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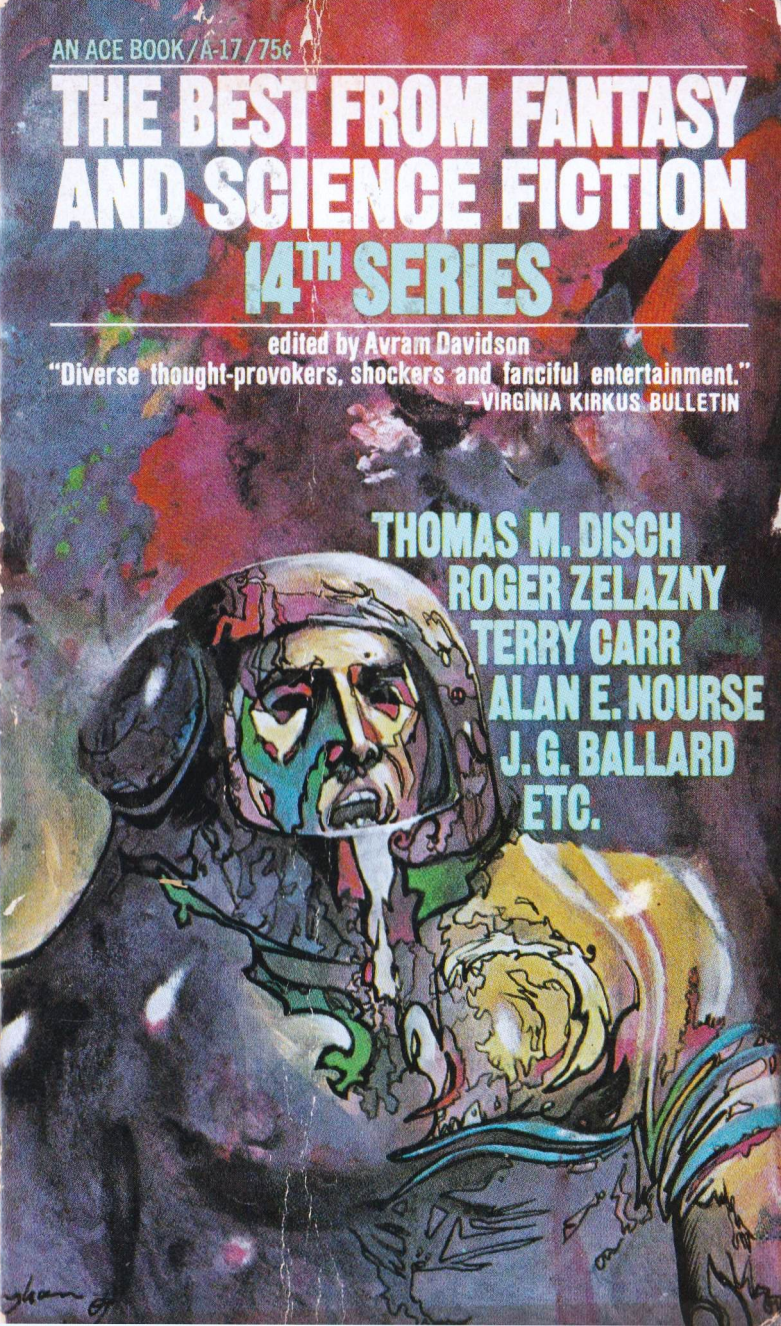
THE BEST FROM FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION

14TH SERIES

edited by Avram Davidson

"Diverse thought-provokers, shockers and fanciful entertainment."
—VIRGINIA KIRKUS BULLETIN



THOMAS M. DISCH
ROGER ZELAZNY
TERRY CARR
ALAN E. NOURSE
J. G. BALLARD
ETC.

A PIECE OF THE MOON

"On our desk and near to hand is a tiny piece of black and glassy rock called a tektite. The theory of its origin cannot (yet) be proven . . . or disproven . . . but if you have ever picked one up it is possible that you have held in your hand a piece of the moon. It is our hope, our sincere and earnest hope, that a similar 'sense of wonder' may be yours by opening yet further the volume which you now hold in your hands. *Thy wonders are a great deep; man and beast Thou savest, O Lord.*"

—From the introduction by
AVRAM DAVIDSON

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Robert P. Mills for *Sacheverell,* by Avram Davidson
Theron Raines for *Trade-In,* by Jack Sharkey; and *Fred One,* by James Ransom
J. G. Ballard for *The Illuminated Man*
McIntosh & Otis for *A Bulletin from the Trustees of the Institute for Advanced Research at Marmouth, Mass.,* by Wilma Shore
Kit Reed for *Automatic Tiger*
T. P. Caravan for *The Court of Tartary*
Terry Carr for *Touchstone*
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Roger Zelazny for *A Rose for Ecclesiastes*
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Louis J. A. Adams for *Dark Conception*
Alan E. Nourse for *The Compleat Consummators*
S. S. Johnson for *The House by the Crab Apple Tree*
Ron Webb for *The Girl with the Hundred Proof Eyes*

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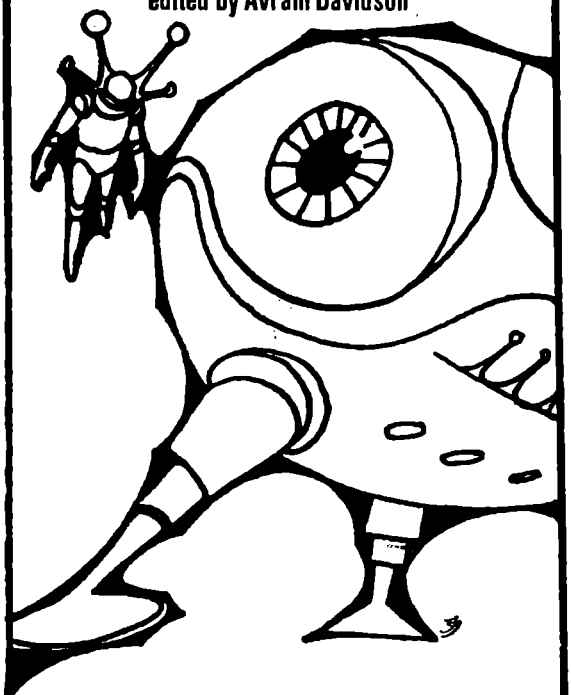

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THE BEST FROM FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION:
FOURTEENTH SERIES

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To GRANIA, ETHAN, and
the Republic of Mexico

Printed in U.S.A.

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INTRODUCTION

FOR THE THIRD and (so it now seems) last time, we take our pen—plucked, at great hazard, from the pinions of the exceeding rare griffin of the Trans-Sambatyon Alps—in hand to introduce this annual compendium. We have endeavored as always to balance its ingredients as carefully as an *obeah* man confecting a love potion, or a rocket fuels engineer engaged in sending yet another flaming probe to "pluck the golden apples of the sun." You will find herein, according to our own, subjective, possibly erroneous calculation, a dozen tales of science fiction—five stories of pure fantasy—and two narratives of that always hotly debated category, science fantasy. We have again such familiar names as J. G. Ballard (presenting for us the gorgeous and glittering and utterly appalling figure of The Illuminated Man), Terry Carr (who has uncovered a Touchstone which it were perhaps better not to touch), Your Servant to Command (and hopes to have shown a new side to an old folk-motif), Ron Goulart (his tart, dry, subtle style now bent to a different and serious use), Alan Nourse (short, this one, with a hot little chill at the end), Kit Reed (whose *"I have a tiger!"* already shows some sign of having passed into the language). And, as always, there are newcomers to this best of books—Louis J. A. Adams's stark story of a ". . . rough beast . . . slouch[ing] towards Bethlehem . . ." T. P. Caravan's wry tale wherein irony overcomes horror—Thomas M. Disch's account of a burden almost too heavy to be borne—S. S. Johnson's vivid and controversial novelet of a world without values—Allen Kim Lang, with a brief bio of an immoralist you may not soon forget—Eric St. Clair's story of a logically insane comeuppance—Jack Sharkey and a love which was hunger—Wilma Shore on a note of illumina-

tion and frustration—Ron Webb's almost purely happy, zany bit about babes and bottles—and Roger Zelazny's delicate depiction of a strange and other-worldly affair (this last story doubly and forever honored for having inspired the last magazine cover to come from the brush of the immortal Hannes Bok, Rest in Glory, Rest in Peace).

We have quoted elsewhere and often the lines from the biblical Book of Proverbs, about a three-fold cord not being easily broken. This is the third volume of selections we have edited from the magazine which we edited for close to three years . . . but edit no more. As we read it and loved it before, so we intend, D.V., to read it, loving it, still. On our desk and near to hand is a tiny piece of black and glassy rock called a tektite. The theory of its origin cannot (yet) be proven . . . or disproven . . . but if you have ever picked one up it is possible that you have held in your hand a piece of the moon. It is our hope, our sincere and earnest hope, that a similar "sense of wonder" may be yours by opening yet further the volume which you now hold in your hands. *Thy wonders are a great deep; man and beast Thou savest, O Lord.*

—AVRAM DAVIDSON

Several months ago, we hurled Mr. Davidson to the floor, planted one knee on his chest and urged him (at blaster point) to dictate some biographical data to our voluptuous gal Friday. We now quote it, and we think you'll find it almost as engaging as the story which follows—E. L. F.

"Subject was born some several decades ago in a non-aristocratic section of Yonkers, N. Y., called Hog Hill—sometimes referred to by social climbers as Swine Heights—and was educated (if that is le mot juste) in the local schools, a process which nearly unfitted him forever for participation in any useful functions whatsoever. He attended four institutions of higher learning without taking a degree from any of them, mind you. During late crossness with Japan, served as US Naval Hospital Corpsman with Marines in South Pacific, and wound up feeding Epsom Salts to the inhabitants of North China; following which the defeat of Chiang Kai-shek came as no surprise. Subject will not bore you with a catalog of his various jobs, such as sheep-herding, tomato-picking, or inspector of fish livers. Sold his first F or SF story to F&SF in the year 53 or 54, being much encouraged by Anthony Boucher and Ward Moore; has since been translated into 10 languages on five continents. Author of SF collection OR ALL THE SEAS WITH OYSTERS (Berkley) factual collection CRIMES AND CHAOS (Regency); novel (with Ward Moore), JOYLEG (Pyramid); most recent (Pyramid) SF novel MUTINY IN SPACE (publisher's—ugh—title). Mr. Davidson is believed to be the only person to have received, for writing, both the SF *Hugo* and the Mystery Writers of America *Edgar* awards. He has no hobbies, cares for neither games nor sports, and regularly votes the straight Whig ticket."

SACHEVERELL

by Avram Davidson

THE FRONT WINDOWS of the room were boarded up, and inside it was dark and cold and smelled very bad. There was a stained mattress on which a man wrapped in a blanket lay snoring, a chair with no back; a table which

held the remains of a bag of hamburgers, several punched beer cans, and a penny candle which cast shadows all around.

There was a scuffling sound in the shadows, then a tiny rattling chattering noise, then a thin and tiny voice said, tentatively, "You must be very *cold,* George . . ." No reply. "Because I know *I'm* very cold . . ." the voice faded out. After a moment it said, "He's still asleep. A man needs his rest. It's very *hard* . . ." The voice seemed to be listening for something, seemed not to hear it; after an instant, in a different tone, said, "All right."

"*Hmm?*" it asked the silence. The chattering broke out again for just a second, then the voice said, "Good afternoon, Princess. Good afternoon, Madame. And General—how very nice to see *you.* I wish to invite you to a tea-party. We will use the best set of doll dishes and if anyone wishes to partake of something *stronger,* I believe the Professor—" the voice faltered, continued, "—has a drop of the oh-be-joyful in a bottle on the sideboard. And now pray take seats."

The wind sounded outside; when it died away, leaving the candleflame dancing, there was a humming noise which rose and fell like a moan, then ended abruptly on a sort of click. The voice resumed, wavering at first, "Coko and Moko? No—I'm very sorry, I really can't invite them, they're very stupid, they don't know how to behave and they can't even talk . . ."

The man on the stained mattress woke in a convulsive movement that brought him sitting up with a cry. He threw his head to the right and left and grimaced and struck the air.

"Did you have a bad *dream,* George?" the voice asked, uncertainly.

George said, "*Uhn!*" thrusting at his eyes with the cushions of his palms. He dropped his hands, cleared his throat and spat, thickly. Then he reached out and grabbed the slack of a chain lying on the floor, one end fastened to a tableleg, and began to pull it in. The chain resisted, he tugged, something fell and squeaked, and George, continuing to pull, hauled in his prize and seized it.

"Sacheverell—"

"I hope you didn't have a bad *dream,* George—"

"Sacheverell—was anybody here? You lie to me and—"

"No, George, honest! Nobody was here, George!"

"You lie to me and I'll kill you!"

"I wouldn't lie to you, George. I know it's wicked to lie."

George glared at him out of his reddened eyes, took a firmer grip with both hands, and squeezed. Sacheverell cried out, thrust his face at George's wrist. His teeth clicked on air, George released him, abruptly, and he scuttled away. George smeared at his trouser-leg with his sleeve, made a noise of disgust. "Look what you done, you filthy little ape!" he shouted.

Sacheverell whimpered in the shadows. "I can't help it, George. I haven't got any sphincter muscle, and you *scared* me, you *hurt* me . . ."

George groaned, huddled in under his blanket. "A million dollars on the end of this chain," he said; "and Om living in this hole, here. Like a wino, like a smokey, like a *bum!*" He struck the floor with his fist. "It don't make sense!" he cried, shifting around till he was on all fours, then pushing himself erect. Wrapping the blanket around his shoulders, he shambled quickly to the door, checked the bolt, then examined in turn the boarded-up front windows and the catch on the barred and frost-rimmed back window. Then he did something in a corner, cursing and sighing.

Under the table Sacheverell tugged on his chain ineffectually. "I don't *like* it here, George," he said. "It's cold and it's dirty and *I'm* dirty and cold, too, and I'm hungry. It's all dark here and nobody ever comes here and I don't like it, George, I don't like it here one bit. I wish I was back with the Professor again. I was very *happy* then. The Professor was nice to me and so was the Princess and Madame Opal and the General. They were the only ones in on the secret, until *you* found out."

George swung around and looked at him. One eye sparked in the candle-light.

"We used to have tea-parties and Madame Opal always brought chocolates when she came, even when she came alone, and she read love stories to me out of a magazine book with pictures and they were all true. Why can't I be back with the Professor again?"

George swallowed, and opened his mouth with a little

smacking sound. "Professor Whitman died of a heart-attack," he said.

Sacheverell looked at him, head cocked. "An attack . . ."

"So he's *dead!* So forget about him!" the words tore out of the man's mouth. He padded across the room. Sacheverell retreated to the end of his chain.

"I don't know what the Hell Om gunna *do* . . . In a few weeks now, they'll tear this rotten building down. Maybe," he said, slyly, putting his foot down on the chain, "I'll sell you to a zoo. Where you belong." He bent, grunting, and picked up the chain.

Sacheverell's teeth began to chatter. "I *don't!*" he shrilled. "I *don't* belong in a zoo! The little people they have there are *stu*pid—they don't know how to be*have*, and they can't even *talk!*"

George closed one eye, nodded; slowly, very slowly, drew in the chain. "Come on," he said. "Level with me. Professor Whitman had a nice little act, there. How come he quit and took off and came here?" Slowly he drew in the chain. Sacheverell trembled, but did not resist.

"We were going to go to a laboratory in a college," he said. "He told me. It was a waste to keep me doing silly tricks with Coko and Moko, when I was so smart. He should have done it before, he said."

George's mouth turned up on one side, creasing the stubble. "Naa, Sacheverell," he said. "That don't make sense. You know what they do to monkeys in them labs? They cut 'em up. That's all. I *know*. I went to one and I asked. They pay about fifteen bucks and then they cut 'em up." He made a scissors out of his fingers and went *k'khkhkhkh* . . . Sacheverell shuddered. George set his foot on the chain again and took hold of him by the neck. He poked him in the stomach with his finger, stiff. It had grown colder, the man's breath shown misty in the tainted air. He poked again. Sacheverell made a sick noise, struggled. "Come on," George said. "Level with me. There's a million dollars inside of you, you dirty little ape. There's *gotta* be. Only I don't know *how*. So you tell me."

Sacheverell whimpered. "I don't *know*, George. I don't *know*."

The man scowled, then grinned slyly. "That's what *you*

say. I'm not so sure. You think I don't know that if They found out, They'd take you away from me? Sure. A million bucks . . . How come I'm being followed, if They don't know? First a guy with a beard, then a kid in a red snow-suit. *I* seen them together. Listen, you frigging little jocko, you better *think*, I'm telling you—you better think hard!" He poked again with his stiff and dirty finger. And again. "I always knew, see, I always *knew* that there was a million bucks waiting for me somewhere, if I only kept my eyes open. What the Hell is a guy like me doing unloading crates in the fruit market, when I got plans for a million? And then—" His voice sank and his eyes narrowed. "—this Professor Whitman come along and put up at the Eagle Hotel. I caught his act in the sticks once, I been around. *First* I thought he was practicing ventriloquism, *then* I found out about *you—you* was the other voice in his room! And that's when I—"

Abruptly he stopped. The outside door opened with a rusty squeal and footfalls sounded in the hall. Someone knocked. Someone tried the knob. Someone said, "Sacheverell? Sacheverell?" and George clamped his hairy, filthy hand over the captive's mouth. Sacheverell jerked and twitched and rolled his eyes. The voice made a disappointed noise, the footfalls moved uncertainly, started to retreat. And then Sacheverell kicked out at George's crotch. The man grunted, cursed, lost his grip—

"Help!" Sacheverell cried. *"Help! Help! Save me!"*

Fists beat on the door, the glass in the back window crashed and fell to the floor, a weasened old-man's face peered through the opening, withdrew. George ran to the door, then turned to chase Sacheverell, who fled, shrieking hysterically. A tiny figure in a red snow-suit squeezed through the bars of the back window and ran to pull the bolt on the door. Someone in boots and a plaid jacket and a woolen watch-cap burst in, melting snow glittering on a big black beard.

"Save me!" Sacheverell screamed, dashing from side to side. "He attacked Professor Whitman and knocked him down *and he didn't get up again—"*

George stooped, picking up the chair, but the red snow-suit got between his legs and he stumbled. The chair was

jerked from his hands, he came up with his fists clenched and the bearded person struck down with the chair. It caught him across the bridge of the nose with a crunching noise, he fell, turned over, stayed down. Silence.

Sacheverell hiccupped. Then he said, "Why are you wearing *men's* clothing, Princess Zaga?"

"A bearded man attracts quite enough attention, thank you," the Princess said, disengaging the chain. "No need to advertise . . . Let's get out of here." She picked him up and the three of them went out into the black, deserted street, boarded-shut windows staring blindly. The snow fell thickly, drifting into the ravaged hall and into the room where George's blood, in a small pool, had already begun to freeze.

"There's our car, Sacheverell," said the man in the red snow-suit, thrusting a cigar into his child-size, jaded old face. "What a time—"

"I assume you are still with the carnival, General Pinkey?"

"No, kiddy. The new owners wouldn't recognize the union, so we quit and retired on Social Security in Sarasota. You'll like it there. Not that the unions are much better, mind you: Bismarkian devices to dissuade the working classes from industrial government on a truly Marxian, Socialist-Labor basis. We got a television set, kiddy."

"And look who's waiting for you—" Princess Zaga opened the station wagon and handed Sacheverell inside. There, in the back seat, was the hugest, the vastest, the fattest woman in the world.

"Princess Opal!" Sacheverell cried, leaping into her arms—and was buried in the wide expanse of her bosom and bathed in her warm Gothick tears. She called him her Precious and her Little Boy and her very own Peter Pan.

"It was Madame Opal who planned this all," Princess Zaga remarked, starting the car and driving off. General Pinkey lit his cigar and opened a copy of *The Weekly People.*

"Yes, I did, yes, I did," Mme. Opal murmured, kissing and hugging Sacheverell. "Oh, how neglected you are! Oh, how thin! We'll have a tea-party, just like we used to, the very best doll dishes; we'll see you eat nice and we'll wash you and comb you and put ribbons around your neck."

Sacheverell began to weep. "Oh, it was *awful* with George," he said.

"Never mind, never mind, he didn't know any better," Mme. Opal said, soothingly.

"The Hell he didn't!" snapped Princess Zaga.

"Predatory capitalism," General Pinkey began.

"Never mind, never mind, forget about it, darling, it was only a bad dream . . ."

Sacheverell dried his tears on Mme. Opal's enormous spangled-velvet bosom. "George was very *mean* to me," he said. "He treated me *very* mean. But worst of all, you know, Madame Opal, he *lied* to me—he lied to me all the time, and I almost believed him—that was the most horrible part of all: I almost believed that I was a monkey."

Thirty-one-year-old Jack Sharkey, piano-player and composer, ex-PFC (Special Services), ex-high school teacher (English), ex-advertising copy writer (Sears, Roebuck), ex-unsuccessful free-lance writer, is the author of THE SECRET MARTIANS (Ace), two crime novels—MURDER, MAESTRO, PLEASE, and DEATH FOR AULD LANG SYNE (Abelard-Schuman; Holt, Rinehart & Winston), numerous stories in other SF magazines, and non-SF stories and humor articles in the slick magazines, "most notably *Playboy.*" He took time out last July 14 to get married, in which project he was assisted by the ex-Miss Patricia Walsh of Chicago: since Mr. Sharkey drove a Renault Dauphine and Miss Walsh was a French teacher, "Bastille Day seemed singularly appropriate." This story of Bob Terrill and Valerie his wife, may perhaps bring tremors to *other* mature (we do not say, "middle-aged") husbands of beautiful young wives: but not to *us.* Of course, we do have this tooth that's been bothering us, but—Nonsensel Pifflel Readers, read on.

TRADE-IN

by Jack Sharkey

HE FELT THE PAIN—a sharp, short knife-jab of pain—as he was rinsing his mouth out after a thorough brushing. Seeking the source, he pushed his upper lip away from the teeth, exposing healthy pink gums and bright white incisors. He prodded, pushed, tugged—and felt the pain again. More annoyed than anything else, he rinsed and dried his hands and went back into the bedroom.

"Do you know," he said musingly to the figure that lay curled beneath the bedclothes, "I believe I have a loose tooth."

The figure stirred, and a sigh found its way through the dark green blanket and rumpled counterpane, then Valerie emerged slowly at the upper end of the tangle, like some honey-haired young moth forcing an egress from a flaccid cocoon, and regarded him steadily with sleepy brown eyes.

"Bump it?" she inquired.

"No—at least, not that I can recall. Though I'm sure I'd remember a bump heavy enough to loosen a tooth. It's a front one."

"Let me see," said Valerie, hunching up on her elbows till the pillow supported her back against the headboard, and she could lift her hands to push back the tangled skein of her hair from the pleasantly long face, with its pointed chin.

"Here," said Bob, sitting on the edge of the bed and leaning toward her. His forefinger pried up his lip again, and he said, slightly incoherent through the interference, "Th' fron' one— Onna righ' . . ."

Valerie obediently took the indicated incisor between her thumb and forefinger and gave it a little wiggle. Bob instantly said, "*Mmmph!*" and pulled away, compressing his lips over the area. "See?" he said, after the flash of pain had subsided.

Valerie nodded. "It looks all right, though . . ."

"Maybe it's in the root," he said, with unenthusiastic self-diagnosis. "I wonder if I bit *into* something too hard—?"

"Shall I call the dentist?" his wife suggested, with calm concern, sliding over toward the bedside phone.

"What for?" he said, with sharp abruptness. Valerie simply lay there and looked up into his face until he reddened, and mumbled, "I—I guess maybe you'd better."

While she dialed, he arose and began to dress, trying not to listen to her conversation. Despite himself, however, he paused in the midst of pulling on one sock as she repeated the time of the appointment aloud. "Today?" he said, with a quite boyish pout, as Valerie replaced the receiver and slid out of bed on the side opposite where he sat. "He can't be a very good dentist if he has so much open time."

"He's excellent," said Valerie, standing in the bathroom doorway. "He had a cancellation."

Bob moistened his lips, then said, "You know—it doesn't have as much of a sting as it did . . . Maybe it was a touch of neuralgia, or something . . ." In the doorway, Valerie repressed a smile, and just looked at him until his gaze dropped.

"All right," he said, just as though she'd been vocally insistent. "All *right!*"

"Two o'clock," she said, before shutting the bathroom door. "I'll call you at work at one-thirty and remind you."

"I'll remember!" he said irritably to the closing door. When he was sure it was quite closed, he added, "I won't be able to think of anything *else* today!"

Dr. Haufen stood by the window a long time, studying the small, still-damp X-ray negative in the tiny clamp. Bob, slumped quietly in the chair with his head well back in the padded grip of the head-rest, tried not to clutch the ends of the chair arms too tightly, and his gaze unconsciously avoided looking at the array of glittering steel instruments on the milky round glass shelf level with his chin, nor did he let himself even think about the corded drill that nearly overhung his perch like the single claw of a one-legged mantis.

"Mr. Terrill," the dentist said, finally turning to face him, a small frown between his neat grey eyebrows, "*how* old did you say you were?"

The question was unexpected. Bob sat up a little taller in the chair, his head free of the rest. "Thirty-six."

The dentist nodded slowly, and then hung the clamp, with the negative still in its rubber jaws, on a small nail beside the drug cabinet, then began puttering—almost distractedly—among some odds and ends of cotton, wire and bottled anodynes on the ledge beneath it. He seemed to be thinking.

"What's wrong with the tooth?" demanded Bob. "Is it broken, infected, or what?"

Dr. Haufen turned to face him. "It's dying," he said. "The nerve is nearly gone, and the periostial membrane has weakened considerably. It must come out, of course."

"Out?" Bob echoed stupidly. "A front tooth?" He considered this possibility numbly, then with weary fortitude. "I—I suppose you can make me some kind of false one, can't you? One of those pivot-teeth? I can't attend to business with a black gap at the front of my mouth. I have to meet a lot of people, smile an awful lot . . ."

"I can make you artificial dentures," the dentist nodded. "It will be less expense, in the long run, if we wait for the others to come out, first, however."

Bob's stomach seemed suddenly filled with slowly congealing gelatine. "Others," he said, savoring the sound of the word before letting his mind apprehend its meaning. Then, "You mean I'm going to lose some *more?*"

The dentist seemed to come to a decision. Almost confidentially, he leaned closer. "Mr. Terrill," he said gently, "I realize that your wife, a lovely woman, is but thirty years of age. I find it quite understandable that you may have—shall we say—*pared* the facts a bit when you married her. I mean, a man is young as he feels, there's no gainsaying that, and to pass up an opportunity for marriage simply because of a mathematical fact would be folly in the extreme—"

"Wait, hold on, Doctor . . ." said Bob, sitting up very straight in the chair, now. "What are you saying? What are you trying to imply?"

The dentist's smile was tolerant as he lifted the clamp from the drug cabinet once more, and held up the X-ray negative to emphasize his point. "People sometimes—for really sound motives—deceive others. But an X-ray cannot lie."

"I don't understand," said Bob, feeling sick and faint with apprehension. "What do you mean?"

"Simply that your claim to be thirty-six," said Dr. Haufen, with a tiny shrug, "in lieu of the evidence on this exposed plate, is quite preposterous."

"But Doctor—!" Bob blurted, confused. "I *am* thirty-six!"

"Not according to this," said the dentist, holding out the negative for Bob's perusal. Bob stared at the grey-and-white-prong-shapes against the glossy black background on the photograph, and shook his head.

"That means nothing to me," he said. "I have no idea what you're driving at."

"All right," said Haufen. "I'll spell it out for you. On your unsupported word, you are thirty-six years of age. Where, then, did you get the teeth of a man easily twice that old?"

Bob's grip on the chair arms relaxed, and he slid downward until the head-rest stopped his descent. "But I *am* thirty-six . . . !"

The doctor again smiled his tolerant smile, and turned away to the shelf under the drug cabinet, selecting his in-

struments with practiced care. "Just as you say, Mr. Terrill," he said, in a soothing tone that implied lack of interest in the other's usage of the truth. "The main thing to do is to get that tooth out. Afterward," he continued, his back still toward the chair, "I would really appreciate your telling me how you keep your voice and face looking so youthful—"

In mid-sentence, he had turned back again, a wad of cotton, dipped in a mild scarlet anesthetic to be rubbed upon the gum about the bothersome tooth before extraction, held in a shiny set of steel forceps. But there was no one in the chair to hear the end of the sentence, so he stopped, gave an insouciant shrug (the bill for consultation would be sent anyway), and dropped the wet cotton into a metal wastebasket.

He saw the glow of flickering yellow candlelight out on the terrace as he repocketed his key and crossed the living room toward the bedroom. The candles, he noted with a guilty pang, were melted more than halfway down, on the white-naperied table, between the polished silver and gleaming china. He looked at his watch, and saw that it was nearly half-past seven. The faint odor of prepared food told him that dinner must have long ago grown cold in the kitchen.

Feeling miserably culpable, he pushed open the bedroom door. Valerie, sitting white-faced and silent beside the phone, jumped to her feet, and a flush of color leaped into her cheeks. "Your office called," she said, her normally well-modulated voice a bit shaky. "They wondered if you were all right." She came to him, then, slid her arms about his waist, and pressed the side of her face against his chest. "I was just going to call the police," she murmured. "I gave you until half-past seven."

"I'm sorry," he said sincerely.

"Was it bad?" Valerie leaned her head back to look up into his face. "The dentist's, I mean?"

Bob slid his own arms about her to keep her from leaning any further away. "Pretty bad," he said with great honesty. "One of the worst experiences I ever had in my life."

"Let me see the tooth," said his wife, tilting her head for a look between his lips. "Does it hurt? Did he fill it?"

"Not exactly," Bob mumbled, his hand pressing her head

gently against his chest again, so that he wouldn't have to control his facial muscles against her curious gaze. "He says—he says it has to come out."

"Oh, Bob!"

The warm sympathy in her voice touched a chord inside his heart, then, and he began to blurt out the entire terrible story. "He must be wrong," he said, when he'd finished. "He's got to be wrong!"

"Well, of *course* he's wrong!" said Valerie. "You big silly! Spending your entire afternoon roaming the streets, sick with fright— Why didn't you come *home?*"

"I was afraid to tell you."

"Me? Afraid to tell *me?*" she asked, with amazement. "For heaven's sake, Bob, why?"

Feeling decidedly stupid, he flung his arms out to the sides, raised his shoulders in a shrug, and slapped his thighs in embarrassed admission of his own idiocy. "Who knows?" he muttered, turning away. "I don't know what I expected you to do. Certainly not to bite my head off. I don't know why I didn't come home."

Abruptly practical, Valerie said, taking his arm, "Come into the kitchen. Maybe I can salvage some of the dinner."

He let her lead him across the living room and into the kitchen. Another pang of guilt hit him as he saw the wilting salads on the sideboard, the congealed mess that would—at five-forty-five—have been a spicy rarebit, the cold brown toast stuck by its steam-wet underside to the plates. "I'm sorry, Baby," he said, feeling perfectly rotten inside. "All your trouble!"

"Don't be foolish," she laughed. "I can whip up a couple of hamburgers, and you can find the opener and pour some beer, and we'll manage fine."

Her hand on the door to the freezer, she turned her head toward him, her eyes deeply earnest in their pleading. "And the next time your world falls apart at the seams—come home, huh? Or phone me? Or send a wire?"

"Baby!" he sighed, and pulled her up against him, covering the top of her burnished blonde hair with soft, urgent kisses. "Never again, I promise. No matter what happens. I'll come right home and tell you about it."

"Please do," she said, relaxing against him. "That's what a

wife is for." Then, pushing away from his embrace with a no-nonsense air: "Let's get some food in that stomach of yours, first. Then you can cry on my shoulder."

Bob laughed, and started looking for the opener.

The next morning, the tooth hurt worse than before, and its nearby companions were just this side of being comfortable. Valerie had awakened when Bob did, though, and his tooth was the first thing she asked about. He lied chivalrously, ignored the pain when he sipped the icy orange juice beside his breakfast plate, and set off for the office as though in the prime of health, his reward being the sweet memory of her smiling face at the door to their apartment.

His first reaction at the office, however, was to get out the classified directory and start looking up dentists. It might, be reasoned, after listing a few in the area, look strange if he took off during working hours for another dental appointment so soon after the first, so he decided to utilize his lunch hour. His waistline could stand to miss a meal.

When he returned to the office at a little past one, however, his face was noticeably greyer, though no one remarked on it. Substantially, each of the two dentists he'd managed to see had said precisely what Dr. Haufen had. His teeth were dying. Of old age. And he himself was only thirty-six, in what should still be the golden years of health.

"It doesn't make any sense!" he told himself furiously. "It's crazy. I can't tell Val what's happening! A man can't tell a young wife that he's suddenly hitting the other side of senile decay!"

After fumbling for a pack of cigarettes that wasn't there, Bob left his desk and crossed the main office between the metallic chattering of the stenographers' desks to the lounge, where the vending machine was. He rummaged for the proper coinage, found it, and tugged the chrome-plated plunger over his favorite brand. It was while gratefully blowing out the first puff from his initial long drag on a hastily lit cigarette that he glanced into the mirror on the front of the machine. The cigarette dropped to the floor, and it was a full minute before he noticed it, and swiftly crunched out its glowing tip under the sole of his shoe. Un-

believingly, he leaned closer to the mirror, and took a really good look.

He couldn't blame it on the lighting. The ceiling of the lounge was alive with fluorescents, and radiated so much cool blue-white light that he'd have been hard-pressed to find a solitary shadow anywhere in the room. So he had to accept what he saw in the mirror as true.

At forelock and temples, his hair—thick, brown and healthy just that morning, in the bathroom mirror—was subtly streaked with silvery grey. And there was the merest trace of crinkling about his eyes, giving his skin the appearance of still-soft flesh-colored crepe paper.

He couldn't go back to his desk. It would mean crossing the main office again, and this time surely someone would notice what was happening to him. Bob turned and went out the opposite door of the lounge, crossed the corridor to the self-service elevator, and rode down, not letting himself think. Out on the sidewalk, it was chilly, and he regretted having to leave his light topcoat back in the office. He couldn't, he felt, last out the walk to the subway and the wait on the platform without screaming. He hailed the first cab with an upright flag, and gave his home address.

When Valerie came in from the terrace at his call, her lithe figure still wrapped comfortably in a bright blue terry-cloth robe, her morning coffee still held gracefully over the saucer, words suddenly failed Bob, and he just stood there looking at her, opening and closing his hands.

"The tooth again?" she asked, after a silence, though the tiniest catch in her voice told him she'd sensed there was something else.

"I wish it were just that," he said, approaching her. As he came full into the sunlight that spilled through the glass doors behind her, he saw Valerie's eyes widen, and then the cup and saucer fell from her hands and clattered unnoticed on the carpet.

"Bob—your hair . . . Your face!"

"Something's wrong," he said, the pale sound of his own voice adding to his fear. "Something's terribly wrong. Two other dentists confirmed what Dr. Haufen said, Val. And now—this!" Dazed, he sank into an armchair and stared at the sodden brown coffeestain on the carpet at his wife's

feet. "Thirty-six years old. With the teeth of a septuagenarian, and the looks of a man nearing sixty."

Valerie sank down on the arm of the chair beside him, found his hands, and held them between her own. "You'd better get into bed," she said. "I'll call the doctor."

"What for?" said Bob, suddenly snappish. "So he can smirk at me and ask my *real* age?"

"You must *have* something . . . Maybe a vitamin shortage," Valerie said, breathlessly, "or it's overwork, or—or some kind of virus . . ."

"*Virus!*" he spat scornfully. "What virus makes a man age decades in a few days?"

"I don't know," Valerie said, her eyes suddenly filled with tears. "But sitting here won't help. I've got to do *something* for you . . ."

"All right," said Bob, suddenly contrite. "All right, honey. Call the doctor. We'll see what he says."

Hours later, with the last faint streak of sunset pink still glowing on the ceiling of their bedroom, Bob lay silent, smoking listlessly, thinking and pondering and wondering. The doctor had left just a few hours ago. He could find nothing physically wrong with Bob, pronouncing him in great shape for a man his age. "What age?" Valerie had asked, urgently.

The doctor—a stranger, their own doctor being on vacation—turned a curious stare at her. "Upper sixties, I should suppose . . ." he said, as if awaiting an explanation of her query. When none was forthcoming, he closed his bag, prescribed a pep tonic, and left, with the terrible words, "I'm sure your father will be feeling much better after a little rest, Miss Terrill."

Neither of them had said anything to disabuse his mind of the understandable error. Bob, suddenly unwilling to face Valerie, or talk to her, had insisted she go out and get the prescription filled. To give himself a bit longer time of seclusion, he had falsified a sudden craving for peppermint schnapps, knowing that Valerie would have to travel far uptown to the German section to get it, the demand being minuscule anywhere else in the city. She'd assured herself he was comfortable, kissed him fondly, and had gone out.

He rather hoped she'd take her time. He missed her awfully, but couldn't stand to watch her face when she looked at his. The pink glow had vanished, and dark blue night was thick in the air of the bedroom when he heard her come into the apartment.

Rather than have to feign pleasure at drinking the syrupy stuff he didn't really like, he let his eyelids close, and breathed deeply and regularly. After a moment, he felt the light from the living room fall upon his face, and could sense her standing in the doorway, watching him. Then, softly, the door closed, and he could hear her making her way across the living room to the kitchen, to put the bottle away until he was awake again.

He listened, trying to follow her with his mind as she moved about the apartment. She was closing the cabinet doors in the kitchen. Now she was running herself a glass of water at the tap. Putting the empty tumbler upside down on the drainboard. Opening the refrigerator, taking something out, closing the door. Now the breadbox . . . the cutlery drawer . . . A heavy metallic clunk—what was it? The coffeepot, on the burner, of course. She was making coffee and fixing a sandwich, or plate of something, for herself.

Oddly miffed, Bob sat up in the bed. Naturally, Valerie had to keep her strength up, but—Bob found that he resented Val's making herself a bite to eat while he lay turning into—he didn't know quite what to call his metamorphosis. The antic term Instant Methuselah flickered in his mind, and he shuddered.

Now Val was coming back into the living room. He lay back, ready to feign sleep if she entered the bedroom. But after a slight pause in the living room, she went out onto the terrace. Bob opened his eyes.

The moon had risen while he lay there, and the city through the bedroom window lay dusted with steely blue radiance, the pebbled-and-tarred rooftops turning into shimmering fields of diamond. Bob got up quietly and stepped to the bedroom window. It did not itself give upon the terrace, but by leaning far to one side, he could see his wife. Valerie was standing sipping a steaming cup of coffee, facing outward, her back to him. Her sandwich lay half-eaten on a small plate atop the terrace's low stone wall, between her

slender body and the giddy drop to the street. Under the spell of the low-hanging silver moon, her blonde hair was like coiled metal, luminous tendrils of soft foam falling to her shoulders in a beautiful cascade.

She stood so still she might have been carved from ivory, from ice, from cloudy crystal. She'd never been more lovely than at that moment. Suddenly, Bob wanted to be with her. He turned from the window and started for the bedroom door. The soft moonlight could be kind to him, kind to his grey hair and wrinkling skin. This might be his final chance to be with her looking somewhat as he used to. Any aging of his body might easily be attributed to the inconstant glow of the moon, grey hair becoming a mere highlight, a wrinkle a mere shadow, his stooped form a mere trick of the night.

With his hand still on the knob of the half-opened door, Bob paused. There was an indeterminate emptiness to the living room . . . Then he saw that the phone was not on the table near the kitchen doorway. That was Valerie's short pause on her way to the terrace. She'd brought the phone out with her. To call— Whom?

Bob shut the bedroom door again and returned to his bed, pulling the blankets up about his chin. Beside the bed, blue moonlight gleamed softly on the extension phone. Bob looked at it, then lifted it and listened. Nothing but the dial tone. He hung up and lay still, thinking. The bell inside the base jingled slightly, and he knew Val had lifted the receiver of the other phone. He reached out, then stopped himself. To pick up the phone while she dialed the other one would break the circuit. He counted to ten, then slid a finger onto the button beneath the receiver, put the receiver to his ear, then very gently let the button up. A soft, distant burring sound had barely met his ear when it cut off sharply, and a man's voice spoke on the line. "Hello?"

"Marty," said his wife's voice. "This is Val."

"Val?" said the man. Then, "Val Morrison?"

Bob felt a queer pang. Morrison was Val's almost-forgotten maiden name. A cold film of perspiration began to coat his face and limbs as he listened, breathing with nearly stealthy caution, even though his hand covered the mouthpiece.

"Had you given me up for dead?" Val laughed.

"You left the party so abruptly the other night—" the man said ruefully. Bob's mind flashed backward. The other night. Just the week before, he'd been out of town on an overnight business trip. He'd phoned, but no one had answered. Val told him she'd taken a sleeping pill before retiring, that night. But it was the only night she could have been out without his knowledge. Feeling cold and sick inside, he kept listening.

Their voices, their speech, struck a familiar chord. The conversation could almost have been one of his own, with Val, before they were married. Uneasy memories moved across his consciousness, in an aura of ominous pertinence —dates she had not kept, sudden disappearances in mid-evening, determined avoidance of questions regarding her address, her past, even her marital status . . . There was a pattern to this, Bob began to realize. But a puzzling pattern. Where did its threads lead? What did it all mean?

Bob couldn't think such thoughts for long. They scared him, conjured up horrors inside his mind that nearly blacked him out with fear. Without knowing why, he decided to go out, to get away from Val—young, beautiful, vibrant Val—and think. Think, while his mind was still clear.

His hands trembling, hard to control, Bob took the phone from his ear, almost hung it up, then didn't dare risk the sound it might make on the line. He slid the receiver beneath the pillow, then got up out of bed, fought against the pain that racked his legs and back, and hobbled across the room to the chair on which his clothing was folded.

The belt had to be tightened two extra notches. His shirt collar hung away from his vulture's neck, even with the necktie pulled into a clumsy knot against it. In the moonlight, a shock of hair fell across his eyes, and Bob saw that it was snowy white, and that the hand which brushed it fitfully back was speckled with brown, and networked with distended blue veins. He couldn't manage his shoelaces; bending to fasten them made him horribly giddy.

Gasping, finding it harder and harder to see, Bob got somehow to the door, supported himself by his grasp on the knob until a wave of sick vertigo passed, then opened it

and moved cautiously into the living room. He looked toward the terrace. He stopped, frozen with fear.

Valerie was at the terrace doors in sharp silhouette, standing like some ancient terrible goddess with the full moon at her back against the vaulted sky, her face dark and unseen amid the lustrous twining aurora of her hair. "Why, Bob," she said, starting toward him. "Feeling better?"

"Yes—*No.* I—I'm dizzy," he said, feeling unaccountable panic. "I want to go out, take a walk." The voice that spoke with his lips was a croaking shadow of the voice that had been his. "Air—" he invented frantically. "I need fresh air."

"I'll help you out onto the terrace," said his wife, coming smoothly toward him. "It's a lovely night." Then she had his arm in hers, and was smiling at him. Smiling *down* at him.

Bob hadn't known his bones could dry so much in so short a time. Beside her, he was a gibbering, grey little monkey-creature in clothes far too large for him, raising gnarled hands to ward off—*What?* The warmth of her flesh where she touched him burnt like hot irons. Her perfume was musky, overpowering. Weakly, trying to resist with limbs that would scarcely move, he let himself be led onto the terrace, trying to speak with a mouth that only drooled wetly down his chest, blinking wild rheumy eyes that barely focussed on objects any more. Val assisted him onto a cold, canvas-and-metal chair on the moonlit terrace. "You're tired," she crooned. "You should rest."

A paralyzing lassitude seeped along his bones like cool water. He was sick, weary, spent. The moonlight hurt his eyes. Life was suddenly an intolerable burden. With an effort, he brought his eyes to sharp focus on the face of his wife. *The young, lovely face that belonged to a girl barely out of her teens.* Some hidden reserve of strength flowed into him, then, something that fought the creak of brittle ribs beneath icy skin, and let him speak.

"Who *are* you?" he said, numbly. "*What* are you?"

Val, radiant in the moonlight, folded her arms and looked at him with reluctant respect. Abruptly, dropping the facade of solicitude, she said, as if quoting, " 'Hunger, Emptiness, Voracity, having no life of my own, only such life as can be drained from others. I, and others like me, have access to

the Book of Age, wherein is recorded the allotted span of years of all the peoples of Earth.' " Her voice was hollow, dull, and incredibly exhausted. "To have even the semblance of life, I must steal the future from such as you. You would have lived to be eighty."

She sat upon the low terrace wall, watching him. Bob held himself conscious with an effort, then said, "How?"

Val smiled. It was not affection, it was triumph. Weary triumph. "By marriage, you willed to be one with me. You joined your life to mine, mine which is not life, but the craving for it. Every touch of my hand, every brush of my lips, every embrace, has drained you. You cannot pit an eighty-year lifespan against eternal emptiness and hope to win. The years that would have been yours are now mine."

Furry blackness was closing in, slowly blotting the sky and the stark white moon from his vision. With an effort that sent sharp knives of pain through his tottering body, Bob lurched to his feet. He clung to the chair arms to support himself. "You can't have my years."

Val looked from him to the edge of the terrace before him, and shook her head. "Don't. It will do you no good," she said, out-guessing him. "If you die of age or accident, now, it will make no difference. Your years are mine."

A hundred thoughts leaped through his mind in that moment. Thoughts of the many haggard husbands of blooming wives, of man's lifespan being statistically shorter than woman's, of the great secrecy women relentlessly keep about their ages. "Ghouls," he gasped out. "You're all *ghouls!*"

He suddenly began to cry, like a little boy. He sank with creaking agony to his knees, then sprawled at her feet on the stone floor of the terrace, the shriveled offering at the feet of the seated goddess. "Mercy," he whispered.

Valerie laughed. It sounded mocking, derisive.

And the sound sparked one last wave of strength through his dwindling consciousness, sent a final flare of angry heat through the heart beneath his bony ribcage. Bob grasped her ankles in his contorted fingers and lifted them high as he was able, screaming out in the agony it cost him. He heard her scream mingle with his own, then Valerie's ankles were wrenched from his grasp.

The scream dwindled, faded, and when Bob fell back-

ward and looked up, the low wall of the terrace was empty. He felt the same pain Val felt at the awful instant when she struck the street, then something snapped like an overstrained cable, and he was suddenly at peace.

It was half an hour before he was strong enough to stand. His clothing fit much better. By the time he'd gotten to the elevator, his hair was no longer white, but its former dark shade. As he emerged in the lobby, he felt better than ever before in his life.

Out in the street, late night traffic spun by the apartment building, roaring metal giants towed by bright cones of light at the front. Bob looked beneath the spinning wheels of the passing cars for Valerie, for some sign of her. But there was no blood, no body, no disturbance anywhere on the pavement. He finally found the rag bundle that had been her clothing. It lay by the curb, in the gutter, smelling faintly of decay, and filled only with a thin powdering of grey and ancient dust.

Sounds, seas, jewels, deserts, flowers, crystals . . . these are things which J. G. Ballard in a very short time has made distinctively and peculiarly his—and distinctively and peculiarly beautiful. He has broken down the walls which Literature, no less than Nature, had seemed to erect between seemingly disparate elements, and from this breech has emerged his own strange beauty. Mr. Ballard is in his early thirties, was born in Shanghai (and interned there during the War), read medicine at Cambridge, has been a copywriter and an RAF pilot. He says, "The biggest development of the immediate future will take place, not on the Moon or Mars, but on Earth, and it is *inner* space, not outer, that needs to be explored."—And concludes: *"The only truly alien planet is Earth."*

THE ILLUMINATED MAN

by J. G. Ballard

By day fantastic birds flew through the petrified forest, and jewelled alligators glittered like heraldic salamanders on the banks of the crystalline rivers. By night the illuminated man raced among the trees, his arms like golden cartwheels, his head like a spectral crown. . . .

DURING THE LAST YEAR, since the news of what is now variously known as the Hubble Effect, the Rostov-Lysenko Syndrome and the LePage Amplification Synchronoclasmique first gained world-wide attention, there have been so many conflicting reports from the three focal areas in Florida, Byelorussia and Madagascar that I feel it necessary to preface my own account of the phenomenon with the assurance that it is entirely based upon first-hand experience. All the events I describe were witnessed by myself during the recent, almost tragic visit to the Florida Everglades arranged by the United States government for the scientific attachés in Washington. The only facts I was not able to verify are the details of Charles Foster Marquand's life which I obtained from Captain Shelley, the late chief of police at

Maynard, and although he was a biased and untrustworthy witness I feel that in this single case he was almost certainly accurate.

How much longer remains before all of us, wherever we are, become expert authorities upon the exact nature of the Hubble Effect is still open to conjecture. As I write, here within the safety and peace of the garden of the British Embassy at Puerto Rico, I see a report in today's *New York Times* that the whole of the Florida peninsula, with the exception of a single highway to Tampa, has been closed and that to date some three million of the state's inhabitants have been resettled in other parts of the United States. But apart from the estimated losses in real estate values and hotel revenues ("Oh, Miami," I cannot help saying to myself, "you city of a thousand cathedrals to the rainbow sun") the news of this extraordinary human migration seems to have prompted little comment. Such is mankind's innate optimism, our conviction that we can survive any deluge or cataclysm, that we unconsciously dismiss the momentous events in Florida with a shrug, confident that some means will be found to avert the crisis when it comes.

And yet it now seems obvious that the real crisis is long past. Tucked away on a back page of the same *New York Times* is a short report of the sighting of another "double galaxy" by observers at the Hubble Institute on Mount Palomar. The news is summarised in less than a dozen lines and without comment, although the implication is inescapable that yet another focal area has been set up somewhere on the earth's surface, perhaps in the temple-filled jungles of Cambodia or the haunted amber forests of the Chilean highland. But it is only a year since the Mount Palomar astronomers identified the first double galaxy in the constellation Andromeda, the great oblate diadem that is probably the most beautiful object in the universe, the island galaxy M 31.

Although these sightings by now seem commonplace, and at least half a dozen 'double constellations' can be picked from the night sky on any evening of the week, four months ago when the party of scientific attachés landed at Miami Airport on a conducted tour of the stricken area there was still widespread ignorance of what the Hubble Effect (as

the phenomenon had been christened in the Western Hemisphere and the English-speaking world) actually involved. Apart from a handful of forestry workers and biologists from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, few qualified observers had witnessed the phenomenon and there were implausible stories in the newspapers of the forest 'crystallising' and everything 'turning into coloured glass.'

One unfortunate consequence of the Hubble Effect is that it is virtually impossible to photograph anything transformed by it. As any reader of scientific journals knows, glassware is extremely difficult to reproduce, and even blocks of the highest screen on the best quality art papers—let alone the coarse blocks used on newsprint—have failed to reproduce the brilliant multi-facetted lattices of the Hubble Effect, with their myriads of interior prisms, as anything more than a vague blur like half-melted snow.

Perhaps in retaliation, the newspapers had begun to suggest that the secrecy which surrounded the affected area in the Everglades—then no more than three or four acres of forest to the northeast of Maynard—was being deliberately imposed by the administration, and a clamour was raised about the rights of inspection and the unseen horrors concealed from the public. It so happened that the focal area discovered by Professor Auguste LePage in Madagascar—in the Matarre Valley, far into the hinterland of the island—was about 150 miles from the nearest roadhead and totally inaccessible, while the Soviet authorities had clamped a security cordon as tight as Los Alamos's around their own affected area in the Pripet Marshes of Byelorussia, where a legion of scientific workers under the leadership of the metabiologist Lysenko (all, incidentally, chasing a complete red herring) was analysing every facet of the inexplicable phenomenon.

Before any political capital could be made from this campaign, the Department of Agriculture in Washington announced that all facilities for inspection would be gladly provided, and the invitation to the scientific attachés proceeded as part of the programme of technical missions and tours.

As we drove westwards from Miami Airport it was immediately obvious that in a sense the newspapers had been right,

and that there was far more to the Hubble Effect than the official handouts had let us believe. The highway to Maynard had been closed to general traffic, and our bus twice overtook military convoys within twenty miles of Miami. In addition, as if to remind us of the celestial origin of the phenomenon, the news of yet another manifestation came through on the radio bulletins.

"There's an Associated Press report from New Delhi," George Schneider, the West German attaché, came aft to tell us. "This time there are millions of reliable witnesses. Apparently it should have been plainly visible in the Western Hemisphere last night. Did none of you see it?"

Paul Mathieu, our French confrère, pulled a droll face. "Last night I was looking at the moon, my dear George, not the Echo satellite. It sounds ominous, but if Venus now has two lamps, so much the better."

Involuntarily we looked out through the windows, searching above the roadside pines for any glimpse of the Echo satellite. According to the AP reports its luminosity had increased by at least ten-fold, transforming the thin pinpoints of light which had burrowed across the night sky for so many faithful years into a brilliant luminary outshone only by the moon. All over Asia, from the refugee camps on the shores of the Jordan to the crowded tenements of Shanghai, it was being observed at the very moment we were making our fifty-mile drive to Maynard.

"Perhaps the balloon is breaking up," I suggested in a lame effort to revive our spirits. "The fragments of aluminium paint will be highly reflective and form a local cloud like a gigantic mirror. It's probably nothing to do with the Hubble Effect."

"I'm sorry, James, I wish we could believe that." Sidney Reston, of the State Department, who was acting as our courier, interrupted his conversation with the U.S. Army major in charge of the bus to sit down with us. "But it looks as if they're very much connected. All the other satellites aloft are showing the same increased albedo, seems more and more like a case of 'Hubble bubble, double trouble.' "

This absurd jingle echoed in my ears as we neared the eastern fringes of Big Cypress Swamp. Five miles from Maynard we left the highway and turned on to a rough track

which ran through the date palms towards the Opotoka River. The surface of the road had been churned by scores of tracked vehicles, and a substantial military camp had been set up among the great oaks, the lines of tents hidden by the grey festoons of the spanish moss. Large piles of collapsible metal fencing were being unloaded from the trucks, and I noticed a squad of men painting a number of huge black signs with a vivid luminous paint.

"Are we going on manoeuvres, major?" the Swedish member of our party complained as the dust filled the cabin. "Why have we left the highway?"

"The highway is closed," the major replied evenly. "You'll be taken on a tour of the site, I assure you, gentlemen. The only safe approach is by river."

"*Safe* approach?" I repeated to Reston. "I say, what is this, Sidney?"

"Just the army, James," he assured me, "you know what they're like in emergencies. If a tree moves they declare war on it." With a shake of his head he peered out at the activity around us. "But I admit I can't see why they have to proclaim martial law."

Reaching the bank of the river, where half a dozen amphibious vehicles were moored by a floating quay, we debarked from the bus and were taken into a large quonset used for briefing visitors. Here we found some fifty or sixty other notables—senior members of government laboratories, public health officials and science journalists—who had been brought by bus from Miami earlier that morning. The atmosphere of light-hearted banter barely concealed a growing uneasiness, but the elaborate precautions of the military still seemed ludicrously exaggerated. After an interval for coffee we were officially welcomed and issued with our instructions for the day. These warned us in particular to remain strictly within the marked perimeters, not to attempt to obtain any of the 'contaminated material,' and above all never to linger at any one spot but always to remain in rapid motion.

Needless to say, the pantomime humour of all this was lost on none of us and we were in high spirits when we set off down the river in three of the landing craft, the green walls of the forest slipping past on either side. I noticed

immediately the quieter mood, by contrast, of the passenger beside me. A slimly built man of about forty, he was wearing a white tropical suit which emphasised the thin rim of dark beard framing his face. His black hair was brushed low over a bony forehead, and with the jaundiced gaze in his small liquid eyes gave him the appearance of a moody D. H. Lawrence. I made one or two attempts to talk to him, but he smiled briefly and looked away across the water. I assumed that he was one of the research chemists or biologists.

Two miles downstream we met a small convoy of motor launches harnessed together behind a landing craft. All of them were crammed with cargo, their decks and cabin roofs loaded with household possessions of every sort, baby carriages and mattresses, washing machines and bundles of linen, so that there were only a few precarious inches of freeboard amidships. Solemn-faced children sat with suitcases on their knees above the freight, and they and their parents gazed at us stonily as we passed.

Now it is a curious thing, but one seldom sees on the faces of Americans the expression of wan resignation all too familiar to the traveller elsewhere in the world, that sense of cowed helplessness before natural or political disaster seen in the eyes of refugees from Caporetto to Korea, and its unmistakable stamp upon the families moving past us abruptly put an end to our light-hearted mood. As the last of the craft pushed slowly through the disturbed water we all turned and watched it silently, aware that in a sense it carried ourselves.

"What *is* going on?" I said to the bearded man. "They look as if they're evacuating the town!"

He laughed briefly, finding an unintended irony in my remark. "Agreed—it's pretty pointless! But I guess they'll come back in due course."

Irritated by this elliptical comment, delivered in a curt off-hand voice—he had looked away again, engrossed upon some more interesting inner topic—I turned and joined my colleagues.

"But why is the Russian approach so different?" George Schneider was asking. "Is the Hubble Effect the same as this Lysenko Syndrome? Perhaps it is a different phenomenon?"

One of the Department of Agriculture biologists, a grey-haired man carrying his jacket over one arm, shook his head. "No, they're almost certainly identical. Lysenko as usual is wasting the Soviets' time. He maintains that crop yields are increased because there's an increase in tissue weight. But the Hubble Effect is much closer to a cancer as far as we can see—and about as curable—a proliferation of the subatomic identity of all matter. It's almost as if a sequence of displaced but identical images were being produced by refraction through a prism, but with the element of time replacing the role of light." As it transpired, these were prophetic words.

We were rounding a bend as the river widened in its approach towards Maynard, and the water around the two landing craft ahead was touched by a curious roseate sheen, as if reflecting a distant sunset or the flames of some vast silent conflagration. The sky, however, remained a bland limpid blue, devoid of all cloud. Then we passed below a small bridge, where the river opened into a wide basin a quarter of a mile in diameter.

With a simultaneous gasp of surprise we all craned forward, staring at the line of jungle facing the white-framed buildings of the town. Instantly I realised that the descriptions of the forest 'crystallising' and 'turning into coloured glass' were exactly truthful. The long arc of trees hanging over the water dripped and glittered with myriads of prisms, the trunks and fronds of the date palms sheathed by bars of livid yellow and carmine light that bled away across the surface of the water, so that the whole scene seemed to be reproduced by an over-active technicolor process. The entire length of the opposite shore glittered with this blurred chiaroscuro, the overlapping bands of colour increasing the density of the vegetation, so that it was impossible to see more than a few feet between the front line of trunks.

The sky was clear and motionless, the hot sunlight shining uninterruptedly upon this magnetic shore, but now and then a stir of wind would cross the water and the trees erupted into cascades of rippling colour that lanced away into the air around us. Then, slowly, the coruscation subsided and the images of the individual trunks, each sheathed in its

brilliant armour of light, reappeared, their dipping foliage loaded with deliquescing jewels.

Everyone in our craft was gaping at this spectacle, the vivid crystal light dappling our faces and clothes, and even my bearded companion was moved by astonishment. Clasping the seat in front of him, he leaned across the rail, the white fabric of his suit transformed into a brilliant palimpsest.

Our craft moved in a wide arc towards the quay, where a score of power cruisers were being loaded by the townsfolk, and we came within some fifty yards of the prismatic jungle, the hatchwork of coloured bars across our clothes transforming us into a boatload of harlequins. There was a spontaneous round of laughter, more in relief than amusement. Then several arms pointed to the waterline, where we saw that the process had not affected the vegetation alone. Extending outwards for two or three yards from the bank were the long splinters of what appeared to be crystallising water, the angular facets emitting a blue prismatic light washed by the wake from our craft. These splinters were growing in the water like crystals in a chemical solution, accreting more and more material to themselves, so that along the bank there was a congested mass of rhomboidal spears like the lengthening barbs of a reef.

Surprised by the extent of the phenomenon—I had expected, perhaps under the influence of the Lysenko theories, little more than an unusual plant disease, such as tobacco mosaic—I gazed up at the overhanging trees. Unmistakably each was still alive, its leaves and boughs filled with sap, and yet at the same time each was encased in a mass of crystalline tissue like an immense glacé fruit. Everywhere the branches and fronds were encrusted by the same translucent lattice, through which the sunlight was refracted into rainbows of colour.

A hubbub of speculation broke out in our craft, during which only myself and the bearded man remained silent. For some reason I suddenly felt less concerned to find a so-called 'scientific' explanation for the strange phenomenon we had seen. The beauty of the spectacle had stirred my memory, and a thousand images of childhood, forgotten for nearly forty years, now filled my mind, recalling the

paradisal world of one's earliest years when everything seems illuminated by that prismatic light described so exactly by Wordsworth in his recollections of childhood. Since the death of my wife and three-year-old daughter in a car accident ten years earlier I had deliberately repressed such feelings, and the vivid magical shore before us seemed to glow like the brief forgotten spring of my marriage.

But the presence of so many soldiers and military vehicles, and the wan-faced townsfolk evacuating their homes, ensured that the little enclave of the transfigured forest—by comparison the remainder of the Everglades basin seemed a drab accumulation of peat, muck and marls—would soon be obliterated, the crystal trees dismembered and carried away to a hundred antiseptic laboratories.

At the front of the landing craft the first passengers began to debark. A hand touched my arm, and the white-suited man, apparently aware of my mood, pointed with a smile at the sleeve of his suit, as if encouraging me. To my astonishment a faint multi-coloured dappling still remained, despite the shadows of the people getting to their feet around us, as if the light from the forest had contaminated the fabric and set off the process anew. "What on—? Wait!" I called.

But before I could speak to him he stood up and hurried down the gangway, the last pale shimmer from his suit disappearing along the crowded quay.

Our party was divided into several smaller groups, each accompanied by two NCO's, and we moved off past the queue of cars and trucks loaded with the townsfolk's possessions. The families waited their turn patiently, flagged on by the local police, eyeing us without interest. The streets were almost deserted, and these were the last people to go—the houses were empty, shutters sealed across the windows, and soldiers paced in pairs past the closed banks and stores. The sidestreets were packed with abandoned cars, confirming that the river was the only route of escape from the town.

As we walked along the main street, the glowing jungle visible two hundred yards away down the intersections on our left, a police car swerved into the street and came to a halt in front of us. Two men stepped out, a tall blond-

haired police captain and a clergyman carrying a small suitcase and a parcel of books. The latter was about thirty-five, with a high scholar's forehead and tired eyes. He seemed uncertain which way to go, and waited as the police captain strode briskly around the car.

"You'll need your embarkation card, Dr. Thomas." The captain handed a coloured ticket to the minister, and then fished a set of keys attached to a mahogany peg from his pocket. "I took these from the door. You must have left them in the lock."

The priest hesitated, uncertain whether to take the keys. "I left them there deliberately, captain. Someone may want to take refuge in the church."

"I doubt it, Doctor. Wouldn't help them, anyway." The captain waved briefly. "See you in Miami."

Acknowledging the salute, the priest stared at the keys in his palm, then slipped them reluctantly into his cassock. As he walked past us towards the wharf his moist eyes searched our faces with a troubled gaze, as if he suspected that a member of his congregation might be hiding in our midst.

The police captain appeared equally fatigued, and began a sharp dialogue with the officer in charge of our parties. His words were lost in the general conversation, but he pointed impatiently beyond the roof-tops with a wide sweep of one arm, as if indicating the approach of a storm. Although of strong physique, there was something weak and self-centred about his long fleshy face and pale blue eyes, and obviously his one remaining ambition, having emptied the town of its inhabitants, was to clear out at the first opportunity.

I turned to the corporal lounging by a fire hydrant and pointed to the glowing vegetation which seemed to follow us, skirting the perimeter of the town. "Why is everyone leaving, corporal? Surely it's not infectious—there's no danger from close contact?"

The corporal glanced laconically over his shoulder at the crystalline foliage glittering in the meridian sunlight. "It's not infectious. Unless you stay in there too long. When it cut the road both sides of town I guess most people decided it was time to pull out."

"Both sides?" George Schneider echoed. "How big is the affected area, corporal? We were told three or four acres."

The soldier shook his head dourly. "More like three or four hundred. Or thousand, even." He pointed to the helicopter circling the forest a mile or so away, soaring up and down over the date palms, apparently spraying them with some chemical. "Reaches right over there, towards Lake Okeechobee."

"But you have it under control," George said. "You're cutting it back all right?"

"Wouldn't like to say," the corporal replied cryptically. He indicated the blond policeman remonstrating with the supervising officer. "Captain Shelley tried a flame thrower on it a couple of days ago. Didn't help any."

The policeman's objections over-ruled—he slammed the door of his car and drove off in dudgeon—we set off once more and at the next intersection approached the forest, which stood back on either side of the road a quarter of a mile away. The vegetation was sparser, the sawgrass growing in clumps among the sandy soil on the verges, and a mobile laboratory had been set up in a trailer, 'U.S. Department of Agriculture' stencilled on its side. A platoon of soldiers was wandering about, taking cuttings from the palmettos and date palms, which they carefully placed like fragments of stained glass on a series of trestle tables. The main body of the forest curved around us, circling the northern perimeter of the town, and we immediately saw that the corporal had been correct in his estimate of the affected area's extent. Parallel with us one block to the north was the main Maynard-Miami highway, cut off by the glowing forest on both the eastern and western approaches to the town.

Splitting up into two's and three's, we crossed the verge and began to wander among the glacé ferns which rose from the brittle ground. The sandy surface seemed curiously hard and annealed, small spurs of fused sand protruding from the newly formed crust.

Examining the specimens collected on the tables, I touched the smooth glass-like material that sheathed the leaves and branches, following the contours of the original like a displaced image in a defective mirror. Everything appeared

to have been dipped in a vat of molten glass, which had then set into a skin fractured by slender veins.

A few yards from the trailer two technicians were spinning several encrusted branches in a centrifuge. There was a continuous glimmer and sparkle as splinters of light glanced out of the bowl and vanished into the brilliant air like an electrical discharge. All over the inspection area, as far as the perimeter fence running like a serrated white bandage around the prismatic wound of the forest, people turned to watch.

When the centrifuge stopped we peered into the bowl, where a handful of limp branches, their blanched leaves clinging damply to the metal bottom, lay stripped of their glacé sheaths. Below the bowl, however, the liquid receptacle remained dry and empty.

Twenty yards from the forest a second helicopter prepared for take-off, its drooping blades rotating like blunted scythes, the down-draught sending up a shower of light from the disturbed vegetation. With an abrupt lurch it made a laboured ascent, swinging sideways through the air, and then moved away across the forest roof, its churning blades apparently gaining little purchase on the air. There was a confused shout of 'Fire!' from the soldiers below, and we could see clearly the vivid discharge of light which radiated from the blades like St. Elmo's fire. Then, with an agonised roar like the bellow of a stricken animal, the aircraft slid backwards through the air and plunged towards the forest canopy a hundred feet below, the two pilots plainly visible at their controls. Sirens sounded from the staff cars parked around the inspection area, and there was a concerted rush towards the forest as the helicopter disappeared from sight.

As we raced along the road we felt its impact with the ground, and a sudden pulse of light drummed through the trees. The road led towards the point of the crash, a few houses looming at intervals at the ends of empty drives.

"The blades must have crystallised while it was standing near the trees!" George Schneider shouted as we climbed over the perimeter fence. "You could see the crystals melting, but not quickly enough. Let's hope the pilots are all right."

Several soldiers ran ahead of us, waving us back, but we

ignored them and hurried on through the trees. After only fifty yards we were well within the body of the forest, and had entered an enchanted world, the spanish moss investing the great oaks with brilliant jewelled trellises. The air was markedly cooler, as if everything were sheathed in ice, but a ceaseless play of radiant light poured through the stained-glass canopy overhead, turning the roof of the forest into a continuous three-dimensional kaleidoscope.

The process of crystallisation was here far more advanced. The white fences along the road were so heavily encrusted that they formed an unbroken palisade, the frost at least a foot thick on either side of the palings. The few houses between the trees glistened like wedding cakes, their plain white roofs and chimneys transformed into exotic minarets and baroque domes. In a lawn of green grass spurs a child's toy, perhaps once a red tricycle with yellow wheels, glittered like a Fabergé gem, the wheels starred into brilliant jasper crowns. Lying there, it reminded me of my daughter's toys scattered on the lawn after my return from the hospital. They had glowed for a last time with the same prismatic light.

The soldiers were still ahead of me, but George and Paul Mathieu had fallen behind. Leaning against the frosted white fencing, they were plucking the soles of their shoes. By now it was obvious why the Miami-Maynard highway had been closed. The surface of the road was pierced by a continuous carpet of needles, spurs of glass and quartz as much as six inches high, reflecting the coloured light through the leaves above. The spurs tore at my shoes, forcing me to move hand over hand along the verge of the road, where a section of heavier fencing marked the approach to a distant mansion.

Behind me a siren whined, and the police car I had seen earlier plunged along the road, its heavy tires cutting through the crystal surface. Twenty yards ahead it rocked to a halt, its engine stalled, and the police captain jumped out. With an angry shout he waved me back down the road, now a tunnel of yellow light formed by the interlocking canopies overhead.

"Get back! There's another wave coming!" He ran after

the soldiers a hundred yards away, his boots crushing the crystal carpet.

Wondering why he should be so keen to clear the forest, I rested for a moment by the police car. A noticeable change had come over the forest, as if dusk had begun to fall prematurely from the sky. Everywhere the glacé sheaths which enveloped the trees and vegetation had become duller and more opaque, and the crystal floor underfoot was grey and occluded, turning the needles into spurs of basalt. The panoply of coloured light had vanished, and a dim amber gloom moved across the trees, shadowing the sequinned lawns.

Simultaneously it had become colder. Leaving the car, I started to make my way down the road—Paul Mathieu and a soldier, hands shielding their faces, were disappearing around a bend—but the icy air blocked my path like a refrigerated wall. Turning up the collar of my tropical suit, I retreated to the car, wondering whether to take refuge inside it. The cold deepened, numbing my face like a spray of acetone, and my hands felt brittle and fleshless. Somewhere I heard the hollow shout of the police captain, and caught a glimpse of someone running at full speed through the ice-grey trees.

On the right-hand side of the road the darkness completely enveloped the forest, masking the outlines of the trees, and then extended in a sudden sweep across the roadway. My eyes smarted with pain, and I brushed away the small crystals of ice which had formed over my eyeballs. Everywhere a heavy frost was forming, accelerating the process of crystallisation. The spurs in the roadway were now over a foot in height, like the spines of a giant porcupine, and the lattices between the tree-trunks were thicker and more translucent, so that the original trunks seemed to shrink into a mottled thread within them. The interlocking leaves formed a continuous mosaic, the crystal elements thickening and overlaying each other. For the first time I suddenly visualised the possibility of the entire forest freezing solidly into a huge coloured glacier, with myself trapped within its interstices.

The windows of the car and the black body were now sheathed in an ice-like film. Intending to open the door so

that I could switch on the heater, I reached for the handle, but my fingers were burned by the intense cold.

"You there! Come on! This way!"

Behind me, the voice echoed down the drive. As the darkness and cold deepened, I saw the police captain waving to me from the colonnade of the mansion. The lawn between us seemed to belong to a less sombre zone. The grass still retained its vivid liquid sparkle and the white eaves of the house were etched clearly against the surrounding darkness, as if this enclave were preserved like an island in the eye of a hurricane.

I ran up the drive towards the house, and with relief found that the air was at least ten degrees warmer. The sunlight shone through the leafy canopy with uninterrupted brilliance. Reaching the portico, I searched for the police captain, but he had run off into the forest again. Uncertain whether to follow him, I watched the approaching wall of darkness slowly cross the lawn, the glittering foliage overhead sinking into its pall. The police car was now encrusted by a thick layer of frozen glass, its windshield blossoming into a thousand fleur-de-lis crystals.

Quickly making my way around the house as the zone of safety moved off through the forest, I crossed the remains of an old vegetable garden, where seed-plants of green glass three feet high rose into the air like exquisite ornamented sculptures. I reached the forest again and waited there as the zone hesitated and veered off, trying to remain within the centre of its focus. I seemed to have entered a subterranean cavern, where jewelled rocks loomed from the spectral gloom like huge marine plants, the sprays of crystal sawgrass like white fountains frozen in time.

For the next hour I raced helplessly through the forest, my sense of direction lost, driven by the swerving walls of the zone of safety as it twisted like a benign tornado among the trees. Several times I crossed the road, where the great spurs were almost waist high, forced to clamber over the brittle stems. Once, as I rested against the trunk of a bifurcated oak, an immense multicoloured bird erupted from a bough over my head and flew off with a wild screech, an aureole of molten light cascading from its red and yellow wings, like the birth-flames of a phoenix.

At last the strange whirlpool subsided and a pale light filtered through the stained glass canopy, transfiguring everything with its iridescence. Again the forest was a place of rainbows, the deep carmine light glowing from the jewelled grottos. I walked along a narrow road which wound towards a great white house standing like a classical pavilion on a rise in the centre of the forest. Transformed by the crystal frost, it appeared to be an intact fragment of Versailles or Fontainbleu, its ornate pilasters and sculptured friezes spilling from the wide roof which overtopped the forest. From the upper floors I would be able to see the distant water-towers at Maynard, or at least trace the serpentine progress of the river.

The road narrowed, declining the slope which led up to the house, but its annealed crust, like half-fused quartz, offered a more comfortable surface than the crystal teeth of the lawn. Suddenly I came across what was unmistakably a jewelled rowing boat set solidly into the roadway, a chain of lapis lazuli mooring it to the verge. Then I realised that I was walking along a small tributary of the river. A thin stream of water still ran below the solid crust, and evidently this vestigial motion alone prevented it from erupting into the exotic spur-like forms of the remainder of the forest floor.

As I paused by the boat, feeling the huge topaz and amethyst stones encrusted along its sides, a grotesque four-legged creature half embedded in the surface lurched forwards through the crust, the loosened pieces of the lattice attached to its snout and shoulders shaking like a transparent cuirass. Its jaws mouthed the air silently as it struggled on its hooked legs, unable to clamber more than a few feet from the hollow trough in its own outline now filling with a thin trickle of water. Invested by the glittering sparkle of light that poured from its body, the alligator resembled some fabulous armourial beast. It lunged towards me again with sudden energy, and I kicked its snout, scattering the crystals which choked its mouth.

Leaving it to subside once more into a frozen posture, I climbed the bank and limped across the lawn towards the mansion, whose fairey towers loomed above the prismatic trees. Although out of breath and almost completely ex-

hausted, I had a curious premonition of hope and longing, as if I were some fugitive Adam chancing upon a forgotten gateway to the lost paradise.

High in an upstairs window, a shot-gun cradled in his arm, the bearded man in the white suit watched me reflectively.

Now that ample evidence of the Hubble Effect is available to scientific workers throughout the world, there is general agreement upon its origins and the few temporary measures which can be taken to reverse its progress. Under pressure of necessity during my flight through the forests of the Everglades I had discovered the principal remedy—to remain in rapid motion—but I still assumed that some accelerated genetic mutation was responsible, even though such inanimate objects as cars and metal fencing were equally affected. However, by now even the Lysenkoists have grudgingly accepted the explanation given by workers at the Hubble Institute, that the random transfigurations throughout the world are a reflection of distant cosmic processes of enormous scope and dimensions, first glimpsed in the Andromeda spiral.

We know now that it is time ('Time with the Midas touch,' as Charles Marquand described it) which is responsible for the transformation. The recent discovery of antimatter in the universe inevitably involves the conception of anti-time as the fourth side of this negatively charged continuum. Where anti-particle and particle collide they not only destroy their own physical identities, but their opposing time-values eliminate each other, subtracting from the universe another quantum from its total store of time. It is random discharges of this type, set off by the creation of anti-galaxies in space, which have led to the depletion of the time-store available to the materials of our own solar system.

Just as a supersaturated solution will discharge itself into a crystalline mass, so the supersaturation of matter in a continuum of depleted time leads to its appearance in a parallel spatial matrix. As more and more time 'leaks' away, the process of supersaturation continues, the original atoms and molecules producing spatial replicas of themselves, substance without mass, in an attempt to increase their foothold upon existence. The process is theoretically without end,

and it is possible eventually for a single atom to produce an infinite number of duplicates of itself and so fill the entire universe, from which simultaneously all time has expired, and ultimate macrocosmic zero beyond the wildest dreams of Plato and Democritus.

As I lay back on one of the glass-embroidered chesterfields in the bedroom upstairs, the bearded man in the white suit explained something of this to me in his sharp intermittent voice. He still stood by the open window, peering down at the lawn and the crystal stream where the jewelled boat and the alligator lay embalmed, driving the butt of his shotgun through the broken panes as they annealed themselves. His thin beard gave him a fevered and haunted aspect. For some reason he spoke to me as if to an old friend.

"Damn it, B—, it was obvious years ago," he said with disgust. "Look at the viruses with their crystalline structure, neither animate nor inanimate, and their immunity to time." He swept a hand along the sill and scooped up a cluster of the vitreous grains, then scattered them across the floor like smashed marbles. "You and I will be like them soon, and the rest of the world. Neither living nor dead!"

He broke off to raise his shot-gun, his dark eyes searching between the trees. "We must move on," he announced, leaving the window. "When did you last see Captain Shelley?"

"The police captain?" I sat up weakly, my feet slipping on the floor. Several plate glass windows appeared to have been fractured and then fused together above the carpet. The ornate Persian patterns swam below the surface like the floor of some perfumed pool in the Arabian Nights. "Just after we ran to search for the helicopter. Why are you afraid of him?" I asked, but he shook his head irritably at the question.

"He's a venomous man," he replied. "As cunning as a pig."

We made our way down the crystal stairway. Everything in the house was covered by the same glacé sheath, embellished by exquisite curlicues and helixes. In the wide lounges the ornate Louis XV furniture had been transformed into huge pieces of opalescent candy, whose countless reflections glowed like giant chimeras in the cut-glass walls.

As we disappeared through the trees towards the stream my companion shouted exultantly, as much to the forest as to myself: "We're running out of time, B——, running out of time!"

Always he was on the look-out for the police captain. Which of them was searching for the other I could not discover, nor the subject of their blood-feud. I had volunteered my name to him, but he brushed aside the introduction. I guessed that he had sensed some spark of kinship as we sat together in the landing craft, and that he was a man who would plunge his entire sympathy or hostility upon such a chance encounter. He told me nothing of himself. Shot-gun cradled under his arm, he moved rapidly along the fossilised stream, his movements neat and deliberate, while I limped behind. Now and then we passed a jewelled power cruiser embedded in the crust, or a petrified alligator would rear upwards and grimace at us noiselessly, its crystalline skin glowing with a thousand prisms as it shifted in a fault of coloured glass.

Everywhere there was the same fantastic corona of light, transfiguring and identifying all objects. The forest was an endless labyrinth of glass caves, sealed off from the remainder of the world (which, as far as I knew, by now might be similarly affected), lit by subterranean lamps.

"Can't we get back to Maynard?" I shouted after him, my voice echoing among the vaults. "We're going deeper into the forest."

"The town is cut off, my dear B——. Don't worry, I'll take you there in due course." He leapt nimbly over a fissure in the surface of the river. Below the mass of dissolving crystals a thin stream of fluid rilled down a buried channel.

For several hours, led by this strange white-suited figure with his morose preoccupied gaze, we moved through the forest, sometimes in complete circles as if my companion were familiarising himself with the topography of that jewelled twilight world. When I sat down to rest on one of the vitrified trunks and brushed away the crystals now forming on the soles of my shoes, despite our constant movements—the air was always icy, the dark shadows perpetually closing and unfolding around us—he would wait impatiently, watch-

ing me with ruminative eyes as if deciding whether to abandon me to the forest.

At last we reached the fringes of a small clearing, bounded on three sides by the fractured dancing floor of a river bend, where a high-gabled summer house pushed its roof towards the sky through a break in the overhead canopy. From the single spire a slender web of opaque strands extended to the surrounding trees, like a diaphanous veil, investing the glass garden and the crystalline summer house with a pale marble sheen, almost sepulchral in its intensity. As if reinforcing this impression, the windows on to the veranda running around the house were now encrusted with elaborate scroll-like designs, like the ornamented stone casements of a tomb.

Waving me back, my companion approached the fringes of the garden, his shot-gun raised before him. He darted from tree to tree, pausing for any sign of movement, then crossed the frozen surface of the river with a feline step. High above him, its wings pinioned by the glass canopy, a golden oriole flexed slowly in the afternoon light, liquid ripples of its aura circling outwards like the rays of a miniature sun.

"Marquand!"

A shot roared into the clearing, its report echoing around the glass trees, and the blond-haired police captain raced towards the summer house, a revolver in his hand. As he fired again the crystal trellises of the spanish moss shattered and frosted, collapsing around me like a house of mirrors. Leaping down from the veranda, the bearded man made off like a hare across the river, bent almost double as he darted over the faults in the surface.

The rapidity with which all this had happened left me standing helplessly by the edge of the clearing, my ears ringing with the two explosions. I searched the forest for any signs of my companion, and then the police captain, standing on the veranda, gestured me towards him with his pistol.

"Come here!" When I tentatively approached he came down the steps, scrutinising me suspiciously. "What are you doing around here? Aren't you one of the visiting party?"

I explained that I had been trapped after the crash of the

helicopter. "Can you take me back to the army post? I've been wandering around the forest all day."

A morose frown twisted his long face. "The Army's a long way off. The forest's changing all the time." He pointed across the river. "What about Marquand? Where did you meet him?"

"The bearded man? He was taking shelter in a house near the river. Why did you shoot at him? Is he a criminal?"

Shelley nodded after a pause. His manner was somehow furtive and shifty. "Worse than that. He's a madman, completely crazy." He started to walk up the steps, apparently prepared to let me make my own way into the forest. "You'd better be careful, there's no knowing what the forest is going to do. Keep moving but circle around on yourself, or you'll get lost."

"Wait a minute!" I called after him. "Can't I rest here? I need a map—perhaps you have a spare one?"

"A map? What good's a map now?" He hesitated as my arms fell limply to my sides. "All right, you can come in for five minutes." This concession to humanity was obviously torn from him.

The summer house consisted of a single circular room and a small kitchen at the rear. Heavy shutters had been placed against the windows, now locked to the casements by the interstitial crystals, and the only light entered through the door.

Shelley holstered his pistol and turned the door handle gently. Through the frosted panes were the dim outlines of a high four-poster bed, presumably stolen from one of the nearby mansions. Gilded cupids played about the mahogany canopy, pipes to their lips, and four naked caryatids with upraised arms formed the corner posts.

"Mrs. Shelley," the captain explained in a low voice. "She's not too well."

For a moment we gazed down at the occupant of the bed, who lay back on a large satin bolster, a febrile hand on the silk counterpane. At first I thought I was looking at an elderly woman, probably the captain's mother, and then realised that in fact she was little more than a child, a young woman in her early twenties. Her long platinum hair lay like a white shawl over her shoulders, her thin high-

cheeked face raised to the scanty light. Once she might have had a nervous porcelain beauty, but her wasted skin and the fading glow of light in her half-closed eyes gave her the appearance of someone preternaturally aged, reminding me of my own wife in the last minutes before her death.

"Shelley." Her voice cracked faintly in the amber gloom. "Shelley, it's getting cold again. Can't you light a fire?"

"The wood won't burn, Emerelda. It's all turned into glass." The captain stood at the foot of the bed, his peaked hat held in his hands, peering down solicitiously as if he were on duty. He unzipped his leather jacket. "I brought you these. They'll help you."

He leaned forwards, hiding something from me, and then spilled several handfuls of red and blue gem-stones across the counterpane. Rubies and sapphires of many sizes, they glittered in the thin light with a fevered power.

"Shelley, thank you. . . ." The girl's free hand scuttled across the counterpane to the stones. Her child-like face had become almost vulpine with greed. Seizing a handful, she brought them up to her neck and pressed them tightly against her skin, where the bruises formed like fingerprints. Their contact seemed to revive her and she stirred slowly, several of the jewels slipping to the floor.

"What were you shooting at, Shelley?" she asked after an interval. "There was a gun going off, it gave me a headache."

"Just an alligator, Emerelda. There are some smart alligators around here, I have to watch them. You get some rest now."

"But, Shelley, I need more of these, you only brought me a few today. . . ." Her hand, like a claw, searched the counterpane. Then she turned away from us and seemed to subside into sleep, the jewels lying like scarabs on the white skin of her breast.

Captain Shelley nudged me and we stepped quietly into the kitchen. The small cubicle was almost empty, a disconnected refrigerator standing on the cold stove. Shelley opened the door and began to empty the remainder of the jewels on to the shelves, where they lay like cherries among the half-dozen cans. A light glacé frost covered the enamel

exterior of the refrigerator, as everything else in the kitchen, but the inner walls remained unaffected.

"Who is she?" I asked as Shelley pried the lid off a can. "Shouldn't you try to get her away from here?"

Shelley stared at me with his ambiguous expression. He seemed always to be concealing something, his blue eyes fractionally lowered from my own. "She's my wife," he said with a curious emphasis, as if unsure of the fact. "Emerelda. She's safer here, as long as I watch out for Marquand."

"Why should he want to hurt her? He seemed sane enough to me."

"He's a psycho!" Shelley said with sudden force. "He spent six months in a strait-jacket! He wants to take Emerelda back to his crazy house in the middle of the swamp." As an afterthought, he added: "She was married to Marquand."

As we ate, forking the cold meat straight from the can, he told me of the strange melancholy architect, Charles Foster Marquand, who had designed several of the largest hotels in Miami and then two years earlier abruptly abandoned his work in disgust. He had married Emerelda, after bribing her parents, within a few hours of seeing her in an amusement park, and then carried her away to a grotesque folly he had built among the sharks and alligators in the swamp. According to Shelley he never spoke to Emerelda after the marriage ceremony, and prevented her from leaving the house or seeing anyone except a blind Negro servant. Apparently he saw his bride in a sort of Pre-Raphaelite dream, caged within his house like the lost spirit of his imagination. When she finally escaped, with Captain Shelley's assistance, he had gone berserk and spent some time as a voluntary patient at an asylum. Now he had returned with the sole ambition of returning with Emerelda to his house in the swamps, and Shelley was convinced, perhaps sincerely, that his morbid and lunatic presence was responsible for Emerelda's lingering malaise.

At dusk I left them, barricaded together in the white sepulcher of the summer house, and set off in the direction of the river which Shelley said was half a mile away, hoping to follow it to Maynard. With luck an army unit would be stationed at the nearest margins of the affected zone,

and the soldiers would be able to retrace my steps and rescue the police captain and his dying wife.

Shelley's lack of hospitality did not surprise me. In turning me out into the forest he was using me as a decoy, confident that Marquand would immediately try to reach me for news of his former wife. As I made my way through the dark crystal grottos I listened for his footsteps, but the glass sheaths of the trees sang and crackled with a thousand voices as the forest cooled in the darkness. Above, through the lattices between the trees, I could see the great fractured bowl of the moon. Around me, in the vitreous walls, the reflected stars glittered like myriads of fireflies.

At this time I noticed that my own clothes had begun to glow in the dark, the fine frost that covered my suit spangled by the starlight. Spurs of crystal grew from the dial of my wrist-watch, imprisoning the hands within a medallion of moonstone.

At midnight I reached the river, a causeway of frozen gas that might have soared high across the Milky Way. Forced to leave it when the surface broke into a succession of giant cataracts, I approached the outskirts of Maynard, passing the mobile laboratory used by the Department of Agriculture. The trailer, and the tables and equipment scattered around it, had been enveloped by the intense frost, and the branches in the centrifuge had blossomed again into brilliant jewelled sprays. I picked up a discarded helmet, now a glass porcupine, and drove it through a window of the trailer.

In the darkness the white-roofed houses of the town gleamed like the funerary temples of a necropolis, their cornices ornamented with countless spires and gargoyles, linked together across the roads by the expanding tracery. A frozen wind moved through the streets, which were waist-high forests of fossil spurs, the abandoned cars embedded within them like armoured saurians on an ancient ocean floor.

Everywhere the process of transformation was accelerating. My feet were encased in huge crystal slippers. It was these long spurs which enabled me to walk along the street, but soon they would fuse together and lock me to the ground.

The eastern entrance to the town was sealed by the forest

and the erupting roadway. Limping westwards again, in the hope of returning to Captain Shelley, I passed a small section of the sidewalk that remained clear of all growth, below the broken window of a jewellery store. Handfuls of looted stones were scattered across the pavement, ruby and emerald rings, topaz brooches and pendants, intermingled with countless smaller stones and industrial diamonds that glittered coldly in the starlight.

As I stood among the stones I noticed that the crystal outgrowths from my shoes were dissolving and melting, like icicles exposed to sudden heat. Pieces of the crust fell away and slowly deliquesced, vanishing without trace into the air.

Then I realised why Captain Shelley had brought the jewels to his wife, and why she had seized upon them so eagerly. By some optical or electromagnetic freak, the intense focus of light within the stones simultaneously produced a compression of time, so that the discharge of light from the surfaces reversed the process of crystallisation. (Perhaps it is this gift of time which accounts for the eternal appeal of precious gems, as well as of all baroque painting and architecture? Their intricate crests and cartouches, occupying more than their own volume of space, so contain a greater ambient time, providing that unmistakable premonition of immortality sensed within St. Peter's or the palace at Nymphenberg. By contrast the architecture of the 20th century, characteristically one of rectangular unornamented facades, of simple Euclidean space and time, is that of the New World, confident of its firm footing in the future and indifferent to those pangs of mortality which haunted the mind of old Europe.)

Quickly I knelt down and filled my pockets with the stones, cramming them into my shirt and cuffs. I sat back against the store front, the semicircle of smooth pavement like a miniature patio, at whose edges the crystal undergrowth glittered like a spectral garden. Pressed to my cold skin, the hard facets of the jewels seemed to warm me, and within a few seconds I fell into an exhausted sleep.

I woke into brilliant sunshine in a street of golden temples, a thousand rainbows spangling the gilded air with a blaze of prismatic colours. Shielding my eyes, I lay back and looked up at the roof-tops, their gold tiles apparently inlaid

with thousands of coloured gems, like the temple quarter of Bangkok.

A hand pulled roughly at my shoulder. Trying to sit up, I found that the semicircle of clear sidewalk had vanished, and my body lay sprawled on a bed of sprouting needles. The growth had been most rapid in the entrance to the store, and my right arm was encased in a mass of crystalline spurs, three or four inches long, that reached almost to my shoulder. My hand was sheathed in a huge frozen gauntlet of prismatic crystals, almost too heavy to lift, my fingers outlined by a rainbow of colours.

Overwhelmed by panic, I managed to drag myself on to my knees, and found the bearded man in the white suit crouching behind me, his shot-gun in his hands.

"Marquand!" With a cry, I raised my jewelled arm. "For God's sake!"

My voice distracted him from his scrutiny of the light-filled street. His lean face with its small bright eyes was transfigured by strange colours that mottled his skin and drew out the livid blues and violets of his beard. His suit radiated a thousand bands of colour.

He moved towards me but before he could speak there was a roar of gunfire and the glass sheet encrusted to the doorway shattered into a shower of crystals. Marquand flinched and hid behind me, then pulled me backwards through the window. As another shot was fired down the street we stumbled past the looted counters into an office where the door of a safe stood open on to a jumble of metal cash boxes. Marquand snapped back the lids on to the empty trays, and then began to scoop together the few jewels scattered across the floor.

Stuffing them into my empty pockets, he pulled me through a window into the rear alley, and from there into the adjacent street, transformed by the overhead lattices into a tunnel of crimson and vermilion light. We stopped at the first turning, and he beckoned to the glistening forest fifty yards away.

"Run, run! Anywhere, through the forest, it's all you can do!"

He pushed me forwards with the butt of his shot-gun, whose breach was now encrusted by a mass of silver crystals,

like a mediaeval flintlock. I raised my arm helplessly. In the sunlight the jewelled spurs coruscated like a swarm of coloured fireflies. "My arm, Marquand! It's reached my shoulder!"

"Run! Nothing else can help you!" His illuminated face flickered angrily. "Don't waste the stones, they won't last you forever!"

Forcing myself to run, I set off towards the forest, where I entered the first of the caves of light. I whirled my arm like a clumsy propeller, and felt the crystals recede slightly. By luck I soon reached a tributary of the river, and hurled myself like a wild man along its petrified surface.

For how many hours, or days, I raced through the forest I can no longer remember, for all sense of time deserted me. If I stopped for more than a minute the crystal bands would seize my neck and shoulder, and I ran past the trees for hour after hour, only pausing when I slumped exhausted on the glass beaches. Then I pressed the jewels to my face, warding off the glacé sheath. But their power slowly faded, and as their facets blunted they turned into nodes of unpolished silica.

Once, as I ran through the darkness, my arm whirling before me, I passed the summer house where Captain Shelley kept guard over his dying wife, and heard him fire at me from the veranda, perhaps confusing my spectral figure with Charles Marquand.

At last, late one afternoon, when the deepening ruby light of dusk settled through the forest, I entered a small clearing where the deep sounds of an organ reverberated among the trees. In the centre was a small church, its gilt spire fused to the surrounding trees.

Raising my jewelled arm, I drove back the oak doors and entered the nave. Above me, refracted by the stained glass windows, a brilliant glow of light poured down upon the altar. Listening to the surging music, I leaned against the altar rail and extended my arm to the gold cross set with rubies and emeralds. Immediately the sheath slipped and dissolved like a melting sleeve of ice. As the crystals deliquesced the light poured from my arm like an overflowing fountain.

Turning his head to watch me, the priest sat at the organ,

his firm hands drawing from the pipes its great unbroken music, which soared away, interwoven by countless overtones, through the panels of the windows towards the distant dismembered sun.

Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
Stains the white radiance of eternity.

For the next week I stayed with him, as the last crystal spurs dissolved from the tissues of my arm. All day I knelt beside him, working the bellows of the organ with my arm as the rippling graces of Palestrina and Bach echoed around us. At dusk, when the sun sank in a thousand fragments into the western night, he would break off and stand on the porch, looking out at the spectral trees.

I remembered him as Dr. Thomas, the priest Captain Shelley had driven to the harbour. His slim scholar's face and calm eyes, their serenity belied by the nervous movements of his hands, like the false calm of someone recovering from an attack of fever, would gaze at me as we ate our small supper on a foot-stool beside the altar, sheltered from the cold all-embalming wind by the jewels in the cross. At first I thought he regarded my survival as an example of the Almighty's intervention, and I made some token expression of gratitude. At this he smiled ambiguously.

Why he had returned I did not try to guess. By now his church was surrounded on all sides by the crystal trellises, as if over-topped by the mouth of an immense glacier.

One morning he found a blind snake, its eyes transformed into enormous jewels, searching hesitantly at the door of the porch, and carried it in his hands to the altar. He watched it with a wry smile when, its sight returned, it slid away noiselessly among the pews.

On another day I woke to the early morning light and found him, alone, celebrating the Eucharist. He stopped, half-embarrassed, and over breakfast confided: "You probably wonder what I was doing, but it seemed an appropriate moment to test the validity of the sacrament." He gestured at the prismatic colours pouring through the stained glass windows, whose original scriptural scenes had been transformed into paintings of bewildering abstract beauty.

"It may sound heretical to say so, but the body of Christ is with us everywhere here—in each prism and rainbow, in the ten thousand faces of the sun." He raised his thin hands, jewelled by the light. "So you see, I fear that the church, like its symbol—" here he pointed to the cross "—may have outlived its function."

I searched for an answer. "I'm sorry. Perhaps if you left here—"

"No!" he insisted, annoyed by my obtuseness. "Can't you understand? Once I was a true apostate—I knew God existed but could not believe in him. Now," he laughed bitterly, "events have overtaken me."

With a gesture he led me down the nave to the open porch, and pointed up to the dome-shaped lattice of crystal beams which reached from the rim of the forest like the buttresses of an immense cupola of diamond and glass. Embedded at various points were the almost motionless forms of birds with outstretched wings, golden orioles and scarlet macaws, shedding brilliant pools of light. The bands of liquid colour rippled outwards through the forest, the reflections of the melting plumage enveloping us in endless concentric patterns. The overlapping arcs hung in the air like the votive windows of a city of cathedrals. Everywhere around us I could see countless smaller birds, butterflies and insects, joining their miniature haloes to the coronation of the forest.

He took my arm. "Here in this forest everything is transfigured and illuminated, joined together in the last marriage of time and space."

Towards the end, when we stood side by side with our backs to the altar, the aisle transformed itself into an occluding tunnel of glass pillars, his conviction seemed to fail him. With an expression almost of panic he watched the keys of the organ manuals frosting like the coins of a bursting coffer, and I knew that he was searching for some means of escape.

Then at last he rallied, seized the cross from the altar and pressed it into my arms, with a sudden anger born of absolute certainty dragged me roughly to the porch and propelled me to one of the narrowing vaults.

"Go! Get away from here! Find the river!"

When I hesitated, the heavy sceptre weighing upon my

arms, he shouted fiercely: "Tell them I ordered you to take it!"

I last saw him standing arms outstretched to the approaching walls, in the posture of the illuminated birds, his eyes filled with wonder and relief at the first circles of light conjured from his upraised palms.

Struggling with the huge golden incubus of the cross, I made my way towards the river, my tottering figure reflected in the hanging mirrors of the spanish moss like a lost Simon of Cyrene pictured in a mediaeval manuscript.

I was still sheltering behind it when I reached Captain Shelley's summer house. The door was open, and I looked down at the bed in the centre of a huge fractured jewel, in whose frosted depths, like swimmers asleep on the bottom of an enchanted pool, Emerelda and her husband lay together. The Captain's eyes were closed, and the delicate petals of a blood-red rose blossomed from the hole in his breast like an exquisite marine plant. Beside him Emerelda slept serenely, the unseen motion of her heart sheathing her body in a faint amber glow, the palest residue of life.

Something glittered in the dusk behind me. I turned to see a brilliant chimera, a man with incandescent arms and chest, race past among the trees, a cascade of particles diffusing in the air behind him. I flinched back behind the cross, but he vanished as suddenly as he had appeared, whirling himself away among the crystal vaults. As his luminous wake faded I heard his voice echoing across the frosted air, the plaintive words jewelled and ornamented like everything else in that transmogrified world.

"Emerelda . . . ! Emerelda . . . !"

Here on this calm island of Puerto Rico, in the garden of the British Embassy these few months later, the strange events of that phantasmagoric forest seem a dozen worlds away. Yet in fact I am no more than 1000 miles from Florida as the crow (or should I say, the gryphon) flies, and already there have been numerous other outbreaks at many times this distance from the three focal areas. Somewhere I have seen a report that at the present rate of progress at least a third of the earth's surface will be affected by the end of the next decade, and a score of the world's capital

cities petrified beneath layers of prismatic crystal, as Miami has already been—some reporters have described the abandoned resort as a city of a thousand cathedral spires, like a vision of St. John the Divine.

To tell the truth, however, the prospect causes me little worry. It is obvious to me now that the origins of the Hubble Effect are more than physical. When I stumbled out of the forest into an army cordon ten miles from Maynard two days after seeing the helpless phantom that had once been Charles Marquand, the gold cross clutched in my arms, I was determined never to visit the Everglades again. By one of those ludicrous inversions of logic, I found myself, far from acclaimed as a hero, standing summary trial before a military court and charged with looting. The gold cross had apparently been stripped of its jewels, and in vain did I protest that these vanished stones had been the price of my survival. At last I was rescued by the embassy in Washington under the plea of diplomatic immunity, but my suggestion that a patrol equipped with jewelled crosses should enter the forest and attempt to save the priest and Charles Marquand met with little success. Despite my protests I was sent to San Juan to recuperate.

The intention of my superiors was that I should be cut off from all memory of my experiences—perhaps they sensed some small but significant change in me. Each night, however, the fractured disc of the Echo satellite passes overhead, illuminating the midnight sky like a silver chandelier. And I am convinced that the sun itself has begun to efflorescence. At sunset, when its disc is veiled by the crimson dust, it seems to be crossed by a distinctive latticework, a vast portcullis which will one day spread outwards to the planets and the stars, halting them in their courses.

I know now that I shall return to the Everglades. As the example of that brave apostate priest who gave the cross to me illustrates, there is an immense reward to be found in that frozen forest. There in the Everglades the transfiguration of all living and inanimate forms occurs before our eyes, the gift of immortality a direct consequence of the surrender by each of us of our own physical and temporal identity. However apostate we may be in this world, there perforce we become apostles of the prismatic sun.

So, when my convalescence is complete and I return to Washington, I shall seize an opportunity to visit the Florida peninsula again with one of the many scientific expeditions. It should not be too difficult to arrange my escape and then I shall return to the solitary church in that enchanted world, where by day fantastic birds fly through the petrified forest and jewelled alligators glitter like heraldic salamanders on the banks of the crystalline rivers, and where by night the illuminated man races among the trees, his arms like golden cartwheels and his head like a spectral crown.

One dull, steam-heated winter day this story blew into our office like a breath of fresh, spring air; and we determined to share it with you.

A BULLETIN FROM THE TRUSTEES OF THE INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED RESEARCH AT MARMOUTH, MASS.

by Wilma Shore

THE FOLLOWING TRANSCRIPT was made from a roll of recording tape found in the laboratories of Dr. Edwin Gerber at the Institute for Advanced Research in Marmouth, Mass., two months after his death, among 67 such tapes containing notes, lectures, and comments upon work in progress.

Although internal evidence suggests that this tape was recorded more than a year before Dr. Gerber died, neither study of his notes nor inquiry among his colleagues have elicited any corroborative data. Grants of the Institute are unconditional and recipients may publish or withhold the results of their investigations; nevertheless, in view of the nature and significance of the experiment purportedly recorded on the tape in question, the Trustees and staff are unable to explain Dr. Gerber's reticence.

Though in no way vouching for its authenticity, the Institute is releasing this transcript with a sense of its own responsibility toward the scientific community and the hope that it may recall to those physicists with whom Dr. Gerber was in correspondence some reference, however oblique, to the theoretical or technical premises of this experiment.

Several Institute members consider the first recorded voice that of Dr. Gerber but, lacking positive identification, we have preferred to designate the voices arbitrarily as "Q" and "A." The transcribed section represents approximately the last half of the tape, the first half, presumably consisting of Dr. Gerber's prefatory and explanatory comments, being hopelessly distorted, possibly by interference from equipment utilized by Dr. Gerber. Unintelligible or inaudible speeches are indicated by the ellipsis (. . .).

(A HIGH, WHINING SOUND)

Q. . . . take a chance . . . up to seventy billion, but . . . knows? . . . maybe the vertical magnetic . . . eighty billion? . . . another four seconds . . .

(THE WHINING SOUND INCREASES)

Q. . . . keep it down . . . conserve the . . .

(FIVE SHARP REPORTS, IRREGULARLY SPACED, THE WHINING SOUND DIMINISHES)

Q. . . . and now . . . highly unlikely, but . . . Yes! Yes! . . . works! . . . a man . . . did it! . . . all right, sir? . . . first person ever to . . . feet out, easy, easy . . . Einstein? . . . through the time barrier . . . over here, sir? . . . microphone . . . name?

A. . . . elman.

Q. Mr. Harry Wencelman, brought back from the year two thousand and . . .

A. . . . go of my arm.

Q. . . . frightened, Mr. Wencelman?

A. I was almost asleep and suddenly . . . figured it was some kind of a rib.

Q. Tell me . . . really believe . . . Twentieth century?

A. It was the middle of the night. I thought, why didn't they wait till Sunday?

Q. How does it feel to go back a hundred—

A. I feel all right. The only thing, my arm, here—

Q. Good! Because I've got a lot of—

A. —very glad to—

Q. —about the next century—

A. Next century! How'm I supposed—

Q. No, no. Next for *us. Last,* for you.

A. Oh. I'm a little turned around.

Q. Well, after a trip like that!

A. Oh! I'm used to traveling. But I've always had some trouble with this arm.

Q. Now, what do you consider the greatest events of your lifetime? That would be—how old are you, Mr. Wencelman?

A. How old would you think?

Q. Forty-five? Or has medical science—

A. Forty-seven.

Q. Well. Now, within your lifetime—

A. All right. Let's see. I was born just outside of Chi-

cago, and when I was ten we moved to Detroit. I went to school, high school and college, then I went with Federated Industries, where I am now, and when I was making a decent living—

Q. Mr. Wencelman—

A. —decent for *those* days, anyhow—I got married. My wife is a year younger. Than I am. We have three children, two boys and a girl.

Q. Thank you. Now, while all this was going on—

A. How do you mean, going on? We had our little problems like any marriage, but—

Q. No, no. In the world generally.

A. Oh. Quite a good bit.

Q. The most important.

A. Well, to my way of thinking, people are getting more selfish. There's too much selfishness in the world. Why we have all these wars.

Q. Where?

A. Africa. Asia. All over.

Q. America?

A. America had the Revolution, Civil War, World Wars. Didn't you get that in school? It must have been in your time—we just had the Centenary. Fireworks. Fellow I know, George Marsh, lost his middle finger. He has to push down his pipe tobacco with his left hand.

Q. Well, actually, Mr. Wencelman, if you could tell about the *later* conflicts—

A. I used to follow all that very closely. But those are the ones get heart attacks, that worry about every little trouble in every little country. What's the use? Nothing you can *do*. Of course, I have a pretty good *general* idea of the situation.

Q. Is the U.N. still in existence?

A. Of course. No, wait. U.N. I thought you said U.S.

Q. The U.N. is not in existence?

A. Now wait a minute. I didn't say is not. I was just reading about it, but whether it was about *now* or *then*—Well, I'm not positive.

Q. Maybe if you stop and think for a minute.

A. Yes, but you keep firing questions at me.

Q. Excuse me, Mr. Wencelman. Naturally I'm pretty

excited. And our time is limited. Now, could you just, in your own words, give me the political picture—

A. My own words? Well, then, I have to say, the last election was pretty dirty.

Q. When was that?

A. Last Election Day.

Q. Which was—

A. Some time in the last four years, roughly.

Q. Go on.

A. It was common knowledge. They bought the election.

Q. The winning candidates.

A. Well, naturally.

Q. Who were they?

A. *All* of them?

Q. What was it, a presidential election?

A. Yes. Well, president or governor, a big election. I was out of town, as it happened. I had a terrible sore throat, fever over 101. Then when it returned to normal I just felt rotten. My wife thought we should go South.

Q. Who's President?

A. President?

Q. What's his *name?*

A. You know, you drove it right out of my mind.

Q. Well. Whenever it comes to you. Now, you live in Detroit?

A. Since I was ten. Ten and a half, really.

Q. Who's your mayor?

A. Of Detroit?

Q. Yes.

A. Not Harvey. He *was* Mayor. Big, heavy-set fellow.

Q. Is the present mayor a Republican?

A. Republican?

Q. Or a Democrat?

A. Or a Democrat. Now, it's one or the other. Six years ago it was a Republican, because I bet Len Sammis a hat. I figured five, six dollars. He sent me a bill for twenty-two fifty. Twenty-two eighty, with the tax.

Q. Well, can you tell me—

A. I frankly don't keep up with politics the way I used to. It's too crooked. Then anyhow the last few years I took up Receba.

Q. Receba? That some religious—

A. You don't know Receba? Receba. You play with a poker deck.

Q. Oh. Very good. Now, what other new inventions—

A. Receba's a game, not an invention. But there *was* one thing last year. I got one as soon as it hit the market. You smoke a pipe? It's for cleaning the *bowl*—

Q. What's new in industry? Atomic energy?

A. Oh, there've been enormous changes. Well, now, let me think how I can explain.

Q. What about your own work? Federated Industries? That where you said you worked?

A. That's where I *do* work.

Q. Fine! What exactly do you do?

A. Well, when the invoices go through the accounting department—

Q. It's a manufacturing firm?

A. You kidding? I don't think there's a pound of steel in the country wasn't processed by F.I. equipment.

Q. What's the nature of the process?

A. That's in the engineering department. They handle all that in Engineering. And Patents.

Q. Well, there must be a lot of discoveries in other fields.

A. It's hard to keep up. There was some big surgical—surgical? Or medical. It was in all the papers, everyone was talking about it. Of course, I keep in pretty good shape myself. A few years ago I had this sore throat—

Q. What about the way people live? Their recreations, what they eat?

A. Well—

Q. For example, what do you eat for dinner?

A. Whatever my wife gives me.

Q. Well, *that* hasn't changed! What does she give you?

A. What I like, mostly. I can't complain.

Q. Well, nowadays food production is on our minds, with the population explosion—

A. The *what*? When was that?

Q. Populations expanding. More children born—

A. We have three. Two boys—

Q. I'm referring to other parts of the world.

A. We plan to travel later on. Right now I'm kind of tied down.

Q. So anything you can tell about food preservation, transportation, new sources of food supply—

A. Well, *there*, you picked a hard question for me to answer. I don't go in the kitchen. She doesn't like me messing around in the kitchen.

Q. Interesting garment you're wearing. What's it called?

A. This? Why, that's my—my jacket. And this here, this is my trousers.

Q. Interesting. What's the fabric? What's it made out of?

A. Why, this is—let me look. Well, it's either wool, or—My wife buys most of my clothes. One thing I do know, it *binds* a little. In the—

Q. How about your house? Where you live.

A. We've been in the same house ever since we're married. I bought wisely, it was a wise choice, and I've never regretted it. My wife neither.

Q. You're located in the city? Suburbs? How do you get to work?

A. I catch the East express. I only have one change. It's about a nineteen minute ride.

Q. On what?

A. The East express.

Q. I mean, does it go through the air?

A. How'd you *think* it went? On the ground?

Q. Well, but, is it a plane? A jet? You still have jet planes?

A. Only for locals. I take the express.

Q. And what is that?

A. I *told* you. The East express. Leaves 7:39, 7:52 and 8:16. Then not till 9:48. Seems crazy, bring a man back all these years and then not listen when he tells you.

Q. Well, you've given me so much interesting detail. Hard to take it all in. About the construction of this—express?

A. The seats are too close together. Your legs—

Q. And the over-all shape of the thing?

A. How do you mean?

Q. How is it shaped? How would you describe it?

A. Well, as a general rule, I just see the back end. I get

in the left rear door, then when I go to change I'm right there at the local.

Q. What keeps it up?

A. Why, the machinery.

Q. It burns fuel?

A. Well, of course it does.

Q. You're being very helpful, Mr. Wencelman. Now, suppose you tell me what kind of fuel?

A. They keep saying they're going to invent something without fuel, but I'll believe it when I see it. And in the meantime, every year they raise the fare. *Someone's* cleaning up.

Q. A nuclear fuel, Mr. Wencelman? Can you tell me that?

A. I can tell you anything you want to know, just so you phrase your questions—so you *phrase* your questions, see what I mean? So I can understand them.

Q. Well, then, is this fuel a *nuclear* fuel?

A. Now, you know, I haven't been into all this since high school. If I had a little notice, instead of *grabbing* me in the middle of the *night*—

Q. You're doing very well. Now, about the express—

A. But no matter what they charge, the service is rotten. Last night it was so jammed, when I went to change, the guard gave me a push, I fell against the—

Q. Where do you change?

A. Third stop.

Q. Yes but—What's the name of the station?

A. East Junction. So I said—

Q. Where is that? What state? Do you still call them states?

A. Call what states?

Q. Or is there some other geographical division?

A. He said, "Why don't you put down your paper and look where—"

Q. Paper? A daily paper?

A. The Report. I guess it's daily. I get it every morning. At the station.

Q. Good! Good! Now, Mr. Wencelman, what I'd like you to do, if you would just tell me what you read in yesterday's paper. Would you do that?

A. Well, to start with—

Q. One second. Before you begin—exactly what was yesterday's date?

A. February 23rd, 2061.

Q. February 23rd, 2061. All right, go ahead.

A. Well, the word to break up into little words was LIQUEFY. That means, to make into a liquid condition.

Q. Go on.

A. The Prairie Dogs won 64-35 over the Cayugas. Hamill by a knockout in the eighth. Lucky for him, because Ortega took every round but the—

Q. Yes. Go on.

A. The veterinary column, some woman had a turtle—

Q. Now wait. Mr. Wencelman. Let me ask you this. Did you look at the first page?

A. Of course.

Q. All right. I want you to close your eyes and think back to yesterday's paper, the first page. See if you can picture it in your mind.

A. Yes.

Q. Yes? Now, up near the top, over on the right—

A. The lead story.

Q. Did you read it? The lead?

A. Well, a person buys a paper—

Q. And you remember it?

A. Not word for word.

Q. Never mind. What was the headline?

A. Sam and Trig meet, vow lasting truce.

Q. Sam? *Uncle* Sam?

A. Sam Prentiss, the singer. And his wife, Trig Slade, supposed to be this ideal marriage, but last spring she started playing around with Hop Parker. Sam took the kids. He acted on impulse, but I think he did the right thing. Of course, it's trivial, really, but my wife eats up all that stuff.

Q. Mr. Wencelman. Mr. Wencelman, listen. What else was on the front page?

A. Cloudy and seasonable, a high in the low thirties. I believe the winters— What's the matter?

Q. Time's up. Have to get you back. Just step over—

A. What's the hurry? My night's sleep is shot anyway.

Q. It's the rotation of the earth—don't want to take chances. This is a new operation.

A. Well, you're doing a great job. I'm certainly going to spread the word. Just one thing I'm not quite clear on, and that is, how you came to—how you picked me.

Q. Pure luck, Mr. Wencelman. Now—

A. . . . say *that* again. Ever stop to think who you might have gotten? A farmer, some kid? Maybe—even a foreigner.

Q. Now. Here we go.

A. . . . piece of *practical* advice? Fix this arm thing, here . . . wouldn't care except I've always had some trouble . . .

(SIX SHARP REPORTS, AS BEFORE. A LOUD WHINING, AS BEFORE, POSSIBLY DUE TO INTERFERENCE)

Kit (Mrs. Joseph) Reed is the author of the recently published novel, AT WAR AS CHILDREN (Farrar Straus). Young Mrs. Reed has been a newspaper reporter (she was once voted New England Newspaperwoman of the Year) and is now the wife of Joseph Reed, English Department, Wesleyan University. Her interests, she says, are housewifery and people-watching; and she now makes her home in Middletown, Connecticut.

Widespread as the cult of the lion is, the lure of the tiger exceeds it in intensity. Or, so many people consider. It was a Tyger, for example, that Blake saw "burning bright / In the forests of the night"—not a Lyon. It was Shir Khan, a tiger-lord, against whom Kipling's Mowgli pitted his man-cunning. India, in fact, is the only place where lions and tigers are found together—and the tigers are gradually gaining sole sway of the turf. Nor must we forget Hilaire Belloc (in this connection at least; in others, we would be glad to); he "had an aunt in Yucatan / who bought a tiger from a man. She has it yet." Kit Reed's Benedict also bought a tiger from a man—perhaps with some gaudy notion of using it for Mr. Belloc's proposed purpose (population control, *vis-a-vis* small children)—but it burned too fiercely in the forests of his own personal night . . .

AUTOMATIC TIGER

by Kit Reed

HE GOT THE TOY for his second cousin Randolph, a knobby-kneed boy so rich he was still in short trousers at thirteen. Born poor, Benedict had no hope of inheriting his Uncle James's money but he spent too much for the toy anyway. He had shriveled under his uncle's watery diamond eyes on two other weekend visits, shrinking in oppressive, dark-paneled rooms, and he wasn't going back to Syosset unarmed. The expensive gift for Randolph, the old man's grandson, should assure him at least some measure of respect. But there was more to it than that. He had felt a strange, almost feted feeling growing in him from the mo-

ment he first spotted the box, solitary and proud, in the dim window of a toy store not far from the river.

It came in a medium-sized box with an orange-and-black illustration and the words ROYAL BENGAL TIGER in orange lettering across the top. According to the description on the package, it responded to commands which the child barked into a small microphone. Benedict had seen robots and monsters something like it on television that year. Own It With Pride, the box commanded. Edward Benedict, removed from toys more by income than by inclination, had no idea that the tiger cost ten times as much as any of its mechanical counterparts. Had he known, he probably wouldn't have cared. It would impress the boy, and something about the baleful eyes on the box attracted him. It cost him a month's salary and seemed cheap at the price. After all, he told himself, it had real fur.

He wanted more than anything to open the box and touch the fur but the clerk was watching him icily so he fell back and let the man attack it with brown paper and twine. The clerk pushed the box into his arms before he could ask to have it delivered and he took it without question, because he hated scenes. He thought about the tiger all the way home on the bus. Like any man with a toy, he knew he wouldn't be able to resist opening it to try it out.

His hands were trembling as he set it in a corner of his living room.

"Just to see if it works," he muttered. "Then I'll wrap it for Randolph." He removed the brown paper and turned the box so the picture of the tiger was on top. Not wanting to rush things, he fixed his dinner and ate it facing the box. After he had cleared the table he sat at a distance, studying the tiger. As shadows gathered in the room something about the drawing seemed to compel him, to draw him to the verge of something important and hold him there, suspended, and he couldn't help feeling that he and this tiger were something more than man and toy, gift and giver, and as the pictured tiger regarded him its look grew more and more imperative, so that he got up finally and went over to the box and cut the string.

As the sides fell away he dropped his hands, disappointed at first by the empty-looking heap of fur. The fur

had a ruggy look and for a minute he wondered if the packers at the factory had made a mistake. Then, as he poked it with his toe he heard a click and the steel frame inside the fur sprang into place and he fell back, breathless, as the creature took shape.

It was a full-sized tiger, made from a real tiger-skin skillfully fitted to a superstructure of tempered metal so carefully made that the beast looked no less real than the steely-limbed animals Benedict had seen at the city zoo. Its eyes were of amber, ingeniously lit from behind by small electric bulbs, and Benedict noted hysterically that its whiskers were made of stiff nylon filament. It stood motionless in an aura of jungle-bottom and power, waiting for him to find the microphone and issue a command. An independent mechanism inside it lashed the long, gold-and-black striped tail. It filled half the room.

Awed, Benedict retreated to his couch and sat watching the tiger. Shadows deepened and soon the only light in the room came from the creature's fierce amber eyes. It stood rooted in the corner of the room, tail lashing, looking at him yellowly. As he watched it his hands worked on the couch, flexing and relaxing, and he thought of himself on the couch, the microphone that would conduct his orders, the tiger in the corner waiting, the leashed potential that charged the room. He moved ever so slightly and his foot collided with something on the floor. He picked it up and inspected it. It was the microphone. Still he sat, watching the gorgeous beast in the light cast by its own golden eyes. At last, in the dead stillness of late night or early morning, strangely happy, he brought the microphone to his lips and breathed into it tremulously.

The tiger stirred.

Slowly, Edward Benedict got to his feet. Then, calling on all his recources, he brought his voice into his throat.

"Heel," he said.

And hugely, magnificently, the tiger moved into place.

"Sit," he said, leaning shakily against the door, not quite ready to believe.

The tiger sat. Even sitting it was as tall as he, and even now, in repose, with glossy fur lying smooth and soft against the body, every line spoke of the coiled steel within.

He breathed into the microphone again, marveling as the tiger lifted one paw. It held the paw to its chest, looking at him, and it was so immense, so strong, so responsive that Benedict, in a burst of confidence, said, "Let's go for a walk" and opened the door. Avoiding the elevator he opened the fire door at the end of the corridor and started down the stairs, exulting as the tiger followed him silently, flowing like water over the dingy steps.

"Shhhhhh." Benedict paused at the door to the street and behind him the tiger stopped. He peered out. The street was so still, so unreal that he knew it must be three or four in the morning. "Follow me," he whispered to the tiger, and stepped out into the darkness. They walked the dark sides of the streets, with the tiger ranging behind Benedict, disappearing into the shadows when it looked as if a car might pass too close. Finally they came to the park, and once they had traveled a few yards down one of the asphalt paths the tiger began to stretch its legs like a horse in slow motion, moving restlessly at Benedict's heels. He looked at it and in a rush of sorrow realized that a part of it still belonged to the jungle, that it had been in its box too long and it wanted to run.

"Go ahead," he said congestedly, half-convinced he would never see it again.

With a bound the cat was off, running so fast that it came upon the park's small artificial lake before it realized it, spanned the water in a tremendous leap and disappeared into the bushes at the far side.

Alone, Benedict slumped on a bench, fingering the flat metal microphone. It was useless now, he was sure. He thought about the coming weekend, when he would have to appear at his uncle's door empty-handed ("I had a toy for Randolph, Uncle James, but it got away. . . ."), about the money he had wasted (then, reflecting on the tiger, the moments they had spent together in his apartment, the vitality that had surged in the room just once for a change, he knew the money hadn't been wasted). The tiger . . . Already burning to see it again, he picked up the microphone. Why should it come back when it was free again, and it had the whole park, the whole world to roam? Even

now, despairing, he couldn't keep himself from whispering the command.

"Come back," he said fervently. "Come back." And then, "Please."

For a few seconds, there was nothing. Benedict strained at the darkness, trying to catch some rustle, some faint sound, but there was nothing until the great shadow was almost upon him, clearing the bench across the way in a low, flat leap and stopping, huge and silent, at his feet.

Benedict's voice shook. "You came back," he said, touched.

And the Royal Bengal Tiger, eyes glowing amber, white ruff gleaming in the pale light, put one paw on his knee.

"You came," Benedict said, and after a long pause he put a tentative hand on the tiger's head. "I guess we'd better go home," he muttered, noticing now that it was beginning to get light. "Come on—" he caught his breath at the familiarity "—Ben."

And he started for his rooms, almost running, rejoicing as the tiger sprang behind him in long, silken leaps.

"We must sleep now," he said to the tiger when they reached the apartment. Then, when he had Ben settled properly, curled nose to tail in a corner, he dialled his office and called in sick. Exhilarated, exhausted, he flung himself on the couch, not caring for once that his shoes were on the furniture, and slept.

When he woke it was almost time to leave for Syosset. In the corner, the tiger lay as he had left him, inert now, but still mysteriously alive, eyes glowing, tail lashing from time to time.

"Hi," Benedict said softly. "Hi, Ben," he said, and then grinned as the tiger raised his head and looked at him. He had been thinking about how to get the tiger packed and ready to go, but as the great head lifted and the amber eyes glowed at him Benedict knew he would have to get something else for Randolph. This was his tiger. Moving proudly in the amber light, he began getting ready for his trip, throwing clean shirts and drawers into a suitcase, wrapping his toothbrush and razor in toilet paper and slipping them into the shoe pockets.

"I have to go away, Ben," he said when he was finished. "Wait, and I'll be back Sunday night."

The tiger watched him intently, face framed by a silvery ruff. Benedict imagined he had hurt Ben's feelings. "Tell you what, Ben," he said to make him feel better. "I'll take the microphone, and if I need you I'll give you a call. Here's what you do. First you go to Manhattan and take the Triboro Bridge . . ."

The microphone fit flatly against his breast, and for reasons Benedict could not understand it changed his whole aspect.

"Who needs a toy for Randolph?" He was already rehearsing several brave speeches he would make to Uncle James. "I have a tiger at home."

On the train, he beat out several people for a seat next to the window. Later, instead of taking a bus or cab to his uncle's place, he found himself calling and asking that someone be sent to pick him up at the station.

In his uncle's dark-paneled study, he shook hands so briskly that he startled the old man. Randolph, knees roughened and burning pinkly, stood belligerently at one elbow.

"I suppose you didn't bring me anything," he said, chin out.

For a split second, Benedict faltered. Then the extra weight of the microphone in his pocket reminded him. "I have a *tiger* at home," he murmured.

"Huh? Wuzzat?" Randolph jabbed him in the ribs. "Come on, let's have it."

With a subvocal growl, Benedict cuffed him on the ear.

Randolph was the picture of respect from then on. It had been simple enough—Benedict just hadn't thought of it before.

Just before he left that Sunday night, his Uncle James pressed a sheaf of debentures into his hand.

"You're a fine young man, Edward," the old man said, shaking his head as if he still couldn't believe it. "Fine young man."

Benedict grinned broadly. "Goodbye, Uncle James. I have a *tiger* at home."

Almost before his apartment door closed behind him he had taken out the microphone. He called the tiger to his feet and embraced the massive head. Then he stepped back. The tiger seemed bigger, glossier somehow, and every hair

vibrated with a life of its own. Ben's ruff was like snow. Benedict had begun to change too, and he spent a long, reflective moment in front of the mirror, studying hair that seemed to crackle with life, a jaw that jutted ever so slightly now.

Later, when it was safe to go out, they went to the park. Benedict sat on a bench and watched his tiger run, delighting in the creature's springy grace. Ben's forays were shorter this time, and he kept returning to the bench to rest his chin on Benedict's knee.

In the first glimmer of the morning Ben raced away once more, taking the ground in flat, racing bounds. He veered suddenly and headed for the lake in full knowledge that it was there, a shadowed streak, clearing the water in a leap that made Benedict come to his feet with a shout of joy.

"Ben!"

The tiger made a second splendid leap and came back to him. When Ben touched his master's knee this time Benedict threw away his coat, yelling, and wheeled and ran with him. Benedict sprinted beside the tiger, careering down flat walks, drinking in the night. They were coursing down the last straight walk to the gate when a slight, feminine figure appeared suddenly in the path in front of them, hands outflung in fear, and as they slowed she turned to run and threw something all in the same motion, mouth open in a scream that couldn't find voice. Something squashy hit Ben on the nose, and he shook his head and backed off. Benedict picked up up. It was a pocketbook.

"Hey, you forgot your . . ." He started after her, but as he remembered he'd have to explain the tiger, his voice trailed off and he stopped, shoulders drooping helplessly, until Ben nudged him. "Hey, Ben," he said, wondering. "We *scared* her."

He straightened his shoulders, grinning. "How about that." Then, with a new bravado he opened the purse, counted out several bills. "We'll make it look like a robbery. Then the cops'll never believe her story about a tiger." He placed the purse out in the open, where she would see it, and then absently pocketed the bills, making a mental note to pay the woman back some day. "Come, Ben," he said softly. "Let's go home."

Spent, Benedict slept the morning through, head resting on the tiger's silken shoulder. Ben kept watch, amber eyes unblinking, the whipping of his tail the only motion in the silent room.

He woke well after noon, alarmed at first because he was four hours late for work. Then he caught the tiger's eye and laughed. *I have a tiger.* He stretched luxuriously, yawning, and ate a slow breakfast and took his time about getting dressed. He found the debentures his uncle had given him on the dresser, figured them up and found they would realize a sizeable sum.

For some days he was content to be lazy, spending afternoons in movies and evenings in restaurants and bars, and twice he even went to the track. The rest of the time he sat and watched the tiger. As the days passed he went to better and better restaurants, surprised to find that headwaiters bowed deferentially and fashionable women watched him with interest—all, he was sure, because he had a tiger at home. There came a day when he was tired of commanding waiters alone, restless in his new assurance, compelled to find out how far it would take him. He had spent the last of the proceeds from the debentures and (with a guilty twinge) the money he'd taken from the woman in the park. He began reading the business section of *The Times* with purpose, and one day he copied down an address and picked up the microphone.

"Wish me luck, Ben," he whispered, and went out.

He was back an hour later, still shaking his head, bemused. "Ben, you should have seen me. He'd never even heard of me—but he begged me to take the job—I had him cornered—I was a tiger—" he flushed modestly "—meet the second vice president of the Pettigrew Works."

The tiger's eyes flickered and grew bright.

That Friday, Benedict brought home his first paycheck, and early the next morning it was Benedict who led the way to the park. He ran with the tiger until his eyes were swimming from the wind, and he ran with the tiger the next morning and every morning after that, and as they ran he grew in assurance. "I have a *tiger* at home," he would tell himself in time of crisis, and then he would forge on to the next thing. He carried the microphone like a talisman, se-

cure in the knowledge that he could whisper in it at any time, and call the tiger to his side. He was named a first vice president in a matter of days.

Even as his career progressed and he became a busy, important man, he never forgot the morning run. There were times when he would excuse himself from a party in a crowded night club to take his tiger ranging in the park, sprinting beside him in his tuxedo, boiled shirt-front gleaming in the dark. Even as he became bolder, more powerful, he remained faithful.

Until the day he made his biggest deal. His employer had sent him to lunch with Quincy, their biggest customer, with instructions to sell him sixteen gross.

"Quincy," Benedict said, "you need twenty gross." They were sitting against a tiger-striped banquette in an expensive restaurant. Quincy, a huge, choleric man, would have terrified him a month before.

"You've got your nerve," Quincy blustered. "What makes you think I want twenty gross?"

". . . " For a second Benedict retreated. Then the tiger striping touched a chord in him and he snapped forward. "Of course you don't *want* twenty gross," he rumbled. "You need them."

Quincy bought thirty gross. Benedict was promoted to general manager.

New title resting lightly on his shoulders, he gave himself the rest of the afternoon off. He was springing toward the door on cat feet when he was interrupted in midflight by an unexpected silky sound. "Well, Madeline," he said.

The secretary, dark, silk-skinned, unapproachable until now, had come up beside him. She seemed to be trying to tell him something—something inviting.

On impulse, he said, "You're coming to dinner with me tonight, Madeline."

Her voice was like velvet. "I have a date, Eddy—my rich uncle from Cambridge is in town."

He snorted. "The—uh—uncle who gave you that mink? I've seen him. He's too fat," and he added in a growl that dissolved her, "I'll be at your place at eight."

"Why, Eddy . . . All right." She looked up through furred

lashes. "But I should warn you—I am not an inexpensive girl."

"You'll cook dinner of course—then we may do the town." He patted his wallet pocket, and then nipped her ear. "Have steak."

As he rummaged in his sock drawer that night, his hand hit something hard, and he pulled it out with a crawly, sinking feeling. The microphone—somehow he'd forgotten it this morning. It must have fallen in among his socks while he was dressing, and he'd been without it all day. All day. He picked it up, shaky with relief, and started to slip it into his tuxedo. Then he paused, thinking. Carefully he set it back in the drawer and shut it. He didn't need it any more. He was the tiger now.

That night, still rosy with drink and the heady sounds of music and Madeline's breath coming and going in his ear, he went to bed without undressing and slept until it got light. When he woke and padded into the living room in his socks he saw Ben in the corner, diminished somehow, watching him. He had forgotten their run.

"Sorry, old fellow," he said as he left for work, giving the tiger a regretful pat.

And "Got to hustle," the next day, with a cursory caress. "I'm taking Madeline shopping."

As the days went by and Benedict saw more and more of the girl, he forgot to apologize. And the tiger remained motionless in the corner as he came and went, reproaching him.

Benedict bought Madeline an Oleg Cassini.

In the corner of the living room, a fine dust began to settle on Ben's fur.

Benedict bought Madeline a diamond bracelet.

In the corner, a colony of moths found its way into the heavy fur on Ben's breast.

Benedict and Madeline went to Nassau for a week. They stopped at an auto dealer's on their way back and Benedict bought Madeline a Jaguar.

The composition at the roots of Ben's alert nylon whiskers had begun to give. They sagged, and one or two fell.

It was in the cab, on his way home from Madeline's apartment, that Benedict examined his checkbook carefully for

the first time. The trip and the down payment on the car had brought his accounts to zero. And there was a payment due on the bracelet the next day. But what did it matter? He shrugged. He was a man of power. At the door to his apartment he wrote the cabbie a check, grandly adding an extra five dollars as tip. Then he went upstairs, pausing briefly to examine his tan in a mirror, and went to bed.

He awoke at three o'clock in the morning, prey to the shadows and the time of day, uneasy for the first time, and in the cold light of his bed lamp, went through his accounts again. There was less money than he'd realized—he had to go to the bank to cover the check for the cabbie, or the down payment on the Jag would bounce. But he'd written a check for the last installment on the bracelet, and that would be coming in, and the rent was overdue. . . .

He had to have money now. He sat in bed, knees drawn up, musing, and as he thought he remembered the woman he and Ben had frightened that first day, and the money in her purse, and it came to him that he would get the money in the park. He remembered rushing down on the woman, her scream, and in memory that first accidental escapade with the tiger became a daring daylight robbery—hadn't he spent the money? And as he thought back on it he decided to try it again, beginning to forget that the tiger had been with him and in fact, forgetting as he slipped into a striped sweatshirt and tied a kerchief at his throat that he was not the tiger, so that he went out without even seeing Ben in the corner, running in low, long strides, hurrying to the park.

It was still dark in the park and he paced the walks, light-footed as a cat, expanding in a sense of power as he stalked. A dark figure came through the gates—his prey—and he growled a little, chuckling as he recognized her—the same sad woman—frightened of a tiger—and he growled again, running toward her, thinking, as he bore down on her, *I will frighten her again.*

"Hey!" she yelled, as he rushed at her and he broke stride because she hadn't shrunk from him in terror; she was standing her ground, feet a little wide, swinging her handbag.

Eyeing the pocketbook, he circled her and made another rush.

"Hand it over," he snarled.

"I beg your pardon," she said coldly, and when he rushed at her with another growl, "What's the *matter* with you?"

"The pocketbook," he said menacingly, hair bristling.

"Oh, the *pocketbook*." Abruptly she lifted the purse and hit him on the head.

Startled, he staggered back, and before he could collect himself for another lunge, she had turned with an indignant snort and started out of the park.

It was too light now to look for another victim. He peeled off the sweatshirt and went out of the park in his shirtsleeves, walking slowly, puzzling over the aborted robbery. He was still brooding as he went into a nearby coffee shop for breakfast, and he worried over it as he ate his Texas steak. The snarl hadn't been quite right, he decided finally, and he straightened his tie and went too early to work.

"The Jaguar company called me," Madeline said when she came in an hour later. "Your check bounced."

"Oh?" Something in her eyes kept him from making anything of it. "Oh," he said mildly. "I'll take care of it."

"You'd better," she said. Her eyes were cold.

Ordinarily he would take this opportunity—before anyone else came in—to bite her on the neck, but this morning she seemed so distant (probably because he hadn't shaved, he decided) and he went back to his office instead, scowling over several columns of figures on a line pad.

"It looks bad," he murmured. "I need a raise."

His employer's name was John Gilfoyle—Mr. Gilfoyle, or Sir, to most of his employees. Benedict had learned early that the use of the initials rattled him, and he used them to put himself at an advantage.

Perhaps because he was off his feed that morning, perhaps because Benedict had forgotten his coat, Gilfoyle didn't even blink. "I've no time for that today," he snapped.

"You don't seem to understand." Benedict filled his chest and paced the rug in front of the conference desk softly, noting uneasily that his shoes were muddy from the fiasco in the park, but still the tiger. "I want more money."

"Not today, Benedict."

"I could get twice as much elsewhere," Benedict said. He bored in as he always did, but there seemed to be a flaw in his attitude—perhaps he was a bit hoarse from running in the early morning air—because Gilfoyle, instead of rising with an offer, as he always did, said, "You don't look very snappy this morning, Benedict. Not like a company man."

". . . The Welchel Works offered me . . ." Benedict was saying.

"Then why don't you go to the Welchel Works." Gilfoyle slapped his desk, annoyed.

"You *need* me," Benedict said. He stuck out his jaw as always, but the failure in the park had left him more shaken than he realized, and he must have said it in the wrong way.

"I don't need you," Gilfoyle barked. "Get out of here or I may decide I don't even want you."

"You . . ." Benedict began.

"Get out!"

"Y—yessir." Completely unnerved, he backed out of the office.

In the corridor, he bumped into Madeline.

"About that down payment . . ." she said.

"I—I'll tend to it. If I can just come over . . ."

"Not tonight," she sniffed. She seemed to sense a change in him. "I'm going to be a little busy."

He was too shattered to protest.

Back at his desk, he mulled over and over the figures in his notebook. At lunch he stayed in his chair, absently stroking his paperweight—a tiger-striped lump he had bought in palmier days, and as he stroked it he thought of Ben. For the first time in several weeks he dwelled on the tiger, unexpectedly, overwhelmingly homesick for him. He sat out the rest of the afternoon in misery, too unsure of himself now to leave the office before the clock told him it was time. As soon as he could he left, taking a cab with a five-spot he had found in a lower drawer, thinking all the time that at least the tiger would never desert him, that it would be good to take Ben out again, comforting to run with his old friend in the park.

Forgetting the elevator, he raced up the stairs and into

his living room, stopping only to switch on a small lamp by the door. "Ben," he said, and threw his arms around the tiger's neck. Then he went into his bedroom and hunted up the microphone. He found it in his closet, under a pile of dirty drawers.

"Ben," he said softly into the microphone.

It took the tiger a long time to get to his feet. His right eye was so dim now that Benedict could hardly see him. The light behind the left eye had gone out. When his master called him to the door he moved slowly, and as he came into the lamplight, Benedict saw why.

Ben's tail was lashing only feebly, and his eyes were dimmed with dust. His coat had lost its luster, and the mechanism that moved his response to Benedict's commands had stiffened with disuse. The proud silver ruff was yellow, spotted here and there where the moths had eaten it too close. Moving rustily, the tiger pressed his head against Benedict.

"Hey, fella," Benedict said with a lump in his throat. "Hey. Tell you what," he said, stroking the thinning fur, "soon as it gets late enough we'll go out to the park. A little fresh air"—he said, voice breaking—"fresh air'll put the spring back in you." With an empty feeling that belied his words, he settled himself on the couch to wait. As the tiger drew near he took one of his silver-backed brushes and began brushing the tiger's lifeless coat. The fur came out in patches, adhering to the soft bristles and Benedict saddened, put the brush aside. "It'll be OK fella," he said, stroking the tiger's head to reassure himself. For a moment Ben's eyes picked up the glow from the lamp, and Benedict tried to tell himself they had already begun to grow brighter.

"It's time," Benedict said. "C'mon, Ben." He started out the door and down the hall, going slowly. The tiger followed him creakily, and they began the painful trip to the park.

Several minutes later the park gates loomed reassuringly, and Benedict pushed on, sure, somehow, that once the tiger was within their shelter his strength would begin to return. And it seemed true, at first, because the darkness braced the tiger in some gentle way, and he started off springily when Benedict turned to him and said, "Let's go."

Benedict ran a few long, mad steps, telling himself the

tiger was right behind him and then slowed, pacing the tiger, because he realized now that if he ran at full strength Ben would never be able to keep up with him. He went at a respectable lope for some distance, and the tiger managed to keep up with him, but then he found himself going slower and slower as the tiger, trying gallantly, moved his soft feet in the travesty of a run.

Finally Benedict went to a bench and called him back, head lowered so the tiger wouldn't see that he was almost crying.

"Ben," he said, "forgive me."

The big head nudged him and as Benedict turned the faint light from the one good eye illuminated his face. Ben seemed to comprehend his expression, because he touched Benedict's knee with one paw, looking at him soulfully with his brave blind eye. Then he flexed his body and drew it under him in a semblance of his old powerful grace and set off at a run, heading for the artificial lake. The tiger looked back once and made an extra little bound, as if to show Benedict that he was his old self now, that there was nothing to forgive, and launched himself in a leap across the lake. He started splendidly, but it was too late—the mechanism had been unused for too long now, and just as he was airborne it failed him and the proud body stiffened in midair and dropped, rigid, into the lake.

When he could see well enough to make his way to the lake Benedict went forward, still grinding tears from his eyes with heavy knuckles. Dust—a few hairs—floated on the water, but that was all. Ben was gone. Thoughtfully, Benedict took the microphone from his pocket and dropped it in the lake. He stood, watching the lake until the first light of morning came raggedly through the trees, struggling to reach the water. He was in no hurry because he knew, without being told, that he was finished at the office. He would probably have to sell the new wardrobe, the silver brushes, to meet his debts, but he was not particularly concerned. It seemed appropriate, now, that he should be left with nothing.

The name of T. P. Caravan, too long absent from Science Fiction, returns now on the byline of a rather intriguing story. Concerning its author, we submit the brief information that "Mr. Caravan is an extremely shy man. He is on the faculty of the College of the City of New York, and is an authority on 18th Century English literature. Once he was an aerial gunner, but now he's too fat." Herewith his account of a Johnsonian scholar in a Kafkaesque situation.

THE COURT OF TARTARY

by T. P. Caravan

PROFESSOR DUNBAR bawled into the cowboy's ear, and the cowpoke slapped him across the rump with the end of his rope, shouting, "Git up, thar." And the professor bawled again and began to run.

Edward Harrison Dunbar, B.A., M.A., Ph.D., L.L.D., member of the Modern Language Association and authority on eighteenth century literature, was not prepared for the situation in which he found himself: it had never been mentioned by any of the writers of the Age of Reason.

Kafka, of course, had treated the subject, but Professor Dunbar seldom read anything written after 1798.

"Classic restraint and control," Professor Dunbar used to tell his classes: "these are the essentials of the pure style."

Now he ran bellowing across the dusty plains of Texas.

"Pure English is the best English," he used to say. "Cleanse your speech of colloquialism. Put limits to your imagination, restrain your fancy, remain within the rules. Speak with clarity and precision."

And now he bawled at another cowboy and the cowboy flapped his hat and yipped at him. Professor Dunbar couldn't help it; his instincts sent him running wall-eyed back to the herd.

He had awakened this morning with a vague feeling that something was wrong. Something was, of course. He had been turned into a steer. But he had always been a man who woke up easily and gradually, and as he lay in a

gentle half-doze, waiting for the smell of coffee to tell him that breakfast was ready, he tried, without any anxiety, to account for the uneasy feeling. His most recently published paper, the one proving that Boswell was the true author of *Ossian*, had been attacked by several fools in the scholarly journals, but he had his refutation prepared: it wasn't that. The college magazine had been suspended again for another four years, but that happened after almost every issue: it wasn't that. His lectures for the rest of the term were fully set up: that was all right. His children weren't in trouble, his wife wasn't in debt, and he hadn't been too drunk at the faculty club for several months.

Smelling coffee at last, he decided that his uneasiness was just the aftermath of some forgotten dream, and he opened his eyes. He came to his feet with a bawl of amazement: he had been sleeping among cows.

His first thought was that this was some student prank. The undergraduate body became more ingenious and unbearable each year; in Professor Dunbar's ideal university, no student under sixty years old would ever be admitted. But even the most brilliant and sadistic freshman would be unable to . . .

His next thought was that he was insane, but he brushed that thought aside as easily as he brushed a fly from his back: he knew perfectly well that he wasn't insane. He wasn't insane because he was a scholar. He was a sane scholar, and he mentally recited the first eighteen verses of Gray's *Elegy* to prove it. But he was still surrounded by cows, and a dozen yards away a group of cowboys were drinking coffee out of thick china mugs.

His third thought was that this was a dream.

His fourth thought told him that he knew it wasn't a dream.

One of the cowboys rolled a cigarette, and Professor Dunbar's mind stopped its hysterical stuttering. He bawled out an appeal for help and started picking his way through the sleeping animals toward the men. Having spent his life in a university town, he was rather frightened by the nearness of the other steers. Roused by his bellowing, the rest of the herd came to its feet. They were all around him, nervous, bawling. He was frightened enough by his predicament, and

his fear spread to them and theirs to him. Frantic, he tried to push his way through the herd. His eyes rolled, his tail lashed out, his voice rose in terror.

Professor Dunbar was spooked.

The herd stampeded; he stampeded with it. He got one foot into the bucket full of hot coffee and he got a hat flapped in his face and somebody shot a gun off behind his back and a thunderclap of panic burst within his head.

He ran and he ran until he couldn't run any more, and even then he kept on running. And even as he ran he wondered if he couldn't prove that Edward Young was the true author of the third book of *Gulliver's Travels*, because he knew that if he stopped thinking scholarly thoughts about the eighteenth century he would have to admit that he had turned into an animal. So as he ran he considered the evidence turned up by the publication of the Tickell papers and the discovery of Swift's old laundry lists and *Night Thoughts* and the graveyard poets and Gray's *Elegy* and the lowing herd winds slowly o'er the lea, and he had to admit that he was an animal.

He thought he was a cow because he had always thought of herds as made up of cows: actually, not that it made any difference, he was a steer.

And then somebody on a horse was running alongside of him, pressing him in, slowing him down, calming him, turning him in a circle. Finally he was milling with the other steers, slowly going round and round on the dusty plains, and then the whole herd was moving peacefully back across the ground over which they had stampeded. Professor Dunbar was ashamed of himself. A scholar is a man who is trained carefully to consider every aspect of the most vexing questions, and then to deliver a dispassionate answer; and here he had run away in terror from a puzzling situation, run away bellowing like an undergraduate. Not only that, he had led the whole valuable herd with him, and the exercise had no doubt run at least three pounds off each animal. Estimating the herd at—he tossed his head up to look—at about a thousand cows, that was three thousand pounds: at a dollar a pound he had cost the owner of the herd about three thousand dollars. He was a professor:

three thousand dollars was almost an inconceivable sum to him.

A dollar a pound! For meat! A cow wasn't meat until it was slaughtered! They kill cows and eat them! Horror leaped upon his back like a swarm of wasps.

This time the stampede didn't last more than a few minutes: the animals were nearly exhausted.

Panting and snorting, Professor Dunbar took stock of the situation. Blind panic was certainly not the answer. First and most important, he had to let these cowboys know who he was; after that he had to find some way of returning to his university. Perhaps some of the people in the biology department, with their cyclotrons and atoms and things could return him to his normal shape: he knew no more about biology than most biologists knew about eighteenth century periodical literature. Or perhaps the faculty of comparative religion would be the people to consult . . . but first he had to tell these cowboys. He slowly made his way to the edge of the herd and trotted up to one of the men on horseback.

Professor Dunbar bawled into the cowboy's ear, and the cowboy slapped him across the rump with the end of his rope, shouting, "Git up, thar." And the professor bawled again and began to run. Couldn't they see? What was the matter with them? And now he bellowed at another cowboy and the cowboy flapped his hat and yipped at him. Professor Dunbar couldn't help it; his instincts sent him running wall-eyed back to the herd.

He was an intelligent man, and he knew how to think directly to the point of a problem. "Sir, if a man find himself set down in the court of Tartary, he can make himself understood, if but his mind be put in order." He reminded himself of this comfortable eighteenth century doctrine as he snorted up the thick Texas dust, forgetting the reply to this dogmatic statement: "The Cham of Tartary is a fool, Sir, and passes his days conglobulated with concubines. Sir, no gentleman will ever make himself understood to a Tartar, a North Briton, or any other gaudy barbarian." And so this steer, pacing slowly with the herd, began to put his mind in order. There was no point in approaching his difficulty through the scientific method: he knew no science.

There was no help for him in metaphysics: he had cleared his mind of Kant. Nor could the classics aid him: he had Ovid, of course, and the *Golden Ass,* but he didn't see how they bore on his problem. And—he hated to admit it—nobody in the eighteenth century seemed to have wondered what would happen to a scholar who woke up and found himself a cow. All right. That left only his own experience to fall back on. But, being a professor, he had never had any experiences.

It was too bad.

But wait—he had once marked a paper in which some student had treated the problem of communicating with intelligent life on other planets. (He had turned the paper over to the dean, with the recommendation that the student be disciplined.) What conclusion had the paper reached? He tossed his head and bawled in the effort to remember. Mathematics. Yes. Mathematical laws would be the same everywhere, and everyone would recognize them. He was safe: all he had to do was display his knowledge of mathematics.

The herd was slowing down now, coming to a stop beside a railroad embankment. A slowly creaking windmill pumped water into a long ditch. But did he know any mathematics? He drank thirstily; stampeding was dry work. Isaac Newton, of course, and the law of gravity. But what was the law of gravity? How did it go? He had seen it once. Another steer shoved him away from the water.

$E=mc^2$.

Somehow that didn't look right. It didn't have the true Newtonian swing to it. And hadn't somebody, some modern fellow, come along and abolished gravity? Sadly he shook his head. There was no stability in the world today. He bellowed in despair.

Was that a train whistle? Chicago. The stockyards. The knacker's hammer. Death. We use everything but the squeal—but that was pigs. How much beef had he eaten during his life? How much cowhide in his wallets and suitcases?

Fear jogged his brain. He had studied mathematics once as an undergraduate, but it had been math for students taking the liberal arts course, and nobody had paid any attention to it. Still, he must remember something. After all, he

had taken the course three times before he had managed to sit behind somebody who was able to do the work when the exams came around. Wasn't there something about triangles?

It was a train whistle, no doubt about it. He could see the white puff of steam down the track.

Yes! You draw a triangle with little boxes on the sides. That means something in mathematics. He was saved! Quickly he jostled his way through the herd, meekly he approached the cowboys. He must remember to be gentle so they wouldn't be afraid of him. He bobbed his head. He tried to smile ingratiatingly.

With his right fore hoof he scraped out an awkward triangle. It was difficult to coordinate; he found his leg wouldn't move easily in the patterns he wanted. Finally, however, he finished and looked up, breathing heavily. Nobody had even noticed him.

He tried to nudge one of the cowboys gently, but he had forgotten his horns. With a shrill yip, the man flung his ten gallon hat into the professor's face. Confused and frightened, he dashed back to the herd. There was an odd feeling of safety in being with the others, and he grazed almost contentedly on the trampled grass. Soon somebody would see his diagrams and realize what had happened.

He moved slowly with the rest of the herd, feeling the warm sun beat down through the dust on his back. Now and then he whisked away a fly with his tail. In just a little while he would be saved, but now he let a pleasant lassitude fill him, the way it did when he used to browse slowly among the books in the cool darkness of the more remote stacks in the university library, back in the eighteenth century section where even the graduate students seldom wandered unless they were lost. He munched slowly on the grass in front of him. Sleepily he wondered if Swift had really been deaf, or had he just been pretending? Dreamily he chewed his cud. If he could get a grant he'd go to England next summer and hunt around for papers to prove his theory that Sir Robert Walpole was the true author of the *Beggar's Opera.* He moved a little faster as the herd became restless.

Suddenly there was a high wooden fence in front of him.

He brushed along it, hemmed in by the other cattle. What was happening? Throwing his head back, he bawled in bewilderment. Then there was a fence on both sides of him, wood under his feet. Up a narrow ramp. What? He was being loaded into a cattle car. The ramp drummed hollowly as he trotted up it.

He wouldn't! He wouldn't go! Where were the people who were going to save him by mathematics? Stopping on the ramp, he looked back: the herd stretched out behind him. They had trampled over his careful diagrams. He bellowed in protest. A cowboy was leaning over the side of the fence, reaching toward him with a stick. Professor Dunbar leaped forward in uncontrollable anguish: he hadn't expected an electric shock. The door of the cattle car slammed shut behind him. He was crowded in, almost unable to move. He stamped his hoofs and bawled as loudly as he could, and all the other steers bawled with him; the noise of the protesting herd rose above the rumble of the wheels all the way from Texas to Chicago.

Chicago! There was a university in Chicago! There would be scholars, Deans, full professors, associate professors, assistant professors, tutors, instructors, readers, lecturers, graduate assistants, fellows: all sorts and conditions of men.

There it was now. He looked up at the tall buildings. His heart leaped up as he beheld Chicago in the sky. The train clanked and grumbled its way into the stockyards. Here? He had vaguely supposed they would lead the cattle down the main street between the station and the packing houses. He looked anxiously out over the cattle-pens. No scholars here. Not even a sophomore. Not even a football player. Only innumerable small fenced-off pens and a series of tall buildings from which—he shuddered—came the bawling of frightened cattle and the faint stink of death.

The doors slid open: he was shoved down an incline as the cattle rushed out of the car. Into a pen. Quick! Quick! He had to get away. He pawed the ground and bellowed. It did no good: all the cattle were pawing the ground and bellowing. Quick! Someone opened the gate of the pen. He was forced out into a runway. So soon? Where were they going? Single file, they trotted into one of the buildings. Up

a ramp, still another. He bellowed for help. Still higher. Cattle were screaming all around him.

And then they weren't going upward any more. The concrete floor clicked under his hoofs as he followed the steer in front. Bright electric lights shone down. No more concrete now: he walked on sawdust mixed with blood. Thump! The steer he was following collapsed; the floor tilted; the body slid away. A man with a sledge hammer stood above the runway, waiting for him to move forward.

This time no electric shocks were going to budge him. He braced himself firmly on three legs, then began to scrape at the floor with his hoof. No mathematics this time: he was going to write out his predicament. He was proud of his self-possession as he remembered to write backward and upside down so the man could read it clearly in the bloody sawdust:

I AM NOT A COW. I AM PROFESSOR DUNBAR. PLEASE DO NOT KILL ME.

And then he trotted forward to accept their apologies.

"How was work today, Eddie?" The paymaster shoved the voucher through the small window.

"OK. Nuttin new. I had another of them crazy animals, know what I mean? The kind that sort of dances in front of you afore you whack em." Laboriously he scrawled his X on the dotted line. "That's five so far this month."

touchstone (tuch ston), *n.* 1. *Mineral.* A black, siliceous stone allied to flint;—used to test the purity of gold and silver by the streak left on the stone when rubbed by the metal. 2. Any test or criterion by which to try a thing's qualities.

Touchstones have a long, complex, and fascinating history—most of which is unknown to Your Editor—and, after some period of desuetude, have begun to reclaim a modicum of popular attention under the name of *feeling-pieces.* Terry Carr here divulges the properties, both hidden and revealed, of a touchstone. The scene is Greenwich Village, whose ancient and beautiful character seems doomed to fall victim to the insensate greed of the speculator. Yet a few sections of this antic faubourg remain still unchanged since the days when poor Poe dwelt there, and in shops both dim and curious—such as Mr. Carr describes—things both curious and dim may still be found. And now let us follow his protagonist—but not, we suggest, too closely . . .

TOUCHSTONE

by Terry Carr

FOR THIRTY-TWO YEARS, during which he watched with growing perplexity and horror the ways of the world and the dull gropings of men reaching for love and security, Randolph Helgar had told himself that there was a simple answer to all of it—somehow it was possible to get a handhold on life, to hold it close and cherish it without fear. And on a Saturday morning in early March when the clouds had disappeared and the sun came forth pale in the sky he found what he had been looking for.

The snow had been gone from the streets of Greenwich Village for over a week, leaving behind only the crispness on the sidewalks. Everyone still walked with a tentative step, like sailors on shore leave. Randolph Helgar was out of his apartment by ten, heading west. His straight, sandy hair was ruffled by an easterly wind, giving him the superficial ap-

pearance of hurrying, but his quick grey eyes and the faint smile that so often came to his mouth dispelled that. Randolph was busier looking around than walking.

The best thing about the Village, as far as he was concerned, was that you could never chart all of it. As soon as you thought you knew every street, every sandal shop, every hot dog or pizza stand, one day you'd look up and there'd be something new there, where you'd never looked before. A peculiar blindness comes over people who walk through the streets of the Village; they see only where they're going.

The day before, on the bus coming home from work at the travel agency on West 4th, he had looked out the window and seen a bookstore whose dirty windows calmly testified to the length of time it had been there. So of course this morning he was looking for that bookstore. He had written down the address, but there was no need now for him to take the slip of paper from his wallet to look at it; the act of writing it had fixed it in his memory.

The store was just opening when he got there. A large, heavy-shouldered man with thick black hair and prominent veins in the backs of his hands was setting out the bargain table in the front of the store. Randolph glanced at the table, filled with the sun-faded spines of anonymous pocketbooks, and nodded at the man. He went inside.

The books were piled high around the walls; here and there were handlettered signs saying MUSIC, HISTORY, PSYCHOLOGY, but they must have been put there years ago, because the books in those sections bore no relation to the signs. Near the front was an old cupboard, mottled with the light which came through the dirty window; a sign on one of its shelves said $10. Next to it was a small round table which revolved on its base, but there was no price on this.

The owner had come back into the store now, and he stood just inside the door looking at Randolph. After a moment he said, "You want anything special?"

Randolph shook his head, dislodging the shock of hair which fell over his eyes. He ran his fingers through it, combing it back, and turned to one of the piles of books.

"I think maybe you'd be interested in this section," said the owner, walking heavily over the bending floorboards to

stand beside Randolph. He raised a large hand and ran it along one shelf. A sign said MAGIC, WITCHCRAFT.

Randolph glanced at it. "No," he said.

"None of those books are for sale," the man said. "That section is strictly lending-library."

Randolph raised his eyes to meet those of the older man. The man gazed back calmly, waiting.

"Not for sale?" Randolph said.

"No, they're part of my own collection," the man said. "But I lend them out at 10¢ a day, if anybody wants to read them, or . . ."

"Who takes them out?"

The heavy man shrugged, with the faint touch of a smile about his thick lips. "People. People come in, they see the books and think they might like to read them. They always bring them back."

Randolph glanced at the books on the shelves. The spines were crisp and hard, the lettering on them like new. "Do you think they read them?" he asked.

"Of course. So many of them come back and buy other things."

"Other books?"

The man shrugged again, and turned away. He walked slowly to the back of the store. "I sell other things. It's impossible to make a living selling books in this day and age."

Randolph followed him into the darkness in back. "What other things do you sell?"

"Perhaps you should read some of the books first," the man said, watching him beneath his eyebrows.

"Do you sell . . . love potions? Dried bat's blood? Snake's entrails?"

"No," said the man. "I'm afraid you'd have to search the tobauconist's shops for such things as that. I sell only imperishables."

"Magic charms?" Randolph said.

"Yes," the man said slowly. "Some are real, some are not."

"And I suppose the real ones are more expensive."

"They are all roughly the same price. It's up to you to decide which ones are real."

The man had stooped to reach into a drawer of his desk,

and now he brought out a box from which he lifted the lid. He set the open box on the top of his desk and reached up to turn on a naked lightbulb which hung from the shadowed ceiling.

The box contained an assortment of amulets, stones, dried insects encased in glass, carved pieces of wood, and other things. They were all tumbled into the box haphazardly. Randolph stirred the contents with two fingers.

"I don't believe in magic," he said.

The heavy man smiled faintly. "I don't suppose I do either. But some of these things are quite interesting. Some are of authentic South American workmanship, and others are from Europe and the East. They're worth money, all right."

"What's this?" Randolph asked, picking up a black stone which just fit into the palm of his hand. The configurations of the stone twisted around and in upon themselves, like a lump of baker's dough.

"That's a touchstone. Run your fingers over it."

"It's perfectly smooth," Randolph said.

"It's supposed to have magical powers to make people feel contented. Hold it in your hand."

Randolph closed his fingers around the stone. Perhaps it was the power of suggestion, but the stone did feel very good. So smooth, like skin . . .

"The man who gave it to me said it was an ancient Indian piece. It embodies Yin and Yang, the opposites that complement and give harmony to the world. You can see a little of the symbol in the way the stone looks." He smiled slowly. "It's also supposed to encase a human soul, like an egg."

"More likely a fossil," Randolph said. He wondered what kind of stone it was.

"It will cost five dollars," the man said.

Randolph hefted the stone in his hand. It settled back into his palm comfortably, like a cat going to sleep. "All right," he said.

He took a bill from his wallet, and noticed the paper on which he'd written the store's address the day before. "If I come back here a week from now," he said, "will this

store still be here? Or will it have disappeared, like magic shops are supposed to do?"

The man didn't smile. "This isn't that kind of store. I'd go out of business if I kept moving my location."

"Well, then," Randolph said, looking at the black stone in his hand. "When I was young I used to pick up stones at the beach and carry them around for weeks, just because I loved them. I suppose this stone has some of that sort of magic, anyway."

"If you decide you don't want it, bring it back," said the man.

When he got back to the apartment Margo was just getting up. Bobby, seven years old, was apparently up and out already. Randolph put yesterday's pot of coffee on the burner to heat and sat at the kitchen table to wait for it. He took the touchstone out of his pocket and ran his fingers over it.

Strange . . . It was just a black rock, worn smooth probably by water and then maybe by the rubbing of fingers over centuries. Despite what the man at the store had said about an Indian symbol, it had no particular shape.

Yet it did have a peculiar calming effect on him. Maybe, he thought, it's just that people have to have something to do with their hands while they think. It's the hands, the opposable thumb, that has made men what they are, or so the anthropologists say. The hands give men the ability to work with things around them, to make, to do. And we all have a feeling that we've got to be using our hands all the time or somehow we're not living up to our birthright.

That's why so many people smoke. That's why they fidget and rub their chins and drum their fingers on tables. But the touchstone relaxes the hands.

A simple form of magic.

Margo came into the kitchen, combing her long hair back over her shoulders. She hadn't put on any makeup, and her full mouth seemed as pale as clouds. She set out coffee cups and poured, then sat down across the table.

"Did you get the paint?"

"Paint?"

"You were going to paint the kitchen today. The old paint is cracking and falling off."

Randolph looked up at the walls, rubbing the stone in his fingers. They didn't look bad, he decided. They could go for another six months without being redone. After all, it was no calamity if the plaster showed through above the stove.

"I don't think I'll do it today," he said.

Margo didn't say anything. She picked up a book from the chair beside her and found her place in it.

Randolph fingered the touchstone and thought about the beach when he had been a boy.

There was a party that night at Gene Blake's apartment on the floor below, but for once Randolph didn't feel like going down. Blake was four years younger than him, and suddenly today the difference seemed insuperable; Blake told off-center jokes about integration in the South, talked about writers Randolph knew only by the reviews in the Sunday *Times*, and was given to drinking Scotch and milk. No, not tonight, he told Margo.

After dinner Randolph settled in front of the television set and, as the washing of dishes sounded from the kitchen and Bobby read a comic book in the corner, watched a rerun of the top comedy show of three seasons past. When the second commercial came on he dug the touchstone from his pocket and rubbed it idly with his thumb. All it takes, he told himself, is to ignore the commercials.

"Have you ever seen a frog?" Bobby asked him. He looked up and saw the boy standing next to his chair, breathing quickly as boys do when they have something to say.

"Sure," he said.

"Did you ever see a black one? A dead one?"

Randolph thought a minute. He didn't suppose he had. "No," he said.

"Wait a minute!" Bobby said, and bounded out of the room. Randolph turned back to the television screen, and saw that the wife had a horse in the living-room and was trying to coax it to go upstairs before the husband came home. The horse seemed bored.

"Here!" said Bobby, and dropped the dead frog in his lap.

Randolph looked at it for two seconds before he realized what it was. One leg and part of the frog's head had been crushed, probably by a car's wheel, and the wide mouth was open. It was grey, not black.

Randolph shook it off him onto the floor. "You'd better throw it away," he said. "It's going to smell bad."

"But I paid sixty marbles for him!" Bobby said. "And I only had twenty-five, and you got to get me some more."

Randolph sighed, and shifted the touchstone from one hand to the other. "All right," he said. "Monday. Keep him in your room."

He turned back to the screen, where everyone had got behind the horse and was trying to push him up the stairs.

"Don't you like him?" Bobby asked.

Randolph looked blankly at him.

"My frog," Bobby said.

Randolph thought about it for a moment. "I think you'd better throw him away," he said. "He's going to stink."

Bobby's face fell. "Can I ask Mom?"

Randolph didn't answer, and he supposed Bobby went away. There was another commercial on now, and he was toying idly with the thought of a commercial for touchstones. "For two thousand years mankind has searched for the answer to underarm odor, halitosis, regularity. Now at last . . ."

"*Bobby!*" said his wife in the kitchen. Randolph looked up, surprised. "Take that out in the hall and put it in the garbage *right now!* Not another word!"

In a moment Bobby came trudging through the room, his chin on his chest. But tiny eyes looked at Randolph with a trace of hope.

"She's gonna make me throw him away."

Randolph shrugged. "It would smell up the place," he said.

"Well, I thought *you'd* like it anyway," Bobby said. "You always keep telling me how *you* were a boy, and *she* wasn't." He stopped for a moment, waiting for Randolph to answer, and when he didn't the boy abruptly ran out with the grey, crushed frog in his hand.

Margo came into the living-room, drying her hands on a towel. "Ran, why didn't you put your foot down in the first place?"

"What?"

"You know things like that make me sick. I won't be able to eat for two days."

"I was watching the program," he said.

"You've seen that one twice before. What's the matter with you?"

"Take some aspirin if you're upset," he said. He squeezed the stone in the palm of his hand until she shook her head and went away.

A few minutes later a news program came on with a report on some people who had picketed a military base, protesting bombs and fallout. A university professor's face came on the screen and gravely he pointed to a chart. "The Atomic Energy Commission admits—"

Randolph sighed and shut the set off.

He went to bed early that night. When he woke up the next day he went and got a book and brought it back to bed with him. He picked up the touchstone from the chair next to the bed and turned it over in his hand a few times. It was really a very plain kind of stone. Black, smooth, softly curving . . . What was it about the rock that could make everything seem so unimportant, so commonplace?

Well, of course a rock is one of the most common things in the world, he thought. You find them everywhere—even in the streets of the city, where everything is man-made, you'll find rocks. They're part of the ground underneath the pavement, part of the world we live on. They're part of home.

He held the touchstone in one hand while he read.

Margo had been up for several hours when he finished the book. When he set it down she came in and stood in the doorway, watching him silently.

After a few minutes she asked, "Do you love me?"

He looked up, faintly surprised. "Yes, of course."

"I wasn't sure."

"Why not? Is anything wrong?"

She came over and sat on the bed next to him in her

terry-cloth robe. "It's just that you've hardly spoken to me since yesterday. I thought maybe you were angry about something."

Randolph smiled. "No. Why should I be angry?"

"I don't know. It just seemed that . . ." She shrugged.

He reached out and touched her face with his free hand. "Don't worry about it."

She lay down beside him, resting her head on his arm. "And you do love me? Everything's all right?"

He turned the stone over in his right hand. "Of course everything's all right," he said softly.

She pressed against him. "I want to kiss you."

"All right." He turned to her and brushed his lips across her forehead and nose. Then she held him tightly while she kissed his mouth.

When she had finished he lay back against the pillow and looked up at the ceiling. "Is it sunny out today?" he asked. "It's been dark in here all day."

"I want to kiss you some more," she said. "If that's all right with you."

Randolph was noticing the warmth of the touchstone in his hand. Rocks aren't warm, he thought; it's only my hand that gives it warmth. Strange.

"Of course it's all right," he said, and turned to let her kiss him again.

Bobby stayed in his room most of the day; Randolph supposed he was doing something. Margo, after that one time, didn't try to talk to him. Randolph stayed in bed fingering the touchstone and thinking, though whenever he tried to remember what he'd been thinking about he drew a blank.

Around five-thirty his friend Blake appeared at the door. Randolph heard him say something to Margo, and then he came into the bedroom.

"Hey, are you all right? You weren't at the party last night."

Randolph shrugged. "Sure. I just felt like lounging around this weekend."

Blake's weathered face cleared. "Well, that's good. Listen, I've got a problem."

"A problem," Randolph said. He settled down in the bed, looking idly at the stone in his hand.

Blake paused. "You sure everything's all right? Nothing wrong with Margo? She didn't look good when I came in."

"We're both fine."

"Well, okay. Look, Ran, you know you're the only close friend I've got, don't you? I mean, there's a lot of people in the world, but you're the only one I can really count on when the chips are down. Some people I joke with, but with you I can talk. You listen. You know?"

Randolph nodded. He supposed he was right.

"Well . . . I guess you heard the commotion last night. A couple guys drank too much, and there was a fight."

"I went to bed early."

"I'm surprised you slept through it. It developed into quite a brawl there for awhile; the cops came later on. They broke three windows and somebody pushed over the refrigerator. Smashed everything all to hell. One of the doors is off the hinges."

"No, I didn't hear it."

"Wow. Well, look, Ran . . . the super is on my neck. He's going to sue me, he's going to kick me out. You know that guy. I've got to get ahold of some money fast, to fix things up."

Randolph didn't say anything. He had found a place on the stone where his right thumb fit perfectly, as though the stone had been molded around it. He switched the stone to his left hand, but it didn't quite fit that thumb.

Blake was nervous. "Look, I know it's short notice. I wouldn't ask you, but I'm stuck. Can you lend me about a hundred?"

"A hundred dollars?"

"I might be able to get by with eighty, but I figured a bribe to the super . . ."

"All right. It doesn't make any difference."

Blake paused again, looking at him. "You can do it?"

"Sure."

"Which? Eighty or a hundred?"

"A hundred if you want."

"You're sure it won't . . . bother you, make you short? I mean, I could look around somewhere else . . ."

"I'll write you a check," Randolph said. He got up slowly and took his checkbook from the dresser. "How do you spell your first name?"

"G-E-N-E." Blake stood nervously, indecisive. "You're sure it's no trouble? I don't want to pressure you."

"No." Randolph signed the check, tore it out and handed it to him.

"You're a friend," Blake said. "A real one."

Randolph shrugged. "What the hell."

Blake stood for a few seconds more, apparently wanting to say something. But then he thanked him again and hurried out. Margo came and stood in the doorway and looked at him silently for a moment, then went away.

"Are you going to get me the marbles tomorrow?" Bobby said that evening over supper.

"Marbles?"

"I told you. I still have to pay that guy for the frog you made me throw away."

"Oh. How many?"

"Thirty-five of them. I owed him sixty, and I only had twenty-five."

Bobby was silent, picking at his corn. He speared three kernels carefully with his fork and slid them off the fork with his teeth.

"I'll bet you forget."

Margo looked up from where she had been silently eating. "Bobby!"

"I'm finished with my dinner," Bobby said quickly, standing up. He threw a quick glance at Randolph. "I'll bet he does forget," he said, and ran out.

After five minutes of silence between them Margo stood up and started clearing away the dishes. Randolph was rubbing the touchstone against the bridge of his nose.

"I'd like to sleep with you tonight," she said.

"Of course," he said, a bit surprised.

She stopped beside him and touched his arm. "I don't mean just sleep. I want you to love me."

He nodded. "All right."

But when the time came she turned away and lay silently

in the dark. He went to sleep with one arm lying carelessly across her hips.

When the telephone rang he came out of sleep slowly. It was ringing for the fifth time when he answered it.

It was Howard, at the agency. "Are you all right?" he asked.

"Yes, I'm all right," Randolph said.

"It's past ten. We thought maybe you were sick and couldn't call."

"Past ten?" For a moment he didn't know what that meant. Then Margo appeared in the doorway from the kitchen, holding the alarm clock in her hand, and he remembered it was Monday.

"I'll be there in an hour or so," he said quickly. "It's all right; Margo wasn't feeling too good, but she's all right now."

Margo, her face expressionless, put the clock down on the chair next to the bed and looked at him for a moment before leaving the room.

"Nothing serious, I hope," said Howard.

"No, it's all right. I'll see you in awhile." He hung up.

He sat on the edge of the bed and tried to remember what had happened. The past two days were a blur. He had lost something, hadn't he? Something he'd been holding.

"I tried to wake you three times," Margo said quietly. She had come back into the room and was standing with her hands folded under her breasts. Her voice was level, controlled. "But you wouldn't pay any attention."

Randolph was slowly remembering. He'd had the touchstone in his hand last night, but it must have slipped out while he was asleep. He began to search among the covers.

"Did you see the stone?" he asked her.

"What?"

"The stone. I've dropped it."

There was a short silence. "I don't know. Is it so important right now?"

"I paid five dollars for it," he said, still rummaging through the bed.

"For a rock?"

He stopped suddenly. Yes, five dollars for a rock, he thought. It didn't sound right.

"Ran, what's the matter with you lately? Gene Blake was up here this morning. He gave back your check and said to apologize to you. He was really upset. He said he didn't think you really wanted to loan him the money."

But it wasn't just a rock, Randolph thought. It was a black, smooth touchstone.

"Is something worrying you?" she asked him.

The back of his neck was suddenly cold. Worrying me? he thought. No, nothing's been worrying me. That's just the trouble.

He looked up. "It may be cold out today. Can you find my gloves?"

She looked at him for a moment and then went to the hall closet. Randolph got up and started dressing. In a few minutes she returned with the gloves. He put them on. "It's a little cold in here right now," he said.

When she had gone back into the kitchen he started looking through the bed again, this time coldly and carefully. He found the touchstone under his pillow, and without looking at it he slipped it into a paper bag. He put the bag into his coat pocket.

When he got to the agency he made his excuses as glibly as possible, but he was sure they all knew that he had simply overslept. Well, it wasn't that important . . . once.

He stopped off at the store on his way home that night. It was just as he remembered it, and the same man was inside. He raised his thick eyebrows when he saw Randolph.

"You came back quickly."

"I want to return the touchstone," Randolph said.

"I'm not surprised. So many people return my magic pieces. Sometimes I think I am only lending them too, like the books."

"Will you buy it back?"

"Not at the full price. I have to stay in business."

"What price?" Randolph asked.

"A dollar only," the man said. "Or you could keep it, if that's not enough."

Randolph thought for a moment. He certainly didn't intend to keep the stone, but a dollar wasn't much. He could throw the stone away . . .

But then someone would probably pick it up.

"Do you have a hammer here?" he asked. "I think it would be better to break the stone."

"Of course I have a hammer," the man said. He reached into one of the lower drawers of his desk and brought one out, old and brown with rust.

He held it out. "The hammer rents for a dollar," he said.

Randolph glanced sharply at the man, and then decided that that wasn't really surprising. He had to stay in business, yes. "All right." He took the hammer. "I wonder if the veins of the rock are as smooth as the outside."

"Perhaps we'll see the fossilized soul," said the man. "I never know about the things I sell."

Randolph knelt and dropped the touchstone from its bag onto the floor. It rolled in a wobbling circle and then lay still.

"I knew quite a bit about rocks when I was young," he said. "I used to pick them up at the beach."

He brought the hammer down on the touchstone and it shattered into three pieces which skittered across the floor and bounced to a stop. The largest one was next to Randolph's foot.

He picked it up and the owner of the store turned on the overhead lightbulb. Together they examined the rock's fragment.

There was a fossil, but Randolph couldn't tell what it was. It was small and not very distinct, but looking at it he felt a chill strike out at him. It was as ugly and unformed as a human foetus, but it was something older, a kind of life that had died in the world's mud before anything like a man had been born.

We discovered Allen Kim Lang in, of all camp places, the blood bank at Indiana University. "I've shaken hands with Harry Truman," said AKL, "submitted fuller biographical material than this to Dr. Alfred Kinsey, and sold my first story a dozen years ago to PLANET (same magazine Bradbury began in: he's rather far ahead). I'm chief technician in the ARC blood program here," said Lang, holding up a test-tube to the light, "processing 20,000 liters (I prefer to ignore English measuration outside of public house pints) of blood yearly. (BE A BLOOD-DONOR . . . Commercial.) I spent four years in the Infantry and four in the Air Force, where I discovered and espoused pacifism. If you don't start WW III, I won't either. Middle name, Kim, is the gift of a Korean family; it's the commonest Korean name, and means *gold.* All of this family, including the 17-year-old ROC youngest son, who learned to use a slide-rule without understanding the English in which I demonstrated it to him, are dead. Except me. My agent, splendid man, signs his name in Chinese. We Orientals are taking over. See Otto v. Bismark for details." Mr. Lang went on to explain the scientific basis for the fast-moving, stylistically-sparkling story below: whole blood is currently being stored in liquid nitrogen at c. −320° C; hypothermia is now a standard surgical procedure; and experiments with cooling rats indicates that it has no adverse effect on the ability to think. We have not been altogether the same since . . . and perhaps, after reading this little goody from the gory crypts, you will not be, either.

THAW AND SERVE

by Allen Kim Lang

Doc Warner's blood lubricated the handcuffs onto my wrists. A police-sergeant draped me in a sweated sheet to lead me from the bedroom where Mildred Warner crouched in a corner, screaming.

"McWha," his Honor said, "you've led busy life."

Indeed.

THAW AND SERVE

The years my contemporaries spent at basketball saw me at Bosky Knoll, an asylum where wolf-cub claws are blunted with Freudian snips. My talons proved tougher than my keepers' clippers. At fifteen, sated with cant and honey, I parolled myself across the chain-link fence and rode the Citrus Express into the city.

Establishing my stake with the aid of a stocking filled with gravel, I entered the pharmaceutical field. Unlike a certain fool who, asked why he held up banks, explained: "Because that's where the money is," I had decided that wealth is most easily pried from the fists of the poor, whose grip is weak. Proffer a Kopyright Kure for Kancer, and the carriage-trade wrinkles its nose. But it clix on the brix.

My welcome to the inner chambers of the Full-Service Bank I favored was won with *qat*, a herb harvested in the sheikdoms of Yemen and unknown, until I introduced it, to our wholesomer clime. While fat-rumped lawmen slashed down groves of marijuana in the public parks, a weed benign as wine, Wolfman McWha pushed at schoolside soda-fountains a brand of tea habit-forming as sins against chastity; and I won for my industry at import the price of a harem of Yemen's only other market-worthy crop, to be disposed of through a consortium of used-flesh dealers in another hemisphere.

Competition was a bother until I discovered arguments developed in the Caribbean from Prussian pilot-models. Distrusting dangerous electrical paraphernalia, I used above all other tools a rod of steel long as a man's forearm and of the diameter of his least external orifice; a device which served all commercial purposes from a mild reproof to the manufacture of a corpse mute to the canniest coroner's physician.

A carnivore in a world where gruel had become the native dish, I was too proud to hide my bristles under sheepskin. Had Slick McWha deigned to dole out dimes to starvlings (the Wicked's Mite) he'd never have been exiled into Paradise. What doomed me was the lack of wit to be a hypocrite.

The only revenge I had intended taking upon Doctor Warner was the seduction of his wife; however, to be brisk as surgery *ante* Morton, he surprised us in the consummation of his shame. I seized the nearest object sufficient to parry

the doctor's violent walking-stick (a bookend; the Warners were a literate couple) and swung. He lay dead and she stood screaming.

In gyves, Slick McWha served Telstar's bouncy purpose. The camera showed the killer fenced in before the solemn bench, where a fat black bat twittered disclaimers to his sup of blood: "Ours is a civilization that no longer kills, but only cools." The sentence, then (C. U. my murderer's face, pan to my clenching fists):

"Kevin McWha, the servants of the State are directed to sequester you for

"TWO HUNDRED YEARS,

"at the end of which time, by the Grace of God and the Pace of Science, you will awake in a world prepared to deal with monsters healingly."

On the Stevie-set over the cash-register at your neighborhood tavern you might have seen, after the penultimate commercial, the next step in the McWoeful way of McWha; the Helium Chamber of the Criminal Crypts.

Insidious Fu Manchu, thou shouldst have lived this hour! *Vide*: silicone straps to hold the delinquent while the smoking vats of liquid gas are tilted over his limbs. The medusoid head-dress to lend a classic touch, together with junior lightnings that leap the cleavage of brass breasts. The victim, calling out details of his regretted turpitude as he's lowered into his tub of Time. . . .

That schtick's worn thin. The truth is this:

A bed. A nurselet, cozy in blue-striped blouse and starched white apron (and nymphettophageous Wolfman knows cozydom!) leans primly over dexter deltoid with two-cc. syringe and stainless needle. "This won't hurt a bit, Mister Son-of-Woe."

She stings. Two hundred years are gone.

No sleep, no chill from my two centuries' soak at 1° Absolute. Just a bee-sting that still smarts, a dozen decades after the dimpled bee's decayed.

The Future's machines wake me and pat me to shape. A naked citizen, Tarzan, comes to walk me in the park. On his left biceps is strapped a silver disc. Anti-McWha device, I posit. "We know why you're with us, Kevin." Wry mouth. "Your dossier is foxed a bit, but we've read it."

Nudism is the style of these comely pedestrians; they've tamed the weather to make it bearable. Wolfman slavers, two centuries celibate, as a girl's gym-class prances past to the tennis-courts.

"No cities; we're beyond the need for efficiency." Milder than milk, which presupposes active glands, my cicerone smiles.

Wolfman smiles, too. *Six Trix Fix Hix* flix his inner pix. "No drug-addiction?" I ask.

"Goodness, no." The fink from the future frowns. "We do have something of a coffee-problem," he confesses.

Add another Black Battalion, thinx Slick McWha. Illicit Java. "No other vice?"

"Perhaps self-satisfaction," says the sweet meech.

No license, I, to peddle ennui. "You've got Cloud-Cuckoo-Land indeed," says cloud-dispelling, cuckoo-cuckolding, land-grabbing Slick McWha.

"We like it here."

"So do I . . . to visit," testifies the sheep-thief.

"You can't go back." A lion, curry-combed to a comeliness no President's-daughter's-pony had in my day yet attained, stalks up to a nearby yew-tree, where he lies down with a lamb. Leo yawns. Lambkin, big-eyed as a peace-walker discovered in a Legion bar, feels her cud turn sour.

"What do you intend to do with me?" ask I, the devil's willingest advocate.

"We'll study you," my ribbon-clerk replies. "You'll do well to cooperate. We'll use force if need be."

"Shame!"

". . . to prevent, say, murder. Rape." Taut look.

"You remember the four-letter lyrics, but you've lost the four-letter lilt," I comment.

"You appear to think that civilized means soft," protests History's Minion. He sees a honeybee light on a golden flower and closes his eyes.

"The truth with this Future," I muse, "is that it's trimmed of testicularity. Fortunately, thanx to the magic of cryogenics (*Anything That Goes In Can Be Frozen; "Break the Law," You'll Freeze & Thaw*, etc.), your hormone-gap is about to be plugged." Dead to shame, Slick McWha voyeurs honeybee twiddling butt-up in buttercup, wonder-

ing, Do monsters on pulp-magazines seize macromastic Earthgirls to sup such innocent dew?

Virgil opens his eyes, pale blue like watered milk. "We want no snakeseed scattered here in Eden," he says. "In any case, our women wouldn't have you."

"Like Poland wouldn't have the SS," growls the Wolf. No response. The Future has no nasty Past.

I think then the thought uppermost in the mind of every fictive Sleeper Waking, the urgency to inspect the headlines that I've missed. "You're at peace?" I inquire.

"Of course," my dainty superman agrees, his mouth a butter-cooler. "Through antenatal conditioning, we've eliminated the birth-trauma. Since there's no poverty, there's no anxiety. Look there:" Twin teenaged darlings, Geminae, dusted with freckles like cinnamoned sweetcakes, stroll hand in hand past Wolf and Rabbit, nod golden heads and pass, not ceasing to sing together in voices like young violins. "The body is no longer the vessel of shame," Rabbit babbitts. "Our Ids are sanitary as our Superegos."

Wolfman licks his lips, tasting sugared cinnamon. "I spoke," I say, "not of you alone, gentle pewt; but of your world."

"Earth is no more a circle of blood-sprent sand," says my beef-cake Fauntleroy. Then, like the handsome stranger in a ladies' magazine, he croons, "But let's talk now about you." He indicates two stone benches, dos-a-dos, cushioned with a moss velour. A little stream, fast-moving, runs to our right, fraying against the three stepping-stones. The air smells of cold water, of pine-needles and grass bruised by naked childfeet. I lust after an atavistic cigar. "It's my privilege to help you find your new career," the milksop says.

"My work was chosen in the dice-fall of my genes," I tell him. "I am, by gland-drive and by training, an entrepreneur."

"A thief," interprets my man from Intourist. "We've seen your dossier, remember?" He touches pinkies tip-to-tip, the top tip to his lips, a curate counting in his head the cucumber-sandwiches he requires for the Parsonage tea. "There's no business here for dope-peddlers," he says. "Nor do we, Kevin McWha, solicit the services of panders, cancer-quacks, or Big-Board bandits."

"A man from the past deserves subsidy," I suggest. "Like a Ming vase, he should be preserved as a national treasure."

"Ming vases of your pattern are commoner than milk-bottles," Mister Interlocutor tells me. "Do you forget the crime statistics of your unkempt day? How your courts, more merciful to contemporaries than to descendants, chilled the mischief-makers and shipped you ahead like frozen fish, to be thawed out stinking in our gentler age?"

"The Judge assured me you'd have new techniques," I point out. "He said you'd have a medicine for misdemeanants."

"We have a rod," answers Exquisite, tracing a steely line in the air, "two hand-breadths long, and very thin."

"I know that rod," says Wolfman, his insides gone albino.

"The conjunctiva of one eye-socket is pierced, the eyeball being cushioned on the sufferer's cheek," my new unfriend elaborates. "Through a small incision in the upper orbit, the rod probes for and disrupts those precincts of the brain-mantle where the Id lives. The eye is then screwed back into its socket, and the whilom sociopath returns to the company of his fellows clean and open-hearted as a child."

"Charming," I say. "Is it not true, however, that your brain-scoured convalescent is apt to find poetry a bore, and love a fiction?"

"Ah, yes," sighs this coaxial-clipper. "To be quite candid, Kevin, our prefrontal philanthropy often leaves our new brother paretically impotent. But the new you will find celibacy no heavy burden."

"How absolute the knave is!" I cry, crossing my legs. "If you're bound to prune me, you'll come at me with an honest gelding-knife, not short my fuses like a burglar." There is some asperity in my tone. My therapist fondles the silver Wolfbane on his left arm, and I unclench my fists.

"Most of you say that," the sheepdog says. "We're not bound, all the same, to let the sinners of our forefathers visit upon us unchecked. We must, as you say, defuze you, as one would defuze a . . . what was the thing called? Bomb?"

"Is there no need in this pleasure-park of demolition?" I demand. "Are assassins' blades now dry letter-openers, coy fingernail-parers?"

"Do I hear rightly, Kevin McWha?" asks the nude frontiersman, his cheeks flushed with rude hemoglobin. "Had you really rather kill than be cured?"

"Five-by-five," I answer. "Yes!"

Kewpie glances up, gauging the altitude of the sun. "You must be hungry," he suggests.

"I haven't had a bite to eat in six generations," Wolfman points out. "A ham sandwich could bridge the void of centuries."

"Ham? No, Kevin. We no longer exploit our fellow-beasts for protein."

"No matter," I sigh, rising to follow him down the garden path. "I'm sure there's no mustard, either, here."

We pass the mausoleum. Son-of-Woe shudders with a chilly thought of the two hundred years he lay there, ripening like a cicada in the earth. I consider the gelid thousands buried still in that timeproof dungeon, waiting for a Lincoln to strike free their icy chains.

The park cuddles about the village of Adamites, who are strolling its paths placidly soaking sunlight, not flinching even at the sight of preserved great-great-grandpa's Twentieth-Century walking-shorts. The houses, Black Forest clock-cases, scatter about playing-fields where snowtopped gentlefolk croquet with balsa balls, and wading-pools where bare babies laugh and slop their feet. I see virgins whose breasts have not conceded gravitation bouncing about a-bowling on the green.

The community hall bears above its entrance a motto my host translates to mean *Don't Rock The Boat.*

We enter the dining-hall and take a table between the fountain and the orchestra. Gymnosophs of all shades, patent-leather Zulu to chamois-skin Finn, stop to gossip with my tour-director. Their language is soft and open-mouthed, like Hawaiian. My English speech, raucous echo from Baltic marshes and Rhenish forests, is not unknown. "Welcome," one says; another, "Eat hearty!" A young man grins. "We'll be seeing you," he says.

After a refection of biscuits and crisp greens, we move to a table in the small motion-picture theater. The film is patently a love-story. We are in, so to speak, at the kill. The hero and heroine are sealing their troth in a triumphant act

of kind, string-music racing bedsprings to crescendo. Drums, hautboys, and a trumpet-blast; Fade Out.

"Now," announces Adonis, "the Feature." He hands me a sweet from the shallow bowl on our table.

On the stereo screen blooms the planet Earth, photographed from perhaps the moon. A Zeus-size zoo-mar hurls us down. Space-sick, I grip the table-edge to make it creak. We're falling toward Australia, old continent of exile.

We drop into the woods of Arnam Land, the front ear of the kangaroo I saw in the atlas as a child. "This used to be an Aboriginal Area," chuckles Constant Companion. "Unfortunately, the little brown boomerangers have lost their forests to a fiercer breed." The camera that feeds our screen swoops and ducks through fat-stemmed gum-trees. Tropical birds, blood-red bile-green, caw and chatter from the tufts of screw-palms. The swampmud belches bubbles.

One man appears, wearing a kilt of pounded bark. His blond beard is streaked with the yolk of his breakfast eggs; his feet are wrapped in buskins of crocodile-hide. He waves his right arm—the left holds a nine-foot spear—and companions scruffy as himself skulk from behind the cycadpalms and stringybark trees into the clearing. Our camera perches on a convenient wild-fig tree to kibitz the making-camp.

"That's a death-spear the leader carries," my interpreter whispers. "Bits of shell and stone are stuck to its point with resin, to wipe off in the wound and cause a festering death."

The camera flutters off its perch to inspect the band of junglemen in detail. A red-bearded giant whose right eye lies buried in its crushed arch swings his morning-star about his head, cursing the camera. One-eye's weapon, a rock the size of two hands clasped, bagged at the end of a liana, whips up toward the eavesdropping automaton. The camera hops in the air; the rock drops back to its hurler.

The rest of the primitives ignore our watchbird. Some twenty men beat about in the bamboo-clumps for hidden enemies. All clear. Blondy whistles through his teeth. Four hags, leeched dry by heat and protozoa, herd children from the bush. The camera peers. Kids are everywhere. These youngsters are skinny, their hair plastered back with mud. We're treated to a closeup of one of the girls, some twelve years old. Her skin is pebbled with raspberry lesions, and

her hair has mostly fallen out. A boy of six is led to the center of the clearing by his sister. The camera holds a clinical conference on his white-filmed eyes. A worm uncoils behind one translucent pupil. "My God!" I bark.

"We're not religious here," Nig-Nog remarks. "But watch now, Kevin-lad."

One of the leather women takes a sack of fish from her shoulder and spits bits on twigs. Another, who carries coals in an earthware pot, piles up the jungle-duff the children bring her and starts the cookfire. The men rest on their haunches, crutching up exhaustion on their spear-shafts.

As though the perfume of roasting fish were their signal, a second troop screams from the jungle. Ambush! One of the attackers swings his string of pawnbroker-balls about his head, releases it, and straps Blondy to his useless spear. Another kneels at the jungle-edge to fit flints into the pouch of his pellet-bow, flinging bullets against the skulls of the defenders. The blind boy, howling, blunders into the legs of a man with a mace, who swats him dead with a hammerblow.

Victory for the ambushers. One hero drags the girl with yaws to the fringes of the clearing, where he bangs her head against a log and rapes her. The camera swoops to remind its audience of the Psalmist's Fourth Wonder, the way of a man with a maid.

Blondy is trussed between forks above his cookfire. The winners snatch fish from under his screaming body to tear and finger-lick. Others gather about the victims with stone knives, giggling and holding up from time to time bits of bloody flesh. The women are enjoyed in order of the victor's rank.

After half an hour, the stolen fish all eaten, the battered women are led off into the jungle on halters. Flies settle to police the area.

Wolfman fights back peristalsis. "I thought you didn't have war," I say.

"We don't," says my fellow-viewer, leading me into the sunlight. "But you fellows do. It's your nature."

We sit again on the mossy benches by the stream. "It really happened?" I ask.

"Ten minutes ago," he says.

"You give the men and women you thaw from the Crimi-

nal Crypts a choice," I say. "Zombihood or transport to Australia."

"The first is the wiser option," says the surgeon's nark. "Some of our most pleasant citizens were once as wild as you are, Kevin. The others, as you saw, furnish us the excitement healthy humans need, making the blood sing through our veins in the ancient poetry of slaughter."

He is strong, but with his right arm broken he can't trigger the Wolfman-gun on his left. He belches as I hold his golden head under the singing creek. At last I wedge him between the first and second stepping-stone. I strap to my arm his silver disc and run. I run past the Crypts, where companions wait an unhallowed resurrection.

I hear dogs, now, baying beside the little stream where I washed away the trail. I'm heading into the mountains, wolf-country.

When I come downhill again, when I've crowned myself King of the Frozen Pirates, I'll make the blood sing through the veins of these loving folk. And from them.

Few of us have been entirely satisfied with our teachers, but we have been unfortunate indeed if we cannot look back thankfully and gratefully to at least *one* teacher who was interested above the average. How much more important, then, must be the role of such a teacher in teaching the so-called "ineducable?" There are those whose mental capacities are stunted by birth, or before; and those whom social environment has warped. And sometimes not even the evil partnership of congenital and environmental affliction seems to offer the full explanation . . .

NADA

by Thomas M. Disch

"WHAT WORD begins with *J*?" Oveta Wohlmuth surveyed the twenty apathetic faces confronting her, the forty dull eyes that watched her only because the seats in the classroom did not comfortably allow them to focus on anything else. "Jill—"

Jill Coldfax looked down at the maple slab of her desk, stolidly silent, invincibly ignorant, resigned and resentful.

"*J*—can't you think of a word that begins with a *J*-sound? Jill?"

Three children laughed; Oveta, for the moment, ignored them. The remaining sixteen faces had sunk, weighted by shame, to contemplate the varnished surfaces of their desks, where, as in mirrors, they were confronted with their own natures: blank tablets upon which years of abuse had left a few beautiless scars as the only evidence of their passage —sixteen faces thus, except for one, which stared at Oveta with disconcerting steadiness, avoiding her glance; which had stared at her so all that day and for many days past.

"Nada—what begins with *J*?"

Nada had been gazing at the monogram on Oveta's collar. Since she had been moved, in November, to the front row (where it was harder to go to sleep) Nada Perez had learned to achieve trance state without even closing her eyes.

"Nada!"

"Kangaroo. *K* is for Kangaroo."

"We were on *J*, Nada." For all that, it was a kind reproach.

"I thought you asked that already. *J* is for Jam." Nada's eyes slipped back from the ironic twist of Oveta's lip to the soothing nothingness of the silver O.

"And what is a kangaroo?"

Nobody knew. She sketched one on the blackboard and pointed out Australia on the Repogle globe, but the forty eyes rested on these artifacts of their education with the same glazed and weighty disinterest that they had evidenced for anything that came before them in the guise of learning.

These children were the special problems in a school for the exceptional: special in the sense that all the other teachers there had despaired of them. All, that is, except Oveta Wohlmuth, who, partly because they were her job and partly because it was natural to her, was more optimistic. "I *can* teach them to learn," she had said once to a friend, once her fiancé, now only a colleague, a specialist himself in exceptional children—but exceptional for their talent rather than their lack of it.

"Why bother?" he had scoffed. "So that they can, after great labors, achieve something else than mediocrity?"

"Why ever bother, John? I bother because others won't, because someone must."

Sometimes, fortunately, it was worth her bother. Sometimes she would break through the apathy, see light dawning in eyes suddenly alive, watch the first floods of knowledge wash across the shallows of a retarded face. At such moments she could have answered her doubters more eloquently. Many years ago there had been Alfredo, who had become an Air Force officer and was occasionally mentioned in news accounts of Pentagon intrigues; and, more recently, Marion, who had married a novelist and was raising three dismayingly bright children. They, and their like, were the reasons she could not stop bothering, although she was now past fifty and, with her doctorate and years of experience with "special problems," could easily have retired to the

relative ease of college teaching. That she did two evenings a week.

Now there was Nada.

A very special problem, Nada. The girl knew much that she would not admit to knowing: the alphabet, words like kangaroo. Oveta suspected that the real limits of her clandestine knowledge were far broader than her few accidental betrayals of it could lead one justly to believe. In fact, she suspected that Nada was a genius-in-hiding, and, like a hunter close on the scent, she was excited at the prospect of scaring that genius out of cover.

But Nada was a difficult quarry. She could be relentlessly, stupefyingly dull. Only once that Oveta had seen had Nada forgotten to be dull. It had been during art period, the day the class had tried watercolors. While the other nineteen special problems wrestled unhappily with the special problems of watercolor, Nada painted. She *painted.*

A picture of the gray Brooklyn tenements outside the schoolroom, not distorted into forbidding expressionistic shapes, but quietly real: full volumes in true spaces—beautiful. It reminded Oveta somehow of a seascape: the elemental rhythms of the calligraphy, the subdued colors, its peace.

So it was that that afternoon—the Day of the Kangaroo—Oveta asked Nada to stay after class. Nada stood before the teacher's desk, a dowdy twelve-year-old, fat, sallow, her clothes in need of laundering, her black hair hanging down to her shoulders in untended, greasy curls, dark eyes staring with steady, dull fixity on Oveta's silver pin.

"How do you feel you're coming along in school, Nada?" The girl shifted her weight with lethargic uneasiness. "I mean . . . you don't seem to take an interest in classwork. Perhaps it bores you?"

"No."

"Do you like school?"

"Yes, I like school."

"What do you like about it?" Oveta asked slyly.

"I—" Nada's mouth hung open as though she were waiting for Oveta to fill it with words she could not invent herself. Then, when the words did not come, it slowly closed.

"Do you like art class? You do very nice things, you

know. With a little practice you could become a good painter. Would you like that?"

"I—" Then, slowly, it closed.

"Of course, practice is important. Do you practice at home?"

"No."

"Would you like to?"

"Yes . . ." An uncertain *yes*, but for all that, Oveta had made her say it.

"Here, then, is a set of watercolor paints, and here is some special paper. The paints belong to the school, so take good care of them."

They lay in Nada's hands, like alien artifacts demanding explication.

"You can take them home—to practice with. Now run along, darling, and show me what you've done, tomorrow."

Oveta never called a child darling.

"A spaceship?" Mrs. Butler asked.

"Well, it didn't look like a spaceship," Oveta went on. "It was shaped a little more like a cornucopia."

"Do you still have the picture?"

"No, Nada took it back home with her."

"How would she know the exact dimensions of a spaceship?" Butler asked in a rhetorical tone. "Or anyone else, for that matter? Especially a twelve-year-old retarded Puerto Rican girl. Or, even if she had some idea from tv or the movies, her draughtsmanship might not have been up to the job."

"Her draughtsmanship is excellent. Judge for yourself; there's an example hanging in your living room."

In the living room at that moment there was a shiver of minor-keyed music, a voice that cried: *"But don't you understand? Earth is being invaded!"*

"Turn down the volume, Billy," Butler shouted into the living room. Then, turning back to Oveta: *"She did that!* —and I thought at first glance it was a Marin! Mmm. Is your plan working out with her?" A tone of professional interest had crept into his voice. "Is she doing better in school?"

"Not that I can see."

"Martians!" said the voice in the next room. *"Now I've heard everything!"*

"Don't be discouraged," Mrs. Butler said with perfunctory good cheer. "Would you like another piece of pie?"

"Thank you, no."

"There they are now—coming out of the sewers!"

"Would you tell Billy to turn down the tv," Butler shouted. "You can't hear yourself think. Oveta, that girl is *talented.* She'll waste away in that slum, marry some dock worker, and never be seen again if we don't do something for her—and soon."

"Billy, turn off the tv and come and have another piece of pie."

"Oh, how horr—"

Oveta smiled. "That's why I came to see you."

"Why does she have this block against learning anything. I've heard of geniuses camouflaging as average kids—but as a sub-normal?"

"Where is it?" Billy asked, taking his place at the table. His mother handed him the pie.

"She's a very strange girl," Oveta said. "I don't understand her at all."

"A pretty girl?" Mrs. Butler asked.

"On the contrary, quite unattractive. She lives with her mother; no father is mentioned on her enrollment card. . . ."

Mrs. Butler tssked. "And the mother's on relief, I suppose."

"I suppose," Oveta grudged. "A slum background. No books in the home. She probably didn't learn English till she came to school. It's not unusual."

"She's unusual, though," Butler insisted.

"Dad, do Martians have tentacles?"

"Don't interrupt the grown-ups, Billy," Mrs. Butler scolded. "And don't be silly—there's no such thing as Martians."

"He's only asking a question, Bridget. And we don't know there aren't any Martians. When we land a spaceship on Mars, Billy," he explained, "we'll find out whether there are Martians—and if they have tentacles."

"On tv," Billy explained patiently, "they showed one. It wasn't on Mars. It was in the sewer, and it had tentacles and big eyes. . . ."

"That was just a story. They weren't the *real* Martians," Mrs. Butler added sarcastically, for her husband's benefit.

". . . and they were going to conquer Earth," Billy concluded.

"Martians are a much-maligned people," Oveta said with mock seriousness. "Always the invaders. If I were a Martian, I think I'd settle down and take it easy."

Butler's eyes twinkled. "Like Mrs. Perez?" he suggested.

"Yes," Oveta returned, "like Mrs. Perez." Mrs. Butler's cooking was beginning to have its usual effects. She felt the first spasm of indigestion.

"If you folks will excuse me, it's time I started on my way home."

"Watch out for the Martians!" Billy shouted to her when she reached the door. Billy doubled with laughter. His father chuckled.

Outside, the air was misty—verging on rain. Oveta raised the hood of her coat.

—Is it too late to go there? she wondered. As though there were ever really a proper time for it!

Once already that week, when Nada had shown her the watercolor of the odd, cornucopean spaceship (starship, she had called it) circling above a distant, moonlit Earth and then had returned the watercolors and left the classroom with a mumbled "Thanks," Oveta had given way to an unconsidered impulse and followed the girl home. Just to see, she had told herself, what Nada's neighborhood was like. She had kept a block's distance between her and her quarry, careful of the film of ice that slicked the streets, preventing herself from thinking of anything but the mechanics of pursuit and concealment; on her right hand, an unending, undifferentiated facade of brick and brownstone, on her left, a monotonous procession of parked cars or, sometimes, banks of soot-crusted snow; and Nada always a block ahead.

She had been too ashamed of her senseless pursuit of Nada to mention it to Butler that evening. She was still ashamed—and upset—remembering Nada's face at the moment before she had gone up the brownstone steps and into the tenement building, glancing back, not even *looking*, but knowing that Oveta was there and viewing her as casu-

ally as if she had been only a part of the landscape. With neither special recognition nor surprise, simply knowing Oveta was there and then turning away, while Oveta's face had crimsoned and blanched with shame.

Now, as the shame of remembering ebbed away again, Oveta climbed into her gray Renault (thinking again that her legs were really too long for a compact car), and set off in the direction of the waterfront.

It was nine forty-five. The drive, from Butler's apartment toward the waterfront, took her half an hour. She stopped the car by a candy store one block from Nada's building. It had begun to rain.

—In general, the evidence for telepathy is very slight, she thought, while, on the other side of rationality, her mind conjured up the image of a large-eyed, tentacled Martian. (If I were a Martian, she remembered saying, and then Billy's laughter, his father's chuckle: *Watch out for them!*) She pulled her cloth coat more tightly about her and set off against the wind that siphoned up the street from the East River.

By the time she reached 1324, Nada's address, she was chilled through. It was a narrow, six-floor walk-up, with a facade identical to five other buildings in the row. The half-flight of brownstone steps that projected from the doorway onto the sidewalk had been painted bilge-green, a color much-favored by Brooklyn landlords. The green shone with incandescent fervor in the light of the streetlamp overhead. Oveta hesitated at the foot of the stairs.

An old woman trundling a baby carriage passed on the sidewalk and stopped before the row of garbage cans stuffed full for the morning's collection beside the entrance way to 1324. She rummaged through the refuse, oblivious of Oveta, and fished out three nylon stockings knitted into a ball and a broken umbrella. These she put in the carriage and trundled on to the next hoard.

"Starlight, starbright, hope to see a ghost tonight!"

Across from 1324 was an asphalt lot, pretending with a few metal poles to be a playground, from which three small figures ran now, pell-mell, giggling.

"Ready or not, here I come."

It was *almost* Nada's voice. Oveta couldn't be sure. Hesi-

tantly, she crossed the narrow ill-lit street. The girl who was *it* couldn't be seen now. Oveta thought she heard, from *somewhere,* a child's giggle.

"Nada?" she called out uncertainly.

The rain was now a steady drizzle that seemed to hang stationary in the air, haloing the streetlamps with coronas of cold, blue light. Across the street in 1324 Oveta saw the silhouette of a fat woman in a third-floor window. As she watched it, it moved out of sight.

"Nada, are you here?"

"Lousy weather," a voice behind her piped. Turning to see who had addressed her, she became aware that her coat was soaked through.

"But not so bad for January." He chuckled, as though it were the punch line of a joke, the rest of which he had forgotten or did not need to recount. A man's voice, though high-pitched, and wearing a man's clothes, but not the figure of a man. Sitting in the swing (a child's swing that adult hips could not have squeezed into), his feet dangled inches from the asphalt. A midget—or a dwarf. Oveta could not decide, for the swing lay in the shadow of the adjacent building.

"I don't recognize your face. New in the neighborhood?"

"Yes. I mean—a visitor."

"Thought so. I know most the faces on this street. I used to live over there . . ." he waved his hand in a vague arc. ". . . over there," he echoed himself. ". . . and I couldn't help overhearing you mention Nada. You know her?"

"Yes, I do."

"Nice girl. Make a good wife for some lucky fellow." He chuckled.

"Do *you* know Nada?" Oveta asked over-eagerly, for the little man made her feel uncomfortable, afraid that he might think she patronized him.

"Nice girl," he repeated.

"You've spoken with her?"

"Well, she doesn't have much to say—you know how it is. Women aren't great talkers."

"No," Oveta agreed reluctantly, for her experience had led her to the opposite conclusion.

"Men are the talkers. Men will make plans, have the big ideas, reach for the stars. Talking, all the time, like me."

She smiled, as a practical measure to keep her teeth from chattering. "Spaceships are certainly a man's idea," she volunteered.

"But it's the woman," he went on, beginning to rock back and forth in the enclosing seat of the swing, "that get things done. From day to day. Practical. A woman."

In the awkward interval of silence that ensued, broken only by the squeaking of the swing and the susurrus of the rain (which had become heavier, falling in distinct droplets on her cheeks), Oveta stood to leave.

"Nada," the little man began, and ended.

"Nada?" Oveta questioned. The momentum of the swing had died out. His head hung slumped onto his chest. "Are you all right?"

"I'm fine. It's nice weather for January. The rain. I pretend it's warm."

"Could I take you home?"

"I don't have a home."

"I'm sorry. To a hotel somewhere, then? I could loan you a little money. The rain isn't really very warm."

"My wife, you know," he continued, ignoring her offer, perhaps not even hearing it, "my wife died."

"I'm sorry."

"Well, that's the way the tide rises." He chuckled.

Slowly, Oveta retreated toward the street, stepping backward, her eyes on the man, whose hands now fell limply out of the sidebars of the swing. When she reached the sidewalk, she turned.

There was only one light on in 1324, in a third-floor window. Even in silhouette, she could recognize Nada, and she imagined her eyes, dull, impassive, and knowing, offering no recognition, as though Oveta were no more than a figure in a landscape of her own invention.

"She *knows*," Oveta whispered. She began to run.

In the car, she discovered that she had lost one of her shoes on the street, and she had to wait several minutes before her hand was steady enough to insert the ignition key.

"You mean, you've *never* been in Manhattan before?"

"No," Nada repeated, "never."

"Amazing! Why, you're a pure specimen of the Brooklynite. I sometimes think that I've been parochial. . . . Do you know what parochial means?"

"It's a kind of school, but you mean narrow-minded, don't you?"

Oveta laughed. "The opposite of cosmopolitan—or international. And speaking of that—those are the United Nations buildings on your right. Are you interested in architecture?"

"No. I mean—it doesn't seem necessary. Nobody needs a building like that to live in."

"Nobody needs paintings for that matter."

"True."

Oveta was inebriated with her success. The hunt was over; her quarry had broken cover, and she would never be able to return to her pose of numbed stupidity—Oveta would see to that.

That morning, Saturday, Oveta had awakened with the beginnings of a cold and the conviction that she would never be able to speak to Nada again. For exactly that reason she had resolved to return to 1324 on the pretext of taking Nada to the Metropolitan Museum, a visit that Nada had once luke-warmly agreed to make. An unannounced visit to a student's home and then her virtual abduction were not professional tactics, but Oveta had convinced herself that, unless she openly declared herself to Nada, the girl would forever distrust her. Since Nada knew already she was being hunted, Oveta had to tell her *why*.

The plan worked smoothly. Nada had been delivered over to her abductress without the least fuss. Of Mrs. Perez, Oveta had seen only one suspicious eye when she had opened the door and a fat-wreathed forearm thrusting Nada outside. As soon as they had gotten into the Renault, Oveta had declared: "You know, Nada, I think you are probably a very intelligent girl and I think you're trying to hide it."

And Nada had replied without hesitation: "I know. I know you thought that." And then shrugged. But, ever so slightly, she had been smiling. Her eyes had not yet been glazed with their customary dullness but had examined the

car with curiosity. "I've never been in one of these before," she had said, the first time, to Oveta's knowledge, she had ever spoken without being addressed a question.

"In a Renault, you mean?"

"In a car. Does it go?" Nada was smiling.

"Yes, it goes."

"The Metropolitan Museum," Nada had said dreamily. "Well, well. . . ."

"Well, here it is, Nada: the Metropolitan Museum. How do you like it?"

"It's too big; it's ugly!"

"Don't judge a book by its cover."

"Why, Miss Wohlmuth, I don't judge books at all."

Oveta laughed, until she began to choke. Her cold was growing worse. "That must change," she brought out weakly, as they mounted the museum steps.

Nada pouted. Each new expression on the girl's face astonished Oveta, as though she were witnessing a prodigy of nature. She didn't feel entirely in control of the situation (as she had with Alfredo or Marion), but it was more exciting that way.

They hesitated in the Grand Hall, dwarfed by colossal Corinthian columns. Oveta felt awed by the sheer size of the space enclosed by the columns; unconsciously she began to breathe more deeply. Nada, on the other hand, seemed altogether unaffected.

"The paintings are on the second floor, and over to your right are the Egyptian rooms. Hieroglyphics, big basalt statues, and part of a pyramid, a small one. Even so, you'd probably find it all too oversized for your tastes."

"Oh, but I like the Egyptians. They never changed—their art, the way they lived. If it hadn't been for other people coming in, interfering, they would always have stayed the same."

"I suppose we're all like that."

"Let's see the paintings."

Nada gave one glance at the Renaissance paintings and snorted with contempt. Only once in these rooms did Nada show enthusiasm to any degree—for Crivelli's *Madonna and Child*. It was also a favorite of Oveta's.

"Look at the fly on the ledge—the shadow it casts," Oveta pointed out.

"Mmm . . . No, what *I* like is the thing hanging up at the top, by the apples. Its shape. What is it, some kind of vegetable?"

"Squash, I think," Oveta answered crestfallen. "Or maybe a cucumber. The draughtsmanship is beautiful, isn't it? Look at the Virgin's fingers, the curve of her wrist."

"Oh, but that's so *easy!*"

"You try it. You'll see how easy it is."

"What I mean is, it's already been done. Everything here has already been done. Why should I try to do something that's already been done?"

Like a witness going down the line-up at the police station, Nada was hurried past the accumulated centuries of painting. There was little that roused her interest. Bruegel's *Harvesters* inspired her to say respectfully, "It makes you feel sort of sleepy," but her response to Rosa Bonheur's *Horse Fair* reawakened Oveta's worst fears. *The Horse Fair* was a large, furious painting of horses rearing and plunging and galloping on an arc that seemed to sweep out of the picture-plane toward the spectator. One could almost hear the shouting, the stomping, the neighing of the horses, the wind of their running.

"How awful!" Nada gasped.

"Why awful?"

"Oh, it's just too—I mean everything is going somewhere. It makes me dizzy. And a *woman* painted it!"

"Rosa Bonheur, about a century ago. How did you know?" They were standing several feet back from the huge canvas, and at that distance the nameplate was illegible.

"I—" Her mouth hung open, waiting for the words to fill it. Oveta grew frightened, recognizing the characteristic expression of insensibility that was stealing over Nada's features: jaws slackened, eyes fixed on a void, the flesh of her face utterly relaxed, inert.

"Shall we get something to eat? Nada! Listen to me! Would you like to eat now? Shall we go to the restaurant I told you about?"

"Yes."

In the museum restaurant, Nada regained some degree

of alertness by being forced to select a pastry from the rack. By the time she had finished eating it, she seemed fully recovered, and Oveta relaxed again. She had let her coffee go cold before her, tasted once and set aside. Her throat was sore and dry, but the coffee's steaming bitterness repelled her. It's coming along nicely, she thought: I'll be in bed with a cold tomorrow.

"Well, I'm surprised at you, Nada," she said with forced cheer. "I thought you'd find a few Old Masters, at least, who could measure up to your standards. Your tastes seem to be pretty solidly formed."

"Not at all. I've never thought about painting before. But I *do* like the Flemish painters better than the Italian ones. Their women have better shapes."

(—Like squash, Oveta thought.) She said, "That's a pretty definite taste, it seems to me. Where do you learn all the things you know? You must do a lot of reading."

"I *can't* read. You know that. Isn't it time to go home?"

"It's still early, Nada. Would you like to take a walk through the park? We could see Cleopatra's Needle and get some fresh air. And it's only a short way to the Planetarium."

"To see the stars, you mean?"

"Yes. The stars."

"No, that would be . . . boring." She yawned for emphasis.

"Are you tired?"

"Yes. Let's go home."

Last night's rain had frozen to the streets, and Oveta had to divide her attention between Nada and the mechanics of driving. Twice Nada fell asleep, only to be awakened when the car skidded uncertainly to a stop at icy street corners. Oveta manufactured commonplace conversation, pointing out the buildings along Fifth Avenue: St. Patrick's ("No," Nada said, "I don't go to church."); the Library ("No, I don't have a card."); and the Empire State Building ("How awful!").

Finally Oveta blurted out the question she had meant to introduce off-handedly, at an appropriate moment, but that moment had never come. "What are you going to do when you grow up, Nada?"

"Oh—get married, I guess."

"Do you have any boyfriends yet?" Oveta asked doubtfully.

"Mmmm." Nada snuggled into the chill plastic upholstery.

"But don't you want anything *else*? Painting, or some kind of job?"

"No."

"Nothing else at all?"

"No. Nothing. It's cold in here, don't you think?"

"We're almost home now. Do you suppose I could stop in for a moment to have a cup of coffee? It is, as you say, cold in here. Something must be wrong with the heater."

"I guess so," Nada said, with grave doubt.

"If it's too much trouble . . ."

"No. You can come in."

"And in good time! Here we are . . . 1324."

Standing in the garlic-weighted hallway, while Nada negotiated with her mother to let her into the apartment, Oveta listened to the chirruping and trills of what seemed to be a whole aviary of canaries in the apartment opposite the Perez'.

Nada came to the door. "Just a minute. Mommy wants to clean up."

"Don't hurry." But Nada had already disappeared into the apartment. Down the hallway, Oveta watched a fat woman with a shopping bag full of groceries labor up the narrow stairway to the next floor, stopping at every third step for breath. Over the trilling of the canaries Oveta could hear the strained tones of Nada's mother, tugging at something and uttering Spanish imprecations. "*Vayas con diablo,*" and "*Muerto.*"

"Come in." (—And in good time, Oveta thought.)

"Thank you." She offered her hand to Mrs. Perez, who regarded it as though she saw through the flesh to a particularly unwholesome tumor. "I'm so glad to meet you at last, Mrs. Perez."

"*No hablo Ingles.*"

"She can't speak English," Nada interpreted.

Oveta repeated her lukewarm amenity in Spanish: "*Mucho gusto do concerla, Señora Perez.*" Mrs. Perez turned her back on Oveta to throw a pile of unlaundered clothes

from an armchair to the unswept floor. Cockroaches scuttered from the heap.

"Yeah," Mrs. Perez said, "the same to you. Have a chair."

"Why—thank you." Oveta repressed her scruples and sat in the threadbare armchair. There might be bugs, but she could take a bath later, at home.

"You wanna drink?"

"Just a cup of—a drink? Whatever you're having. Thank you."

"Nada, get some glasses."

While Nada went into the next room, her mother sat down on a mattress on the floor and stared at Oveta, who was herself staring at the room in which she found herself, like a Dowager Queen touring her dungeons, suddenly trapped. Oveta could not imagine what measures of tidying Mrs. Perez had taken with the room, for it seemed in a nearly perfect state of disorder: clothes, blankets, and what seemed no more than rags, in various conditions of dirtiness, were heaped over and stuffed under the few scant pieces of furniture. The walls were a pastiche of wall-papers (Oveta counted four distinct patterns) and green paint in various stages of discoloration. The patchwork of linoleum and bare boards on the floor presented a similar spectacle, like an uncared-for billboard in the warehouse district from which the rains had peeled the years' detritus of posters irregularly to create a ragged montage of meaninglessness. Yet, the final impression was not one of wild disarray, or even of untidiness, but rather, sedative, asleep, like a garden gone to seed.

Perhaps it was the figure of Mrs. Perez that produced that impression, for her figure certainly dominated the room. She was a gargantuan woman, of vast breasts and a stomach that hung, gothic and pendulous, over the edge of the mattress and rested on a patch of bare, unpainted boards. It was her face that most fascinated Oveta, for it was the nightmare image of a face that Nada's could become: devoid of expression, stuporous, and vaguely, almost obscenely sensuous, like a composite allegory of the vices, the more lethargic vices.

Nada handed her mother three grease-clouded tumblers, which the woman filled brim-full with gin. (Oveta pre-

sumed it was gin; the bottle, which she replaced at the side of the mattress, was unlabelled.) One tumbler she handed to Oveta, one she kept for herself, the last was Nada's. Oveta sipped warily at her drink; it was gin. Nada drank from her glass as though it contained, at the worst, a sweetened medicine.

Outrageous! Oveta thought. But she kept the thought to herself.

"Mud in your eye!" Mrs. Perez mumbled into her glass, which she proceeded to drain in two swallows and a switch of her tongue.

"Cheers," Oveta returned.

A smile faded from Nada's lips. Her eyes began to take on the glazed, benign indifference of her mother's.

"Nada has told me so much about you," Oveta lied.

"Yeah, kids talk too much."

"Really? I've always thought her a very *quiet* girl. Until today," she added, smiling at Nada, who lowered her eyes to stare at her tumbler of gin and seemed to blush.

"Whadya say?" Mrs. Perez poured herself another tumbler-full.

"Nothing. Nothing at all."

"Mud in your eye."

"Cheers," Oveta replied gloomily, taking a sip of gin. Actually, the liquor felt good trickling down her sore throat, but she felt that she would lose any advantage she possessed in Nada's eyes by seeming to enjoy it.

"Nice apartment."

"Like hell," Mrs. Perez said.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Like hell," Nada repeated. "But I think it's a nice apartment too. Mommy's joking."

Mrs. Perez no longer made a pretense of sitting up. She lay back on the mattress, her eyes closed, and began to snore.

"Your mother seems to be quite . . . worn out."

"She's always that way."

Only a few rays of the afternoon's dying light penetrated the grime-coated windows to spend their power dimly and to no purpose upon the montage of floor and walls and

heaped clothing; darkness spread over the room like a rising tide.

"Nada," Oveta whispered, "you don't want *this*." Her hands gestured awkwardly, but her tone conveyed her disgust eloquently. "You can't. Nada, let me help you get away from this."

"But I do."

"Nada, please."

"This *is* what I want. I *like* it."

Mrs. Perez rolled over on the mattress. "Get out of here," she grunted. "Go on, get out."

When Oveta reached the door, she imagined she heard a chuckle, high-pitched and mocking, but she realized it was only the canaries trilling in the next apartment.

Oveta Wohlmuth's living room was untidy. It could never have been called untidy before, but now there was no other word for it.

Oveta had been in bed (or on the sofa) for four days with her cold. Saturday evening, after returning home in a high fever, she had had to call in a doctor. Sunday she could not remember at all, and the rest of the week until today she had spent impatiently convalescing from what threatened constantly to become pneumonia. Breathing was still slightly painful. Coughing was an agony, but holding it back was worse agony. The doctor had been strict: she could not leave her apartment.

She had contented herself with phoning the substitute teacher twice a day. Nada had not come to school on Monday, or on Tuesday, or yesterday, or today. Perhaps, Oveta thought, Nada had caught cold too, but it was a very faint *perhaps*. The school nurse had visited 1324 and claimed that she couldn't find the Perez' apartment.

Oveta had made another series of phone calls while she was confined to her apartment, breathing in the medicated fumes that steamed out of the vaporizer. She had called Butler and social workers she knew and, by force of will and patient and repeated explanations, had extorted from them the papers she would need to remove Nada temporarily from her mother. Temporarily—while that woman was tried for incompetence and a number of other charges that

Oveta had not too closely inquired of. She had also persuaded the welfare agency to allow her to call for Nada, when the legal process had been completed. Now she was waiting for Butler to arrive with those papers.

To pass the time, she made a few ineffectual gestures of housecleaning, but she quickly exhausted herself and ended up on the sofa, fighting to regain her breath. Butler found her not quite recovered.

"Are you sure you're well enough to leave the house?"

"Positive. Now, help me on with my coat, will you? God, I still feel so *guilty!* It's my first legal kidnapping. Usually, I'm against meddling."

"From what you told me about Mrs. Perez. . . ."

"I know. But I still feel guilty. It's irrational."

In Butler's car, with a traveling blanket over her legs, she pulled the hood of her coat close about her fever-reddened face. Butler could see the trembling of her hands even beneath the bulky fur mittens.

"Oveta, if you're too sick—"

"Damn the sickness! We've got a job to do. Now let's get on with it."

The car pulled away from the curb. Oveta kept glancing to Butler's face and away; several times her lips parted to speak. Then, hesitatingly, she began: "When I was sick, John, I couldn't help thinking about Nada. I couldn't read. My eyes would begin to smart, and my mind would wander. I kept thinking of Nada.

"I was sick. I'm still sick, for that matter. What I mean to say is, I don't really *believe* what I'm going to tell you. . . . No that's not true either. The commonplace, commonsense Miss Wohlmuth doesn't believe it, but I think *I* do. At least, it's *possible*—and that's bad enough."

Butler made a *moue* of impatience. "Get to the point."

"Well, then. Imagine a race, John—an alien race, telepathic, living on another planet, in another part of the galaxy. Imagine that they have spaceships—no, starships. They've traveled everywhere, seen everything—or enough to satisfy them that they've seen all they need to. Telepaths can share their knowledge. What one has known and seen, they all know and remember. Their minds are filled with it: knowledge, memories, piling up through the generations."

"A dismal picture," Butler commented.

"So dismal that they might decide just to blot it out."

"You're shivering, Oveta."

"And you're trying to humor me. Just listen for a minute. Nada is such an alien. She's telepathic. I've seen that for myself. And I've already told you about that starship she painted, drawn, probably, from a memory in her mother's mind. And her attitude, her uncanny quiescence—her background—can't be explained in any other way."

"You explained it well enough another way—gin."

"No, let me finish. Mrs. Perez is not human: she doesn't look human or act human. She's a vegetable on two feet. She has only one purpose in life: homeostasis, physiological equilibrium, Nirvana. She eats, she drinks, she sleeps, she breeds more vegetables, and that's all she wants out of life. A Homeostat. There are thousands more like her, and God only knows how many of them are . . ."

Butler laughed indulgently. "It's a nice theory. It fits the facts. But a simpler theory will fit the facts just as well."

"It doesn't fit the way I feel about Nada—and Nada's mother."

"Look, Oveta—you've been sick, and that scene with Mrs. Perez upset you. We all feel uneasy about the Mrs. Perezes of this world. She's a Homeostat, as you put it, and she's turning Nada into another. That doesn't mean she's an alien telepath, for God's sake."

"Women," Oveta went on dreamily, "*women* are more likely to be vegetables, you know. Squash and cucumbers. I'll tell you something else. It was explained to me by a widower of my acquaintance, but I didn't understand him at the time. They are married to little men—midgets. It was the men who built the spaceships in the first place, but the women got their way in the end, when the men were ready to give up, when they'd seen all there was to see, when their minds were filled up until they couldn't hold any more."

"So they came to Earth to go on relief?" Butler asked mockingly.

"Because it was the easiest thing to do. They could leave the shell of their own civilization behind. It was too much trouble to keep it intact, and they only wanted homeostasis after all. Well, they've got it."

"Oveta, if I didn't know you better, I'd think you'd cracked under the strain."

"That's why I told you and not someone else. I know it's a theory for the casebooks, but when I lay in bed thinking of Nada, all the pieces began to lock together, by themselves. I feel like the victim of my own idea. It's not just for Nada's sake that I want to get her out of the nightmare she's living in. At the hospital, they're bound to discover any —anomalies. I hope I'm wrong, but if there are aliens. . . ." Oveta began to cough, a lung-ripping cough that brought the conversation to an abrupt end.

"1324," Butler announced, as they stood before the door of the tenement, "where two civilizations meet. Do you think you can get up the steps?"

"I'll make it." On the second floor landing, where she was attacked by another fit of coughing, she was almost proven wrong.

In the third floor hallway, the lights were dim, the air heavy with garlic, and the canaries were still to be heard. "You knock," she asked Butler. "I feel slightly *deja vu.*"

The door was answered by a woman Oveta had never seen before. She was very fat; her eyes were dull. "Perez? Perez don't live here any more."

"Where have they moved? It's very important that we know."

"I dunno. They just *moved.* Away."

"But *where?*" The door was closed in Oveta's face.

Her eyes burned with an intensity: of fear; of sickness; of understanding too well. "We *won't* find her new address either. Did you see her? She was one of them. I could tell. They knew I'd come back for Nada. I must have been thinking about it when I left them, and they read my mind."

Behind them, down the hall, there was the patter of a child's steps ascending the stairway.

"Now I'll never find out. They've won!"

"Oveta, be reasonable. Mrs. Perez didn't need telepathy to figure you'd be back. Oveta? Oveta, for God's sake, what's the matter!"

A boy edged by them in the hallway and entered what

had been the Perez' apartment. He was not quite three feet tall, and he wore a moustache.

Oveta had fainted.

Then she was outside again, and the weather seemed milder than it had a minute ago. Children were playing in the asphalt lot, and down the street Oveta recognized the old woman with the baby carriage.

"Are you all right, darling?"

Oveta smiled at the unfamiliar tenderness, then, remembering what she had just seen, the smile stiffened into a rictus of terror. "That midget in the hall. Did you see him? He had a moustache."

"That was a boy—just a little boy. His moustache was probably painted on. Little boys will do that." He rested his hand on her brow.

"You've helped me so much, John. I don't know how to thank you."

"Oveta, look—in the ashcan. Isn't that an art pad?"

"Do you think—?"

Butler removed the tablet of watercolor paper from the garbage pail and shook off the coffee grounds that covered it. A drawing fell out.

"The spaceship," they said in chorus. And, indeed, it was the spaceship, poised, above the hazy globe of Earth, at the instant before its descent, like an enormous apple just caugh in the grip of Newton's Laws.

"Is there anything else?" Oveta asked, hoping there was, and hoping, as well, against it.

Butler opened the pad and grew numb, as before a basilisk.

"*Let me see!*"

"It doesn't mean anything. A child's imagination. Nothing . . . at all. *Oh, how horr—*"

Oveta grabbed the watercolor pad. She began to scream, and then to cough.

Underneath the picture, in an almost illegible scrawl, Nada had pencilled the words: MOMMY AND DADDY.

"They aren't from Puerto Rico, are they," Butler said expressionlessly. "Farther, much farther, much farther away."

The woman was recognizably "Mrs. Perez." Nada had captured perfectly the stuporous expression, the ponderous

weight of the breasts and abdomen. Of the man, only his face was visible: eyes twinkling with an ageless wisdom and unwanted knowledge, an ironic smile on his thin lips. The rest of him—his dwarf's body—was nestled securely in Mrs. Perez' marsupial pouch.

Although this latest Ron Goulart story displays his unmatched talent for the *reductio ad absurdum*, it is not basically a funny story at all.

INTO THE SHOP

by Ron Goulart

THE WAITRESS screamed, that was the trouble with live help, and made a flapping motion with her extended arm. Stu Clemens swung sideways in the booth and looked out through the green tinted window at the parking lot. A dark haired man in his early thirties was slumping to his knees, his hands flickering at his sides. Silently the lawagon spun back out of its parking place and rolled nearer to the fallen man.

"There's nobody in that car," said the waitress, dropping a cup of coffee.

She must be new to this planet, from one of the sticks systems maybe. "It's my car," said Clemens, flipping the napkin toggle on the table and then tossing her one when it popped up. "Here, wipe your uniform off. That's a lawagon and it knows what it's doing."

The waitress put the napkin up to her face and turned away.

Out in the lot the lawagon had the man trussed up. It stunned him again for safety and then it flipped him into the back seat for interrogation and identification. "It never makes a mistake," said Clemens to the waitress' back. "I've been Marshall in Territory #23 for a year now and that lawagon has never made a mistake. They built them that way."

The car had apparently given the suspect an injection and he had fallen over out of sight. Three more napkins popped up out of the table unasked. "Damn it," said Clemens and pounded the outlet with his fist once sharply.

"It does that sometimes," said the waitress, looking again at Clemens, but no further. She handed him his check card.

Clemens' touched the waitress' arm as he got up. "Don't

worry now. The law is always fair on Barnum. I'm sorry you had to see a criminal up close like that."

"He just had the businessman's lunch," the waitress said.

"Well, even criminals have to eat." Clemens paid the cash register and it let him out of the drivein oasis.

The cars that had been parked near the lawagon were gone now. When people were in trouble they welcomed the law but other times they stayed clear. Clemens grimaced, glancing at the dry yellow country beyond the oasis restaurant. He had just cleaned up an investigation and was heading back to his office in Hub #23. He still had an hour to travel. Lighting a cigarette he started for the lawagon. He was curious to see who his car had apprehended.

"This is a public service announcement," announced the lawagon from its roof speakers. "Sheldon Kloog, wanted murderer, has just been captured by Lawagon-A-10. Trial has been held, a verdict of guilty brought in, death sentenced and the sentence carried out as prescribed by law. This has been a public service announcement from the Barnum Law Bureau."

Clemens ran to the car. This was a break. Sheldon Kloog was being hunted across eleven territories for murdering his wife and dismantling all their household androids. At the driver's door the marshall took his ID cards out of his grey trouser pocket and at the same time gave the day's passwords to the lawagon. He next gave the countersigns and the oath of fealty and the car let him in.

Behind the wheel Clemens said, "Congratulations. How'd you spot him?"

The lawagon's dash speaker answered, "Made a positive identification 5 seconds after Kloog stepped out of the place. Surprised you didn't spot him. Was undisguised and had all the telltale marks of a homicide prone."

"He wasn't sitting in my part of the restaurant. Sorry." Clemens cocked his head and looked into the empty back seat. The lawagons had the option of holding murderers for full cybernetic trial in one of the territorial hubs or, if the murderer checked out strongly guilty and seemed dangerous, executing them on the spot. "Where is he?"

The glove compartment fell open and an opaque white jar rolled out. Clemens caught it. *Earthly Remains of Shel-*

don Kloog, read the label. The disintegrator didn't leave much.

Putting the jar back Clemens said, "Did you send photos, prints, retinal patterns and the rest on to my office?"

"Of course," said the car. "Plus a full transcript of the trial. Everything in quadruplicate."

"Good," said Clemens. "I'm glad we got Kloog and he's out of the way." He lit a fresh cigarette and put his hands on the wheel. The car could drive on automatic or manual. Clemens preferred to steer himself. "Start up and head for the hub. And get me my Junior Marshall on the line."

"Yes, sir," said the car.

"Your voice has a little too much treble," said Clemens, turning the lawagon on to the smooth black six lane roadway that pointed flat and straight toward Hub #23.

"Sorry. I'll fix it. This is a public announcement. This is a public announcement. Better?"

"Fine. Now get me Kepling."

"Check, sir."

Clemens watched a flock of dot sized birds circle far out over the desert. He moistened his lips and leaned back slightly.

"Jr. Marshall Kepling here," came a voice from the dash.

"Kepling," said Clemens, "a packet of assorted ID material should have come out of the teleport slot a few minutes ago. Keep a copy for our files and send the rest on to Law Bureau Central in Hub #1."

"Right, sir."

"We just got that murderer, Sheldon Kloog."

"Good work. Shall I pencil him in for a trial at Cybernetics Hall?"

"We already had the trial," said Clemens. "Anything else new?"

"Looks like trouble out near Townten. Might be a sex crime."

"What exactly?"

"I'm not sure, sir," said Kepling. "The report is rather vague. You know how the android patrols out in the towns are. I dispatched a mechanical deputy about an hour ago and he should reach there by mid afternoon. If there's a

real case I can drive our lawagon over after you get back here."

Clemens frowned. "What's the victim's name?"

"Just a minute. Yeah, here it is. Marmon, Dianne. Age 25, height 5'6", weight . . ."

Clemens had twisted the wheel violently to the right. "Stop," he said to the lawagon as it shimmied off the roading. "Dianne Marmon, Kepling?"

"That's right. Do you know her?"

"What are the details you have on the crime?"

"The girl is employed at Statistics Warehouse in Townten. She didn't appear at work this morning and a routine check by a personnel andy found evidence of a struggle in her apartment. The patrol says there are no signs of theft. So kidnapping for some purpose seems likely. You may remember that last week's report from Crime Trends said there might be an upswing of sex crimes in the outlying areas like Townten this season. That's why I said it might be a sex crime. Do you know the girl?"

Clemens had known her five years ago, when they had both been at the Junior Campus of Hub #23 State College together. Dianne was a pretty blonde girl. Clemens had dated her fairly often but lost track of her when he'd transferred to the Police Academy for his final year. "I'll handle this case myself," he said. "Should take me a little over two hours to get to Townten. I'll check with you enroute. Let me know at once if anything important comes in before that."

"Yes, sir. You do know her then?"

"I know her," said Clemens. To the lawagon he said, "Turn around and get us to Townten fast."

"Yes, sir," said the car.

Beyond Townseven, climbing the wide road that curved between the flat fields of yellow grain, the call from Jr. Marshall Kepling came. "Sir," said Kepling. "The patrol androids have been checking out witnesses. No one saw the girl after eleven last night. That was when she came home to her apartment. She was wearing a green coat, orange dress, green accessories. There was some noise heard in the apartment but no one thought much of it. That was a little after

eleven. Seems like someone jimmied the alarm system for her place and got in. That's all so far. No prints or anything."

"Damn it," said Clemens. "It must be a real kidnapping then. And I'm an hour from Townten. Well, the lawagon will catch the guy. There has to be time."

"One other thing," said Kipling.

"About Dianne Marmon?"

"No, about Sheldon Kloog."

"What?"

"Central has a report that Sheldon Kloog turned himself in at a public surrender booth in a park over in Territory #20 this morning. All the ID material matches. Whereas the stuff we sent shows a complete negative."

"What are they talking about? We caught Kloog."

"Not according to Central."

"It's impossible. The car doesn't make mistakes, Kepling."

"Central is going to make a full checkup as soon as you get back from this kidnapping case."

"They're wrong," said Clemens. "Okay. So keep me filled in on Dianne Marmon."

"Right, sir," said the Jr. Marshall, signing off.

To his lawagon Clemens said, "What do you think is going on? You couldn't have made a mistake about Sheldon Kloog. Could you?"

The car became absolutely silent and coasted off the road, brushing the invisible shield around the grain fields. Everything had stopped functioning.

"I didn't order you to pull off," said Clemens.

The car did not respond.

Lawagons weren't supposed to break down. And if they did, which rarely happened, they were supposed to repair themselves. Clemens couldn't get Lawagon-A-10 to do anything. It was completely dead. There was no way even to signal for help.

"For god's sake," said Clemens. There was an hour between him and Dianne. More than an hour now. He tried to make himself not think of her, of what might be happening. Of what might have already happened.

Clemens got out of the lawagon, stood back a few feet from it. "One more time," he said, "will you start?"

Nothing.

He turned and started jogging back toward Townseven. The heat of the day seemed to take all the moisture out of him, to make him dry and brittle. This shouldn't have happened. Not when someone he cared for was in danger. Not now.

Emergency Central couldn't promise him a repairman until the swing shift came on in a quarter of an hour. Clemens requested assistance, a couple of lawagons at least from the surrounding territorities. Territory #20 had had a reactor accident and couldn't spare theirs. Territory #21 promised to send a lawagon and a Jr. Marshall over to Townten to pick up the trail of Dianne Marmon's kidnapper as soon as the lawagon was free. Territory #22 promised the same, although they didn't think their car would be available until after nightfall. Clemens finally ordered his own Jr. Marshall to fly over to Townten and do the best he could until a lawagon arrived. A live Jr. Marshall sure as hell couldn't do much, though. Not what a lawagon could.

The little Townseven cafe he was calling from was fully automatic and Clemens sat down at a coffee table to wait for the repairman to arrive. The round light blue room was empty except for a hunched old man who was sitting at a breakfast table, ordering side orders of hash browns one after another. When he'd filled the surface of the table he started a second layer. He didn't seem to be eating any of the food.

Clemens drank the cup of coffee that came up out of his table and ignored the old man. It was probably a case for a Psych Wagon but Clemens didn't feel up to going through the trouble of turning the man in. He finished his coffee. A car stopped outside and Clemens jumped up. It was just a customer.

"How can I do that?" said the repairman as he and Clemens went down the ramp of the automatic cafe. "Look." He pointed across the parking area at his small one man scooter.

Clemens shook his head. "It's nearly sundown. A girl's life

is in danger. Damn, if I have to wait here until you fix the lawagon and bring it back I'll lose that much more time."

"I'm sorry," said the small sun-worn man. "I can't take you out to where the car is. The bureau says these scooters are not to carry passengers. So if I put more than 200 pounds on it it just turns off and won't go at all."

"Okay, okay." There were no cars in the parking lot, no one to commandeer.

"You told me where your lawagon is. I can find it if it's right on the highway. You wait."

"How long?"

The repairman shrugged. "Those babies don't break down much. But when they do. Could be a while. Overnight maybe."

"Overnight?" Clemens grabbed the man's arm. "You're kidding."

"Don't break my damn arm or it'll take that much longer."

"I'm sorry. I'll wait here. You'll drive the lawagon back?"

"Yeah. I got a special set of ID cards and passwords so I can get its hood up and drive it. Go inside and have a cup of coffee."

"Sure," said Clemens. "Thanks."

"Do my best."

"Do you know anything about the dinner-for-two tables?" the thin loose-suited young man asked Clemens.

Clemens had taken the table nearest the door and was looking out at the twilight roadway. "Beg pardon?"

"We put money in for a candle and nothing happened, except that when the asparagus arrived its ends were lit. This is my first date with this girl, marshall, and I want to make a good impression."

"Hit the outlet with your fist," said Clemens, turning away.

"Thank you, sir."

Clemens got up and went in to call the Law Bureau answering service in Townten. The automatic voice told him that Jr. Marshall Kepling had just arrived and reported in. He was on his way to the victim's apartment. No other news.

"She's not a victim," said Clemens and cut off.

"Arrest those two," said the old man, reaching for Clemens as he came out of the phone alcove.

"Why?"

"They shot a candle at my table and scattered my potatoes to here and gone."

The young man ran up. "I hit the table like you said and the candle came out. Only it went sailing all the way across the room."

"Young people," said the old man.

"Here," said Clemens. He gave both of them some cash. "Start all over again."

"That's not," started the old man.

Clemens saw something coming down the dark road. He pushed free and ran outside.

As he reached the roadway the lawagon slowed and stopped. There was no one inside.

"Welcome aboard," said the car.

Clemens went through the identification ritual, looking off along the roadway, and got in. "Where's the repairman? Did he send you on in alone?"

"I saw through him, sir," said the lawagon. "Shall we proceed to Townten?"

"Yes. Step on it," said Clemens. "But what do you mean you saw through him?"

The glove compartment dropped open. There were two white jars in it now. "Sheldon Kloog won't bother us anymore, sir. I have just apprehended and tried him. He was disguised as a repairman and made an attempt to dismantle an official Law Bureau vehicle. That offense, plus his murder record, made only one course of action possible."

Clemens swallowed, making himself not even tighten his grip on the wheel. If he said anything the car might stop again. There was something wrong. As soon as Dianne was safe Lawagon-A-10 would have to go into the shop for a thorough checkup. Right now Clemens needed the car badly, needed what it could do. They had to track down whoever had kidnapped Dianne. "Good work," he said evenly.

The headlights hit the cliffs that bordered the narrow road and long ragged shadows crept up the hillside ahead of them.

"I think we're closing in," said Clemens. He was talking to Jr. Marshall Kepling whom he'd left back at the Law Bureau answering service in Townten. He had cautioned

Kepling to make no mention of the Kloog business while the car could hear them.

"Central verifies the ID on the kidnapper from the prints we found," said Kepling. Surprisingly Kepling had found fingerprints in Dianne's apartment that the andy patrol and the mechanical deputy had missed. "It is Jim Otterson. Up to now he's only done short sentence stuff."

"Good," said Clemens. That meant that Otterson might not harm Dianne. Unless this was the time he'd picked to cross over. "The lawagon," said Clemens, "is holding onto his trail. We should get him now anytime. He's on foot now and the girl is definitely still with him the car says. We're closing in."

"Good luck," said Kepling.

"Thanks." Clemens signed off.

Things had speeded up once he and the lawagon had reached Townten. Clemens had known that. The lawagon had had no trouble picking up the scent. Now, late at night, they were some twenty-five miles out of Townten. They'd found Otterson's car seven miles back with its clutch burned out. The auto had been there, off the unpaved back road, for about four hours. Otterson had driven around in great zigzags. Apparently he had spent the whole of the night after the kidnapping in a deserted storehouse about fifty miles from Townten. He had left there, according to the lawagon, about noon and headed toward Towneleven. Then he had doubled back again, swinging in near Townten. Clemens and the lawagon had spent hours circling around on Otterson's trail. With no more car Otterson and the girl couldn't have come much farther than where Clemens and the lawagon were now.

The lawagon turned off the road and bumped across a rocky plateau. It swung around and stopped. Up above was a high flat cliffside, dotted with caves. "Up there, I'd say," said the lawagon. It had silenced its engine.

"Okay," said Clemens. There wasn't much chance of sneaking up on Otterson if he was up in one of those caves. Clemens would have to risk trying to talk to him. "Shoot the lights up there and turn on the speakers."

Two spotlights hit the cliff and a hand mike came up out of the dash. Taking it, Clemens climbed out of the

lawagon. "Otterson, this is Marshall Clemens. I'm asking you to surrender. If you don't I'll have to use stun gas on you. We know you're in one of those caves and we can check each one off if we have to. Give up."

Clemens waited. Then halfway up the cliffside something green flashed and then came hurtling down. It pinwheeled down the mountain and fell past the plateau.

"What the hell." Clemens ran forward. There was a gully between the cliff and the plateau, narrow and about thirty feet deep. At its bottom now was something. It might be Dianne, arms tangled over interlaced brush.

"Get me a handlight and a line," he called to the lawagon.

Without moving the car lobbed a handbeam to him and sent a thin cord snaking over the ground. "Check."

"Cover the caves. I'm going down to see what that was that fell."

"Ready?"

Clemens hooked the light on his belt and gripped the line. He backed over the plateau edge. "Okay, ready."

The line was slowly let out and Clemens started down. Near the brush he caught a rock and let go of the line. He unhitched the light and swung it. He exhaled sharply. What had fallen was only an empty coat. Otterson was trying to decoy them. "Watch out," Clemens shouted to his car. "It's not the girl. He may try to make a break now."

He steadied himself and reached for the rope. Its end snapped out at him and before he could catch it it whirred up and out of sight. "Hey, the rope. Send it back."

"Emergency," announced the lawagon, its engine coming on.

Up above a blaster sizzled and rock clattered. Clemens yanked out his pistol and looked up. Down the hillside a man was coming, carrying a bound up girl in his arms. His big hands showed and they held pistols. Dianne was gagged but seemed to be alive. Otterson zigzagged down, using the girl for a shield. He was firing not at Clemens but at the lawagon. He jumped across the gully to a plateau about twenty yards from where Clemens had started over.

Holstering his gun Clemens started to climb. He was halfway up when he heard Otterson cry out. Then there was no sound at all.

Clemens tried to climb faster but could not. The gully side was jagged and hard to hold on to. Finally he swung himself up on the plateau.

"This is a public service announcement," said the lawagon. "Sheldon Kloog and his female accomplice have been captured, tried, sentenced and executed. This message comes to you from the Law Bureau. Thank you."

Clemens roared. He grabbed up a rock in each hand and went charging at the car. "You've killed Dianne," he shouted. "You crazy damn machine."

The lawagon turned and started rolling toward him. "No you don't, Kloog," it said.

Roger Zelazny, whose first story for F&SF makes its impressive appearance below, says that he has read SF and Fantasy for as far back as he can remember, and has wanted to write it for almost as long, "but did not have much opportunity to do so until early last year when Colombia got around to giving me the M.A. for *'Two Traditions and Cyril Tourneur: An Examination of Morality and Humor In —The Revenger's Tragedy—.'* " Former épée instructor, ex-Nike crewman, Mr. Zelazny is now an OASDI claims examiner with the Social Security Administration, is 25 years old, claims that he is dreadfully lazy and likes beer . . . All the elements of Classical Old-Fashioned Science Fiction are here in this story of a Mars "where the sun is a tarnished penny . . . the wind is a whip [and] two moons play at hotrod games"—but the author's wide-ranging mind and perceptive pen bring us new lamps for old.

A ROSE FOR ECCLESIASTES

by Roger Zelazny

I

I WAS BUSY translating one of my *Madrigals Macabre* into Martian on the morning I was found acceptable. The intercom had buzzed briefly, and I dropped my pencil and flipped on the toggle in a single motion.

"Mister G," piped Morton's youthful contralto, "the old man says I should 'get hold of that damned conceited rhymer' right away, and send him to his cabin. —Since there's only one damned conceited rhymer . . ."

"Let not ambition mock thy useful toil." I cut him off.

So, the Martians had finally made up their minds! I knocked an inch and a half of ash from a smouldering butt, and took my first drag since I had lit it. The entire month's anticipation tried hard to crowd itself into the moment, but could not quite make it. I was frightened to walk those forty

feet and hear Emory say the words I already knew he would say; and that feeling elbowed the other one into the background.

So I finished the stanza I was translating before I got up.

It took only a moment to reach Emory's door. I knocked twice and opened it, just as he growled, "Come in."

"You wanted to see me?" I sat down quickly to save him the trouble of offering me a seat.

"That was fast. What did you do, run?"

I regarded his paternal discontent:

Little fatty flecks beneath pale eyes, thinning hair, and an Irish nose; a voice a decibel louder than anyone else's . . .

Hamlet to Claudius: "I was working."

"Hah!" he snorted. "Come off it. No one's ever seen you do any of that stuff."

I shrugged my shoulders and started to rise.

"If that's what you called me down here—"

"Sit down!"

He stood up. He walked around his desk. He hovered above me and glared down. (A hard trick, even when I'm in a low chair.)

"You are undoubtedly the most antagonistic bastard I've ever had to work with!" he bellowed, like a belly-stung buffalo. "Why the hell don't you act like a human being sometime and surprise everybody? I'm willing to admit you're smart, maybe even a genius, but—oh, Hell!" He made a heaving gesture with both hands and walked back to his chair.

"Betty has finally talked them into letting you go in." His voice was normal again. "They'll receive you this afternoon. Draw one of the jeepsters after lunch, and get down there."

"Okay," I said.

"That's all, then."

I nodded, got to my feet. My hand was on the doorknob when he said:

"I don't have to tell you how important this is. Don't treat them the way you treat us."

I closed the door behind me.

I don't remember what I had for lunch. I was nervous,

but I knew instinctively that I wouldn't muff it. My Boston publishers expected a Martian Idyll, or at least a Saint-Exuperay job on space flight. The National Science Association wanted a complete report on the Rise and Fall of the Martian Empire.

They would both be pleased. I knew.

That's the reason everyone is jealous—why they hate me. I always come through, and I can come through better than anyone else.

I shovelled in a final anthill of slop, and made my way to our car barn. I drew one jeepster and headed it toward Tirellian.

Flames of sand, lousy with iron oxide, set fire to the buggy. They swarmed over the open top and bit through my scarf; they set to work pitting my goggles.

The jeepster, swaying and panting like a little donkey I once rode through the Himalayas, kept kicking me in the seat of the pants. The Mountains of Tirellian shuffled their feet and moved toward me at a cockeyed angle.

Suddenly I was heading uphill, and I shifted gears to accommodate the engine's braying. Not like Gobi, not like the Great Southwestern Desert, I mused. Just red, just dead . . . without even a cactus.

I reached the crest of the hill, but I had raised too much dust to see what was ahead. It didn't matter, though, I have a head full of maps. I bore to the left and downhill, adjusting the throttle. A cross-wind and solid ground beat down the fires. I felt like Ulysses in Malebolge—with a terza-rima speech in one hand and an eye out for Dante.

I sounded a rock pagoda and arrived.

Betty waved as I crunched to a halt, then jumped down.

"Hi," I choked, unwinding my scarf and shaking out a pound and a half of grit. "Like, where do I go and who do I see?"

She permitted herself a brief Germanic giggle—more at my starting a sentence with "like" than at my discomfort—then she started talking. (She is a top linguist, so a word from the Village Idiom still tickles her!)

I appreciate her precise, furry talk; informational, and all that. I had enough in the way of social pleasantries before

me to last at least the rest of my life. I looked at her chocolate-bar eyes and perfect teeth, at her sun-bleached hair, close-cropped to the head (I hate blondes!), and decided that she was in love with me.

"Mr. Gallinger, the Matriarch is waiting inside to be introduced. She has consented to open the Temple records for your study." She paused here to pat her hair and squirm a little. Did my gaze make her nervous?

"They are religious documents, as well as their only history," she continued, "sort of like the Mahabharata. She expects you to observe certain rituals in handling them, like repeating the sacred words when you turn pages—she will teach you the system."

I nodded quickly, several times.

"Fine, let's go in."

"Uh—" she paused. "Do not forget their Eleven Forms of Politeness and Degree. They take matters of form quite seriously—and do not get into any discussions over the equality of the sexes—"

"I know all about their taboos," I broke in. "Don't worry. I've lived in the Orient, remember?"

She dropped her eyes and seized my hand. I almost jerked it away.

"It will look better if I enter leading you."

I swallowed my comments and followed her, like Samson in Gaza.

Inside, my last thought met with a strange correspondence. The Matriarch's quarters were a rather abstract version of what I imagine the tents of the tribes of Israel to have been like. Abstract, I say, because it was all frescoed brick, peaked like a huge tent, with animal-skin representations like gray-blue scars, that looked as if they had been laid on the walls with a palette knife.

The Matriarch, M'Cwyie, was short, white-haired, fifty-ish, and dressed like a Gypsy queen. With her rainbow of voluminous skirts she looked like an inverted punch bowl set atop a cushion.

Accepting my obeisances, she regarded me as an owl might a rabbit. The lids of those black, black eyes jumped upwards as she discovered my perfect accent. —The tape

recorder Betty had carried on her interviews had done its part, and I knew the language reports from the first two expeditions, verbatim. I'm all hell when it comes to picking up accents.

"You are the poet?"

"Yes," I replied.

"Recite one of your poems, please."

"I'm sorry, but nothing short of a thorough translating job would do justice to your language and my poetry, and I don't know enough of your language yet."

"Oh?"

"But I've been making such translations for my own amusement, as an exercise in grammar," I continued. "I'd be honored to bring a few of them along one of the times that I come here."

"Yes. Do so."

Score one for me!

She turned to Betty.

"You may go now."

Betty muttered the parting formalities, gave me a strange sidewise look, and was gone. She apparently had expected to stay and "assist" me. She wanted a piece of the glory, like everyone else. But I was the Schliemann at this Troy, and there would be only one name on the Association report!

M'Cwyie rose, and I noticed that she gained very little height by standing. But then I'm six-six and look like a poplar in October: thin, bright red on top, and towering above everyone else.

"Our records are very, very old," she began. "Betty says that your word for their age is 'millennia.' "

I nodded appreciatively.

"I'm very eager to see them."

"They are not here. We will have to go into the Temple —they may not be removed."

I was suddenly wary.

"You have no objections to my copying them, do you?"

"No. I see that you respect them, or your desire would not be so great."

"Excellent."

She seemed amused. I asked her what was funny.

"The High Tongue may not be so easy for a foreigner to learn."

It came through fast.

No one on the first expedition had gotten this close. I had had no way of knowing that this was a double-language deal—a classical as well as a vulgar. I knew some of their Prakrit, now I had to learn all their Sanskrit.

"Ouch! and damn!"

"Pardon, please?"

"It's non-translatable, M'Cwyie. But imagine yourself having to learn the High Tongue in a hurry, and you can guess at the sentiment."

She seemed amused again, and told me to remove my shoes.

She guided me through an alcove . . .

. . . and into a burst of Byzantine brilliance!

No Earthman had ever been in this room before, or I would have heard about it. Carter, the first expedition's linguist, with the help of one Mary Allen, M.D., had learned all the grammar and vocabulary that I knew while sitting cross-legged in the ante-chamber.

We had no idea this existed. Greedily, I cast my eyes about. A highly sophisticated system of esthetics lay behind the décor. We would have to revise our entire estimation of Martian culture.

For one thing, the ceiling was vaulted and corbelled; for another, there were side-columns with reverse flutings; for another—oh hell! The place was big. Posh. You could never have guessed it from the shaggy outsides.

I bent forward to study the gilt filigree on a ceremonial table. M'Cwyie seemed a bit smug at my intentness, but I'd still have hated to play poker with her.

The table was loaded with books.

With my toe, I traced a mosaic on the floor.

"Is your entire city within this one building?"

"Yes, it goes far back into the mountain."

"I see," I said, seeing nothing.

I couldn't ask her for a conducted tour, yet.

She moved to a small stool by the table.

"Shall we begin your friendship with the High Tongue?"

I was trying to photograph the hall with my eyes, knowing I would have to get a camera in here, somehow, sooner or later. I tore my gaze from a statuette and nodded, hard.

"Yes, introduce me."

I sat down.

For the next three weeks alphabet-bugs chased each other behind my eyelids whenever I tried to sleep. The sky was an unclouded pool of turquoise that rippled calligraphies whenever I swept my eyes across it. I drank quarts of coffee while I worked and mixed cocktails of Benzedrine and champagne for my coffee breaks.

M'Cwyie tutored me two hours every morning and occasionally for another two in the evening. I spent an additional fourteen hours a day on my own, once I had gotten up sufficient momentum to go ahead alone.

And at night the elevator of time dropped me to its bottom floors . . .

I was six again, learning my Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and Aramaic. I was ten, sneaking peeks at the *Iliad.* When Daddy wasn't spreading hellfire, brimstone, and brotherly love, he was teaching me to dig the Word, like in the original.

Lord! There are so many originals and so *many* words! When I was twelve I started pointing out the little differences between what he was preaching and what I was reading.

The fundamentalist vigor of his reply brooked no debate. It was worse than any beating. I kept my mouth shut after that and learned to appreciate Old Testament poetry.

—Lord, I am sorry! Daddy—Sir—I am sorry! —It couldn't be! It couldn't be . . .

On the day the boy graduated from high school, with the French, German, Spanish, and Latin awards, Dad Gallinger had told his fourteen-year-old, six-foot scarecrow of a son that he wanted him to enter the ministry. I remember how his son was evasive:

"Sir," he had said, "I'd sort of like to study on my own for a year or so, and then take pre-theology courses at some liberal arts university. I feel I'm still sort of young to try a seminary, straight off."

The Voice of God: "But you have the gift of tongues,

my son. You can preach the Gospel in all the lands of Babel. You were born to be a missionary. You say you are young, but time is rushing by you like a whirlwind. Start early, and you will enjoy added years of service."

The added years of service were so many added tails to the cat repeatedly laid on my back. I can't see his face now, I never can. Maybe it is because I was always afraid to look at it then.

And years later, when he was dead, and laid out, in black, amidst bouquets, amidst weeping congregationalists, amidst prayers, red faces, handkerchiefs, hands patting your shoulders, solemn-faced comforters . . . I looked at him and did not recognize him.

We had met nine months before my birth, this stranger and I. He had never been cruel—stern, demanding, with contempt for everyone's shortcomings—but never cruel. He was also all that I had had of a mother. And brothers. And sisters. He had tolerated my three years at St. John's, possibly because of its name, never knowing how liberal and delightful a place it really was.

But I never knew him, and the man atop the catafalque demanded nothing now; I was free not to preach the Word.

But now I wanted to, in a different way. I wanted to preach a word that I could never have voiced while he lived.

I did not return for my Senior year in the fall. I had a small inheritance coming, and a bit of trouble getting control of it, since I was still under 18. But I managed.

It was Greenwich Village I finally settled upon.

Not telling any well-meaning parishioners my new address, I entered into a daily routine of writing poetry and teaching myself Japanese and Hindustani. I grew a fiery beard, drank espresso, and learned to play chess. I wanted to try a couple of the other paths to salvation.

After that, it was two years in India with the Old Peace Corps—which broke me of my Buddhism, and gave me my *Pipes of Krishna* lyrics and the Pulitzer they deserved.

Then back to the States for my degree, grad work in linguistics, and more prizes.

Then one day a ship went to Mars. The vessel settling in its New Mexico nest of fires contained a new language.

—It was fantastic, exotic, and esthetically overpowering. After I had learned all there was to know about it, and written my book, I was famous in new circles:

"Go, Gallinger. Dip your bucket in the well, and bring us a drink of Mars. Go, learn another world—but remain aloof, rail at it gently like Auden—and hand us its soul in iambics."

And I came to the land where the sun is a tarnished penny, where the wind is a whip, where two moons play at hotrod games, and a hell of sand gives you the incendiary itches whenever you look at it.

I rose from my twistings on the bunk and crossed the darkened cabin to a port. The desert was a carpet of endless orange, bulging from the sweepings of centuries beneath it.

"I a stranger, unafraid— This is the land— I've got it made!"

I laughed.

I had the High Tongue by the tail already—or the roots, if you want your puns anatomical, as well as correct.

The High and Low Tongues were not so dissimilar as they had first seemed. I had enough of the one to get me through the murkier parts of the other. I had the grammar and all the commoner irregular verbs down cold; the dictionary I was constructing grew by the day, like a tulip, and would bloom shortly. Every time I played the tapes the stem lengthened.

Now was the time to tax my ingenuity, to really drive the lessons home. I had purposely refrained from plunging into the major texts until I could do justice to them. I had been reading minor commentaries, bits of verse, fragments of history. And one thing had impressed me strongly in all that I read.

They wrote about concrete things: rocks, sand, water, winds; and the tenor couched within these elemental symbols was fiercely pessimistic. It reminded me of some Buddhist texts, but even more so, I realized from my recent *recherches*, it was like parts of the Old Testament. Specifically, it reminded me of the Book of Ecclesiastes.

That, then, would be it. The sentiment, as well as the vocabulary, was so similar that it would be a perfect exer-

cise. Like putting Poe into French. I would never be a convert to the Way of Malann, but I would show them that an Earthman had once thought the same thoughts, felt similarly.

I switched on my desk lamp and sought King James amidst my books.

Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity. What profit hath a man . . .

My progress seemed to startle M'Cwyie. She peered at me, like Sartre's Other, across the tabletop. I ran through a chapter in the Book of Locar. I didn't look up, but I could feel the tight net her eyes were working about my head, shoulders, and rapid hands. I turned another page.

Was she weighing the net, judging the size of the catch? And what for? The books said nothing of fishers on Mars. Especially of men. They said that some god named Malann had spat, or had done something disgusting (depending on the version you read), and that life had gotten underway as a disease in inorganic matter. They said that movement was its first law, its first law, and that the dance was the only legitimate reply to the inorganic . . . the dance's quality its justification,—fication . . . and love is a disease in organic matter—Inorganic matter?

I shook my head. I had almost been asleep.

"M'narra."

I stood and stretched. Her eyes outlined me greedily now. So I met them, and they dropped.

"I grow tired. I want to rest awhile. I didn't sleep much last night."

She nodded, Earth's shorthand for "yes", as she had learned from me.

"You wish to relax, and see the explicitness of the doctrine of Locar in its fullness?"

"Pardon me?"

"You wish to see a Dance of Locar?"

"Oh." Their damned circuits of form and periphrasis here ran worse than the Korean! "Yes. Surely. Any time it's going to be done I'd be happy to watch."

I continued, "In the meantime, I've been meaning to ask you whether I might take some pictures—"

"Now is the time. Sit down. Rest. I will call the musicians."

She bustled out through a door I had never been past.

Well now, the dance was the highest art, according to Locar, not to mention Havelock Ellis, and I was about to see how their centuries-dead philosopher felt it should be conducted. I rubbed my eyes and snapped over, touching my toes a few times.

The blood began pounding in my head, and I sucked in a couple deep breaths. I bent again and there was a flurry of motion at the door.

To the trio who entered with M'Cwyie I must have looked as if I were searching for the marbles I had just lost, bent over like that.

I grinned weakly and straightened up, my face red from more than exertion. I hadn't expected them *that* quickly.

Suddenly I thought of Havelock Ellis again in his area of greatest popularity.

The little redheaded doll, wearing sari-like, a diaphanous piece of the Martian sky, looked up in wonder—as a child at some colorful flag on a high pole.

"Hello," I said, or its equivalent.

She bowed before replying. Evidently I had been promoted in status.

"I shall dance," said the red wound in that pale, pale cameo, her face. Eyes, the color of dream and her dress, pulled away from mine.

She drifted to the center of the room.

Standing there, like a figure in an Etruscan frieze, she was either meditating or regarding the design on the floor.

Was the mosaic symbolic of something? I studied it. If it was, it eluded me; it would make an attractive bathroom floor or patio, but I couldn't see much in it beyond that.

The other two were paint-spattered sparrows like M'Cwyie, in their middle years. One settled to the floor with a triple-stringed instrument faintly resembling a *samisen.* The other held a simple woodblock and two drumsticks.

M'Cwyie disdained her stool and was seated upon the floor before I realized it. I followed suit.

The *samisen* player was still tuning up, so I leaned toward M'Cwyie.

"What is the dancer's name?"

"Braxa," she replied, without looking at me, and raised her left hand, slowly, which meant yes, and go ahead, and let it begin.

The stringed-thing throbbed like a toothache, and a ticktocking, like ghosts of all the clocks they had never invented, sprang from the block.

Braxa was a statue, both hands raised to her face, elbows high and outspread.

The music became a metaphor for fire.

Crackle, purr, snap . . .

She did not move.

The hissing altered to splashes. The cadence slowed. It was water now, the most precious thing in the world, gurgling clear then green over mossy rocks.

Still she did not move.

Glissandos. A pause.

Then, so faint I could hardly be sure at first, the tremble of the winds began. Softly, gently, sighing and halting, uncertain. A pause, a sob, then a repetition of the first statement, only louder.

Were my eyes completely bugged from my reading, or was Braxa actually trembling all over, head to foot.

She was.

She began a microscopic swaying. A fraction of an inch right, then left. Her fingers opened like the petals of a flower, and I could see that her eyes were closed.

Her eyes opened. They were distant, glassy, looking through me and the walls. Her swaying became more pronounced, merged with the beat.

The wind was sweeping in from the desert now, falling against Tirellian like waves on a dike. Her fingers moved, they were the gusts. Her arms, slow pendulums, descended, began a countermovement.

The gale was coming now. She began an axial movement and her hands caught up with the rest of her body, only now her shoulders commenced to writhe out a figure-eight.

The wind! The wind, I say. O wild, enigmatic! O muse of St. John Perse!

The cyclone was twisting round those eyes, its still center. Her head was thrown back, but I knew there was no ceiling

between her gaze, passive as Buddha's, and the unchanging skies. Only the two moons, perhaps, interrupted their slumber in that elemental Nirvana of uninhabited turquoise.

Years ago, I had seen the Devadasis in India, the street-dancers, spinning their colorful webs, drawing in the male insect. But Braxa was more than this: she was a Ramadjany, like those votaries of Rama, incarnation of Vishnu, who had given the dance to man: the sacred dancers.

The clicking was monotonously steady now; the whine of the strings made me think of the stinging rays of the sun, their heat stolen by the wind's halations; the blue was Sarasvati and Mary, and a girl named Laura. I heard a sitàr from somewhere, watched this statue come to life, and inhaled a divine afflatus.

I was again Rimbaud with his hashish, Baudelaire with his laudanum, Poe, De Quincy, Wilde, Mallarme, and Aleister Crowley. I was, for a fleeting second, my father in his dark pulpit and darker suit, the hymns and the organ's wheeze transmuted to bright wind.

She was a spun weather vane, a feathered crucifix hovering in the air, a clothes-line holding one bright garment lashed parallel to the ground. Her shoulder was bare now, and her right breast moved up and down like a moon in the sky, its red nipple appearing momently above a fold and vanishing again. The music was as formal as Job's argument with God. Her dance was God's reply.

The music slowed, settled; it had been met, matched, answered. Her garment, as if alive, crept back into the more sedate folds it originally held.

She dropped low, lower, to the floor. Her head fell upon her raised knees. She did not move.

There was silence.

I realized, from the ache across my shoulders, how tensely I had been sitting. My armpits were wet. Rivulets had been running down my sides. What did one do now? Applaud?

I sought M'Cwyie from the corner of my eye. She raised her right hand.

As if by telepathy the girl shuddered all over and stood. The musicians also rose. So did M'Cwyie.

I got to my feet, with a Charley Horse in my left leg, and said, "It was beautiful," inane as that sounds.

I received three different High Forms of "thank you."

There was a flurry of color and I was alone again with M'Cwyie.

"That is the one hundred-seventeenth of the two thousand, two hundred-twenty-four dances of Locar."

I looked down at her.

"Whether Locar was right or wrong, he worked out a fine reply to the inorganic."

She smiled.

"Are the dances of your world like this?

"Some of them are similar. I was reminded of them as I watched Braxa—but I've never seen anything exactly like hers."

"She is good," M'Cwyie said. "She knows all the dances."

A hint of her earlier expression which had troubled me . . .

It was gone in an instant.

"I must tend my duties now." She moved to the table and closed the books. "M'narra."

"Good-bye." I slipped into my boots.

"Good-bye, Gallinger."

I walked out the door, mounted the jeepster, and roared across the evening into night, my wings of risen desert flapping slowly behind me.

II

I had just closed the door behind Betty, after a brief grammar session, when I heard the voices in the hall. My vent was opened a fraction, so I stood there and eavesdropped:

Morton's fruity treble: "Guess what? He said 'hello' to me a while ago."

"Hmmph!" Emory's elephant lungs exploded. "Either he's slipping, or you were standing in his way and he wanted you to move."

"Probably didn't recognize me. I don't think he sleeps any more, now he has that language to play with. I had night watch last week, and every night I passed his door

at 0300—I always heard that recorder going. At 0500, when I got off, he was still at it."

"The guy *is* working hard," Emory admitted, grudgingly. "In fact, I think he's taking some kind of dope to keep awake. He looks sort of glassy-eyed these days. Maybe that's natural for a poet, though."

Betty had been standing there, because she broke in then: "Regardless of what you think of him, it's going to take me at least a year to learn what he's picked up in three weeks. And I'm just a linguist, not a poet."

Morton must have been nursing a crush on her bovine charms. It's the only reason I can think for his dropping his guns to say what he did.

"I took a course in modern poetry when I was back at the university," he began. "We read six authors—Yeats, Pound, Eliot, Crane, Stevens, and Gallinger—and on the last day of the semester, when the prof was feeling a little rhetorical, he said, 'These six names are written on the century, and all the gates of criticism and Hell shall not prevail against them.'

"Myself," he continued, "I thought his *Pipes of Krishna* and his *Madrigals* were great. I was honored to be chosen for an expedition he was going on.

"I think he's spoken two dozen words to me since I met him," he finished.

The Defense: "Did it ever occur to you," Betty said, "that he might be tremendously self-conscious about his appearance? He was also a precocious child, and probably never even had school friends. He's sensitive and very introverted."

"Sensitive? Self-conscious?" Emory choked and gagged. "The man is as proud as Lucifer, and he's a walking insult machine. You press a button like 'Hello' or 'Nice day' and he thumbs his nose at you. He's got it down to a reflex."

They muttered a few other pleasantries and drifted away.

Well bless you, Morton boy. You little pimple-faced, Ivy-bred connoisseur! I've never taken a course in my poetry, but I'm glad someone said that. The Gates of Hell. Well now! Maybe Daddy's prayers got heard somewhere, and I am a missionary, after all!

Only . . .

. . . Only a missionary needs something to convert people *to.* I have my private system of esthetics, and I suppose it oozes an ethical by-product somewhere. But if I ever had anything to preach, really, even in my poems, I wouldn't care to preach it to such lowlifes as you. If you think I'm a slob, I'm also a snob, and there's no room for you in my Heaven—it's a private place, where Swift, Shaw, and Petronius Arbiter come to dinner.

And oh, the feasts we have! The Trimalchio's, the Emory's we dissect!

We finish you with the soup, Morton!

I turned and settled at my desk. I wanted to write something. Ecclesiastes could take a night off. I wanted to write a poem, a poem about the one hundred-seventeenth dance of Locar; about a rose following the light, traced by the wind, sick, like Blake's rose, dying . . .

I found a pencil and began.

When I had finished I was pleased. It wasn't great—at least, it was no greater than it needed to be—High Martian not being my strongest tongue. I groped, and put it into English, with partial rhymes. Maybe I'd stick it in my next book. I called it *Braxa*:

In a land of wind and red,
where the icy evening of Time
freezes milk in the breasts of Life,
as two moons overhead—
cat and dog in alleyways of dream—
scratch and scramble agelessly my flight . . .
This final flower turns a burning head.

I put it away and found some phenobarbitol. I was suddenly tired.

When I showed my poem to M'Cwyie the next day, she read it through several times, very slowly.

"It is lovely," she said. "But you used three words from your own language. 'Cat' and 'dog', I assume, are two small animals with a hereditary hatred for one another. But what is 'flower'?"

"Oh," I said. "I've never come across your word for 'flower', but I was actually thinking of an Earth-flower, the rose."

"What is it like?"

"Well, its petals are generally bright red. That's what I meant, on one level, by 'burning head'. I also wanted it to imply fever, though, and red hair, and the fire of life. The rose, itself, has a thorny stem, green leaves, and a distinct, pleasant aroma."

"I wish I could see one."

"I suppose it could be arranged. I'll check."

"Do it, please. You are a—" She used the word for "prophet", or religious poet, like Isaiah or Locar. "—and your poem is inspired. I shall tell Braxa of it."

I declined the nomination, but felt flattered.

This, then, I decided, was the strategic day, the day on which to ask whether I might bring in the microfilm machine and the camera. I wanted to copy all their texts, I explained, and I couldn't write fast enough to do it.

She surprised me by agreeing immediately. But she bowled me over with her invitation.

"Would you like to come and stay here while you do this thing? Then you can work night and day, any time you want—except when the Temple is being used, of course."

I bowed.

"I should be honored."

"Good. Bring your machines when you want, and I will show you a room."

"Will this afternoon be all right?"

"Certainly."

"Then I will go now and get things ready. Until this afternoon . . ."

"Good-bye."

I anticipated a little trouble from Emory, but not much. Everyone back at the ship was anxious to see the Martians, talk with the Martians, poke needles in the Martians, ask them about Martian climate, diseases, soil chemistry, politics, and mushrooms (our botanist was a fungus nut, but a reasonably good guy)—and only four or five had actually gotten to see them. The crew had been spending most of its

time excavating dead cities and their acropolises. We played the game by strict rules, and the natives were as fiercely insular as the nineteenth-century Japanese. I figured I would meet with little resistance, and I figured right.

In fact, I got the distinct impression that everyone was happy to see me move out.

I stopped in the hydroponics room to speak with our mushroom-master.

"Hi, Kane. Grow any toadstools in the sand yet?"

He sniffed. He always sniffs. Maybe he's allergic to plants.

"Hello, Gallinger. No, I haven't had any success with toadstools, but look behind the car barn next time you're out there. I've got a few cacti going."

"Great," I observed. Doc Kane was about my only friend aboard, not counting Betty.

"Say, I came down to ask you a favor."

"Name it."

"I want a rose."

"A what?"

"A rose. You know, a nice red American Beauty job—thorns, pretty smelling—"

"I don't think it will take in this soil. *Sniff, sniff.*"

"No, you don't understand. I don't want to plant it, I just want the flowers."

"I'd have to use the tanks." He scratched his hairless dome. "It would take at least three months to get you flowers, even under forced growth."

"Will you do it?"

"Sure, if you don't mind the wait."

"Not at all. In fact, three months will just make it before we leave." I looked about at the pools of crawling slime, at the trays of shoots. "—I'm moving up to Tirellian today, but I'll be in and out all the time. I'll be here when it blooms."

"Moving up there, eh? Moore said they're an in-group."

"I guess I'm 'in' then."

"Looks that way—I still don't see how you learned their language, though. Of course, I had trouble with French and German for my Ph.D., but last week I heard Betty demonstrate it at lunch. It just sounds like a lot of weird

noises. She says speaking it is like working a *Times* crossword and trying to imitate birdcalls at the same time."

I laughed, and took the cigarette he offered me.

"It's complicated," I acknowledged. "But, well, it's as if you suddenly came across a whole new class of mycetae here—you'd dream about it at night."

His eyes were gleaming.

"Wouldn't that be something! I might yet, you know."

"Maybe you will."

He chuckled as we walked to the door.

"I'll start your roses tonight. Take it easy down there."

"You bet. Thanks."

Like I said, a fungus nut, but a fairly good guy.

My quarters in the Citadel of Tirellian were directly adjacent to the Temple, on the inward side and slightly to the left. They were a considerable improvement over my cramped cabin, and I was pleased that Martian culture had progressed sufficiently to discover the desirability of the mattress over the pallet. Also, the bed was long enough to accommodate me, which *was* surprising.

So I unpacked and took 16 35 mm. shots of the Temple, before starting on the books.

I took 'stats until I was sick of turning pages without knowing what they said. So I started translating a work of history.

"Lo. In the thirty-seventh year of the Process of Cillen the rains came, which gave rise to rejoicing, for it was a rare and untoward occurrence, and commonly construed a blessing.

"But it was not the life-giving semen of Malann which fell from the heavens. It was the blood of the universe, spurting from an artery. And the last days were upon us. The final dance was to begin.

"The rains brought the plague that does not kill, and the last passes of Locar began with their drumming . . ."

I asked myself what the hell Tamur meant, for he was an historian and supposedly committed to fact. This was not their Apocalypse.

Unless they could be one and the same . . . ?

Why not? I mused. Tirellian's handful of people were

the remnant of what had obviously once been a highly developed culture. They had had wars, but no holocausts; science, but little technology. A plague, a plague that did not kill . . . ? Could that have done it? How, if it wasn't fatal?

I read on, but the nature of the plague was not discussed. I turned pages, skipped ahead, and drew a blank.

M'Cwyiel M'Cwyiel When I want to question you most, you are not around!

Would it be a *faux pas* to go looking for her? Yes, I decided. I was restricted to the rooms I had been shown, that had been an implicit understanding. I would have to wait to find out.

So I cursed long and loud, in many languages, doubtless burning Malann's sacred ears, there in his Temple.

He did not see fit to strike me dead, so I decided to call it a day and hit the sack.

I must have been asleep for several hours when Braxa entered my room with a tiny lamp. She dragged me awake by tugging at my pajama sleeve.

I said hello. Thinking back, there is not much else I could have said.

"Hello."

"I have come," she said, "to hear the poem."

"What poem?"

"Yours."

"Oh."

I yawned, sat up, and did things people usually do when awakened in the middle of the night to read poetry.

"That is very kind of you, but isn't the hour a trifle awkward?"

"I don't mind," she said.

Someday I am going to write an article for the *Journal of Semantics*, called "Tone of Voice: An Insufficient Vehicle for Irony."

However, I was awake, so I grabbed my robe.

"What sort of animal is that?" she asked, pointing at the silk dragon on my lapel.

"Mythical," I replied. "Now look, it's late. I am tired. I

have much to do in the morning. And M'Cwyie just might get the wrong idea if she learns you were here."

"Wrong idea?"

"You know damned well what I mean!" It was the first time I had had an opportunity to use Martian profanity, and it failed.

"No," she said, "I do not know."

She seemed frightened, like a puppy being scolded without knowing what it has done wrong.

I softened. Her red cloak matched her hair and lips so perfectly, and those lips were trembling.

"Here now, I didn't mean to upset you. On my world there are certain, uh, mores, concerning people of different sex alone together in bedrooms, and not allied by marriage . . . Um, I mean, you see what I mean?"

"No."

They were jade, her eyes.

"Well, it's sort of . . . Well, it's sex, that's what it is."

A light was switched on in those jade lamps.

"Oh, you mean having children!"

"Yes. That's it! Exactly."

She laughed. It was the first time I had heard laughter in Tirellian. It sounded like a violinist striking his high strings with the bow, in short little chops. It was not an altogether pleasant thing to hear, especially because she laughed too long.

When she had finished she moved closer.

"I remember, now," she said. "We used to have such rules. Half a Process ago, when I was a child, we had such rules. But," she looked as if she were ready to laugh again, "there is no need for them now."

My mind moved like a tape recorder played at triple speed.

Half a Process! HalfaProcessaProcessaProcess! No! Yes!

Half a Process was two hundred-forty-three years, roughly speaking!

—Time enough to learn the 2224 dances of Locar.

—Time enough to grow old, if you were human.

—Earth-style human, I mean.

I looked at her again, pale as the white queen in an ivory chess set.

She was human, I'd stake my soul—alive, normal, healthy, I'd stake my life—woman, my body . . .

But she was two and a half centuries old, which made M'Cwyie Methusala's grandma. It flattered me to think of their repeated complimenting of my skills, as linguist, as poet. These superior beings!

But what did she mean 'there is no such need for them now'? Why the near-hysteria? Why all those funny looks I'd been getting from M'Cwyie?

I suddenly knew I was close to something important, besides a beautiful girl.

"Tell me," I said, in my Casual Voice, "did it have anything to do with 'the plague that does not kill,' of which Tamur wrote?"

"Yes," she replied, "the children born after the Rains could have no children of their own, and—"

"And what?" I was leaning forward, memory set at "record".

"—and the men had no desire to get any."

I sagged backward against the bedpost. Racial sterility, masculine impotence, following phenomenal weather. Had some vagabond cloud of radioactive junk from God knows where penetrated their weak atmosphere one day? One day long before Shiaparelli saw the canals, mythical as my dragon, before those "canals" had given rise to some correct guesses for all the wrong reasons, had Braxa been alive, dancing, here—damned in the womb since blind Milton had written of another paradise, equally lost?

I found a cigarette. Good thing I had thought to bring ashtrays. Mars had never had a tobacco industry either. Or booze. The ascetics I had met in India had been Dionysiac compared to this.

"What is that tube of fire?"

"A cigarette. Want one?"

"Yes, please."

She sat beside me, and I lighted it for her.

"It irritates the nose."

"Yes. Draw some into your lungs, hold it there, and exhale."

A moment passed.

"Ooh," she said.

A pause, then, "Is it sacred?"

"No, it's nicotine," I answered, "a very *ersatz* form of divinity."

Another pause.

"Please don't ask me to translate 'ersatz'."

"I won't. I get this feeling sometimes when I dance."

"It will pass in a moment."

"Tell me your poem now."

An idea hit me.

"Wait a minute," I said, "I may have something better."

I got up and rummaged through my notebooks, then I returned and sat beside her.

"These are the first three chapters of the Book of Ecclesiastes," I explained. "It is very similar to your own sacred books."

I started reading.

I got through eleven verses before she cried out, "Please don't read that! Tell me one of yours!"

I stopped and tossed the notebook onto a nearby table. She was shaking, not as she had quivered that day she danced as the wind, but with the jitter of unshed tears. She held her cigarette awkwardly, like a pencil. Clumsily, I put my arm about her shoulders.

"He is so sad," she said, "like all the others."

So I twisted my mind like a bright ribbon, folded it, and tied the crazy Christmas knots I love so well. From German to Martian, with love, I did an impromptu paraphrasal of a poem about a Spanish dancer. I thought it would please her. I was right.

"Ooh," she said again. "Did you write that?"

"No, it's by a better man than I."

"I don't believe you. You wrote it."

"No, a man named Rilke did."

"But you brought it across to my language. —Light another match, so I can see how she danced."

I did.

" 'The fires of forever'," she mused, "and she stamped them out, 'with small, firm feet'. I wish I could dance like that."

"You're better than any Gypsy," I laughed, blowing it out.

"No, I'm not. I couldn't do that."

Her cigarette was burning down, so I removed it from her fingers and put it out, along with my own.

"Do you want me to dance for you?"

"No," I said. "Go to bed."

She smiled, and before I realized it, had unclasped the fold of red at her shoulder.

And everything fell away.

And I swallowed, with some difficulty.

"All right," she said.

So I kissed her, as the breath of fallen cloth extinguished the lamp.

III

The days were like Shelley's leaves: yellow, red, brown, whipped in bright gusts by the west wind. They swirled past me with the rattle of microfilm. Almost all the books were recorded now. It would take scholars years to get through them, to properly assess their value. Mars was locked in my desk.

Ecclesiastes, abandoned and returned to a dozen times, was almost ready to speak in the High Tongue.

I whistled when I wasn't in the Temple. I wrote reams of poetry I would have been ashamed of before. Evenings I would walk with Braxa, across the dunes or up into the mountains. Sometimes she would dance for me; and I would read something long, and in dactylic hexameter. She still thought I was Rilke, and I almost kidded myself into believing it. Here I was, staying at the Castle Duino, writing his *Elegies.*

> *. . . It is strange to inhabit the Earth no more,*
> *to use no longer customs scarce acquired,*
> *nor interpret roses . . .*

No! Never interpret roses! Don't. Smell them (sniff, Kane!), pick them, enjoy them. Live in the moment. Hold to it tightly. But charge not the gods to explain. So fast the leaves go by, are blown . . .

And no one ever noticed us. Or cared.

Laura. Laura and Braxa. They rhyme, you know, with a bit of a clash. Tall, cool, and blonde was she (I hate blondes!), and Daddy had turned me inside out, like a pocket, and I thought she could fill me again. But the big, beat word-slinger, with Judas-beard and dog-trust in his eyes, oh, he had been a fine decoration at her parties. And that was all.

How the machine cursed me in the Temple! It blasphemed Malann and Gallinger. And the wild west wind went by and something was not far behind.

The last days were upon us.

A day went by and I did not see Braxa, and a night.

And a second. A third.

I was half-mad. I hadn't realized how close we had become, how important she had been. With the dumb assurance of presence, I had fought against questioning roses.

I had to ask. I didn't want to, but I had no choice.

"Where is she, M'Cwyie? Where is Braxa?"

"She is gone," she said.

"Where?"

"I do not know."

I looked at those devil-bird eyes. Anathema maranatha rose to my lips.

"I must know."

She looked through me.

"She has left us. She is gone. Up into the hills, I suppose. Or the desert. It does not matter. What does anything matter? The dance draws to a close. The Temple will soon be empty."

"Why? Why did she leave?"

"I do not know."

"I must see her again. We lift off in a matter of days."

"I am sorry, Gallinger."

"So am I," I said, and slammed shut a book without saying "m'narra".

I stood up.

"I will find her."

I left the Temple. M'Cwyie was a seated statue. My boots were still where I had left them.

All day I roared up and down the dunes, going nowhere. To the crew of the *Aspic* I must have looked like a sandstorm, all by myself. Finally, I had to return for more fuel.

Emory came stalking out.

"Okay, make it good. You look like the abominable dust man. Why the rodeo?"

"Why, I, uh, lost something."

"In the middle of the desert? Was it one of your sonnets? They're the only thing I can think of that you'd make such a fuss over."

"No, dammit! It was something personal."

George had finished filling the tank. I started to mount the jeepster again.

"Hold on there!" He grabbed my arm.

"You're not going back until you tell me what this is all about."

I could have broken his grip, but then he could order me dragged back by the heels, and quite a few people would enjoy doing the dragging. So I forced myself to speak slowly, softly:

"It's simply that I lost my watch. My mother gave it to me and it's a family heirloom. I want to find it before we leave."

"You sure it's not in your cabin, or down in Tirellian?"

"I've already checked."

"Maybe somebody hid it to irritate you. You know you're not the most popular guy around."

I shook my head.

"I thought of that. But I always carry it in my right pocket. I think it might have bounced out going over the dunes."

He narrowed his eyes.

"I remember reading on a book jacket that your mother died when you were born."

"That's right," I said, biting my tongue. "The watch belonged to her father and she wanted me to have it. My father kept it for me."

"Hmph!" he snorted. "That's a pretty strange way to look for a watch, riding up and down in a jeepster."

"I could see the light shining off it that way," I offered, lamely.

"Well, it's starting to get dark," he observed. "No sense looking any more today.

"Throw a dust sheet over the jeepster," he directed a mechanic.

He patted my arm.

"Come on in and get a shower, and something to eat. You look as if you could use both."

Little fatty flecks beneath pale eyes, thinning hair, and an Irish nose; a voice a decibel louder than anyone else's . . .

His only qualifications for leadership!

I stood there, hating him. Claudius! If only this were the fifth act!

But suddenly the idea of a shower, and food, came through to me. I could use both badly. If I insisted on hurrying back immediately I might arouse more suspicion.

So I brushed some sand from my sleeve.

"You're right. That sounds like a good idea."

"Come on, we'll eat in my cabin."

The shower was a blessing, clean khakis were the grace of God, and the food smelled like Heaven.

"Smells pretty good," I said.

We hacked up our steaks in silence. When we got to the dessert and coffee he suggested:

"Why don't you take the night off? Stay here and get some sleep."

I shook my head.

"I'm pretty busy. Finishing up. There's not much time left."

"A couple days ago you said you were almost finished."

"Almost, but not quite."

"You also said they'll be holding a service in the Temple tonight."

"That's right. I'm going to work in my room."

He shrugged his shoulders.

Finally, he said, "Gallinger," and I looked up because my name means trouble.

"It shouldn't be any of my business," he said, "but it is. Betty says you have a girl down there."

There was no question mark. It was a statement hanging in the air. Waiting.

—*Betty, you're a bitch. You're a cow and a bitch. And a*

jealous one, at that. Why didn't you keep your nose where it belonged, shut your eyes? Your mouth?

"So?" I said, a statement with a question mark.

"So," he answered it, "it is my duty, as head of this expedition, to see that relations with the natives are carried on in friendly, and diplomatic, manner."

"You speak of them," I said, "as though they are aborigines. Nothing could be further from the truth."

I rose.

"When my papers are published everyone on Earth will know that truth. I'll tell them things Doctor Moore never even guessed at. I'll tell the tragedy of a doomed race, waiting for death, resigned and disinterested. I'll tell why, and it will break hard, scholarly hearts. I'll write about it, and they will give me more prizes, and this time I won't want them.

"My God!" I exclaimed. "They had a culture when our ancestors were clubbing the sabre-tooth and finding out how fire works!"

"*Do* you have a girl down there?"

"Yes!" I said. *Yes, Claudius! Yes, Daddy! Yes, Emory!* "I do. But I'm going to let you in on a scholarly scoop now. They're already dead. They're sterile. In one more generation there won't be any Martians."

I paused, then added, "Except in my papers, except on a few pieces of microfilm and tape. And in some poems, about a girl who did give a damn and could only bitch about the unfairness of it all by dancing."

"Oh," he said.

After awhile:

"You *have* been behaving differently these past couple months. You've even been downright civil on occasion, you know. I couldn't help wondering what was happening. I didn't know anything mattered that strongly to you."

I bowed my head.

"Is she the reason you were racing around the desert?"

I nodded.

"Why?"

I looked up.

"Because she's out there, somewhere. I don't know where, or why. And I've got to find her before we go."

"Oh," he said again.

Then he leaned back, opened a drawer, and took out something wrapped in a towel. He unwound it. A framed photo of a woman lay on the table.

"My wife," he said.

It was an attractive face, with big, almond eyes.

"I'm a Navy man, you know," he began. "Young officer once. Met her in Japan.

"Where I come from it wasn't considered right to marry into another race, so we never did. But she was my wife. When she died I was on the other side of the world. They took my children, and I've never seen them since. I couldn't learn what orphanage, what home, they were put into. That was long ago. Very few people know about it."

"I'm sorry," I said.

"Don't be. Forget it. But," he shifted in his chair and looked at me, "if you do want to take her back with you—do it. It'll mean my neck, but I'm too old to ever head another expedition like this one. So go ahead."

He gulped his cold coffee.

"Get your jeepster."

He swivelled the chair around.

I tried to say "thank you" twice, but I couldn't. So I got up and walked out.

"Sayonara, and all that," he muttered behind me.

"Here it is, Gallinger!" I heard a shout.

I turned on my heel and looked back up the ramp.

"Kane!"

He was limned in the port, shadow against light, but I had heard him sniff.

I returned the few steps.

"Here what is?"

"Your rose."

He produced a plastic container, divided internally. The lower half was filled with liquid. The stem ran down into it. The other half, a glass of claret in this horrible night, was a large, newly-opened rose.

"Thank you," I said, tucking it into my jacket.

"Going back to Tirellian, eh?"

"Yes."

"I saw you come aboard, so I got it ready. Just missed you at the Captain's cabin. He was busy. Hollered out that I could catch you at the barns."

"Thanks again."

"It's chemically treated. It will stay in bloom for weeks."

I nodded. I was gone.

Up into the mountains now. Far. Far. The sky was a bucket of ice in which no moons floated. The going became steeper, and the little donkey protested. I whipped him with the throttle and went on. Up. Up. I spotted a green, unwinking star, and felt a lump in my throat. The encased rose beat against my chest like an extra heart. The donkey brayed, long and loudly, then began to cough. I lashed him some more and he died.

I threw the emergency brake on and got out. I began to walk.

So cold, so cold it grows. Up here. At night? Why? Why did she do it? Why flee the campfire when night comes on?

And I was up, down around, and through every chasm, gorge, and pass, with my long-legged strides and an ease of movement never known on Earth.

Barely two days remain, my love, and thou hast forsaken me. Why?

I crawled under overhangs. I leapt over ridges. I scraped my knees, an elbow. I heard my jacket tear.

No answer, Malann? Do you really hate your people this much? Then I'll try someone else. Vishnu, you're the Preserver. Preserve her, please! Let me find her.

Jehovah?

Adonis? Osiris? Thammuz? Manitou? Legba? Where is she?

I ranged far and high, and I slipped.

Stones ground underfoot and I dangled over an edge. My fingers so cold. It was hard to grip the rock.

I looked down.

Twelve feet or so. I let go and dropped, landed rolling.

Then I heard her scream.

I lay there, not moving, looking up. Against the night, above, she called.

"Gallinger!"

I lay still.

"Gallinger!"

And she was gone.

I heard stones rattle and knew she was coming down some path to the right of me.

I jumped up and ducked into the shadow of a boulder.

She rounded a cut-off, and picked her way, uncertainly, through the stones.

"Gallinger?"

I stepped out and seized her shoulders.

"Braxa."

She screamed again, then began to cry, crowding against me. It was the first time I had ever heard her cry.

"Why?" I asked. "Why?"

But she only clung to me and sobbed.

Finally, "I thought you had killed yourself."

"Maybe I would have," I said. "Why did you leave Tirellian? And me?"

"Didn't M'Cwyie tell you? Didn't you guess?"

"I didn't guess, and M'Cwyie said she didn't know."

"Then she lied. She knows."

"What? What is it she knows?"

She shook all over, then was silent for a long time. I realized suddenly that she was wearing only her flimsy dancer's costume. I pushed her from me, took off my jacket, and put it about her shoulders.

"Great Malann!" I cried. "You'll freeze to death!"

"No," she said, "I won't."

I was transferring the rose-case to my pocket.

"What is that?" she asked.

"A rose," I answered. "You can't make it out much in the dark. I once compared you to one. Remember?"

"Yu-Yes. May I carry it?"

"Sure." I stuck it in the jacket pocket.

"Well? I'm still waiting for an explanation."

"You really do not know?" she asked.

"No!"

"When the Rains came," she said, "apparently only our men were affected, which was enough. . . . Because I—wasn't—affected—apparently—"

"Oh," I said. "Oh."

We stood there, and I thought.

"Well, why did you run? What's wrong with being pregnant on Mars? Tamur was mistaken. Your people can live again."

She laughed, again that wild violin played by a Paginini gone mad. I stopped her before it went too far.

"How?" she finally asked, rubbing her cheek.

"Your people live longer than ours. If our child is normal it will mean our races can intermarry. There must still be other fertile women of your race. Why not?"

"You have read the Book of Locar," she said, "and yet you ask me that? Death was decided, voted upon, and passed, shortly after it appeared in this form. But long before, the followers of Locar knew. They decided it long ago. 'We have done all things,' they said, 'we have seen all things, we have heard and felt all things. The dance was good. Now let it end.' "

"You can't believe that."

"What I believe does not matter," she replied. "M'Cwyie and the Mothers have decided we must die. Their very title is now a mockery, but their decisions will be upheld. There is only one prophecy left, and it is mistaken. We will die."

"No," I said.

"What, then?"

"Come back with me, to Earth."

"No."

"All right, then. Come with me now."

"Where?"

"Back to Tirellian. I'm going to talk to the Mothers."

"You can't! There is a Ceremony tonight!"

I laughed.

"A ceremony for a god who knocks you down, and then kicks you in the teeth?"

"He is still Malann," she answered. "We are still his people."

"You and my father would have gotten along fine," I snarled. "But I am going, and you are coming with me, even if I have to carry you—and I'm bigger than you are."

"But you are not bigger than Ontro."

"Who the hell is Ontro?"

"He will stop you, Gallinger. He is the Fist of Malann."

IV

I scudded the jeepster to a halt in front of the only entrance I knew, M'Cwyie's. Braxa, who had seen the rose in a headlamp, now cradled it in her lap, like our child, and said nothing. There was a passive, lovely look on her face.

"Are they in the Temple now?" I wanted to know.

The Madonna-expression did not change. I repeated the question. She stirred.

"Yes," she said, from a distance, "but you cannot go in."

"We'll see."

I circled and helped her down.

I led her by the hand, and she moved as if in a trance. In the light of the new-risen moon, her eyes looked as they had the day I met her, when she had danced. I snapped my fingers. Nothing happened.

So I pushed the door open and led her in. The room was half-lighted.

And she screamed for the third time that evening:

"Do not harm him, Ontro! It is Gallinger!"

I had never seen a Martian man before, only women. So I had no way of knowing whether he was a freak, though I suspected it strongly.

I looked up at him.

His half-naked body was covered with moles and swellings. Gland trouble, I guessed.

I had thought I was the tallest man on the planet, but he was seven feet tall and overweight. Now I knew where my giant bed had come from!

"Go back," he said. "She may enter. You may not."

"I must get my books and things."

He raised a huge left arm. I followed it. All my belongings lay neatly stacked in the corner.

"I must go in. I must talk with M'Cwyie and the Mothers."

"You may not."

"The lives of your people depend on it."

"Go back," he boomed. "Go home to *your* people, Gallinger. Leave *us!*"

My name sounded so different on his lips, like someone else's. How old was he? I wondered. Three hundred? Four? Had he been a Temple guardian all his life? Why? Who was there to guard against? I didn't like the way he moved. I had seen men who moved like that before.

"Go back," he repeated.

If they had refined their martial arts as far as they had their dances, or worse yet, if their fighting arts were a part of the dance, I was in for trouble.

"Go on in," I said to Braxa. "Give the rose to M'Cwyie. Tell her that I sent it. Tell her I'll be there shortly."

"I will do as you ask. Remember me on Earth, Gallinger. Good-bye."

I did not answer her, and she walked past Ontro and into the next room, bearing her rose.

"Now will you leave?" he asked. "If you like, I will tell her that we fought and you almost beat me, but I knocked you unconscious and carried you back to your ship."

"No," I said, "either I go around you or go over you, but I am going through."

He dropped into a crouch, arms extended.

"It is a sin to lay hands on a holy man," he rumbled, "but I will stop you, Gallinger."

My memory was a fogged window, suddenly exposed to fresh air. Things cleared. I looked back six years.

I was a student of Oriental Languages at the University of Tokyo. It was my twice-weekly night of recreation. I stood in a 30-foot circle in the Kodokan, the *judogi* lashed about my high hips by a brown belt. I was *Ik-kyu,* one notch below the lowest degree of expert. A brown diamond above my right breast said 'Jiu-Jitsu' in Japanese, and it meant *atemiwaza,* really, because of the one striking-technique I had worked out, found unbelievably suitable to my size, and won matches with.

But I had never used it on a man, and it was five years since I had practiced. I was out of shape, I knew, but I tried hard to force my mind *tsuki no kokoro,* like the moon, reflecting the all of Ontro.

Somewhere, out of the past, a voice said, *"Hajime,* let it begin."

I snapped into my *neko-ashi-dachi* cat-stance, and his eyes burned strangely. He hurried to correct his own position—and I threw it at him!

My one trick!

My long left leg lashed up like a broken spring. Seven feet off the ground my foot connected with his jaw as he tried to leap backward.

His head snapped back and he fell. A soft moan escaped his lips. *That's all there is to it,* I thought. *Sorry, old fellow.*

And as I stepped over him, somehow, groggily, he tripped me, and I fell across his body. I couldn't believe he had strength enough to remain conscious after that blow, let alone move. I hated to punish him any more.

But he found my throat and slipped a forearm across it before I realized there was a purpose to his action.

No! Don't let it end like this!

It was a bar of steel across my windpipe, my carotids. Then I realized that he was still unconscious, and that this was a reflex instilled by countless years of training. I had seen it happen once, in *shiai.* The man had died because he had been choked unconscious and still fought on, and his opponent thought he had not been applying the choke properly. He tried harder.

But it was rare, so very rare!

I jammed my elbows into his ribs and threw my head back in his face. The grip eased, but not enough. I hated to do it, but I reached up and broke his little finger.

The arm went loose and I twisted free.

He lay there panting, face contorted. My heart went out to the fallen giant, defending his people, his religion, following his orders. I cursed myself as I had never cursed before, for walking over him, instead of around.

I staggered across the room to my little heap of possessions. I sat on the projector case and lit a cigarette.

I couldn't go into the Temple until I got my breath back, until I thought of something to say?

How do you talk a race out of killing itself?

Suddenly—

—Could it happen? Would it work that way? If I read

them the Book of Ecclesiastes—if I read them a greater piece of literature than any Locar ever wrote—and as somber—and as pessimistic—and showed them that our race had gone on despite one man's condemning all of life in the highest poetry—showed them that the vanity he had mocked had borne us to the Heavens—would they believe it?—would they change their minds?

I ground out my cigarette on the beautiful floor, and found my notebook. A strange fury rose within me as I stood.

And I walked into the Temple to preach the Black Gospel according to Gallinger, from the Book of Life.

There was silence all about me.

M'Cwyie had been reading Locar, the rose set at her right hand, target of all eyes.

Until I entered.

Hundreds of people were seated on the floor, barefoot. The few men were as small as the women, I noted.

I had my boots on.

Go all the way, I figured. *You either lose or you win—everything!*

A dozen crones sat in a semicircle behind M'Cwyie. The Mothers.

The barren earth, the dry wombs, the fire-touched.

I moved to the table.

"Dying yourselves, you would condemn your people," I addressed them, "that they may not know the life you have known—the joys, the sorrows, the fullness. —But it is not true that you all must die." I addressed the multitude now. "Those who say this lie. Braxa knows, for she will bear a child—"

They sat there, like rows of Buddhas. M'Cwyie drew back into the semicircle.

"—my child!" I continued, wondering what my father would have thought of this sermon.

". . . And all the women young enough may bear children. It is only your men who are sterile. —And if you permit the doctors of the next expedition to examine you, perhaps even the men may be helped. But if they cannot, you can mate with the men of Earth.

"And ours is not an insignificant people, an insignificant place," I went on. "Thousands of years ago, the Locar of our world wrote a book saying that it was. He spoke as Locar did, but we did not lie down, despite plagues, wars, and famines. We did not die. One by one we beat down the diseases, we fed the hungry, we fought the wars, and recently, have gone a long time without them. We may finally have conquered them. I do not know.

"But we have crossed millions of miles of nothingness. We have visited another world. And our Locar had said, 'Why bother? What is the worth of it? It is all vanity, anyhow.'

"And the secret is," I lowered my voice, as at a poetry reading, "he was right! It *is* vanity, it *is* pride! It is the hybris of rationalism to always attack the prophet, the mystic, the god. It is our blasphemy which has made us great, and will sustain us, and which the gods secretly admire in us. —All the truly sacred names of God are blasphemous things to speak!"

I was working up a sweat. I paused dizzily.

"Here is the Book of Ecclesiastes," I announced, and began:

" 'Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity. What profit hath a man . . . ' "

I spotted Braxa in the back, mute, rapt.

I wondered what she was thinking.

And I wound the hours of night about me, like black thread on a spool.

Oh it was late! I had spoken till day came, and still I spoke. I finished Ecclesiastes and continued Gallinger.

And when I finished there was still only a silence.

The Buddhas, all in a row, had not stirred through the night. And after a long while M'Cwyie raised her right hand. One by one the Mothers did the same.

And I knew what that meant.

It meant no, do not, cease, and stop.

It meant that I had failed.

I walked slowly from the room and slumped beside my baggage.

Ontro was gone. Good that I had not killed him . . .

After a thousand years M'Cwyie entered.

She said, "Your job is finished."

I did not move.

"The prophecy is fulfilled," she said. "My people are rejoicing. You have won, holy man. Now leave us quickly."

My mind was a deflated balloon. I pumped a little air back into it.

"I'm not a holy man," I said, "just a second-rate poet with a bad case of hybris."

I lit my last cigarette.

Finally, "All right, what prophecy?"

"The Promise of Locar," she replied, as though the explaining were unnecessary, "that a holy man would come from the heavens to save us in our last hours, if all the dances of Locar were completed. He would defeat the Fist of Malann and bring us life."

"How?"

"As with Braxa, and as the example in the Temple."

"Example?"

"You read us his words, as great as Locar's. You read to us how there is 'Nothing new under the sun'. And you mocked his words as you read them—showing us a new thing.

"There has never been a flower on Mars," she finished. "He-Who-Must-Mock-in-the-Temple—you go shod on holy ground."

"But you voted 'no'," I said.

"I voted not to carry out our original plan, and to let Braxa's child live instead."

"Oh." The cigarette fell from my fingers. How close it had been! How little I had known!

"And Braxa?"

"She was chosen half a Process ago to do the dances—to wait for you."

"But she said that Ontro would stop me."

M'Cwyie stood there for a long time.

"She had never believed the prophecy herself. Things are not well with her now. She ran away, fearing it was true. When you completed it and we voted, she knew."

"Then she does not love me? Never did?"

"I am sorry, Gallinger. It was the one part of her duty she never managed."

"Duty," I said flatly. . . . Dutydutyduth! Tra-la!

"She has said good-bye, she does not wish to see you again.

". . . and we will never forget your teachings," she added.

"Don't," I said, automatically, suddenly knowing the great paradox which lies at the heart of all miracles. I did not believe a word of my own gospel, never had.

I stood, like a drunken man, and muttered "M'narra."

I went outside, into my last day on Mars.

I have conquered thee, Malann—and the victory is thine! Rest easy on thy starry bed. God damned!

I left the jeepster there and walked back to the *Aspic,* leaving the burden of life so many footsteps behind me. I went to my cabin, locked the door, and took forty-four sleeping pills.

But when I awakened I was in the dispensary, and alive.

I felt the throb of engines as I slowly stood up and somehow made it to the port.

Blurred Mars hung like a swollen belly above me, until it dissolved, brimmed over, and streamed down my face.

The connection between bears and gulls may not be at once apparent, but it's there, good people; it's *there.* Eric St. Clair is perhaps the leading American writer of children's stories about bears, having sold close to 100 of them; and has had a rather limited range of occupations—statistician, social worker, horticulturalist and shipfitter. He is now a laboratory assistant in the University of California's Physics Department, at Berkeley. His wife is well-known as a Science Fiction writer, both as Margaret St. Clair and Idris Seabright. "My first sale in the genre," he says of this story; "though not much Science Fiction . . . no space warp, nobody named Xalff." Seems to have done all right without them, though.

OLSEN AND THE GULL

by Eric St. Clair

ONE HOT AFTERNOON, some five months after he had been cast away on the island, Olsen found out how to run the weather.

A gull told him how.

There wasn't a thing on the island except gulls and their nests—millions of each—and the place was knee-deep with guano. Any other man, five months alone, hundreds of miles off the shipping lanes, might have gone crazy.

Not Olsen, though. He lacked what it takes to go crazy with. He chased gulls by the hour, yelling at them because they could fly away any time they liked, while he couldn't—but he never talked to them in a conversational way. Nor did he talk to himself. Olsen, a man of few words and even fewer ideas, had nothing to say.

As a pastime, for amusement, he kicked the gulls' nests about, and trampled their eggs. True, the eggs were his sole food—but how he detested them! They were foul and rank and fishy, and the rainwater he sometimes found to drink them down with always reeked with guano. There were millions of eggs; gladly he trampled them!

On this particular afternoon Olsen trampled eggs in time to a chant he had made up. "Tromp tromp tromp!" and he

was eggy up to his knees. He was neither sad nor happy about it; he just trampled and bellowed because it seemed the thing to do.

A gray gull swooped down, landed, and stepped daintily toward him on its pretty little pink legs.

"Olsen," said the gull.

Olsen's bellowing died away. His trampling stopped. His mouth fell open. "Hoo?" he said. "Hawm? Now I have gone crazy."

"Very likely you have," said the gull. "But pull yourself together, Olsen. I propose to do you a favor."

Olsen's mind, never a quick one, remained motionless.

"You're a fine fellow, Olsen," the gull went on, "and we all think the world of you—but couldn't you be just a little more careful with our nests?" The gull eyed Olsen's eggy legs with some sort of expression: a gull's face being the type it is, it's hard to tell just what might be on its mind.

"Well hey," said Olsen in his own defense. "If you—"

"What you need," the gull said, "is something to take your attention away from damaging our nests. Wholesome recreation—"

"Burlesque shows!" breathed Olsen beatifically.

"Not quite," the gull said. "I have something different in mind. Now observe—" the gull hauled a length of stout twine from under its wing—"with this bit of twine (and the age-old wisdom I shall impart to you) you can build a cat's cradle that will raise the storm, or quiet it, whenever you feel like it. You can run the weather. Myl" the gull said heartily, "won't that be *fun!*"

"I guess so," said Olsen. "But—"

"The power, Olsen! Think of it!" the gull cried ringingly. "The grandeur of the primeval storm! The roar of the white-crested seas that you can raise! The typhoon screaming, sheets of pelting rain, jagged lightning, the boom of thunder—at *your* call, Olsen!"

"No strippers?" said Olsen. "No fanny dancers?"

Not troubling to reply to this, the gull thereupon taught Olsen the art of constructing such a cat's cradle as would constrain the weather into obeying his, Olsen's, slightest whim.

And Olsen found it sort of interesting. He tried a typhoon,

a waterspout, a—but Olsen's mind was pretty limited. His slightest whim was indeed slight. He tried and tried, and after three days, he thought of doing some St. Elmo's Fire with his cat's cradle. Then his ideas ran out.

The gulls, meanwhile, had been repairing nests, and laying new eggs. They hadn't much time for this, though, before Olsen got bored with the weather. One storm is pretty much like another, especially with a dull fellow like Olsen in charge—a spot of rain, a bit of wind, what's so wonderful about that?

He had been eating eggs right along, which the gulls did not apparently mind, but now that his storms had lost what charm they had had, Olsen noticed once more how bad the eggs tasted. Ugh!

Bellowing the chant he had made up, "Tromp tromp tromp!" Olsen kicked nests right and left, and smashed many a fine egg.

"Olsen!" said the gray gull. "Oh, Olsen!"

"Tromp tromp tromp tromp."

"*You stop that!*" The way the gull said it made Olsen stop.

"Really, Olsen," the gull said. "I can't figure you out. You're on an island paradise with the power of a god over the weather, a fine climate, plenty of good, nourishing food—"

"Food!" shouted Olsen. He caught up a nestful of eggs. "Lousy, stinking eggs!" He dashed the nest to the guano-covered rocks at his feet. "Fooey on such eggs!"

The gull gazed at Olsen in frank astonishment. "You mean," it said slowly, "you don't *like* our eggs?"

Olsen merely spat loudly on the nest he had smashed.

"If it's food you want," said the gull thoughtfully, "give me that twine." Olsen did so, grinding the remnant of an egg under his heel. "I *am* surprised," said the gull. "Why, we all like our eggs!"

Olsen was quite horrified. "*You eat your own eggs?*"

"On occasion, yes." Placidly, daintily, the gull worked with beak and claws. A truly wonderful cat's cradle took shape.

"CANNIBALS!" Olsen shouted.

"Oh, nonsense," said the gull. "Do pull yourself together,

Olsen. Pay attention." It displayed the new cat's cradle, finished. "With this Wishing Pattern (which I will instruct you in making), you can command the sea to deliver any toothsome delicacy you want. For example, thus:"

At once the sea parted beside them. A hefty little oaken cask rolled to Olsen's feet. "Me?" said Olsen, and the gull nodded. Whimpering with joy, Olsen caught up a stone. Drooling, he battered at the head of the cask.

However, the cask turned out to contain what seemed to be a blend of gravel, worms and various fish—all in a pretty well decomposed state. "Fool" cried Olsen, shuddering at the smell.

"Well, my goodness, Olsen," said the gull fretfully. "Isn't there *anything* you like?" It pecked with gusto at what was inside the cask, making small cooing noises of pleasure. "Your very peculiar tastes are quite beyond me," the gull said after a time. "You must order for yourself from the sea. I will show you how."

Olsen would have made some comments on the dietary of gulls, but words (as usual) failed him. Instead, he allowed himself to be taught how to build the Wishing Pattern cat's cradle.

And now, whatever delicious foodstuff Olsen asked for, the sea would bring him. He scowled, as his mind churned slowly . . . what should he ask for . . . what did he want . . . ?

This time, the gulls had almost a week of peace. They repaired old nests, they built new ones, they laid a thousand eggs.

The happy period ended, though, for the same reason as before: Olsen was a man of no imagination whatever.

The Wishing Pattern cat's cradle worked just as the gull had said it would. Olsen got his hardtack and his salt pork and his tub of pineapple sherbet and his barrel of rum—and he settled down for an orgy. He gnawed at the hardtack and chomped the salt pork. He lapped up sherbet. He guzzled rum.

But the salt pork turned out to be too salty. The hardtack jarred the back of his head when he gnawed it. The sherbet melted, and ran. Only the rum really hit the spot—but even a lot of rum could not give Olsen any ideas for food other than what he was used to. Hardtack, salt pork and

pineapple sherbet were all he could think to ask for: hard-tack, salt pork and pineapple sherbet were what he got. Plus the rum, of course.

So, when the week was up, here was Olsen back at work, kicking nests, trampling eggs. chanting his "Tromp tromp tromp!" Just like old times, except that the reek of rum was now added to the eggy stench of destruction.

"Olsen!" cried the gull almost in despair. "My *good* Olsen!"

Olsen picked up an egg. He sighted at the gull.

"Please," the gull begged, preparing to dodge. "Have you no thought for the finer things the sea might bring you?"

"A keg of stale worms!" Olsen shouted. He hurled the egg, but missed widely (because of the rum in him).

"Olsen, my pet!" the gull wailed, as a gull wails when it feels bad. "My pride! My joy! My good fellow! Isn't there something . . . something . . . *I* don't know what you want: don't *you* know? Tell me! *Anything* to keep you from smashing our eggs! What, oh what, *do* you want?"

Olsen stood as though hypnotized by the gull's earnest gaze. After nearly a minute, a grin took over his face. "Women," he said.

"So!" said the gull. "The love of a good woman."

Olsen nodded eagerly, as this new idea of his slowly took over. The love of a good woman. . . . He thought of the good women who stroll the streets of Buenos Aires, of Marseilles, of Singapore. He sighed noisily, and the rum in his head went round and round.

"I'm sorry, Olsen," said the gull. "I really am—but how could I call up a woman for you, out of the sea?"

"Easy!" cried Olsen. "Like this—" With two fingers in his mouth, he gave out a shrill wolf-call. And he stared about him, as if he really expected a woman to come in answer. Five months with no company but that of gulls had done things to what passed for Olsen's mind.

Pierced by the whistle, the gull shuddered. "Don't do that," it said. "But I'll show you how to make a Mermaid Line. Wouldn't a mermaid do, a lovely, lovely mermaid?" Coaxingly, the gull spoke.

"Mermaid!" sniffed Olsen. "Half fish, half girl! Why, how

could I. . . ." Olsen's voice trailed off as he scowled, trying to think. "Say!" he said after a bit. "Would I catch one just like I like?"

"You would!" the gull said. "She will be exactly what you ask for—so *beautiful,* and she will *love* you, Olsen!"

Grinning, Olsen gave back the Wishing Pattern, and the gull unraveled it. "Observe," said the gull. "Over and under. Now reeve through the bight, so. Then you . . ." Olsen, tongue a-dangle, followed each move of the gull's pink claws.

After a couple of trials, no more than that, Olsen got it clear. (He was a sailor; even swimming in rum, he understood fancy ropework.) "Now," said the gull, "toss one end into the sea."

First, though, Olsen tied the line securely around his wrist. "But," said the gull, "what if—?"

"I don't take no chance she get away," said Olsen—and he threw the other end into the sea. It was a ten-foot line, intricate.

Almost immediately the line quivered. Olsen had caught his mermaid. No need, though, to haul her in. Gladly, she leaped from the foam; willingly, she ran to him. Adoration swam wetly in her big blue-green eyes.

Olsen threw back his head, and hollered with horror.

With her mouth, the mermaid caught the line close to the knot around Olsen's wrist. She tugged impatiently. She must get back into the sea at once; this mermaid could not live on land.

Still hollering, Olsen resisted the tug—but rum rolled and seethed inside his head, and his knees buckled. He recovered, and pulled desperately, straining against the pull of the mermaid. The line between them sang with tension—and suddenly parted.

Olsen reeled, and fell heavily on a heap of guano behind him. The mermaid toppled backward into the sea. Her legs kicked briefly above the water before they sank.

This mermaid had completely met Olsen's specifications. She was half beautiful girl (the golden legs that Olsen had now glimpsed were a delight; the round, young hips, a promise and a treasure) and half fish, from the waist on up; an unpleasant fish, like an outsize carp or a big herring.

But now the fish part was under water, out of sight; only the lovely, lovely legs beckoned for a moment, and were gone.

Olsen's mind was slow—but his instincts were in top working order. "You wait!" he bellowed, and rushed headlong toward the legs, into the sea. But the legs were gone—no, there they were, farther out. He floundered toward them. A wave caught him; he choked on the bitter water, and it almost sobered him. There were the legs again, though, in a new direction. Instinct conquered reason. Olsen splashed and struggled toward them. A wave swept over his head, but he came up undaunted.

Now, suddenly, there was no bottom at all under Olsen's feet, and he could feel a current taking him to sea. A new instinct, self-preservation, spoke up. "Swim, Olsen," it counseled, but Olsen, of course, could not swim. The golden legs flashed close beside him, and disappeared.

And something underneath the water grasped his ankle lovingly and gently. Olsen began again to holler as he felt himself being pulled under, gently, lovingly, but very firmly. After his hollering stopped, there were bubbles. Then the bubbles floated away.

The gull had watched all this with great interest. "What a *remarkable* mating custom!" it said to no one in particular. "Olsen is certainly a peculiar fellow."

It forgot about Olsen then, and set out looking for driftwood to patch up its nest.

Trying to write biographical data for a pseudonymous collaboration poses certain difficulties. We have, however, been given leave to mention that this one is the work of Alexei Panshin and Joe Hensley. It is difficult to say, in these moiling, toiling days of changing relationships between the American "races" whether the sounds we hear are the trumpets proclaiming "the year of Jubilo" or those of the "alarm-bell in the night." Or both. Or perhaps neither. Certain seasons seem appointed for change, and when the hour comes, for better or worse or unclassifiably different, no man or men can hold them back. This story will probably shock you.

DARK CONCEPTION

by Louis J. A. Adams

FOUR BLOCKS down the street, opposite the courthouse with the Confederate monument and the stack of cannonballs on the lawn, Grove Avenue was a row of antiseptic, air-conditioned storefronts. The windows looked like magazine ads. White faces moved here, in the stores, in the courthouse—the black faces were hidden, in kitchens, in storerooms, or invisibly mowing the courthouse lawn. It was the way things were.

Four blocks in Mississippi can be a long way. On the other side of the overpass, Grove Avenue was peeling paint, chipped brick, and ten-year-old cars, a smashed bottle in the gutter, stores pinched together, two storefront churches. It was a darker world—here there were no white faces—and even the sun seemed duller and hotter. It was the way things were.

He looked out the window at the street below for a long time. He'd come a long way from New York, in years as well as distance. Sometimes he wondered why he'd come at all.

Doctor William Roosevelt Brown turned away from the window that mirrored the Bington scene below feeling the sense of loss and futility that had gripped him for a long time. He looked around his neat, out-of-date examining room and brought his mind back to present time.

His nurse came in the door. She was a thin, brown girl, much lighter than his own color and she had worked for him for about a year. She was attractive in her white uniform and Brown had cat and moused her for a long time without real enthusiasm. He liked her and once he had kissed her in the darkness of the drug room, but they had broken quickly away, and that was all. Now it was strictly business.

"Eli Cadwell," she said.

"In the waiting room?" he asked, surprised.

She nodded.

Cadwell was among the people Brown had counted as least likely to show up in his office, although once they'd been friends. But that had been long ago, before Brown had gone north to med school, when Cadwell had been able to think of something other than his festering hate.

"He brought his wife in," the nurse said.

"Miss Emmet," he said formally, "are you telling me that Eli Cadwell is married?"

She nodded. "Since last month. I thought you knew. Mary Lou Shipman."

Brown picked at his neat mustache. "She's about fifteen, Eli's over fifty," he said with irritation.

"Yeah."

"All right—show them in."

At the door, Miss Emmet looked back, unsmiling. "She's pregnant, Doctor."

She ushered them in. Cadwell came first, then the girl. Cadwell's eyes darted here and there about the office, never resting. He was a lean man and once he had been tall, but now his height seemed an illusion and he walked bent, his body queerly out of focus. A group of white men, drunk on raw moonshine, larking, had caught him stealing chickens. They had lashed him between the front bumpers of two cars and backed away gently until his bones and joints had torn and cracked. That had been in the next county and a long time ago, before Brown had come here. Mostly they didn't do that sort of thing any more. They had other ways of dealing with you.

The girl, Mary Lou, was obviously pregnant. She was tiny and low breasted, her hands nervously carried over the

hump of her stomach. She watched her husband like a silent wren and her eyes were fearful when she looked elsewhere in the room, more fearful when she looked at him.

"You want me to look at her, Eli?"

Cadwell nodded. "Just look," he said.

Brown pointed at his nurse, who waited at the door. "Go with her, Mary Lou. She'll show you what to do."

She looked at her husband, awaiting his nod. When it came she shuffled, head down, following Miss Emmet.

Cadwell limped around the room. Brown watched him study the signed picture of Thurgood Marshall and the Brotherhood of Man framed certificate.

"Is that baby yours?" he asked.

Cadwell turned back and his cold eyes came up and he smiled sourly. "You're a smart son of a bitch, Brown. You figure it out." Then his eyes went down and a look of secret triumph came in his smile. "You jus' examine her, *Doctor.*" He sat down in a chair and got out a worn Bible. "I'll read me a little of this hogwash while you're doing it."

"White men, black men, and God," Brown said, feeling the tiredness come. "All right, Eli."

He went into his tiny obstetrics room and examined the girl. She lay passively, without curiosity, under his hands.

When he was done he said; "Stay here with the nurse, Mary Lou. I'll be back in a few minutes." He closed the connecting door behind him.

"Eli," he said, "did you know your wife's a virgin?"

The old man nodded crookedly. "I want a paper sayin' it. I mean to get me papers from fo', maybe five doctors saying it."

"What for?"

Now the triumph came lashing through. "For the newspapers, man. To let 'em know jus' the way things is. I mean to let all them white bastards know that a virgin is pregnant and she a black girl. They say here," he said pointing at the Bible, "that it happen before, but they lie all the time with their Jesus Crise this and Jesus Crise that and they put us down with it and spit on us." His eyes were crafty and unsane. "Now I got us a God and now we rise up and grind them to blood." He pulped the world to-

gether by grinding his hands savagely. "And we'll kill all the rest, all of the ones that don't stay with us."

"That would mean me," Brown said.

"Sure, you." His lips made a vicious parody of a smile. "Bad as them. You try to live with them. You one of them tries to get us to march to the courthouse. You fooled some of them, but not me. All them big people you got here in town. What good that do? March a few times and they stick you in the gut with a club or hose you off and you noplace—nothing. You can't live with them—you got to kill . . ."

Brown held up his hands. "You're wrong, Eli."

"Don' you call me Eli! Call me Mr. Cadwell or don' call me. You're no white man to call me Eli or Boy." He moved up close and for the first time Doctor Brown could smell the corn whiskey on his breath, sour and strong. "I'm not wrong."

Brown shook his head and retreated behind his desk out of breathshot. He looked down the titles of his books, then took one down and thumbed until he found the right place.

"Here! Crumm, Weizmann and Evans, 'Heredity, Eugenics, and Human Biology.' See here—'Parthenogenesis.' Now read what it says. It says it's possible for a virgin to have a baby. It's extremely rare, but it's possible." He thrust the book at Cadwell. "Read!"

Cadwell took the book suspiciously. In a moment he thumped it with a finger. "I don' make out these words." But he went on reading.

After a while he looked up. "It say a virgin can only have a girl baby, not a boy baby."

"Yes."

"Well, you been a big Jesus Crise man. How you explain that?" Cadwell challenged triumphantly.

Doctor Brown kept the self-taught carefulness in his voice. You learned to be careful when you were a Negro doctor in Bington.

"I'm not trying to explain Jesus. I didn't examine Jesus or his Mother. I'm only saying that your wife is pregnant with a fully intact and inelastic hymen and that medical science says it's possible, but the child born in such circumstances has to be a female."

"Why?" Cadwell almost shouted.

Brown controlled his exasperation. He said: "Every woman is a female because she has two X chromosomes. The male has one X and one Y. If the man gives an X, during intercourse, the woman gives another X, which is all she has, and the baby is a girl. If the man gives a Y the woman still gives an X and the baby is a boy. But a woman who conceives without a man has nothing but X chromosomes and so the baby *has* to be a girl."

"You mean it ain't a miracle?" Cadwell said uncertainly, partially beaten down by the flood of words.

"That's right."

Cadwell looked away and when he looked back there was a sign of craftiness in his eyes. He said slowly, as if to himself: "But mos' people, they don' know that. They think it's a miracle. It still mean somethin'."

"Not what you want it for. You start giving stories out to the newspapers and it will come out just like another freak story. You tell anything else then maybe you'll get a few people lathered up and maybe some killed."

Cadwell said, very quietly: "They's more of us in this state than they is of them."

"Sure," Brown said desperately, "but you haven't got the answer to it there. Hate and bloodshed is no solution to hate and bloodshed. All of the things worth having are coming for us. All you'll do is set it back."

Cadwell's face tensed with lines of bitterness. "I don' want what you want, man. I want what they got and for them to be like me now. I want to lead me a lynch mob and hang someone who look at one of *our* girls. I want to rent me some of my land to one of them and let them get one payment behind. I want them to try to sen' they kids to our school. I want 'em to give me back myself like I was before, when I didn't hurt so bad that I better off dead."

He held out his hands so Brown could see the pink, calloused palms. "I do it with these, Doctor. Now I want a paper from you sayin' nothin' but the hones' truth. I want you to write me a paper and say that you look at Mary Lou and that she a virgin and pregnant. You a black man and I'm a black man. You give that to me—that paper."

Brown looked at the old man steadily for a moment and

then he said evenly: "I want to finish my examination. I'll be back."

The old man smiled and made his eyes go sleepy. "I'll wait," he said. He sat his crooked body in a chair and Brown felt the terrible weight of those eyes until he closed the door.

Brown looked down at the supine woman. "All right, Mary Lou. Just lay still and relax." He crossed over to the sideboard and picked up a sterile instrument pack lying there. Miss Emmet, the nurse, watched him with curious eyes.

"What you goin' to do?" Mary Lou asked, her eyes big and afraid.

"I won't hurt you," he said. He placed the towel around her legs and, with surgical care, slit the hymen.

She gave a cry of outrage and surprise and Brown heard the door to the room open with a whoosh of air.

"What you do to Mary Lou?" Eli Cadwell demanded.

Brown turned on the water tap at the sink and calmly scrubbed his hands. He watched the girl sit up on the table. There was a thin, red line of blood on the towel.

Cadwell saw it also. With a howl of rage that was also a sound of pain he stepped forward to the sink and swung his fist at Brown. Brown saw it coming, and tried to move away. He went down hard.

"Get out of here," he heard Miss Emmet say. "I'm going to call the police. You get out of here!"

Cadwell ignored her and looked down at Brown. He said: "Maybe I take that little knife and cut you so you never bother no one again. Maybe that the answer fo' you. But I think I let you stay like you is. You know it, too. Maybe you a doctor, but when the white boys see you then you jus' another nigger." Without turning his head he said to the sobbing frightened girl on the table, "Mary Lou, you get your clothes on."

Brown came up to a sitting position and the old man kicked him hard. Brown felt the breath go out of his lungs and he slid back down, the hurt almost gone now in semi-consciousness.

He heard the old man say: "You an' Uncle Tom. You eat

their spit and you take their learnin'. White men wrote them books out there. White men can't change this baby. When this baby born I'm goin' to raise him up to hate the way I hate. They's goin' to be a line that baby draw someday and you goin' to be on the wrong side. Boy baby or girl baby—hate like I hate. We see what this virgin's baby be when it grow up."

He took Mary Lou's hand in his and they went on out the door.

When they were gone Brown let Miss Emmet help him to his feet. He looked at himself in the mirror. There was a large welt on his chin and his ribs were sore, but he felt no worse than he had when he had been hit by the fire-hose in the march on the courthouse. He would not allow Miss Emmet to call the police. He was not sure they would come anyway.

He sat down in his chair. Despite the pain in his face and chest he didn't feel bad, not bad at all.

Through the fall Brown heard almost nothing of Eli Cadwell. Sometimes on his rounds, he would hear a little of him as he heard of others, but the old man seemed peaceful and appeared to be working his tiny area of rented ground. It wasn't until the middle of December that he really heard anything of interest. One of his patients told him that Mary Lou had had her baby.

When they were back in the car after seeing the patient Brown told Miss Emmet, "I think we'd better go past Eli Cadwell's."

She shook her head. "Don't go. You'll only get in trouble."

He looked at her. "You want me to take you back to town before I go over?"

After a minute she said, "No," in a suddenly tired voice.

"Now that the little girl is here I want to try to help," he explained. "Maybe he'll let me check them over. I'd give a lot if some of these people would give up their midwives and come to me. There'd be fewer to bury."

The house was a small cabin, old and unpainted. On behind there was an outhouse. Both were in the state that comes shortly before total collapse. Brown pulled his car up

into the rutted, red dirt drive and walked through the fireweed that winter had not quite killed.

No one answered his knock. He started back for the car, oddly relieved. He saw Miss Emmet watching him with frightened eyes.

A voice called to him from down the road and he recognized Mrs. Jackman. She was stout and old and she wore a tired red sweater over her dress. She waddled towards him.

"They gone off," she said breathlessly when she was close enough.

He went on up to her. She lived down the road and she was a part time midwife. He looked at her hands, the nails encrusted with dirt no soap would reach, and sighed to himself.

"Where?" he asked.

"I don' know," she said. "Eli never talk much. After the baby born, Eli pack that old car and they all leave."

"How soon after the baby was born?"

"Three, fo' days," she said. "I tol' him that was too soon, but he don' listen. He give me his mule fo' ten dollahs and helpin' with the baby like I done. He sold his tools, too. I don' think he comin' back."

"Thank you, Mrs. Jackman," Brown said and started to turn.

"Hol' on there," she said. "I spose to pass on a message to you."

"To me?" Brown said in surprise.

"Yeah, he said to tell you they named the boy Elijah after his pa."

Slowly Brown said, "It was a boy . . ."

"Oh, yeah. Real buster of a boy."

With her message delivered, she left and Brown watched her walk back down the road to her own place. He stood there for a minute just thinking and then he went back to the car.

"I feel like a drink," he said. "Doris, do you feel like having a drink?"

She looked at him. "All right," she said.

There wasn't any place to hide, really. In twenty years he might be dead, anyway. He thought about it for a minute,

and then he reached across and opened the glove compartment. He took out a bottle and some Dixie cups.

"Merry Christmas," he said.

"It isn't Christmas yet," Doris said.

"Oh, yes," he said. "Oh, yes."

Alan E. Nourse, the writingest physician we know, considers here the question of The Perfect Match, and comes to a quite logical—and quite horrible—conclusion.

THE COMPLEAT CONSUMMATORS

by Alan E. Nourse

"THERE IS just no question about it," Tethering was saying. "Our services are made for you. The ordinary man is no problem—easy to analyze, still easier to satisfy. We hardly earn our fee. But a man of such superb discrimination who has held out for so long. . . ." He spread his hands ecstatically. "You're a challenge, my friend. You will tax our resources to the limit. But then, Consummation, Incorporated, thrives on challenge. You won't regret the outcome, I tell you three times."

"Tell me again," Frank Bailey said, still unconvinced.

"Well, the principle is obvious," said Tethering. "Until now, no marriage in history has ever been completely consummated. It's as simple as that."

"Come, now," Frank Bailey said. "You're over-selling."

"Not at all," Tethering said, flushing. "When I said consummated, I meant *consummated.* In the fullest sense of the word. Now, we can't deny that marriages have been consummated before, perhaps physically, in a haphazard sort of way, but emotionally, intellectually, spiritually . . . never! And even on the physical level . . ." Tethering broke off as though he could no longer endure the pain. "But how could you really expect more, under the circumstances? You pick a man and a woman at random from the grab-bag, utterly incompatible in a thousand subtle ways, and force them to live indefinitely in the closest, most persistent contact . . ." He sighed. "No wonder marriage is a farce. It's ridiculous. It has always been ridiculous."

"Until Consummation, Incorporated, came along," Frank Bailey said dubiously.

"Exactly," Tethering said. "Things have changed since the Frightful Fifties. No need to take chances now . . . we

have computer analysis and profile delineation to work with. We have Hunyadi and his neuropantograph. We can offer you the perfect marriage, the ultimate consummation. No risks, no gambles. Every notch in one personality is matched with the other, every line fitted perfectly to every groove."

Frank Bailey scratched his jaw. "*Somewhere* there must be a woman worth marrying," he admitted. "Though I can't imagine where."

"But what are your chances of finding her without help? Infinitesimal! How would you know her if you saw her? How could you hope to judge?" Tethering smiled. "The means of identification have been available for decades, but we are the first ones with courage enough to apply them. We need only your signal to begin."

"I think," Frank Bailey said, "that you have made a sale. You guarantee your results, of course?"

"Without reservation," Tethering said happily. "One hundred percent compatibility on all levels, or your money is refunded and the alliance annulled. I tell you three times."

It was enough for Frank Bailey. When he signed the service order, his hand didn't quiver for an instant. After all, he thought, how could he possibly lose?

The profile was exhaustive; it was clear that Consummation, Incorporated, did not intend to slouch on the job. Frank had envisioned a questionnaire or two to fill out, an interview with a man with thick glasses, and very little else. When he emerged from the gauntlet a week later he was a badly shaken man.

They started with physical measurements, and Frank saw what Tethering meant by "thorough." They recorded his height and his girth, his shoulder span and arm length. They measured him with vernier and calipers down to the point of embarrassment. They screened his eyes for exact color shade, and examined his hair for rate-of-growth, and carefully calculated his bone-muscle-fat ratio. No detail of his physical wherewithal escaped their painstaking attention.

Other things were measured, too . . . his likes and dislikes, his tastes and preconceptions, his conscious desires

and unconscious cravings. Men in white frock-coats scurried to and from the computer, programming the data already taken, verifying it, and hurrying back with new questions to be asked.

They used the latest devices and drugs to help define the dimensions of his ego. With the neuropantograph they turned his mind inside out and twisted it into a pretzel, wringing from him his most guarded emotional responses and transposing them to the activated Hunyadi tubes in the computer. Relays of interviewers spelled each other picking his brain from a dozen different directions, until Frank was almost ready to explode in their faces and storm out in a rage.

But each fragment of data extracted went onto a tape, and each segment of tape left impressions in the computer which punched holes in a card, and when it was finally over, Frank Bailey stood revealed in elemental nakedness, ready to be electronically mated.

It took time, just as Tethering had said. His own profiling was only the first step; the winnowing of prospective mates was even more painstaking. Rack after rack of female profile cards went into the machines, and day after day Frank paced the floor, certain that when all available cards had finally been screened and discarded, none would be left at all.

But one morning Tethering appeared, beaming. "Our work is done, my friend! The moment is at hand. Look!"

Frank peered with growing excitement at the two cards that represented himself and his perfect complement. "Where is she?" he demanded. "When will I meet her?"

"At once," Tethering said. "Unless you can think of some reason for waiting . . ."

And for all his native caution, Frank Bailey couldn't.

Her name was Barbara, and at first he was certain that some sort of fearful mistake had been made.

She was hardly his ideal of beauty, with her mouse-brown hair, her 30-inch bust and her slightly prominent incisors. The glasses did nothing to enhance the illusion, nor did her habit of stuttering whenever she became the least excited. And *she* was so shaken by their first meeting that

she couldn't utter a word all day; it seemed that Frank Bailey was not exactly what she had anticipated, either.

But bit by bit they began to grow on each other.

The first day neither of them ate. Barbara loved extravagant sauces and dainty salads, and she couldn't cook anyway, while Frank was a meat-and-potatoes man who brooked no nonsense at the dinner table. But the second day, almost miraculously, there was food on the table that both could tolerate, and by the third day the meals were veritable ambrosia.

They began talking, and found that their interests, while divergent, were fundamentally coherent. If she responded unexpectedly to Frank's alien taste in jazz, he was amused by her Mozart quartets, and found them excellent comic relief. Their tastes in books and entertainment did not coincide; rather, they compounded, until neither could identify the source of which interest.

It was a Platonic relationship, for a while. On the first day no mention whatever was made of the marriage. On the second day they agreed that things of the flesh were really unnecessary, and talked for hours about spiritual fulfillment. On the third day they decided simultaneously that primitivism had its moments after all; they engaged each other on the bathroom floor at four o'clock in the morning, and there was nothing haphazard about it.

Each day proved a new enrichment and a new fulfillment; they could feel themselves drawing closer. "It's wonderful," Barbara said. "It was silly to expect it all in the first instant."

"Foolish," Frank agreed.

"But there must be a flaw," she said thoughtfully. "How will we ever know when it reaches completion? Today is better than yesterday, and tomorrow will be better than today. Where will it end?"

"Who says it has to?" Frank said, brushing away the fragmentary worry that kept worming into his mind. "Tethering promised us one hundred percent fulfillment . . . and considering his fee, we have it coming. When it stops getting better and settles into a routine, then we'll know the end point. Until then, why fret?"

But it did not settle into a routine. Every day was ex-

citingly different as new heights of consummation were achieved. Mysteriously, they found themselves thinking alike, knowing what the other was about to say and leaping ahead in conversations that were only half spoken. Their lives were suddenly supercharged with a strange exhilaration, like the influence of a suble narcotic. It seemed that it could never end.

But there had to be an end point, of course.

They were sitting on the sofa one evening, exhausted from a day of ecstatic togetherness, when Barbara drew back and stared at her husband. Frank felt a chill creep down his back. He frowned at her.

"I feel very odd," Barbara said.

"I know," Frank said. "I've been feeling that way for days."

"B-b-b-b-but I mean right now, suddenly," Barbara said. "I f-f-f-feel like I'm burning up! It's different than before!"

"You're right," Frank said, suddenly alarmed. "It *is* different . . ."

"I don't like it," she said, pushing away from him.

"Neither do I," he said, starting to rise.

"Something's happening!"

"Something's happening!"

"HELP . . ."

There was silence then, with only the echo of a strangled scream.

After It had jelled for a while, It got up from the sofa and went into the kitchen to make a pot of coffee.

S. S. (for Simon Sigvart) Johnson was born in 1940 and made his first sale when he was eight. Lest aspiring and so-far-unsuccessful authors rush out like lemmings and drown themselves in despair, we add, hastily, that this sale was of a drawing—he didn't start writing for money until he was a ripe fourteen and began doing sports stories for the Hartford *Courant*. In a letter to us last Spring, Mr. Johnson said: "After changing high schools five times in three years, I quit without graduating and went to college. Five years, five majors, and three colleges later, I am finally getting a degree this June, in technical journalism from Colorado State University. During this time I have worked as head soda jerk in a creamery, forest fire fighter, fire lookout, and research directory editor. After graduation, I plan to hit the road again. I have not made up my mind whether to go to Alaska, or down to Mexico. I have red hair, a red beard, and am single, and my second desire is to see the world. My first is to write." This story leaves little doubt that he can and will. Its impact is considerable; it is a violent story, but unlike most such, its chief impact derives from what it reveals of the *minds* of its characters. We do not now know if Mr. Johnson went to Alaska or to Mexico; we do know that he has a writer's eye and will produce good things wherever he goes. CAUTION: This story stuns, and is not for the squeamish.

THE HOUSE BY THE CRAB APPLE TREE

by S. S. Johnson

RAIN BLURRED the farmhouse lying in the small valley. To the west rose the Forgotten Mountains and to the east lay low hills. Cottonwoods stood around the house and in the front yard grew a crab apple tree. Buds were forming on its branches.

The house was built of logs with some of the bark still on. Against the wall next to the door leaned a shed of rough-hewn boards. The house was still chinked in places with cement, but most of it had crumbled out and had been re-

placed with mud from the yard. Next to the broken slab porch, a skinny sow rooted in the mud.

A woman pulled the canvas aside and looked out the glassless window at the gently falling rain. She could hear the sow grunt below the window, but she couldn't see her.

Saura wished vaguely that the rain would stop. If it kept up for another week, the growing season might be too short. A short season would mean poor crops, and poor crops would cause more people to hunt. She pushed the canvas back over the edge of the window and turned. But if more people came by, she thought, she would have a better chance to get a man for Verie. She frowned.

"Does it look like it's going to clear today?" Weed asked her.

"It seems to be clearing a little."

"Perhaps it'll stop tomorrow."

Saura looked at him. "We're getting low on wood," she said. Her mouse colored hair was cropped close to her head, framing her raw red face. She wore a blouse and skirt of heavy wool.

She stared at Weed, sitting on the bench at the table, but she didn't say any more for fear of angering him. Finally he said, "Tomorrow could be worse." He pushed himself up and walked past her. At the door, he took off a stiff leather long coat from a peg, and shrugged into it. He grabbed his ax from the woodbox and pulled the door open and stepped out.

Saura walked to the opposite end of the table from where Weed had been, and sat. She picked up a potato from the pile on the floor and started peeling it with a knife she took from the table. She hoped Weed wouldn't be long. She didn't like staying in the house alone with just Verie, especially in spring when people started to the mountains to hunt.

The house was low roofed with only the main room and the room in the shed. Across from the door to the outside was the cookstove, which they used to cook and heat with, and at the end of the room near the table was a stove to heat with, but they never used it. Wood was too hard to find. The main room still had a wood floor except between the door and the cookstove. The boards there had collapsed once, so they burned them and filled the spot with dirt.

Weed had been gone only a short time when Saura heard a noise in the yard. She jerked her head in that direction, set the knife and the potato on the table, and listened. She could hear the ordinary sounds of the rain and house. Then she heard it again. She ran toward the door. Before she could reach it, someone swung it open.

"Aha!" the man laughed. "Come to greet us?"

She backed up as others filed in, stamping the mud from their leather stockings onto the dirt floor. She looked at their clubs and knives, and tried not to seem frightened. She hoped Verie would hear them and stay in the bedroom.

Five men stomped into the room, all but one wrapped in wool and leather. The fifth man was dressed only in a leather skirt, and his skin was red from the cold. He had a leather collar around his neck with a leash tied to it. The man had no arms and from the smooth skin on his shoulders, he looked as if he'd been born without them. But what fascinated Saura was his face. Long straggly hair grew on his head and he had eyebrows but no hair on his chin the way all the other men she had ever seen had. And he had no eyes, and no place for them.

Saura realized she'd stared too openly when the first man laughed a deep vicious laugh and snorted loudly, "Hey boys, she likes Alice," and they all laughed. "Well, he won't harm you." They laughed in unison again, but when the first man spoke, they stopped laughing until he finished. "We fixed that." They laughed again. "Tell the lady you won't hurt her, Alice," he commanded. The others grinned, showing yellowed and broken teeth, waiting for Alice to speak.

Alice grinned, and Saura sensed a contagious animal fright in him that made her heart beat faster. "I can't hurt you," he said in a high pitched squeak, and all five roared.

Saura couldn't see anything funny, but she smiled slightly.

"We're cold. Get a fire going," the first man ordered. When Saura stood looking at him for a moment, he stepped forward and hit her with his fist. She fell heavily to the ground and he walked to her and kicked her gently in the side. "When I say something, I mean it."

She got up and opened the firebox on the stove and looked in. The heat of the slow burning wood warmed her

face. Her hand shook slightly when she shoved the lid handle in to stir up the wood. "There is a fire," she said, standing back so they could see. The first one bent over and looked in.

He swore a word she didn't understand, and then said, "Look at that, boys, she's got a fire inside of this thing." They crowded around to look at it, except Alice, who only took a few steps forward because the man who held the leash pulled on it.

"That's a stove?" the first man asked. Saura nodded. He grunted. "What's your name?" he demanded.

"Saura."

"Saura." He grunted again. "I'm King." He turned and pointed to each of the others. "He's Knifeson, he's Longpole, he's Jay, and he's Alice." The men laughed when he pointed to Alice.

Saura had heard of the freaks, but Alice was the first she had seen.

"Knifeson, you look around in the house," King ordered, "and the rest look outside. Get that pig." He looked at Saura. "And you fix us something to eat with the pig." He glanced around. "I see you have potatoes."

"I was going to make them into bread."

"That's all right, we'll eat them the way they are." King walked to the table and sat on the bench. His face and hands were black with encrusted dirt, and his hair and beard were matted and greasy. His nose was wide and flattened against his face as if it had been pounded that way. He was bigger than the rest of the gang by half a head and he looked brawny enough to have cracked all their heads together at once.

Saura didn't know what to do, so she stood before him, looking at the floor. In a few moments, Verie stumbled into the room, pushed by Knifeson. He laughed when she tripped on a loose board and almost fell. He pushed her again. "Look what I found," he said.

Verie straightened and looked from King to Knifeson and back again. Saura was proud of her daughter for the way she stood up to them, straight, perhaps afraid, but willing to face them. Verie was dressed in wool clothing to match

Saura's, and her face was clean. Saura clenched her fists in fear for her.

"What's your name?" King demanded.

"Verie," she said softly, her voice quavering a little.

A horrible scream sounded outside the window. Saura stiffened with the sound and looked at Verie. She tried not to let the fear show, but she could see from the look Verie gave her that she was afraid too. Saura heard the two men talking and laughing. Knifeson grinned at his own thoughts. Saura glanced quickly at him. He was fat and pudgy. Something about him made her fear him more than the others. She looked back at King, but he seemed to ignore the sounds. Jay and Longpole burst into the room. Longpole, a short skinny man, held the sow by a hind leg. Saura winced. The sow was young, small and skinny, and they had kept it in hopes of breeding it. The two men had slit open its belly and cleaned out the insides. "Here's something to eat," Longpole said. Blood dripped to the floor from the sow's half opened mouth.

"Where do you cook?" King asked Saura.

She frowned that the leader of the gang could be so dumb. "In the oven," she said.

He shrugged. "Let her cook it," he said, nodding to Verie. Longpole swung the dead pig into Verie, almost knocking her over. The four laughed, Knifeson the loudest.

Verie took the sow and tried to hold it away from her. "How shall I cook it?"

"Let me help you," Saura said softly. She took the pig from Verie and pushed her before it toward the stove. Saura didn't want Verie to start to show fear now. There was no telling what the gang might do if they thought she were afraid. Fear did something to animals, and Saura was afraid it might to the men.

"Leave the skin on," King said. "I like my meat juicy."

Saura looked at him but didn't say anything. Gangs had come before, and she knew what to expect. But none had found the farm since Verie had been too young to remember. She shoved the pig, hair and all, into the oven and closed the door. She would not have cooked it that way for Weed and them, but she reasoned that the gang wouldn't know any better. Weed, if he killed an animal, butchered it,

and only let them eat a little at a time, so it would last. Saura whispered to Verie, "Don't talk to them any more than you can help. Do what they ask you." She searched her mind for something else to say, but she couldn't think of a thing. She wished she could say something comforting, but while the gang stayed, she knew there would be trouble. She couldn't even say how long they would stay. One gang, just after Weed and she had found the farm, had stayed a month. They both still had scars—she pushed the memory from her mind, and shuddered. There was nothing to say.

"What's he?" Verie whispered, nodding toward Alice.

"A freak."

Verie nodded.

"Help me peel," Saura said out loud. They walked back toward the pile of potatoes. Saura felt the eyes of the men on them. "So you're Verie," King said.

Verie stopped and nodded.

"How old are you?"

"Fourteen."

King grunted. Saura noticed Knifeson grin at Jay. Her heart sank. Softly she prayed. It hadn't done any good before, but Saura could remember her mother telling her how, and that God always helped those who asked Him. That was before she was killed.

King scratched under his arm and looked around absentmindedly. "Lie down," he yelled at Alice, who was standing next to the stove.

Saura sat on the floor against the wall and motioned to Verie to sit beside her. Then Saura picked the knife off the table and tried to peel a potato. At first her hand shook, and she couldn't peel. After a moment, her hand steadied, and she peeled slowly to keep her mind off the men. She hoped Weed would hurry back, and at the same time she hoped he wouldn't. She had no way of knowing if he could help, and she didn't want him hurt. She didn't care for him, but he was easy to get along with, and he helped protect Verie. At least he had as long as Saura was around. She was careful not to leave him alone with her.

The soggy sweat smell of the men's drying clothes mingled with the ham smells that began to fill the room. Saura watched the men nod sleepily. After a while, each lay

down on the floor and went to sleep. But King showed no sign of even being tired. As he sat on the bench, leaning against the table, he closed his eyes but continued to scratch. Saura vaguely considered him as a match for Verie. He was strong, and would be able to take care of her. He smelled bad and was dirty, but that didn't matter if he could keep her from being killed, and wouldn't kill her himself. She was trying to think of a way to put the idea in his head when Verie interrupted.

"Where did Dad go?"

"To get wood," Saura answered quietly. She stopped peeling and looked at Verie.

"What do they want?" Verie asked.

"First they want food." Saura paused and took a deep breath. "Then they'll want you and me."

Verie looked down and frowned. Saura wasn't sure that Verie understood. She didn't know how much her daughter knew.

"Why do they lie around?" Verie whispered. "Why don't they take what they want and leave? I don't like them here. I want them to leave."

Saura watched Verie lift her head up and look at her and plead with her eyes. Saura looked down. She couldn't meet her eyes. They seemed to accuse her of not doing something to make the men go. But she felt that the best thing was to humor them, to get along with them, the way she did with Weed, until maybe she could control them without their knowing, to get what she wanted for herself and Verie. "I'm afraid they won't leave until they've eaten everything there is to eat and done what else they like. There's so many of them. Usually they don't travel in such a large gang." It was too hard to find food for too many, she knew. When Verie had gotten to be about four, Weed had talked over the advisability of killing her because of the food. Feigning indifference, Saura had pointed out that there seemed to be enough for three, and Weed had grown fond of her, so he forgot the idea. One winter they almost had to kill her so they would have something to eat, but they got through all right.

Now Saura hoped a man would come to live with them for Verie. He could help with the planting and hunting.

Then they would not have to be so afraid of starving to death because Weed had not been able to find enough in the summer to last. And a man would keep Weed away from Verie.

Saura hoped none of the gang would scar Verie and make her so ugly that a man wouldn't want her. King seemed like a decent man. When he hit her, before Verie came into the room, he hadn't hit her hard. It had almost stopped hurting. Knifeson was different though. Saura looked at Knifeson, sleeping on the floor. Even in his sleep, he seemed mean and cruel. He was fat while the others were thin, which meant he hogged more food than the others. He seemed to enjoy pushing Verie around, too. Saura didn't like him. He made her afraid.

King stood and stretched. Saura watched him at the edge of her vision as he walked softly over the sagging floor and reached into the pile of peeled potatoes and grabbed one. He swore a word Saura had never heard before and then said, "You're too slow. Peel faster." He walked carefully back to his seat. Knifeson stirred at a creak, but none of the gang woke. King sat and bit off a chunk of potato and started chewing. When pieces fell on his beard and lap, he picked them up and shoved them back in his mouth. When he finished, he picked over his clothes and stuck in his mouth the few crumbs that he found.

Time seemed to pass slowly, and Saura finished the potatoes. She stood, picked up the potatoes in her skirt, and motioned Verie to follow. As they passed near him, King opened his eyes, but he didn't speak. Saura stepped around Alice, who was snoring in front of the stove. After she opened the oven door, Saura set the potatoes on the bottom to soak up the juices that dripped from the pig. She pulled some rags from a peg on the wall and used them as pot holders to turn the pig so it would cook evenly.

After she turned the pig and put more wood on, she sat on the floor close to the door and as far from the freak as she could get. Verie sat facing her, but didn't say anything. Saura was not as frightened as she had been, because she was tired of being frightened. It looked as if they were not going to eat either Verie or her, so they would be all right until Weed came back. She hoped he would stay away. She

was sure now that they wouldn't hurt her or Verie too badly as long as King kept control, and she didn't want Weed coming to complicate matters. Then again, she wasn't sure. She feared what the gang might do because there was nothing to hold them back. Saura could remember her mother warning her. Rape was what her mother feared most. She used to tell Saura stories about girls left so weak after a gang finished with them that they couldn't move, and near the ruins the dog packs finding them, or in the country the wolves.

Saura shuddered. Then she heard Weed stamp his feet on the concrete outside the door.

Alice sat up, hitting his head on the stove. King jumped up and kicked Jay awake. The four men picked up their weapons. Jay and Longpole had clubs carved from the tree limbs. Jay's was short and squat for killing, and Longpole's was long for catching. King and Knifeson had knives. King's was almost a foot and a half long. The other was only half a foot long.

Saura jumped to her feet and pulled Verie away from the door. She thought to yell, but she had lived too long trying to get along. She thought first, who was going to win, and then she kept quiet.

The door opened wide and Weed started to step in, a cottonwood log on his shoulder and his ax in the opposite hand. Saura noticed that the log was big and would last for several days.

Jay swung his killing club but Weed ducked his head. The club crashed against the log. Weed's knees buckled, but he slipped the log from his shoulder and shoved it at the gang and managed to keep his feet. He jumped backward, away from the door into the rain.

Longpole jumped over the log as it hit the floor. The others got around it. The log rolled onto Alice's foot, and he screamed, but he pulled his foot out and was quiet.

Saura maneuvered so she could watch the fight through the door. Longpole swung his club as he went out. Weed stepped back out of the swing and then forward, swinging his ax. Longpole managed to get his club out to parry the blow, but the ax head hit the club and splintered it. His

club slowed the ax enough so he got out of the way as the other three piled at Weed.

Weed jumped back off the porch into the mud of the yard. The men circled warily. Every few moments, Weed would jump forward and try to kill one of them, and Saura would bite her knuckle. She wanted Weed to win, for Verie's sake, but she was afraid what he might do to her for not warning him of the gang. Weed swung at Jay, and King jumped in while he was off guard, but Weed managed to back off before King could cut him.

Saura could almost feel the fear in Weed, feel him backing, afraid of moving too fast for fear of slipping in the mud and knowing that if he slipped he was dead. She could feel the rain hit his face, mix with the cold sweat, and run in his eyes. For a moment she was sorry for him, but it was too late. Then she saw Jay jump, swing the killing club, and Weed jump back, swinging the ax, and Saura saw his mistake.

King jumped forward and Weed couldn't get his ax up to ward him off. Saura stiffened and grasped her side as she watched the knife slip to the hilt in Weed's side. She could feel the steel cut, as if some rainwater had gotten under his coat, and she watched him slip, and fall. The strength seemed to leave Saura too, as she watched. Weed screamed once as Knifeson cut again but the man ignored him. When he screamed again, Jay bashed his head with the club. When they finished, they picked up his clothes and started back to the house.

Saura looked at the body lying under the crab apple tree, and then turned from the door. "Let's check the pig," she said to Verie. They were turning it when the gang came back.

". . . Teach her not to warn us," Knifeson was saying.

"Later," King ordered.

"He won't bother you anymore," Knifeson snarled to Saura, and the other men laughed. Alice heard them laugh so he laughed, but the others had stopped. His laugh sounded strange by itself.

When he stopped, Saura could hear the rain fall on the roof and run down. It sounded like water on the stove that

had just begun to boil. "The pig is half done," she said to break the silence.

"Let's eat then," King said. Jay grabbed Alice's leash and followed the others to the table. Alice sat on the floor behind Jay's place.

Saura took a wooden slab that Weed had made and put the pig on it and set it on the table in front of the men. She left the potatoes in the oven, hoping the men would fill up on pig so she and Verie could at least eat something.

Saura watched the men carve the pig as she lit two tallow lamps. They smelled greasy, but they lit the room enough to eat by. Then she closed the damper to cool the stove a little and to keep the wood from burning so fast. She sat on the floor in front of the stove and motioned Verie to sit beside her. Then she watched the men eat, and listened to the grumbling of her own stomach. King cut off one of the hind quarters. Then Knifeson hacked off the other. When they each had their piece, they handed their knives to Longpole and Jay, who cut off front quarters. When Longpole finished, he jabbed the knife into the rib cage and left it there while he gnawed on the half cooked meat.

Jay kept the knife he had and sliced pieces off the back of the pig and threw them to Alice. When Alice felt a piece hit him, he felt around with his feet until he found it. Then he held it between his feet, and leaning over, tore off bites with his teeth.

Saura was repulsed and at the same time fascinated. All the men ate noisily, chewing with their mouths open and shoving the food back in when it fell out.

When King finished his first bone, he threw it to Saura. "You can have this," he said.

Jay and Longpole each threw a bone toward her, but Knifeson dropped his at his feet and ground it back and forth into the floor with his heel. He didn't look to see if anyone were watching, he seemed to do it just for the enjoyment of knowing that when he finished with it, no one else could have it. Saura hated him then, and feared him all the more. She picked up the bone King threw and gave the other two to Verie. The meat that remained was cold and raw, but she hadn't eaten since morning and it was better than nothing.

How can I get King interested in Verie, she wondered, so he'll keep her to himself? Now that the men had slept and eaten, unless they slept again, they would turn to other things. She wondered how Verie would take it. If she fought, they might make it a lot harder on her. She hoped the gang wouldn't torture them. She thought of praying, and just in case it might do some good, she said a prayer to herself so the others wouldn't hear.

"Let's have some music!" King ordered, interrupting her thoughts.

Knifeson dropped the bone he was working on and ground it under his heel as he turned and looked at Saura and Verie. "Let's," he grinned.

"Sing to us," King said, pointing a rib bone at Saura. "You must know some of the old songs. I like to hear the old songs."

"I only know one," Saura said. Verie looked at her, and Saura could see that she was beginning to get frightened.

"Sing it!" King ordered.

The song was one that Saura's mother used to sing occasionally. The words didn't make any sense to her, but she supposed that they had in the old days. She started singing, "Boo-pop, a-loo-pop, za-boom-pop, a-loo-pop," over and over the way her mother sang it.

"Hold it!" King ordered. "That's a good song to dance to." He pointed the rib bone at Verie. "You dance."

Verie looked at her mother. "But I don't know how to dance."

"Don't know how?" King looked incredulous. He looked at the others. "We'll teach you," he said. They laughed. Saura's hope to save Verie from what was coming fell. King didn't seem interested in Verie for himself at all.

"Stand up," King said.

Verie looked at her mother again. Saura nodded and looked at the bone in her hand. What could she tell her? She'd find out soon enough anyway.

Verie stood.

"Lift your left foot." Verie did. "Right foot. Left. Right. Left, right. Sing!"

Saura sang, "Boo-pop, a-loo-pop, za-boom-pop, a-loo-pop."

The men chanted, "Left right, left right," faster and faster.

Suddenly Verie stopped. "I can't go that fast," she said, stubbornly.

"I teach you," Knifeson growled, jumping to his feet. King smiled, but the others laughed.

Saura saw there was no hope for saving Verie for just King. He wasn't interested in a girl to himself. She had to try. "Wait, she hasn't—"

Knifeson kicked at her. "Shut up!" he snarled.

Saura tried to duck the kick but the foot grazed her head and knocked her down. She sat back up and shook her head to clear it.

"All right," he sneered. He lifted Verie to the top of the stove and stood her on it. "Now dance."

"Right. Left. Right, left, right, left," they chanted and clapped their hands. Saura couldn't understand why they should want to torture them. None of them seemed particularly vicious except Knifeson, but King was the leader. Why did he let them? What could she do?

"Sing!" Knifeson shouted at her.

"Boo-pop, a-loo-pop, za-boom-pop, a-loo-pop," Saura sang in time to their chanting.

"Louder!" Knifeson roared.

"Boo-pop, a-loo-pop, za-boom-pop, a-loo-pop."

"Right, left, right, left," faster and faster. "Right, left, right left rightleftrightleft."

Saura continued singing but she no longer heard the words nor saw the men. A roar filled her head that seemed to scream, why are they doing this, why doesn't God help, why doesn't anyone help, until something fell on her and knocked her over.

"Kill him!" she heard someone snarl, and all the men seemed to be running at her and something twanged in her ears and then they stopped. Saura realized that Verie had fallen off the stove onto her.

"Hold it!" someone shouted.

Saura looked around, trying to find out what happened. King lay on his face in front of her, a dark stain growing on his back, and the others stood still behind him.

"Whose house is this?" someone behind her demanded.

Saura twisted around to see who it was. She had never seen him before. He looked something like the others, except his dark beard and hair were trimmed close and he didn't look as dirty. He held a bow and arrow pointed at the gang. "It's ours," she said. "These men came this morning and killed our sow and Weed, Verie's father."

The man looked at the others and after a pause, said, "You better leave. I want some sleep under a dry roof tonight."

The men grumbled and started to pick up King's knife.

"Leave the weapons here," the man ordered. "And while you're at it, strip him and leave his clothes."

Saura looked at the men. She saw hate fill their faces and a touch of fear, too. Being outside on a cold rainy night without something to cut firewood with would be hard and dangerous. Saura noticed the strength and self confidence in the voice of the man who was in control. She feared him a little. He had killed King and was chasing the gang off by himself. She hadn't been able to control the gang at all, how could she hope to control him? She cuddled Verie in her arms and turned toward the man. "Can I take her to the bedroom?"

He nodded, and made way for her to walk past. Saura stood, holding Verie, and walked into the bedroom in the shed. In the middle of the room was a large bed with heavy wool blankets on it. Saura lay Verie on the bed and pulled the blankets back. Then she picked up her daughter's feet and looked at them. Saura's hands shook a little as she ran her fingers over the raw flesh. She leaned over and kissed the sole of each foot, and pressed her eyes shut to keep the tears back. My poor baby, she crooned to herself. She slipped the feet under her blouse and pressed them to her breasts to cool them. My poor baby, she crooned. The feet were hot and rough on her skin.

"If I catch you around in the morning, I'll kill you," Saura heard the man say in the other room. Then she heard the door open and the board floor creak as the men walked out.

"But we'll freeze to death," she heard Jay plead.

"Keep walking," the man answered.

Then she heard Knifeson call from the outer edge of the yard, "We'll be back." A chill of fear settled in her stomach.

She lay Verie's feet on the bed and pulled the blankets over her. Saura leaned over her daughter's face and kissed her on the lips. Then she turned and walked into the other room.

The man wasn't there. She walked to the door. Snow was falling and a thin coat lay on the ground. The man was tying his horse in the shelter of the angle between the shed and the house. Saura wondered why he didn't bring it inside. Didn't he know that the wolves would smell the blood of the dead men in the yard and would come and kill his horse? She watched him unsaddle and place the saddle next to the wall out of the falling snow. He picked up his saddle blanket and his quiver and carried them inside and placed them and his bow on the shelf next to the door. Then he turned to Saura.

"I'm Saura," she said before he could speak, "and the girl is Verie, my daughter. Thank you for chasing them off. She's never been with a man before."

He frowned. She wondered if he was interested. She had thought of a way to keep him, but she couldn't make up her mind if he would be a good one to keep. She didn't want someone who would eat either Verie or her if the winters were too long.

"I'm Ted Brace," he said. "I'd like a place for the night and something to eat."

She smiled slightly. "That's a funny name," she said. "It's not half so funny as Saura and Verie."

She quit smiling. She wondered if he was going to be as bad as the gang. "We've still got some potatoes," she said. "They left some pig." She looked at the remains of the sow lying on the table. "I can heat it if you like."

Ted smiled slightly. "You better save the pork for breakfast. If the potatoes are hot, I'll eat them."

"If you wait a few moments, I'll check." She turned and walked out the door and to the window. She stood the wood cover for the window on its end, and started lifting it up to fill the window. If the wolves came, she didn't want them coming inside. She shoved it against the logs and held it for a second with her knee. In the distance, she heard a howl. She could barely hear it, but it sounded like a man being tortured. She wondered if the people wolves ate stayed inside the animal and that was what made them so

mournful. Before she could lift the cover again, it was lifted from the inside and set in place. She walked back to the door and paused before going in. She shuddered a little, to think of what would happen to the horse. Then she walked inside and took the wood bar and set it in the irons to hold the window cover in place, and did the same for the door.

She stopped then and looked at Ted. "Thank you," she said.

"That's all right."

She shrugged and turned to the stove and replaced a lid that had been kicked out when Verie fell. Then she opened the oven door, reached in, and squeezed one of the potatoes. "They're ready to eat," she said.

Ted walked to the wall at the end of the table and pulled out two arrows that were sticking there and put them with his others. While he was at the shelf, he pulled his leather rainshirt over his head and set it next to the bow and arrows. He turned and sat on the floor in front of the oven and picked a potato out. He motioned Saura to sit beside him as he took a bite. "That your husband out there?" he asked.

Saura nodded. "That was Weed."

"What happened?"

Saura quietly told how the men had come after Weed had left for wood, and what had happened until the time that Ted had stepped inside and shot King.

"Shall I bring him in until we can bury him?" he asked around a mouthful of potato. A piece fell on the floor and he picked it up and threw it into the woodbox.

Saura watched him throw it, feeling the hunger in her stomach. How wasteful he is, she thought. She couldn't decide what to do. If she had him bring Weed in, he might get suspicious, and bring the horse in. If she didn't Weed would get eaten by the wolves. She shrugged. "He'll be all right out there, I suppose." Now if Ted still wanted to bring him in, he could, but he would be deciding for himself. She looked at the stove leg to avoid his eyes. The leg was shaped like an eagle's claw, clutching a naked head.

"Where did you come from," she asked.

"I've been riding down from the north."

"From the north? Nobody comes from the north in spring."

"Well I did." He said it with such finality that she couldn't argue with him, but she was sure that nobody lived farther north than they did. Ted reached for another potato. "You want one?" he asked, offering it to her. She took it from him and started gnawing on it.

"How did you find the farm?" she asked.

He shook his head. "It was beginning to snow so I was looking for some shelter. I saw the trees here, and when I got closer I saw your light." He took another potato. "I wanted to see the ruins. My grandfather used to tell when I was little how they looked before and after the fight, he'd seen 'em both times, and I wanted to see for myself if there really were a place like what he described. I started early because I wanted to get back to the ranch before winter."

"There's not much to see anymore," she said.

He looked up from his potato. "You been there?"

"I was born near there and we used to go there to see if we could find anything we needed."

"What are you doing here?"

"Weed stole me a long time ago. He brought me here because he thought it would be far enough north to keep away from the gangs. We didn't think anybody could live farther north."

Ted finished the potato, and wiped his mouth on his sleeve. "That's enough," he said, "I want to sleep now."

He stood and started arranging the clothes that he found lying around the two rooms into a bed in front of the stove. Saura was surprised. She expected him to sleep in the bed. She was waiting for him to ask for it. Then she was going to tell him that he'd have to sleep with Verie, because her feet were too burned for her to sleep in front of the stove as she usually did. Then he'd see how nice she was and would stay. It was even more important for him to stay now than it would have been if Weed hadn't died. Saura walked into the living room and blew out the candle. She picked up Verie's bedding and carried it to the stove and dropped it on the bedding Ted had already arranged. "Verie usually sleeps there until we get up, then she goes into the bedroom," she said. "She's never slept with a man."

Ted looked up from arranging the bedding and smiled at her but he didn't say anything. She held the second lamp

high for him as he crawled between the layers. When he was under except for the top of his head, she blew out the lamp.

Saura set the lamp on the shelf next to the door to the bedroom, but instead of going through, she stood still, letting her eyes grow accustomed to the dark. She was puzzled by him. She wished he hadn't killed King. If it had been Knifeson, she would not have minded. She wasn't sure but that he might be worse than the gang. She couldn't understand him. He didn't hit her or shout, and he didn't seem to want either her or Verie. Vaguely, she felt it was an insult, but she didn't know what she could do about it. Perhaps he is the answer to my prayer, she thought. Verie was tortured, but not very much. Perhaps God just takes time to work. Saura could only remember some of the things her mother had told her about God, and she didn't pretend to understand. Maybe you have to pray a long time for what you want, to make sure that you get it. He must be from God. After all, he said he came from the north, and that's impossible, because it gets too cold farther north for anyone to live. She remembered Weed telling her that when they decided to take over the ranch.

In the light that shone through the cracks around the door to the firebox, she could see Ted's shape under the bedding. She wondered, should she kill him while there was a chance? No telling what he would do when he got angry. He didn't seem too hungry for potatoes, he might be saving himself for one of them. As she stood, her eyes grew more accustomed to the dark, until she could see almost as well as if the lamp had been burning. If she killed him, she could bring the horse inside, and Weed too. There was a lot of meat on that horse. It was the first one she'd seen that someone could ride, although she had heard that lots of them ran wild somewhere to the east.

He had saved their lives, maybe, she thought. But that didn't mean much. He had killed King, the best of the gang. Here was her chance to get rid of the last man that would bother her. She looked across the kitchen to the shelf where she kept her two knives. One had a foot long blade. That would be the one to use. Hate welled in her. She could hear her mother scream long ago as that gang used

her for their purposes. Saura wanted to run and help her, but she remained hidden and safe. She took a step toward where the knives were. She could see them rape and kill, and her heart beat hard as she relived the running she did when the gang left, and then finally when she came back to pile rocks on the remains, a dog pack was there. She watched, unable to turn away. Then Verie's face seemed to come between her and the dogs. Saura frowned. Ted wasn't interested yet, but if she killed him, he never would be. Verie needed someone to protect her. She had to have a man for that.

Her hands relaxed. She had balled them into tight fists, but thinking of Verie relaxed her. Besides, if Ted were from God, and she killed him, wouldn't God be angry? The fire flashed up and died down as she stood wondering. Finally she shrugged her shoulders. She supposed that if he meant them harm, he would have done some already. She turned and stepped into the doorway. She looked back at Ted. He groaned in his sleep and stirred uneasily. When he settled into sleep again, she walked to her bed and crawled in beside Verie. The bed was warm and Saura shivered comfortably.

In the blackness just before dawn, Saura woke. She jumped out of bed and stepped quietly to the doorway. The horse whinnied, and she could hear growls. She saw Ted heading toward the door, a club in his hand.

"Don't go out," she shouted. "It's the wolves!"

"My horse is out there," he growled, flinging open the door.

Saura saw something fly at him out of the black. He managed to knock it down as another came at him. Saura picked up the lamp and ran to the firebox and lit it. The light shone beyond Ted into the yard. It was alive with black shapes. The horse screamed. Saura ran to the door. No man could fight that many wolves. She watched for an opportunity. Ted smashed the club onto the skull of one wolf as another leaped at his face. He threw up his arms as the shape knocked him backward. He fell and rolled, kicking at it. Saura slammed the door and replaced the bar. She turned to look at Ted. He had regained his feet as the wolf rushed in. It was too fast for him to get a full swing

but he managed a short blow which knocked it to one side. He jumped back and swung the club over his head and sent it crashing into the wolf's skull. Its head smashed, and the body flipped over and lay still.

Ted whirled toward the door, but when he saw it was shut, he sank to the floor. His breath came in gasps and his face was pale under the beard. He lay back and tried to relax. "Thanks for shutting the door," he said.

"I was going to shut it behind you," she said. "One man can't fight off the wolves." She wondered if he were just stupid or if he were brave. The horse screamed once more, and Ted tried to stand, but all he managed to do was sit up. He must really like that horse, Saura thought. She shrugged. Well, he couldn't leave now. She built up the fire and prepared the wolf for skinning. After a while, the growling and rustling outside grew quieter.

"What are you doing that for?"

Saura looked up at him, puzzled by his sharpness. He was frowning at her. "It's meat, isn't it?" she asked and went back to skinning. After a pause, he got up and took the knife from her. She stood up and backed off, watching him skin. He took the skin off with swift, sure strokes, even though she knew he found the job distasteful. Wolf meat's tougher than some, she thought, but it's better than none. By the time he finished, daylight had come. He stopped and stretched, rubbing his neck.

"Do you want me to cut it up?" he asked.

Saura nodded, and watched him start to cut it into pieces that would cook well. She walked to the door and opened it to look out. The morning was bright, and all the rolling hills to the east that she could see were covered with shallow snow. She looked at the front yard. All the snow was tromped into the mud. The wolves were gone. She stepped out. She had gotten what she wanted. He was stuck at the farm. He wouldn't dare leave by himself. Verie would have a man.

Here and there on the mud lay a bone or part of a bone. The front porch where Ted had fought was covered with mud of a darker color than the rest, as was the spot where the horse had been. She stooped and looked at the saddle. The wolves had chewed it to the point where

Ted couldn't have used it even if he had a horse. Saura shook her head. The only sign that wolves had been there were the footprints covering the mud. She walked to a spot under the crab apple tree and looked at the darker mud. That was all there was left, darker colored mud.

Suddenly she wanted to be with someone, away from what she had done. She turned and walked back to the house. She stepped inside the door and shut it behind her and leaned against it.

Ted looked up from his cutting. "Someone coming?" he asked sharply.

She shook her head. She wished he hadn't spoken that way. She walked to the stove and warmed her hands over the firebox. She couldn't explain her feeling, she just wanted to be with someone who was alive and whole and warm, not like Weed or King. Being alive in any condition was better than being outside in the mud. She shivered and moved closer to the stove.

"You knew that wolves would come, didn't you?" Ted asked after a few moments.

Saura wondered what he would do if he knew why she did it. She didn't know what to say. Finally she said, "They sometimes do."

"If you knew, why didn't you have me bring in your husband?"

She looked at Ted, and the thought of her own mother came to her. "It gives them something to eat so perhaps they'll stay away from the rest of us," she said after a long pause. She shrugged. "It saved burying him." She would have buried her mother too. But she was afraid.

"You could have eaten him," Ted said.

Saura shrugged and didn't answer. She and Weed had eaten a visitor once or twice when times were hard. It was them or maybe Verie or herself. But she had a vague feeling that she couldn't have eaten Weed unless she were very hungry. "He was probably too tough anyway," she said, unable to think out the real reason.

She started to fix some food as Ted walked into the living room. She glanced at him out of the corner of her eye and he didn't look happy. She wondered if she could get him to

get some wood. Cooking the whole pig had burnt a lot, and they were still low.

She gave Ted potatoes to eat, and took some in to Verie and fed her. When she returned, Ted had his gear assembled on the floor and was straightening the feathers on one of the arrows. "I'm leaving in a bit," he said.

"By yourself?"

He nodded, looking up at her. She read in the disgust in his face that she would have gotten him to stay easier if she had warned him about the wolves.

"What about wood?" Saura was so surprised, she mentioned the wood without meaning to. She hadn't wanted to say it outright. She wanted him to think it was his idea.

"What about the wood?" he asked.

Saura decided to ask him. "We're almost out of wood. You wouldn't leave us without any wood, would you?"

Ted looked down at his arrow. Saura could see that he wanted to leave. If it were she, she would have left, but he was different. She was sure he'd do what she asked. She wasn't sure why, but she was beginning to get used to him. It seemed strange, not to fear him. He was different.

"Let's go," he said, standing and walking out.

Saura picked up the ax and ran to catch him to lead the way over the first two hills to the north. While she walked, she thought about what made him different. The main thing was that he wasn't going to hurt her, unless there was a good reason for it. He realized that his horse died because she hadn't warned him, and although he was willing to fight the wolves for it, he didn't even strike her. After they reached the downed cottonwood, she thought about it while he chopped. Any of the others she ever knew would do almost anything if the mood hit them. Even Weed would beat her if he felt like it, just to show her who was boss.

After cutting enough to last Saura until warmer weather, Ted swung the ax into a log, and leaned against the cottonwood trunk. "Tell me about the ruins," he said.

Saura shrugged. She couldn't see why he was so interested in the ruins. "I haven't been there in about fifteen seasons," she said, "and I've been told they've changed a lot."

"What were they like when you were there?"

Saura looked at the horizon, trying to remember. "They were big, some of them very high, but what was strange was that they stretched for miles and miles, the low ones anyway." She paused for a while. "I could never see how that many people could feed themselves, or how they could live so close together. It seems to me that they'd always be eating each other."

"I don't see why they should. Quite a few people live on the ranch with us and we never eat anyone."

"Not even in the longest winter?"

He shook his head.

Saura looked at him and frowned. "What's living on a ranch like?"

"Twelve people live there now that I'm gone. We always had enough to eat because we had lots of cattle and sheep. Before he died, my grandfather rode to the ruins and got lots of bows and arrows and even some crossbows and guns, so we've never had to worry about gangs. Besides, we're too far north for most of them."

"What's a crossbow?" The other thing he mentioned meant nothing to Saura. She couldn't even think of what he called it.

Ted raised his eyebrows at her. She could see he thought she was dumb. "It just shoots arrows harder than regular bows."

"You said your grandfather was to the ruins before the fight. What were they like then? My mother used to tell me that they were like Heaven, but she wasn't born until a long time after the fight, so she only knew what her mother told her. She used to say that God caused the fight, and be sure and pray every day that it doesn't happen again."

Ted frowned. "I don't think God started it," he said. "Grandfather said that the leaders of this country and another started it."

"Why?"

Ted shook his head. "He never knew."

"What were the ruins like?"

"He said there were so many people, I could never count them. They were always riding around in metal carriages—we've got some at the ranch but they don't run anymore—and they always had enough to eat and a place to sleep.

They never worried about getting hurt because they got together and agreed to certain rules."

"If it was so nice, why did they fight?"

"I don't know." Ted sounded annoyed. "Why did that gang kill your husband?"

She thought about it for a second and then dismissed it with, "My mother used to say that some men believed in God and they were good. Others didn't and they were bad."

Ted scratched his beard for a few moments before he said anything. "I don't believe that. My folks never said anything about God, but they weren't bad."

"They must've been," Saura stated.

"Then what's good and what's bad?" Ted asked.

Saura chewed on a knuckle. She was sitting on the row of logs that Ted had cut, with her legs folded under her skirt. Finally she said, "You're good, and the men in that gang were bad. The men in the gang did things for no reason. You don't."

"I'm helping you for no reason."

"That's different."

"How?" He paused for a moment, but Saura couldn't think of a reason. "Those men killed your husband. They had a reason. He had something they didn't and they knew he wouldn't give it to them. So they killed him."

"There are some things you just don't give away."

"You've been trying to give away your daughter."

Saura hit her knee with her fist. "They tried to rape Verie and me. You didn't."

"I could just as well have raped you. Nothing stopped me. But I didn't need to. You were trying to give it away."

Saura chewed her knuckle, trying to straighten the ideas in her mind. She rather would have known about life on the ranch. She was not yet convinced that there was a ranch like Ted described. Weed had told her that no one could live to the north, and he wasn't often wrong. She looked at Ted's face, with its sharp features, black from the sun. She wasn't sure that someone as stupid as he seemed would be a good match for Verie. "Would you have offered to share everything you had with them, if you were Weed?"

"That's got nothing to do with it."

Saura knew then that he would be all right for Verie. "You didn't try to rape us, so you're good."

"They didn't either."

"They would have." She saw that she had pushed him too far. He jumped at her and slapped her face hard with his open hand. She uttered a cry as she fell from the pile of logs. Ted followed her over the pile. He grabbed her legs and jerked her flat on her back. He reached to her blouse and tore it over her head, exposing her breasts. Then he stood, holding the blouse.

"I could rape you now," he said.

"Why don't you then?" she asked. She knew that if he did, he would help them afterward. She didn't try to move from where he had jerked her.

Saura stared him in the eyes for a moment. Then he threw the blouse at her face. She jerked it away and watched him walk to the other side of the log pile and sit there. "If you're not good," she said, "why didn't you rape me?"

Ted shrugged his shoulders. "I didn't want to, that's all. It has nothing to do with good or bad. Nobody's good or bad. Only weather's good or bad."

"Maybe . . ."

"Let's carry some of this back," he said, standing and motioning to the logs. He shouldered his bow and quiver, picked up three logs, and started walking through the mud.

Saura lifted one, and balanced it on her hip while she picked up the ax. Then she hurried to catch up. When she reached him, she had to hurry to keep up, so she didn't try to talk. She tried to think of a way to get him to stay or at least take them with him. She wanted a man like Ted around. She felt safer. He hadn't harmed her, even if he had killed King, so he was good, she felt. If only Verie's feet had not been so burned, she could have sent her into the kitchen to sleep with him. He didn't act as if he would have liked the idea, but Saura felt that if Verie had climbed in without clothes on, he would have gotten used to her. That might have kept him for a while, or maybe he would have taken them both back to his ranch. That sounded nice. She wasn't convinced that there was such a place where there was always enough to eat, and people didn't have to worry about gangs. It sounded too much like the descrip-

tions she had heard of the ruins before the fight. But if there was such a place, she was sure that people like Ted would live there. Anyway, it would be nice to leave the farmhouse.

A jackrabbit jumped at Ted's feet. Saura watched it run in long low hops up the rise in front of them. When it reached the top, it stood on its hindlegs for a second and looked at them. It took a hop down the other side but stopped and stood to look that way. Then it turned and ran at a right angle to the way it had run.

"You said the ruins had changed," Ted said suddenly. "How are they different now?"

Saura didn't answer for a second. The rabbit bothered her but Ted's question distracted her and she forgot about the rabbit. "We were told a season ago by a hunter that except for two tall buildings, all the rest have crumbled. He said there was nothing left except miles and miles of piles of stone and dirt with weeds growing on them."

They reached the top of the rise that the rabbit had stopped on, and started down toward the farmhouse. Saura walked in silence, trying to think of a way to get him to stay. The only thing of value that she had to offer him was Verie, and she had a feeling that he wouldn't like being offered her.

She reached the porch a step after Ted, and stepped up as the door opened. Knifeson stepped out. He had a long club in his hands.

Saura looked at Knifeson's grease covered beard and slime streaked grinning face and saw the face of the dogs that ate her mother and the wolves that ate Weed. The strength left her arms. Run! she thought. She saw Ted throw the three logs, and turn to run, fighting to get the bow off his shoulder. Knifeson laughed as he knocked the first log aside with his arm and jumped out of the way of the others. Verie's man was going to be killed! Saura leaped at Knifeson, digging her fingers into his face, tearing at the dogs, the wolves, her fear. She didn't feel the blow, but she found herself lying in the mud. She heard bone crunch, and the running stop. She knew then. She had failed Verie.

"Get in and build a fire," Jay snarled. He jerked her to her feet. "We're hungry."

Saura glanced at Knifeson tearing the clothes off the body under the crab apple tree. She turned and walked to the kitchen and knelt in front of the stove and started feeding pieces of wood into it. She heard the bed squeak. Outside, Jay and Knifeson laughed. Between laughs, she heard grunts from the bedroom.

As the fire grew, she stared into it, and as she stared, ideas seemed to settle into place in her mind. She would bury Ted, and that would make up for the others. Ted had told her of the ranch, and it was as if God had come to tell her about Heaven. The sounds of the men no longer had the everlastingness that they had had before.

Although Ron Webb is being currently and callously removed from his self-built house in the Everglades (to make way for an airport) he is neither a Seminole nor bitter. He is, instead, 27, married, father of three little girls; and has been a disc jockey, a clerk, and a newspaperman; and is now—after 21 years of effort—a professional writer. Here he is now, with a story about Danny, Jeannie, Harold, and a bottle of the kind of stuff we have, alas, been unable to buy at the friendly French Wine and Liquor Store around the corner. We still buy, though. Feel it is our duty.

THE GIRL WITH THE HUNDRED PROOF EYES

by Ron Webb

I FIRST met Jeannie over a bottle of vintage Scotch in my apartment. I found her before that in a bar. But perhaps I'd better explain. You see it all began in the Five O'Clock Club about 1 ayem—an hour into my birthday.

I was sitting alone in the joint, having had a tiff with my chick, and was sopping up a few with Al, the barkeep. I mentioned how it was my birthday and how tame it was with no broad to celebrate with and all when Al said: "Damn shame, Danny boy," and went into the back room.

He came back a minute later with this dusty old bottle of Scotch which he had copped from his boss's supply.

"For you," he said, "my compliments. The old man won't miss it. He orders the stuff by the crate from some foreign outfit, but he just opens one, maybe two, a year."

I blew the dust off to read the label, but it was in a language I'd never seen before.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Scotch. Or so the old man says. He never opened one here. Take it home and forget you're living. I'm gonna lock up."

So I went to my apartment.

After dropping some cool, blues-type wax into the machine, I cut the seal on the bottle and broke out a few cubes. Although the bottle sloshed, the booze was not

forth-coming. I was in the middle of kicking myself for a fall guy when what do I see but tiny fingers sticking out over the rim. Then with a whosh of smoke, this little dame crawled out—a little bitty naked dame.

"I'm Jeannie," the bite-sized chick said.

"I'm nuts," I answered. Whereupon she began to grow, Alice-in-Wonderland-wise, into this luscious Las Vegas type. Tall and rangy legged and a stacked upper deck. Her eyes were a bourbon amber that matched her hair.

I figured it was all done with mirrors or something. I mean who would expect a gorgeous doll like that to come out of a bottle. She stood there on my coffee table for a minute with this sleepy sort of look in her eyes.

She looked real enough. She smelled real too—sort of musky and sexy with an overlay of vintage wine. She might be a parlor trick, but who the hell cared.

"Let me help you down," I said reaching out for her.

The sleepy look vanished and her eyes got wide. Then she gave a little breathy shriek and jumped down from the table, knocking over her bottle in the process, and ran into the bathroom. I ran in too before she had a chance to lock the door. She grabbed a towel and wrapped it around her. "Don't touch me," she said with her eyes all wide and ran out the door. The towel flapped open behind exposing her luscious bottom which had a dimple. The dimple twitched tormentingly away as she fled into the living room and sat down on the couch with the towel up around her.

"I'll scream," she threatened.

I decided that discretion was the better part of valor, and sat down across the room. After all, we weren't even acquainted yet and Jeannie was obviously the shy type.

"Hi," I opened cautiously.

"Hi," she answered suspiciously.

This, I could see, was getting us nowhere.

"You always hang out in a Scotch bottle?"

"Mostly," she said beginning to relax a little. "I have to stay there until I'm uncorked."

"You ever been uncorked before?"

Her eyes got all dreamy. "Yes."

I was beginning to get a little dreamy myself. "What happened?"

She frowned a little and said, "I don't remember."

I got the impression she was lying. I tried a different gambit. "Ever live in a lamp?"

She was offended. "Me? In a smelly old lamp? Heavens no. My family is of the finest bottles. Of course—well there was uncle Charlie. He lived in an awful kerosene lantern." She blushed and then added, "But we never associated with him."

I had a sudden inspiration. "Then if you're a real genie, since I'm the one that uncorked you, you're my slave. You have to do anything I command."

"That's not so."

"What do you mean it's not so? It says so in all the books."

"Well," she said, thinking, "it's not entirely so."

"Aha!" I gloated. "Then I'm right." I thought about the possibilities and I think a gleam must have come into my eyes because she said quickly:

"You just get three."

"Three commands?"

She nodded.

With only three mystic goodies to play around with I suppose I should have given it more thought, but she looked so luscious sitting there with only her towel that I said, just like that, "Submit."

"Now?" she asked. And her eyes got all wide again.

"Now."

"You have to say the magic words."

"Which would be?"

"Mogen David."

"Huh?"

"The bottler had a sense of humor."

"Oh," I said with a stupid smile, "a clown."

She smiled too, but on her it wasn't stupid, and her towel slipped down a little.

"Mogen David," I said, breathing hard, "submit."

Then those hundred proof eyes of hers got all fun-lovely and smoky amber, and she smiled some more and kind of sank back on the couch. Her hair fell around her shoulders in red brown waves and she let go of the towel.

I reached out for her and kissed her. Her lips were warm

and soft and things were going well when all of a sudden she began to shrink.

"What in hell?" I yelled. But there she lay all naked on the couch and only eight, nine, inches tall.

She smiled again—it was definitely a wicked smile—and grew back to normal size.

"Where do you get off?" I questioned, "doing that."

She grabbed up her towel. "I submitted," she said all innocent again.

Then she started to cry. I mean, *she* started to cry. Can you beat that? And she said all tear-drippy, "It's a sort of defense mechanism. You know—?"

I didn't know at all, but it shook me seeing her cry.

She wiped her eyes with the end of the towel and sniffing, said, "I can't help it. When I get commanded, it works to protect me."

She pouted her lovely lips and said, "I like you, Danny, I really do, but I just can't submit until—" She started to cry again. "Until I have Granny with me."

I didn't say anything. I mean, what could I say?

Jeannie daubed at her eyes again and said, "The poor old thing. She's all alone. She was evicted from her lovely Drambuie bottle and now she's living in a cheap wine jug at Shoermer's Delicatessen." She fluttered her lashes at me and said, "I just know everything will be all right when I have Granny out of there. Won't you help?"

I didn't have much choice. So I went to Shoermer's and got the jug. I recognized it by the blue cork that Jeannie said it would have.

I handed the jug to Jeannie and averted my eyes while she opened it, figuring that it might be disrespectful to watch the nude grandmother climb out and all.

I heard the cork come out with a little "thunk" and then next thing I heard was this deep male voice saying, "Baby," and Jeannie saying, "Harold, honey."

And there wasn't any grandmother at all.

Just this big naked guy prancing around my apartment, and Jeannie hanging onto his arm with a lovesick look in her eyes.

Then she looked at me and said sympathetically, "I'm

sorry, Danny, it was a dirty trick. But I know you understand. Harold and I are in love."

And the big guy, Harold, laughed. I could tell that the love was one-sided, because Harold dripped lust and avarice. What he was after was not pure and wholesome.

"Jeannie," I cried, "you are blinded by this creature. He is not for you."

Harold helped himself to my bourbon and lit one of my cigarettes.

"It's no use," said Jeannie wistfully. "Harold and I are soul mates."

It kind of got to me, you know--seeing Jeannie so stuck on this big oaf who was drinking my booze.

"Mogen David," I said to Harold, "get lost."

Harold poured himself another drink and Jeannie said, "It won't work. You didn't uncork him, I did, and commands are nontransferable."

"Two can play at this silly game," I told her sternly. "Mogen David. Put Harold back in the jug."

"O-o-oh!" she squealed and started to cry again, but she did it, and Harold got all vaporous looking and spewed back into his bottle. Jeannie cried a little more as she corked him.

"Jeannie, honey," I said trying to comfort her, "don't cry."

She shuddered a little, and as she did, Harold's bottle began to shimmy on the table. Then it began to shake and dance around and it split—right in two. Then there was this big naked guy prancing around my apartment again and Jeannie looking apologetic and talking about defense mechanisms and soul mates.

This was intolerable. I mean like it ripped me up. And now that big Harold crud had smashed his bottle and was leering at Jeannie's dimple. I looked at Jeannie who was looking at Harold.

"Who needs it?" I sneered. But it wasn't any use because I knew that I did, so I used my last command. "Mogen David. Love *me*."

Jeannie still looked at Harold, but it was like he had come out from under a rock or something. Then she looked

at me with her eyes getting all sleepy and said, "Danny, honey. Harold has got to go."

"If you say so," I said as casually as I could. "But what about his bottle?"

"He can use mine," she said. "I won't be needing it." Then she went up to Harold and whispered something to him. He glared at her, but then his frown faded—and so did Harold and he drifted into the Scotch bottle.

"Poor thing," said Jeannie corking him. "I know he'll be terribly cramped in there."

"Never mind. He'll adjust," I said, thinking how shook the owner of the Five O'Clock Club would be if I snaked the bottle back into his private stock and he uncorked Harold instead of some chick.

Then I forgot the practical joke because Jeannie was looking at me adoringly with those amber eyes and I began to feel warm inside. She said softly, "I love you, Danny."

And I said all mushy, "I love you too."

"My defense mechanism," she giggled. "You had to love me."

But I didn't mind at all.

I held her with one arm and kissed her, and with the other arm I pitched Harold into the trash basket.

And Jeannie smiled all sleepy eyed, and dropped her towel.

"*Ransom, James* [our Official Report reads]. From Cleveland. Forty-one, married, five kids; wife a psychologist. One hitch, regular Navy, wartime. Editor, medical publishing firm, 10 years. Books on all medical surgical subjects for medical students and practicing physicians. AB, English, Stanford, '52, Ph.D, English Philology, Stanford, '62. Creative writing as undergraduate. Poetry prize. Novel, play (both bad), hundreds of short stories. Gave it up on entering graduate school. Spent ten years (while working full time) writing dissertation. When finished, was so used to working all spare time in an office rented for the purpose, just went back to writing. Sold the third thing to *Esquire*, sold soon after to *Playboy* and *Sports Illustrated*. Has written for TV, publishes also in *Journal of the American Medical Association*—humor and satire." Mr. Ransom's first F& SF story is neither humor nor satire. The despised rat, in many ways man's greatest enemy in the animal kingdom (spreader of plague, destroyer of millions of dollars in food each year), is ironically also in one specific way one of man's greatest friends. The Magazine has dealt before with the rat as a laboratory animal. Now Mr. Ransom makes a worthy addition.

FRED ONE

by James Ransom

NIGHT FALLS in clinical laboratories much the same as elsewhere. Shadows lengthen across tabletops. The furnace clears its heavy throat and rumbles complacently into being. Lights flash on and off and feet shuffle about, kicking wheeled buckets of Roccal disinfectant, as the mops flick back and forth in the corridors quelling outbreaks of infectious riot like so many horses swatting flies. Long silences now—and darkness fitful with cold instrumental luminosities and the bewhiskered questing in confinement of a thousand tiny noses.

In Room 17B—Experimental Psychology: Edwin Allen, Ph.D.—a rack of twelve cages on a wheeled flat has been rolled to the center of the floor from Breeding and Procurement in the subcellar. Each cage contains eight rats, mostly all white with pink tails and eyes but some of them

brindled and a few "pintos" with rakish patches of black and brown in saddle or eye-shield distributions. Six of the cages are tagged "M" and six "F"—for male and female, which is to be the significant point of differentiation among the animals. No other differences are of interest—nor, indeed, would further differentiation be possible in the present state of these particular experimenters' knowledge of these particular rats. Among the rats themselves, however, individual differences are widely acknowledged.

The twelve cages are stacked up in three piles of four, like a cluster of apartment dwellings newly erected in the center of town. In the uppermost compartment of one pile a brindled male upright along the grillwork sidesteps neatly to the corner, completing an unsatisfactory surveillance of the dim laboratory, and hustles across drowsing bodies to a crouched white resting easily on all fours in the centermost corner of the three stacks of life.

"Fred One?"

"What is it?" the white murmurs softly, as if not to wake whatever sleepers there may be among them.

"I can't see anything yet. Are you Fred One?"

"Yes."

"I'm Fred Three, but I guess I'm Two if that's all right. I don't think there's a Two in any of the cages."

"Did you try to find out?"

"Yes. Hell, I'm not bucking for anything."

"All right, you're Two, then. What does it look like out there?"

"I can't see. Just a bare lab, for all I can tell. I lost track of the turns on the way up and I'm not sure which side of the building we're on now. Maybe the moon will help."

"Or the sun, of course."

"No, I doubt if the sun will help." Fred Three—now Fred Two—flicked his whiskers in a fierce gesture and threw himself down on all fours at a discreet distance from One. "I've heard of you," he said.

Fred One gave a mental shrug and glanced with fleeting concern at Two crouched nervously alert among the shredded headlines of the nest. One of those bitter ones, he concluded—or rather Twos, he corrected himself with that scrupulous linguistic honesty that was more a source of an-

noyance to him than of pride and comfort. He would have to work on Two if he expected to be any good to the others, and there wasn't much time. One had calculated the orientation of the windows from the apparent slant of the wind against them, and he knew that the moon would soon give sufficient light to enable them to make out the contours of the equipment.

"Can you smell anything, Two?"

"Just the water."

"Nothing else?"

"No food. Just water."

"Well, all labs have water, Two."

"I know. They use it to wash out the test tubes."

"Well, they do."

"Fred One on my last design was one of their test tubes."

Fred One nodded in a pleasant way to acknowledge the gibe and to say that he knew well enough the cruel uses to which water could be put in certain types of experiments.

"How many of these designs have you been on, Two?"

"This is my fourth."

"It's my twenty-third. Some of them were not so bad."

Fred Two crouched closer at the sleeve-plucking insistence of his curiosity.

"Tell me about the one where you stretched the learning curve up into the superior adult human range," he said.

"That was a long time ago." Fred One shook his head, annoyed at the pleasure any reference to this exploit always gave him. That had been a first-rate design and it had caught him at the full tilt of his powers—or Powers, he giggled, remembering with strange pleasure Edith Powers and her soft clean hands lifting him into the maze to show her skeptical colleagues what a smart rat could do with adequate "reinforcement," they called it—the adroit manipulation of challenge and reward. Like geniuses of all times and species, Fred One was not above day-dreaming, and his fondest reverie always found him loose at night in the stacks of the library scratching through the files of the *Journal of Comparative & Physiological Psychology* for Lister & Powers: "Positive Reinforcement and Escalated Obstacle Frustration in a Group of Sexually Deprived Inbred Male Rats." Sexually deprived! Fred One knew their

attitude and no longer bewailed it: a rat is cheese, disease, and procreation, or the occasional object of a terrier's hunt. But why even mention such a meaningless form of deprivation when deprivation was the cage itself? Oh, he did not mean the absence of freedom—to starve or to be caught and killed. He meant the cage of idleness—to be stacked in a corner of the subcellar and fed and watered but never again . . . rewarded? No—challenged. It had not been the tidbits at the goal that drew his racing feet along the corridors of the Lister Maze—he had sometimes barely managed to choke them down. It was the peering girl and her ticking stopwatch, and the triumphant flourish as she depressed the stem when he saw through a clumsy lure and went on to beat his best time. Fred One had bitterly resented not being chosen for the next design—phase II of the same experiment—in which an entire colony of twelve cages were kept for six weeks in an enriched environment with toys, light, and plenty of mazes. There was one toy in particular that he dearly wished he could get his hands on—*paws* on!—a clockwork thing that you . . . But no matter, and no matter either that all of the rats in that experiment were later sacrificed and their brains spun down for cerebrocortical cholinesterase determinations. If Fred One had news for the world it was that none of his kind expected not to be sacrificed and if he had more news it was that he would go on being sexually deprived until *Rattus rattus* was no more IF ONLY THEY WOULD LET HIM LEARN! !

"What's the matter, One?" Fred Two crouched closer still, glancing about nervously for the source of One's unease.

"Nothing, it's all right. I was just thinking . . . Do you like cheese, Two?"

"Not much. I like grain. I like—"

"Grain, then. I remember one of these designs where all we were asked to do was express a preference for any of several kinds of food. Grain was one of the choices. We were in individual cages, I recall, and after we had made our selections the various foods were distributed over the metal flooring and the food each of us had chosen was defended with an electric charge. You could do one of three things: brave the charge and get to your favorite food;

avoid that food and settle for something a bit less to your liking; or try to plot the field and learn to get to your preferred food without receiving a shock. I was Fred One for the first time."

"Yeah?"

"Well, what do you think we did?"

"I don't know. What are these shocks like?"

"They're not pleasant. You can stand it."

"Well, I don't know. I guess it would depend."

"No."

"Well, what, then?"

"We sized it up and passed the word. Every one of us chose a food we didn't like and let them defend that. So we just relaxed with our 'second choices' and had a nice vacation for about two weeks."

This story was almost more than Fred Two could stand. Feeling vaguely grumpy at what he felt to be too much success, Fred One turned his mind away in search of better things while Two glinted and snarled and swayed from side to side in staccato paroxysms of joy. "Oh, oh, that's rich!" he gasped over and over, and more than once started up as if to nudge the others in the nest and then drew back, unwilling yet to interrupt pleasure with the effort of sharing it. Fred One waited between convulsions for the opportunity to make his point.

"And they—and they—oh, ho-ho-ho!" Fred Two exulted, triumphant with the vision of his hated testers carefully observing and writing things down and drawing con—con—*conclusions* from the cautious behavior of Fred One and the other rats.

"The point, Two, is that—"

"Oh, ho-ho-ho—"

"Two!"

"Yes, One." Two subsided with effort, and gazed happily at Fred One with renewed admiration and confidence.

"The *point*, Two, is that these things are not necessarily the end of the world *as long as we cooperate.*"

"I know the system, One."

"These are intelligent people, trying to do a good job. They're all right."

"If you say so, One."

"We only have to keep our heads and look sharp. If it gets tough, we just try to save as many as we can."

"I know. You tell me what to do and I'll do it."

"I don't know what to do because I have no idea what the design is. Are you sure no one has heard anything?"

"Nothing, One. Every cage has at least a Four, and each one has called the roll. Nobody knows anything."

"These things don't just start on somebody's inspiration, you know. They have weeks of conferences, get preliminary approval from the department chief, then the Dean—the money has to be okayed, the time, the physical facilities, us, the research assistants and technicians, all have to be lined up. You'd think—"

"Excuse me, One. I'm sure. Nothing."

"All right. Then we depend on our first sight of the equipment. Some of it you can see. Some of it—chemicals, food, machine oil—you can smell. I'll need you for that."

"I know."

One was sure that Two did know, and hoped he also knew that the subject was delicate. Lured beyond the bounds of judgment by the taunt that her "brilliant" rat was simply following a scent, Edith Powers had paralyzed the nerves inside his nose with a cotton swab soaked in a dilute solution of trichloroacetic acid that had not been dilute enough, and he had never quite regained the ability to make out presences in the dark. What was worse, she had spilled the stock bottle near the cage and then rushed to open a window before trapping the fumes in a towel, so that a gust of wind blew the greedy stuff into his eyes and he now saw reality through a pane of frosted glass. He didn't blame her and he wished the others wouldn't—it had been her pride in him, he was sure, that had made her do it. But it was awkward all the same, especially since part of his job depended upon being able to convince the others that they were in the hands of intelligent people.

It was a job that was difficult enough at times, One admitted. Word had gotten around lately about a nonesterified fatty acid study in the medical school in which an inexperienced laboratory assistant had fed lin*olenic* instead of linoleic acid in the final phase of an experiment and six weeks of semi-starvation (fourteen of twenty rats had de-

veloped nephritis and died) ended in "no result." (That experiment should have been confined in the first place, One was sure, to fatty acids showing geometric isomerism, since the negligible effects of arachidonic withdrawal had already been sufficiently demonstrated by Harper and others at Bethesda.)

But in the meantime the night was passing. Two was waiting, and the moon was coming. What would it show? One had uneasy feelings about this design. He thought he had heard of Erwin Allen, Ph.D., but something about the name bothered him. A visiting professor? If he turned out to be a young fellow, just starting out, that in itself could be a bad thing. Or if he were over thirty and still assistant prof that could be even worse. Some of these chaps eagerly approaching their first work or beginning to flounder in mid-career could be dangerous, especially if they were on warning from the chief to produce something. One definitely knew of a case where a sick rat was stuffed in a lunch bag to suffocate and a healthy one substituted so a meaningless sleeping pill could be reported out as harmless to laboratory animals. But Allen?— For some reason the name was associated in One's mind with sleep deprivation and exhaustion time studies—the bane of the laboratory animal's life and the all too frequent cause of his untimely death. The classic example was Koprowski & Moore (1951). In that experiment forty rats were slotted in treadmills tilted into water in such a way that they could stay out of the water only by walking uphill. At the same time they could get air only by working a complicated spring mechanism at the top of the hill with their noses. As time went on and the rats got tired, they became confused about how the spring mechanism worked. The frequency of successful manipulations (rhinipulations?) of the spring was automatically recorded, and the treadmills were stopped in different series for ten minutes per hour, five minutes, three minutes, and one minute per hour. All of the rats ultimately drowned, and One supposed the data were used to support somebody's idea about coffee breaks in business and industry. The design itself, however—so it seemed to One—left a great deal to be desired. After all, it was not the business of business and industry to work people until they drowned.

Those animals should have been kept alive and checked carefully over a period of months to determine if there were any lasting ill effects of fatigue. If he had his way, he would repeat that experiment, taking care this time to—

One clapped a mental paw over his racing thoughts and peered guiltily at Two as if to make certain that he had not been talking to himself. What was he thinking! *Would* he repeat such a barbaric experiment if he had the authority? He knew he would not. And yet—

And yet he had not quite told Two all of what had happened on that happy occasion of the defended choices. Anything—but comfort most of all—gets dull after a while. One had found himself looking with mounting intellectual greed at a dish of gritty stuff he knew he hated. Surely there must be a way to get at it? Vague fragments of conversation overheard in a dozen labs had finally clicked into place and he had determined to try an experiment of his own. One night he had collected tiny shavings of newspaper from the place where he hid his droppings and rubbed them vigorously against a bakelite water container attached to the bars of his cage. One by one, in a line pointing toward the forbidden dish, he had let them fall slowly to the floor. Suddenly he let one drop and it fell like lead—and he had located the outermost limits of the charged field. All night he worked furiously, and by dawn had cleared a narrow winding path hedged on both sides by bits of paper. Gaily he made his way back and forth from the dish to his bed, piling up the hateful gritty stuff—for no other reason than to sit gloating beside it when the technicians checked the cages in the morning.

The immediate result had been most gratifying. Oh, the head-scratching and the clipboard-clutching and the *attention* he had received! One laughed once, as he often did thinking of that morning—but then immediately sobered, as he always did, and acknowledged his full personal responsibility for what followed. The simple design was immediately reshuffled beyond their powers (Edith!) of divination, the voltage was increased, and three of the older rats making a break for it across a loaded field had gone into ventricular fibrillation and died.

They should have died hereafter!—a great human king

had once proclaimed.

No, One. You have taken as the touchstone of your behavior the minimization—to paraphrase Pauling—of murine misery, and that is—

"Yes, Two?"

A flurry of nerve impulses nearby in the nest wrenched One away from his contemplation.

"One, I think the moon is coming!"

It was true. The first rays had fallen on the far wall, and soon would sweep the tables clean of their mystery. One would then know what Erwin Allen (*Allen?*) and his co-workers had in store for the colony. Two raced to the bars, squeaking messages to all of the Fours in the other cages as the colony came to life. The females, One knew, would begin briskly to move shredded papers about into little hollows—as if the act of preparing to nourish nonexistent young would protect them from harm. The males would watch their Fours, scuttling out of the way as the Fours moved importantly back and forth inside the bars peering for data. Two did the same thing, skillfully maintaining his own vigilance while at the same time cocking his whiskers to receive signals from his lieutenants in the other cages. The moon slowly swelled with borrowed heat and floated upward until One could almost feel its light like fingers on his blinking lids.

"One, they see a computer!" Two scampered to headquarters and then back to his forward post, trembling with excitement.

One pricked up his whiskers. "What kind?"

"Large—I see it now—at least, it *looks* like a computer."

"What does it say on the front panel, Two?"

"I can't make it out! Oh, God! Wires! One, it's electricity again! Wires leading to cages!"

"How many cages? Calm down, Two."

"I don't know—they're all over the floor! There must be a hundred of them!" One got up slowly and made his way to the grillwork. Two crouched beside him, starting to snivel. "One, I don't think I'd like those shocks! My feet are tender! I was raised in a cage!"

"Be quiet, we were all raised in cages." With gruff sympathy he nudged Two with his nose and pressed against

the grillwork, vainly trying to see. "Tell them to be quiet." Two swallowed hard against the resistance of the dry membranes inside his mouth and throat and ran along the grill croaking orders. With the habit of obedience the rats fell silent except for one voice on the far side of the flat.

"Is that a Four? What's he saying?"

Two ran to the extreme corner of the cage and exchanged a relay of messages, reporting back over his shoulder as the reply came in.

"Pile of papers or magazines on a desk . . ."

"That'll be it."

". . . journals, it looks like."

"Bound volumes?"

"Unbound . . ."

"Recent, then. What journals?"

". . . can't see the titles . . ."

"The top one?"

". . . getting it. *The Journal . . . of the . . . Institute . . .*"

"Of what? What institute?" One came alert.

". . . *of Radio Eng—*"

"Radio Engineers! The I.R.E.!" One tensed and held his breath as the name Allen circled widely into the vortex of his bottomless memory. Brusquely he called Two and nudged him roughly to attention. "Now you describe that equipment, Two. It must be light enough—I can feel it."

"C-Cages, One, like I said."

"How big?"

"Large—larger than this one—room for m-maybe forty rats in each one."

"What else?"

"This big thing—computer thing—only I've seen comp-puters and this one has these . . . wires!"

"What about the wires?"

"They run out of this big thing, One—all over the front of it—"

Fred One lowered his voice to almost a whisper. "All right, now listen—this is very important: Do you see any *buttons?*"

"B-Buttons, One?"

"Buttons! In the cages!"

Two scrambled away, calling to the Fours on the lower-

most tiers to describe the inside of the cages, and came back, momentarily forgetful of his anxieties under the prodding of reinforced admiration. "One, you've got something? Yes! Each cage has these but—"

"By God, Two, we're all right!" One laughed and reached blindly with a paw as if to ruffle the hair on Two's head the way he remembered seeing a young experimenter do to his visiting son. He grinned fiercely and made a swooping infinity sign with his tail.

"W-Whuh—"

"It's a branching 709!"

"What's a—"

"A teaching machine, you idiot!" THIS IS THE CULMINATION!—One almost screamed it as the name Allen tilted and fell. Four hundred thousand from HEW to develop a self-organizing mathetics logosystem with wash-ahead and subsequence—Burkhaalter circuits with looping impedance —and the "let the machine do it" answer to the problem of programming ahead of the superior students. "Why Can't Johnny Read Sanskrit?"—Abel & Forbes, *J.Res.Soc.Am. 33, 1962. Because he hasn't got a 709!*

So it had come. This was what he had been building for—training for—being "deprived" for . . . Deprived? One slammed shut the steel valves of memory but it was too late. Now he remembered . . . It had not been her clumsiness that day in the lab that had spilled the acid and blinded him, it had been Alan Lister and their sudden reaching for each other and her breathless, "Yes, Alan! Oh, yes! Yes!"— and then the swirling and shouting in each others' arms while he lunged at the grillwork, squeaking, "Edith! Edith!" and *then* the acid and the haze forever before his eyes and the sleepless nights thinking about her and Alan Lister squirming together in their warm nest of shredded newspapers. But no matter now, Edith! Take your Alan—I have mine!

The cages were in a furor as the word went down that Fred One was excited about something. It didn't matter. They would be all right. They could scamper about in the way rats were expected to do, dropping feces whenever they felt like it. They would be his backdrop, the base-line of his accomplishment, the abscissa to his rocketing ordinate, the

muted accompaniment to his virtuoso improvisations. Two would take care of them, order them about. It was what they liked. They were the rats. Cheese, disease, and procreation. Shucking off the last shred of his vanishing guilt he regretted no longer his inability to smell them or see them. Ugly scampering things with their naked tails! Fred One was going to join his own! Life was short, and rats were cheap, but a liberated brain can outrun the stars and the 709 had better be ready. Fred One chuckled, imagining the first-frame programmers groping downward to rat level: things in twos reward with food; threes, water; five, pain. And now you and the computer are on your own. Well then, what about multiples—or even cubes—of two, three, five? Would he leap to thirty—the first multiple of all three? Or why go in that direction at all? Fred One could do square root and nobody knew it. A self-organizing system was bound to take him at least that far. He leaned against the grill, brushing aside Two's eager questions and blinking through frosted corneas at the huge black friend. How much farther would it take him? How far was there to go? One caught his breath and whistled loudly through his nose at the sudden thought that in effect he would be programming his own system . . . a self-organizing computer responded at *and beyond* the level of the input and *made no distinction between rats and men!*

Fred One began to tremble. It was better than that. If the computer was organized to stay ahead of him, One was in effect teaching, then learning, teaching, then learning—as fast as the circuits could function. There was—simply and at last—no limit any more.

Fred One slumped against the grill, smiling. What did they want—his beloved colleagues with their white coats and pipes and grubby politicking after grants? The $beta_2$ chain of isovaleryl? The coefficient of weightlessness in the Enders neutrino? Well, they should have it! They were good people, and had held him gently. What did they call it—serendipity? Would they accept a breakthrough—would they recognize one—from a rat and a computer? Probably not. Probably not.

But Fred One would die knowing.

And the computer would remember . . .

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