sir. Shall I call it back? Perhaps you wish to examine, or treat it?" But the Doctor waved his hand. "King's Evil, is what the common people call it, you know. Scrofula, I mean to say. Some of them profess to regard it as beyond *medical* aid. They still remember that the monarchs of the former dynasty, as late as Queen Anne, used to 'touch' for it. An interesting ceremony it must have been. The touch of an anointed king, the common people say, is the only cure for it. Now what think you, Doctor, of sympathetical mummy, or capons fed with vipers?"

Dr. Mainauduc, who had been listening with a trace of impatience, cleared his throat. Blee stood once more by the fire.

"You mentioned, sir, my pamphlet, earlier in the evening—my pamphlet entitled, *A Treatise on the Magnetickal Fluid.* Whilst I was in Paris I met the eminent American sage, Dr.

Franklin, and I presented him a copy, for it seems to me evident that what he calls the positive and negative of electricity is none other than the intension and remission of which that great giant of natural philosophy, Franz Anton Mesmer, writes. Mr. Blee—Mr. *Blee?*" But that gentleman was staring, his lower lip caught up beneath his teeth, at Mr. Farmer; and Mr. Farmer was weeping.

"Directly you mentioned Franklin, Doctor, he began to shed tears," whispered Wentworth. "Do you know, Doctor, I commence to think that he is an American himself—a Loyalist—and that the 'loss' he spoke of was his property—or perhaps his son—in the Rebellion there. What think *you, sir?*"

"*I* commence to think, sir, that he is a man whom I am shortly to magnetize, for it is plain he is in need of it."

Dr. Mainauduc rose and blew out all but one of the candles. Wentworth's eyes glistened and he stepped nearer, but Blee retreated further into the gloom. Only a dull red glow now came from the fire. Dr. Mainauduc seated himself facing Mr. Farmer, touching him knee to knee. He took his hands in his.

"Attend to me now, sir," Dr. Mainauduc said.

"My head *does* ache," Mr. Farmer murmured.

"It shall presently ache no more. . . . Attend."

He gently placed Farmer's hands so they rested, palms up, on his knees, and slowly began to stroke them with the palms of his own hands. He did this for some time, then drew his hands along Mr. Farmer's arms, leaning forward, until they rested with the fingers touching the neck. Slowly his hands passed up the sides of the man's face, then withdrew till they were opposite his eyes. Again and again he repeated these passes. The candle's light glittered on the single ring he wore, and Wentworth saw the glitter reflected in Mr. Farmer's wide-open eyes. Mr. Farmer was motionless, and the noise of his heavy breathing died away. It seemed to Wentworth, as he watched, that a smoke or vapor, like a thin mist, or the plume from a tobacco-pipe, was exuded from the mesmerist's

face and hands. It moved slowly and sluggishly and hung in the air about Mr. Farmer's head.

And as Wentworth watched, he fancied that he saw strange scenes take form for fleeting moments in this miasmic suspiration: a procession of people in heavy robes and men with miters, a phantasm of silent men in violent riot, and noiseless battles on land and sea. Then all vanished, ghosts and mists alike. He heard once more the sound of Mr. Farmer's breathing, and Dr. Mainauduc had lit the candles and the light was reflected on the paneled walls.

Wentworth cleared his throat. Mainauduc looked at him, and there was terror in his eyes. He started to speak, and his voice caught in his throat.

"We had better leave, you and I," he said, at last. "Do you know who your country squire is, your Loyalist?"

"*I* know," said Blee's voice from the door. He stood there, his sallow skin gone paler than Wentworth's, but a look of determination fixed upon his face. Behind him were two broad-shouldered, shifty-looking men. "We will take charge of Mr. Farmer, if you please."

"No, I think not," Mr. Farmer said. He stood up, an air of dignity upon him. "There has been enough taking charge of Mr. Farmer, and Mr. Farmer has a task to do."

"Oh, sir, you are unwell," Blee said, in a fawning tone, and he sidled forward, followed by his minions. And then, without warning, the room was filled with men: constables with their staves in their hands, soldiers in red coats, Mr. Martinson, the magistrate, and a tall young man looking very much like Mr. Farmer himself, and others.

"You had better come with us, sir, I think," said the tall young man. Mr. Farmer slumped. The air of dignity fell from him. Then he laughed vacantly.

"Very well, Fred, very well," he said. "Very well, very well. You think it best, what, what?" He shambled forward, stopped, looked over his shoulder. "These two gentlemen"—he indicated Dr. Mainauduc and Mr. Wentworth—"treated me with great consideration. They are not to be bothered,

d'ye hear?" The magistrate bowed. Mr. Farmer went out slowly, leaning on the arm of the tall man, and muttering, "Bothered, bothered, bothered . . ."

Let us return to the *Memoirs.*

"On this occasion [Mainauduc writes] the entire Atmosphere was so saturated with the Magnetickal Fluid that there was cured in another part of the House a Child suffering from a Complaint long-seated and pronounced beyond help, *viz.*, Scrofula, or King's Evil. There was not a Lesion or Scar or Mark left, and all this without my even having touched him."

As to the identity of Mr. Farmer, Dr. Mainauduc is coy. He says only that he was "a Gentleman of exceedingly high Station, exceedingly afflicted. Had I been allowed to treat him further, a Privilege denied me, he might have been spared the terrible Malady which had already begun its Ravages, and which, save for a few brief periods, never entirely left him.

Thus far, on this subject, *The Memoirs of Dr. Mainauduc, the Mesmerist,* a man of his time—or behind his time, if you prefer; or, considering that mesmerism was the forerunner of hypnotism and that the study of hypnotism led Freud on to psychoanalysis, perhaps a man ahead of his time. Could he, perchance—or could anyone—really have cured "Mr. Farmer"? It is impossible to say. If certain private papers of Frederick, Duke of York, still sealed to public inspection, could be opened, we might learn what truth there was—if any—to a curious legend concerning his father. Is it really so that he evaded all who surrounded him, and for six hours one day in early October 1788 wandered unrecognized through London on some strange and unsuccessful quest of his own, in the month when it was finally deemed impossible to doubt any longer that he was mad—that longest-lived and most unfortunate of British Kings, George III?

INTRODUCTION

to

"The Ogre"

I no longer remember how I got the idea for this story. What I remember with great clarity, however, was that it was somewhat rewritten—and the penultimate paragraph supplied entirely (and deftly) by Damon Knight, then editor of *If . . .* who refused either a by-line or a share in the moneys on the grounds that what he had done "wasn't enough to bother about." But let the record so state.

The Ogre

When the menace of Dr. Ludwig Sanzmann first appeared, like a cloud no bigger than a man's hand, Dr. Fred B. Turbyfil, at twenty-seven, had been the youngest museum director in the country; and now at thirty-five he was still one of the youngest. Moreover, he had a confident, if precarious, hold on greater glories to come: the Godbody Museum of Natural History; Dr. Fred B. Turbyfil, Director.

The salary would be splendid, the expense account lavish and tax-free, and the director would have ample time to finish his great work, at present entitled *Man Before the Dawn*—recondite, yet eminently readable. There were already seventeen chapters devoted to the Mousterian—or Neanderthal—Era alone. (It would be certain to sell forever to schools and libraries; a big book, firm in the grasp, profusely illustrated and done in so captivating a style that even a high school senior, picking it up unwarily in search of nudes, would be unable to extricate himself for hours.)

Mr. Godbody, the future source of all these goodies, was a skeptic of the old-fashioned sort. "Where did Cain get his wife?" was a favorite cackle, accompanied by a nudge of his bony elbow. "Found any feathers from angels' wings yet?" was another.

There was, at the moment, a minor hitch. Old Mr. Godbody affected to be shaken by the recent revelation of scandal in anthropology. From that respectable group of ancestors, whose likenesses were known to every schoolchild, from that jolly little club—judgment falling like a bolt of thunder—Piltdown Man had been expelled for cheating at cards.

If Piltdown Man was a fake, why not all the rest? Java Man, Peiping Man, Australopithecus Africanus—all bone-scraps, plaster of paris, and wishful thinking!

In vain, Turbyfil assured him that competent scholars had been leery of H. Piltdown for years; ugly old Mr. Godbody testily replied: "Then why didn't you say so?"

Having lost one faith in his youth, the merchant prince was reluctant to lose another in his old age. But Dr. Turbyfil trusted his patron's doubt was only a passing phase.

In sum, Dr. Turbyfil was about to reap the rewards of virtue and honest toil, and when he reflected on this (as he often did) it amused him to sing—a trifle off-key—a song from his childhood, called "Bringing in the Sheaves."

That was before the advent of Dr. Sanzmann.

The two men had come to Holden within a few months of one another, Dr. Turbyfil from his two-year stay at the Museum of Natural Philosophy in Boston, and Dr. Sanzmann from a meager living translating in New York, whither he had come as an exile from his native country. Sanzmann was politically quite pure, with no taint of either far right or near left; was, in fact, a Goethe scholar—and what can be purer than a Goethe scholar? He had a post at the local denominational university: Professor of Germanic *and* Oriental Languages, neatly skipping the questionable Slavs. Dr. Turbyfil was not an ungenerous man, and he was quite content to see Prof. Sanzmann enjoy the full measure of linguistic success.

But Dr. Philosoph. Ludwig Sanzmann was also an amateur anthropologist, paleontologist, and general antiquarian; and this was enough to chill the blood of any museum director or even curator. Such amateurs are occupational hazards. They bring one smelly cowbones, and do it with a proud air of expectancy, fully anticipating the pronouncement of a new species of megatherium or brontosaurus.

"My dear Dr. Turbyfil! I have looked forward to this our meeting for so long! I cannot tell you—" Sanzmann shook the proffered hand, sat down, holding a cardboard carton as if it

contained wedding cake, took out a handkerchief, wiped his rosy face, and panted.

"Dr. Turbyfil!" the name assumed the qualities of an indictment. "What is that which they used always to tell us? *Uhrmencsh*—Primal Man, that is—he was a stunted little creature, like a chimpanzee, with a molybdenum deficiency, and he—which is to say, *we*—grew larger and bigger and more so, until, with the help of the actuarial tables of the insurance companies, we have our present great size attained, and also life expectancy. And we, pres-u-mably, will greater grow *yet.*

"*But!*" (Dr. Turbyfil quivered.) "What then comes to pass? An anthropologist goes into an *apotheke*—a druckstore, yes?—in Peiping—oh, a bea-u-tiful city, I have been there, I love it with all my heart!—he goes into a native Chinese pharmacy, and there what is it that he finds? He finds—amongst the dried dragon bones, powdered bats, tigers' gall, rhinoceros horn, and pickled serpents—two humanlike gigantic molar teeths! And then, behold, for this is wonderful! The whole picture changes!"

Oh, my, oh my! thought Dr. Turbyfil, suffering.

"Now Primal Man becomes huge, tremendous, like the Sons of Anak in the First Moses Book. We must now posit for him ancestors like the great apes of your Edgar Burroughs-Rice, and how it is that we, his children, have shrunken! Pit-i-ful! Instead of the pigs becoming elephants, the elephants are become pigs!" Dr. Sanzmann clicked his tongue.

"But that is nothing! Nothing at all! Wherefore have I come to you now? To make known to you a something that is so much *more* startling, I must begin earlier than our own times. Charles the Fifth!"

Dr. Turbyfil quavered, "I beg your pardon?"

"Charles the Fifth of Hapsburg. In fifteen hundred and fifty-five, Charles the Emperor resigns, no retires? *Ab*dicates. His brother Ferdinand succeeds him as sovereign of the Hapsburg dominions, and Charles retreats himself to a monastery.

"'With age, with cares, with maladies opprest,
"He seeks the refuge of monastic rest—'"

"Ahh, Professor *Sanz*mann," Dr. Turbyfil began.

"Yes-yes: I *di*-gress. Well. Charles and Ferdinand. A medallion is struck, Charles, one side—Ferdinand, the other. And the date, fifteen hundred and fifty-five. Here is the medallion." Dr. Sanzmann reached into an inner pocket and pulled out a flat little box, such as jewelers use. He opened it.

Inside lay a blackened disk about the size of a silver dollar, and a piece of paper with two rubbings—the profiles of two men, Latin mottoes, and the date: fifteen hundred and fifty-five. Completely at sea, and feeling more and more sorry for himself, Dr. Turbyfil looked at his rosy-faced, and gray-haired caller. He made a small, bewildered gesture.

"Soon, soon, you will understand everything. Nineteen-thirty. My wacations—I am still in Chairmany—I spend at Maldenhausen, a little rural hamlet in a walley. Then things are quiet. Ah, these Chairman walleys! So green, remote, enchanting, full of mysteries! I drink beer and wine, I smoke my pipe, and go on long walks in the countryside. And—since I am a scholar, and ever the dog returns to his womit—I spend also some time in the willage archives. . . . Many interesting things. . . . A child named Simon.

"In fifteen hundred and fifty-five a child named Simon is stolen by an ogre."

Dr. Turbyfil pressed a fist to his forehead and moaned faintly. "Is—*what?*" he said fretfully.

"Please! You see the hole in the medallion? The child wore it about his neck on a thong. They were very reverend, these peasant people. An Imperial medallion, one wears it on one's bosom. A photostatic copy of the testimony." Prof. Sanzmann opened the box, removed papers. Photostatic copies, indeed, were among them, but the language was a monkish Latin, and in Gothic lettering. Dr. Turbyfil felt his eyes begin to hurt; he closed them.

Prof. Sanzmann, dreadful man, spoke on. "There were two witnesses, an old man of the name Sigismund, a boy called Lothar. It was winter. It was snow. The child Simon runs with his dog down the field. He shouts. He is afraid. Out of the

snow behind him the ogre comes. He is just as they always knew ogres to be: Huge, hairy, crooked, clad in skins, carrying a cudgel. Terrible.

"Lothar runs for help. The old man cannot run, so he stays. And prays. The ogre seizes up the child Simon and runs away with him, back into the fields, toward the hills, until the snow hides them.

"The people are aroused, they are fearful, but not surprised. This happens. There are wolves, there are bears, there are ogres. Such are the hazards of living on the remote farms."

Dr. Turbyfil shivered. A chill crept into his flesh. He rubbed his fingers to warm them. "Folklore," he said. "Old wives' tales."

Dr. Sanzmann waved his hands, then placed them on the photostats. "This is not the Brothers Grimm," he said. "These are contemporary accounts with eyed witnesses. I continue. The people go out in the storm, with dogs and pikes and even a few matchlocks; and since they huddle fearingly together and the snow has hid all foot-marks, it is not a surprise that they do not find the child or the ogre's spoor. The dog, yes—but he is quite dead. Crushed. One tremendous blow. The next day they search, and then the next, and then no more. Perhaps in the spring they will find some bones for Christian burial. . . .

"The child had been warned that if he went too far from home he would be stolen by an ogre. He *did* go too far away from home, and he *was* stolen by an ogre. So, fifteen-sixty."

Dr. Turbyfil ventured a small smile. "The child has been dead for five years." He felt better, now that he knew what was in the carton. He visualized the card which would never, certainly *never,* be typed: *"Bones of child devoured by ogre in* 1555. *Gift of Prof. Ludwig Sanzmann, Dr. Phil."*

The Goethe scholar swept on. "In fifteen hundred and sixty, the child Simon," he said, "is discovered trying to pilfer fowls from a farmyard in the nexten walley. He is naked, filthy,

long-haired, lousy. He growls and cannot speak coherent speech. He fights. It is wery sad."

The Museum Director agreed that it was very sad. (Then what *was* in the cardboard carton?)

"Child Simon is tied, he is delivered up to his parents, who must lock him in a room to keep him from escaping. Gradually he learns to speak again. And then comes to see him the burgemeister, and the notary, and the priest, and the baron, and I should imagine half the people of the district, and they ask him to tell his story, speaking ever the truth.

"The ogre (he says) carried him away wery distantly and high up, to his cave, and there in his cave is his wife, the ogress, and a small ogre, who is their child. At first Simon fears they will consume him, but no. He is brought to be a companion to the ogre-child, who is ill. And children are adaptive, wery adaptive. Simon plays with the ogre-child, and the ogre brings back sheep and wenison and other foods. At first it is hard for Simon to eat the raw meat, so the ogress chews it soft for him—"

"*Please!*" Dr. Turbyfil held up a protesting hand, but Professor Sanzmann neither saw nor heard him. With gleaming eyes gazing afar, he went on.

"It comes the spring. The ogre family sports in the forest, and Simon with them. Then comes again the autumn and winter and at last the ogre-child dies. It is sad. The parents cannot believe it. They moan to him. They rock him in their arms. No use. They bury him finally beneath the cave floor. *Now* you will ask," he informed the glassy-eyed Turbyfil, "do they smear the dead body with red ochre as a symbol of life, of blood, and flesh, as our scientists say? No. And why not? Because he is already smeared. All of them. All the time. They like it so. It is not early religion; it is early cosmetic only."

He sighed. Dr. Turbyfil echoed him.

"And so, swiftly pass the years." Prof. Sanzmann patted his hand on the empty air to indicate the passing years. "The old ogre is killed by a she-bear and then the ogress will not eat. She whimpers and clasps Simon to her, and presently she

grows cold and is dead. He is alone. The rest we know. Simon grows up, marries, has children, dies. But there are no more ogres.

"Not ever.

"Naturally, I am fascinated. I ask the peasants, where is there a cave called the Cave of the Ogres? They look at me with slanting glances, but will not answer. I am patient. I come back each summer. Nineteen hundred thirty-one, nineteen hundred thirty-two, nineteen hundred thirty-three. Everyone knows me. I give small presents to the children. By myself I wander in the hills and search for caves. Nineteen hundred and thirty-four. There is a cow-tending child in the high pastures. We are friends. I speak of a cave near there. This, I say, is called the Cave of the Ogres. The child laughs. No, no, he says, that is another cave; it is located thus and so.

"And I find it where he says. But I am circumspect. I wait another year. Then I come and I make my private excawations. And—I—find—*this*."

He threw open the carton and unwrapped from many layers of cotton-wool something brown and bony, and he set it in front of Dr. Turbyfil.

"There was a fairly complete skeleton, but I took just the skull and jaw-bone. You recognize it at once, of course. And with it I found, as I expected, the medallion of Charles and Ferdinand. Simon had allowed them to bury it with the ogre-child because he had been fond of it. It is all written in the photostatic paper copies. . . . In nineteen hundred thirty-six, the Nazis—"

Dr. Turbyfil stared at the skull. "No, no, no, no," he whispered. It was not a very large skull. "No, no, no," he whispered, staring at the receding forehead and massive chinless jaw, the bulging eye-ridges.

"So, tell me now, sir Museum Director: Is this not a find more remarkable than big teeths in a Peiping herbshop?" His eyes seemed very young and very bright.

Dr. Turbyfil thought rapidly. It needed just something like this to set the Sunday supplements and Mr. Godbody ablaze,

and ruin forever both his reputation and that of the Holden Museum. Years and years of work—the seventeen chapters on the Mousterian Era alone in *Man Before the Dawn*—the bequest from old Mr. Godbody—

He arose, placed a hand on Professor Sanzmann's shoulder.

"My friend," he said, in warm, golden tones. "My friend, it will take some time before the Sanzmann Expedition of the Holden Museum will be ready to start. While you make the necessary personal preparations to lead us to the site of your truly astounding discovery, please oblige me by saying nothing about this to our—alas—unscholarly and often sensational press. Eh?"

Dr. Sanzmann's rosy face broke into a thousand wrinkles; tears of joy and gratitude rolled down his cheeks. Dr. Turbyfil generously pretended not to see.

"Imagine what a revolution this will produce," he said, as if he were thinking aloud. "Instead of being tidily extinct for fifty thousand years, our poor cousins survived into modern times. Fantastic! Our whole timetable will have to be rewritten. . . ." His voice died away. His eyes focused on Prof. Sanzmann, nodding his head, sniffling happily, as he tied up his package.

"Incidentally, my dear Professor," he said, "before you leave, I must show you some interesting potsherds that were dug up not a mile from here. You will be fascinated. Aztec influences! This way . . . mind the stairs. I am afraid our cellar is not very well arranged at present; we have been recataloguing. . . . This fascinating collection formerly belonged to a pioneer figure, the late Mr. Tatum Tompkins."

Behind a small mountain of packing cases, Dr. Turbyfil dealt Prof. Sanzmann a swift blow on the temple with one of Uncle Tatum's tomahawks. The scholar fell without a sound, his rosy lips opened upon an unuttered aspirate. Dr. Turbyfil made shift to bury him in the farthest corner of the cellar, and to pile upon his grave such a pyramid of uncatalogued horrors as need not, God and Godbody willing, be disturbed for several centuries.

Dusting his hands, and whistling—a trifle off-key—the hymn called "Bringing in the Sheaves," Dr. Turbyfil returned to the office above stairs. There he opened an atlas, looking at large-scale maps of Germany. A village named Maldenhausen, in a valley. . . . (Where there had been *one* skeleton, there must be others, unspoiled by absurd sixteenth-century paraphernalia—which had no business being there anyway.) His fingers skipped joyfully along the map, and in his mind's eye he saw himself already in those valleys, with their lovely names: Friedenthal, Johnnesthal, Hochsthal, Neanderthal, Waldenthal . . . beautiful valleys! Green, remote, enchanting . . . full of mysteries.

INTRODUCTION

to

"The Phoenix and the Mirror"

(Chapter Eight)

When I finished this book I said to Grania, my then-wife,* "I have just finished the book which will crown my career, win me the Hugo [award], and make me famous." I was serious, too. I don't know if it crowned my career or not, but it certainly did not make me famous or win me the Hugo. The Hugo (for that matter: and the Nebula) for the year *Phoenix* was published was won by Ursula K. Le Guin for *The Left Hand of Darkness*—a far-outstanding book, one of the true enchantments. As I wrote to her thereafter, "I should not at all have minded my book coming in second to yours, but I minded that it was not even in the running." Mrs. Le Guin replied, "Keep on with *Vergil Magus* and I am sure it will bring you the credit it deserves; I only hope that by that time you will not be eighty, like Tolkien, or dead, like Peake." And I said of course that I also hoped.

I have "kept on with *Vergil Magus*," the name of the complete corpus of which *Phoenix* forms a part; a trinity of trilogies is projected and planned. But I have not kept on writing the rest of the novels. I have kept on gathering my materials for the background of the medieval Vergil Legend, and, as

* whose assistance, along with that of others mentioned in the book, I desire again to acknowledge.

of the date I write this (July 19, 1977), I have at hand twenty-five large notebooks and over five thousand file cards bearing on the matter: the ensuing year of my life is to be mainly devoted to reworking it all, going backward over it *at an angle,* and so producing, both systematically and by inspiration, *The Encyclopedia of the World of Vergil Magus*—

—it has been revealed to me, for example, that Byzantium was named after the vyzant or wisant, the European bison, whose image appeared on its coins . . . that the Mage Vergil invented the navigators' compass . . . that he sought to break the ban on alum because he used it in his alchemy . . . that when the Negus and the Soldan between them had shut up the Gates of the Erythraean Sea, Vergil kept the other key . . . that—

But I must stop. By revelation and by research (many beside me must know that the King of Mali's five thousand horses had each its own copper urinal; that Archimedes burned the Roman ships not by "mirrors" but by burnished shields; and that the Corridors of the Cumaean Sybil, so long buried as to sink them almost into myth, were rediscovered this very century), by research and by revelation reckoning perhaps five references per file card, I have now accumulated about 25,000 data.

It is now up to me to get them into order during this next year of my life, upon the generous soil of Virginia, where the College of William and Mary has appointed me for that period of time its Writer-in-Residence. In this I am very fortunate. I am very humble. And I am very proud.

The Phoenix and the Mirror

(Chapter Eight)

The admiralty office had informed Vergil's courier that Sergius Amadeus, Lord-of-the-Sea, commanding the Fleet of the South, would receive him and his request provided he arrived before noon.

Accordingly, well before that hour, the day after the puzzling interview with Queen Cornelia, he set out in state to pay his visit. No formality had been neglected. He wore his doctoral robes, and the golden chain signifying his rank as honorary member of the Senate; in one hand he carried the bag of purple silk, embroidered with the Imperial monogram, in which were his letters of state; and in the other was the baculum, or wand, of hazelwood, symbolic of his association with the Order. The Imperial Navy was not what it had been, but ritual things were yet important.

He neither went afoot nor on horseback, but rode in a litter carried by six bearers, with two footmen preceding and two following; these four with staves in their hands. The whole team of ten had been selected and trained by a famous and luxury-loving old proconsul, Lentonius, when Governor of Lesser Nubia. Freed by virtue of a testamentary manumission of old Lentonius, who also left them perpetual stipends, they hired out their services for special occasions.

They moved smoothly enough in the hilly, narrow streets, but on entering the broad and level range of Kings Way, they slipped immediately into their intricate and ritual pace, said to have been derived from that in use at the courts of the

Candaces, the Queens of Cush, whose territory was adjacent to that of Lesser Nubia. They took a step forward, halted, drew the other foot slowly up to an exact parallel; paused; stepped forward on the other foot.

So they made their slow, almost hieratic way through the crowded morning streets. The people responded in their individual ways—some by ignoring the sight; some with awe; some with fear; some with shouted comments (not always respectful), and with quips, taking advantage of that tradition of Naples which held that Fate and Fortune—having bestowed wealth or power—compensated those who received neither with the right to be free of tongue about either.

So they passed by fishmongers with baskets full of squirming sardines; processions of schoolboys off to take lessons in archery, swordsmanship, or harp-playing; porters bowed beneath loads of charcoal; peripatetic vendors of woven stuffs, displaying lengths of yellow broadcloth and striped cotton; a squad of gentlemen crossbowmen marching out to a target shoot; swarms of children with dirty arms, dirty legs, and dirty noses, who had never seen the inside of a school and never would.

It was one of those—or so he thought—who came running up and jumped and darted to attract his attention, crying, "Lord! Lord!" A grubby boy who might have been ten, or perhaps a stunted twelve.

Placing his wand in his lap, the Magus began to grope automatically for a small coin, when the boy leaped up, seized the frame of the litter, and pulled himself in. The footmen broke pace and came to drag him out, but the boy eluded them.

"Lord!" he exclaimed. "Your house is on fire!"

"What!"

"For true, lord—it burns, it burns!"

Vergil called to the bearers to let him down, to fetch him a horse; instead, at a word in their own language, they wheeled about in an instant—the fore footmen clearing a way with shouts and gestures—and set off, back the way they came, at an effortless run. Old Lentonius had trained them well.

Soon enough Vergil saw the plume of smoke; he could not have told exactly that it was his house, but it was in the right direction. *Fire!* He thought of his books, collected with infinite pains and expense from all the known world. Of his machinery and engines, constructed with loving labor over the course of the years—there were not three men alive who could reconstruct them; perhaps there were not even two. He ran over, in his mind, the experiments and works in progress—that of the speculum majorum had barely begun, was only one of many: there were some of such long duration and great delicacy that to interrupt them even briefly was to destroy them. He thought of his cunningly wrought water system, his globes of light, his automatons, homunculi, horlogues, his mandrakes, his instruments, equipment . . . his furniture and personal gear, his objects of art. . . . And he thought of his three master workmen: Tynus, Iohan, and Perrin, any one of whom was worth an Imperial ransom.

And all of whom were flesh and blood—friends—had families. . . .

News of the fire had spread, crowds were thicker, the footmen cried out their coming in unison, voices rising higher than the noise of the crowds, cleared a path for the bearers—who, saving their breath, spoke not a word, but loped along.

The Street of the Horse-Jewelers was a contrast between plan and panic. Some there were whose houses lay at the extremities, safe of fire for hours, probably—who had procured carts and wagons and were carrying their movable property to places of safety. There were others, such as Appolonio the loriner, and the tavernkeeper of the Sun and Wagon, a notorious old rogue named Prosenna—whose places lay adjacent to Vergil's house, and these had formed a bucket brigade from the Fountain of Cleo. The leathern vessels, brimming, splashing, passed rapidly along the line of men, which vanished from sight through the open door of the House of the Brazen Head.

Shouts and cries, not all of alarm and fear, filled the smoky air.

From her roof, old Dame Allegra caught sight of Vergil, coming up from below as fast as the Nubians could part the crowd (*"Abrech!"* the fore footmen shouted, a cry as ancient as the Crown of Egypt; *"Abrech! Abrech!"*).

"My lord!" she screamed. "My lord! Greek fire! A charm! A spell! A tetragrammaton! Greek fire! My lord! Greek fire!"

The bearers forged steadily through the swarm till they reached the foot of the steps. A word—they brought down the poles from shoulder-height to the length of their lowered arms; before he could get out, at another word, they knelt. Vergil raced up the steps. They placed the litter down against the wall, stood in front of it with folded arms. Their dedication was perfect, but it did not include fighting fires.

The men at the door of the balcony of the great hall, from which smoke came billowing, saw Vergil appear in their midst. Before they could say a word to him or to each other, he had vanished into the obscurity where blackness was from time to time shot through with a red and orange tongue of flame. Sweaty, sooty, coughing, they continued to receive the leather buckets of water, to dash them forward over the balcony, to return them down the line.

At length he reappeared. "Enough," he said. "Stop!" They had fallen into a rhythm from which his words could not remove them. He seized the wrists of the man in front. "The fire is out!" he cried. "It's out!"

They gaped at him. Then the man whose wrists he held said, "Sir . . . the smoke . . ."

"The smoke will be a long time in going away. But the fire is out." He raised his voice. "The fire is out! Men—friends, neighbors, strangers—I thank you for your work of saving my house. Let Prosenna bring out his best wine and I will pay for it, and for an ox—"

"There are embers enough to roast him, for sure," someone said. A burst of laughter followed; died away, uncertainly, as they gazed at the buckets in their hands, suddenly become an encumbrance. After a moment the brigade took up its work again, now returning them as full as they got them.

From out in the haze, in rustic accents, perhaps those of a wagoner, a comment—"You may thank us, sir, it be your courtesy to do so . . . but we all knows it weren't our work as put the fire out. You'd only to return and douse it with a spell. All's we did was keep it in check till then." A murmur of agreement followed. A familiar figure approached through the murk—Iohan.

"Master, it was Greek fire," he said. "A projectile—"

"Ah," the countryman agreed. "A sallymandros, it were. Bain't that a Greek word? I see un and I heard un, a-flyin' and a-flamin' through the air. I tell 'ee—"

"I haven't time, I must get back at once—the Admiral—" Even as he spoke, Vergil was moving. He glanced at an horlogue. It showed close to noon. He broke into a run. The floor was slippery with water, but he held his footing until he reached the stairs. And there he lost it . . .

Sergius Amadeus, Lord-of-the-Sea, commanding the Fleet of the South, stood on the quarter-deck of his flagship and squinted shoreward suspiciously. Everything he wore was white and freshly starched. At length he pointed a hairy, freckled hand.

"What's that cockleshell craft approaching us so fast from astern?" he demanded.

Bonifavio, the ship's navigator, followed the gesture. "An it please Your Lordship, looks to me like a Punic ship's boat," he said.

The Admiral continued to look suspicious. He never fully trusted anything on shore, near shore, or coming from shore. "She wouldn't be overhauling us if this damned wind hadn't dropped so damned low," he said. "Who's that aboard of her, clutching that gear in his hand and dressed in all that flummery?"

"An it please Your Lordship," Bonifavio said, "I do b'lieve it's that famous mage, as they call him. Vergil, he is by name. Them would be his doctor's uniform, what he's got on, me lord."

"Damned chap broke an appointment with me this morning," growled the Admiral. "Don't like that. Shan't let him aboard. A woman, a white horse, and a witch doctor—bad luck, all three, on shipboard. . . . Damn that wind! Where's it gone to?"

Bonifavio looked up at the drooping sails, looked aft to where the craft steadily gained on them, its four oars flashing in the sun. "An it please your Lordship," he said, "the thought what's occurring to me is, maybe the mage has taken the winds outen our sails so's he could ketch up to us, in a manner of speaking, me lord."

Sergius Amadeus swore, stamped his foot, but made no objection to a line being thrown to the swift, slender little shell when she overhauled his flagship. Then, suddenly deciding to make the most of a bad matter, he invoked protocol. Two trumpeters wound their horns and a company of spearmen presented arms as Vergil, not indicating by anything in his manner that his doctoral robes were filthy with soot and water or that the blood on his bruised forehead was scarcely dry, came aboard.

Vergil saluted the quarter-deck with his wand, extended the pouch of purple silk to the Admiral, who touched it, did not take it. "Neptune's navel!" he exclaimed, throwing protocol to the winds. "What in Hades has happened to Your Sapience? Flood, fire, and civil commotion, it looks like. . . . I trust the Emperor's enemies were not involved?" he added, suddenly grim, seemingly prepared to put his ship about to grapple and board anything reachable on a heavy dew.

"You'd better come below, sir," he said, pretending not to notice that Bonifavio had surreptitiously spat three times to ward off the malign influences, then dipped his right great toe in the water still dripping from Vergil's robes to attract the benign ones.

Briefly, in the Admiral's cabin, the Magus explained his errand.

The Lord-of-the-Sea was interested. "Speculum majorum, heard something about 'em here and there," he said. "Be use-

ful to have one on board to see where enemy forces are located. Sea-Huns, filthy swine. They stay out of *my* sea, I can tell you, else I'd hang 'em up on high, directly I catch them—only, of course, sometimes one *can't* catch them, skittering away like water bugs. Cyprus . . . Paphos port . . . Temple of Aphrodite . . . ah-ah, Doctor!"—here he dug Vergil in the ribs, guffawed—"*there's* the kernel in the nut, eh? No? Hmm, well, I'm sure Your Sapience won't take an old sea dog's little joke amiss. Surely you'll at least *see* the Temple? Respect all religions, is my motto, believe in none. Sensible principle. Still, you know, must say, after all, two thousand beautiful priestesses! All ready, willing, able—and I must say—dextrous! —to do their best to inspire male worshipers with love for their goddess, hah-hah!"

The Admiral's wind-burned face took on an added glow of recollection, which was, despite his disclaimer, almost pious. Then he sighed. "Use of Imperial ships to get to Cyprus, quite impossible, sir, sorry, like to be of assistance. Impossible."

"Why so, Lord-of-the-Sea?" asked Vergil.

Use of an Imperial ship, the Admiral explained to him (looking up at the drooping sails with dismay, regret, and semiconcealed impatience), was impossible without Imperial consent. The Viceroy could no more give such consent than he could coin money or issue patents of nobility. Letters of state were one thing—pieces of parchment with pretty words on them. But to risk one of the Emperor's ships? Only the Emperor could permit it.

Vergil beat one fist into the other palm. "So we must send to Rome," he said, vexed. "A delay of—"

Sergius Amadeus interrupted him. "Sorry, sir, Rome's no good. Wasting your time, Rome. No official business been done for weeks by the August House, and everyone knows why . . . don't *you*? No? Surprised at Your Sapience. Well, sir, the Crown and Staff—that is to say, the Emperor—has a new girl, the Empress is wild, so himself has gone to Avignon with his doxy. He likes 'em young, always has, no secret. And

herself is not only long in the tooth, but bad-tempered about it. That's a fault *I* could never abide in women, so why should the Emperor? Of course, this is just a bit of fun and games, this latest girl, it won't last—but the scuttlebutt has it that the Imperial marriage won't, either, don't you see. . . ."

Muttering polite phrases, Vergil rose to leave. The Admiral accompanied him topside. Again, the trumpets sounded, the spearmen presented arms, and Vergil prepared to descend into the boat.

"You understand, then," the Admiral said, "that withholding the ship is not of my doing. Rules, you know. Regulations."

"Yes, yes. Certainly. Thank you for—"

The face of the Lord-of-the-Sea grew redder than usual. "Then perhaps you'll be good enough," he said, in a low bellow, "to give me my wind back! I've got to make my inspection tour of the damned fleet, and—"

The wind flapped into the sails with loud cracks. The flagship gave a lurch. Vergil almost tumbled into the boat. Sergius Amadeus shouted his thanks. "'Ware the Huns!" his voice came over the widening gap. "No quarter! And don't pass up the Temple! Two thousand . . ." His voice vanished into the wind, but his gestures were unmistakable.

The Bay of Naples was, for once, its famous blue. Rocked, but not violently, by the wind and water, Vergil pondered. The subject of his thoughts were the words of old, mad Allegra, which he had almost forgotten. "It's the Empire that's wanted." By Cornelia? It had made no sense at the time. How could the widow of an obscure frontier king, daughter of a provincial doge, aspire to the Empire?

But if Admiral Amadeus should be right, if his scuttlebutt was correct, if the Imperial Consortium was going to break up by reason of the Empress's inability to accept the Emperor's infidelity, then—then, perhaps, more than just a gleam of light could be shed on the cat woman's quasi-oracular pronouncement. If there was a chance for a new consort to the

August House, then there was indeed a chance at the Empire. The current consort had no interest in politics, had never used her influence for any more than the award of minor posts to members of her not very influential family. Nothing interested her greatly, except the Emperor—and she could not bring herself to recognize that he was not, could not, be separated from his appetites. An aging, angry woman . . . *and a barren one!*

Surely, though, it was absurd to expect that Cornelia had any hopes of wearing the crown matrimonial herself? She must be older than the one who wore it now. Though was not barren . . .

Of course. Of course! *Of course!* Vergil saw again the curious, calm look that had passed between Cornelia and the Viceroy Agrippa at the stag hunt, when Doge Tauro—displaying Laura's miniature and so loudly boasting—had hinted, broadly, that he and Cornelia's daughter would wed. What could be more natural than that the daughter of a doge of Naples should desire to see her own daughter its dogessa? Why, that she should desire to see that daughter Empress; that was what.

The reigning sovereign never desired more than an excuse to slough off cares of state. How natural, how inevitable, that he should—via a new, young, and beautiful wife—let those cares slip into the hands of . . . say, the Viceroy Agrippa. *He* would not object to becoming the husband of the ambitious dowager, the step-father-in-law of the Emperor. Oh yes, it began to make sense; more and more sense . . . if an Imperial marriage were intended for the Princess Laura, then a great deal more was involved in finding her than maternal concern (which appeared nonetheless genuine) and keeping open the Great High Road. . . .

There was a polite cough. He looked up, blinked, suddenly conscious of his sodden, filthy robes; of the fact that he was tossing on the Bay of Naples, a quarter of a league (or almost) off shore.

"Pardon me, Captain An-Thon," he said. "I'm obliged to

you for your efforts. In fact, if I hadn't been lucky enough to find you and your ship's boat by the Water Stairs—"

"Yes. Right." The Red Man continued to call the strokes, beating with his bolt of wood upon the gunwale, and, although absently, as deftly as any water bailiff. The oarsmen bent to their tasks, the cedar-skin skimmed swiftly over the sea. Vergil returned to his own thoughts, did not emerge from them until they were almost in port. Grain freighters in from Sicily and not yet unladen wallowed heavily in the clotted waters of the harbor, and then the oars flashed and the boat glided beneath a figurehead carved in the shape of a grotesque and heavily stylized bird.

"What ship is this? Why are we here?"

But An-Thon Saphir was already balanced on one foot in a line, grasped Vergil's wrist, did not so much help as haul him aboard. "Mine," he said. "Why not?"

Vergil suddenly had neither mind nor stomach for displaying his present sorry condition again to the whole of Naples. Clean clothes and a chance to wash off blood and grime were certainly available on board the Red Man's ship.

The Red Man led his guest to a cabin carved in cedarwood that came from scented Lebanon, and did the valet's part while Vergil stripped off his clammy garments and bathed in water containing nard and calamus. Offered his pick of the captain's closet, he chose a suit in the local and current mode —fawn-colored shirt and tights, and a black doublet with silver laces.

This done, "I smell fire," said the host, leading him to a place on deck where the sail had been rigged as an awning, for shade. They took seats on the cushions spread out upon a red rug, and the Phoenician poured wine and held out a platter of olives, raisins, and small dried cakes.

"I do not doubt it."

"Each fire has its own odor . . . and this one stinks of Byzantium. Have you been there, by some mage-like art? Or has Byzant fire been brought to you? A gift, I should say, which you did not request, and which brings to my mind

what one of the priests of Tyre, Léo-Cohan by name, said during that fatal siege: 'Beware the Greeks when they come bearing gifts.'"

Vergil, nose dipped into wine goblet, reflected that mad old Dame Allegra had shrieked of Greek fire, and he told the Red Man so. The latter listened to his account of the conflagration at the House of the Brazen Head, then said, "Well, certainly, it's possible that it was a salamanderos. But it's not likely. It takes seven years to hatch one, and, besides, who in Neapolis has the craft to carry out such a project? You and Dr. Clemens. It wasn't either one who did this day's work.

"No—I think your man Iohan was correct. It must have been done with a projectile—a bolt of iron, likely, wrought to carry tow steeped in the Grecian fire. As to who is so skilled in artillery that his catapult could find your house at first attempt, I cannot say. An appeal or at least an inquiry to the Doge's Master at Arms might produce results. In the meanwhile you appealed to Admiral Amadeus. Do you care to say with what results?"

The bosun of the ship alongside, a black man, came to the cancel and, leaning upon his massive arms, exchanged greetings in the Punic dialect with Ebbed-Saphir; and stayed there, at rest, regarding them with untroubled eyes.

"He said I would have to appeal to Caesar, but that Caesar was disporting himself in Southern Gaul, beyond the vexatious reach of appeals."

"Where will you get your ship, then, for Cyprus? Do you know of any private shipmaster who might agree to such a perilous voyage?"

Vergil shook his head, looked at the Red Man.

Who said, "I understand your mind. And I am agreeable. It would be a straight commercial transaction—one thousand ducats for the charter, and the customary demurrage fees if we remain in Cyprus longer than a fortnight. The risk is great, and I can't chance—without protecting myself—missing my

customary cargoes by reason of a late return. What do you say?"

In reply, Vergil gave him his hand. The man took it, then said, hesitating a moment, "There is a condition. I can't afford trouble with the copper cartel. My connection has to remain a secret one. We'll have to rendezvous off Messina, and off Messina is where I'll have to leave you upon our return . . . if we return."

The Phoenician's ship seemed a good one. It would not be easy to get another. Vessels plied constantly between Naples and Messina, and it was worth the inconvenience. He asked one or two more questions; then gave his hand once more. "Remember," said the Red Man. "No one must know. *No one.*"

"No one need know. And no one shall."

The black bosun of the Sicilian freighter rowed him ashore. He spoke a word or two of Latin, not more; and, though declining with a grin Vergil's offer of money, accepted with an even wider grin a jack of wine when put before him.

The Street of the Horse-Jewelers had not quite returned to normal when Vergil got back. Though the ox was reduced to bones being cracked for marrow, the wine still flowed. Allegra's cats lay about her feet, too stuffed to move. She waved him a greeting, so busily finishing a spit of tripes that she couldn't talk. Flagons were lifted toward him as he passed, and winey voices pledged his health and commended his generosity. One or two offered to put out as many fires as he cared to name, at the same reward.

He felt a tug at the hem of his doublet, and, looking down, saw one of the swarming children who had gathered around the ox roast like flies. Doubtless they, too, had been given their share; if not, they would have stolen it. The state of this one's face—grease over the original grime—indicated that he had no complaints in this wise.

"Child, have you eaten enough beef?"

A vigorous nod. "Enough for this whole year, lord."

Acting on what he thought was a reminder that hunger, unlike ox roasts, was a frequent visitor, Vergil put his hand to his purse. The gesture made him think that he had made it more than once before that day. Boncar, the black bosun . . . who else and where else?

"You are the boy who ran to tell me of the fire!" he exclaimed. The child gave a vigorous nod, looked at him with keen, bright eyes, large in his pinched face. "What is your name?" he asked.

"Morlinus, lord."

"I offered you money before and you did not take it. There is, in fact, scarcely enough money in Naples to pay you. Have you a family for whom you want something done?"

Morlinus shook his head. "I work the bellows for Lothar," he said, naming a small baker of the district. "He gives me bread and a place to sleep. But what I want—I'd like"—he hesitated, then words came out in a rush—"lord, I'd like to be a magus, too! And I can't even read."

The smell of the fire hung heavy in the house. To Iohan, Vergil said, "I hope the damage was not great."

"No, sir. Fortunately. But there was a loss of good seasoned timber." Behind him, in the murk, an apprentice sat, still weighing bits of charcoal in the scale, still checking the hourglass before adding them to the fire beneath the closed vessel.

Vergil pointed to him. "Was much time lost from that?" Four years the steady fire had burned, and there were two yet to go before the year in which the heat would be slowly reduced, then the six months of cooling.

"Sir, no time was lost from that at all."

Vergil looked at the man's back. Thus he had sat and performed his careful tasks in the early day; thus he had sat, concentrating and carrying out when the projectile came sounding and crashing; and, while the flames rose and the smoke billowed, he—not knowing but what the very house might burn around and above and beneath him—or, rather, utterly confident that his master's craft and cunning would prevent

any such thing from happening—had continued to sit, intent and diligent.

"Have him take his pick among the small instruments in my cabinet," Vergil said. "Astrolabe, horlogue, or be it what it may. If it is silver, have it enchased in gold. If gold, in silver. If neither, then in both. And upon the chasement let the engraver write the single word *Faithful.*"

He turned to the boy at his side. "Morlinus, could you serve like that? Carefully, and without fear?"

The boy hesitated, then said, "Sir—lord—I would try to be very careful-careful. But I would probably be a little bit afraid."

The Magus smiled. "Iohan, start this one off as a forge boy, and have someone teach him his letters—just Latin ones for a start. Greek, Hebrew, Etruscan, Saracen, Runic, the character of Bouge, and the others, can wait till he has encompassed ciphering. If he learns well, advance him. If he learns ill, he shall have a place at the forge as long as he cares to keep it, with food, clothing, lodging, and wages."

The boy gaped, wide-eyed, said nothing.

"If you learn well," said Iohan, voice rumbling in his great chest, "then you shall lodge with me. And if you learn ill"—he bent his huge arm till the muscle swelled—"then I shall beat you until you learn well."

Morlinus rolled his eyes, trying to take all in at once. He swallowed, Adam's apple bobbing in his scrannel throat, and in a thin voice he said, "I give you leave."

Again, Vergil smiled. "Iohan, send word to Dr. Clemens that I am leaving soon and would like to see him even sooner. Perrin, Tynus, judge when it is best suited that I speak to the men about affairs during my absence, and tell me awhile in advance. You have helped me arrange my gear for a journey before, and I will have you help me for this one."

But he had never made a journey like this one before, and deeply and dismally he knew it.

INTRODUCTION

to

"The Trefoil Company"

Ellery Queen (in whose pages this story was first given light) commenced by calling me "one of the most thought-provoking (and sometimes thought-frustrating) mystery magicians of our time . . ." and concluded by calling it "one of Avram Davidson's most baffling performances." How exceedingly *odd* (this last). It all seems perfectly simple to me.

The Trefoil Company

"No," said Mrs. Nolte, who had been with the firm for quite some time, "that's certainly no matter to take up the first thing with Old Herbert. What the first thing he ever learned was, 'Buy at ninety days, sell at thirty days,' and if you come up with some notion of how to buy at say ninety-*one* days and sell at say twenty-*nine* days, then he'd be the very first partner you want to talk to. But not about serving any little sandwiches with the coffee break, no. *Not* him. Not *him.*"

Marlene, who was new at The Trefoil Company, said, "Well, *I* didn't know. My brother-in-law's sister was the one who showed me this clipping, from the house newspaper where he works, and it's got a lot of *figures* in it: so I thought, Old Herbert."

Mrs. Nolte took Marlene and the clipping in with her to see Mr. George and talk about it. Mrs. Nolte didn't want all the credit if the idea went over, and she didn't want all the blame if it didn't.

"'*Brightens the coffee break and adds to employee efficiency at small cost,*'" he read. Then he rubbed his mustache. "Something to think about," he said, scribbling his initials on the clipping and making a note on his pad. "Tell you what, see if Les has any ideas. I'll tell him you're coming in," he said, reaching to the intercom. "I'll—say, I appreciate your discussing it with me. Never too busy to talk to our own employees."

Lester, who was on top of his funny desk, dressed in leotards and sitting in the lotos position, said nothing to them as they entered. Mrs. Nolte never blinked an eyelash and held

the clipping in front of his face. She must have just stood there a whole minute. Then, all of a sudden, he jumped up, took the clipping from her, and started turning cartwheels across the floor. "Thanks, Lester," she said, giving Marlene a poke, and out they went.

"Oh, he's so handsome!" the girl said. "But what a *nut!*"

Serene was the word for Mrs. Nolte. "When they're that important you don't call them nuts," she said. "You *used* to term them 'essentric,' but now the word is 'creative.' Boy, is he ever creative, Lester."

Marlene snickered. "Well, at least he had something like *clothes* on just now," she said. Mrs. Nolte gave her a look. "Only what I *heard*—but if you ever hear me scream—" The older woman nodded and repeated the last word in a low tone of voice skeptically.

An order went down to the Design Shop, marked *RUSH, Les,* and some weird things came back up. "Darndest-looking cookie cutters I ever seen," was the comment of Al, the foreman. Mr. George spoke to Mrs. Nolte about them. When she took Old Herbert his invariable lunch of a glass of milk, an apple, and a ham sandwich, the weird things were on the plate, all put together somehow.

Old Herbert looked up from his sheets and sheets of figures, and gestured. Mrs. Nolte pressed down on the sandwich. He took the pieces of it apart, easily. Now there were seven or eight cute little sandwiches, all in different and funny designs.

"Man is right," said Old Herbert. "No waste pieces at all. Waste not, want not. Man sometimes has good ideas."

Mrs. Nolte said, "I bet you don't always have the same supper as you do lunch."

"Man doesn't want a sandwich when he comes home from work. Man wants pot roast and potatoes." He squared his gray-suited shoulders, picked up a bite to eat and a sheet of figures.

Mr. George was jovial in the elevator with The Trefoil Company employees. Mr. George was going to a fancy restaurant with a few prospective customers. Sometimes Les cooked

himself a pot of pickled snails or something like that, sometimes he ate a big bag of organic pumpkin chips or something like *that*, and sometimes he was seen in mod clothes at a hot-dog stand wih the shipping clerks.

By the time Mrs. Nolte saw Old Herbert again he had figured out a new way to save the company three mills per gross on another item. Also, he waved his hand at the funny sandwich cutters. "Might pay us to put in a line of those," he said. "Ask Planning to work on it." He picked up his sheets of figures.

Mrs. Nolte took the memo for Planning in to Mr. George for his initials. He was slightly more red-faced than usual and he smelled of the best brandy and was humming as he blocked out a new contract. Les was wearing cricket flannels, and with him and also wearing cricket flannels was a—a—one of them.

"Nolte, this is Darcy Plantagenet from Jamaica who will be working with me on, oh, things," said Lester.

Darcy Plantagenet of Jamaica looked critically at Les's stance. "I said, 'Show me a *leg*,'" said Darcy Plantagenet of Jamaica.

The funny little sandwiches were a big success at the afternoon coffee break (with tea optional) as an experiment. Although none were left over to get stale, yet everyone seemed to have had enough. The concensus was that a breakdown of three-fifths from The Trefoil Company and two-fifths from the Employees' Rec Fund would be sufficient to pay for the little sandwiches in the future. A woman named Elaine, from the steno pool, who was fairly ugly and no chicken, didn't want any, however, and after Mrs. Nolte had conferred with her in the Ladies Lounge and made her blow her nose, they went in to see Mr. George.

"Elaine says she is in the family way, and she names Lester," said Mrs. Nolte, getting right to the point.

Mr. George said, "Oh, my. Well, I am very—I mean, you have my complete—well, now, Elaine, have you discussed this with Lester?"

She nodded. "Either he *laughs*," she said, "or he gives me a

list of the craziest names for children you ever *saw*. Or like that last time he—well, he made me an indecent proposition. I suppose I'll have to destroy myself by jumping off a building or something," she said glumly.

But Mr. George showed how shocked he was and brought her a glass of water himself. "There is a very discreet agency we can contact for you," he said. "Or, there is, I believe, a doctor in, I believe—"

Now it was Elaine's turn to be shocked. Then she lit a cigarette, put her elbows on his desk, and leaned forward. "No, you see," she explained, "I have this aunt and uncle and they never had any children, but I can't show up there while I'm—well, till afterwards, because they got to be able to say it's a regular adoption because of the neighbors."

Mr. George, nodding very rapidly, assured her that he understood perfectly and that all arrangements would be made, including expenses. "Only, you understand, Elaine, that Old Herbert must never know. He just wouldn't understand. So, then, Mrs. Nolte, make out the check for, *you* know—"

He winked elaborately. She knew.

"And—what did you say, Elaine? Oh, certainly. Oh, yes. We want you to come back. And you mustn't think too badly of Les. He is young, you know. And he is very, uh—"

"Creative," said Mrs. Nolte.

At five after five she started turning out lights for the benefit of Old Herbert, who never checked the other floors anyway. Then she turned out the lights in the office of Mr. George and the office of Lester. On the funny desk was an unfinished collage of rose petals, candy wrappers, and bus transfers. And into the changing-room, of course, she never went.

The traffic was worse than usual and it took him a full hour getting home. His mother-in-law was visible two rooms away, as she usually was, no matter what room he happened to be in. His wife said, "I hope you had a good day at the office. The store made another mistake about my charge account and

Meg wants to spend the weekend in New York with that exchange student and his family and of course he hasn't really got a family there and Mr. McDonald telephoned and said he'd call back."

He said, "Oh, nuts."

"Well, that's the way it is, and I can't do anything about it. What I can do anything about is a dry martini, a nice home-cooked meal, lots of loving, and a good night's sleep."

The phone rang and they both turned to it but the mother-in-law got to it first. "Herbert George Lester residence," they heard her say. Then she pointed. He picked up the extension.

"Speaking," he said.

INTRODUCTION

to

"What Strange Stars and Skies"

This began as less than a spoof, as a mere bit of Fun with the Typewriter. I did it (to begin with) purely for my own pleasure . . . and that of Randall Gordon Philip David Garrett, my close friend. My close friend and fellow aficionado of a certain type of Anglo-British literature. One who, I don't know about you, but even as I, keenly relished certain turns of phrase to be found (till then) only in works printed somewhere between John O'Groat's and Land's End. Somehow, as is so often the case, it got away from me. I gave it its head and held on to the carriage. The old London background, I will say, is as authentic as seven months' residence there could make it. This was in 1952, but quite a bit of older days and ways still survived Time, Progress, and Enemy Action. Edward Ferman, of *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* (F&SF, to the faithful), said of it, musingly, "It's really not . . . exactly . . . a story. But it has a *style* . . . The Style is Everything." And someone else (wild horses wouldn't drag . . .) wrote me, with perhaps more vigor than accuracy: "You deserve some sort of congratulations for having devoted thirty perfect pages to setting a stage on which absolutely nothing ever happens."

But I don't believe that; do you?

What Strange Stars and Skies

The terrible affair of Dame Phillipa Garreck, which struck horror in all who knew of her noble life and mysterious disappearance, arose in large measure from her inordinate confidence in her fellow-creatures—particularly such of them as she might, from time to time, in those nocturnal wanderings which so alarmed her family and friends, encounter in circumstances more than commonly distressed. This great-hearted and misfortunate woman would be, we may be sure, the first to deplore any lessening of philanthropy, any diminution of charity or even of charitable feelings, resultant from her own dreadfully sudden and all but inexplicable fate; yet, one feels, such a result is inevitable. I am not aware that Dame Phillipa ever made use of any heraldic devices or mottoes, but, had she done so, *Do what is right, come what may,* would have been eminently appropriate.

It is not any especial sense of competence on my part which has caused me to resolve that a record of the matter should and must be made. Miss Mothermer, Dame Phillipa's faithful secretary-companion, to say nothing of her cousin, Lord Fitz-Morris-Banstock, would each—under ordinary circumstances, of course—be far more capable than I of delineating the events in question. But the circumstances, of course, are as far from being "ordinary" as they can possibly be. Miss Mothermer has, for the past six months next Monday fortnight, been in seclusion at Doctor Hardesty's establishment near Sutton Ho; and, whilst I can state quite certainly the falsehood of the rumor that her affairs have been placed in charge of the Master in Lunacy, nevertheless, Doctor Hardesty is adamant

that the few visitors she is permitted to receive must make no reference whatsoever to the affairs of last Guy Fawkes Day, the man with the false nose, or the unspeakably evil Motilal Smith. As for Lord FitzMorris-Banstock, though I am aware that he has the heart of a lion and nerves of steel, his extreme shyness (in no small measure the result of his unfortunate physical condition) must advertise to all who know him the unlikelihood of his undertaking the task.

It falls to me, therefore, and no one else, to proceed forthwith in setting down the chronicle of those untoward and unhappy events.

Visitors to Argyll Court, which abuts onto Primrose Alley (one of that maze of noisome passages off the Commercial Road which the zeal and conscience of the London County Council cannot much longer suffer to remain untouched), visitors to Argyll Court will have noticed the large signboard affixed to the left-hand door as one enters. Reading, *If The Lord Will, His Word Shall Be Preached Here Each Lord's Day At Seven O'Clock In The Evening. All Welcome,* it gives notice of the Sabbath activities of Major Bohun, whose weekdays are devoted to his sacred labors with The Strict Baptist Tram-Car and Omnibus Tract Society (the name of which appears on a small brass plate under the sign). Had the major been present that Fifth of November, a different story it would be which I have to tell; but he had gone to attend at an Anti-Papistical sermon given to mark the day at the Putney Tabernacle.

The fetid reek of the Court, which has overwhelmed more than one less delicately bred than Dame Phillipa, bears—besides the effluvia of unwashed beds and bodies emanating from the so-called Seaman's Lodging House of Evan-bach Llewellyn, the rotting refuse of the back part of a cookshop of the lowest sort, bad drains, and the putrid odors of Sampson Stone's wool-pullery—tainted breath of the filthy Thames itself, whose clotted waters ebb and flow not far off.

On many an evening when the lowering sun burned dully in the dirty sky and the soiled swans squatted like pigs in the

mudbanks of London River, the tall figure of Dame Phillipa would turn (for the time being) from the waterfront, and make her way, by any one of a variety of routes, towards the quickening traffic of the Commercial Road and Goodman Fields; proceeding not infrequently through Salem Yard, Primrose Alley, and Argyll Court. The fashionable and sweet-smelling ladies of the West End, as well as their wretched and garishly bedaubed fallen sisters, smelling of cheap "scent" and sweetened gin, just at this hour beginning those peregrinations of the East End's mean and squalid streets for which those less tender than Dame Phillipa might think them dead to all shame; were wearing, with fashion's license, their skirts higher than they had ever been before: but Dame Phillipa (though she never criticized the choice of others) still wore hers long, and sometimes with one hand she would lift them an inch or two to avoid the foul pavements—though she never drew back from contact, neither an inch or an instant, with any human being, however filthy or diseased.

Sometimes Miss Mothermer's bird-like little figure was with her friend and employer, perhaps assuming for the moment the burden of the famous Army kit-bag; sometimes—and such times Dame Phillipa walked more slowly—Lord FitzMorris-Banstock accompanied her; but usually only quite late at night, and along the less-frequented thoroughfares, where such people whom they were likely to meet were too preoccupied with their own unhappy concerns, or too brutalized and too calloused, to stare at the muscular but misshapen peer for more than a second or two.

The kit-bag had been the gift of Piggott, bat-man to Dame Phillipa's brother, the late Lt.-Colonel Sir Chiddiock Garrett, when she had sent him out to the Transvaal in hopes that that Province's warmer and dryer air would be kindlier to his gas-ruined lungs than the filthy fogs and sweats of England. The kit-bag usually contained, to my own knowledge, on an average evening, the following:

Five to ten pounds in coins, as well as several ten-shilling notes folded quite small. Two sets of singlets and drawers,

two shirts, and two pairs of stockings—none of them new, but all clean and mended. A dozen slices of bread and margarine, wrapped in packets of two. Ten or twenty copies of a pamphlet-sized edition of the Gospel of St. John in various languages. A britannia-metal pint flask of a good French brandy. A quantity of hard-cooked eggs and an equal supply of salt and pepper in small screws of paper. Four cotton handkerchiefs. First-aid equipment. Two reels of cotton, with needles. A packet of mixed toffees. A Book of Common Prayer. Fifteen packets of five Woodbine cigarettes, into each of which she had thrust six wooden matches. One pocket-mirror. A complete change of infant's clothing. Several small cakes of soap. Several pocket-combs. A pair of scissors.

And three picture-postcards of the Royal Family.

All this arranged with maximum efficiency in minimum space, but not packed so tightly that Dame Phillipa's fingers could not instantly produce the requisite article. It will be observed that she was prepared to deal with a wide variety of occasions.

Tragic, infinitely tragic though it is, not even a person of Dame Phillipa's great experience among what a late American author termed, not infelicitously, The People of the Abyss, could have been prepared either to expect or to deal with such persons as the man wearing the false nose, the woman who offered the antimacassers, and the hideously, the unspeakably evil Motilal Smith.

The night of that Fifth of November found the unfortunates among whom this great lady pursued her noble work no more inclined than in other years to celebrate the delivery from Gunpowder Plot of King James VI and I and his English Parliament. Here and there, to be sure, in the glare of the gin-palaces of the main thoroughfares, a group of grimy and tattered children had gotten up an even more unsavory Guy; for them Dame Phillipa had provided herself with a large supply of pennies. But that night as on most other nights there was little enough evidence of innocent gaiety. There are multi-

tudes, literally multitudes, in this vast labyrinth of London for whom the normal institutions of a human society seem barely to exist. There are physicians in the East End, hospitals, and dispensaries; yet numbers past counting will suffer injury and disease and creep off to die like brutes in their dim corners, or, if they are fortunate, by brute strength survive. There are public baths in every borough, and facilities for washing clothes, yet many never touch water to their skins, and wear their rags unchanged till they rot. Babes are born without benefit of any human witness to the event save their own wretched mothers, though a word to the great hospital in Whitechapel Road will bring midwife and physician without charge. And while eating-places abound, from quite decent restaurants down to the dirty holes-in-the-wall offering tupenny cups of tea and sixpenny papers of breaded smelts and greasy chips, and while private and public charity arrangements guarantee that no one need quite die of hunger who will ask to be fed, no day goes by without its toll from famine of those who—having their hoards of copper and silver—are disabled by their madness from spending either tuppence or shilling; or who find it much, much easier to die like dogs in their secluded kennels than come forward and declare their needs.

As the pigeons in Trafalgar Square have learned when and where the old man with the bag of breadcrumbs will appear, as the ownerless cats near Billingsgate can tell what time and in what place to scavenge for the scraps of fish the dustmen miss, as the rats in the sewers beneath Smithfield know without error the manner in which "they seek their meet from God"; just so, from this stinking alley and from that crumbling tenement, here from underneath a dripping archway and there from a disused warehouse, slinking and creeping and peering fearfully and furtively and sidling with their ragged backs pressed against ragged walls, there appeared by one and by one cast-offs—one must call them "humans," for what other name is theirs?—the self-exiled, the utterly incapable, to take in their quick reptilian grasp the things Dame Phillipa

had for them. She knew, knew by instinct and knew by practice, which ones would benefit by a shilling and which by half-a-crown; she knew those to whom money was of no more use than cowry-shells but who would relish the meat of a hard-cooked egg and the savor of the tiny scrap of seasoning which went with it; knew those who would be hopelessly baffled by the labor of cracking the shell but who could manage to rip the paper off a packet of bread and margarine (huddled and crouched in the rank, familiar darkness of their burrows, tearing the soft food with their toothless gums); knew those who would fight, squealing or wordlessly, fight like cornered stoats rather than surrender a single one of the unspeakably filthy rags into which their unspeakably filthy bodies were sewn; and those who would strip by some forgotten water-tap and wash themselves and put on the clean things she provided—but only if provided them, having no longer in many cases the ability to provide either soap or singlets for themselves. She also knew who could be coaxed another foot or two up the path to self-respect by the tempting bait of mirror and comb, the subtle appeal such things made to the ravaged remnants of pride. And she knew when even a handful of toffee or a small picture of the charismatic King and Queen could brighten a dim corner of an eroded mind.

And often (though not always) with her on this humble and saintly mission went her faithful secretary-companion, Miss Mothermer, though by herself Miss Mothermer would have died a thousand dreadful deaths in such places; and sometimes Dame Phillipa was accompanied by her unhappy and unfortunate cousin, Lord FitzMorris-Banstock, though usually he shunned the company of any but his few, familiar servants.

On this particular night, Mawhinney, his chauffeur-footman, had been obliged by a Guy Fawkes bonfire and its attendant crowd to drive the heavily curtained Rolls motorcar by a different and less familiar route; hence he arrived later at the usual place of rendezvous. Miss Mothermer and Dame

Phillipa, tall figure and tiny one, picture-hat and turban, had come by and, as was the unspoken understanding, had not tarried. So many considerations affected the presence or absence of Lord FitzMorris-Banstock: was he engaged in a conversation particularly interesting by means of his amateur wireless radio equipment, was he in more pain than a certain degree, was he in less pain than a certain degree, was the moon too bright—for one or more of these reasons the starcurs't noble lord might not come despite his having said he might.

The obedient Mawhinney did not turn his head as his master slowly and awkwardly crept from the vehicle, inch by inch over the black silk upholstery. Nor, well-trained, did he suggest leaving the car in a garage and coming with his master. He waited a few moments after the door closed, then he drove straightway to Banstock House, where he stayed for precisely three hours, turning the Tarot cards over and over again with old Gules, the butler, and Mrs. Ox, the cook. On this Fifth of November night they observed that the Priestess, the Fool, and the Hanged Man turned up with more than their common frequency; and were much exercized to conjecture what, if anything, this might portend: and for whom.

And at the conclusion of three hours he put on his cap and coat and drove back to the place set.

Besides those nameless (and all but formless) figures from the silent world, of whom I had spoken above, there were others who awaited and welcomed Dame Phillipa's presence; and among them were women with names like Flossie and Jewel and Our Rose, Clarabel and Princess Mick and Jenny the Hen, Two-Bob Betty and Opaline and Queeny-Kate. She spoke to every one of them, gave them (if they required it, or thought they might: or if Dame Phillipa thought they might) the money needed to make up the sum demanded by their "friends" or "protectors"; the money for rent or food or what it might be, if they had passed the stage where their earnings could possibly be enough to concern the swine who had earlier lived on them. She tended to their cuts and bruises the

poor wretches received in the way of business, and which they were too ashamed to bring before the very proper nurses and the young, lightheartedly cruel, interns.

Sometimes she interceded for them with the police, and sometimes she summoned the police to their assistance; her manner of doing this was to direct Miss Mothermer to blow upon the police whistle she wore upon a lanyard, Dame Phillipa not liking the vibration this made on her lips.

Those to whom Dame Phillipa may have seemed but a tall, gaunt eccentric woman, given to wearing old-fashioned dresses, and hats which ill became her, would do well to recollect that she was among the very first to be honored with the title of *dame;* and that His Majesty's Government did not take this step exclusively in recognition of her work prior to her retirement as an educationist, or on behalf of the Woman's Sufferage Movement through entirely legal methods.

It was close to midnight when the two ladies arrived in Primrose Alley and Dame Phillipa rapped lightly with her walking-stick upon the window of a woman in whose maternity she had interested herself: actually persuading the young woman, who was not over-bright, to accept medical attention, eat something resembling proper food, and have the child christened in the nearby and unfortunately ill-attended Church of St. Gustave Widdershins. She rapped a second time —loud enough (she hoped) to wake the mother, but not loud enough to wake the child. As it happened it was the father she woke, a young man who circulated among three or four women in a sort of tandem polygamy; and who informed the lady that the baby had been sent to its mother's people in Wales, and who begged her, not altogether disdainfully, for sweet Christ's sake to bugger off and let him get back to sleep again.

Dame Phillipa left him to his feculent slumbers in absolute but resigned certainty that this time next year she would again be called upon to swaddle, victual, and renounce by proxy the World, the Flesh, and the Devil, on behalf of another squalling token of his vigor—unless the young woman

should perhaps miscarry, as she had done twice before, or carry out her own suggestion of dropping the child in the River, by accident, like.

It was as she turned from the window, then, that Dame Phillipa first clearly observed the man wearing the false nose—as she thought, because of the Guy Fawkes festivities; though it appears Miss Mothermer instantly suspected that he did so by way of disguise—although she had been aware, without giving consideration to the matter, that there had been footsteps behind her. All inquiries as to this man's identity or motive have failed, but the singularity of his appearance is such that, unless he has been secretly conveyed out of the Kingdom, he cannot long continue to evade the vigilance of the police.

Thinking nothing further of the matter, as we may assume, Dame Phillipa and her companion continued their way into Argyll Court. The sound of voices, and the odor of hot gin and lemon, both proceeding from a bow-window greatly resembling in carving and overhang the forecastle of an ancient sailing-ship, directed her attention to the gas-jet which burned redly in the close air, illuminating the sign of the seaman's lodging-house. In times gone bye, Evan-bach Llewellyn had been a notorious crimp. Board regulations, closely attended to, had almost put a stop to this, as far as vessels of British register were concerned. It was widely said, however, and widely believed, that the masters of foreign vessels putting into London with cargoes of coffee, copra, palm oil, fuel oil, hardwood and pulpwood; and finding members of their crew swallowed up by The Smoke, often appealed to the giant Welshman (he sang bass in the choir of Capel Cymrig) for replacements; and did not appeal in vain. Protests entered by surprised seamen, whose heads cleared of chloral in the Bay of Biscay, when they found themselves on board of strange vessels whose language they often did not recognize, would in the general course of things prove quite bootless.

As Dame Phillipa's attention was distracted to the window, where she saw the familiar-enough silhouette of Sampson

Stone, the wool-puller, who was a close crony of the crimp, smoking the churchwarden he affected when at leisure; two men, who must have been huddled silently at the other side of the court, came suddenly towards the two ladies, reeling and cursing, striking fiercely at one another, and giving off the fumes of that poisonous mixture of methylated spirits and cheap port wine commonly called *red biddy*. The ladies took a few steps in confusion, not knowing precisely what course to take, nor having much time to consider it: they could not go forward, because of the two men fighting, and it seemed that when they attempted to walk to the side, the bruisers were there, cutting off their way, too.

Dame Phillipa therefore turned quickly, leading Miss Mothermer in the same direction, but stopped short, as out of Primrose Alley, whence they had just issued, darted the man who had been wearing the false nose. He made a curious sound as he did so; if he spoke words is not certain; what *is* certain is that he had plucked the false pasteboard from his face—it was hideously pockmarked—and that the flesh underneath was a mere convoluted hollow, like some gross navel, but nothing like a human nose.

Miss Mothermer gave a stifled cry, and drew back, but Dame Phillipa, though certainly no less startled, placed a reassuring hand on her companion's arm, and courteously awaited what this unfortunate might have to say or to ask. He beckoned, he gestured, he mewled and gibbered. Murmuring to Miss Mothermer that he evidently stood in need of some assistance, and that they were bound to endeavor to find what it was, Dame Phillipa stepped forward to follow him. For an instant only Miss Mothermer hesitated—but the two larrikins menaced from behind, she was too shy to demand assistance of Sampson Stone (who seemed unaware of their presence), and she was too fearful for herself and for Dame Phillipa to allow her to go on alone; perforce she followed. She followed into a door which stood open as if waiting.

If her testimony (and if one may give so succinct a name to confused and diffused ramblings noted down by Doctor

Hardesty over a period of several months) may be relied on, the door lay but a few paces into Primrose Alley. The facts, however, are that no such door exists. The upper part of the Alley contains the tenements officially designated as Gubbinses' Buildings and called, commonly, "the Jakes"; entrance is through a covered archway twenty feet long which divides into two shallow flights of steps from each of which a hallway leads to the individual apartments. It was in one of these, the window and not the door of which faced the Alley, that the young parents of Dame Phillipa Garreck's godchild were lodging. The lower part of the Alley on the same side is occupied by the blind bulk of the back of the old flour warehouse. The opposite side is lined with the infamous Archways, wherein there are no doors at all. There are, it is true, two doors of sorts in the warehouse itself, but one is bricked up and the other is both rusted shut and locked from the inside. A search of the premises via the main gate failed to show any signs that it had been opened in recent years—or, indeed, that it could have been.

It was shortly after one o'clock on the morning of the sixth of November that Lord FitzMorris-Banstock, toiling painfully through Thirza Street, in the direction of Devonport Passage, received (or perhaps I should say, became aware of) an impression that he should retrace his steps and then head north. There is no need to suggest telepathy and certainly none to mention the supranormal in conjunction with this impression: Miss Mothermer was blowing the police-whistle, blowing it with lips which trembled in terror, and so weak and feeble was the sound produced that no police constable had heard it. On the conscious level of his mind Lord FitzMorris did not hear it, either. But there are sensual perceptions of which the normal senses are not aware, and it was these, which there can be no doubt that he (perhaps in compensation, perhaps sharpened by suffering, perhaps by both) possesses to an unusual degree, which heard the sound and translated it. He obeyed the impulse, walking as fast as he could, and as he

walked he was aware of the usual noises and movements in the darkness—rustlings and shufflings and whispers, breathings and mutterings—which betokened the presence of various of Dame Phillipa Garreck's charges. It seemed to him that they were of a different frequency, as he put it to himself, accustomed to think in wireless terms, this night. That they were uncommonly uneasy. It seemed to him that he could sense their terror.

And as he turned the corner into Salem Yard he saw something glitter, he saw something flash, and he knew in that instant that it was the famous Negrohead opal, which he had seen that one time before when his lady-cousin occasioned the assistance of the Metropolitan Police to rescue the girl Bessie Lovejoy, then in process of being purchased for the Khowadja of Al-Khebur by the ineffably evil Motilal Smith.

It glittered and flashed in the cold and the darkness, and then it was gone.

Fenugreek Close is long and narrow and ill-lit, its western and longest extremity (where the Lascar, Bin-Ali, perished with the cold on the night of St. Sylvester) being a *cul-de-sac* inhabited—when it is inhabited at all—by Oriental seamen who club together and rest the premises whilst they await a ship. But there were none such that night. It was there, pressed against the blank and filthy wall, pressing feebly as if her wren-like little body might obtain entry and safety and sanctuary, sobbing in almost incoherent terror, that Lord Fitz-Morris-Banstock found the crouching form of Miss Mothermer. The police-whistle was subsequently found in the infamous Archways, and Miss Mothermer has insisted that, although she would have sounded it, she did not, for (she says) she could not find it; although she remembers Dame Phillipa pressing it into her hand. On this point she is quite vehement, yet one is no more apt to credit it than her statement about the open door towards which they were led by the man without a nose: for as Miss Mothermer did not blow upon the whistle, who did?

The noble and misfortunate lord did not waste breath in-

quiring of his cousin's companion if she were all right, it being patent that she was not. He demanded, instead, what had become of Dame Phillipa; and upon hearing the name, Miss Mothermer became first quite hysterical and then unconscious. Lord FitzMorris lifted her up and carried her to the place of rendezvous where, exactly on time, Mawhinney, his chauffeur-footman, had just arrived with the Rolls motorcar. They drove immediately to Banstock House where she was given brandy and put to bed by Mrs. Ox, the cook, whilst Lord FitzMorris summoned the police.

An alarm had already been given, or, at any rate, an alarm of sorts. One of the wretchedly miserable folk to whose succor Dame Phillipa devoted so much of her time, having somehow learned that she was in danger, had informed Police-Sergeant L. Robinson to this effect. This man's name is not known. He is, or at any event was, called by the curious nickname of "Tea and Two Slices," these being the only words which he was usually heard to utter, and then only in a sort of whisper when ordering the only items he was known to eat. His age, background, residence, and present whereabouts are equally unknown. He had apparently an absolute horror of well-lighted and much-frequented places and an utter terror of policemen, one cannot tell why, and it may be hard to imagine what agonies and efforts it must have cost him to make his way to the police-station and inform Sergeant Robinson that he must go at once and "help the lady." Unfortunately and for unknown reasons, he chose to make his way to the police-station in Whitechapel instead of to the nearer one in Shadwell. His testimony would be of the utmost importance, but it cannot now be obtained, for, after giving the alarm, he scurried forth into the night again and has not since been seen.

The matter is otherwise with the testimony of the seaman, Greenbriar. It is available, it is copious, it fits in with that of Miss Mothermer, it is unfortunate that it is quite unbelievable. Unbelievable, that is, unless one is willing to cast aside every conceivable limit of credulity and to accept that on the night of Guy Fawkes Day in this year of our sovereign lord King

George V the great and ancient city of London was the scene of a visitation more horrible than any in its previous history.

Albert Edward Greenbriar, Able-Bodied Seaman, is thirty-one years of age, and except for two occasions on which he was fined, respectively, £2 and £2.10, for being drunk and disorderly, has never been in any trouble with the authorities. On the first of November he landed at St. Katherine Docks aboard the merchant vessel *Salem Tower,* from the Straits Settlements with a cargo of rubber, copra, and tinned pine-apples. Neither the *Salem Tower* nor Greenbriar had been in the United Kingdom for the space of eleven months, and, consequently, when paid off, he was in possession of a considerable sum of money. In the course of one week he had, with the assistance of several women who are probably prostitutes, dissipated the entire sum. On discovering this, the women, who share a communal flat in Poplar, asked him to leave.

It was Greenbriar's intention to obtain another ship, but in this endeavor he was unsuccessful. He managed to obtain a loan of half-a-crown from a casual acquaintance and spent the night at a bed-and-breakfast place in Ropemakers Fields, Limehouse. The following evening, footsore and hungry, save for a single sixpence, penniless, he found himself in the Commercial Road, where he entered a cookshop whose signboard announced that good tea, bread, smelts and chips were obtainable for that sum. Obtainable they were, good they were not, but he was in no position to object. Having finished, he inquired the way to the convenience, and there retired. On emerging he observed that he was next to the back door which opened onto Argyll Court, although he did not know that was its name, and on looking out he espied a sign.

The sign is still there; in white calligraphy of a fine Spencerian sort up on a black background it reads,

Seamen's Lodging House
Good Beds
E. Llewellyn, Prop.

Albert Edward Greenbriar entered, rang the bell for the governor, and, upon the instant, saw a panel open in the wall, through which a face looked at him. It was the face of a gigantic cherub, white and dimpled and bland, surmounted by a poll of curly hair; in short, it was the face of Evan-bach Llewellyn. Greenbriar in a few words stated his situation and offered to give over his seaman's papers as a surety until such time as he might obtain a ship, in return for bed and board. The governor thrust forth a huge, pale hand, took the documents, slid shut the panel, and presently appeared to beckon Greenbriar down a corridor, at the end of which was a dimly lit dormitory. He gave him a thin blanket which was all in all not quite so filthy as it might have been, informed him that gaming and novel-reading were not permitted on the premises, invited him to take any bed he chose, and forthwith withdrew.

Greenbriar found an empty pallet, under the head of which he placed his shoes, not so much as a pillow as a precaution, drew the cover about him and fell instantly asleep. He was awakened several times by the entry of other men, some of whom appeared to have been flung rather than escorted into the room, and once he was awakened by the sound of the proprietor playing upon a small patent organ a hymn of his own composition on the subject of the Priesthood of Melchisedec. Greenbriar gazed at the tiny blue tip of the night-light as it burned tremulously on the twisted jet and on the odd and grotesque shadows cast upon the stained and damp-streaked walls by the tossings and turnings of the lodgers, and listened to the no less odd nor grotesque noises made by them. It was only by the start he gave upon being awakened that he realized that he had gone to sleep again.

Who awakened him he did not know, but, although the light was no brighter, there was a stir in the dormitory and men were getting to their feet and he heard the word "scoff" repeated several times. He dashed water on his face and moved with the others into what was evidently the main kitchen of the establishment. To his surprise he observed that the clock

there read eleven o'clock. It was too dark to be morning. Evidently he had slept only a few hours or else he had slept round the clock and a bit more. It seemed an odd hour for victuals but he was beginning to conceive the idea that this was an odd place.

Broiled bloaters, fried sausage, potatoes, cabbage and sprouts were being turned out of pots and pans and dumped higgeldy-piggeldy onto cracked and not over-clean plates; and tea was steaming in coarse crockery cups. No one ventured to eat or drink, however, until Evan-bach Llewellyn had pronounced a grace in the Cymric tongue and immediately after the Amen imparted a piece of information, *videlicet* that he had got a ship for them. It was a good ship, too, he said; they would all be very pleased with it; it was not one of their dirty old English tubs but a fine modern vessel: he urged them all to eat hearty of the scoff, or victuals, so that no time need be lost in getting aboard, and he then produced a large bottle of gin and proceeded to pour a generous portion into each cup, with many assurances that it was free and would come out of his own commission.

No sooner had he given the signal, with a wave of his pale and dimpled paw, than the men fell to like so many ravening wolves, cramming the hot food into their mouths and gulping down the gin and lemon tea. Greenbriar concedes that the aliment was savory, and, finding himself hungrier than he had thought, took but a hasty swallow of the drink before addressing himself at length to the solids. A furtive movement at his elbow caused him to cease, abruptly. The man to his right, a hulking fellow with red hair and an exceedingly dirty face, was emptying his mug and looking at him out of the corner of his eye. It took but a second to ascertain that the wretched fellow had all but drained his own supply and then switched cups and was now doing away with Greenbriar's, who contented himself with stealing a link of the man's sausage whilst the latter was elaborately gazing elsewhere. Steeling himself to meet this man's resentment, he was dumbfounded to ob-

serve the fellow fall upon his face into the mashed potatoes and sprouts on his plate.

Within a matter of seconds, almost as if it were one of the contagious seizures which takes hold at times of the unfortunate patients of an institution for the epileptic—within a matter of seconds, then, all the others at the table sank down into unconsciousness, and Greenbriar, following suit, knew no more.

He awoke to a scene of more than Gothic horror.

He lay with his head against the silent form of another man; he could feel the weight of another on his legs, and others lay like dead men all about. They were not dead, he knew, for he could hear them breathing. The room where they lay was walled and floored and roofed in stone and at regular intervals were carvings in bas-relief of a strange and totally unfamiliar kind. Paraffin lamps were set into niches here and there. There was a humming noise whose origin was not visible to him. Very slowly, so as not to attract attention (for he could hear voices), Greenbriar turned his head. As he did so he felt that there was a rope tied round his neck, and a sudden and quite involuntary convulsive movement which he gave upon this discovery disclosed to him that his hands took a quite long time in shifting his position so as to obtain some intelligence of his surroundings. If what he had seen before was strange and uneasy enough, what he saw now was sufficient to deprive him for the moment of the use of his limbs altogether.

Off to one side, bound and linked arms to arms and necks to necks like a prostrate caffle of slaves, and to all appearances also unconscious, were the bodies of a number of women; how many, he could not say, but evidently less than the number of the men. This, however, and however shocking even to the sensibilities of a seafarer, this was nothing—

Directly in front of his gaze, which was at an angle, and seated upon a sort of altar, was a figure as it were out of eastern clime: red-bronze in color, hideous of visage, and with six

arms. Bowing low before it was, as Greenbriar then thought, a man, who addressed it in placatory tones and with many fawning gestures.

No other thought occurred to the British sailor at that moment but that he was in some sort of clandestine Hindu temple and that he and all his other companions would presently be sacrificed before this idol; not being aware that such is not the nature or character of the Hindu religion, which contains, despite numerous errors and not a few gross impostures, many sublime and lofty thoughts. But be that as it may; the red-bronze-colored figure proceeded to move its limbs, the torso stirred, the entire body leaned forward. The figure spoke, and as it spoke, it seized the man with four of its limbs and struck him with the other two. Then it dropped him. As he scrambled to his feet his face was turned so that the sailor could see it, and he saw that it had no nose.

Greenbriar must once again have passed into unconsciousness. When again he awoke he could not see the "idol," the altar was empty, but he could hear its voice. It was speaking in anger, and as one used to command. Another voice began when this one (deep, hollow, dreadful) had ceased; the new voice was a thin one, and it took a moment for him to realize that, despite its curious snuffling quality, it was speaking a sort of English. Two other voices replied to it, also in English; one was that of Evan-bach Llewellyn, the other one he did not know. By his description of both speech and speaker, for in a moment the latter moved into view, it is apparent that this was no other than the inhuman and unconscionable Motilal Smith.

The countenance of Motilal Smith, once observed, is not one likely ever to be forgotten, and proves a singular and disturbing exception to the rule that Eurasians are generally of a comely appearance; it being broad and frog-like in its flatness, protuberance of the eyes (which are green and wet-looking), reverse U-shaped mouth, and profusion of warts or wart-like swellings. Most striking of all, however, is the air of slyness,

malevolence, of hostility both overt and covert, towards everything which is kindly and decent and, in a word, human.

Motilal Smith has since his first appearance in the United Kingdom been the subject of unremitting police attention, and for some time now has gained the sinister distinction of being mentioned more often in the Annual Report of the League of Nations Commission on the Traffic in Women and Children than any other resident of London. He has often been arrested and detained on suspicion, but the impossibility of bringing witnesses to testify against him has invariably resulted in his release. Evidences of his nefarious commerce have come from places so far distant as the Province of Santa Cruz in the Republic of Bolivia and the Native Indian States of Patiala and Cooch Behar, as well as two of the Trucial Sheikdoms, the Free City of Danzig, and Deaf Smith County in the Commonwealth of Texas; none of which, it must be regretted, is admissible in proceedings at the Old Bailey. As he is a British subject by birth, he can be neither deported nor denied admission on his return from frequent trips abroad. He is known to be always ready to purchase, he is entirely eclectic as to the nature of the merchandise, and he pays well and he pays in gold.

It is necessary only to add that, offered any obstacle, affront, or rebuff, he is unremitting in his hostility, which combines the industry of the West with the patience of the East. Smith occupies both sides of the semi-detached villa in Maida Vale of which he owns the freehold; its interior is crammed with opulent furnishings from all round the world, and stinks of stale beer, spilt gin, incense, curry, raw fish, the foul breaths and bodies of those he deals with, and chips fried in ghee.

His long, lank, and clotted hair is covered in scented grease, and on his fingers are rings of rubies, diamonds, pearls and other famous precious stones worth with their settings a prince's ransom. Add only the Negrohead opal worn in his stained silk four-in-hand, (and for which Second Officer Smollet of the *Cutty Sark* is said to have strangled Mrs. Pigler), and

there you have the creature Motilal Smith in all his repulsive essence.

Something, it seemed, was "not enough." There was an insufficiency of . . . something. This it was which occasioned the wrath of the person or creature with the six arms. And he was also in great concern because of a shortage of time. All four—the creature with six arms, the man without a nose, Smith and Llewellyn—kept moving about. Presently there was the scrape of wood and then a thud and then the wet and dirty odor of the River. The thought occurred to Greenbriar that they might be thrown into the Thames, which was then at high tide, he reflected that (in common with a great many seamen) he had never learned to swim; and then, for a third time, he fainted.

When he awoke he could hear someone singing the Doxology, and he thought—so he says—that he had died and was now in Heaven. One glance as he opened his eyes was enough to undeceive him. He lay where he had before and everything was as it was before, save that there were two people present who he is certain were not there before, and by his description of them they were clearly Dame Phillipa Garreck and her secretary-companion, Miss Mothermer.

Miss Mothermer was crouched down with her hands over her eyes, whether in prayer or terror or not inconceivably both, he could not say. Dame Phillipa however, was otherwise engaged, for she moved from insensate figure to insensate figure and the light gleamed upon the scissors with which she was severing their bonds. She spoke to each, shook them, but was able to elicit no response. At this, Greenbriar regained his voice and entreated her help. She proceeded to cut the ropes which bound him, and left off her singing of the Doxology to inquire of him if he had any knowledge as to why they were all of them being detained, and what was intended to be done with them.

He was assuring her that he did not know, when a door opened and Miss Mothermer began to scream.

That a fight ensued is certain. Greenbriar was badly cut

about and Miss Mothermer received bruises which were a long time in vanishing, though in this I refer only to bruises of the flesh; those of the spirit are still, alas, with her. But he can provide us with few details of the conflict. Certain, it is, that he escaped; equally certain, so did Miss Mothermer. Dame Phillipa plainly did not. Greenbriar was discovered at about three in the morning wandering in a daze in the vicinity of the Mile End Road by a very conscientious alien named Grebowski or Grebowsky, who summoned medical attention and the police. Little or no attention would or could have been paid to Greenbriar's account, had it not been for his description of the two ladies. His relation, dovetailing as it did with that of Miss Mothermer, left the police no choice but to cause a search to be made of the area of Argyll Court, in one corner of which a false nose was found.

Acting on the information received and under authority of a warrant, Superintendent Sneeth, together with a police-sergeant and a number of constables, entered Llewellyn's premises, which they found completely deserted. Soundings of the walls and floors indicated the presence of passageways and rooms which could have had no place in a properly-conducted establishment licensed under the Common Lodging-Houses Act, and these were broken into. A cap belonging to Greenbriar was found, as was part of the lanyard of Dame Phillipa's police-whistle, in one of these corridors. There was a perfect maze or rabbit-warren of them, and, on the lowest level, there was discovered that chamber, the existence of which was previously publicly unknown, and which Professor Singleton of the University of London has pronounced to be a genuine Mithrarium of the reign of Marcus Aurelius, or, perhaps, Nerva; and which was used by the unscrupulous Llewellyn for the illicit portion of his professional activity. It would have been here that the captives were assembled, if Greenbriar's account is to be believed. What is, as a first premise, obvious, is that it cannot possibly be believed.

That Lord FitzMorris-Banstock has chosen to believe it is, I am constrained to say, a greater testimony to the powers of

his imagination than to any inherently credible elements in the story. The man Greenbriar now forms part of the staff of Banstock House; this is entirely the affair of Lord FitzMorris himself, and requires no comment on my own part, nor shall it obtain any. It may, however, be just as well to include some opinions and observations which are the fruits of Lord FitzMorris's very understandably deep concern in this tragic and intensely puzzling affair.

He has collected a number of reports of some sort of aquatic disturbance moving downstream from London River early in the morning of the sixth of November just about the time of the turning of the tide. To this he compares a report of the Astronomer Royal's concerning an arc of light which appeared off the Nore immediately subsequent. These have led him to the opinion that a craft of unknown origin and nature moved underwater from London to the sea and then rose not only above the surface of the water but into the air itself. This craft or vessel was captained by the creature with the six arms, and the man without a nose would have been an inferior officer aboard of her. Somehow this vessel became short of personnel and applied to Evan-bach Llewellyn to make up the shortage by crimping or shanghaiing the requisite number. For reasons which cannot be known and concerning which I, for one, would rather not speculate, several women were also required (Lord FitzMorris is of the opinion that they were required only for such duties as members of their sex commonly fulfill in the mercantile navies of various foreign nations, such as service in the steward's branch). This being out of Llewellyn's line of business, an appeal was made by him to the notorious and wicked Motilal Smith, who is known to have left his headquarters at the semi-detached villa in Maida Vale on the Fifth of November, whither he never returned.

Lord FitzMorris suggests two possible provenances for this curious and hypothetical vessel. Suppose, he suggests, the being with the six arms to have been the original of the many East Indian and Buddhist myths depicting such creatures. It

is likely then, that the ship or submarine-airplane emanated from the vast and unexplored regions in the mountains which ring round the northern plateau of Tibet, the inhabitants of which have for centuries been rumored to possess knowledge far surpassing ours, and which they jealously guard from the mundane world. The other possibility is even less likely, and is reminiscent of I fear, far more of the romances associated with the pen of Mr. Herbert G. Wells, a journalist of radical tendencies, than with proper scientific attitudes. Do not the discoveries of Professor Schiaparelli, establishing that there are canals upon the planet Mars, demonstrate that the inhabitants thereof must be given to agricultural pursuits? In which case, how unlikely that they should engage themselves in filibustering or blackbirding expeditions to, of all conceivable places, the civilized capital city of the British Empire!

Lord FitzMorris thinks that this theoretical craft of his must have carried off the unscrupulous Evan Llewellyn in order to make up the tally of captives; how much more likely it is that this wicked man has merely fled to escape detection, prosecution, and punishment—perhaps to the mountains of wild Wales, where the King's writ runneth scarcely more than it does in the mountains of Tibet.

Concerning the present whereabouts of Motilal Smith, we are on firmer ground. That he intended to devise harm to Dame Phillipa, who had on far more than one occasion interfered with him in his nefarious traffickings, we need not doubt. The close search of Superintendent Sneeth of the premises on and about Argyll Court, Primrose Alley, Fenugreek Close and Salem Yard uncovered a sodden mass of human clay lying part in and part out of a pool of muck far under the notorious Archways. It was the drowned body of Motilal Smith himself; both from the evidence of his own powerful physique and the presence of many footprints thereabouts, it is clear that a number of persons were required, and were found, to force him into that fatal submersion. The friends—silent though they are to the world, dumb by virtue of their affliction and suffering—the friends of Dame

Phillipa Garreck, the so-called and by no means ill-named People of the Abyss, whom she so constantly and so assiduously attended upon, had avenged their one friend and sole protector. It must now, one fears, go ill with them. The body of this unspeakably evil man, as well as his entire and vast estate (except the famous Negrohead opal, which was never found), was at once claimed by his half-brother, Mr. Bertram Bannerjee. The body was removed to Benares, and there subjected at the Burning Ghauts to that incomplete process of combustion peculiar to the Hindu persuasion; and has long since become the prey of the wandering crocodiles which scavenge perpetually up and down the sacred waters of the River Gunga.

As I commence my last words for the present on the subject of this entire tragic affair I must confess myself baffled. Inacceptable as are Lord FitzMorris's theories, there are really no others that I can offer in their place. All is uncertainty. All, that is, save my conviction that Dame Phillipa's noble and humanitarian labors still continue, no matter under what strange stars and skies.

INTRODUCTION

to

"The Necessity of His Condition"

Really, I have, in part, to thank *Life* magazine for first implanting in my mind a certain detail of the Slave Code on which this story is based (it dealt, I believe, with a nephew of one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence). This detail came to my attention years later during my long research into the institution of slavery in the United States as background for a projected article on the Dred Scott decision (the article brought a letter from a great-granddaughter of Chief Justice Taney; she found only one error in it). The research produced much that was new to me, all of it of course unpleasant: did you know, for instance, that (I believe) 300,000 Free Negroes themselves owned slaves?—and it also produced this story. It also produced the Queen's* Award, the first large sum of money I had ever made. It is neither fantasy nor science fiction: although, God knows, I could wish it were.

* Ellery, not Elizabeth.

The Necessity of His Condition

Sholto Hill was mostly residential property, but it had its commercial district in the shape of Persimmon Street and Rampart Street, the latter named after some long-forgotten barricade stormed and destroyed by Benedict Arnold (wearing a British uniform and eaten with bitterness and perverted pride). Persimmon Street, running up-slope, entered the middle of Rampart at right angles, and went no farther. This section, with its red brick houses and shops, its warehouses and offices, was called The T, and it smelled of tobacco and potatoes and molasses and goober peas and dried fish and beer and cheap cookshop food and (the spit-and-whittle humorists claimed) old man Bailiss' office, where the windows were never opened—never had *been* opened, they said, never were *made* to be opened. Any smell off the street or farms or stables that found its way up to Bailiss' office was imprisoned there for life, they said. Old man Bailiss knew what they said, knew pretty much everything that went on anywhere; but he purely didn't care. He didn't have to, they said.

J. Bailiss, Attorney-at-Law (his worn old sign said), had a large practice and little competition. James Bailiss, Broker (his newer, but by no means new, sign), did an extensive business; again, with little competition. The premises of the latter business were located, not in The T, but in a whitewashed stone structure with thick doors and barred windows, down in The Bottom—as it was called—near the river, the canal, and the railroad line.

James Bailiss, Broker, was not received socially. Nobody expected that bothered him much. Nothing bothered old man

Bailiss much—Bailiss, with his old white hat and his old black coat and his old cowhide shoes that looked old even when they were new—turned old on the shoemaker's last (the spit-and-whittle crowd claimed) directly they heard whose feet they were destined for.

It was about twenty-five years earlier, in 1825, that an advertisement—the first of its kind—appeared in the local newspaper.

"*Take Notice!* (it began). James Bailiss, having lately purchased the old arsenal building on Canal Street, will henceforth operate it as a Negro Depot. He will at all times be found ready to purchase all good and likely young Negroes at the Highest Price. He will also attend to Selling Negroes on Commission. Said Broker also gives Notice that those who have Slaves rendered unfit for labor by yaws, scrofula, chronic consumption, rheumatism, & C., may dispose of them to him on reasonable terms."

Editor Winstanley tried to dissuade him, he said later. "Folks," he told him, "won't like this. This has never been said out open before," the editor pointed out. Bailiss smiled. He was already middle-aged, had a shiny red face and long mousy hair. His smile wasn't a very wide one.

"Then I reckon I must be the pioneer," he said. "This isn't a big plantation State, it never will be. I've give the matter right much thought. I reckon it just won't pay for anyone to own more than half a dozen slaves in these parts. But they will multiply, you can't stop it. I've seen it in my lawwork, seen many a planter broke for debts he's gone into to buy field hands—signed notes against his next crop, or maybe even his next three crops. Then maybe the crop is so good that the price of cotton goes way down and he can't meet his notes, so he loses his lands *and* his slaves. If the price of cotton should happen to be high enough for him to pay for the slaves he's bought, then, like a dumned fool"—Bailiss never swore—"why, he signs notes for a few more. Pretty soon things get so bad you can't *give* slaves away round here. So a man has a dozen of them eating their heads off and not even earning

grocery bills. No, Mr. Winstanley; slaves must be sold south and southwest, where the new lands are being opened up, where the big plantations are."

Editor Winstanley wagged his head. "I know," he said, "I know. But folks don't like to say things like that out loud. The slave trade is looked down on. You know that. It's a necessary evil, that's how it's regarded, like a—well . . ." He lowered his voice. "Nothing personal, but . . . like a sporting house. Nothing personal, now, Mr. Bailiss."

The attorney-broker smiled again. "Slavery has the sanction of the law. It is a necessary part of the domestic economy, just like cotton. Why, suppose I should say, 'I love my cotton, I'll only sell it locally'? People'd think I was just crazy. Slaves have become a surplus product in the Border States and they must be disposed of where they are not produced in numbers sufficient to meet the local needs. You print that advertisement. Folks may not ask me to dinner, but they'll sell to me, see if they won't."

The notice did, as predicted, outrage public opinion. Old Marsta and Old Missis vowed no Negro of *theirs* would ever be sold "down the River." But somehow the broker's "jail"—as it was called—kept pretty full, though its boarders changed. Old man Bailiss had his agents out buying and his agents out selling. Sometimes he acted as agent for firms whose headquarters were in Natchez or New Orleans. He entered into silent partnerships with gentlemen of good family who wanted a quick return on capital, and who got it, but who still, it was needless to say, did not dine with him or take his hand publicly. There was talk, on and off, that the Bar Association was planning action not favorable to Bailiss for things connected with the legal side of his trade. It all came to nought.

"Mr. Bailiss," young Ned Wickerson remarked to him one day in the old man's office, "whoever said that 'a man who defends himself has a fool for a client' never had the pleasure of your acquaintance."

"Thank you, boy."

"Consequently," the young man continued, "I've advised

Sam Worth not to go into court if we can manage to settle out of it."

"First part of your advice is good, but there's nothing to settle."

"There's a matter of $635 to settle, Mr. Bailiss." Wickerson had been practicing for two years, but he still had freckles on his nose. He took a paper out of his wallet and put it in front of them. "There's this to settle."

The old man pushed his glasses down his nose and picked up the paper. He scanned it, lips moving silently. "Why, this is all correct," he said. "Hmm. To be sure. 'Received of Samuel Worth of Worth's Crossing, Lemuel County, the sum of $600 cash in full payment for a Negro named Dominick Swift, commonly called Domino, aged thirty-six years and of bright complexion, which Negro I warrant sound in mind and body and a slave for life and the title I will forever defend. James Bailiss, Rutland, Lemuel County.' Mmm. All correct. And anyway, what do you mean, six hundred and *thirty-five* dollars?"

"Medical and burial expenses. Domino died last week."

"Died, now, did he? Sho. Too bad. Well, all men are mortal."

"I'm afraid my client doesn't take much comfort from your philosophy. Says he didn't get two days' work out of Domino. Says he whipped him, first off, for laziness, but when the doctor—Dr. Sloan, that was—examined him, Doctor said he had a consumption. Died right quickly."

"Negroes *are* liable to quick consumptions. Wish they was a medicine for it. On the other hand, they seldom get malaria or yella fever. Providence."

He cut off a slice of twist, shoved it in his cheek, then offered twist and knife to Wickerson, who shook his head.

"As I say, we'd rather settle out of court. If you'll refund the purchase price we won't press for the other expenses. What do you say?"

Bailiss looked around the dirty, dusty office. There was a case of law books with broken bindings against the north wall. The south wall had a daguerreotype of John C. Calhoun hanging crookedly on it. The single dim window was in the

east wall, and the west wall was pierced by a door whose lower panels had been scarred and splintered by two generations of shoes and boots kicking it open. "Why, I say no, o' course."

Wickerson frowned. "If you lose, you know, you'll have to pay *my* costs as well."

"I don't expect I'll lose," the old man said.

"Why, of course you'll lose," the young man insisted, although he did not sound convinced. "Dr. Sloan will testify that it was *not* 'a quick consumption.' He says it was a long-standing case of Negro tuberculosis. And you warranted the man sound."

"Beats me how them doctors think up long words like that," Bailiss said placidly. "Inter'sting point of law just come up down in N'Orleans, Ned. One of my agents was writing me. Negro brakeman had his legs crushed in a accident, man who rented him to the railroad sued, railroad pleaded 'negligence of his fellow-servant'—in this case, the engineer."

"Seems like an unassailable defense." The younger lawyer was interested despite himself. "What happened?"

"Let's see if I can recollect the Court's words." This was mere modesty. Old man Bailiss' memory was famous on all matters concerning the slave codes. "Mmm. Yes. Court said: 'The slave status has removed this man from the normal fellow-servant category. He is fettered fast by the most stern bonds our laws take note of. He cannot with impunity desert his post though danger plainly threatens, nor can he reprove free men for their bad management or neglect of duty, for the necessity of his condition is upon him.' Awarded the owner—Creole man name of Le Tour—awarded him $1300."

"It seems right, put like that. But now, Dr. Sloan—"

"Now, Neddy. Domino was carefully examined by *my* Doctor, old Fred Pierce—"

"Why, Pierce hasn't drawn a sober breath in twenty years! He gets only slaves for his patients."

"Well, I reckon that makes him what they call a specialist, then. No, Ned, don't go to court. You have no case. My jailer

will testify, too, that Domino was sound when I sold him. It must of been that whipping sickened him."

Wickerson rose. "Will you make *partial* restitution, then?" The old man shook his head. His long hair was streaked with gray, but the face under it was still ruddy. "You *know* Domino was sick," Wickerson said. "I've spoken to old Miss Whitford's man, Micah, the blacksmith, who was doing some work in your jail awhile back. He told me that he heard Domino coughing, saw him spitting blood, saw you watching him, saw you give him some rum and molasses, heard you say, 'Better not cough till I've sold you, Dom, else I'll have to sell you south where they don't coddle Negroes.' This was just before you *did* sell him—to my client."

The old man's eyes narrowed. "I'd say Micah talks overmuch for a black man, even one of old Miss Whitford's—a high and mighty lady that doesn't care to know me on the street. But you forget one mighty important thing, Mr. Wickerson!" His voice rose. He pointed his finger. "It makes no difference what Micah heard! Micah is property! Just like my horse is property! And property can't testify! Do you claim to be a lawyer? Don't you know that a slave can't inherit—can't bequeath—can't marry nor give in marriage—can neither sue nor prosecute—and that it's a basic principle of the law that a slave can never testify in court except against another slave?"

Wickerson, his lips pressed tightly together, moved to the door, kicked it open, scattering a knot of idlers who stood around listening eagerly, and strode away. The old man brushed through them.

"And you'd better tell Sam Worth not to come bothering me, either!" Bailiss shouted at Wickerson's back. "I know how to take care of trash like him!" He turned furiously to the gaping and grinning loungers.

"Get away from here, you mud-sills!" He was almost squeaking in his rage.

"I reckon you don't own the sidewalks," they muttered. "I reckon every white man in this state is as good as any other

white man," they said; but they gave way before him. The old man stamped back into his office and slammed the door.

It was Bailiss' custom to have his supper in his own house, a two-story building just past the end of the sidewalk on Rampart Street; but tonight he felt disinclined to return there with no one but rheumaticky old Edie, his housekeeper-cook, for company. He got on his horse and rode down toward the cheerful bustle of the Phoenix Hotel. Just as he was about to go in, Sam Worth came out. Worth was a barrel-shaped man with thick short arms and thick bandy legs. He stood directly in front of Bailiss, breathing whiskey fumes.

"So you won't settle?" he growled. His wife, a stout woman taller than her husband, got down from their wagon and took him by the arm.

"Come away, now, Sam," she urged.

"You'd better step aside," Bailiss said.

"I hear you been making threats against me," Worth said.

"Yes, and I'll carry them out, too, if you bother me!"

A group quickly gathered, but Mrs. Worth pulled her husband away, pushed him toward the wagon; and Bailiss went inside. The buzz of talk dropped for a moment as he entered, stopped, then resumed in a lower register. He cast around for a familiar face, undecided where to sit; but it seemed to him that all faces were turned away. Finally he recognized the bald head and bent shoulders of Dr. Pierce, who was slumped at a side table by himself, muttering into a glass. Bailiss sat down heavily across from him, with a sigh. Dr. Pierce looked up.

"A graduate of the University of Virginia," the doctor said. His eyes were dull.

"At it again?" Bailiss looked around for a waiter. Dr. Pierce finished what was in his glass.

"Says he'll horsewhip you on sight," he muttered.

"Who says?" Bailiss was surprised.

"Major Jack Moran."

Bailiss laughed. The Major was a tottery veteran of the War

of 1812 who rode stiffly about on an aged white mare. "What for?" he asked.

"Talk is going around you Mentioned A Lady's Name." Pierce beckoned, and at once a waiter, whose eye old man Bailiss had not managed to catch, appeared with a full glass. Bailiss caught his sleeve as the waiter was about to go and ordered his meal. The doctor drank. "Major Jack says, impossible to Call You Out—can't appear on Field of Honor with slave trader—so instead will whip you on sight." His voice gurgled in the glass.

Bailiss smiled crookedly. "I reckon I needn't be afraid of him. He's old enough to be my daddy. A lady's name? What lady? Maybe he means a lady who lives in a big old house that's falling apart, an old lady who lives on what her Negro blacksmith makes?"

Dr. Pierce made a noise of assent. He put down his glass. Bailiss looked around the dining room, but as fast as he met anyone's eyes, the eyes glanced away. The doctor cleared his throat.

"Talk is going around you expressed a dislike for said Negro. Talk is that the lady has said she is going to manumit him to make sure you won't buy him if she dies."

Bailiss stared. "Manumit him? She can't do that unless she posts a bond of a thousand dollars to guarantee that he leaves the state within ninety days after being freed. She must know that free Negroes aren't allowed to stay on after manumission. And where would she get a thousand dollars? And what would she live on if Micah is sent away? That old lady hasn't got good sense!"

"No," Pierce agreed, staring at the glass. "She is old and not too bright and she's got too much pride on too little money, but it's a sis"—his tongue stumbled—"a singular thing: there's hardly a person in this town, white or black or half-breed Injun, that doesn't *love* that certain old lady. Except you. And *no*body in town loves *you*. Also a singular thing: here we are—"

The doctor's teeth clicked against the glass. He set it down,

swallowed. His eyes were yellow in the corners, and he looked at Bailiss steadily, save for a slight trembling of his hands and head. "Here we are, heading just as certain as can be towards splitting the Union and having war with the Yankees—all over slavery—tied to it hand and foot—willing to die for it—economy bound up in it—sure in our own hearts that nature and justice and religion are for it—and yet, singular thing: nobody likes slave traders. Nobody likes them."

"Tell me something new." Bailiss drew his arms back to make room for his dinner. He ate noisily and with good appetite.

"Another thing," the doctor hunched forward in his seat, "that hasn't added to your current popularity is this business of Domino. In this, I feel, you made a mistake. *Caveat emptor* or not, you should've sold him farther away from here, much farther away, down to the rice fields somewhere, where his death would have been just a statistic in the overseer's annual report. Folks feel you've cheated Sam Worth. He's not one of your rich absentee owners who sits in town and lets some cheese-paring Yankee drive his Negroes. He only owns four or five, he and his boy work right alongside them in the field, pace them row for row."

Bailiss grunted, sopped up gravy.

"You've been defying public opinion for years now. There might come a time when you'd want good will. My advice to you—after all, your agent only paid $100 for Domino—is to settle with Worth for five hundred."

Bailiss wiped his mouth on his sleeve. He reached for his hat, put it on, left money on the table, and got up.

"Shoemaker, stick to your last," he said. Dr. Pierce shrugged. "Make that glass the final one. I want you at the jail tomorrow, early, so we can get the catalogue ready for the big sale next week. Hear?" the old man walked out, paying no attention to the looks or comments his passage caused.

On his horse Bailiss hesitated. The night was rather warm, with a hint of damp in the air. He decided to ride around for a while in the hope of finding a breeze stirring. As the horse

ambled along from one pool of yellow gaslight to another he ran through in his mind some phrases for inclusion in his catalogue. *Phyllis, prime woman, aged 25, can cook, sew, do fine ironing . . .*

When he had first begun in the trade, three out of every five Negroes had been named Cuffee, Cudjoe, or Quash. He'd heard these were days of the week in some African dialect. There was talk that the African slave trade might be legalized again; that would be a fine thing. But, sho, there was always such talk, on and off.

The clang of a hammer on an anvil reminded him that he was close to Black Micah's forge. As he rounded the corner he saw Sam Worth's bandy-legged figure outlined against the light. One of the horses was unhitched from his wagon and awaited the shoe Micah was preparing for it.

A sudden determination came to Bailiss: he would settle with Worth about Domino. He hardly bothered to analyze his motives. Partly because his dinner was resting well and he felt comfortable and unexpectedly benevolent, partly because of some vague notion it would be the popular thing to do and popularity was a good thing to have before and during a big sale, he made up his mind to offer Worth $300—well, maybe he would go as high as $350, but no more; a man had to make *some*thing out of a trade.

As he rode slowly up to the forge and stopped, the blacksmith paused in his hammering and looked out. Worth turned around. In the sudden silence Bailiss heard another horse approaching.

"I've come to settle with you," the slave trader said. Worth looked up at him, his eyes bloodshot. In a low, ugly voice Worth cussed him, and reached his hand toward his rear pocket. It was obvious to Bailiss what Worth intended, so the slave trader quickly drew his own pistol and fired. His horse reared, a woman screamed—did *two* women scream? Without his meaning it, the other barrel of his pistol went off just as Worth fell.

"Fo' gawdsake don't kill me, Mister Bailiss!" Micah cried.

"Are you all right, Miss Elizabeth?" he cried. Worth's wife and Miss Whitford suddenly appeared from the darkness on the other side of the wagon. They knelt beside Worth.

Bailiss felt a numbing blow on his wrist, dropped his empty pistol, was struck again, and half fell, was half dragged, from his horse. A woman screamed again, men ran up—where had they all come from? Bailiss, pinned in the grip of someone he couldn't see, stood dazed.

"You infernal scoundrel, you shot that man in cold blood!" Old Major Jack Moran dismounted from his horse and flourished the riding crop with which he had struck Bailiss on the wrist.

"I never—he cussed me—he reached for his pistol—I only defended myself!"

Worth's wife looked up, tears streaking her heavy face.

"He had no pistol," she said. "I made him leave it home."

"You said, 'I've come to get you,' and you shot him point-blank!" The old Major's voice trumpeted.

"He tried to shoot Miss Whitford too!" someone said. Other voices added that Captain Carter, the High Sheriff's chief deputy, was coming. Bodies pressed against Bailiss, faces glared at him, fists were waved before him.

"It wasn't like that at all!" he cried.

Deputy Carter came up on the gallop, flung the reins of his black mare to eager outthrust hands, jumped off, and walked over to Worth.

"How was it, then?" a scornful voice asked Bailiss.

"I rode up . . . I says, 'I've come to settle with you' . . . He cussed at me, low and mean, and he reached for his hip pocket."

In every face he saw disbelief.

"Major Jack's an old man," Bailiss faltered. "He heard it wrong. He—"

"Heard it good enough to hang you!"

Bailiss looked desperately around. Carter rose from his knees and the crowd parted. "Sam's dead, ma'am," he said. "I'm sorry." Mrs. Worth's only reply was a low moan. The

crowd growled. Captain Carter turned and faced Bailiss, whose eyes looked at him for a brief second, then turned frantically away. And then Bailiss began to speak anxiously—so anxiously that his words came out a babble. His arms were pinioned and he could not point, but he thrust his head toward the forge where the blacksmith was still standing—standing silently.

"Micah," Bailiss stuttered. "Ask Micah!"

Micah saw it, he wanted to say—wanted to shout it. *Micah was next to Worth, Micah heard what I really said, he's younger than the Major, his hearing is good, he saw Worth reach . . .*

Captain Carter placed his hand on Bailiss and spoke, but Bailiss did not hear him. The whole night had suddenly fallen silent for him, except for his own voice, saying something (it seemed long ago) to young lawyer Wickerson.

"It makes no difference what Micah saw! It makes no difference what Micah heard! Micah is property! . . . And property can't testify!"

They tied Bailiss' hands and heaved him onto his horse.

"He is fettered fast by the most stern bonds our laws take note of . . . can't inherit—can't bequeath . . . can neither sue nor prosecute—"

Bailiss turned his head as they started to ride away. He looked at Micah and their eyes met. Micah knew.

". . . it's basic principle of the law that a slave can never testify in court except against another slave."

Someone held the reins of old man Bailiss' horse. From now on he moved only as others directed. The lights around the forge receded. Darkness surrounded him. The necessity of his condition was upon him.

INTRODUCTION

to

"The Sources of the Nile"

The source of this particular Nile I did not seek; I found it in a casual comment by Laura Goforth Cohen about "some people she knew who had a peculiar gift they didn't know they had." I never asked their name and I never learned, really, any more about them than the most general nature of the gift. The "Benson" family is thus as purely fictitious as the circumstance allows. So is "Noreen." So is—but never mind. And as for the title, well, I wrote my story a bit before Alan Moorehead wrote his excellent *The White Nile* and *The Blue Nile.* I did not "get the idea" from him, he did not "get the idea" from me: we both have read others, lots of others; and if the estate of Pliny the Elder has any complaints, let *their* lawyer see *my* lawyer.

The Sources of the Nile

It was in the Rutherford office on Lexington that Bob Rosen met Peter ("Old Pete"—"Sneaky Pete"—"Poor Pete": take your pick) Martens for the first and almost last time. One of those tall, cool buildings on Lexington with the tall, cool office girls it was; and because Bob felt quite sure he wasn't and damned well never was going to be tall or cool enough for him to mean anything to them, he was able to sit back and just enjoy the scenery. Even the magazines on the table were cool: *Spectator, Botteghe Oscuro,* and *Journal of the New York State Geographical Society.* He picked up the last and began to leaf through "Demographic Study of The Jackson Whites."

He was trying to make some sense out of a mass of statistics relating to albinism among that curious tribe (descended from Tuscorora Indians, Hessian deserters, London street women, and fugitive slaves), when one of the girls—delightfully tall, deliciously cool—came to usher him in to Tressling's office. He lay the magazine face down on the low table and followed her. The old man with the portfolio, who was the only other person waiting, got up just then, and Bob noticed the spot of blood in his eye as he passed by. They were prominent eyes, yellowed, reticulated with tiny red veins, and in the corner of one of them was a bright red blot. For a moment it made Rosen feel uneasy, but he had no time then to think about it.

"Delightful story," said Joe Tressling, referring to the piece which had gotten Rosen the interview, through his agent. The story had won first prize in a contest, and the agent had

thought that Tressling . . . if Tressling . . . maybe Tressling . . .

"Of course, we can't touch it because of the theme," said Tressling.

"Why, what's wrong with the Civil War as a theme?" Rosen said.

Tressling smiled. "As far as Aunt Carrie's Country Cheese is concerned," he said, "the South *won* the Civil War. At least, it's not up to Us to tell Them differently. It might annoy Them. The North doesn't *care*. But write another story for us. The Aunt Carrie Hour is always on the lookout for new dramatic material."

"Like for instance?" Bob Rosen asked.

"What the great cheese-eating American public wants is a story of resolved conflict concerning young contemporary American couples earning over ten thousand dollars a year. But nothing sordid, controversial, outré, or passé."

Rosen was pleased to be able to see Joseph Tressling, who was the J. Oscar Rutherford Company's man in charge of scripts for the Aunt Carrie Hour. The *Mené Mené* of the short story was said that year to be on the wall, the magazines were dying like mayflies, and the sensible thing for anyone to do who hoped to make a living writing (he told himself) was to get into television. But he really didn't expect he was going to make the transition, and the realization that he didn't really know any contemporary Americans—young, old, married, single—who were earning over ten thousand dollars a year seemed to prophesy that he was never going to earn it himself.

"And nothing avant-garde," said Tressling.

The young woman returned and smiled a tall, cool smile at them. Tressling got up. So did Bob. "Mr. Martens is still outside," she murmured.

"Oh, I'm afraid I won't be able to see him today," said Joe Tressling. "Mr. Rosen has been so fascinating that the time seems to have run over, and then some. . . . Great old boy," he said, smiling at Bob and shaking his hand. "Really one of

the veterans of advertising, you know. Used to write copy for Mrs. Winslow's Soothing Syrup. Tells some fascinating yarns. Too bad I haven't the time to listen. I expect to see you back here soon, Mr. Rosen," he said, still holding Bob's hand as they walked to the door, "with another one of your lovely stories. One that we can feel delighted to buy. No costume dramas, no foreign settings, nothing outré, passé, or avant-garde, and above all—nothing controversial or sordid. You're not going to be one of those *hungry* writers, are you?"

Even before he answered, Rosen observed Tressling's eyes dismiss him; and he resolved to start work immediately on an outré, controversial, sordid costume drama with a foreign setting, etc., if it killed him.

He made the wrong turn for the elevator and on coming back he came face to face with the old man. "'Demography of the Jackson Whites'," the old man said, feigning amazement. "What do you care about those poor suckers for? They don't buy, they don't sell, they don't start fashion, they don't follow fashion. Just poach, fornicate, and produce oh-point-four hydrocephalic albinoes per hundred. Or something."

The elevator came and they got in together. The old man stared at him, his yellow-bloody eye like a fertilized egg. "Not that I blame them," he went on. "If I'd had any sense I'd've become a Jackson White instead of an advertising man. The least you can do," he said, without any transition, "is to buy me a drink. Since Truthful Tressling blames it onto you that he can't see me, the lying bugger. Why, for crying out loud!" he cried. "What I've got here in this little old portfolio—why, it's worth more to those men on Madison, Lexington, Park—if they only—"

"Let me buy you a drink," said Rosen, resignedly. The streets were hot, and he hoped the bar would be cool.

"A ball of Bushmill," said old Peter Martens.

The bar *was* cool. Bob had stopped listening to his guest's monologue about what he had in his little old portfolio (something about spotting fashion trends way in advance) and had begun talking about his own concerns. By and by the

old man, who was experienced beyond the norm in not being listened to, had begun to listen to *him.*

"This was when everybody was reading Aku-Aku," Bob said. "So I thought for sure that mine would go over good because it was about Rapa Nui—Easter Island—and Peruvian blackbirders and hints of great legends of the past and all that."

"And?"

"And it didn't. The publisher, the only one who showed any interest at all, I mean, *that* publisher, he said *he* liked the writing but the public wouldn't buy it. He advised me to study carefully the other paperbacks on the stands. See what they're like, go thou and do likewise. So I did. You know the stuff. On even-numbered pages the heroine gets her brassiere ripped off while she cries, *'Yes! Yes! Now! Oh!'"*

He was not aware of signalling, but from time to time a hand appeared and renewed their glasses. Old Martens asked, "Does she cry 'rapturously'—or 'joyously'?"

"Rapturously *and* joyously. What's the matter, you think she's frigid?"

Martens perished the thought. At a nearby table a large blonde said, lugubriously, "You know, Harold, it's a lucky thing the Good Lord didn't give me any children or I would of wasted my life on them like I did on my rotten stepchildren." Martens asked what happened on the odd-numbered children.

"I mean, 'pages'," he corrected himself, after a moment.

The right side of Bob Rosen's face was going numb. The left side started tingling. He interrupted a little tune he was humming and said, "Oh, the equation is invariable: On odd-numbered pages the hero either clonks some bastard bloodily on the noggin with a roscoe, or kicks him in the collions and *then* clonks him, or else he's engaged—with his shirt off, you're not allowed to say what gives with the pants, which are so much more important: presumably they melt or something—he's engaged, shirtless, in arching his lean and muscular flanks over some bimbo, *not* the heroine, because these aren't her

pages, some other female in whose pelvis he reads strange mysteries . . ." He was silent for a moment, brooding.

"How could it fail, then?" asked the old man, in his husky voice. "I've seen the public taste change, let me tell you, my boy, from A Girl of the Limberlost (which was so pure that nuns could read it) to stuff which makes stevedores blench: so I am moved to inquire, How could the work you are describing to me fail?"

The young man shrugged. "The nuns were making a comeback. Movies about nuns, books about nuns, nuns on TV, westerns. . . . So the publisher said public taste had changed, and could I maybe do him a life of St. Teresa?"

"Coo."

"So I spent three months doing a life of St. Teresa at a furious pace, and when I finished it turned out I'd done the wrong saint. The simple slob had no idea there was any more than one of the name, and I never thought to ask did he mean the Spanish St. Teresa or the French one? D'Avila or The Little Flower?"

"Saints preserve us. . . . Say, do you know that wonderful old Irish toast? 'Here's to the Council of Trent, that put the fasting on the meat and not on the drink'?"

Bob gestured to the barkeeper. "But I didn't understand why if one St. Teresa could be sold, the other one couldn't. So I tried another publisher, and all *he* said was, public taste had changed, and could I do him anything with a background of juvenile delinquency? After that I took a job for a while selling frozen custard in a penny arcade and all my friends said, BOB! You with *your talent*? How COULD you?"

The large blonde put down a jungle-green drink and looked at her companion. "What you mean, they love me? If they love me why are they going to Connecticut? You don't go to Connecticut if you love a person," she pointed out.

Old Martens cleared his throat. "My suggestion would be that you combine all three of your mysteriously unsalable novels. The hero sails on a Peruvian blackbirder to raid Easter Island, the inhabitants whereof he kicks in the collions, if

male, or arches his loins over, if female; until he gets converted by a vision of both St. Teresas who tell him their life stories—as a result of which he takes a job selling frozen custard in a penny arcade in order to help the juvenile delinquents who frequent the place."

Bob grunted. "Depend on it, with my luck I would get it down just in time to see public taste change again. The publishers would want a pocket treasury of the McGuffey Readers, or else the memoirs of Constantine Porphyrogenetus. I could freeze my arse climbing the Himalayas only to descend, manuscript in hand, to find everybody on Publishers' Row vicariously donning goggles and spearing fish on the bottom of the Erythrean Sea. . . . Only thing is, I never was sure to what degree public taste changed by itself or how big a part the publishers play in changing it. . . ."

The air, cool though he knew it was, seemed to shimmer in front of him, and through the shimmer he saw Peter Martens sitting up straight and leaning over at him, his seamed and ancient face suddenly eager and alive. "And would you like to be sure?" old Martens asked. "Would you like to be able to know, really to *know*?"

"What? How?" Bob was startled. The old man's eye looked almost all blood by now.

"Because," Martens said, "*I* can tell you what. *I* can tell you how. Nobody else. Only *me*. And not just about books, about everything. Because—"

There was an odd sort of noise, like the distant susurration of wind in dry grass, and Rosen looked around and he saw that a man was standing by them and laughing. This man wore a pale brown suit and had a pale brown complexion, he was very tall and very thin and had a very small head and slouched somewhat. He looked like a mantis, and a mustache like an inverted V was cropped out of the broad blue surface of his upper lip.

"Still dreaming your dreams, Martens?" this man asked, still wheezing his dry whispery laugh. "Gates of Horn, or Gates of Ivory?"

"Get the Hell away from me, Shadwell," said Martens.

Shadwell turned his tiny little head to Rosen and grinned. "He been telling you about how he worked on old Mrs. Winslow's Soothing Syrup Account? Too bad the Harrison Narcotics killed that business! He tell you how he worked on the old Sapolio account. The old Stanley Steamer account?" ("Shove off, Shadwell," Martens ordered, planting his elbows in the table and opening his mouth at Bob again.) "Or has he been muttering away like an old Zambezi hand who claims to know the location of the Elephants' Graveyard? Tell me, where is fashion bred?" he intoned. "In the bottle—or in Martens' head?"

Martens' head, thinly covered with yellowish-white hair, jerked in the direction of the new arrival. "This, my boy, is T. Pettys Shadwell, the most despicable of living men. He runs—out of his pocket, because no one will sell him a hat on credit—he runs a so-called market research business. Though who in blazes would hire him since Polly Adler went respectable beats the Hell out of me. I'm warning you, Shadwell," he said, "take off. I've had my fill of you. I'm not giving you any more information." And with a further graphic description of what else he would *not* give T. Pettys Shadwell if the latter was dying of thirst, he folded his arms and fell silent.

The most despicable of living men chuckled, poked a bone-thin hand into a pocket, plucked out a packet of white flaps of cardboard, one of which he tore along a perforated line and handed to Bob. "My card, sir. My operation, true, is not large, but it is Ever Growing. Don't take Mr. Martens too seriously. And don't buy him too many drinks. His health is not as good as it used to be—and then, it never was." And with a final laugh, like the rustling of dried corn-shucks, he angled away.

Martens sighed, lapped the last few dewy drops of Bushmill's off a molten ice-cube. "I live in mortal fear that some day I'll have the money to buy all the booze I want and wake up finding I have spilled the beans to that cockatrice who just walked out. Can you imagine anyone having business cards printed to be torn off of perforated pads? Keeps them from

getting loose and wrinkled, is his reason. Such a man has no right, under natural or civil law, to live."

In the buzzing coolness of the barroom Bob Rosen tried to catch hold of a thought which was coyly hiding behind a corner in his mind. His mind otherwise, he felt, was lucid as never before. But somehow he lost the thought, found he was telling himself a funny story in French and—although he had never got more than an 80 in the course, back in high school—marvelled at the purity of his accent and then chuckled at the punchline.

"'Never mind about black neglijays,'" the stout blonde was saying. "'If you want to keep your husband's affections,' I said to her, 'then listen to me—'"

The errant thought came trotting back for reasons of its own, and jumped into Bob's lap. "'Spill the beans'?" he quoted, questioningly. "Spill *what* beans? To Shadwell, I mean."

"Most despicable of living men," said old Martens, mechanically. Then a most curious expression washed over his antique countenance: proud, cunning, fearful . . .

"Would you like to know the sources of the Nile?" he asked. "Would you?"

"'Let him *go* to Maine,' I said. 'Let him paint rocks all day,' I said. 'Only for Heaven's sake, keep him the Hell off of Fire Island,' I said. And was I right, Harold?" demanded the large blonde.

Pete Martens was whispering something, Bob realized. By the look on his face it must have been important, so the young man tried to hear the words over the buzzing, and thought to himself in a fuddled fashion that they ought to be taken down on a steno pad, or something of that sort . . . *want to know, really know, where it begins and how, and how often?* But no; what do I know? For years I've been Clara the rotten stepmother, and now I'm Clara the rotten mother-in-law. *Are there such in every generation? Must be . . . known for years . . . known for years . . . only, Who?—and Where?—searched and sought, like Livingston and all the others searching and*

seeking, enduring privation, looking for the sources of the Nile . . .

Someone, it must have been Clara, gave a long, shuddering cry; and then for a while there was nothing but the buzzing, buzzing, buzzing, in Bob Rosen's head; while old Martens lolled back in the chair, regarding him silently and sardonically with his blood-red eye, over which the lid slowly, slowly drooped: but old Martens never said a word more.

It was one genuine horror of a hangover, subsiding slowly under (or perhaps despite) every remedy Bob's aching brain could think of: black coffee, strong tea, chocolate milk, raw-egg-red-pepper-worcestershire sauce. At least, he thought gratefully after a while, he was spared the dry heaves. At least he had all the fixings in his apartment and didn't have to go out. It was a pivotal neighborhood, and he lived right in the pivot, a block where lox and bagels beat a slow retreat before the advance of hog maw and chitterlings on the one hand and *bodegas, comidas criollas,* on the other; swarms of noisy kids running between the trucks and buses, the jackhammers forever wounding the streets.

It took him a moment to realize that the noise he was hearing now was not the muffled echo of the drills, but a tapping on his door. Unsteadily, he tottered over and opened it. He would have been not in the least surprised to find a raven there, but instead it was a tall man, rather stooping, with a tiny head, hands folded mantis-like at his bosom.

After a few dry, futile clickings, Bob's throat essayed the name "Shadburn?"

"Shadwell," he was corrected, softly. "T. Pettys Shadwell . . . I'm afraid you're not well, Mr. Rosen . . ."

Bob clutched the doorpost, moaned softly. Shadwell's hands unfolded, revealed—not a smaller man at whom he'd been nibbling, but a paper bag, soon opened.

". . . so I thought I'd take the liberty of bringing you some hot chicken broth."

It was gratefully warm, had both body and savor. Bob lapped at it, croaked his thanks. "Not at all, not-a-tall," Shad-

well waved. "Glad to be of some small help." A silence fell, relieved only by weak, gulping noises. "Too bad about old Martens. Of course, he *was* old. Still, a shocking thing to happen to you. A stroke, I'm told. I, uh, trust the police gave you no trouble?"

A wave of mild strength seemed to flow into Bob from the hot broth. "No, they were very nice," he said. "The sergeant called me, 'Son.' They brought me back here."

"Ah." Shadwell was reflective. "He had no family. I know that for a fact."

"Mmm."

"But—assume he left a few dollars. Unlikely, but— And assume he'd willed the few dollars to someone or some charity, perhaps. Never mind. Doesn't concern us. He wouldn't bother to will his papers . . . scrapbooks of old copy he'd written, so forth. That's of no interest to people in general. Just be thrown out or burned. But it would be of interest to *me*. I mean, I've been in advertising all my life, you know. Oh, yes. Used to distribute handbills when I was a boy. Fact."

Bob tried to visualize T. Pettys Shadwell as a boy, failed, drank soup. "Good soup," he said. "Thanks. Very kind of you."

Shadwell urged him strongly not to mention it. He chuckled. "Old Pete used to lug around some of the darndest stuff in that portfolio of his," he said. "In fact, some of it referred to a scheme we were once trying to work out together. Nothing came of it, however, and the old fellow was inclined to be a bit testy about that, still—I believe you'd find it interesting. May I show you?"

Bob still felt rotten, but the death wish had departed. "Sure," he said. Shadwell looked around the room, then at Bob, expectantly. After a minute he said, "Where is it?" "Where is what?" "The portfolio. Old Martens'."

They stared at each other. The phone rang. With a wince and a groan, Bob answered. It was Noreen, a girl with pretensions to stagecraft and literature, with whom he had been furtively lecherous on an off-and-on basis, the off periods' commencements being signaled by the presence in Noreen's

apartment of Noreen's mother, (knitting, middleclass morality and all) when Bob came, intent on venery.

"I've got a terrible hangover," he said, answering her first (guarded and conventional) question; "and the place is a mess."

"See what happens if I turn my back on you for a minute?" Noreen clucked, happily. "Luckily, I have neither work nor social obligations planned for the day, so I'll be right over."

Bob said, "Crazy!", hung up, and turned to face Shadwell, who had been nibbling the tips of his prehensile fingers. "Thanks for the soup," he said, in tones of some finality.

"But the portfolio?" "I haven't got it." "It was leaning against the old man's chair when I saw the two of you in the bar." "Then maybe it's still *in* the bar. Or in the hospital. Or maybe the cops have it. But—" "It isn't. They don't." "But *I* haven't got it. Honest, Mr. Shadwell, I appreciate the soup, but I don't know where the Hell—"

Shadwell rubbed his tiny, sharp mustache, like a △-mark pointing to his tiny, sharp nose. He rose. "This is really too bad. Those papers referring to the business old Peter and I had been mutually engaged in—really, I have as much right to them as . . . But look here. Perhaps he may have spoken to you about it. He always did when he'd been drinking and usually did even when he wasn't. What he liked to refer to as, 'The sources of the Nile'? Hmm?" The phrase climbed the belfry and rang bells audible, or at least apparent, to Shadwell. He seemed to leap forward, long fingers resting on Bob's shoulders.

"You do know what I mean. Look. You: Are a writer. The old man's ideas aren't in your line. I: Am an advertising man. They are in my line. For the contents of his portfolio—as I've explained, they are rightfully mine—I will give: One thousand: Dollars. In fact: For the opportunity of merely *looking* through it: I will give: One *hundred.* Dollars."

As Bob reflected that his last check had been for $17.72 (Monegasque rights to a detective story), and as he heard

these vasty sums bandied about, his eyes grew large, and he strove hard to recall what the Hell *had* happened to the portfolio—but in vain.

Shadwell's dry, whispery voice took on a pleading note. "I'm even willing to pay you for the privilege of discussing your conversation with the old f— the old gentleman. Here—" And he reached into his pocket. Bob wavered. Then he recalled that Noreen was even now on her way uptown and crosstown, doubtless bearing with her, as usual, in addition to her own taut charms, various tokens of exotic victualry to which she—turning her back on the veal chops and green peas of childhood and suburbia—was given: such as Shashlik makings, *lokoumi*, wines of the warm south, *baklava*, *provalone*, and other living witnesses to the glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome.

Various hungers, thus stimulated, began to rise and clamor, and he steeled himself against Shadwell's possibly unethical and certainly inconveniently timed offers.

"Not now," he said. Then, throwing delicacy to the winds, "I'm expecting a girl friend. Beat it. Another time."

Annoyance and chagrin on Shadwell's small face, succeeded by an exceedingly disgusting leer. "Why, of *course*," he said. "Another time? Certainly. My card—" He hauled out the perforated pack. "I already got one," Bob said. "Goodbye."

He made haste to throw off the noisome clothes in which he had been first hot, then drunk, then comatose; to take a shower, comb his mouse-colored hair, shave the pink bristles whose odious tint alone prevented him from growing a beard, to spray and anoint himself with various nostra which T. Pettys Shadwell's more successful colleagues in advertising had convinced him (by a thousand ways, both blunt and subtle) were essential to his acceptance by good society; then to dress and await with unconcealed anticipation the advent of the unchaste Noreen.

She came, she kissed him, she prepared food for him: ancient duties of women, any neglect of which is a sure and certain sign of cultural decadence and retrogression. Then she

read everything he had written since their last juncture, and here she had some fault to find.

"You waste too much time at the beginning, in description," she said, with the certainty possible to those who have never sold a single manuscript. "You've got to make your characters come *alive*—in the very first sentence."

"'Marley was dead, to begin with,'" muttered Bob.

"What?" murmured Noreen, vaguely, feigning not to hear. Her eye, avoiding lover boy, lit on something else. "What's this?" she asked. "You have so much money you just leave it lying around? I thought you said you were broke." And Bob followed her pointing and encarnadined fingertip to where lay two crisp twenty-dollar bills, folded lengthwise, on the table next the door.

"Shadwell!" he said, instantly. And, in response to her arched brows (which would have looked much better unplucked, but who can what will away?), he said, "A real rat of a guy—a louse, a boor—who had some crumby proposal."

"And who also has," said Noreen, going straight to the heart of the matter, "money." Bob resolved never to introduce the two of them, if he could help it. "Anyway," she continued, laying aside Bob's manuscript, "now you can take me out somewhere." Feebly he argued the food then cooking; she turned off the gas and thrust the pots incontinently into the ice-box, rose, and indicated she was now ready to leave. He had other objections to leaving just then, which it would have been impolitic to mention, for in Noreen's scheme of morality each episode of passion was a sealed incident once it was over, and constituted no promise of any other yet to come.

With resignation tempered by the reflection that Shadwell's four sawbucks couldn't last forever, and that there was never so long-drawn-out an evening but would wind up eventually back in his apartment, Bob accompanied her out the door.

And so it was. The next day, following Noreen's departure in mid-morning, found Bob in excellent spirits but flat-broke. He was reviewing the possibilities of getting an advance from his agent, Stuart Emmanuel, a tiny, dapper man whose eyes

behind double lenses were like great black shoebuttons, when the phone rang. ESP or no ESP, it was Stuart himself, with an invitation to lunch.

"I'm glad *some* of your clients are making money," said Bob, most ungraciously.

"Oh, it's not my money," said Stuart. "It's J. Oscar Rutherford's. One of his top men—no, it's not Joe Tressling, I know you saw him the day before yesterday, yes, I know nothing came of it, this is a different fellow altogether. Phillips Anhalt. I want you to come."

So Bob left yesterday's half-cooked chow in the ice-box and, very little loath, set out to meet Stuart and Phillips Anhalt, of whom he had never heard before. The first rendezvous was for a drink at a bar whose name also meant nothing to him, though as soon as he walked in he recognized it as the one where he had been the day before yesterday, and this made him uneasy—doubly so, for he had callously almost forgotten what had happened there. The bartender, it was at once evident, had not. His wary glance at the three of them must have convinced him that they were reasonably good insurance risks, however, for he made no comment.

Anhalt was a middle-sized man with a rather sweet and slightly baffled face and iron-gray haircut *en brosse*. "I enjoyed your story very much," he told Bob—thus breaking in at once upon the shallow slumber of the little scold who boarded in Bob's Writer's Consciousness. Of *course* (it shrilled) I know *exactly* the one you mean, after all, I've written only *one* story in my entire *life* so *"your story"* is the only identification it needs. I liked your *novel,* Mr. Hemingway. I enjoyed your *play,* Mr. Kaufman.

Stuart Emmanuel, who knew the labyrinthine ways of writers' minds as he knew the figures in his bank statement, said smoothly, "I expect Mr. Anhalt refers to *Unvexed to the Sea.*"

With firm politeness Mr. Anhalt disappointed this expectation. "I know that's the prize-winner," he said, "and I mean to read it, but the one I referred to was *The Green Wall.*" Now,

as it happened this very short little story had been bounced thirteen times before its purchase for a negligible sum by a low-grade salvage market of a magazine; but it was one of Bob's favorites. He smiled at Phillips Anhalt, Anhalt smiled at him, Stuart beamed and ordered drinks.

The waiter passed a folded slip of paper to Bob Rosen when he came with the popskull. "The lady left it," he said. "What lady?" "The blond lady." Agent and ad man smiled, made appropriate remarks while Bob scanned the note, recognized it as being in his own handwriting, failed to make it out, crammed it in his pocket.

"Mr. Anhalt," said Stuart, turning dark, large-pupiled eyes on his client, "is a very important man at Rutherford's: he has a corner office." A gentle, somewhat tired smile from Anhalt, who gave the conversation a turn and talked about his home in Darien, and the work he was doing on it, by himself. Thus they got through the round of drinks, then walked a few blocks to the restaurant.

Here Bob was infinitely relieved that Anhalt did not order poached egg on creamed spinach, corned beef hash, or something equally simple, wholesome, and disgusting, and tending to inhibit Bob's own wide-ranging tastes: Anhalt ordered duckling, Stuart had mutton chops, and Bob chose tripe and onions.

"Joe Tressling tells me that you're going to write something for the cheese show," said Anhalt, as they disarranged the pickle plate. Bob half-lifted his eyebrows, smiled. Stuart gazed broodingly into the innards of a sour tomato as if he might be saying to himself, "Ten percent of $17.72, Monegasque rights to a detective story."

"More cheese is being eaten today in the United States than twenty-five years ago," Anhalt continued. "Much, much more. . . . Is it the result of advertising? Such as the Aunt Carrie Hour? Has that changed public taste? Or—has public taste changed for, say, other reasons, and are we just riding the wave?"

"The man who could have answered that question," Bob said, "died the day before yesterday."

Anhalt let out his breath. "How do you know he could have?"

"He said so."

Anhalt, who'd had a half-eaten dilled cucumber in his hand, carefully laid it in the ash-tray, and leaned forward. "What else did he say? Old Martens, I mean. You *do* mean old Martens, don't you?"

Bob said that was right, and added, with unintentional untruthfulness, that he'd been offered a thousand dollars for that information, and had turned it down. Before he could correct himself, Anhalt, customary faint pink face gone almost red, and Stuart Emmanuel, eyes glittering hugely, said with one voice, "*Who offered*—?"

"What comes out of a chimney?"

Stuart, recovering first (Anhalt continued to stare, said nothing, while the color receded), said, "Bob, this is not a joke. That is the reason we have this appointment. An awful lot of money is involved—for you, for me, for Phil Anhalt, for, well, for everybody. For just everybody. So—"

It slipped out. "For T. Pettys Shadwell?" Bob asked.

The effect, as they used to say in pre-atomic days, was electrical. Stuart made a noise, between a moan and a hiss, rather like a man who, having trustingly lowered his breeches, sits all unawares upon an icicle. He clutched Bob's hand. "You didn't godforbid *sign* anything?" he wailed. Anhalt, who had gone red before, went white this time around, but still retained diffidence enough to place his hand merely upon Bob's jacket cuff.

"He's a cad!" he said, in trembling tones. "A swine, Mr. Rosen!"

"'The most despicable of living men'," quoted Mr. Rosen. ("Exactly," said Anhalt.)

"Bob, you didn't *sign* anything, godforbid?"

"No. No. No. But I feel as if I've had all the mystery I intend to have. And unless I get Information, why, gents, I

shan't undo one button." The waiter arrived with the food and, according to the rules and customs of the Waiters' Union, gave everybody the wrong orders. When this was straightened out, Stuart said, confidently, "Why, of course, Bob: Information: Why, certainly. There is nothing to conceal. Not from *you*," he said, chuckling. "Go ahead, start eating. I'll eat and talk, you just eat and listen."

And so, as he tucked away the tripe and onions, Bob heard Stuart recount, through a slight barrier of masticated mutton-chop, a most astonishing tale. In every generation (Stuart said) there were leaders of fashion, arbiters of style. At Nero's court, Petronius. In Regency England, Beau Brummel. At present and for some time past, everyone knew about the Paris designers and their influence. And in the literary field ("Ahah!" muttered Bob, staring darkly at his forkful of stewed ox-paunch)—in the literary field, said Stuart, swallowing in haste for greater clarity, they all knew what effect a review by any one of A Certain Few Names, on the front page of the Sunday Times book section, could have upon the work of even an absolute unknown.

"It will sky-rocket it to Fame and Fortune with the speed of light," said Stuart.

"Come to the point." But Stuart, now grinding away on a chunk of grilled sheep, could only gurgle, wave his fork, and raise his eyebrows. Anhalt stopped his moody task of reducing the duckling to a mass of orange-flavored fibres, and turned to take the words, as it were, from Stuart's mutton-filled mouth.

"The point, Mr. Rosen, is that poor old Martens went up and down Madison Avenue for years claiming he had found a way of predicting fashions and styles, and nobody believed him. Frankly, *I* didn't. But I do now. What caused me to change my mind was this: When I heard, day before yesterday, that he had died so suddenly, I had a feeling that I *had* something of his, something that he'd left for me to look at once, something I'd taken just to get rid of him. And, oh, perhaps I was feeling a bit guilty, certainly a bit sorry, so I asked my secretary to get it for me. Well, you know, with the J.

Oscar Rutherford people, as with Nature, nothing is ever lost" —Phillips Anhalt smiled his rather shy, rather sweet and slightly baffled smile—"so she got it for me and I took a look at it. . . . I was . . ." he paused, hesitated for *mot juste.*

Stuart, with a masterful swallow, leaped into the breach, claymore in hand. "He was flabbergasted!"

Astounded, amended Anhalt. He was astounded.

There, in an envelope addressed to Peter Martens, and postmarked November 10, 1945, was a color snapshot of a young man wearing a fancy weskit.

"Now, you know, Mr. Rosen, no one in 1945 was wearing fancy weskits. They didn't come in till some years later. How did Martens *know* they were going to come in? And there was another snapshot of a young man in a charcoal suit and a pink shirt. Nobody was wearing that outfit in '45 . . . I checked the records, you see, and the old gentleman had left the things for me in December of that year. I'm ashamed to say that I had the receptionist put him off when he called again . . . But just think of it: fancy weskits, charcoal suits, pink shirts, in 1945." He brooded. Bob asked if there was anything about gray flannel suits in the envelope, and Anhalt smiled a faint and fleeting smile.

"Ah, Bob, now, Bob," Stuart pursed his mouth in mild (and greasy) reproof. "You still don't seem to realize that this is S*E*R*I*O*U*S*."

"Indeed it is," said P. Anhalt. "As soon as I told Mac about it, do you know what he said, Stu? He said, 'Phil, don't spare the horses.'" And they nodded soberly, as those who have received wisdom from on high.

"Who," Bob asked, "is Mac?"

Shocked looks. Mac, he was told, the older men speaking both tandem and *au pair,* was Robert R. Mac Ian, head of the happy J. Oscar Rutherford corporate family.

"Of course, Phil," Stuart observed, picking slyly at his baked potato, "I won't ask why it took you till this morning to get in touch with me. With some other outfit, I might maybe suspect that they were trying to see what they could locate for

themselves without having to cut our boy, here, in for a slice of the pie. He being the old man's confidante and moral heir, anyway, so to speak." (Bob stared at this description, said nothing. Let the thing develop as far as it would by itself, he reflected.) "But not the Rutherford outfit. It's too big, too ethical, for things like that." Anhalt didn't answer.

After a second, Stuart went on, "Yes, Bob, this is really something big. If the late old Mr. Martens' ideas can be successfully developed—and I'm sure Phil here will not expect you to divulge until we are ready to talk Terms—they will be really invaluable to people like manufacturers, fashion editors, designers, merchants, and, last but not least—advertising men. Fortunes can literally be made, and saved. No wonder that a dirty dog like this guy Shadwell is trying to horn in on it. Why, listen—but I'm afraid we'll have to terminate this enchanting conversation. Bob has to go home and get the material in order—" (What material? Bob wondered. Oh, well, so far: $40 from Shadwell and a free lunch from Anhalt.)—"and you and I, Phil, will discuss those horses Mac said not to spare."

Anhalt nodded. It seemed obvious to Rosen that the ad man was unhappy, unhappy about having given Peter Martens the brush-off while he was alive, unhappy about being numbered among the vultures now that he was dead. And, so thinking, Bob realized with more than a touch of shame, that he himself was now numbered among the vultures; and he asked about funeral arrangements. But it seemed that the Masonic order was taking care of that: the late Peter Martens was already on his way back to his native town of Marietta, Ohio, where his lodge brothers would give him a formal farewell: aprons, sprigs of acacia, and all the ritual appurtenances. And Bob thought, why not? And was feeling somehow, very much relieved.

On the uptown bus which he had chosen over the swifter, hotter, dingier subway, he tried to collect his thoughts. What on earth could he ever hope to remember about a drunken conversation, which would make any sense to anybody, let

alone be worth money? "The Sources of the Nile," the old man had said, glaring at him with bloody eye. Well, Shadwell knew the phrase, too. Maybe Shadwell knew what it meant, exactly what it meant, because he, Bob Rosen, sure as Hell didn't. But the phrase did catch at the imagination. Martens had spent years—who knew how many?—seeking the sources of his particular Nile, the great river of fashion, as Mungo Park, Livingston, Speke, and other half-forgotten explorers, had spent years in search of theirs. They had all endured privation, anguish, rebuffs, hostility . . . and in the end, just as the quest had killed Mungo Park, Livingston, Speke, the other quest had killed old Peter Martens.

But, aside from insisting that there *was* a source or sources, and that he knew *where,* what had Peter said? Why hadn't Bob stayed sober? Probably that fat blonde at the next table, she of the poisonously green drink and the rotten stepchildren, probably she retained more of the old man's tale, picked up by intertable osmosis, than did Bob himself.

And with that he heard the voice of the waiter at the bar that noon: *The lady left it . . . What lady? . . . The blond lady . . .* Bob scrabbled in his pocket and came up with the note. On the sweaty, crumpled bit of paper, scrawled in his own writing, or a cruel semblance of it, he read: *Ditx sags su Bimsoh oh—*

"What the *Hell!*" he muttered, and fell to, with furrowed face, to make out what evidently owed more to Bushmill's than to Everhard Faber. At length he decided that the note read, *Peter says, see Bensons on Purchase Place, the Bronx, if I don't believe him. Peter says, write it down.*

"It must mean something," he said, half-aloud, staring absently from Fifth Avenue to Central Park, as the bus roared and rattled between opulence and greenery. "It has to mean something."

"Well, what a shame," said Mr. Benson. "But how nice it was of you to come and tell us." His wavy-gray hair was cut evenly around in soupbowl style, and as there was no white

skin at the back of his neck, had evidently been so cut for some time. "Would you like some iced tea?"

"Still, he Went Quickly," said Mrs. Benson, who, at the business of being a woman, was in rather a large way of business. "I don't think there's any iced tea, Daddy. When I have to go, that's the way I want to go. Lemonade, maybe?"

"There isn't any lemonade if what Kitty was drinking was the last of the lemonade. The Masons give you a nice funeral. A real nice funeral. I used to think about joining up, but I never seem to get around to it. I think there's some gin. Isn't there some gin, Mommy? How about a nice cool glass of gin-and-cider, Bob? Kit will make us some, by and by."

Bob said, softly, that that sounded nice. He sat half-sunken in a canvas chair in the large, cool living-room. A quarter of an hour ago, having found out with little difficulty *which* house on Purchase Place was the Bensons', he had approached with something close to fear and trembling. Certainly, he had been sweating in profusion. The not-too-recently painted wooden house was just a blind, he told himself. Inside there would be banks of noiseless machines into which cards were fed and from which tapes rolled in smooth continuity. And a large, broad-shouldered young man whose hair was cut so close to the skull that the scars underneath were plain to see, this young man would bar Bob's way and, with cold, calm, confidence, say, "Yes?"

"Er, um, Mr. Martens told me to see Mr. Benson."

"There is no Mr. Martens connected with our organization and Mr. Benson had gone to Washington. I'm afraid you can't come in: everything here is Classified."

And Bob would slink away, feeling Shoulders' scornful glance in the small of his shrinking, sweaty back.

But it hadn't been like that at all. Not anything like that at all.

Mr. Benson waved an envelope at Bob. "Here's a connivo, if you like," he said. "Fooled I don't know how many honest collectors, and dealers, too: Prince Abu-Somebody flies over here from Pseudo-Arabia without an expense account. Gets in

with some crooked dealers, *I* could name them, but I won't, prints off this *en–tire* issue of airmails, precancelled. Made a mint. Flies back to Pseudo-Arabia, *whomp!* they cut off his head!" And he chuckled richly at the thought of this prompt and summary vengeance. Plainly, in Mr. Benson's eyes, it had been done in the name of philatelic ethics; no considerations of dynastic intrigues among the petrol pashas entered his mind.

"Kitty, are you going to make us some cold drinks?" Mrs. B. inquired. "Poor old Pete, he used to be here for Sunday dinner on and off, oh, for just years. Is that Bentley coming?"

Bob just sat and sucked in the coolness and the calm and stared at Kitty. Kitty had a tiny stencil cut in the design of a star and she was carefully lacquering her toenails with it. He could hardly believe she was for real. "Ethereal" was the word for her beauty, and "ethereal" was the only word for it. Long, long hair of an indescribable gold fell over her heart-shaped face as she bent forward towards each perfectly formed toe. And she was wearing a dress like that of a child in a Kate Greenaway book.

"Oh, Bentley," said B., Senior. "What do you think has happened? Uncle Peter Martens passed away, all of a sudden, day before yesterday, and this gentleman is a friend of his and came to tell us about it; isn't that thoughtful?"

Bentley said, "*Ahhh.*" Bentley was a mid-teener who wore jeans cut off at the knees and sneakers with the toes, insteps, and heels removed. He was naked to the waist and across his suntanned and hairless chest, in a neat curve commencing just over his left nipple and terminating just under his right nipple, was the word VIPERS stenciled in red paint.

"*Ahhh,*" said Bentley Benson. "Any pepsies?"

"Well, I'd asked you to bring some," his mother said, mildly. "Make a nice, big pitcher of gin-and-cider, Bentley, please, but only a *little* gin for yourself, in a separate glass, remember, now." Bentley said, "*Ahhh,*" and departed, scratching on his chest right over the bright, red S.

Bob's relaxed gaze took in, one by one, the pictures on the

mantelpiece. He sat up a bit, pointed. "Who is that?" he asked. The young man looked something like Bentley and something like Bentley's father.

"That's my oldest boy, Barton, Junior," said Mother B. "You see that nice vest he's wearing? Well, right after the War, Bart, he was in the Navy then, picked up a piece of lovely brocade over in Japan, and he sent it back home. I thought of making a nice bed-jacket out of it, but there wasn't enough material. So I made it into a nice vest, instead. Poor old Uncle Peter, he liked that vest, took a picture of Bart in it. Well, what do you know, a few years later fancy vests became quite popular, and, of course, by that time Bart was tired of his ("Of course," Bob murmured), so he sold it to a college boy who had a summer job at Little and Harpey's. Got $25 for it, and we all went out to dinner down town that night."

Kitty delicately stenciled another star on her toenails.

"I see," Bob said. After a moment, "Little and Harpey's?" he repeated.

Yes, that same. The publishers. Bart, and his younger brother Alton, were publishers' readers. Alt had been with Little and Harpey but was now with Scribbley's Sons; Bart had worked for Scribbley's at one time, too. "They've been with *all* the biggest publishing houses," their mother said, proudly. "Oh, *they* aren't any of your stick-in-the-muds, no sirree." Her hands had been fiddling with a piece of bright cloth, and then, suddenly, cloth and hands went up to her head, her fingers flashed, and—complete, perfect—she was wearing an intricately folded turban.

Bentley came in carrying a pitcher of drink in one hand and five glasses—one to each finger—in the other. "I told you to mix yours separately, I think," his mother said. Taking no notice of her youngest's *Ahhh*, she turned to Bob. "I have a whole basket of these pieces of madras," she said, "some silk, some cotton . . . and it's been on my mind all day. Now, if I just remember the way those old women from the West Indies used to tie them on their heads when I was a girl . . . and

now, sure enough, it just came back to me! How does it look?" she asked.

"Looks very nice, Mommy," said Bart, Sr. And added, "I bet it would cover up the curlers better than those babushkas the women wear, you know?"

Bob Rosen bet it would, too.

So here it was and this was it. The sources of the Nile. How old Peter Martens had discovered it, Bob did not know. By and by, he supposed, he would find out. How did they *do* it, was it that they had a *panache*—? or was it a "wild talent," like telepathy, second sight, and calling dice or balls? He did not know.

"Bart said he was reading a real nice manuscript that came in just the other day," observed Mrs. Benson, dreamily, over her glass. "About South America. He says he thinks that South America has been neglected, and that there is going to be a revival of interest in non-fiction about South America."

"No more Bushmen?" Barton, Sr., asked.

"No, Bart says he thinks the public is getting tired of Bushmen. He says he only gives Bushmen another three months and then—poo—you won't be able to *give* the books away." Bob asked what Alton thought. "Well, Alton is reading fiction now, you know. He thinks the public is getting tired of novels about murder and sex and funny war experiences. Alt thinks they're about ready for some novels about ministers. He said to one of the writers that Scribbley's publishes, 'Why don't you do a novel about a minister?' he said. And the man said he thought it was a good idea."

There was a long, comfortable silence.

There was no doubt about it. *How* the Bensons did it, Bob still didn't know. But they did do it. With absolute unconsciousness and with absolute accuracy, they were able to predict future trends in fashion. It was marvelous. It was uncanny. It—

Kitty lifted her lovely head and looked at Bob through the long, silken skein of hair, then brushed it aside. "Do you ever have any money?" she asked. It was like the sound of small

silver bells, her voice. Where, compared to this, were the flat Long Island vocable of, say, Noreen? Nowhere at all.

"Why, Kitty Benson, what a question," her mother said, reaching out her glass for Bentley to refill. "Poor Peter Martens, just to think—a little more, Bentley, don't think you're going to drink what's left, young man."

"Because if you ever have any money," said the voice like the Horns of Elfland, "we could go out somewhere together. Some boys don't ever have any money," it concluded, with infinitely loving melancholy.

"I'm going to have some money," Bob said at once. "Absolutely. Uh—when could—"

She smiled an absolute enchantment of a smile. "Not tonight," she said, "because I have a date. And not tomorrow night, because I have a date. But the day after tomorrow night, because then I don't have a date."

A little voice in one corner of Bob's mind said, "This girl has a brain about the size of a small split pea; you know that, don't you?" And another voice, much less little, in the opposite corner, shrieked, "Who *cares*? Who *cares*?" Furthermore, Noreen had made a faint but definite beginning on an extra chin, and her bosom tended (unless artfully and artificially supported) to droop. Neither was true of Kitty at all, at all.

"The day after tomorrow night, then," he said. "It's a date."

All that night he wrestled with his angel. "You can't expose these people to the sordid glare of modern commerce," the angel said, throwing him with a half-nelson. "They'd wither and die. Look at the dodo—look at the buffalo. Will you *look*?" "*You* look," growled Bob, breaking the hold, and seizing the angel in a scissors-lock. "I'm not going to let any damned account executives get their chicken-plucking hands on the Bensons. It'll all be done through me, see? Through *me*!" And with that he pinned the angel's shoulders to the mat. "And besides," he said, clenching his teeth, "I need the money . . ."

Next morning he called up his agent. "Here's just a few samples to toss Mr. Phillips Anhalt's way," he said grandiosely. "Write 'em down. Soupbowl haircuts for men. *That's*

what I said. They can get a sunlamp treatment for the backs of their necks in the barber-shops. Listen. Women will stencil stars on their toe-nails with nail polish. Kate Greenaway style dresses for women are going to come in. Huh? Well, you bet your butt that Anhalt will know what Kate Greenaway means. Also, what smart women will wear will be madras kerchiefs tied up in the old West Indian way. This is very complicated, so I guess they'll have to be pre-folded and pre-stitched. Silks and cottons. . . . You writing this down? Okay.

"Teen-agers will wear, summer-time, I mean, they'll wear shorts made out of cut-down blue jeans. And sandals made out of cut-down sneakers. No shirts or undershirts—bare-chested, and—What? *NO*, for cry-sake, just the *boys!*"

And he gave Stuart the rest of it, books and all, and he demanded and got an advance. Next day Stuart reported that Anhalt reported that Mac Ian was quite excited. Mac had said —did Bob know what Phil said Mac said? Well, Mac said, "Let's not spoil the ship for a penny's worth of tar, Phil."

Bob demanded and received another advance. When Noreen called, he was brusque.

The late morning of his date-day he called to confirm it. That is, he tried to. The operator said that she was sorry, but that number had been disconnected. He made it up to the Bronx by taxi. The house was empty. It was not only empty of people, it was empty of everything. The wallpaper had been left, but that was all.

Many years earlier, about the time of his first cigarette, Bob had been led by a friend in the dead of night (say, half-past ten) along a quiet suburban street, pledged to confidence by the most frightful vows. Propped against the wall of a garage was a ladder—it did not go all the way to the roof: Bob and friend had pulled themselves up with effort which, in another context, would have won the full approval of their gym teacher. The roof made an excellent post to observe the going-to-bed preparations of a young woman who had seemingly never learned that window shades could be pulled down. Suddenly lights went on in another house, illuminating the roof of

the garage; the young woman had seen the two and yelled; and Bob, holding onto the parapet with sweating hands and reaching for the ladder with sweating feet, had discovered that the ladder was no longer there. . . .

He felt the same way now.

Besides feeling stunned, incredulous, and panicky, he also felt annoyed. This was because he acutely realized that he was acting out an old moving picture scene. The scene would have been close to the (film) realities had he been wearing a tattered uniform, and in a way he wanted to giggle, and in a way he wanted to cry. Only through obligation to the script did he carry the farce farther: wandering in and out of empty rooms, calling out names, asking if anyone was there.

No one was. And there were no notes or messages, not even *Croatan* carved on a doorpost. Once, in the gathering shadows, he thought he heard a noise, and he whirled around, half-expecting to see an enfeebled Mr. Benson with a bacon-fat lamp in one hand, or an elderly Negro, perhaps, who would say, tearfully, "Marse Bob, dem Yankees done burn all de cotton . . ." But there was nothing.

He trod the stairs to the next house and addressed inquiries to an old lady in a rocking-chair. "Well, I'm sure that *I* don't know," she said, in a paper-thin and fretful voice. "I saw them, all dressed up, getting into the car, and I said, 'Why, where are you all *going*, Hazel?' ("Hazel?" "Hazel Benson. I thought you said you *knew* them, young man?" "Oh, yes. Yes, of course. Please go on.") Well, I said, 'Where are you all *going*, Hazel?' And she said, 'It's time for a change, Mrs. Machen.' And they all laughed and they waved and they drove away. And then some men came and packed everything up and took it away in trucks. Well! 'Where did they all *go*?' I asked them. 'Where did they all *go*?' But do you think they'd have the common decency to *tell* me, after I've lived here for fifty-four years? Not-a-word. Oh—"

Feeling himself infinitely cunning, Bob said, offhandedly, "Yes, I know just the outfit you mean. O'Brien Movers."

"I do *not* mean O'Brien Movers. Whatever gave you such an idea? It was the Seven Sebastian Sisters."

And this was the most that Bob Rosen could learn. Inquiries at other houses either drew blanks or produced such probably significant items as, "Kitty said, 'Here are your curlers, because I won't need them anymore'"; "Yes, just the other day I was talking to Bart, Senior, and he said, 'You know, you don't realize that you're in a rut until you have to look up to see the sky.' Well, those Bensons always talked a little crazy, and so I thought nothing of it, until—"; and, "I said to Bentley, 'Vipe, how about tomorrow we go over to Williamsbridge and pass the chicks there in review?' and he said, 'No, Vipe, I can't make the scene tomorrow, my ancients put another poster on the billboard.' So I said, 'Ay-las,' and next thing I know—"

"His who did what?"

"Fellow, you don't wot this Viper talk one note, do you? His *family*, see, they had made other plans. They really cut loose, didn't they?"

They really did. So there Bob was, neat and trim and sweet-smelling, and nowhere to go, and with a pocketful of money. He looked around the tree-lined street and two blocks away, on the corner, he saw a neon sign. *Harry's,* it flashed (green). *Bar and Grill* (red).

"Where's Harry?" he asked the middle-aged woman behind the bar.

"Lodge meeting," she said. "He'll be back soon. They aren't doing any labor tonight, just business. Waddle ya have?"

"A ball of Bushmill," he said. He wondered where he had heard that, last. It was cool in the bar. And then he remembered, and then he shuddered.

"Oh, that's bad," Stuart Emmanuel moaned. "That sounds very bad . . . And you shouldn't've gone to the moving van people yourself. Now you probably muddied the waters."

Bob hung his head. His efforts to extract information from the Seven Sebastian Sisters—apparently they were septuplets, and all had gray mustaches—had certainly failed wretchedly.

And he kept seeing Kitty Benson's face, framed in her golden hair like a sun-lit nimbus, kept hearing Kitty Benson's golden voice.

"Well," Stuart said, "I'll do my damndest." And no doubt he did, but it wasn't enough. He was forced to come clean with Anhalt. And Anhalt, after puttering around, his sweet smile more baffled than ever, told Mac everything. Mac put the entire *force majeure* of the T. Oscar Rutherford organization behind the search. And they came up with two items.

Item. The Seven Sebastian Sisters knew no other address than the one on Purchase Place, and all the furniture was in their fireproof warehouse, with two years' storage paid in advance.

Item. The owner of the house on Purchase Place said, "I told them I'd had an offer to buy the house, but I wouldn't, if they'd agree to a rent increase. And the next thing I knew, the keys came in the mail."

Little and Harpey, as well as Scribbley's Sons, reported only that Alt and Bart, Junior, had said that they were leaving, but hadn't said where they were going.

"Maybe they've gone on a trip somewhere," Stuart suggested. "Maybe they'll come back before long. Anhalt has ears in all the publishing houses, maybe he'll hear something."

But before Anhalt heard anything, Mac decided that there was no longer anything to hear. "I wash my hands of it all," he declared. "It's a wild goose chase. Where did you ever pick up this crackpot idea in the first place?" And Phillips Anhalt's smile faded away. Weeks passed, and months.

But Bob Rosen has never abandoned hope. He has checked with the Board of Education about Bentley's records, to see if they know anything about a transcript or transfer. He has haunted Nassau Street, bothering—in particular—dealers specializing in Pseudo-Arabian air mail issues, in hopes that Mr. Benson has made his whereabouts known to them. He had hocked his watch to buy hamburgers and pizzas for the Vipers, and innumerable Scotches on innumerable rocks for

the trim young men and the girls fresh out of Bennington who staff the offices of our leading publishers. He—

In short, he has taken up the search of Peter Martens (Old Pete, Sneaky Pete). He is looking for the sources of the Nile. Has he *ever* found *anything*? Well, yes, as a matter of fact, he has.

The strange nature of cyclical coincidences has been summed up, somewhere, in the classical remark that one can go for years without seeing a one-legged man wearing a baseball cap; and then, in a single afternoon, one will see three of them. So it happened with Bob Rosen.

One day, feeling dull and heavy, and finding that the elfin notes of Kitty Benson's voice seemed to be growing fainter in his mind, Bob called up her old landlord.

"No," said the old landlord, "I never heard another word from them. And I'll tell you who else I never heard from, either. The fellow who offered to buy the house. He never came around and when I called his office, he just laughed at me. Fine way to do business."

"What's his name?" Bob asked, listlessly.

"Funny name," said the old landlord. "E. Peters Shadwall? Something like that. The Hell with him, anyway."

Bob tore his rooms apart looking for the card with the perforated top edge which Shadwell had—it seemed so very long ago—torn off his little book and given him. Also, it struck him, neither could he find the piece of paper on which he had scribbled old Martens' last message, with the Bensons' name and street on it. He fumbled through the Yellow Book, but couldn't seem to locate the proper category for the mantis-man's business. And he gave up on the regular directory, what with Shad, Shadd, -wel, -well, -welle, etc.

He would, he decided, go and ask Stuart Emmanuel. The dapper little agent had taken the loss of the Bensons so hard ("It was a beauty of a deal," he'd all but wept) that he might also advance a small sum of money for the sake of the Quest. Bob was in the upper East 40s when he passed a bar where he had once taken Noreen for cocktails—a mistake, for it had ad-

vanced her already expensive tastes another notch—and this reminded him that he had not heard from her in some time. He was trying to calculate just how much time, and if he ought to do something about it, when he saw the third one-legged man in the baseball cap.

That is to say, speaking nonmetaphorically, he had turned to cross a street in the middle of a block, and was halted by the absence of any gap between the two vehicles (part of a traffic jam caused by a long-unclosed incision in the street) directly in front of him. Reading from right to left, the vehicles consisted of an Eleanor-blue truck reading *Grandma Goldberg's Yum-Yum Borsht*, and an Obscene-pink Jaguar containing T. Pettys Shadwell and Noreen.

It was the Moment of the Shock of Recognition. He understood everything.

Without his making a sound, they turned together and saw him, mouth open, everything written on his face. And they knew that he knew.

"Why, Bob," said Noreen. "Ah, Rosen," said Shadwell.

"I'm sorry that we weren't able to have you at the *wedding*," she said. "But everything happened so *quickly*. Pet just swept me off my feet."

Bob said, "I'll bet."

She said, "Don't be bitter"—seeing that he was, and enjoying it. Horns sounded, voices cursed, but the line of cars didn't move.

"You did it," Bob said, coming close. Shadwell's hands left the wheel and came together at his chest, fingers down. "*You* saw that crisp green money he left and you saw his card and got in touch with him and *you* came in and took the note and —*Where are they?*" he shouted, taking hold of the small car and shaking it. "I don't give a damn about the money, just tell me where they are! Just let me see the girl!"

But T. Pettys Shadwell just laughed and laughed, his voice like the whisper of the wind in the dry leaves. "Why, *Bob*," said Noreen, bugging her eyes and flashing her large, coarse

gems, and giving the scene all she had, "why, Bob, was there a *girl*? You never told *me*."

Bob abandoned his anger, disclaimed all interest in the commercial aspect of the Bensons, offered to execute bonds and sign papers in blood, if only he were allowed to see Kitty. Shadwell, fingering his tiny carat of a mustache, shrugged. "Write the girl a letter," he said, smirking. "I assure you, all mail will be forwarded." And then the traffic jam broke and the Jag zoomed off, Noreen's scarlet lips pursed in blowing a kiss.

"Write?" Why, bless you, of course Bob wrote. Every day and often twice a day for weeks. But never a reply did he get. And on realizing that his letters probably went no farther than Noreen (Mrs. T. Pettys) Shadwell, who doubtless gloated and sneered in the midst of her luxury, he fell into despair, and ceased. Where is Kitty of the heart-shaped face, Kitty of the light-gold hair, Kitty of the elfin voice? Where are her mother and father and her three brothers? Where now are the sources of the Nile? Ah, where?

So there you are. One can hardly suppose that Shadwell has perforce kidnapped the entire Benson family, but the fact is that they have disappeared almost entirely without trace, and the slight trace which remains leads directly to and only to the door of T. Pettys Shadwell Associates, Market Research Advisors. Has he whisked them all away to some sylvan retreat in the remote recesses of the Great Smoky Mountains? Are they even now pursuing their prophetic ways in one of the ever-burgeoning, endlessly proliferating suburbs of the City of the Angels? Or has he, with genius diabolical, located them so near to hand that far-sighted vision must needs forever miss them?

In deepest Brooklyn, perhaps, amongst whose labyrinthine ways an army of surveyors could scarce find their own stakes? —or in fathomless Queens, red brick and yellow brick, world without end, where the questing heart grows sick and faint?

Rosen does not know, but he has not ceased to care. He

writes to live, but he lives to look, now selling, now searching, famine succeeding feast, but hope never failing.

Phillips Anhalt, however, has not continued so successfully. He has not Bob's hopes. Anhalt continues, it is true, with the T. Oscar Rutherford people, but no longer has his corner office, or any private office at all. Anhalt failed: Anhalt now has a desk in the bullpen with the other failures and the new apprentices.

And while Bob ceaselessly searches the streets—for who knows in which place he may find the springs bubbling and welling?—and while Anhalt drinks bitter tea and toils like a slave in a salt mine, that swine, that cad, that most despicable of living men, T. Pettys Shadwell, has three full floors in a new building of steel, aluminum, and blue-green glass a block from the Cathedral; he has a box at the Met, a house in Bucks County, a place on the Vineyard, an apartment in Beekman Place, a Caddy, a Bentley, *two* Jaguars, a yacht that sleeps ten, and one of the choicest small (but ever-growing) collections of Renoirs in private hands today. . . .

INTRODUCTION

to

"The Unknown Law"

When this first occurred to me, I thought of doing it humorously. Then I decided to do it seriously. *Nobody would touch it with a ten-foot pole!* The universal cry in the late fifties was, "You/We cannot *say* such a thing about a President of the United States—not even a fictional one!"

So, after time had passed, I turned it into a science-fiction story and it was accepted and published without a murmur. Not one complaint was, to my knowledge, ever received.

At that time I was of course convinced that It Can't Happen Here.

The Unknown Law

"Then you would say, sir, that the United States has no plans for occupying any of the asteroids at all?"

"The United States has no plans for occupying any of the asteroids at all, at the present time. By that I do not mean to say that we have plans for occupation at any future time. Our action, our policy, in this regard, remains fluid. What we intend to do must continue to take notice of the intentions of the other Space Powers and the decisions of the United Nations."

There was a pause. The President faced the assembled reporters. Then, "Thank you, Mr. President—" The reporters stood up to applaud politely. They faded from view as the 3D wall went blank. A faint bell sounded and a tiny light went on, set in a hood in a far corner of his desk. He lifted the hood and took up a cup of the famous green tea which was almost a trademark of his, steaming hot as he liked it. Prior to the campaign, "In public—coffee," his advisors had said. But then came the ugly business in Brazil, followed by Colombia coffee pricing itself off the market and other supplies inadequate, followed by the popular *coup d'etat* in Formosa, which had, for the moment, scarcely anything to sell—except green tea! Formosa was popular, Dave Smith was popular, coffee wasn't, Byers continued to drink coffee. It wasn't that that elected Smith, anymore than it was hard cider elected Harrison, almost a century and a half earlier. It had helped, though.

Now he sat, in the privacy of his White House office and sipped his cup, watching the wall come alive again, this time

with open circuit 3D—Steven Senty's bland face and voice giving the inconsequentia of the news.

"—and, apropos of the President's comments on the asteroid question, it is agreed that the other as yet unfilled cabinet position will go to millionaire moonestate operator Hartley Gordon, though as yet official confirmation is lacking. Gordon's readiness to bail the party out of the hole the last campaign left it in hasn't been forgotten. Gordon, however, sees himself as an organizer, not an administrator; privately tells friends he will resign after clearing up the 'mess' the Space Department is now in. Likely successors include ex-diplomat Charles Salem Smith, no relation—" The newscaster smiled; the President made a rude noise. "And Party Stalwart J. T. Macdonald, who gave up a shoo-in chance at his father's old seat in the House to direct President Smith's campaign in the Southeast. Those in the real know say that his chances are better than might be expected."

Roger David Smith made a rude noise again, followed it by a ruder word, drank tea.

"A small but time-honored tradition gets in its once-every-four-years airing this afternoon when three major minor—or minor major, ha, ha, officeholders pay their traditional call to greet the new president in person. Personal visits with a president have become increasingly rare, partly because of security problems: how dangerous they can be was demonstrated by the assassination of President Kennedy and the attempted assassination of President Byers: and partly because of the perfection and improvement of the 3D system. No official basis for this ceremony exists, but old-time residents of the District like to tell how it originated. Back in George Washington's time, it seems that—"

The wall went blank, the President took another mouthful of unfermented tea, and reflected sourly just how much he hated the "like to tell" locution. Did the faces of old-time residents of the District light up when they had the opportunity to tell? Did they chuckle, set up the occasion or opportunity, did— Oh, well. He looked at his watch. It was just exactly

time. He touched his fingertip to the *Ready* button. A bell chimed, some rooms away. Pleased, smiling, he repeated this, then three times, fast. Then he frowned in self-reproof, withdrew his hand.

Roger David Smith was thirty-five years old, just past the minimum age the Constitution sets for the presidency, and had occupied the office for exactly three days and two hours. His dark, rugged face, marked with the scars of the shrapnel he had picked up in Sumatra, showed no trace inevitable to the time and place. The new president had not even been born when Warren Gamaliel Harding was playing hide-and-go-seek with his teen-age mistress in the presidential cloakroom; nor when John Calvin Coolidge took two-hour naps every afternoon on the sofa in his office.

Some recollection of this may have been in the President's mind; just before the press conference he had made a teleview call (untapped—the presidential circuit was said to be untappable: he hoped so, but had taken care to keep the conversation innocuous), and a woman's face was still in his eyes and a woman's voice still in his ears—would always be, it seemed—and although poor Harding had managed to hide his own cheap amour, the light which beat unceasingly down on whoever held the office was now almost intolerable.

Smith got up from the desk and faced the door just as it opened, just as the Chief Usher's voice announced the callers. He frowned again, slightly, trying to remember just exactly what it was the retiring president had said to him three days ago; quickly erased the frown and let the thought fade. He smiled politely. The smile was not returned.

The three minor major, or major minor officeholders entered, and there was the usual brief see-sawing before the order in which they approached the president was decided. Anderson, the Federal Armorer, was first; a square-shaped, ruddy man, with crispy gray hair. After him, the Sergeant-Secretary of the Cabinet, Lovel, tall and bony and pale. Both wore the plaids which were, with their short capes, fashionable for formal but unceremonial occasions. Dressed in the

lime-green which psychodynamicists included among the preferred shades for work clothes was Gabrielli, Civil Provost of the Capital, elf-small and moving soundlessly; the President knew that he held the Medal of Honor for his part in the assault on Telukbetung.

Not one of them smiled.

The door closed behind them, and, after a second or two, the silence was broken by the small noise of the door in the outer office being shut.

"Gentlemen," said Roger David Smith, keeping up the little smile, though with a little difficulty. He extended his hand. Each of the callers took it in turn; still, none smiled. A feeling of unease settled on the President, not great, but definite. Thoughts of other times he had felt it came to him in quick-rushing reflection. There was the time he had been summoned to see his CO, in Sumatra, near The Rice Paddy, that dreadful summer, expecting to be court-martialed for exceeding his orders; instead he had been commended for quick thinking. There was the time six Party leaders had called on him in his hotel room at the Convention, to tell him (he had been thinking) that he stood no chance after all of being offered the vice-presidential nomination; instead they had asked him to allow his name to go forward for the presidency. And there was the third time, in between the other two, when he had first met the woman to whom he had earlier this afternoon spoken on the teleview. *She doesn't like me,* was his instant thought then. But she had become his mistress after all.

She could not become his wife.

"Mr. President," said Anderson, "we have come to ask you to accept our felicitations on your selection as Chief Magistrate of the Republic, and to assure you that we stand, as always, ready to assist you in maintaining the integrity of our national confederation."

In the silence which followed this declaration Smith had time to reflect that it all seemed damned odd. He started to say, "Thank you," but Anderson was already speaking.

"We'll be as brief as we can, sir," he said. "We've made this

same declaration to other presidents, in happier times, in unhappier times, and in times equally unhappy. I've done it on five occasions—I'm acting as spokesman because of seniority in office—Lovel and Gabrielli have done it four times each."

The President of the United States said, "I don't really know—"

"You don't really know what this is all about, sir, do you?" Roger David Smith shook his head. The Federal Armorer nodded, unsurprised. "Except—well, I remember now, just before we left for the inauguration, President Byers told me . . . let's see . . . he did tell me you would come here today to tell me something. And he said, 'You'd better believe them, too.' I remember now. I was a little surprised, but there were so many other things on my mind right then. . . . And besides that, only what I've seen in the newspapers and 3D: very little." This was all *damned* odd, he thought. He thought also of his appointments schedule—the Ambassador of the great (and sole remaining) neutral power of the Nether Orient, two western state governors eager to see what they could do about mustering regional support for the president's program (and even more eager to see what they could do about mustering presidential support for their own putative senatorial campaigns), the American Representative to the U.N.—who, of course, should have been scheduled before the governors, but politics had to go on as usual, no matter what. Even if the "what" be the ever-shaky Condominium of the Moon, the threat of the South American Civil War spreading into Central America, the looming rocketry strike, and—not once and again, but again and again—the matter of the asteroids. . . . Still, his appointments secretary had allotted fifteen minutes to these three men. So—

"As I understand it, this tradition began when the first three men to hold your office saved George Washington from an assassination attempt," said President Smith. "And that he promised them that they would have the power to nominate their own successors and to greet every new president on the third day of his term. Isn't that—?"

Anderson asked, "Correct? Not quite, Mr. President."

Smith caught a fleeting resemblance, in the older man's face, to his own father's. Quickly, the thought brought others: his father's insistence, gentle but insistent, when young Dave Smith had failed to make the Space Academy, that he go to law school rather than Paris; then Sumatra, cutting short his legal career before it had really begun; the entry into politics via a local "reform" club; Sarra—

For ten years, almost, everything had been Sarra. Jim, too, of course, but mainly Sarra. The state legislature, the race for the House seat, getting Jim's father to use his great popularity and influence . . . And how had he, Roger David Smith, repaid the old man? By putting horns on his son. Fortunately, the old man never knew. But Jim knew—Jim *must* know. He just didn't care. So—Roger David ("Dave") Smith, here he was: the high school teacher's son, the youngest man ever to sit in the White House. Jefferson, Jackson, Lincoln, the two Roosevelts . . . Kennedy and now Dave Smith. And it was all Sarra. She would have made a damned vigorous president herself, he thought, not for the first time. Only she would never do it, even if it were possible; she'd rather have Jim be elected, had the chance existed, and rule through him. Rule? *Reign!*

And, sighing, without being aware that he was sighing, his eye fell on the new asteroid chart they had installed only this morning. White lights for the U.N., blue for the U.S.A., red for the U.S.S.R., and yellow for the disputed ones—ones which were, in American eyes, disputed: the Russians, of course, had a different listing.

His eyes came back to Anderson, his mind recalled Anderson's last comment. "'Not quite correct?' Your jobs aren't civil service and they're not on the patronage list, either. So—"

Lovel said nothing, bent his long gaunt face a few inches toward his senior, who caught the movement, nodded, and said, "That's true enough, sir, about our being traditionally allowed to nominate our successors. Not exactly true about the assassination thing. Not the *whole* truth."

The whole truth, Anderson went on to say, standing on the rug which a Persian ambassador had given Mrs. Grover Cleveland; the whole truth was that during Washington's first Administration, at a time when New York was still the Capital, a great danger towards the nation had arisen, arisen in secret—a cabal, as it was then called. A plot to seize power, to force the new president to follow the direction of a group of men who, alarmed by the radical ideas then emanating from France, intended a more rigorous system of government.

There was evidence, oh, there was evidence in plenty. But it was not evidence that you could bring to court, on which you could base a hope that the matter would be settled swiftly and peacefully.

Delay meant either a successful *coup d'etat* and an oligarchy like that of the Venetian Republic—rule by the heads of the great families, secret police, dungeons, and everything hateful and dangerous to liberty-loving Americans—or else full civil war. The nation was new, the nation was young and weak, operating under a constitution barely tried and largely suspect. British troops still maintained bases on American soil, Spanish armies ringed our Southern and Western borders, French navies were on the seas; and the Indians, still powerful, were everywhere. . . .

"I've never heard a word of it," Smith declared. "I'm not sure I believe it. Although"—memory flashed—"is this what President Byers meant when he said I'd better believe you? Because—"

"It's all true, sir," Anderson said. "Great names were involved. Conway's Cabal was nothing in comparison to it. Three men came and brought the evidence before President Washington—they'd served under him in the War of the Revolution—they presented him with the evidence on his third day in office. One was the Federal Armorer, William Dickensheet."

"One was the Sergeant-Secretary of the cabinet, Richard Main," said Lovel.

"The third was Simon Stavers, Civil Provost of the Capital," Gabrielli said.

President Smith stared at them. It hardly seemed possible to remain in doubt of these three men, known to be honorable career men, sober, stable and loyal. But surely they had not come to give him a history lesson? "Go on," he said.

Those three, Anderson continued, discussed the matter a whole night through with President Washington. They debated as to what the right course would be. Speed—as it was counted in those days of slow and difficult transport and communication—speed was essential, if the country was to be spared either a tyranny whose end no man could foresee, or a bloody domestic war. *Wars,* perhaps, and perhaps ending in invasion and conquest and an end to national independence.

Despite the teleview, the luminescents, the model on his desk of the latest moonship, Roger Smith felt something of that evening so far back—he believed it now, he did believe; it was impossible to doubt those three good men any longer: the archaic formula of their greeting to him (". . . *our felicitations on your selection as Chief Magistrate . . . we stand, as always, ready to assist you in maintaining the integrity of our national confederation*)—that long-distant night when the Father of his Country, no doubt with his wig set aside and perhaps his famous painful and ill-fitting false teeth as well, debated what move to make and make fast . . . and the candles guttered in the dimness. President Smith had his own problems, the United States of America under the First Administration of President Roger David Smith had its own problems. They were heavy, grave and great, and no one now spoke of or scarcely dared dream of any "return to normalcy." (The Harding note again!)

He leaned forward, caught up in this account (unaccountably, till now, concealed from him) of the Nation's first crisis under its Constitution. "What did they decide to do?" he asked.

"Immediate contact was made," Anderson said, in the same

steady tones he had used throughout, "with those members of the Government who were then in town." He paused. His colleagues nodded slowly, gazing steadfastly at the President. "The leader of the cabal was known, his whereabouts were known. It was also known that if he were removed, the scheme would collapse. It was agreed that the welfare of the Nation depended upon—demanded—his removal.

"He was, accordingly, removed."

"*How?*"

"The decision was, by pistoling."

Smith half-turned his back and struck his fist on his desk.

"Are you trying to tell me," he cried, "that *George Washington* ordered the murder of a man he couldn't convict on a fair trial?" And swung around to face them again.

But they wouldn't admit the word, *murder*. Execution was not *murder*. The slaying of an enemy was not *murder* in time of war. Nor did "war" depend upon a formal declaration. The welfare of the Nation had to be the paramount thing in the eyes of its Chief. The enjoyment of private scruples was a luxury with which he had no right to indulge himself in his official capacity.

"Go on," said Smith.

Could anyone looking back, Anderson went on, doubt that the original decision was the best one? It was obvious beyond doubt even at the time. It had been obvious also that similar situations would arise again—and again and again. It was inevitable. So there grew up a law, he said—and the nods of his colleagues' assents confirmed his words, a law unwritten, but, unlike the so-called "Unwritten law" justifying a husband's killing his wife's lover, it was an unknown law—unknown except to the fewest possible people—the men who held these three offices, their predecessors, the President, and the ex-Presidents—but a *law*, nonetheless, authorizing a President to order the death of any person in the country whose existence constituted what was later to be called a "clear and present danger" to the welfare of the Nation.

"My God!" said Roger Smith. Then—a sudden rush of inter-

est overcoming his shock—he asked, "How in the Hell did they miss Aaron Burr?"

"He skipped the country too soon. And by the time he came back he wasn't dangerous."

"I see. Well—"

"There have to be limits, of course, Mr. President," the Federal Armorer explained. "The President has to declare his intention to us. And he can only do it once. Once in each term of office, that is. Because there have to be limits. There *have* to be—" His voice, for the first time, rose just a trifle.

After a moment, "I see," said the President. "How often—?"

"In the country's history? Seventeen times. Who carries out the decision? One of us. How chosen? By lot. Is there any danger of detection? Almost none. Over the course of almost two hundred years," said Anderson, "certain techniques have been developed. Effective ones. How often during our own tenures of office? Once."

President Smith swallowed. "Who is the man who was . . . killed?"

"That question, sir, is not answered."

"I see. I'm sorry. Of course not. Well, which one of you—"

"And *that* question, sir, is not even asked."

There was silence. "*You'd better believe them,*" the ex-President Byers had said. Was there something of a deeper, personal knowledge in Byers' voice when saying it? Smith could not now remember, the Inauguration, only moments away, had driven anything but bare reception of the words from his mind. He searched his memory; who had died—suddenly—during the previous Administration, whose death might have . . . ? No name occurred to him. He glanced at the clock set into his desk-top at a slant. The fifteen minutes were up. During that fifteen minutes anything might have occurred. Panama invaded by the Continentalists ("South America ends at the northern boundary of Mexico," Lopez-Cardoso was said to have said; he was dead now, could neither confirm nor deny it; but his slogan of "One Continent, One People, One Faith, One Destiny" was certainly very

much alive), the friendly but unstable Colored government of the Free Cape State overthrown by either Black or White intransigents, another "incident" unfavorably affecting the Lunar Condominium—nothing, it seemed, could affect it favorably any more, further troubles in the still-vex'd Asteroids: any or even all of these could have occurred in the quarter-hour he'd just spent chittering over ancient history.

"Have you anything else to tell me?" he asked, starting forward.

"Only that at least one of us will remain in the District at all times, in case of, well, immediate need, let's say. . . . No, sir, nothing else to tell you."

Smith nodded. Anderson glanced at his colleagues. Gabrielli, the most junior of the three in office, spoke for the first time. "Mr. President, we tender you our renewed assurances that we stand, as always, ready to assist you in maintaining the integrity of our national confederation. And we ask your permission to withdraw." He was elf-small and some people found his voice amusing, but the President knew that he held the Congressional Medal of Honor for his part in the assault on Telukbetung.

After those three came the ambassador of the great neutral power of the Nether Orient, equally full of his grave misgivings about American space policy and his grave insistence upon increased American financial aid to his own country, both couched in the most mellifluous English, and after him came one of the Western American state governors, slyly awkward or awkwardly sly, not even knowing the name of the diplomat who had preceded him but knowing just what to offer and just what to demand in the way of political horse-trading. Neither of these two were present in person, of course. And after him—

"What are you doing here, Jim?" the President demanded, frowning. "Governor Millard was supposed to be next; you're not down for an appointment until tomorrow afternoon." He was brusque, not so much because he gave a damn about that

as because he had been wondering—tired, disgusted, knowing that his impending interview with the American representative to the U.N. would bring new problems which neither weariness nor disgust could ignore—had been wondering if there were any chance of his being with Sarra that night. There was, he had finally realized, no chance at all. A President of the United States might sell his country down the river or let it drift down by incompetence, but he could never under any circumstances let it be hinted that he had a mistress. Perhaps ten years ago he might have gotten away with it, so far had the pendulum swung from the old morality. But there had been one, or perhaps two, scandals too many; now the pendulum was on the far swing again.

James Thackeray Macdonald smiled, waved his hand; Smith fancied he could smell the familiar odor of the man's cigar, but of course it was only fancy—the 3D hadn't gotten that far yet, despite continual efforts. There was not the slightest chance in the world of Jim's being any sort of menace in his physical person, but—protocol was protocol. "The day I can't persuade Millard or a thousand yokels like him to trade appointments with me, that's the day I'll close the store and go fishing," Jim said, his ruddy face glowing and cheerful as usual.

"What did you promise him? Off-shore oil rights on the Moon?"

Macdonald leaned back in the chair which he had taken, unbidden, and laughed. It was the famous Macdonald laugh, with rich echoes of his famous father, and, despite everything, Roger Smith found himself smiling faintly. Jim had charm, if nothing else. And there was damned little else between the charm and the nothing else.

"Well, come on, Jim, what the Hell do you want?"

J.T. Macdonald smiled indulgently. "Yes, I *know*, Rog: okay, I'll make it brief, and then you can let Nick Mason tell you his latest hardluck story about the Rooshians and the Prooshians. Okay. I spoke to Harley Gordon just a few minutes ago, and he told me that he definitely will not stay in office

more than three months, not if you offered him Manhattan Island for a nickel. So what I want to know is, how about my taking an undersecretariat now, so I'll be able to step into his shoes without any trouble when he quits?"

The faint smile on the President's face had slipped easily into a frown. Macdonald's appointment to a Cabinet position had been suggested—once, and not by the President, either. J.T.'s name had been, was being frequently mentioned by the media in this connection, however; but speculation of this sort was too common for the President to think it seemed worth even an unofficial denial. He had assumed it would die down. But Jim seemed to be taking it seriously.

"Have you talked about this with Sarra?" Smith asked.

Now the frown was Macdonald's, as faint as the President's smile had been. "Dammit, Rog, I don't have to talk over every little thing with Sarra. I have a mind of my own, you know."

"A Cabinet appointment is no little thing, Jim. I never—no, don't interrupt me—I never promised it to you, I never even suggested it. I know Sarra did mention it, but I never thought you'd think she meant it seriously. Who it was that leaked the fact of your name having been proposed at all I don't know, but I can't be committed by a *leak,* dammit! You have no right, none whatsoever, to treat a lighthearted remark of Sarra's as if it were a promise from me. I am not to be cornered that way. The Secretariat is *out.* And that means, so is an undersecretariat." Macdonald was still trying to speak, but the President swept on over him. "Besides, as far as I'm concerned, it's been definite for some time now that you would take a position on my personal staff here. Hasn't it? I value your talents, Jim, especially with meeting people face to face, and—"

But Jim wasn't taking the compliment. Thanks for nothing, was his attitude. He had no intention of becoming the Presidential Grover Whalen, he said, pinning carnations on visiting dignitaries' wives, and glad-handing prominent Rotarians and Exempt Spacemen from the Middle West, taking them on personally conducted tours of the White House.

"I deserve better than that," he said, stormily. "If you hadn't won in the Southeast you wouldn't be here—"

"Yes, you're a good man for smoke-filled rooms and rostrums, Jim, just as I've just told you: the personal touch. But listen—the Southeast? Don't let's kid ourselves. The strategy there wasn't yours anymore than it was mine. It was Sarra's, all the way."

Macdonald uttered a short, ugly word. Roger Smith's head snapped back. "You're talking to the President of the United States," he said.

Macdonald laughed. "No, I'm not. I'm talking to the guy who sleeps with my wife."

Smith stared at him, bleakly.

Then he said, "I'm turning you off. You get out of here."

But Macdonald shook his head. "You talk to me or I talk to the press. Okay?" Smith said nothing, continued staring at him. "Okay," Macdonald muttered. What he was going to do, he said, leaning back, and taking out a cigar, was to give Rog a little history lesson, free. . . . His expression, as he lit his cigar, raised his eyebrows, darted little glances at the grim-faced man viewing him, and gazed at the smoke as it came swirling from his own pursed lips, was that of an actor in a classical "B movie"—a heavy, who has just announced that he is "going to enjoy this, very much."

"Go ahead," Smith said. "But just remember that while you are getting this off your chest, or wherever the hell you've been keeping it, that the job I have is the most difficult one in the world, and that the world isn't going to stand still for either of us. Now, go ahead."

Jim, who had waved his hand, lightly, at mention of difficulty, now nodded, puffed at his cigar. After a moment he said, "You've heard, I suppose, of Charles Stewart Parnell."

"Parnell? Parnell? The Irish—"

"*That's* the one. Home rule for dear old Ireland. The 1880's, 90's. Well, Parnell had a friend named Captain O'Shea—Willie O'Shea. Ever heard of him? No? Doesn't matter. O'Shea, you see, was useful to Parnell, acted as his confidential

agent, took care of difficult matters for him, let his own political career languish in order to help Parnell's. . . . And Parnell appreciated it. In fact, he appreciated it so much that he determined to keep O'Shea happy. That is, not exactly *Captain* O'Shea, but *Mrs.* O'Shea. The beautiful Kitty O'Shea. Willie wasn't good enough for her, it would seem. Whether he lacked *looks,* or *glamour,* or whether she couldn't twist him quite so far around her finger as she'd've liked to, who knows. Anyway, whatever it was that Willie didn't have, Smith—oops, sorry—Parnell had it."

He grinned, lifting his upper lip in front, and glancing sideways at the other man.

"Did Willie know about it? Oh, you bet your life Willie knew about it. He was nobody's fool. Of *course* he knew about it. Almost right from the start. Why didn't he do anything?" Jim considered his own question, shrugged. "Might be any one of a number of reasons. Maybe Willie didn't think that something was necessarily wrong just because an old book said it was. Maybe Willie *liked* Parnell—maybe he even *loved* Parnell, hmm?—so much that he just didn't *care.* Or . . . maybe even . . . maybe Kitty was the kind of woman that no one man could satisfy, hey? Oh, I don't just mean sexually. Maybe she had other desires—power, say. A lust for intrigue, for action, for— And maybe Willie figured that, if there had to be another man, well, he'd rather it was Parnell than anyone else. Could've been *any* of those reasons. Or all of them. Hey, Rog?"

Roger David Smith continued to stare at him, said nothing. Now and then he raised a hand and stroked the tiny scars on his face. Macdonald took another fleeting look at him, resumed.

"Well, where were we? *Oh,* yes— *'And the song he sang/Was, "Old Ireland free."'* Well, Home Rule. It was almost all wrapped up, you see. Gladstone was all for it. Ireland was to have its own government at last, with Parnell as Prime Minister. Now, Willie had worked as hard for the cause as

any man. And he felt it was time that he had his reward. It was a modest one—a place in Parnell's Cabinet."

After all, what difference did it make who held what Cabinet post? The actual work was always done by underlings, career men, drudges who delighted in details and red tape and hard work. . . .

"Do you see the point, Rog?"

The President nodded. "I see it. And the answer is still 'No.'"

For the first time something like uncertainty flickered across Macdonald's face. "Ah, come on, Rog," he said, almost pleadingly. "You know something? I wouldn't make the worst Space Secretary in the world. I've followed things closely, damned closely. I've read up on it very, ver-ry carefully. I've got ideas which go beyond re-organizing the bookkeeping system, which is about all that Harley Gordon has in mind, or just sitting tight and hoping that the bogeymen will go away, which is all that Salem Smith has in mind."

"*You've* got ideas?"

Evidently stung by the tone of the questioning voice, Macdonald went from ruddy to red. "Yes, *I've* got ideas," he said. "And a lot of other important people have the same ideas —people whose support you'll damned well be needing." His eyes left the President's face and rested on something in the White House room behind the President; met the President's eyes as he returned his gaze; for an instant, fell; then faced him squarely and defiantly. Smith turned his head. There it was—the white, blue, red and yellow lights of the newly-installed Asteroid chart.

The President snorted. What would Macdonald do? he demanded. Occupy the Asteroids? Was that one of his ideas?

Yes, it was. It certainly was. The USA was tied hand and foot in one big Gordian knot, he said. The Condominium of the Moon, just look at it? The Russians did just as they damned well pleased, and in return for being let alone they raised every kind of hell imaginable with what the United States was doing. Whenever the United States *did* anything,

that is; which was damned seldom . . . too damned seldom. And Mars? The U.S. had one station on Mars, count them, one; the British had one; the U.N. had two; and the Russians had *four!* The same as everyone else put together. And yet there were people claiming that the single American Mars station was costing too much.

"In a way they're *right,* Rog," Jim said, confidently now, almost cockily. "For a weather bureau, which is about all we use it for, it *is* costing too much. But Rog, if we occupied the Asteroids, then Mars Station could be busier than New York! And—rocketry strike? Hell, there'd be so much doing, we could double, triple their pay—the 'teers would be so busy making money they wouldn't have *time* to strike!"

"Uh-huh. And which ones would you occupy? Just the ones we claim? The ones the Russians claim, too? Any unclaimed ones we fancy? Or the whole works, maybe?"

For a moment Macdonald's face hung askew. Then something hateful and ugly entered it. Then he caught control of himself once more.

"How much longer are the American people going to sit still and let the Russians get away with insisting that everything they've already claimed is theirs and that everything they haven't claimed belongs to the U.N.? Where does that leave *us?* The American people—"

Smith got up abruptly, so abruptly that Macdonald jumped.

"I don't know who put you up to this—"

"Nobody put me—"

"I could make a good guess. You can tell them that they picked the wrong cat to try the chestnut game. 'The American people?' Listen, little Jimmy, the American people showed last November what they wanted in the way of leadership, and it wasn't *your* hand that went on the Bible three days ago."

"You—"

"*Me.* That's right. And I'll tell you something else, I'll give it to you right between the eyes, fellow—even if you didn't have these dangerous ideas you still wouldn't stand a chance

at the job. Not a pip in a snow-hole. Because without Sarra you're not worth a—"

Scarlet, his cigar fallen unnoticed from his hand, Macdonald on his feet gestured and yammered in incoherent rage.

"My appointing *you,* if you hadn't so obviously sold yourself out, would have meant that *she'd* be the brains of the post. And I don't need her there, I don't want her there."

Now silence fell. Outside, the wet gray afternoon vanished as the exterior lights went on.

"Then it's 'No,'" Macdonald said, very softly. He looked older, he looked genuinely stricken, he looked a little sick.

"It's 'No,' Jim."

Jim nodded. "I'll wait . . . I'll wait until tomorrow. Just the same. Because . . . 'history lesson.' Parnell said 'No' to Captain Willie O'Shea, too, you see. And then Willie sued Kitty for divorce, naming Parnell as correspondent. He got the divorce. And Parnell got the axe. His party kicked him out. Gladstone backed off on Home Rule. Parnell died of a broken heart. And Ireland drowned in blood."

He paused in turning to go, did not look back.

"But I'll wait till tomorrow, anyway," he said.

Nicholas Mason, the American Representative to the U.N., his face noble and haggard, thanked the President again for having asked him to continue in office. Then, in a low voice, he told his latest tale of defeats, struggles, major setbacks, and minor victories.

Smith interrupted him, "What in your opinion, Mr. Ambassador—in your personal and confidential opinion—would be the effect of a scandal, an open and notorious and unsavory scandal, concerning the personal life of the President?"

Mason brought his mind to bear upon this abrupt question with visible difficulty. Slowly he raised his eyes and looked at Smith. Then a tremor ran over his face. "I can hardly suppose . . . that this question is hypothetical, Mr. President?" The President shook his head. In a voice still lower, Mason asked,

"Could this . . . scandal of which you speak be averted? Is it possible? Then—"

"Averted only at great cost to the welfare of the Nation, and possibly, probably, involving dangers to its prestige, its proper functioning, and perhaps even its peace."

Mason slowly raised his hand and laid the palm against his face. "I may at least hope that the danger could not be that great. Even so, it would then be a matter of balancing dangers . . . costs. I need hardly tell you—I need hardly tell you—at this juncture, anything which would divide the country might well destroy the country. And then—you spoke of our prestige —it's none too high as it now is. . . . I . . . His voice died into a whisper.

Smith muttered, "I could resign, I suppose."

Mason snapped straight. "No President of the United States has *ever* resigned! *Mr. President!* Had you forgotten who would succeed you? If the present Vice-President were put in charge of a chickenyard, my money would be on the hawks and the weasels!"

Smith's face twisted.

"You have been a soldier, Mr. President," Mason continued. "I have not. But I know, and you surely know, that there is more than one way to win a battle. It is up to you to decide which way it has to be now. And . . . need I say . . . if I can in any way . . . ?"

The President shook his head.

Left alone, he got up and went to the windows. It was miserable weather. Only three days ago he had been inaugurated, on a crisp and sparkling afternoon. Despite all he knew of the world scene, the day had seemed flecked with gold. He had caught sight of Sarra, face shining with triumph, dressed in a gray robe which had appeared to his eyes then as brighter than scarlet or crimson. Now the dying sun broke through the clouds briefly and turned the wet walks and puddles red: yet his mood was gray, grayer than it had ever been before in his life. Sarra's voice rang in his ears, her face was before his

eyes, and for the first time he failed to draw comfort from either. Could she deal with Jim at this late stage? Persuade him to do nothing? Could he be trusted to remain persuaded?

Or should he, the President, give the man the office he coveted, oblige him to live up to his own first picture of it, a sinecure in which the actual work was done by others? And depend upon the tight reign of the President from there on?

But would Jim remain content? Might he not have more "ideas"? His own, or others, it might not even matter—ideas, policies, plans, purposes, ambitions? Where would it stop? James Thackeray Macdonald, red-faced little politician, the Secret President of the United States!

But where, where had he gotten the *nerve*? Why—and how—after all these years, had he brought himself to defy his wife? Except in those easy cajoleries which came so naturally to him, and which had made politics his natural field; except in these shallows he had scarcely ever seemed to have a mind of his own or an ambition which was not Sarra's. Why, after all these years, had the worm turned?

For a long time, in the lowering dusk, the President of the United States stayed at the window, deep in thought. Then he drew the curtains and went to the teleview.

He had thought that the three men might ask many questions—or, rather, bring forth cautions and disagreements disguised as questions—but they asked only two, after all.

Anderson, this time, was silent. It was Lovel who spoke first.

"Mr. President," he began, "have you concluded that in order to maintain the integrity of our national confederation it is imperative for you to invoke the unknown law?"

"I have," said Roger David Smith.

Lovel's face was impassive, but the skin seemed suddenly tighter upon the almost fleshless bones.

"What is his name?" he asked.

Softly, almost gently, the President corrected him.

"*Her* name," he said.

INTRODUCTION

to

"Now Let Us Sleep"

Robert P. Mills asked me to write a story for the newly begun magazine *Venture,* of which he was editor. I asked, What About? He answered, The Soul of Man in Torment. I had just recently seen a photograph of the last Tasmanian aborigines (they died out in "the pure blood"* about a hundred years ago), and this was the genesis of the story.

It may be that the very attempts to "save" the full-blooded Tasmanian aborigines were what, nonviolently, killed them off. We can at any rate, it is maintained, see a similar process going on with some so-called primitive Indian tribes in South America. Attempts to Do Something about it are rejected with scorn and anger as invasions of National Sovereignty—and anyway, we are asked, who are we to complain? The counterquestion, Who do you have to be? accomplishes nothing. There are, apparently, enough Indians to go around.

Are there?

* "Mixed-blood" descendants still survive.

Now Let Us Sleep

A pink-skinned young cadet ran past Harper, laughing and shouting and firing his stungun. The wind veered about, throwing the thick scent of the Yahoos into the faces of the men, who whooped loudly to show their revulsion.

"I got three!" the chicken cadet yelped at Harper. "Did you see me pop those two together? Boy, what a stink they have!"

Harper looked at the sweating kid, muttered, "You don't smell so sweet yourself," but the cadet didn't wait to hear. All the men were running now, running in a ragged semi-circle with the intention of driving the Yahoos before them, to hold them at bay at the foot of the gaunt cliff a quarter-mile off.

The Yahoos loped awkwardly over the rough terrain, moaning and grunting grotesquely, their naked bodies bent low. A few hundred feet ahead one of them stumbled and fell, his arms and legs flying out as he hit the ground, twitched, and lay still.

A bald-headed passenger laughed triumphantly, paused to kick the Yahoo, and trotted on. Harper kneeled beside the fallen Primitive, felt for a pulse in the hairy wrist. It seemed slow and feeble, but then, no one actually knew what the normal pulse-beat should be. And—except for Harper—no one seemed to give a damn.

Maybe it was because he was the grandson of Barret Harper, the great naturalist—back on Earth, of course. It seemed as if man could be fond of nature only on the planet of man's origin, whose ways he knew so well. Elsewhere, it was too strange and alien—you subdued it, or you adjusted to it, or you were perhaps even content with it. But you almost

never *cared* about the flora or fauna of the new planets. No one had the feeling for living things that an earth-born had.

The men were shouting more loudly now, but Harper didn't lift his head to see why. He put his hand to the shaggy gray chest. The heart was still beating, but very slowly and irregularly. Someone stood beside him.

"He'll come out of it in an hour or so," the voice of the purser said. "Come on—you'll miss all the fun—you should see how they act when they're cornered! They kick out and throw sand and"—he laughed at the thought—"they weep great big tears, and go, *'Oof! Oof!'*"

Harper said, "An ordinary man *would* come out of it in an hour or so. But I think their metabolism is different. . . . Look at all the bones lying around."

The purser spat. "Well, don't that prove they're not human, when they won't even bury their dead? . . . *Oh,* oh!—look at that!" He swore.

Harper got to his feet. Cries of dismay and disappointment went up from the men.

"What's wrong?" Harper asked.

The purser pointed. The men had stopped running, were gathering together and gesturing. "Who's the damn fool who planned this drive?" the purser asked, angrily. "He picked the wrong cliff! The damned Yahoos *nest* in that one! Look at them climb, will you—" He took aim, fired the stungun. A figure scrabbling up the side of the rock threw up its arms and fell, bounding from rock to rock until it hit the ground. "*That* one will never come out of it!" the purser said, with satisfaction.

But this was the last casualty. The other Yahoos made their way to safety in the caves and crevices. No one followed them. In those narrow, stinking confines a Yahoo was as good as a man, there was no room to aim a stungun, and the Yahoos had rocks and clubs and their own sharp teeth. The men began straggling back.

"This one a she?" The purser pushed at the body with his foot, let it fall back with an annoyed grunt as soon as he de-

termined its sex. "There'll be Hell to pay in the hold if there's more than two convicts to a she." He shook his head and swore.

Two lighters came skimming down from the big ship to load up.

"Coming back to the launch?" the purser asked. He had a red shiny face. Harper had always thought him a rather decent fellow—before. The purser had no way of knowing what was in Harper's mind; he smiled at him and said, "We might as well get on back, the fun's over now."

Harper came to a sudden decision. "What're the chances of my taking a souvenir back with me? This big fellow, here, for example?"

The purser seemed doubtful. "Well, I dunno, Mr. Harper. We're only supposed to take females aboard, and unload *them* as soon as the convicts are finished with their fun." He leered. Harper, suppressing a strong urge to hit him right in the middle of his apple-red face, put his hand in his pocket. The purser understood, looked away as Harper slipped a bill into the breast pocket of his uniform.

"I guess it can be arranged. See, the Commissioner-General on Selopé III wants one for his private zoo. Tell you what: We'll take one for him and one for you—I'll tell the supercargo it's a spare. But if one croaks, the C-G has to get the other. Okay?"

At Harper's nod the purser took a tag out of his pocket, tied it around the Yahoo's wrist, waved his cap to the lighter as it came near. "Although why anybody'd *want* one of these beats me," he said, cheerfully. "They're dirtier than animals. I mean, a pig or a horse'll use the same corner of the enclosure, but these things'll dirty anywhere. Still, if you *want* one—" He shrugged.

As soon as the lighter had picked up the limp form (the pulse was still fluttering feebly) Harper and the purser went back to the passenger launch. As they made a swift ascent to the big ship the purser gestured to the two lighters. "That's

going to be a mighty slow trip *those* two craft will make back up," he remarked.

Harper innocently asked why. The purser chuckled. The coxswain laughed.

"The freight-crewmen want to make their points before the convicts. *That's* why."

The chicken cadet, his face flushed a deeper pink than usual, tried to sound knowing. "How about that, purser? Is it pretty good stuff?"

The other passengers wiped their perspiring faces, leaned forward eagerly. The purser said, "Well, rank has its privileges, but that's one I figure I can do without."

His listeners guffawed, but more than one looked down toward the lighters and then avoided other eyes when he looked back again.

Barnum's Planet (named, as was the custom then, after the skipper who'd first sighted it) was a total waste, economically speaking. It was almost all water and the water supported only a few repulsive-looking species of no discernible value. The only sizable piece of land—known, inevitably, as Barnumland, since no one else coveted the honor—was gaunt and bleak, devoid alike of useful minerals or arable soil. Its ecology seemed dependent on a sort of fly: A creature rather like a lizard ate the flies and the Yahoos ate the lizards. If something died at sea and washed ashore, the Yahoos ate that, too. What the flies ate no one knew, but their larvae ate the Yahoos, dead.

They were small, hairy, stunted creatures whose speech—if speech it was—seemed confined to moans and clicks and grunts. They wore no clothing, made no artifacts, did not know the use of fire. Taken away captive, they soon languished and died. Of all the primitives discovered by man, they were the most primitive. They might have been left alone on their useless planet to kill lizards with tree branches forever—except for one thing.

Barnum's Planet lay equidistant between Coulter's System

and the Selopés, and it was a long, long voyage either way. Passengers grew restless, crews grew mutinous, convicts rebellious. Gradually the practice developed of stopping on Barnum's Planet "to let off steam"—archaic expression, but although the nature of the machinery man used had changed since it was coined, man's nature hadn't.

And, of course, no one *owned* Barnum's Planet, so no one cared what happened there.

Which was just too bad for the Yahoos.

It took some time for Harper to settle the paperwork concerning his "souvenir," but finally he was given a baggage check for "One Yahoo, male, live," and hurried down to the freight deck. He hoped it would be still alive.

Pandemonium met his ears as he stepped out of the elevator. A rhythmical chanting shout came from the convict hold. "Hear that?" one of the duty officers asked him, taking the cargo chit. Harper asked what the men were yelling. "I wouldn't care to use the words," the officer said. He was a paunchy, gray-haired man, one who probably loved to tell his grandchildren about his "adventures." This was one he wouldn't tell them.

"I don't like this part of the detail," the officer went on. "Never did, never will. Those creatures *seem human to me*—stupid as they are. And if they're *not* human," he asked, "then how can we sink low enough to bring their females up for the convicts?"

The lighters grated on the landing. The noise must have penetrated to the convict hold, because all semblance of words vanished from the shouting. It became a mad cry, louder and louder.

"Here's your pet," the gray-haired officer said. "Still out, I see . . . I'll let you have a baggage-carrier. Just give it to a steward when you're done with it." He had to raise his voice to be heard over the frenzied howling from the hold.

The ship's surgeon was out having tea at the captain's table. The duty medical officer was annoyed. "What, another one?

We're not veterinarians, you know . . . Well, wheel him in. My intern is working on the other one . . . *whew!*" He held his nose and hastily left.

The intern, a pale young man with close-cropped dark hair, looked up from the pressure-spray he had just used to give an injection to the specimen Yahoo selected for the Commissioner-General of Selopé III. He smiled faintly.

"Junior will have company, I see. . . . Any others?"

Harper shook his head. The intern went on, "This should be interesting. The young one seems to be in shock. I gave him two cc's of anthidar sulfate, and I see I'd better do the same for yours. Then . . . Well, I guess there's still nothing like serum albumen, is there? But you'd better help me strap them down. If they come to, there's a cell back aft we can put them in, until I can get some cages rigged up." He shot the stimulant into the flaccid arm of Harper's Yahoo.

"Whoever named these beasties knew his Swift," the young medico said. "You ever read that old book, *Gulliver's Travels*?"

Harper nodded.

"Old Swift went mad, didn't he? He hated humanity, they all seemed like Yahoos to him. . . . In a way I don't blame him. I think that's why everybody despises these Primitives: They seem like caricatures of ourselves. Personally, I look forward to finding out a lot about them, their metabolism and so on. . . . What's *your* interest?"

He asked the question casually, but shot a keen look as he did so. Harper shrugged. "I hardly know, exactly. It's not a scientific one, because I'm a businessman." He hesitated. "You ever hear or read about the Tasmanians?"

The intern shook his head. He thrust a needle into a vein in the younger Yahoo's arm, prepared to let the serum flow in. "If they lived on Earth, I wouldn't know. Never was there. I'm a third generation Coulterboy, myself."

Harper said, "Tasmania is an island south of Australia. The natives were the most primitive people known to Earth. They were almost all wiped out by the settlers, but one of them suc-

ceeded in moving the survivors to a smaller island. And then a curious thing happened."

Looking up from the older Primitive, the intern asked what that was.

"The Tasmanians—the few that were left—decided that they'd had it. They refused to breed. And in a few more years they were all dead. . . . I read about them when I was just a kid. Somehow, it moved me very much. Things like that *did*—the dodo, the great auk, the quagga, the Tasmanians. I've never been able to get it out of my mind. When I began hearing about the Yahoos, it seemed to me that they were like the old Tasmanians. Only there are no settlers on Barnumland."

The intern nodded. "But that won't help our hairy friends here a hell of a lot. Of course no one knows how many of them there are—or ever were. But I've been comparing the figures in the log as to how many females are caught and taken aboard." He looked directly at Harper. "And on every trip there are less by far."

Harper bowed his head. He nodded. The intern's voice went on: "The thing is, Barnum's Planet is no one's responsibility. If the Yahoos could be used for labor, they'd be exploited according to a careful system. But as it is, no one cares. If half of them die from being stungunned, no one cares. If the lighter crews don't bother to actually land the females—if any of the wretched creatures are still *alive* when the convicts are done—but just dump them out from twenty feet up, why, again: no one cares. Mr. Harper?"

Their eyes met. Harper said, "Yes?"

"Don't misunderstand me. . . . I've got a career here. I'm not jeopardizing it to save the poor Yahoos—but if *you* are interested—if you think you've got any influence—and if you want to try to do anything—" He paused. "Why, now is the time to start. Because after another few stopovers there aren't going to *be* any Yahoos. No more than there are any Tasmanians."

Selopé III was called "The Autumn Planet" by the poets. At

least, the P.R. picture-tapes always referred to it as "Selopé III, The Autumn Planet of the poets," but no one knew who the poets were. It was true that the Commission Territory, at least, did have the climate of an almost-perpetual early New England November. Barnumland had been dry and warm. The Commissioner-General put the two Yahoos in a heated cage as large as the room Harper occupied at his company's bachelor executive quarters.

"Here, boy," the C-G said, holding out a piece of fruit. He made a chirping noise. The two Yahoos huddled together in a far corner.

"They don't seem very bright," he said, sadly. "All my *other* animals eat out of my hand." He was very proud of his private zoo, the only one in the Territory. On Sundays he allowed the public to visit it.

Sighing, Harper repeated that the Yahoos were Primitives, not animals. But, seeing the C-G was still doubtful, he changed his tactics. He told the C-G about the great zoos on Earth, where the animals went loose in large enclosures rather than being caged up. The C-G nodded thoughtfully. Harper told him of the English dukes who—generation after ducal generation—preserved the last herd of wild White Cattle in a park on their estate.

The C-G stroked his chin. "Yes, yes," he said. "I see your point," he said. He sighed gustily. "Can't be done," he said.

"But why not, sir?" Harper cried.

It was simple. "No money. Who's to pay? The Exchequer-Commissioner is weeping blood trying to get the budget through Council. If he adds a penny more— No, young fellow. I'll do what *I* can: I'll feed these two, here. But that's all I can do."

Trying to pull all the strings he could reach, Harper approached the Executive-Fiscal and the Procurator-General, the President-in-Council, the Territorial Advocate, the Chairman of the Board of Travel. But no one could do anything. Barnum's Planet, it was carefully explained to him, remained No Man's Land only because no man presumed to give any

orders concerning it. If any government did, this would be a Presumption of Authority. And then every other government would feel obliged to deny that presumption and issue a claim of its own.

There was a peace on now—a rather tense, uneasy one. And it wasn't going to be disturbed for Harper's Yahoos. Human, were they? Perhaps. But who cared? As for morality, Harper didn't even bother to mention the word. It would have meant as little as chivalry.

Meanwhile, he was learning something of the Yahoos' language. Slowly and arduously, he gained their confidence. They would shyly take food from him. He persuaded the C-G to knock down a wall and enlarge their quarters. The official was a kindly old man, and he seemed to grow fond of the stooped, shaggy, splay-footed Primitives. And after a while he decided that they were smarter than animals.

"Put some clothes on 'em, Harper," he directed. "If they're people, let 'em start acting like people. They're too big to go around naked."

So, eventually, washed and dressed, Junior and Senior were introduced to Civilization via 3-D, and the program was taped and shown everywhere.

Would you like a cigarette, Junior? Here, let me light it for you. Give Junior a glass of water, Senior. Let's see you take off your slippers, fellows, and put them on again. And now do what I say in your own language . . .

But if Harper thought that might change public opinion, he thought wrong. Seals perform, too, don't they? And so do monkeys. They talk? Parrots talk better. And anyway, who cared to be bothered about animals *or* Primitives? They were okay for fun, but that was all.

And the reports from Barnumland showed fewer and fewer Yahoos each time.

Then one night two drunken crewmen climbed over the fence and went carousing in the C-G's zoo. Before they left, they broke the vapor-light tubes, and in the morning Junior and Senior were found dead from the poisonous fumes.

That was Sunday morning. By Sunday afternoon Harper was drunk, and getting drunker. The men who knocked on his door got no answer. They went in anyway. He was slouched, red-eyed, over the table.

"People," he muttered. "Tell you they were *human!*" he shouted.

"Yes, Mr. Harper, we know that," said a young man, pale, with close-cropped dark hair.

Harper peered at him, boozily. "Know you," he said. "Thir' gen'ration Coulterboy. Go 'way. Spoi' your c'reer. Whaffor? Smelly ol' Yahoo?" The young medico nodded to his companion, who took a small flask from his pocket, opened it. They held it under Harper's nose by main force. He gasped and struggled, but they held on, and in a few minutes he was sober.

"That's rough stuff," he said, coughing and shaking his head. "But—thanks, Dr. Hill. Your ship in? Or are you stopping over?"

The former intern shrugged. "I've left the ships," he said. "I don't have to worry about spoiling my new career. This is my superior, Dr. Anscomb."

Anscomb was also young, and, like most men from Coulter's System, pale. He said, "I understand you can speak the Yahoos' language."

Harper winced. "What good's that now? They're dead, poor little bastards."

Anscomb nodded. "I'm sorry about that, believe me. Those fumes are so quick. . . . But there are still a few alive on Barnum's Planet who can be saved. The Joint Board for Research is interested. Are you?"

It had taken Harper fifteen years to work up to a room of this size and quality in bachelor executives' quarters. He looked around it. He picked up the letter which had come yesterday. ". . . neglected your work and become a joke . . . unless you accept a transfer and reduction in grade . . ." He nodded slowly, putting down the letter. "I guess I've already made my choice. What are your plans?"

Harper, Hill, and Anscomb sat on a hummock on the north coast of Barnumland, just out of rock-throwing range of the gaunt escarpment of the cliff which rose before them. Behind them a tall fence had been erected. The only Yahoos still alive were "nesting" in the caves of the cliff. Harper spoke into the amplifier again. His voice was hoarse as he forced it into the clicks and moans of the Primitives' tongue.

Hill stirred restlessly. "Are you sure that means, *'Here is food. Here is water'*—and not, *'Come down and let us eat you'*? I think I can almost say it myself by now."

Shifting and stretching, Anscomb said, "It's been two days. Unless they've determined to commit race suicide a bit more abruptly than your ancient Tasmanians—" He stopped as Harper's fingers closed tightly on his arm.

There was a movement on the cliff. A shadow. A pebble clattered. Then a wrinkled face peered fearfully over a ledge. Slowly, and with many stops and hesitations, a figure came down the face of the cliff. It was an old she. Her withered and pendulous dugs flapped against her sagging belly as she made the final jump to the ground, and—her back to the wall of rock—faced them.

"Here is food," Harper repeated softly. "Here is water." The old woman sighed. She plodded wearily across the ground, paused, shaking with fear, and then flung herself down at the food and the water.

"The Joint Board for Research has just won the first round," Hill said. Anscomb nodded. He jerked his thumb upward. Hill looked.

Another head appeared at the cliff. Then another. And another. They watched. The crone got up, water dripping from her dewlaps. She turned to the cliff. "Come down," she cried. "Here is food and water. Do not die. Come down and eat and drink." Slowly, her tribes-people did so. There were thirty of them.

Harper asked, "Where are the others?"

The crone held out her dried and leathery breasts to him. "Where are those who have sucked? Where are those your

brothers took away?" She uttered a single shrill wail; then was silent.

But she wept—and Harper wept with her.

"I'll guess we'll swing it all right," Hill said. Anscomb nodded. "Pity there's so few of them. I was afraid we'd have to use gas to get at them. Might have lost several that way."

Neither of them wept.

For the first time since ships had come to their world, Yahoos *walked* aboard one. They came hesitantly and fearfully, but Harper had told them that they were going to a new home and they believed him. He told them that they were going to a place of much food and water, where no one would hunt them down. He continued to talk until the ship was on its way, and the last Primitive had fallen asleep under the dimmed-out vapor-tube lights. Then he staggered to his cabin and fell asleep himself. He slept for thirty hours.

He had something to eat when he awoke, then strolled down to the hold where the Primitives were. He grimaced, remembering his trip to the hold of the other ship to collect Senior, and the frenzied howling of the convicts awaiting the females. At the entrance to the hold he met Dr. Hill, greeted him.

"I'm afraid some of the Yahoos are sick," Hill said. "But Dr. Anscomb is treating them. The others have been moved to this compartment here."

Harper stared. "Sick? How can they be sick? What from? And how many?"

Dr. Hill said, "It appears to be Virulent Plague. . . . Fifteen of them are down with it. You've *had* all six shots, haven't you? Good. Nothing to worry—"

Harper felt the cold steal over him. He stared at the pale young physician. "No one can enter or leave any system or planet without having had all six shots for Virulent Plague," he said slowly. "So if we are all immune, how could the Primitives have gotten it? And how is it that only fifteen have it?

Exactly half of them. What about the other fifteen, Dr. Hill? *Are they the control group for your experiment?*"

Dr. Hill looked at him calmly. "As a matter of fact, yes. I hope you'll be reasonable. Those were the only terms the Joint Board for Research would agree to. After all, not even convicts will volunteer for experiments in Virulent Plague."

Harper nodded. He felt frozen. After a moment he asked, "Can Anscomb do anything to pull them through?"

Dr. Hill raised his eyebrows. "Perhaps. We've got something we wanted to try. And at any rate, the reports should provide additional data on the subject. We must take the long-range view."

Harper nodded. "I suppose you're right," he said.

By noon all fifteen were dead.

"Well, that means an uneven control group," Dr. Anscomb complained. "Seven against eight. Still, that's not *too* bad. And it can't be helped. We'll start tomorrow."

"Virulent Plague again?" Harper asked.

Anscomb and Hill shook their heads. "Dehydration," the latter said. "And after that, there's a new treatment for burns we're anxious to try. . . . It's a shame, when you think of the Yahoos being killed off by the thousands, year after year, *uselessly*. Like the dodo. We came along just in time—thanks to you, Harper."

He gazed at them. "*Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?*" he asked. They looked at him, politely blank. "I'd forgotten. Doctors don't study Latin any more, do they? An old proverb. It means: 'Who shall guard the guards themselves?' . . . Will you excuse me, Doctors?"

Harper let himself into the compartment. "I come," he greeted the fifteen.

"We see," they responded. The old woman asked how their brothers and sisters were "in the other cave."

"They are well. . . . Have you eaten, have you drunk? Yes? Then let us sleep," Harper said.

The old woman seemed doubtful. "Is it time? The light still shines." She pointed to it. Harper looked at her. She had been

so afraid. But she had trusted him. Suddenly he bent over and kissed her. She gaped.

"Now the light goes out," Harper said. He slipped off a shoe and shattered the vapor tube. He groped in the dark for the air-switch, turned it off. Then he sat down. He had brought them here, and if they had to die, it was only fitting that he should share their fate. There no longer seemed any place for the helpless, or for those who cared about them.

"Now let us sleep," he said.

INTRODUCTION

to

"Help! I Am Dr. Morris Goldpepper"

Once upon a time I listened to the radio. One night while so engaged some words came into my mind, I know not why, although a certain relationship obtains: *paper gold.* This somehow changed into *gold paper.* And this into *gold pepper.* And so, suddenly, it came to me that it was really one word, *Goldpepper,* that it was a last name, and that the first name was *Morris.* I reached for the paper and pencil always on the night stand, as I was reaching I realized that the man was a dentist, and I took the pencil and wrote the words, *Help! I Am Dr. Morris Goldpepper.* Lin Carter's brief review was the only one I ever learned by heart. "Very few stories could live up to such a title [he wrote], and this one doesn't."*

* Grudges I don't keep; after he dedicated a book to me and stood three days barefoot in the snow, I forgave him. I am large, I contain multitudes.

Help! I Am Dr. Morris Goldpepper

I

Four of the men, Weinroth, McAllister, Danbourge and Smith, sat at the table under the cold blue lighting tubes. One of them, Rorke, was in a corner speaking quietly into a telephone, and one, Fadderman, stood staring out the window at the lights of the city. One, Hansen, had yet to arrive.

Fadderman spoke without turning his head. He was the oldest of those present—the Big Seven, as they were often called.

"Lights," he said. "So many lights. Down here." He waved his hand toward the city. "Up there." He gestured toward the sky. "Even with our much-vaunted knowledge, what," he asked, "do we know?" He turned his head. "Perhaps this is too big for us. In the light of the problem, can we really hope to accomplish anything?"

Heavy-set Danbourge frowned grimly. "We have received the suffrage of our fellow-scientists, Doctor. We can but try."

Lithe, handsome McAllister, the youngest officer of the Association, nodded. "The problem is certainly not worse than that which faced our late, great colleague, the immortal Morton." He pointed to a picture on the panelled wall. "And we all know what *he* accomplished."

Fadderman went over and took his hand. "Your words fill me with courage."

McAllister flushed with pleasure.

"I am an old man," Fadderman added falteringly. "Forgive my lack of spirit, Doctor." He sat down, sighed, shook his head slowly. Weinroth, burly and red-haired, patted him

gently on the back. Natty, silvery-haired little Smith smiled at him consolingly.

A buzzer sounded. Rorke hung up the telephone, flipped a switch on the wall intercom. "Headquarters here," he said crisply.

"Dr. Carl T. Hansen has arrived," a voice informed him.

"Bring him up at once," he directed. "And, Nickerson—"

"Yes, Dr. Rorke?"

"Let no one else into the building. *No* one."

They sat in silence. After a moment or two, they heard the approach of the elevator, heard the doors slide open, slide shut, heard the elevator descend. Heavy, steady footsteps approached; knuckles rapped on the opaque glass door.

Rorke went over to the door, said, "A conscientious and diligent scientist—"

"—must remain a continual student," a deep voice finished the quotation.

Rorke unlocked the door, peered out into the corridor, admitted Hansen, locked the door.

"I would have been here sooner, but another emergency interposed," Hansen said. "A certain political figure—ethics prevent my being more specific—suffered an oral hemorrhage following an altercation with a woman who shall be nameless, but, boy, did she pack a wallop! A so-called *Specialist*, gentlemen, with offices on Park Avenue, had been, as he called it, 'applying pressure' with a gauze pad. I merely used a little Gelfoam as a coagulant agent and the hemorrhage stopped almost at once. When will the public learn, eh, gentlemen?"

Faint smiles played upon the faces of the assembled scientists. Hansen took his seat. Rorke bent down and lifted two tape-recording devices to the table, set them both in motion. The faces of the men became serious, grim.

"This is an emergency session of the Steering Committee of the Executive Committee of the American Dental Association," Rorke said, "called to discuss measures of dealing with the case of Dr. Morris Goldpepper. One tape will be depos-

ited in the vaults of the Chase Manhattan Bank in New York; the other will be similarly secured in the vaults of the Wells Fargo and Union Trust Company Bank in San Francisco. Present at this session are Doctors Rorke, Weinroth and Smith—President, First and Second Vice-presidents, respectively—Fadderman, Past President, McAllister, Public Information, Danbourge, Legal, and Hansen, Policy."

He looked around at the set, tense faces.

"Doctors," he went on, "I think I may well say that humanity is, as of this moment, face to face with a great danger, and it is a bitter jest that it is not to the engineers or the astronomers, not to medicine nor yet to nuclear nor any other kind of physics, that humanity must now look for salvation—but to the members of the dental profession!"

His voice rose. "Yes—to the practitioners of what has become perhaps the least regarded of all the learned sciences! It is indeed ironical. We may at this juncture consider the comments of the now deceased Professor Earnest Hooton, the Harvard anthropologist, who observed with a sorrow which did him credit that his famed University, instead of assisting its Dental School as it ought, treated it—and I quote his exact words—'Like a yellow dog.'" His voice trembled.

McAllister's clean-cut face flushed an angry red. Weinroth growled. Danbourge's fist hit the table and stayed there, clenched. Fadderman gave a soft, broken sigh.

"But enough of this. We are not jealous, nor are we vindictive," President Rorke went on. "We are confident that History, 'with its long tomorrow,' will show how, at this danger-fraught point, the humble and little thought-of followers of dental science recognized and sized up the situation and stood shoulder to shoulder on the ramparts!"

He wiped his brow with a paper tissue. "And now I will call upon our beloved Past President, Dr. Samuel I. Fadderman, to begin our review of the incredible circumstances which have brought us here tonight. Dr. Fadderman? If you please . . ."

The well-known Elder Statesman of the A.D.A. nodded his head slowly. He made a little cage of his fingers and pursed and then unpursed his lips. At length he spoke in a soft and gentle voice.

"My first comment, brethren, is that I ask for compassion. *Morris Goldpepper is not to blame!*

"Let me tell you a few words about him. Goldpepper the Scientist needs no introduction. Who has not read, for instance, his 'The Bilateral Vertical Stroke and Its Influence on the Pattern of Occlusion' or his 'Treatment, Planning, Assemblage and Cementation of a 14-Unit Fixed Bridge'—to name only two? But I shall speak about Goldpepper the Man. He is forty-six years of age and served with honor in the United States Navy Dental Corps during the Second World War. He has been a widower since shortly after the conclusion of that conflict. Rae—the late Mrs. Goldpepper, may she rest in peace—often used to say, 'Morry, if I go first, promise me you'll marry again,' but he passed it off with a joke; and, as you know, he never did.

"They had one child, a daughter, Suzanne, a very sweet girl, now married to a Dr. Sheldon Fingerhut, D.D.S. I need not tell you, brethren, how proud our colleague was when his only child married this very fine young member of our profession. The Fingerhuts are now located on Unbalupi, one of the Micronesian islands forming part of the United States Trust Territory, where Dr. Sheldon is teaching dental hygiene, sanitation and prosthesis to the natives thereof."

Dr. Hansen asked, "Are they aware of—"

"The son-in-law knows something of the matter," the older man said. "He has not seen fit to inform his wife, who is in a delicate condition and expects shortly to be confined. At his suggestion, I have been writing—or, rather, typing—letters purporting to come from her father, on his stationery, with the excuse that he badly singed his fingers on a Bunsen burner whilst annealing a new-type hinge for dentures and consequently cannot hold his pen." He sipped from a glass of water.

"Despite his great scientific accomplishments," Dr. Fadderman went on, "Morry had an impractical streak in him. Often I used to call on him at his bachelor apartment in the Hotel Davenport on West End Avenue, where he moved following his daughter's marriage, and I would find him immersed in reading matter of an escapist kind—tales of crocodile hunters on the Malayan Peninsula, or magazines dealing with interplanetary warfare, or collections of short stories about vampires and werewolves and similar superstitious creations.

"'Morry,' I said reproachfully, 'what a way to spend your off-hours. Is it worth it? Is it healthy? You would do much better, believe me, to frequent the pool or the handball court at the Y. Or,' I pointed out to him, 'if you want to read, why ignore the rich treasures of literature: Shakespeare, Ruskin, Elbert Hubbard, Edna Ferber, and so on? Why retreat to these immature-type fantasies?' At first he only smiled and quoted the saying, 'Each to his or her own taste.'"

The silence which followed was broken by young Dr. McAllister. "You say," he said, "'at first.'"

Old Dr. Fadderman snapped out of his revery. "Yes, yes. But eventually he confessed the truth to me. He withheld nothing."

The assembled dental scientists then learned that the same Dr. Morris Goldpepper, who had been awarded not once but three successive times the unique honor of the Dr. Alexander Peabody Medal for New Achievements in Dental Prosthesis, was obsessed with the idea that *there was sentient life on other worlds—that it would shortly be possible to reach these other worlds—and that he himself desired to be among those who went.*

"'Do you realize, Sam?' he asked me," reported Fadderman. "'Do you realize that, in a very short time, it will no longer be a question of fuel or even of metallurgy? That submarines capable of cruising for weeks and months without surfacing foretell the possibility of traveling through airless space? The chief problem has now come down to finding how

to build a take-off platform capable of withstanding a thrust of several million pounds.' And his eyes glowed."

Dr. Fadderman had inquired, with good-natured sarcasm, how the other man expected this would involve *him*. The answer was as follows: Any interplanetary expedition would find it just as necessary to take along a dentist as to take along a physician, and that he—Dr. Goldpepper—intended to be that dentist!

Dr. Weinroth's hand slapped the table with a bang. "By thunder, I say the man had courage!"

Dr. Rorke looked at him with icy reproof. "I should be obliged," he said stiffly, "if there would be no further emotional outbursts."

Dr. Weinroth's face fell. "I beg the Committee's pardon, Mr. President," he said.

Dr. Rorke nodded graciously, indicated by a gesture of his hand that Dr. Fadderman had permission to continue speaking. The old man took a letter from his pocket and placed it on the table.

"This came to me like a bolt from the blue beyond. It is dated November 8 of last year. Skipping the formal salutation, it reads: 'At last I stand silent upon the peak in Darien'—a literary reference, gentlemen, to Cortez's alleged discovery of the Pacific Ocean; actually it was Balboa—'my great dream is about to be realized. Before long, I shall be back to tell you about it, but just exactly when, I am not able to say. History is being made! Long live Science! Very sincerely yours, Morris Goldpepper, D.D.S.'"

He passed the letter around the table.

Dr. Smith asked, "What did you do on receiving this communication, Doctor?"

Dr. Fadderman had at once taken a taxi to West End Avenue. The desk clerk at the hotel courteously informed him that the man he sought had left on a vacation of short but not exactly specified duration. No further information was known. Dr. Fadderman's first thought was that his younger friend had gotten some sort of position with a Government project which

he was not free to discuss, and his own patriotism and sense of duty naturally prevented him from making inquiries.

"But I began, for the first time," the Elder Statesman of American Dentistry said, "to read up on the subject of space travel. I wondered how a man 46 years of age could possibly hope to be selected over younger men."

Dr. Danbourge spoke for the first time. "Size," he said. "Every ounce would count in a spaceship and Morris was a pretty little guy."

"But with the heart of a lion," Dr. Weinroth said softly. "Miles and miles and miles of heart."

The other men nodded their agreement to this tribute.

But as time went on and the year drew to its close and he heard no word from his friend, Dr. Fadderman began to worry. Finally, when he received a letter from the Fingerhuts, saying that *they* had not been hearing either, he took action.

He realized it was not likely that the Government would have made plans to include a dentist in this supposed project without communicating with the A.D.A. and he inquired of the current President, Dr. Rorke, if he had any knowledge of such a project, or of the whereabouts of the missing man. The answer to both questions was no. But on learning the reasons for Dr. Fadderman's concern, he communicated with Col. Lemnel Coggins, head of the USAF's Dental Corps.

Col. Coggins informed him that no one of Dr. Goldpepper's name or description was or had been affiliated with any such project, and that, in fact, any such project was still—as he put it—"still on the drawing-board."

Drs. Rorke and Fadderman, great as was their concern, hesitated to report Dr. Goldpepper missing. He had, after all, paid rent on apartment, office and laboratory, well in advance. He was a mature man, of very considerable intelligence, and one who presumably knew what he was doing.

"It is at this point," said Dr. Danbourge, "that I enter the picture. On the 11th of January, I had a call from a Dr. Milton Wilson, who has an office on East 19th Street, with a small

laboratory adjoining, where he does prosthetic work. He told me, with a good deal of hesitation, that something exceedingly odd had come up, and he asked me if I knew where Dr. Morris Goldpepper was . . ."

The morning of the 11th of January, an elderly man with a curious foreign accent came into Dr. Wilson's office, gave the name of Smith and complained about an upper plate. It did not feel comfortable, Mr. Smith said, and it irritated the roof of his mouth. There was a certain reluctance on his part to allow Dr. Wilson to examine his mouth. This was understandable, because the interior of his mouth was blue. The gums were entirely edentulous, very hard, almost horny. The plate itself—

"Here is the plate," Dr. Danbourge said, placing it on the table. "Dr. Wilson supplied him with another. You will observe the perforations on the upper, or palatal, surface. They had been covered with a thin layer of gum arabic, which naturally soon wore almost entirely off, with the result that the roof of the mouth became irritated. Now this is so very unusual that Dr. Wilson—as soon as his patient, the so-called Mr. Smith, was gone—broke open the weirdly made plate to find why the perforations had been made. In my capacity as head of the Association's Legal Department," Dr. Danbourge stated, "I have come across some extraordinary occurrences, but nothing like *this*."

This was a small piece of a white, flexible substance, covered with tiny black lines. Danbourge picked up a large magnifying glass.

"You may examine these objects, Doctors," he said, "but it will save your eyesight if I read to you from an enlarged photostatic copy of this last one. The nature of the material, the method of writing, or of reducing the writing to such size all are unknown to us. It may be something on the order of microfilm. But that is not important. The important thing is the *content* of the writing—the *portent* of the writing.

"Not since Dr. Morton, the young Boston dentist, realized the uses of sulphuric ether as an anesthetic has any member

of our noble profession discovered anything of even remotely similar importance; and perhaps not before, either."

He drew his spectacles from their case and began to read aloud.

II

Despite the fact that our great profession lacks the glamour and public adulation of the practice of medicine, and even the druggists—not having a Hippocratic Oath—can preen themselves on their so-called Oath of Maimonides (though, believe me, the great Maimonides had no more to do with it than Morris Goldpepper, D.D.S.), no one can charge us with not having as high a standard of ethics and professional conduct as physicians and surgeons, M.D. Nor do I hesitate for one single moment to include prostheticians not holding the degree of Doctor of Dental Surgery or Doctor of Dental Medicine, whose work is so vital and essential.

When the records of our civilization are balanced, then—but perhaps not before—the real importance of dental science will be appreciated. Now it is merely valued at the moment of toothache.

It is only with a heavy heart that I undertake deliberately to produce inferior work, and with the confidence that all those to whom the standards of oral surgery and dental prosthetics are dear will understand the very unusual circumstances which have prompted me so to do. And, understanding, will forgive. No one can hold the standards of our profession higher or more sacred than I.

It must be admitted that I was not very amused on a certain occasion when my cousin, Nathaniel Pomerance, introduced me to an engineering contractor with these words, "You two should have a lot in common—you both build bridges," and uttered a foolish laugh. But I venture to say that this was one of the truest words ever spoken in questionable jest.

Humility is one thing, false pride another. Those who know

anything of modern dentistry at all know of the Goldpepper Bridge and the Goldpepper Crown. It is I, Dr. Morris Goldpepper, inventor of both, and perfector of the Semi-retractable Clasp which bears my name, who writes these words you see before you. Nothing further should be needful by way of identification. And now to my report.

On the first of November, a day of evil import forever in the personal calendar of the unhappy wretch who writes these lines, not even knowing for sure if they will ever be read—but what else can I do?—shortly after 5:00 P.M., my laboratory door was knocked on. I found there a curious-looking man of shriveled and weazened appearance. He asked if I was Dr. Morris Goldpepper, "the famous perfector of the Semi-retractable Clasp," and I pleaded guilty to the flattering impeachment.

The man had a foreign-sounding accent, or—I thought—it may be that he had an impediment in his speech. Might he see me, was his next question. I hesitated.

It has happened to me before, and to most other practitioners—a stranger comes and, before you know it, he is slandering some perfectly respectable D.D.S. or D.M.D. The dentist pulled a healthy tooth—the dentist took such and such a huge sum of money for new plates—they don't fit him, he suffers great anguish—he's a poor man, the dentist won't do anything—*et cetera, ad infinitum nauseamque.* In short, a nut, a crank, a crackpot.

But while I was hesitating, the man yawned, did not courteously cover his mouth with his hand, and I observed to my astonishment that the interior of his mouth was an odd shade of blue!

Bemused by this singular departure from normalcy, I allowed him to enter. Then I wondered what to say, since he himself was saying nothing, but he looked around the lab with interest. "State your business" would be too brusque, and "Why is your mouth blue?" would be too gauche. An impasse.

Whilst holding up a large-scale model of the Goldpepper

Cap (not yet perfected—will it ever be? Alas, who knows?) this curious individual said, "I know all about you, Dentist Goldpepper. A great scientist, you are. A man of powerful imagination, you are. One who rebels against narrow horizons and yearns to soar to wide and distant worlds, you are."

All I could think of to say was, "And what can I do for *you*?"

It was all so true; every single word he said was true. In my vanity was my downfall. I was tricked like the crow with the cheese in the ancient fable of Aesop.

The man proceeded to tell me, frankly enough, that he was a denizen of another planet. He had *two hearts*, would you believe it? And, consequently, two circulatory systems. Two pulses—one in each arm, one slow, the other fast.

It reminded me of the situation in Philadelphia some years ago when there were two telephone systems—if you had only a Bell phone, you couldn't call anyone who had only a Keystone phone.

The interior of his mouth was blue and so was the inside of his eyelids. He said his world had three moons.

You may imagine my emotions at hearing that my long-felt dream to communicate with otherworldly forms of sentient life was at last realized! And to think that they had singled out *not* the President of the United States, *not* the Director-General of the U.N., but *me*, Morris Goldpepper, D.D.S.! Could human happiness ask for more, was my unspoken question. I laughed softly to myself and I thought, What would my cousin Nathaniel Pomerance say *now*? I was like wax in this extraterrestrial person's hands (he had six distinct and articulate digits on each one), and I easily agreed to say nothing to anyone until the question of diplomatic recognition could be arranged on a higher echelon.

"Non-recognition *has* its advantages, Goldpepper Dental Surgeon," he said with a slight smile. "No passport for your visit, you will need."

Well! A personal invitation to visit Proxima Centauri Gamma, or whatever the planet's name is! But I felt con-

strained to look this gift-horse just a little closer in the mouth. How is it that they came inviting *me,* not, let us say, Oppenheimer? Well?

"Of his gifts not in need, we are, Surgical Goldpepper. We have passed as far beyond nuclear power as you have beyond wind power. We can span the Universe—*but in dentistry, like children still,* we are. Come and inspect our faculties of your science, Great Goldpepper. If you say, 'This: Yes,' then it will be yes. If you direct, 'This: No,' then it will be no. In respect to the science of dentistry, our Edison and our Columbus, you will be."

I asked when we would leave and he said in eight days. I asked how long the trip would take. For a moment, I was baffled when he said it would take no longer than to walk the equivalent of the length of the lab floor. Then he revealed his meaning to me: Teleportation! Of course. No spaceship needed.

My next emotion was a brief disappointment at not being able to see the blazing stars in black outer space. But, after all, one ought not be greedy at such a time.

I cannot point out too strongly that at no time did I accept or agree to accept any payment or gratuity for this trip. I looked upon it in the same light as the work I have done for various clinics.

"Should I take along books? Equipment? What?" I asked my (so-to-speak) guide.

He shook his head. Only my presence was desired on the first trip. A visit of inspection. Very well.

On the morning of Nov. 8th, I wrote a brief note to my old and dear friend, Dr. Samuel Fadderman, the senior mentor of American Dentistry [on hearing these words, the Elder Statesman sobbed softly into his cupped hands], and in the afternoon, so excited and enthralled that I noticed no more of my destination than that it was north of the Washington Market, I accompanied my guide to a business building in the aforesaid area.

He led me into a darkened room. He clicked a switch. There was a humming noise, a feeling first of heaviness, then of weightlessness, and then an odd sort of light came on.

I was no longer on the familiar planet of my birth! I was on an unknown world!

Over my head, the three moons of this far-off globe sailed majestically through a sky wherein I could note unfamiliar constellations. The thought occurred to me that poets on this planet would have to find another rhyme, inasmuch as *moons* (plural form) does not go with *June* (singular form). One satellite was a pale yellow, one was brown, and the third was a creamy pink. Not knowing the names of these lunary orbs in their native tongue, I decided to call them Vanilla, Chocolate and Strawberry.

Whilst my mind was filled with these droll fancies, I felt a tug at my sleeve, where my guide was holding it. He gestured and I followed.

"Now," I thought to myself, "he will bring me before the President of their Galactic Council, or whatever he is called," and I stood obediently within a circle marked on the surface of the platform whereon we stood.

In a moment, we were teleported to an inside room somewhere, and there I gazed about me in stupefaction, not to say astonishment. My eyes discerned the forms of Bunsen burners, Baldor lathes, casting machines and ovens, denture trays, dental stone, plaster, shellac trays, wires of teeth, and all the necessary equipment of a fully equipped dental prosthetic laboratory.

My surprise at the progress made by these people in the science at which they were allegedly still children was soon mitigated by the realization that all the items had been made on Earth.

As I was looking and examining, a door opened and several people entered. Their faces were a pale blue, and I realized suddenly that my guide must be wearing makeup to conceal his original complexion. They spoke together in their native

dialect; then one of them, with a rod of some kind in his hand, turned to me. He opened his mouth. I perceived his gums were bare.

"Dentical person," he said, "make me teeth."

I turned in some perplexity to my guide. "I understood you to say my first visit would be one of inspection only."

Everyone laughed, and I observed that all were equally toothless.

The man in the chair poked me rudely with his rod or staff. "Talk not! Make teeth!"

Fuming with a well-justified degree of indignation, I protested at such a gross breach of the laws of common hospitality. Then, casting concealment to the winds, these people informed me as follows:

Their race is entirely toothless in the adult stage. They are an older race than ours and are born looking ancient and wrinkled. It is only comparatively recently that they have established contact with Earth, and in order that they should not appear conspicuous, and in order to be able to eat our food, they realized that they must be supplied with artificial teeth.

My so-called guide, false friend, my enticer and/or kidnaper, to give him his due, had gotten fitted at a dentist's in New York and cunningly enquired who was the leading man in the field. Alas for fame! The man answered without a second of hesitation, "That is no other one than Morris Goldpepper, D.D.S., perfector of the Semi-retractable Clasp."

First this unscrupulous extraterrestrial procured the equipment, then he procured *me.*

"Do I understand that you purport that I assist you in a plan to thwart and otherwise circumvent the immigration laws of the United States?" was my enquiry.

The man in the chair poked me with his rod again. "You understand! So now make teeth!"

What a proposition to make to a law-abiding, patriotic American citizen by birth! What a demand to exact of a war veteran, a taxpayer and one who has been three times on jury

duty since 1946 alone (People vs. Garrity, People vs. Vanderdam, and Lipschutz vs. Krazy-Kut Kool Kaps, Inc.)! My whole being revolted. I spoke coldly to them, informing them that the situation was contrary to my conception of dental ethics. But to no avail.

My treacherous dragoman drew a revolver from his pocket. "Our weapons understand, you do not. Primitive Earth weapons, yes. So proceed with manufacture, Imprisoned Goldpepper."

I went hot and cold. Not, I beg of you to understand, with fear, but with humiliation. *Imprisoned Goldpepper!* The phrase, with all the connotations it implied, rang in my ears.

I bowed my head and a phrase from the literary work "Sampson Agonistes" (studied as a student in the College of the City of New York) rang through my mind: Eyeless in Gaza, grinding corn . . . Oh, blind, blind, blind, amidst the blaze of noon. . . .

But even in this hour of mental agony, an agony which has scarcely abated to speak of, I had the first glimmering of the idea which I hope will enable me to warn Earth.

Without a word, but only a scornful glance to show these blue-complected individuals how well I appreciated that their so-called advanced science was a mere veneer over the base metal of their boorishness, I set to work. I made the preliminary impressions and study casts, using an impression tray with oval floor form, the best suited for taking impressions of edentulous ridges.

And so began the days of my slavery.

Confined as I am here, there is neither day nor night, but an unremitting succession of frenum trims, post dams, boxing in, pouring up, festoon carving, fixing sprue channels, and all the innumerable details of dental prosthetic work. No one assists me. No one converses with me, save in brusque barks relevant to the word at hand. My food consists of liqueous and gelatinous substances such as might be expected would form the diet of a toothless race.

Oh, I am sick of the sight of their blue skins, bluer mouths and horny ridges! I am sick of my slavish serfdom!

I have been given material to keep records and am writing this in expectation of later reducing it in size by the method here employed, and of thereinafter inserting copies between the palatal and occlusual surfaces of the plates. It will be necessary to make such plates imperfect, so that the wearers will be obliged to go to dentists on Earth for repairs, because it is not always practical for them to teleport—in fact, I believe they can only do it on the 8th day of every third month. Naturally, I cannot do this to every plate, for they might become suspicious.

You may well imagine how it goes against my grain to produce defective work, but I have no other choice. Twice they have brought me fresh dental supplies, which is how I calculate their teleporting cycle. I have my wristwatch with me and thus I am enabled to reckon the passing of time.

What their exact purpose is in going to Earth, I do not know. My growing suspicion is that their much-vaunted superior science is a fraud and that their only superiority lies in the ability to teleport. One curious item may give a clue: They have questioned me regarding the Old Age Assistance programs of the several States. As I have said, they all *look* old.

Can it be that elsewhere on this planet there is imprisoned some poor devil of a terrestrial printer or engraver, toiling under duress to produce forged birth certificates and other means of identification, to the fell purpose of allowing these aliens to live at ease at the financial expense of the already overburdened U.S. taxpayer?

To whom shall I address my plea for help? To the Federal Government? But it has no official or even unofficial knowledge that this otherworldly race exists. The F.B.I.? But does teleporting under false pretenses to another planet constitute kidnaping across State lines?

It seems the only thing I can do is to implore whichever dental practitioner reads these lines to communicate at once

with the American Dental Association. I throw myself upon the mercy of my fellow professional men.

Dentists and Dental Prostheticians! Beware of men with blue mouths and horny, edentulous ridges! Do not be deceived by flattery and false promises! Remember the fate of that most miserable of men, Morris Goldpepper, D.D.S., and, in his horrible predicament, help, oh, help him!

III

A long silence followed the reading of this document. At length it was broken by Dr. Hansen.

"That brave man," he said in a husky voice. "That brave little man."

"Poor Morris," said Dr. Danbourge. "Think of him imprisoned on a far-off planet, slaving like a convict in a salt mine, so to speak, making false teeth for these inhuman aliens, sending these messages to us across the trackless void. It's pitiful, and yet, Doctors, it is also a tribute to the indomitable spirit of Man!"

Dr. Weinroth moved his huge hands. "I'd like to get ahold of just one of those blue bastards," he growled.

Dr. Rorke cleared his throat. All present looked at their President respectfully and eagerly.

"I need hardly tell you, Doctors," he said crisply, "that the A.D.A. is a highly conservative organization. We do not go about things lightly. One such message we might ignore, but there have been eleven reported, all identical with the first. Even eleven such messages we might perhaps not consider, but when they come from a prominent scientist of the stature of Dr. Morris Goldpepper—

"Handwriting experts have pronounced this to be *his* handwriting beyond cavil of a doubt. Here"—he delved into a box—"are the eleven plates in question. Can any of you look at these clean lines and deny that they are the work of the incomparable Goldpepper?"

The six other men looked at the objects, shook their heads.

"Beautiful," murmured Dr. Smith, "even in their broken state. Poems in plastic! M.G. *couldn't* produce bad work if he tried!"

Dr. Rorke continued. "Each report confirmed that the person who brought in the plate had a blue mouth and edentulous ridges, just as the message states. Each blue-mouthed patient exhibited the outward appearance of old age. *And,* gentlemen, of those eleven, no less than *eight* were reported from the State of California. Do you realize what that means? California offers the highest amount of financial assistance to the elderly! Goldpepper's surmise was right!"

Dr. Hansen leaned forward. "In addition, our reports show that five of those eight are leaders in the fight against fluoridation of drinking water! It is my carefully considered belief that there is something in their physical makeup, evolved on another planet, which cannot tolerate fluorine even in minute quantities, because they certainly—being already toothless—wouldn't be concerned with the prevention of decay."

Young Dr. McAllister took the floor. "We have checked with dental supply houses and detail men in the New York metropolitan area and we found that large quantities of prosthetic supplies have been delivered to an otherwise unknown outfit—called the Echs Export Company—located not far north of the Washington Market! There is every reason to believe that this is the place Dr. Goldpepper mentioned. One of our men went there, found present only one man, in appearance an *old* man. Our representative feigned deafness, thus obliging this person to open his mouth and talk loudly. Doctors, he reports that this person *has a blue mouth!*"

There was a deep intake of breath around the table.

Dr. Rorke leaned forward and snapped off the tape recorders. "This next is off the record. It is obvious, Doctors, that no ordinary methods will suffice to settle this case, to ensure the return of our unfortunate colleague, or to secure the withdrawal of these extraterrestrial individuals from our nation and planet. I cannot, of course, officially endorse what

might be termed 'strong-arm' methods. At the same time, I feel that our adversaries are not entitled to polite treatment. And obviously the usual channels of law enforcement are completely closed to us.

"Therefore—and remember, no word of this must pass outside our circle—therefore I have communicated something of this matter to Mr. Albert Annapollo, the well-known waterfront figure, who not long ago inaugurated the splendid Longshoremen's Dental Health Plan. Mr. Annapollo is a somewhat rough person, but he is nonetheless a *loyal* American. . . .

"We know now the Achilles heel of these alien creatures. It is fluorine. We know also how to identify them. And I think we may shortly be able to announce results. Meanwhile—" he drew a slip of paper from his pocket—"it is already the first of the month in that quarter when the dental supplies are due to be transported— or teleported, as Dr. Goldpepper terms it—to their distant destination. A large shipment is waiting to be delivered from the warehouses of a certain wholesaler to the premises of the Echs Exporting Company. I have had copies of this made and wrapped around each three-ounce bottle of Ellenbogen's Denture Stik-Phast. I presume it meets with your approval."

He handed it to Dr. Hansen, who, as the others present nodded in grimly emphatic approval, read it aloud.

"From The American Dental Association, representing over 45,000 registered dentists in the United States and its Territories, to Dr. Morris Goldpepper, wherever you may be: DO NOT DESPAIR! *We are intent upon your rescue! We will bend every effort to this end! We shall fight the good fight!*

"Have courage, Dr. Morris Goldpepper! You shall return!"

AFTERWORD

by

Avram Davidson

There are people who say things like this, "A book, or a story, or an essay, or a this or a that," they say, "must have and contain such and such and so forth." As though the joy of man's heart can be defined like a measure in the metric system. Listen:

Yuan Mei said, "Poetry . . . is like the flower of the fields; in spring the orchid, in summer the chrysanthemum. One cannot say that one is better than the other. *Any poem that by its music and beauty and conception can move the heart is a good poem.*"[1]

If the writer in the writing creates and sustains a mood, this should be sufficient. Thus spake Zarathustra.

A million schoolmams, male and female, have taught us as if teaching geometry or other holy writ, that a story must have a beginning, a middle, and an end. And, of course, a story has. The beginning of a story is where it begins, the middle of a story is where it middens, and the end of a story is where it ends. This is exemplified by the one book found even in homes where the mom and the dad have provided no Bible, namely the telephone book. It begins at A and it ends at Z and it middens at or about L. It is the story or song of the Tenth Sister, Elemenope, the Muse of the Alphabet. Characters? *Look* at all of those characters! Plot? Plots? As many as

[1] Arthur Waley, *Yuan Mei, Eighteenth Century Chinese Poet* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1970). The translation is Sir Arthur Waley's, the italics are my own.

you like. From Abbott Plott to Zygmunt Plotz. Also, it comes in a variety of regional editions; if you want a thin one you can get a thin one and if you want a thick one you can get that, too.

And of course there is always television.

Too bad.

And under C there is Cervantes. Listen to what Mr. Somerset Maugham says. "The biographers of Cervantes have tried to make a saint out of him. Folly! An artist needs no whitewashing. You must take him as he is and it is impertinent to deny his failings: without them he would not be the man, and so the artist, that he is [or the woman, she. Do you hear, Colin Wilson, who proved that Jane Austen was a snob?]. A writer constructs characters by observation, but he only gives them life if they are himself. The more persons he is the more characters he creates. Cervantes was not only the noble Don Quixote, he was the astute and faithful Sancho, the rascally Gines de Pasamonte, the barber, the Curate, the joking Sanson Carrasco as well. The artist, like the mystic who tries to attain God, is detached in spirit from the world. He has by his nature the freedom which the mystic seeks in the repression of desires. He stands aloof. The artist's right and wrong are not the right and wrong of plain men. Plain men may condemn him if they choose; he shrugs his shoulders and gravely goes his own way."[2]

This is of course a rather idealized portrait, and takes no note, for example, of how difficult it is for the artist to do anything gravely when bankers are defecating on him, for example. Or editors, agents, or publishers. For example. Sometimes the artist shrugs his shoulders and gravely goes his own way and sometimes he most ungravely screams and tears his beard and makes scenes public or private, and sometimes he goes the way others go, will he nill he; and sometimes he stands stick stock still and goes nowhere at all.

Often.

Edward Albee asks Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? and as I have not yet finished the play I have not yet found the an-

[2] W. Somerset Maugham, *Don Fernando* (New York: Sun Dial, 1938).

swer. Her nephew, Quentin Bell, says that ". . . her gift was for the pursuit of shadows, for the ghostly whispers of the mind and for Pythian incomprehensibility. . . ." But she herself says, "Now and again I feel my mind take shape, like a cloud with the sun on it, as some idea, plan or image wells up, but they travel on, over the horizon, like clouds, and I wait peacefully for another to form, or nothing—it matters not which."[3]

Quentin Bell goes on to say of Virginia Woolf in her own times that "her manner of writing was not one to arouse the enthusiasm of young people in the [19]30s. To many she must have appeared as an angular, remote, and perhaps rather intimidating figure . . . oddly irrelevant—a distressed gentlewoman caught in a tempest and making little effort either to fight against it or to sail before it. She made far less of an attempt than did [E.M.] Forster. . . ." He does not remind us that E. M. Forster said of C. P. Cavafy that, "like all poets, he stands at a slight angle to the universe. . . ."

This age, any more than that one, is not one which pauses long to hearken to the small murmuring voice, nor to peer at even the slight angle of the poetic angular. Ketchup and no subtler spice will do for our food; noise and gore for our entertainment pleasure. And if, now and then, and in fact far too seldom, an invitation (usually part-time and short-term) to Reside in the groves of academe comes to a poet, far too often it is to a poet who is already in Residence there anyway.

"Faulkner reduced his needs," writes Malcolm Cowley (who has Faulkner's letters to him to prove it), "to the requisites of the writer's trade, which are . . . 'whatever peace, whatever solitude, and whatever pleasure he can get at not too high a cost,' and beyond these, 'Paper, tobacco, food, and a little whiskey.'"[4] And, once again, I call upon Mr. Maugham, who obliges as before, and *he* says that "the writer should seek his reward in the pleasure of work and in release from the burden of his thoughts; and, indifferent to aught

[3] Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1972).
[4] Malcolm Cowley, *The Faulkner-Cowley File* (New York: Viking, 1966).

else, care nothing for praise or censure, failure or success."[5] Some may think this a counsel of perfection, some may not. It is worthy of the Stoics in either case.

Now, although many a one has embarked upon the hazardous enterprise of the writer, resigned to the neglect of the world at large (the world thinks it has more important tasks, and perhaps the world is right), it comes sometimes and nevertheless as a delayed shock to realize that, as far as even the world of letters goes, the writer might just as well have never been born at all. What then? Why, then, take Marion Murdock's advice,[6] then, and "grasp the little bits of grace that come wafting by. If you run into someone who recognizes your name as a writer it's because they've read you—not because your name is a household word."

James Agee saw the whole world wide at nightfall divided into an infinity of little rooms, the people in each one unable to see and indifferent to seeing what goes on in any other little room; is it not the work, the privilege, the pleasure, of the writer, to help us to see into the other rooms, indeed to take us there? . . . if only for a little while?

I think so.

And of those of us who are writers (sometimes) of what is called fantasy (sometimes), there are those who may, and indeed must, ask such questions as, "How, in view of the state of the nation, the human race, and the world, can you devote any large part of your life and time to tales of that which never was and in fact can never be?" To them in reply I quote Gavin Maxwell: *"But these questions have no relevance to my theme."* My theme is to build my bridge of dreams, to weave it out of the wild and outcast grasses.

And thereon to reach out and grasp whatever little bits of grace come wafting by.

Whenever.

[5] W. Somerset Maugham, *The Moon and Sixpence* (New York: Penguin, 1969).

[6] Personal communication to the writer, dated October 17, 1974.

(continued from front flap)

imagination are totally unique; his gallows humor combined with his playful sense of human speech sets him apart. His fiction has earned him the Hugo Award, the Howard Award, and the Edgar and Queens Awards. Damon Knight has called him "the best short story writer since John Collier." With an introduction by Michael Kurland.

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