

AN ANTHOLOGY OF POLITICAL FOREBODING

Edited by Thomas M. Disch

BAD MOON RISING

Listening to the daily news or just walking a city street keeps one increasingly aware of the disintegration of societies everywhere and the impingement of injustice and chaos on our daily lives. *Bad Moon Rising* is a compelling volume of twenty-one original stories and poems that deal with the worsening political situation around the world and its grim implications for the future of people in society.

Most, but not all, of these pieces are science fiction. Thomas M. Disch has compiled a book that represents the whole spectrum of political possibilities and ways of writing about them. For example: Harlan Ellison, writing a gruesome horror story of the Satan-soul of New York City; Gene Wolfe with an incandescent story of political greed, corporate machinations, and the ultimate reality of political martyrdom; Geo. Alec Effinger with two tales: one of a most appalling solution to the population problem, the other a whimsical fantasy of innocent deaths; Charles Naylor with a gentle story of two people helping one another survive in the midst of the physical decay and almost total personal isolation that results from the

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malfunctionings of society and its institutions; a humorous story by Kit Reed, telling the truth about Miss America; a sorrowful, rational, moving plea by Robert Silverberg for us to stop and look at what we are and where we are going; and many others.

The quality of writing and degree of thoughtfulness in these pieces does not flag from one to the next. Each is a little different, covering yet another aspect of the theme. Some of the stories are funny, but the best hope they extend, collectively, is that by having given us warning we may avoid in fact what they present as fiction.

THOMAS M. DISCH, who makes his home in New York City, is a young man with boundless energy and talent. His writing has appeared in Poetry, Paris Review, Playboy, Mademoiselle, New Worlds, and other magazines. He is the author of Camp Concentration, Fun With Your New Head, and One Hundred & Two H Bombs, the editor of The Ruins of Earth, and is at present working on several new projects including two novels.

Jacket design by Patricia Dunbar



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Some Notes on the Predynastic Epoch: Robert Silverberg 291 There are two politics. One, ideal, a product of the imagination, which sorts the world into poles—North and South, left and right, them and us, good and evil; it simplifies, beautifies, flies. The other politics is the art of the possible, the wisdom of old men who have endured bad jobs, bad marriages and global catastrophes.

The two politics are necessary to each other. If all things are perceived as either black or white, one is soon reduced to a sterile, despairing fanaticism, whether of the left or right, then to terrorism and/or suicide. Yet in a fog of only varying shades of gray one may muddle from one expedient to another until one stumbles into the devil only knows what horrors. Vietnam? New York City?

The devil? I think, in a way, yes. For how often in that fog of expedience does one end up accidentally doing something wonderfully nice? The best political writer in America, Norman Mailer, is always catching a whiff of *him* inside of this or that smoke-filled room, and surely, whether as a metaphor or literally, he's there, whispering, sniggering, offering us what we too hastily have wished for.

There are two ways of writing about politics—retrospectively, with a view to what is known to have happened, or prospectively, with a view to the best or worst that yet may be. In other words, the writer of fiction has a simple choice: the historical novel—or science fiction. No matter how he may try to fix his story to exactly *this* moment in time, he must opt for one or the other. All the King's Men is a historical novel; The Manchurian Candidate is sf. These two possibilities parallel the two kinds of politics. Swordplay and foreplay aside, the main task of the historical novelist has been the analysis of what actually happened in history, of how, in fact, power has been used and abused at a given moment in time. The best of them, from Scott to Pasternak, have been good, if not always overcareful, historians. And so, often despite themselves, they were relativists and pragmatists and apologists for compromise. The more one studies history, the harder it is to choose sides.

Science fiction, by contrast, has been a partisan literature. It attracts writers with causes to promote, writers who are impatient with our own eternally compromising world. George Orwell, Kornbluth and Pohl, Robert Heinlein: all of them were propagandists for some ideal, or against some gargantuan Enemy. Like most idealists, they had few scruples about loading their dice. The future, after all, is so much more malleable than the past. This is why it's so much harder to "argue" with a book like 1984 than with, say, Darkness at Noon. Koestler, in order to be faithful to the actualities of history, undermines his own most cogent arguments. His may be a better work of art, but Orwell's is more effective. And that's why almost all the books being written today on political themes are, to a greater or lesser degree, science fiction. It works.

Which brings me, at last, to *Bad Moon Rising*. The single theme unifying these stories (and poems) is a concern for the present political scene and the dismal, or dismaying, or downright terrifying direction in which it's been drifting and/or hurtling during this last grim decade. There is no need to make a list. Reading the newspapers, watching TV, or just walking dirty streets, it's impossible for a rational person not to get the feeling that almost everything is going from bad to worse, and onward. To the degree, often, that even the mildest, milkiest expressions of optimism (the basically-I-have-confidence-in-thisgreat-land-of-ours approach) begin to seem like the blackest and most benighted reaction.

Most but not all of these stories are science fiction. Politics is

a continuum: the future is a function of the past. I've tried to put together a book that will refract, as much as one book can, the whole spectrum. The result has been an increase not only in its scope, but in its depth and moral complexity. Both kinds of politics, the ideal and the pragmatic, are represented here.

There are, however, no utopias among these stories. The best hope they extend, collectively, is that by having given us warning we may avoid in fact what they present as fiction.

Fiction, finally, cannot be a call to action. It only lifts the mirror, tilts it this way or that. Hopefully our actions, whether on the barricades or in the voting booth, will be better, saner, more humane for our having stopped a moment and studied what that mirror has made visible.

THOMAS M. DISCH

Bad Moon Rising



Ho Chi Minh Elegy

Peter Schjeldahl

Ho Chi Minh was our real President The one we counted on For right decisions

His face enthralled us: Confidential, Oriental, clear As a passage of music

He was always himself

He held in his thoughts The immensity of these times Cradled in his sense of what was fit

He smoked Salems, you know Think for what else he might have liked us Had he not been obliged to wage war To give us ourselves and our future

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Elegy for Janis Joplin

Marilyn Hacker

Crying from exile, I mourn you, dead singer, crooning and palming your cold cheeks, calling you: You. A man told me you died; he was foreign, I felt for the first time, drunk, in his car, my throat choked: You won't sing for me now. Later I laughed in the hair between his shoulder blades, well enough loved in a narrow bed; it was your Southern Comfort grin stretching my mouth. You were in me all night,

shouting our pain, sucking off the mike, telling a strong-headed woman's daily beads to dumb kids creaming on your high notes. Some morning at wolf hour they'll know. Stay in my gut, woman lover I never touched, tongued, or sang to; stay in back of my throat, sandpaper velvet, Janis, you

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overpaid your dues, damn it, why are you dead?

Cough up your whiskey gut demon, send him home howling to Texas, to every fat bristle-chinned white motelkeeper on Route 66, every half-Seminole waitress with a crane's neck, lantern-jawed truck drivers missing a finger joint, dirt farmers' blond boys with asthma and sea dreams, twenty-one-year-old mothers of three who got far as Albuquerque once.

Your veins were highways from Coca-Cola flatland, dust and dead flies crusting the car window till it rained. Drive! anywhere out of here, the ratty upholstery smelling of dogpiss and cunt, bald tires swiveled and lurched on slicked macadam skidding the funk in your mouth to a black woman's tongue.

Faggots and groupies and meth heads loved you, you loved bodies and booze and hard work, and more than that, fame. On your left tit was a tattooed valentine, around your wrist a tattooed filigree; around your honeycomb brain webbed klieg lights and amp circuits screamed Love Love and the boozeskag-and-cocaine baby twisted your box, kicked your throat and the songs came.

I wanted to write your blues, Janis, and put my tongue in your mouth that way. Lazy and grasping and treacherous, beautiful insomniac freaking the ceiling, the cold smog went slowly blue, the cars caught up with your heartbeats, maybe you were not alone, but the ceiling told you otherwise, and skag said: you are more famous than anyone out of West Texas, your hair is a monument, your voice preserved in honey, I love you, lie down.

I am in London and you, more meat than Hollywood swallowed, in Hollywood, more meat. You got me through long nights with your coalscuttle panic, don't be scared to scream when it hurts and oh mother it hurts, tonight we are twenty-seven, we are alone, you are dead.

We Are Dainty Little People

Charles Naylor

"For he that is mighty hath done to me great things." (Luke 1:49)

He looked through the bars and into the great George Washington windows that sank deep below street level. They were coated evenly with soot. A barely illuminated cellar of pipes and insulated pipes disappeared far into the space. A power station. A communications transformer, he thought, although it might as well have been a hospital, as the more revealing windows were all above eye level.

The neighborhood proved otherwise undiscernible as well: a Chinese laundry, cars (all old) scattered on either side of the street, a small makeshift deli. He moved along. Spanish deli, a church facade—yet the street couldn't be called sinister. It was dark. He wouldn't realize for perhaps a week that the darkness was urged each day prematurely by the hospital (it was in fact a school) chunking up sixteen stories and at the other end of the block a modern, very very high (at no time during those ten years had he been curious to count just how high) apartment building with entrance on the reassuringly Jamesian next street downtown. Between the two monsters were, from west to east, a small and attractive residential building put up probably during the forties, followed by two tenement buildings (twins, six floors each) and then a renovated brownstone.

He stopped at the second tenement and rang the buzzer marked SUPER for the keys. As there was no response he pushed the door (it was open) and walked up the steep slate stairs.

He supposed that with the money saved in rent it would be possible and pleasant to make the three rooms livable. He would sand the floors, paint everything white, buy a new refrigerator and stove. Rugs, paintings, curtains. But the next day, waking at eleven, there was no light. He sat the afternoon on a milk crate near the living room window with typewriter perched on the radiator *pretending to be using* the light, then *waiting* for light, then, *glancing angrily* at his wristwatch, he told himself there would be light tomorrow—perhaps in the morning. But there was never light.

A year later: the same old rocking stove, a gas refrigerator which didn't work (leaky compressor), no spanking white walls. And the rubber plant (Nancy's rubber plant), relegated to the fire escape already a month—to catch the sun at noon—had died.

"Do you think it really was the soot? I even washed the leaves with milk," Nancy said, sighing.

Nancy was not unpleasant to have around. She didn't cook, but came with a great deal of specialized cooking equipment and didn't object to his using it: a garlic press, a colander, a doughnut maker, nesting plastic mixing bowls. The living room became her room. She brought a bed, two caned chairs, burlap throw pillows and burlap curtains. She was rarely home but he looked forward to her being home.

He would come in from work Tuesdays and Thursdays and find her asleep. She napped for two hours and then read or went off to the man she eventually married.

He remembered years later the one time they had shared a bowl of bean soup before going to bed. She always said good night. And he always said good night, though like their telephone good-byes these signals for solitude rang of hasty premeditation. They had discussed the problem.

"I guess I have trouble with beginnings and endings. I'm afraid no one will say anything at all. I don't like telephones. No—I don't dislike telephones. It's as though when I'm sitting alone in a room knitting and the telephone rings, while I am saying hello I'm still alone."

"You say hello all right."

"Mmmm." She touched the corner of her mouth. "But when

I begin to think about saying good-bye . . . The receiver is only something I hold in my hand. That terrifies me."

"Does it really terrify you?"

"No, I didn't mean that. I just said that. I don't know."

He had lived for nearly a year in the apartment before encountering the girl across the hall, Eula.

Nancy had recently moved in and it was one of her nights away. He sat in the kitchen reading. Nancy's brass lamp stood on the corner of the enamel bathtub cover giving off a palpable ocher light that ghosted the other darkened rooms.

The door across the hall crashed shut and there was the sound of bare feet thumping through the short corridor and down the stairs. More noise. Banging on doors the floor below, probably the super's apartment. Fifteen minutes later there were sounds coming from everywhere. Great footsteps in the hall, people on the fire escape opening and shutting windows, a flashlight beam across the ceiling and gone. He imagined a voice somewhere: *OK*, no more of this apartment stuff. Let's open every door, sound every voice. Miss Porter, what the hell do you put in your soup? But it didn't, when he thought about it, really concern him. And he knew no one. And he felt determined to continue and finish the book he had begun.

The commotion continued for ten minutes behind closed doors. There were the sounds of a bumbling leave-taking and he couldn't help but hear a girlish gasping voice:

"I wonder what he was doing. I mean, he could have been out there on the fire escape for hours. . . ."

"Pro'ly lookin' at y'r broccoli," a man's voice boomed. Followed by a chorus of policemanlike guffaws.

Minutes later he met Eula.

"I saw your light was on. Oh, I wish I'd known you were home. I just almost got raped!"

"Jesus!"

"Jesus K. Rowst. That's what my daddy would've said. Those sonsabitches downstairs. Y'know the super's wife. Here I am bangin' my ass off—my Ass off—an' she opens the door just a crack. She's scared 'cause I ain't got no clothes on. Finally—y'know, I'm freezin'—th' other door opens an' the fat old lady with the white hair, she throws me an' old torn sheet, gives me a dirty look, like . . . They called the police though."

"What happened? Would you like a cup of coffee?"

"I would, that's just what I'd like. Well, I was layin' in bedy'know, I've got a Castro convertible—readin' *Backstage* with my clothes off. I always do. I do what I like. An' . . . the window was open. An' this big motha fucka . . . I tell you the truth: I didn't even see him. You musta heard me scream. You been here all the time?"

"Uh-huh."

"Well, he comes in the window, an' I go right out the front door. He took my radio. I think. Now I'm not sure whether it was in the kitchen. . . . As I say, I think he hot-assed it off with my fuckin' radio. An' you'd like to know just how long it took me to find a DC radio?"

Eula Porter was heavy and good. She slid onto the bathtub cover while he poked through the silverware in the bottom of the refrigerator feeling for the coffee tin.

"Damn black-ass sonabitch . . . Your refrigerator don't work?" she asked, pulling out a crumpled pack of Gauloises from a brown paper bag she had been clutching.

"No, I'll have to get a new one, or . . . I don't know. This DC electricity is a problem. I heard that you can't have a new gas frig installed anymore; it's illegal."

"Oh . . ." She searched for a match. "Wow . . . uh, say, do you have a match?"

He produced a large old-fashioned box of kitchen matches from the ice tray compartment and tossed it to her.

"Thanks." She inhaled deeply, offered the pack but he shook his head. "Mine's gas too. Someone painted it black, but it works. You're welcome to put stuff in it."

He smiled. The cold tap only dribbled water disconcertingly

into the aluminum percolator. When it had filled up to the sixcup line he took a match and lighted the gas. "I have someone staying with me—all this stuff is hers."

"There's room in my frig for the both of you. Hey, does this babe cook? We could chip in on a turkey, a really big one. What's her name?"

"Nancy."

"Oh, I'm Eula. Eula Porter. Imagine me comin' in hereyou were readin'-an' not even . . ."

"I saw it on the mailbox—43, in red crayon. Last week you had a note Scotch-taped up that said, 'Please ring, long and hard.'"

"My bell don't work so good." She laughed, displaying incredible white teeth. "Wow, I was really scared. You didn't hear me?"

"No."

"You had the radio on." She indicated a small square transistor squatting between the shaving cream and a broken mirror speckled with toothpaste.

"Nope. I was reading."

"You must read a lot," she offered, realizing that the kitchen cupboards were entirely filled with books. Six shelves.

"I've had most of them a long time. It gets bigger. This was the only place to put books, actually. And with the frig not working, I don't need that space for canned goods. Hey, have you noticed the way cans always look wrong, you know?"

"Yeah, except when you've got a lot of the same thing. Like I'd put all different kinds of Metrecal across the top there." Pointing.

"Or Campbell Chicken Gumbo. The whole room: Campbell Chicken Gumbo!"

"That's it. That's it." Eula had begun to wave her hands excitedly and jumped from the bathtub. "I have it. I knew . . . I've been savin' this just for you. I must've know'd I was going to meet you." Just as she was about to turn the doorknob she remembered and froze. "Oh, listen, would you mind comin' in with me? I'm afraid maybe that sonabitch'll come back."

The coffee had only begun to perk. He turned it down so that it wouldn't boil over and followed.

Eula Porter's apartment was structurally and at heart the mirror image of his own. But some enterprising person—he supposed it hadn't been Eula—had tried very hard to disguise the fact. Her kitchen cabinets were intact, where his weren't. A medicine chest with mirror had been added over the sink, although it hadn't solved the overstock problem: clusters of aspirin bottles, shampoo, lipstick and hair conditioners clung precariously to the little wooden ledge over the taps. The stove and refrigerator could be curtained off into their own small burlap-bound room. The arch between kitchen and living room had been reduced to a normal-size door, with bookshelves taking up the new space. So many books: he was surprised.

These old rooms never allowed for closet space. Classically, one used a wardrobe in the living room. Yet somehow Eula's tiny bedroom, while still accommodating a bed and dresser, had been long ago (with ten dollars' worth of plywood and some paint) turned into a large clothes closet with overhead storage space, and at its entrance a few shelves for linen and ample space in a cupboard for canned goods.

The living room, Eula apologized, was in a state of disorder. The convertible, still spread open like a drugged grasshopper, couldn't help but dominate the room. Yet end tables, each supporting a great bowling pin table lamp, stood on either side; an oversize dresser crouched at the foot of the bed; a sewing machine, disguised as an occasional table, stood between the two windows; the TV catty-corner by the door; King Korn Savings Stamps bulged from the drawer of still another table, overflowing to the no-longer-yellow carpet; magazines and newspapers beckoned from underneath an end table; a horseshoe, a redsatin-covered Christmas tree ball and two paintings had been attached to the brown burlap walls arbitrarily (one a photographically honest accounting of down by the old mill stream; the other allegorical, perhaps a sixteenth-century, and very fussy, imagining of purgatory). There was additionally a piece of music parehment in a baroque frame. The Latin text asked, "Do we like daisies?" Squeezed between the dresser and sewing machine and directly under the window that gave access to the fire escape was a stuffed yellow armchair.

"I guess you know that chair saved my life." She climbed across the bed on her knees to indicate that not only was the chair comfortably overstuffed and covered with a rich yellow (though dusted lightly with soot) fabric; it rocked.

"He wasn't expectin' no rockin' chair." She laughed. "Fell right on his face."

Quite unexpectedly she placed her full weight forward on the edge of the chair, rocking it toward her, and reached into the corner behind with her free hand to pull out a peculiar black metal . . . what must have been a display rack for . . .

"I'd been savin' this, thought it might come in handy someday, hang kitchen things on it, or anything." Grunting and struggling to maintain her balance, she managed to drag the steel massproduced whimsy up on the edge of the bed, where she now sat with one leg folded under her. A pair of panty hose had got caught on the base, while the two-tiered carousel-like body turned (with a squeak) just far enough to prove that it might turn if called upon to do so in its eventual function.

"You like it, don't you," she chirped. "I knew you would." He beamed.

He worked in a bookstore. It was pleasant. The other clerks were of all ages, but predominantly they were in their twenties and full of hope. Some days they all wanted to become wealthy bookstore managers. Other times one might want to be a book editor while another would nearly register for a night course at Hunter. Still other possibilities were brought up and, a day or a week later, were dropped: the Peace Corps, prostitution, life drawing classes at the League. Miss Sears couldn't consider any change until after the abortion. Mr. Lockwood wistfully hoped for an adventure. No, nothing in particular. Just an adventure.

They had a game. The team you were on related directly to age and perhaps salary—one supposed that the older clerks were making a living wage, although later it was learned that all were being exploited, whether for their love of books and bookish people or for a disability to decide on a better career.

The object of the game was to steal books. One began with the slim green paperback Tagore and moved on to philosophy, novels highly recommended, uniform paperback editions of Eliot, Austen and Dickens, all the Anchor Books with Ed Gorey covers—but did not just pilfer books in an orderless fashion. Each night one competed with the other clerks in a department. The paperback people most often won. Yet in winter, muffled to the teeth in what warm coats had been salvaged from days living at home—who could afford a winter coat on the salary? even the various hard-cover teams could guarantee a few surprises: six or eight Loeb Classics, a variorum Yeats, or—the pinnacle of achievement—one volume of *The Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles.*

"What'd you get?" Mr. Vesey asked the girl at his side as soon as they were a safe distance from the service entrance. Eager to trump with his fourteen pale blue cloth-bound Yale Shakespeares, he didn't honestly want to share the glow of triumph until they had all reached Miss Weber's furnished room (they were not allowed to call each other by first names at the store and often the habit extended into after hours).

"You'll see." Miss Weber giggled and continued down the avenue listing noticeably to the east.

"A globe?"

Mr. Maxwell inquired what she might do with a cash register. He, the gentlest and most perverse, took children's books: great oversize picture books filled with princesses and jeweled serpents, black gothic forests and fields trembling under rain. Often he would take nothing, so much preoccupied was he still with last week's linen alphabet zoo or *The Birthday of the Infanta*. Those too large to steal he signed out and never returned. One day he vanished.

Eula hadn't got out all day. Having lingered at a film showing until three the morning before, she resisted sleep and stayed up reading until about seven, tiptoeing often into the kitchen to nibble at some leftover cauliflower. When her neighbor left the house at eight-fifteen to go to the bookstore, she was only beginning to drift off.

She awoke at four, folded up the convertible and began to run a bath. The bathtub cover was no longer attached to the hinges on the wall and had to be lifted and carried (resounding like tympani through the building) into the living room, where it remained for the rest of the day propped against the TV. As the tub filled, she breakfasted on diet cottage cheese.

Poking about in the bottom of the refrigerator for a stalk of celery, she accidentally uncovered the missing radio with her foot (it had made its nest, as a radio will, under a shopping bag full of soap and No-Cal Lemon beneath the kitchen table). Still wearing her nightgown—as she did now each night since the invasion—and armed with the cottage cheese, she settled down in the living room to wait out the bath and to hear all the music she had missed.

When he returned about six the door to his apartment was standing ajar. Somehow it didn't seem wrong. Nancy didn't come on Wednesdays, nor did she leave the door unlocked to go to the john, which lay just down the hall from Eula's apartment, but, he reconsidered, it didn't seem wrong.

Once inside, his heart pounded in disbelief. There was nothing. No chairs. No black Formica kitchen table. No bed (his). No bed (hers). No great straw laundry basket. The Wyeth-like cityscape. They were all hers. The tiny triple-A shoes. The dressing gown. The mops and the ironing board. The living room gaped and the window nearest the fire escape stood open, making the space cool and dark. Yes, and the lamps.

Nancy took it well. Some of the jewelry, her high school class

ring specifically, could never be replaced. And the earthenware pickle vat from an auction in her home town had been like no other.

He lost two dollars in pennies, the typewriter, a reversible raincoat, one pair of slacks, shaving equipment. There was little satisfaction in the knowledge that he had nearly bundled the laundry off to a laundromat the previous night, for that too was gone.

Two days later he noticed the spare key slipped under the door. Nancy too, it seemed, had been taken from him.

He no longer left the window open a crack. Sometimes Eula would come over and they'd sit side by side on top of the bathtub wondering what the super's wife could possibly be cooking below—mixed with the stench from the drains it was unearthly and staring at the steel display rack. That remained. It held four new white Japanese plates and matching coffee mugs, a beginning.

The next robbery occurred within a year. Both their transoms had been pushed in; but, they reasoned, the wood was rotten. He lost a transistor radio. She couldn't be sure what was gone. Drawers were emptied onto the floor. Books lay all about the living room, their spines broken like baseball bats. Eula wondered how she would ever find anything again.

When the super's boy stopped by, his child eyes opened wide with amazement at the mess. No less bewildered at the other door, he said, "Wow, they really cleaned you out!"

What had been the quality of life. He could no longer recall the essentials. At best he could only be sentimental: walking through truckyards at morning, sunrise from the bridge, Chrystie Street Park yawning and yellow and alive, the ferry at two in the morning, tunnels and hills and talking to strangers, wondering primarily what mail waited in the box.

Life was no worse. Eula, with her mooning and anger, her absurd cooking, her bags and boxes, was a joy. They each made love in the bathtub and there was talk of tearing down the wall between the two kitchens. Affairs succeeded each other like waves, counterpointing, coloring, recasting, enlarging.

But sometimes late at night a mistaken key might try the lock and he would rise with a jolt.

At Christmas Eula proffered a plastic parakeet (named Spirochete), bottles of spice one had never heard of, a small enamel sign for the WC.

What. He felt the floor for a towel, or underpants. Crept the length of the three rooms. A sound like a muffled pogo stick, like the Brooklyn Bridge fluttering all about you as you climb the cable, like a man wearing rubber-soled shoes advancing gingerly down the fire escape. He raised the window gently, feeling the anger and frustration swell, the murderous anger. He looked up. And down. Nothing.

Or bubble bath wrapped hastily in a newspaper, a conical device for measuring gills and half liters, a winking rubber lamb—Anthropomorphic. He gave her the sorely needed new, aquamarine toilet seat, a button that had a stylized picture of the world and read underneath: "Mr. Coconut." He returned, in perfect condition, the can of Puerto Rican pepper sauce she had given him the Christmas before.

What had been the quality of life that was now missing. With postprandial optimism he recalled reading how Mahatma Gandhi never closed a door, lived like a turtle without its carapace. One wandered through room after room (he liked to think), house after house asking each shrunken and dark man who sat crosslegged in a dhoti, Are you? Are you Gandhi?

Had he ever felt secure, he asked himself, for he couldn't remember.

If one were obliged to draw an analogy, it must be in art: the persuasion of light, heat and darkness in a painting; the elusive and androgynous center shimmering midair above the void, spinning like vocalises—all-seeing eyes of the hurricane—in Couperin's Leçons de Ténèbres; and then, the moment when they no longer live, no longer unfold like apotheosizing flowers. Life's delicate energy is not experienced dialectically.

He began to believe that nothing could be explained. There were no analogues. Take flowerpots, with or without the apotheosizing flower:

One Saturday he was sitting in the middle of the kitchen floor naked, about to have a hero sandwich and a Coke. He was naked because he had been rolling across the living room and kitchen floors, trying after four years to come to terms with the soot, the splinters, the loose floorboards, the roaches, the absence of furniture. He wanted the dirty walls and faded red deckpainted wooden floors to make some statement for themselves. And they hadn't. He knew no more about Mary Murray's friend who had lived nearly thirty years in these rooms and died; nor the painter who succeeded her; nor the tall boy who took over the painter's lease and stayed only a month; least of all did he learn about himself, but that now, dirty and breathing heavily, he felt foolish and abandoned to ugliness, bad air and the wasteful, slipping-away, factory-lavatory sound of his bathtub filling.

Looking in the direction of the fire escape, he realized that the long-since-dead rubber plant lingered as a stalk in its large red clay pot outside. He considered this for a moment and took a bite of the sandwich. What could one do? It might as well stay. He would buy a large ugly plastic flower and put it out there to collect soot, reproaching God or himself.

He turned. Something moved outside the diagonal kitchen window. A man. He got to his feet. A man, dressed in a suit? Yes, was—and tennis shoes—very slowly and with care climbing down the fire escape of the next building, stopping to peer in windows. Now, just at eye level.

He ran into the living room, threw up the window and grabbed the pot. Ordinarily it would have been heavy in his hands but blind rage had made it no more than a Webster's Third International at the store, a football suddenly thrust into his hands. He shoved up the kitchen window.

"Hey, you . . ."

No answer. The man fairly skittered like a dancer down.

"Hey, you son of a bitch. Answer me."

Down. Down. Soon he would have to jump for it.

The frustration, he thought. I can't. I'd kill him. And I want to kill him.

He threw it shattering. Shards, soil, the soot of four years splaying out as it connected with steel three floors below. A hollow sound. Then nothing.

And Eula. Walking home late, she stopped to pick up the Sunday *Times* at the intersection and a man, short, thirty-five, amorphous, funny hat, red cardigan, was waiting for the light to change. He smiled. Eula had just been kissed by the newsman. She bubbled. The theater section, the puzzle, boiled chicken and cold cornbread, she thought. And she smiled.

Having adjusted the strap of her great carryall bag, she secured her woolly cap and, cursing the paper—in a friendly way—for being unmanageably large, proceeded up the avenue. A cab cruised by, picked up speed, passed.

After a block and a half she realized that she was being followed, and she knew by whom.

Did she want to talk. A *nice* girl. What was her name. Do you like me, he asked and—he begged—couldn't we be friends.

He was a child. In many ways Eula herself was willfully a child. For her it was a means of self-preservation, a self-deluding that made the least likely event absurdly funny, buoying her spirits constantly to the plane on which she could endure and produce. In such spirit, and after a delicate haggle in front of the building, she bid her new friend a firm good night.

"Jesus," she muttered, bundling up the steep stairs. "Jesus K. Rowst."

The next day at about five in the afternoon there was a knock on the door. Usually knockings on the door were preceded by buzzings on the buzzer. Cautiously she asked who it was through the closed door. "It's me. I brought you something."

The voice, detached from a body, was unfocused. She trembled.

"No. Go away. I don't want anything."

Fifteen minutes later there was another knock.

"Eula . . ."

"Yes, Jaime," she answered, recognizing the super's little boy. It was a relief to hear his voice. She opened the door.

"A man gave this to me. He asked me to bring it to you."

In Jaime's arms was a battered, but living, home-grown carnation in a clay pot.

"Oh."

Four nights later she had received and ignored not only the flower, but three amazing letters printed with the greatest care in block letters. They were lovely, childlike, innocent and uniquely terrifying.

When the key turned in the lock across the hall, she threw open her door and thrust out the new message folded in four.

He leaned one bag of groceries against the interconnecting wall and unfolded the note carefully with his free hand. After puzzling for a moment he looked up.

"Don't worry about it. There isn't anything you *can* do until he threatens you."

"I'm thinking, maybe he's watching the house."

"Scream, cross your eyes. He'll run." Eula's face melted for a moment.

"Look." She produced her floppy brown shoulder bag. Inside was the largest pork butt he'd ever seen. "I lifted it at Bohack's." She beamed.

Not to be outdone, he reached into a vest pocket. A shipment of miniature music scores had come into the stockroom that day earmarked for the remainder book department: a pocket-size *Eroica*, Haydn's last *London* symphony—the 104—Bach's *Magnificat in D*. Eula gasped with delight.

"We can put on our *own* Magnificat. I have the record." Forgetting the note, the pork butt, she dashed off to a corner of the kitchen and began ferreting through a dusty stack of LPs.

"Just let me take the groceries in-what do you want with the ham? Spinach. I have spinach. Corn fritters?"

"Spinach! I know . . ." came her voice bowels away, "I know how to make spinach with salsify."

"Salsify?"

"Uh-huh."

He cleared a space on the next to the last shelf of the refrigerator for the ten cans of evaporated milk—there had been a sale. He unscrewed the cap from a half-empty jar of mayonnaise to see whether it had turned, though really one could never tell. Eula had once described the refrigerating system back home when she was a kid. They dug a deep hole. That was it. Anyway, who needs a refrigerator, he mumbled.

When he returned she was ready. The ham had been put to boil with bay leaves and fennel. Chunks of wooden-looking salsify—"Oh, that's salsify"—floated pale in their brine, waiting only for the spinach and a dash of poultry seasoning. A tiny tin of pickled eggplant had been opened and already sampled (for the hors d'oeuvre). And the Bach *Magnificat* scratched away.

They waited and listened in the living room. Sometimes Eula would join in on the alto recorder. He turned pages, sang when it came easily.

"Y'gotta be a goddamn black midget—" She pressed closer to the speckled score.

When they reached the bass aria "Quia fecit mihi magna," she became noticeably agitated and jumped to bring the needle back a few bars on the surface of the record.

"I forgot all about that . . . listen. That guy . . ." Tears came to her eyes. "He's sayin' . . ." She pulled her chin in, constricting the larynx, swallowing the sound to make it more basslike: "'We are daint-y lit-tle peo-ple'—that's . . . that's just what he's sayin'. " And he was. The window exploded. The frame shook. About the corner and general vicinity of the yellow rocker lay great chunks of earth, shimmering here a spike of window glass, there terra cotta. A yellow carnation's broken stem had caught in the window gate.

Lines had begun to form in his face like webs, like shattered windows. Perhaps only he saw them for his face was, at the same moment, young. Who had polished the thick pane of glass in the front entrance door? Still there was no lock. He remembered when he had been there but a few months, petitioning the other people in the building to urge the administration to lock the door, repair the buzzer system—his had never worked—and distribute keys, but to no avail. He met apathy. Some of the older people had been there for twenty or thirty years; they feared that any attention from the agent would bring a rent hike, or (speaking irrationally) eviction. Many depended on small pension checks and were obliged not to rock the boat. Finally, there was his own apathy. Had he even approached all the twenty-three other units?

Now the names on the letter boxes were new. Eula's box read "Alvarez" and had been dashed over with silver paint. On the wall beneath an invading gang had left their logo. There were four names on his old box. Kids, he guessed.

The old daily changing odor of urine and garbage touched his nostrils as he climbed the stairs. He remembered, for no reason, how one night alone in his darkened living room perhaps in boredom—he had sat for hours staring out the back windows and across the vast space at the school—was it the last year?—and there, in the darkened typing class directly across, was someone else staring back, studying him, waiting.

When he reached his old floor he hesitated. It hadn't changed, the door. New locks, but the same reddish-brown wooden door. Seven times they had broken the lock, but not the door. He had been waiting for the door to go.

And now. How strange, how still. The roof. How high the

school was. Had he never been here? Why, he asked himself, breathing deeply, am I not afraid?

He swung down over the edge to the platform that gave access to the sixth-floor windows, easing gently all his weight into the tips of his tennis shoes until, like some miraculous transferral of protoplasm, he felt himself crouching without any feeling between the two windows. The greatest artistic patience had to be applied to descending the other two floors, or madness.

On five there was a wait while a woman in her fifties with bright red hair dried her dripping body—like some curious new vegetable—after the bath, but then as she disappeared into the little bedroom he slid down.

It was his own. Black. No one home. Gently he jiggled the window with the three loose nails in it. Had it even occurred to him that they might be home? Asleep? No.

After what seemed hours the first nail slid forward and dropped to the floor inside; the other two followed quickly.

He eased up the window and felt knowingly with his right foot for the floor. The rooms were black as blood. He waited for his eyes to adjust, and then he realized-there were curtains, thick old secondhand curtains drawn, disguising the kitchen window. Could he turn on the light? Best not, reaching into his jeans for a match but without success. The refrigerator. There would be matches in the refrigerator. The handle was cool and familiar in his hand. Groping. Tins of spice. A salt shaker fell to the floor, broke, making a luminous pool. Insanity. Salt, matches. In a warm refrigerator. They might have been his own-the box nearly empty. He struck one against the rough scab but it was very worn. The second burst into flame, and there in that moment he saw it all: the half-used bottle of professional roach spray that predated even his time, gobs of homemade plaster on the walls and ceilings, dried powdery, fallen to the floor, ground in, the wall switch midair, a clutter of beginnings. Eula's old vellow chair had somehow made its way here. Telephone books under the tub, dirty despair, another life.

He unlocked each of the locks and went away.

Strangers

Carol Emshwiller

Across many miles of marshes to the west, below the wooded mountains to the north, lies the city.

The people have always lived: (a) on an island in the middle of the river or (b) on the outskirts of the city.

Skipping breakfast, they come out into the street, unlock cars and drive away.

These days it is said that the eye is the most spiritual of all the senses and touch the most primitive.

The people don't know whether the sea will cover their land or whether it will be the air (as they know it) that will disappear first.

Someone said the beaches don't smell like beaches anymore. That is possible.

We were the people in those days.

These were our ways.

This was our mass transit system, our means for the disposal of solid wastes, our endangered species, our Stravinsky, our abortion laws, our telephone company. We had lived this way ourselves, sending our sludge to the sea, listening to music, paying bills, tolls, fines and taxes. We were crossing the oceans in less than eight hours. Our mothers noticed that between the ages of five and twelve the penis hardly grows at all.

We miss the summer.

Instead of sunsets, we have the North Star.

Centuries passed. We didn't notice them except in our history books.

We have eaten the passenger pigeons. Also the lobsters are almost gone. Places vanish. San Francisco might as well be just a name.

We've tried, but it seems we have lost the knack of miracles. We distinctly remember a pillar of fire or a fire ball on the mountain, but we were so small at the time we wonder if we only dreamed it.

Across many miles of marshes from the west came the stranger, having already asked us if we had once been the people, having asked us about the activities (cultural, political and educational) that went on in the city. He was dressed like one of us in a transparent shirt and fashionable tight pants even though he wasn't one of us.

"Have you indicated" (he had indicated) "the city and province of your birth in the proper place on the proper form?"

"Are you familiar with some of our newer forms of behavior, especially as regards sex, love and marriage?"

"You may have already won ten thousand dollars in cash prizes and other surprises."

Across many miles of marshes came another stranger out of the west, this time a woman, having filled out the proper forms, et cetera, and wearing a transparent shirt. Art is thought of as life, or almost, and life as art, so the strangers play themselves.

Under their gaze we turn away our eyes.

We read odd things in our newspapers.

Our birds are dying.

Ceremonially we planted a small tree.

We have neither elephant- nor dog-headed gods, but we have chemicals that can eliminate odors twenty-four hours a day.

As luck would have it, we come across as civilized.

The city commissioner said that our women might be: muse, goddess, earth mother or whore, nothing less nor nothing more.

We have lived through all this before.

There are still places to go for a quick abortion. There are still lotteries. There are still enemies of the people. Some women still have babies, others still go to psychologists. They are the mystics. Some of us have regained consciousness on the brink of disaster and expressed our views.

In another era we might have said that one stranger had the head of an elephant and the other the head of a dog, but by now we know better. We are not deceived by appearances and we have learned to live with our doubts, so that if one has the head of an elephant (which might be true) and the other et cetera, we do not notice it.

Our city commissioner said that a woman might become president of the country, but not president of the company (as General Motors). We have heard about a great sage who grew an orange tree from the palm of his hand but we have not believed it (or we have felt there was certainly some entirely different explanation). We have heard about angels of destruction and horses that count to ten, people with lion bodies and heads of men. We have not believed them.

But some things we have seen with our own eyes or at least on TV, such as a pole vaulter who jumped eighteen feet and then one of us has held his breath for six minutes, twenty-nine and eight-tenths seconds. There was one of us buried for thirtyone days with his food passed down to him through a three-inch tube, and even here in our own country some of us have burned ourselves alive in protest of something.

QUESTIONS FOR A THIRD STRANGER

Have you indicated the type of disaster at the top of the page? Have you mentioned the time at which it will take place and the exact point where it will occur? Have you shown the dimensions of the disaster? The extent and type of damage? Have you described the physical and mental anguish?

Civilization has meant a lot to us.

However, we have had a pretty good society, a pretty good cultural situation for a long time now. We have had some people with a lot of good ideas. We have had instances of selflessness. In general, we have tried to accept the lesser of two evils. Also we have had a lot of very nice animals, plants and insects crickets, for instance, cicadas, whales, zinnias, pelicans, baboons, marigolds, grizzly bears, bobcats, ferrets, sparrows, daddy longlegs and so forth for quite some time now. Also some of us have already lived to the age of seventy-five or eighty. Others ean boast that they have changed the entire course of human existence. We form car pools, write letters, make out legal documents and write case histories. Some of us have had horoscopes drawn up and our handwriting analyzed.

We still do not believe in angels of destruction.

We have given the best years of our lives to the outskirts of the city.

Patiently we're waiting for a third stranger.

Are we in danger?

Relatives

Geo. Alec Effinger

The radio said that the quality of the air had been judged acceptable for the first time in two years. Ernest Weinraub couldn't see any difference; through his apartment's single window the skies over Brooklyn still looked yellow, a sick color that usually tempted him to get back into bed. But, as every morning, he prodded himself with thoughts of job and money. He closed the steel shutters so the light wouldn't disturb Gretchen in her sleep. Then he went into the tiny curtained bathroom area to shave.

Ernest wondered if the air outside would smell better than usual. He could almost recall the summertime fragrances of his childhood. Lord, there were probably plenty of kids on the streets now who had never got that first fresh spring smell. They were probably down there this morning, bouncing spaldeens against the building, trying to figure out why the air was so funny. Not many trees got leaves these days, just a few in Prospect Park. That didn't make Ernest feel sad. It made him feel old.

It was dark in the small apartment with the louvers shut. Ernest dressed quickly; he always felt lonely in the morning, with his wife asleep across the room. He tended to think cheerless things, unpleasant things, and he often had to shake his head to stop those melancholy ideas. On television he heard the popular sociologists talking about the reasons. Too many people living too closely together. A person needed a certain territory that he felt he could master. The regulated apartment modules seemed more and more like tin boxes, the kind they packed dead fish in. . . . Ernest sighed. He had to get to work. He walked quietly across the room, not even glancing at Gretchen. He didn't want to think about her yet.

"You going?" she said, yawning.

He stopped by the door, still not turning. "Yeah. See you later."

"What you want for supper?"

Ernest opened the door, ready to duck out quickly. He looked at his wife. "How do I know?" he said. "Lord, it's only eight-thirty. How do I know what I want for supper? Anything you want. I got to go."

"All right, baby. I love you." Ernest nodded and shut the door behind him. He was halfway downstairs before he remembered that he hadn't checked the baby.

Ernest's job bored him to the point of insanity. He worked in a factory, making electronic testing equipment. He sat at a long table with a dozen women; everyone at the table had a box of tools and a high stool with an uncomfortable back. Ernest was a fourth-class subassembler, which meant that he was not rated for soldering work; his toolbox held fewer and less specialized tools than those of the women, who were for the most part third- and second-class assemblers. Maybe his feelings of inferiority were imaginary. He didn't know, and he didn't have access to anyone qualified to understand. But Ernest noticed how rarely the women included him in their conversation.

Some days Ernest worked only on front panels. He would take the plates of sheet metal from their tissue wrappings very carefully, because if he nicked the light green paint on the front the slightest bit, the panel was ruined. His panels had odd-sized holes punched in them, some with calibration markings painted around their circumferences. In some of the holes Ernest installed control knobs, in some he merely pushed rubber gaskets or fuses, and in one he put an On-Off toggle, which was difficult to tighten without chipping the paint on the front. Sokol, the nervous foreman, walked around the section checking how much was wasted by each employee. He carried a blue plastic notebook; several times a day he'd stand behind each worker and scribble his idea of that person's worth.

Before him on the bench Ernest arranged the color-coded socket wrenches to his left, and the corresponding screwdrivers to his right. He seated the toggle switch in the proper hole, held it with a wrench, and tightened a hexagonal nut on the back. As the morning passed he paid less attention to his work, completing one panel after another efficiently, mechanically. His hands were cut and his fingernails torn. His day was measured out from clocking in to coffee break, from break to lunch, from lunch to afternoon break to clocking out. Those were the only goals he had; if he worked quickly it was only to minimize the awful tedium. But the company knew perfectly well that his boredom would begin to work against that productivity. All that it could devise to alleviate the monotony was piped-in music.

Ernest found that even worse. He sat huddled over his work, protecting his tiny domain from the innocent glances of the women and the omniscient gaze of the foreman. He defined the others by their functions—not even so human a thing as a name on a time card. There was the heavy black woman who picked up the stack of front panels he completed. There was the old lady next to him who soldered complex balls of electronic components, turning out those delicate webs with the same mindless precision. And Sokol, the foreman. He was *the boss*. He prowled with more freedom, and Ernest envied him. But Sokol wasn't a real person to Ernest, either. Sokol was only the man who watched him.

It was as if everyone was a rough crystal, with dozens of different facets. Here in the factory Ernest saw only one facet of each person, the same facet every day. And he didn't want these strangers to have access to more than one of his own facets. There were thirty million people in the New York metropolitan area, and he could feel the presence of every individual of those masses. There wasn't any way to escape it. The only privacy available was *inside*; to defend it there could be no hints of one's feelings, no tentative gestures of friendship or loneliness. And there was a terrible loneliness.

Ernest enforced his own alienation; he had to ignore the multiple facets of the millions of others. Each person had to work out his own salvation; idealism to the contrary, there was no way for Ernest to submerge himself in the incessant dramas of all his neighbors and maintain his own mind. So he held himself apart from the shopping-bag ladies who lived their meager lives on the subway, and the kids who shaved a round area on their skulls where three wires poked out, and the others who could so easily upset him. He concentrated on those friendships he wished to promote; and, when those people were busily ignoring him, he found only a deeper depression. There could be only trouble when one person presented the wrong facet to another.

It was late in the morning before he began to think about his wife, just before lunch. His job annoyed him. It provoked him more as the day went on, and his thoughts moved from simple to abstract. When they became too frightening he thought about Gretchen. She had no longer any facets of her own that he could respond to. Gretchen was the cement that filled the gaps of his other relationships. She was a bland, even unattractive, substitute, but she was dependable. From there he thought about the lack of depth of their marriage; the even shallower relationship he had with almost everyone else; how such a willingness to ignore people guaranteed their freedom to do as they pleased; how, after all, misanthropy was the surest safeguard of liberty; how such an attitude led to community apathy; and then, just as the lunch bell rang, he realized that the apathy was what had suckered them all into accepting the world they lived in.

The ten-minute coffee break only began to soothe him; lunch was his only chance to relax during the long day. But even here the company could order his private life with its rules. It required him to take a full hour every day, and so, working from nine to four, in order to make up a full thirty-five-hour week he had to come in for almost a full day on Saturdays. Every day at noon the employees lined up to punch out at the time clocks, then filed into the large, cold cafeteria. The lunch tables were staked out by the various cliques, none of which seemed interested in including Ernest. Often he ate alone, but lately he had been speaking to one of the secretaries from the front office. He had hopes of the noontime conversations developing into an affair.

"Hello, Eileen," he said, sitting in the seat that she had saved for him. "How's it going?"

"Hi, Ernest. Terrible. I'm just getting so sick of that Mr. Di Liberto. I mean, no matter *what* I do, he knows better. I've been a secretary for three years now, you know. For crying out loud, there *are* some things I can do by myself. I'm not as stupid as he thinks I am."

"Don't mind him. It's just a job. Just do what you're told and take your money."

Eileen took a sip from her milk carton. "Easy enough for you to say," she said. They talked a while longer, until they were interrupted by the chime signal that prefaced an announcement on the public address system.

"Your attention, please." The amplified voice spoke out from several locations in the lunchroom. "We have a message of special importance from the president of the Jennings Manufacturing Corporation, Mr. Robert L. Jennings."

"Thank you, Bob. My fellow employees, as my son has told you, I have unusual and particularly important news. For that reason I would appreciate it if you all would stop what you're doing, whether you are working or on the lunch shift, and listen closely.

"We have received word of a grave situation, the details of which unfortunately have not been released. But the government has ordered that all normal daily employment be suspended, so that you may all go home to be with your families when an official statement is made later this afternoon. Only essential police and transportation facilities will remain operative after one o'clock this afternoon.

"Therefore, in compliance with the governmental order, you are all hereby dismissed to return to your homes. We are given to understand that normal activity will resume as soon as circumstances permit. Please do not attempt to call our offices for details, for, as I have said, I am as ignorant of the exact situation as you. But whatever the emergency, I wish you all the best of luck, and may God bless."

The cafeteria was a scene of confusion. Ernest began packing up his lunch. "That's fine with me," he said.

"But what do you think is the matter?" asked Eileen.

"I don't really care." Eileen stared at him, and he smiled back. "We'll find out soon enough, won't we? I mean, what *could* it be? Maybe a Representative died, or something. I don't care. I'm just glad to go home. Can you give me a ride to the subway? I want to beat this rush."

The trains were already crowded. Apparently everyone in the city had been given the same message, and they all rode home together with the same worried expression. Ernest wondered if he was the only one who didn't have that paralyzing feeling of apprehension. No matter what had happened, its effects would probably never trickle far enough down the ladder of fortune to alter his life. Or, he thought, the lives of any of these people. But here they all were.

The crush in the subway car was terrible, for the time spoiling Ernest's holiday. In a perverse way he wished that the emergency was, in fact, as serious as they feared, to reward all their sullen, graceless behavior. It was so damned easy for people to lose their perspective. When they all got home, their TVs would probably tell them nothing more than that the Asian Representative's daughter-in-law had had another miscarriage. The world would be due for a planetwide Day of Prayer. Or something equally unshattering; hardly worth all the anxiety. In any event, he would have to find ways of killing the additional time at home. The prospect of spending the extra hours with his charming bride was not at all attractive. Whatever the seriousness of the situation demanded, Gretchen would react with panic and hysteria. He hoped the announcement would be made early; the sooner it came, the quicker he could dope her up and put her away.

The press on the subway was so unpleasant that Ernest decided to walk the mile and a half to his apartment, rather than take a bus. The pedestrians had the same concerned look as the passengers on the train. Ernest shouldered his way through the people, forcing his own path among the currents of traffic.

The buildings that he passed were all condominium dormitories, every one of them filled to capacity with various-colored modular apartments. The government claimed that housing was being built at an even faster rate than necessary, but Ernest didn't believe it. Everyone knew someone who was having a difficult time finding a place for his modapt.

Ernest hated his own module. It was a Kurasu; it had been given to him new by his parents as a wedding gift. It was as small and as inexpensive as possible-Gretchen thought it was "snug." Ernest rented a place for it in a privately owned building, a third-floor slot. They didn't have the money yet to rent a higher slot, up away from the noise and filth of the city. But, at least, they were well in the interior of the building, with only a single window to the outside. Although Ernest complained that it was like living in a shoebox, still they were never troubled by the racket from the street. The economy modapt came equipped with only the merest essentials; it was old now, without the standard equipment of the Fords, the Chevrolets, the Peugeots Ernest dreamed of. It could not take advantage of even those piped-in luxuries which the skeleton frame of the building offered. Rather than moving, as Gretchen hoped to do, Ernest planned eventually to trade in the modapt and buy another and better-fitted model.

As Ernest unlocked the door to his apartment, his wife called

to him. "Is that you?" she asked. When he didn't reply, she came out of the partitioned nursery. "I was expecting you to come home," she said. "Mom called to tell me about the announcement."

Ernest sat on the couch, rubbing his aching temples. "It's hot in here, you know that? You like it like this, or what? Why don't you get me a can of beer." While she crossed the room to the kitchen area he said, "How come you didn't know about it yourself? All you do is watch TV anyway."

She gave him the cold beer, and he held it against the side of his head for a few seconds. "Our set's broken again," she said. "I don't know, it just faded flat, and then it went out all the way. I haven't seen a thing all day. Maybe we'll have to get a new one. Ours is so old anyway."

"Never mind. I'll run it down to the building superintendent. That's what he's for, you know. Sometimes I wonder if you know where money comes from."

"But what are we going to watch the bulletin on? That Spanish guy they have here to fix things takes weeks. I don't trust him anyhow."

"There's the flat set in the kid's room. Did you forget about that?"

"I can't stand watching shows on that old set. It seems so stupid, looking at everything flat like a painting. It makes my head hurt, now that I'm used to the stereo," said Gretchen.

"It's good enough for the announcement. I'll get it out."

"Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, concerned citizens of North America. The regularly scheduled programs and their sponsors have relinquished their time so that we may bring you this special message of national importance. Ladies and gentlemen, the Representative of North America."

"My fellow Americans," said the Representative. "This morning I met with the other members of our government—with the Representatives of South America, of Europe, Asia, Africa and of the Pacific—and it was our decision to inform you of an impending state of emergency in this way. We sincerely felt that under the circumstances this is the fairest procedure, not only for you, my colleagues and neighbors of North America, but for each and every person in the world, each of whom, I hope, is right now listening to his Representative in whatever distant land he calls home."

"When is the next election?" asked Ernest. "Fifteen years? Remind me not to vote for this guy, whatever his name is. He sure likes to hear himself talk."

"Quiet," said Gretchen. "I'm sure he's doing it for a reason. Maybe he doesn't want to start a panic."

"Panic!" said Ernest scornfully.

"Now, let me describe the situation calmly," said the Representative. "The most serious hazard at this moment is the possibility of causing an unfortunate and emotional reaction among you. But, nevertheless, the case is simply that the world, and thus the entire population of our planet, is in grave danger of sudden and violent destruction." The face of the North American Representative, flat on the screen of the old television set, displayed no emotion. His expression was adopted to foster confidence and composure, even while he was reporting such alarming news.

"Precisely what the doom that threatens us is, and how it will wreak its terrible havoc, is not to be disclosed. The particulars of this information are known only to your six Representatives, and to the team of specialists who prepared the original papers. It is our decision here that the details could not benefit the average citizen, and only serve to interfere with our plans for orderly and impartial evacuation."

"We're all going to die?" asked Gretchen, her voice rising in pitch and volume with each syllable.

"No, aren't you listening? He just said 'evacuation.' Trust him. That's what he's for; he knows what he's doing."

"Although we are faced with a catastrophe on a scale previously unknown on earth, there is no cause for uncontrolled hysteria. Our teams of engineers have been at work since the first hint of the cataclysm was interpreted several months ago. We are pleased to report that protective bunkers have been built, with the assurance that they are completely and perfectly able to withstand the harshest blows that our disaster will deal. Following the actual period of disruption, we will emerge into a somewhat disordered and damaged world, but we, ourselves, will be none the worse for the experience. We will then be able to resume our lives with only the most moderate and reasonable of adjustments.

"However, we have not had adequate time to build enough protective shelters for each and every one of you. Indeed, the most generous estimates indicate that there is room for only one out of each two hundred and fifty persons. Consequently, we have devised this scheme for ensuring that those fortunate individuals who do survive will be chosen by means of an unbiased system."

"We are going to die!" said Gretchen, sobbing.

"Admittance to the bunkers will be granted only to those persons who present one of these tokens." The Representative held up a shiny brass coin, about the size of a quarter dollar. "Each person must have one; therefore make sure that each member of your family obtains his own. All persons without a token will be turned away on the day of evacuation. Families will receive no special treatment. We will show no compunction at all about splitting up such groups. This is the only way we have of enforcing fair conduct.

"Furthermore, each person must obtain his token by himself. Only one token will be given to each individual. In the case of children under the age of five years, they will receive their tokens only if they are brought to the dispensing station by a parent. The aged and the infirm must obtain their tokens in similar fashion. This may seem heartless at first glance, but proper reflection will reveal it to be the only reliable course. Names will be taken at the dispensing stations, and positive proof of identification will be required. Later, these lists will be compared with lists of those persons admitted to the shelters. Any person who thus appears to have obtained entrance by fraudulent means will be immediately executed, and his entire party with him.

"Finally, beginning tomorrow the dispensing stations will be located at random spots around the globe. Their positions have been chosen with especial care to safeguard the equitable distribution of tokens. But the exact locations are also a secret, so that a further element of chance may work to the democratic effect.

"And now, I and my colleagues wish you all the best of luck, and may God bless."

The flat set dimmed for a second or two, and then presented two network commentators who tried to cope with the unexpected news. Ernest listened to their stammers until he grew annoyed, and switched off the set.

"What are you doing?" asked Gretchen. "We're going to die unless we find out what to do!"

Ernest drank some more of his beer. "Those guys don't know any more than we do. I don't want to hear about it."

"What's the matter? Do you *want* to die or something? I mean, you don't have any *choice*. The whole world's going to blow up and all we can do is get one of those things. . . ."

"Tomorrow morning I'll get up, and you take the baby, and we'll find one of those booths. There's bound to be crowds around them. They can't stay hidden long, can they? There's nothing we can do now, so just shut up." Ernest felt slightly sick. His reaction to pressure was a withdrawal into apathy, but he knew that now he couldn't afford that. He had to face the problem this time. He didn't yet know if he would.

"Ernie," said Gretchen, "I can't go. You know I can't go. I'm pregnant."

"Yeah," he said, staring at her, "among other things."

"No, really. I can't go out and fight those crowds tomorrow. You do it. You can tell them. Tell them I'm in no shape to go out of the house. And we have a baby too. They can't expect me to go out like this, and with a baby yet. They're not that cruel." "Weren't you listening? I can't get your token for you. Didn't you hear that? You have to get your own. They won't let me bring you one. You have to come with me tomorrow."

"Oh, Ernie," said Gretchen, crying and gasping for breath. "Ernie, I can't! I just can't! I don't want this! I—"

"Here," said Ernest, "take these. Go to sleep."

"Will you ask them to give you three?"

"No. You're coming with me."

"No, Ernie, no!"

"You just want to go to sleep, and wake up tomorrow, and everything will be taken care of for you, right? But it won't. You have to go out there and get your own damn token. Because I'm getting *mine*, and if you don't want to bother, well, I'm sorry."

"But you'll try? Ask them for three?"

"All right, I'll ask them. For two. I'll take the baby with me."

"Ernie, no! You can't take Stevie out there with all those people. Leave him home with me tomorrow, please? You can't take my baby!"

"Go to sleep. I'm going out now; we'll talk about it in the morning."

"Come on, get dressed."

"Ernie, I'm not going."

"If you don't come with me, you're going to die."

"No, I won't. Tell them at the station. Tell them I'm pregnant. They'll give you a token for me. They have to."

"All right. See you."

That's it, Ernest thought. Their relationship, the marriage, the baby, everything. Gretchen had locked herself and little Stevie in the nursery, and nothing that he had said had shaken her wall of fear. Well, then, he'd get *his* token. Maybe this was the best way.

His own fear was lessened by a confusion of other emotions. He knew that he was not going to die: he'd get a token one way or another. But his wife, and his son . . . There was just too much to accept all at once, and he shunted the strange thoughts away for a while, preferring rather to deal with the here-andnow problem of getting his token.

He was still trying to figure the best search method when he reached the street. In a city the size of New York there must be dozens of stations. Where? Follow the mob. Just find an angry crowd and get to the head of the line. No problem there, thought Ernest, nodding to himself. Just find a station.

And now, of course, the same thought occupied every one of the other thirty million residents of the city. His own street, normally a mildly busy thoroughfare, was jammed with shouting, milling people. That's service, thought Ernest. There must be a station set up on the corner.

It took him about half an hour to shove his way through the people to the corner, a distance of sixty yards. He had to fight all the way, and every foot he gained was at the expense of a great deal of pounding and cursing from the others. He began to hit back, slapping and throwing people out of the way, ignoring them as individuals. Ernest cleared himself a path with a spirit of the community of all men: now *none* of them were his brothers; the sense and humor of the mob treated him and all the rest impartially.

When he got to the corner of the street there was no sign of a token station. The avenue was filled, as packed with people as his street had been. There was no hope for public transportation; even cars and motorcycles were useless. And, probably, there was no one to operate the subways. Where were these people going?

While he stood staring down the avenue he was hit sharply in the ribs and pushed. Only the density of the crowd itself prevented him from falling to his knees, where he easily might have been crushed or suffocated. He struck back angrily with his fist, and hit a young girl in the face. Ernest could not tell if she had been the one that had struck him; she seemed to collapse in her place, and Ernest caught her, supporting her while she recovered. "Thanks," she said. "I could have been trampled."

"I'm sorry I hit you in the first place. I don't know. This whole thing is starting to get to me."

"Did you hit me? Oh, never mind; it doesn't make any difference." She felt her swollen lip and tried to smile. "We're not getting anywhere," she said.

"Doesn't look like it. Which way are we headed?"

"I don't know," she said. "I've been out since five this morning and I haven't seen a hint of a token station."

"Maybe that's their plan. Maybe they have them hidden where only the smart people would think to look. They don't want a bunch of idiots coming out of those bunkers."

"Maybe. How much time do we have?" she asked.

"What?"

"I said, how much time do we have? Will the stations close tonight? Do we have a week? How long before the disaster?"

"I don't think they ever told us," he said. Ernest pushed his way downtown, and the girl followed closely in his wake. They had to shout to make themselves understood.

"That figures. Have you seen anybody with a token?"

"No," said Ernest. "But I don't imagine that the people who get them will tell. They'll try to hold the lines down for their own family and friends. Cut out the competition by playing cool. We're just going to have to keep looking."

"We won't get ten blocks by nightfall at this rate," said the girl.

"You know what?" said Ernest.

"What?" she said. Darlaine pushed herself through the people who closed in behind Ernest's back. They rested at their goal, a sheltered doorway along the avenue.

"We got to get one of those tokens."

The girl laughed. "Yeah. Two. How?"

Ernest wiped his upper lip with his wrist. "I don't know. You know what else?"

Darlaine sighed. "No." She looked out over the swarms of

people. If they had, in fact, been in some sort of line, their short rest had lost them what advantage they had won in the last hour.

"This crowd is getting to me."

"Me too," she said.

Ernest started to push back into the crowd, but the girl held his arm. "How many tokens do you need?" she asked.

"Huh? You have some? All this time?"

"No," she said, looking past his shoulder. "I just wondered." Ernest hesitated. "One. Just one. Why?"

"I only need one too, I guess."

Ernest laughed. "That makes things much simpler, doesn't it?"

They cut across Fort Greene Park, where the open spaces were not as thickly jammed with people. There was little likelihood that a token station would be anywhere in the area, but Darlaine thought the government might set one up for the benefit of the CAS forces billeted near the East River. Ernest had no objection to her idea.

As they merged with the street-molded streams of people on the far side of the park, Ernest felt the fear once more. He viewed everything from a frightening distance; the scene flickered like a bad splice in a reel of film. The world was sliding away, out of control, and he couldn't tell himself anything that eased the panic. It meant nothing that the real world had never been in his control to begin with. He wanted to cry, but that passed into a sick nightmare feeling. He wanted to scream, or hurt himself, or somehow regain his sense of vitality. But the teeming streets and the shouting, brawling people scared him again and again.

"You know what?" asked Darlaine.

"Yeah."

"We're not getting anywhere here either."

"Well, God damn it, what do you want me to do about it? Wherever those stations are, if they aren't pretty damn near here, they're not going to do us one bit of good." "You know the bench in the park where we stopped?"

"Yeah," said Ernest suspiciously.

"I'll meet you there tonight."

"What?"

"If we split up we'll stand a better chance. Two of us looking. Right now I'm just duplicating your effort. And I'm slowing you down. If I find one I'll tell you. Or you'll tell me."

"You running off to meet somebody now? How many times you done this before? How many other guys are you working with?"

"Three," said Darlaine quietly.

"Am I supposed to trust you? I mean, if one of those guys tells you where you can get a token, are you planning on telling the other three of us?"

Darlaine looked hurt. "Of course I would. You should know me by now."

"Yeah, I do. And when we all get tokens, who are you going off with? You're lucky, you know that? You got more to bargain with."

"I'll stick with you."

"Right," said Ernest. "You want me to believe that. Well, I'll be there at ten tonight."

"I love you, Ernest."

"See you."

As the day passed, and as the night deepened, the crowds became hysterical. No one knew for sure how long they might have left. Was the disaster natural, on a cosmic scale, coming one year, five years in the future? Or was it manmade? Could it come this very night, at midnight? No one still on the streets seemed to have heard of anyone who had managed to obtain a token. Those hypothetical persons who had stumbled onto the locations of the token stations kept their secrets. Soon everyone learned to ignore the sudden, excited news: Under the bridge! No one would think to look there! The dugout at the stadium! A perfect place! Everyone listened unbelievingly but, as the situation was *that* desperate, and as everyone was *that* unnerved, the rumors were passed. . . .

It was impossible to tell where the violence began. The frantic movements of the crowd threw some of its weaker members to the side, off the street, through a storefront window. The crashing drama of the broken glass promised release; the crowd wanted more—rocks, litter baskets, bodies thrown through more windows. Signposts were ripped loose from the pavement. Wires were pulled down to hang like mortified, failed servants of processes no longer of value. Thirty million members of the mindless mob in the city alone, and diffused among them were the uniformed services, the usual containing forces of order, themselves given over to violence checked only by lack of operating space.

Ernest was caught up in the confusion as he tried to force his way crosstown toward the park. Even in the night-shaded patches of the park there was little peace. Ernest avoided the noisy fighting as he headed for the meeting place; he had not given up. Somehow he had found the determination to keep looking. Giving up now, handing himself over to the pointless disorder, would be, effectively, suicide. Good, he thought as he warily observed the brawlers in the park; it keeps them off the streets.

At ten o'clock he was at the bench, alone. At ten-thirty. At eleven he began to panic. At eleven-fifteen he left. According to reports the destruction would begin at midnight; half an hour to find a token, *if any were left*.

I'm as good as dead, he told himself as he battered his way through the crowd. I'm as good as dead. It's all over. I'm dead. After a while he stopped thinking even this. He was crying when he thought he saw Darlaine.

He was certain that it was her, fighting through the crowd just a little way in front of him. Maybe she had got the token after all. Maybe she just couldn't get through the throng to meet him.

"Hey," he screamed, knowing that she probably wouldn't

hear or pay attention. "Darlaine, wait up! It's me, Ernest Weinraub." The girl did hear, and turned back to look at him. Her expression was terrified, and instead of attempting to make her way back to join him she pushed on, trying to lose herself among the people.

"What the hell," said Ernest. "She has one."

He struggled against the crowd, trying to overtake the girl. He caught up with her, thanks to the vicious tactics he used in pursuit. He forced her to one side of the street and into a doorway.

"Let me go," she screamed.

"Why didn't you show up? Where'd you get the token?"

"What do you mean? I don't have one! Who are you?" She was crying now.

"Let me have your purse," said Ernest.

She stared at him, horrified. "No!"

He tried to take it from her and she kicked his knee. He hit her across the throat, and she collapsed in the doorway. He searched the purse carefully, hopefully. There was no token. Meanwhile, the scene had been watched by the members of the crowd nearby. They quickly interpreted its meaning.

"She had one!" someone cried.

"He's got it now. . . ."

Ernest turned and fled through the lobby of the condominium building. He hurried down the arcadelike hallway, followed by scores of shouting people. He left the building at the other end of the hall, hiding himself in the crowded street.

Ernest wandered now, with only a few minutes left to all their lives. So many had already died, victims of the energies of the crowd, or of their own fatal dread. There was no hope. If he could find a token station now, would there be any more tokens? Certain that the disaster was only minutes away, he doubted that he could get to a bunker before midnight.

Where would the death come from? Why wouldn't they tell him? As he walked, his panic grew and spread from him to touch the whole surrounding world; he could not look into the sky, for his fear told him that he would see a blazing comet come screaming down to crush him to the ground. He could not look down, either, for fear of sceing the street begin to break up, crack and thrust and fissure, and he would fall and burn.

The air might suddenly turn poison, or hang in space while the earth turned out from under it, leaving him to choke in the instant of space. He had lost, but so had all these other millions, and nothing that anyone had to say could make him feel sad for them.

At midnight. Everyone knew somehow; the news spread faster than even the swiftest of the day's rumors. It was twelve o'clock, and they all held their breaths, or cried, or swore. But the only sound came from the loudspeakers, the MIU boxes on the rooftops.

"Attention, all citizens. You are in no immediate danger. Please return to your homes and await further reports from your Representative. We repeat, you are in no further immediate danger. You can only risk doing yourself serious injury by remaining in the streets. Return to your homes. A special bulletin from the Representative Council will be broadcast tomorrow at noon. . . ."

At noon the next day Ernest turned on the flat set. Gretchen sat with him on the couch, still groggy from the drugs that had got her through the previous day's crises. She had not set foot outside the modapt, and had no idea of the scale of the riots. She slept through the day and the night, and in the morning reproached Ernest for his failure to get the tokens.

"Shut up about it already," he said. "They're going to tell us something now. All I want to know is when it's going to happen. If we have time, there'll be ways of getting tokens. Just let me listen."

Over a blank gray screen a voice announced, "Ladies and gentlemen, Their Democratic Dignities, the Representatives of the peoples of Earth."

The scene was the library of some building. The six men sat

in a semicircle of captains' chairs before a manteled fireplace. Some of them held partially filled glasses, others smoked. They seemed relaxed and, of course, confident.

The camera closed in on the Representative of North America. He smiled pleasantly. "As you are no doubt aware," he said, "a bulletin issued by our offices reported that the entire world was endangered by an unspecified though total form of annihilation. I believe that Ed, here, would like to say a few words about the current status of that situation."

"Thank you, Tom. The circumstances have simplified somewhat. I'm sure that our viewers will be gratified to learn that there is no longer any danger of any sort of worldwide cataclysm." He paused to sip from his glass.

"At least, as far as we can tell now," said one of the others, chuckling. "We don't want to ruin the insurance companies."

"Right, Chuck," said Ed. "But what I meant was rather that the entire story of the disaster was untrue, that it was total fabrication from the very beginning."

Ernest was bewildered. He said nothing. He couldn't tell if Gretchen said anything.

"I hope that our constituents don't believe that we went to such lengths merely for our own amusement," said Tom.

"Our reasons are our own," said one of the others, "and we don't think it wise to explain them fully just now."

"Whatever they are, they must be pretty important to do all this," said Gretchen.

"Shut up," said Ernest.

"At least we're not all going to die," she said.

"Shut up!"

". . . felt that this would present a convenient and relatively painless way to thin out the population, for one thing," the Representative continued.

"Sort of enforced natural selection," said Chuck.

"Right," said Tom. "And that reminds me. We're still counting on you people being upset enough to riot tonight. That was part of the original scenario." The six Representatives went on for nearly half an hour. Ernest watched in stunned and outraged silence. He didn't want to believe it; it *must* be their warped idea of a joke. His wife sat with him, for the most part thankful that she was not, after all, going to die. At last Ernest got up and turned off the flat set.

"It still seems ridiculous. I mean, isn't that going a little too far?" Gretchen said.

Ernest searched around in a drawer, finally finding his small revolver. "I don't know," he said. "You can't really have an opinion."

Gretchen noticed the gun. "What are you going to do?" she asked nervously. "Just because they expect you to go out—"

Ernest shot her three times. "You're not in any position to criticize the government," he said. He went into the nursery and looked down at Stevie, his infant son. He took out his wallet and found a twenty-dollar bill. He folded it and tucked it into Stevie's little fist. Then he went back out into the room and locked and chained the front door.

"You don't have the right to that sort of statement," he said, just before he shot himself. "They're the only ones that have all the facts. They know what they're doing."

Riding

Norman Rush

The adjacent cottages rented in 1967 by the three families stood in moderate isolation at the edge of the summer colony, in thin pine woods, their back porches overlooking a salt pond. Although initially the wives had referred to the pond as a wallow, they admitted having mixed feelings about it: it was undoubtedly only the proximity of this evesore that had kept the unit of cottages available so late in the spring. They decided that they had no cause for complaint: they were college friends, now residentially separated in suburbs outlying New York City, who had determined suddenly and tardily to spend the summer together on Cape Cod, having their husbands stay with them during regular vacations and commute to the Cape on weekends the rest of the time. The wives wanted the experience of living as neighbors to one another. They were sophisticated enough to know that sharing a single large house, which they had been prepared to do, might have led to problems. On the whole they considered themselves fortunate with the cottages.

The eldest of their cohort of children was only six. At first the children had been given the freedom of the slope above the pond, since it was an ideal play place, evenly dotted with umbrella pines and carpeted with trailing myrtle. But before long the children had had to be barred from behind the houses altogether. They proved unable to stay away from the pond, and the pond struck everyone as unsafe. It was a half-acre pond, triangular-looking, bounded on two sides by dense beds of flowering gray reed that radiated away into undergrowth and trees. At the center of the near shore of the pond was a railed, listing dock. The pond had been used as a dump by previous tenants, but apparently only for the disposal of large, clean, intact objects like webless lawn chaises, barbecue equipment, shopping carts. There was no broken glass. The pond was not miasmal, not badly bug-afflicted. The scoured head in profile of a rocking horse protruded from the reeds beyond the pond: on arrival the husbands had promised to remove it, since it attracted the children, but in July it was still there. No one could say how deep the pond was, the bottom was clearly irregular, the pond level changed erratically from week to week, the men had no wading gear and it would have seemed inappropriate to go to the length of renting or borrowing a skiff. Proposals for extracting the horse became whimsical before ceasing completely.

As July ended and the ghetto risings in Newark and Detroit began, the pond became the center of a custom among the husbands.

Saturday and Sunday dinners were eaten in common in rotation in the different households. Before dinner the men would have their first highball, which they would drink watching the riot coverage on the six-thirty television news. They would pour and bolt a second highball. Then, carrying a fresh final round of drinks, the men would go down the slope to the pond, where they could be observed in conversation, occasionally firing an insecticide aerosol, awkwardly trying to make themselves comfortable on the sodden dock. The wives had been rebuffed in their gestures at attempts to follow the men; the children had been rudely turned back. It was novel of the men to separate so openly and unapologetically from the women: always formerly husbands and wives equally had resisted any temptation toward sexual self-segregation. The wives were apprehensive that the pattern of separation might be noticed in the colony.

As to what was drawing the men to the pond, the wives had a

quasi theory, which was that covert extra drinking was going on during the forty minutes or so that the men remained away together. One suggestion was that the men, upset by the ghetto rebellions, needed to exceed the tacit three-drink limit that had evolved in each family. All of them, in the eight years since college, had matured into strong and catholic drinkers. They looked back with amusement at their undergraduate winedrinking. But they considered themselves moderate by comparison with the society at large, particularly when the drug pandemic was kept in mind. No evidence presented itself to support the quasi theory.

For a time the men themselves were uncertain about the impulse that led them to separate. Of course they were interested in their own attitudes to the rioting, the casual arson going on. They all sensed that their reaction to events was weaker than was called for, deficient-seeming but not deficient-feeling, as one of them expressed it. They did agree that their reaction couldn't be dismissed as simple *je-m'en-ficheisme*. One difficulty was that their wives were turning out to be incapable of a coherent attitude of their own: with the women, one minute it was precisely eat-drink-and-be-merry and the next it was reflex racist fantasy. Their wives amazed them. One thing did become clear: the men concluded that they had all been moving almost unconsciously leftward from the weak liberalism of their student days.

On a Sunday, with central Detroit in flames, and during a scenic sunset, the men succeeded in resolving their feelings around a phrase: "the ride to the trap." They had already confessed to one another an inexplicable positive feeling about the disorders, and an accompanying feeling of self-justification and relief at having been politically inert during the last few years. Someone said, apropos of nothing, "the ride to the trap," and an attempt was made to penetrate the phrase which they found immediately arresting. The riots meant fascism, a prospect which in theory should be frightening and galvanizing. But fascism concealed a further prospect. They could see how it could be

that their true social energies would be released only when they were forced to be together, by repression, with others like themselves, their equals and contemporaries, in the fist or forcinghouse of fascism. It was mentioned that the breakup of unitary working-class districts-like mill towns, concentrations of workers all in the same industry-had been identified as a main cause of the decline of labor militancy. In short, repressive encirclement could have unintended good outcomes. They were confident that the number of those who had, like them, been slipping unconsciously left-added to the number of those who had been bright enough to move consciously left-would be sufficiently great that if all were to be detained, really large camps or settlements, amounting to small whole cities, would be required. It occurred to them also that they were members of an economic class so crucial to the nation that ultimately they would have to be bargained with and conceded to. They would represent an investment that couldn't be written off without bankrupting the country.

The sun was setting. A little low wreckage of cloud at the treeline shone like gold leaf; the pond shone mauve; in the darkening vault of the sky were faint coarse linear clouds like fractures or like coarse stitching coming loose.

They discussed the considerations that made it unlikely that they would ever, as a group, face political elimination. The destruction of European Jewry had given every fascist a limit from which to recoil: no fascist could parade as a moderate—which would always be essential in America—unless he drew the line just at detention. And like it or not, there would be further protection in their being white: through their economic value they would constitute a barrier against the destruction of the blacks, who would admittedly be in more danger. But the historical destruction of the Jews by Hitler would tend to protect the blacks too. In any case, there were clearly too many Negroes to destroy. So, for various reasons, what could be called a salutary or modest degree of repression seemed likely. What would happen to their dependents? They found it hard to see why there should be any problem. There would inevitably appear a mass of new sympathizers, millions of them, drawn leftward by the repression: it would be logical for this latecomer mass to undertake underground support activities for the families of the first wave of resisters. So possibly the three of them were justified in their feelings, in consciously enjoying the ride to the trap, and just possibly the fascists might regret imposing *bondad*, a term two of them remembered simultaneously from Gerald Brenan's *The Spanish Labyrinth*.

They faced around and filed up toward the train of orange-lit windows.

Good-natured affection was shown toward the wives when the men returned, and, when the couples returned to their own cottages, sex was predictable. Privately, among the women, allusions to the pond, to finding out what was in the pond, or to sending a husband down to the pond for a minute, came to be understood as a sign that the speaker was having lascivious thoughts.

An Apocalypse: Some Scenes from European Life

Michael Moorcock

I. IN THE COMMUNE: PARIS, 1871

Karl was seven. His mother was twenty-five. His father was thirty-one, but had probably been killed fighting the Prussians at Saint-Quentin. Karl's father had been eager to join the National Guard and prove that he was a true Frenchman.

"Now, Karl." His mother put him down and he felt the hard cobbles of the street beneath his thin shoes. "You must walk a little. Mother is tired too."

It was true. When she was tired, her Alsatian accent always became thicker and now it was very thick. Karl felt ashamed for her.

He was not sure what was happening. The previous night he had heard loud noises and the sounds of running feet. There had been shots and explosions, but such things were familiar enough since the siege of Paris. Then his mother had appeared in her street clothes and made him put on his coat and shoes, hurrying him from the room and down the stairs and into the street. He wondered what had happened to their maid. When they got into the street he saw that a fire had broken out some distance away and that there were many National Guardsmen about. Some of them were running toward the fires and others, who were wounded, were staggering in the other direction. Some bad soldiers were attacking them, he gathered, and his mother was afraid that the house would be burned down. "Starvation bombardment—and now fire," she had muttered bitterly. "I hope all the wretched Communards are shot!" Her heavy black skirts hissed as she led him through the night, away from the fighting.

By dawn, more of the city was burning and all was confusion. Ragged members of the National Guard in their stained uniforms rallied the citizens to pile furniture and bedding onto the carts which had been overturned to block the streets. Sometimes Karl and his mother were stopped and told to help the other women and children, but she gave excuses and hurried on. Karl was dazed. He had no idea where they were going. He was vaguely aware that his mother knew no better than he. When he gasped that he could walk no further, she picked him up and continued her flight, her sharp face expressing her disapproval at his weakness. She was a small, wiry woman who would have been reasonably pretty had her features not been set so solidly in a mask of tension and anxiety. Karl had never known her face to soften, either to him or to his father. Her eyes had always seemed set on some distant objective which, secretly and grimly, she had determined to reach. That same look was in her eyes now, though much more emphatic, and the little boy had the impression that his mother's flight through the city was the natural climax to her life.

Karl tried not to cry out as he trotted behind his mother's dusty black skirts. His whole body was aching and his feet were blistered and once he fell on the cobbles and had to scramble up swiftly in order to catch her as she turned a corner.

They were now in a narrow side street not far from the Rue du Bac on the Left Bank. Twice Karl had caught a glimpse of the nearby Seine. It was a beautiful spring morning, but the sky was slowly being obscured by thick smoke from the many burning buildings on both sides of the river. Noticing this, his mother hesitated.

"Oh, the animals!" Her tone was a mixture of disgust and despair. "They are setting fire to their own city!"

"May we rest now, Mother?" asked Karl.

"Rest?" She laughed bitterly. But she made no effort to con-

tinue on her way, though she cast about her in every direction, trying to decide where she could best expect to find safety.

Suddenly, from a couple of streets away, there came a series of explosions which shook the houses. There were shots and then a great angry cry, followed by individual screams and shouts. In the guise of addressing her son, she muttered to herself.

"The streets are not safe. The dogs are everywhere. We must try to find some government soldiers and ask their protection."

"Are those the bad soldiers, Mother?"

"No, Karl, they are the good soldiers. They are freeing Paris of those who have brought the city to ruin."

"The Prussians?"

"The Communists. We all knew it would come to this. What a fool your father was."

Karl was surprised to hear the contempt in her voice. She had previously always told him to look up to his father. He began to cry. For the first time since leaving the house, he felt deeply miserable, rather than merely uncomfortable.

"Oh, my God!" His mother reached out and shook him. "We don't need your weeping on top of everything else. Be quiet, Karl."

He bit his lip, but he was still shaken by sobs.

She stroked his head. "Your mother is tired," she said. "She has always done her duty." A sigh. "But what's the point?" Karl realized that she was not trying to comfort him at all, but herself. Even the automatic stroking of his hair was done in an effort to calm herself. There was no real sympathy in the gesture. For some reason this knowledge made him feel deep sympathy for her. It had not been easy, even when his father was alive, with no one coming to buy clothes in the shop just because they had a German-sounding name. And she had protected him from the worst of the insults and beaten the boys who threw stones at him.

He hugged her waist. "Have courage, Mother," he whispered awkwardly.

She looked at him in astonishment. "Courage? What does it gain us?" She took his hand. "Come. We'll find the soldiers."

Trotting beside her, Karl felt closer to her than he had ever felt, not because she had shown affection for him but because he had been able to show affection for her. Of late, he had begun to feel guilty, believing he might not love his mother as much as a good son should.

The two of them entered the somewhat broader street that was Rue du Bac and here was the source of the sounds they had heard. The Communards were being beaten back by the welltrained Versailles troops. The Versaillese, having been so roundly defeated by the Prussians, were avenging themselves on their recalcitrant countrymen. Most of the Communards were armed with rifles on which were fixed bayonets. They had run out of ammunition and were using the rifles as spears. Most of them were dressed in ordinary clothes, but there was a handful of National Guardsmen among them, in soiled pale blue uniforms. Karl saw a torn red flag still flying somewhere. Many women were taking part in the fighting. Karl saw one woman bayonet a wounded Versaillese who lay on the ground. His mother pulled him away. She was trembling now. As they rounded a bend in the Rue du Bac, they saw another barricade. Then there was an eruption and a roar and the barricade flew apart. Through the dust and debris Karl saw bodies flung in every direction. Some of the dead were children of his own age. A terrifying wailing filled the street, a wailing which turned into a growl of anger. The remaining Communards began to fire at the unseen enemy. Another eruption and another roar and the remains of the barricade went down. For a second there was silence. Then a woman rushed from a nearby house and screamed something, hurling a burning bottle through an open window in her own cellar. Karl saw that a house on the opposite side of the street was beginning to burn. Why were the people setting fire to their own houses?

Now through the smoke and the ruins came the Versaillese in

their smart dark blue and red uniforms. Their eyes were red and glaring, reflecting the flames. They frightened Karl far more than the National Guardsmen. Behind them galloped an officer on a black horse. He was screaming in the same highpitched tone as the woman. He was waving a saber. Karl's mother took a step toward the troops and then hesitated. She turned and began to run in the other direction, Karl running with her.

There were several shots and Karl noticed that bullets were striking the walls of the houses. He knew at once that he and his mother were being fired at. He grinned with excitement.

They dashed down the next side street and had to wade through piles of garbage to enter a ruined building, an earlier victim of the first siege. His mother hid behind a quaking wall as the soldiers ran past. When they had gone she sat down on a slab of broken stone and began to cry. Karl stroked her hair, wishing that he could share her grief.

"Your father should not have deserted us," she said.

"He had to fight, Mother," said Karl. It was what she had said to him when his father joined the Guard. "For France."

"For the Reds. For the fools who brought all this upon us!" Karl did not understand.

Soon his mother was sleeping in the ruins. He curled up beside her and slept too.

When they awakened that afternoon there was much more smoke. It drifted everywhere. On all sides buildings burned. Karl's mother staggered up. Without looking at him or speaking to him, she seized his hand in a grip that made him wince. Her boots slipping on the stones, her skirts all filthy and ragged at the hem, she dragged him with her to the street. A young girl stood there, her face grave. "Good day," she said.

"Are they still fighting?"

The girl could hardly understand his mother's accent, it had become so thick. The girl frowned.

"Are they still fighting?" his mother asked again, speaking in a peculiar, slow voice.

"Yes." The girl shrugged. "They are killing everyone. Anyone."

"That way?" Karl's mother pointed toward the Seine. "That way?"

"Yes. Everywhere. But more that way." She pointed in the general direction of the Boulevard du Montparnasse. "Are you a petrol woman?"

"Certainly not!" Mme Glogauer glared at the girl. "Are you?"

"I wasn't allowed," said the girl regretfully. "There isn't much petrol left."

Karl's mother took him back the way they had come. The fires which had been started earlier were now out. It appeared that they had done little damage. Not enough petrol, thought Karl.

With her sleeve over her mouth, his mother picked her way through the corpses and crossed the ruins of the barricade. The men and women who were searching for dead friends or relatives ignored them as they went by.

Karl thought there were more dead people than living people in the world now.

They reached the Boulevard Saint Germain, hurrying toward the Quai d'Orsay. On the far side of the river monstrous sheets of flame sprang from a dozen buildings and smoke boiled into the clear May sky.

"I am so thirsty, Mother," murmured Karl. The smoke and the dust filled his mouth. She ignored him.

Here again the barricades were deserted, save for the dead, the victors and the sightseers. Groups of Versaillese stood about, leaning on their rifles, smoking and watching the fires, or chatting to the innocent citizens who were so anxious to establish their hatred of the Communards. Karl saw a group of prisoners, their hands bound with rope, sitting miserably in the road, guarded by the regular soldiers. Whenever a Communard moved, he would receive a harsh blow from a rifle butt or would be threatened by the bayonet. The red flag flew nowhere. In the distance came the sound of cannon fire and rifle fire.

"At last!" Mme Glogauer began to move toward the troops. "We shall go home soon, Karl. If they have not burned our house down."

Karl saw an empty wine bottle in the gutter. Perhaps they could fill it with water from the river. He picked it up even as his mother dragged him forward.

"Mother . . . we could-"

She stopped. "What have you got there? Put the filthy thing down!"

"We could fill it with water."

"We'll drink soon enough. And eat."

She grabbed the bottle from his hand. "If we are to remain respectable, Karl-"

She turned her head at a shout. A group of citizens were pointing at her. Soldiers began to run toward them. Karl heard the word *pétroleuse* repeated several times. Mme Glogauer shook her head and threw the bottle down. "It is empty," she said quietly. They could not hear her. The soldiers stopped and raised their rifles. She stretched her hands toward them. "It was an empty bottle!" she cried.

Karl tugged at her. "Mother!" He tried to take her hand, but it was still stretched toward the soldiers. "They cannot understand you, Mother."

She began to back away and then she ran. He tried to follow, but fell down. She disappeared into a little alley. The soldiers ran past Karl and followed her into the alley. The citizens ran after the soldiers. They were shrieking with hysteria and blood lust. Karl got up and ran behind them. There were some shots and some screams. By the time Karl had entered the little street the soldiers were coming back again, the citizens still standing looking at something on the ground. Karl pushed his way through them. They cuffed him and snarled at him and then they too turned away. "The pigs use women and children to fight their battles," said one man. He glared at Karl. "The sooner Paris is cleansed of such scum the better."

His mother lay sprawled on her face in the filth of the street. There was a dark wet patch on her back. Karl went up to her and, as he had suspected, found that the patch was blood. She was still bleeding. He had never seen his mother's blood before. He tried hard to turn her over, but he was too weak. "Mother?" Suddenly her whole body heaved and she drew in a great dry breath. Then she moaned.

The smoke drifted across the sky and evening came and the city burned. Red flames stained the night on every side. Shots boomed. But there were no more voices. Even the people who passed and whom Karl begged to help his wounded mother did not speak. One or two laughed harshly. With his help, his mother managed to turn herself over and sat with her back propped against the wall. She breathed with great difficulty and did not seem to know him, staring as fixedly and as determinedly into the middle distance as she had always done. Her hair was loose and it clung to her tight, anxious face. Karl wanted to find her some water, but he did not want to leave her.

At last he got up and blocked the path of a man who came walking toward Boulevard Saint Germain. "Please help my mother, sir," he said.

"Help her? Yes, of course. Then they will shoot me too. That will be good, eh?" The man threw back his head and laughed heartily as he continued on his way. "Very good!"

"She did nothing wrong!" Karl shouted.

The man stopped just before he turned the corner. "It depends how you look at it, doesn't it, young man?" He gestured into the boulevard. "Here's what you need! Hey, there! Stop! I've got another passenger for you." Karl heard the sound of something squeaking. The squeaking stopped and the man exchanged a few words with someone else. Then he disappeared. Instinctively Karl backed away with some idea of defending his mother. A filthy old man appeared next. "I've just about got room," he complained. He brushed Karl aside, heaved Mme Glogauer onto his shoulder and turned, staggering back down the street. Karl followed. Was the man going to help his mother? Take her to the hospital?

A cart stood in the street. There were no cart horses, for they had all been eaten during the siege, as Karl knew. Instead, between the shafts stood several ragged men and women. They began to move forward when they saw the old man appear again, dragging the squeaking cart behind them. Karl saw that there were people of all ages and sexes lying on top of one another in the cart. Most of them were dead, many with gaping wounds and parts of their faces or bodies missing. "Give us a hand here," said the old man, and one of the younger men left his place at the front and helped heave Mme Glogauer onto the top of the pile. She groaned.

"Where are you taking her?" asked Karl.

They continued to ignore him. The cart squeaked on through the night. Karl followed it. From time to time he heard his mother moan.

He became very tired and could hardly see, for his eyes kept closing, but he followed the cart by its sound, hearing the sharp clack of clogs and the slap of bare feet on the road, the squeal of the wheels, the occasional cries and moans of the living passengers. By midnight they had reached one of the outlying districts of the city and entered a square. There were Versaillese soldiers here, standing about on the remains of a green. In the middle of the green was a dark area. The old man said something to the soldiers and then he and his companions began unloading the cart. Karl tried to see which one of the people was his mother. The ragged men and women carried their burdens to the dark area and dropped them into it. Karl could now see that it was a freshly dug pit. There were already a large number of bodies in it. He peered in, certain that he had heard his mother's voice among the moans of the wounded as, indiscriminately, they were buried with the dead. All around the square shutters were closing and lights were being extinguished. A soldier came up and dragged Karl away from the graveside. "Get back," he said, "or you'll go in with them."

Soon the cart went away. The soldiers sat down by the graveside and lit their pipes, complaining about the smell, which had become almost overpowering, and passing a bottle of wine back and forth. "I'll be glad when this is over," said one.

Karl squatted against the wall of the house, trying to distinguish his mother's voice among those that groaned or cried out from the pit. He was sure he could hear her pleading to be let out.

By dawn, her voice had stopped and the cart came back with a fresh load. These were dumped into the pit and the soldiers got up reluctantly at the command of their officer, putting down their rifles and picking up shovels. They began to throw earth onto the bodies.

When the grave was covered, Karl got up and began to walk away.

The guards put down their shovels. They seemed more cheerful now and they opened another bottle of wine. One of them saw Karl. "Hello, young man. You're up early." He ruffled the boy's hair. "Hoping for some more excitement, eh?" He took a pull on the bottle and then offered it to Karl. "Like a drink?" He laughed.

Karl smiled at him.

2. LONDON, 1905

Karl was eleven. His mother was thirty. His father was thirtyfive. They lived in London. They had come to London from Poland three years earlier. They had been escaping a pogrom. On their way, they had been robbed of most of their money by their countrymen. When they had arrived at the dockside, they had been met by a Jew who said he was from the same district as Karl's father and would help them. He had taken them to lodgings which had proved poor and expensive. When Karl's father ran out of money the man had loaned him a few shillings on his luggage and, when Karl's father could not pay him back, had kept the luggage and turned them out onto the street. Since then, Karl's father had found work. Now they all worked, Karl, his mother and his father. They worked for a tailor. Karl's father had been a printer in Poland, an educated man. But there was not enough work for Polish printers in London. One day Karl's father hoped that a job would become vacant on a Polish or Russian newspaper. Then they would become respectable again, as they had been in Poland.

At present, Karl, his mother and his father all looked rather older than their respective ages. They sat together at one corner of the long table. Karl's mother worked a sewing machine. Karl's father sewed the lapel of a jacket. Karl stitched the padding into the shoulder of a jacket. Around the table sat other groups—a man and a wife, three sisters, a mother and daughter, a father and son, two brothers. They all had the same appearance, were dressed in threadbare clothes of black and brown. The women's mouths were tight shut. The men mostly had thin, straggly beards. They were not all Polish. Some were from other countries: Russia, Bohemia, Germany and elsewhere. Some could not even speak Yiddish and were therefore incapable of conversing with anyone not from their own country.

The room in which they worked was lit by a single gas jet in the center of the low ceiling. There was a small window, but it had been nailed up. The walls were of naked plaster through which could be seen patches of damp brick. Although it was winter, there was no fire in the room and the only heat came from the bodies of the workers. There was a fireplace in the room, but this was used to store the scraps of discarded material which could be reused for padding. The smell of the people was very strong, but now few of them really noticed it, unless they left the room and came back in again, which was rarely. Some people would stay there for days at a time, sleeping in a corner and eating a bowl of soup someone would bring them, before starting work again.

A week ago, Karl had been there when they had discovered

that the man whose coughing they had all complained about had not woken up for seven hours. Another man had knelt down and listened at the sleeping man's chest. He had nodded to the sleeping man's wife and sister-in-law and together they had carried him from the room. Neither the wife nor the sisterin-law came back for the rest of the day and it seemed to Karl that when they did return the wife's whole soul had not been in her work and her eyes were redder than usual, but the sisterin-law seemed much the same. The coughing man had not returned at all and, of course, Karl reasoned, it was because he was dead.

Karl's father laid down the coat. It was time to eat. He left the room and returned shortly with a small bundle wrapped in newspaper, a single large jug of hot tea. Karl's mother left her sewing machine and signed to Karl. The three of them sat in the corner of the room near the window while Karl's father unwrapped the newspaper and produced three cooked herrings. He handed one to each of them. They took turns to sip from the tea jug. The meal lasted ten minutes and was eaten in silence. Then they went back to their place at the table, having carefully cleaned their fingers on the newspaper, for Mr. Armfelt would fine them if he discovered any grease spots on the clothes they were making.

Karl looked at his mother's thin red fingers, at his father's lined face. They were no worse off than the rest.

That was the phrase his father always used when he and his mother crawled into their end of the bed. Once he had prayed every night. Now that phrase was the nearest he came to a prayer.

The door opened and the room became a little more chill. The door closed. A short young man wearing a black bowler hat and a long overcoat stood there, blowing on his fingers. He spoke in Russian, his eyes wandering from face to face. Few looked up. Only Karl stared at him.

"Any lad like to do a job for me?" said the young man. "Urgent. Good money." Several of the workers had his attention now, but Karl had already raised his hand. His father looked concerned, but said nothing.

"You'll do fine," said the young man. "Five shillings. And it won't take you long, probably. A message."

"A message where?" Like Karl, Karl's father spoke Russian as well as he spoke Polish.

"Just down to the docks. Not far. I'm busy, or I'd go myself. But I need someone who knows a bit of English, as well as Russian."

"I speak English," said Karl in English.

"Then you're definitely the lad I need. Is that all right?" glancing at Karl's father. "You've no objection?"

"I suppose not. Come back as soon as you can, Karl. And don't let anybody take your money from you." Karl's father began to sew again. His mother turned the handle of the sewing machine a trifle faster, but that was all.

"Come on, then," said the young man.

Karl got up.

"It's pelting down out there," said the young man.

"Take the blanket, Karl," said his father.

Karl went to the corner and picked up the thin scrap of blanket. He draped it round his shoulders. The young man was already clumping down the stairs. Karl followed.

Outside in the alley it was almost as dark as night. Heavy rain swished down and filled the broken street with black pools in which it seemed you could fall and drown. A dog leaned in a doorway, shivering. At the far end of the alley were the lights of the pub. Blinds were drawn in half the windows of the buildings lining both sides of the street. In some of the remaining windows could be seen faint, ghostly lights. A voice was shouting, but whether it was in this alley or the next one, Karl couldn't tell. The shouting stopped. He huddled deeper into the blanket. "You know Irongate Stairs?" The young man looked rapidly up and down the alley.

"Where the boats come ashore?" said Karl.

"That's right. Well, I want you to take this envelope to someone who's landing from the *Solchester* in an hour or so. Tell no one you have the envelope, save this man. And mention the man's name as little as you can. He may want your help. Do whatever he asks."

"And when will you pay me?"

"When you have done the work."

"How will I find you?"

"I'll come back here. Don't worry, I'm not like your damned masters! I won't go back on my word." The young man lifted his head almost proudly. "This day's work could see an end to what you people have to suffer."

He handed Karl the envelope. On it, in Russian, was written a single word, a name: KOVRIN.

"Kovrin," said Karl, rolling his r. "This is the man?"

"He's very tall and thin," said his new employer. "Probably wearing a Russian cap. You know the sort of thing people wear when they first come over. A very striking face, I'm told."

"You've not met him?"

"A relative, come to look for work," said the young man somewhat hastily. "That's enough. Go, before you're too late. And tell no one save him that you have met me, or there'll be no money for you. Get it?"

Karl nodded. The rain was already soaking through his blanket. He tucked the envelope into his shirt and began to trot along the alley, avoiding the worst of the puddles. As he passed the pub, a piano began to play and he heard a cracked voice singing:

Don't stop me 'arf a pint o' beer, It's the only fing what's keepin' me alive. I don't mind yer stoppin' of my corfee and my tea, But 'arf a pint o' beer a day is medicine to me. I don't want no bloomin' milk or eggs, And to buy them I'll find it very dear. If you want to see me 'appy and contented all my life, Don't stop my 'arf a pint o' beer!

Now I'm a chap what's moderate in all I 'ave to drink, And if that's wrong, then tell me what is right . . .

Karl did not hear all the words properly. Besides, such songs all sounded the same to him, with virtually the same tunes and the same sentiments. He found the English rather crude and stupid, particularly in their musical tastes. He wished he were somewhere else. Whenever he wasn't working, or when he could daydream as he sewed pads into jackets, this feeling overwhelmed him. He longed for the little town in Poland he could barely remember, for the sun and the cornfields, the snows and the pines. He had never been clear about why they had had to leave so hastily.

Water filled his ruined shoes and made the cloth of his trousers stick to his thin legs. He crossed another alley. There were two or three English boys there. They were scuffling about on the wet cobbles. He hoped they wouldn't see him. There was nothing that cheered up bored English boys so much as the prospect of baiting Karl Glogauer. And it was important that he shouldn't lose the letter or fail to deliver it. Five shillings was worth nearly two days' work. In an hour he would make as much as he would normally make in thirty-six. They hadn't seen him. He reached the broader streets and entered Commercial Street, which was crowded with slow-moving traffic. Everything, even the cabs, seemed beaten down by the gray rain. The world was a place of blacks and dirty whites, spattered with the yellow of gas lamps in the windows of the pie-and-mash shops, the secondhand clothes shops, the pubs and the pawnshops. Plodding dray horses threatened to smash their heads against the curved green fronts of the trams or the omnibuses; carters swore at their beasts, their rivals and themselves.

Swathed in rubber, or canvas, or gabardine, crouching beneath umbrellas, men and women stumbled into each other or stepped aside just in time. Through all these dodged Karl with his message in his shirt, crossing Aldgate and running down the dismal length of Leman Street, past more pubs, a few dismal shops, crumbling houses, brick walls which seemed to have no function but to block light from the street, a police station with a blue lamp gleaming over its door, another wall plastered with advertisements for meat drinks, soaps, bicycles, nerve tonics, beers, money lenders, political parties, newspapers, music halls, jobs ("No Irish or Aliens Need Apply"), furniture on easy terms, the army. The rain washed them down and made some of them look fresh again. Across Cable Street, down Dock Street, through another maze of alleys, even darker than the others, to Wapping Lane.

When he reached the river, Karl had to ask his way, for in fact he had lied when he had told the man he knew Irongate Stairs. People found his guttural accent hard to understand and lost patience with him quickly, but one old man gave him the direction. It was still some distance off. He broke into a trot again, the blanket drawn up over his head, so that he looked like some supernatural creature, a body without a skull, running mindlessly through the cold streets.

When he reached Irongate Stairs, the first boats were already bringing the immigrants ashore, for the ship itself could not tie up at the wharf. He saw that it was the right ship, a mass of red and black, belching oily smoke over the oily river, smoke which also seemed pressed down by the rain and which would not rise. The *Solchester* was a regular caller at Irongate Stairs, sailing twice a week from Hamburg with its cargo of Jews and political exiles. Karl had seen many identical people in his three years in Whitechapel. They were thin and there was hunger in their eyes; bewildered, bareheaded women, with shawls round their shoulders more threadbare than Karl's blanket, dragged their bundles from the boats to the wharf, trying at the same time to keep control of their scrawny children. A number of the men were quarreling with the boatman, refusing to pay the sixpence which was his standard charge. They had been cheated so often on their journey that they were certain they were being cheated yet again. Others were staring in miserable astonishment at the blurred and blotted line of wharves and grim buildings which seemed to make up the entire city, hesitating before entering the dark archway which protected this particular wharf. The archway was crowded with loafers and touts, all busily trying to confuse them, to seize their luggage, almost fighting to get possession of it.

Two policemen stood near the exit to Irongate Stairs, refusing to take part in any of the many arguments which broke out, unable to understand the many questions which the refugees put to them, simply smiling patronizingly and shaking their heads, pointing to the reasonably well-dressed man who moved anxiously among the people and asked questions in Yiddish or Lettish. Chiefly he wanted to know if the people had an address to go to. Karl recognized him. This was Mr. Somper, the superintendent of the Poor Jews' Temporary Shelter. Mr. Somper had met them three years before. At that time Karl's father had been confident that he needed no such assistance. Karl saw that many of the newcomers were as confident as his father had been. Mr. Somper did his best to listen sympathetically to all the tales they told him-of robbery at the frontier, of the travel agent who told them they would easily find a good job in England, of the oppression they had suffered in their own countries. Many waved pieces of crumpled paper on which addresses were written in English-the names of friends or relatives who had already settled in London. Mr. Somper, his dark face clouded with care, saw to it that their baggage was loaded onto the waiting carts, assured those who tried to hang onto their bundles that they would not be stolen, united mothers with stray children and husbands with wives. Some of the people did not need his help and they looked as relieved as he did. These were going on to America and were merely transferring from one boat to another.

Karl could see no one of Kovrin's description. He was jostled back and forth as the Germans and the Rumanians and the Russians, many of them still wearing the embroidered smocks of their homeland, crowded around him, shrieking at each other, at the loafers and at the officials, terrified by the oppressive skies and the gloomy darkness of the archway.

Another boat pulled in and a tall man stepped from it. He carried only a small bundle and was somewhat better dressed than those around him. He wore a long overcoat which was buttoned to the neck, a peaked Russian cap and there were high boots on his feet. Karl knew immediately that this was Kovrin. As the man moved through the crowd, making for the exit where the officials were checking the few papers the immigrants had, Karl ran up to him and tugged at his sleeve.

"Mr. Kovrin?"

The man looked surprised and hesitated before answering. He had pale blue eyes and high cheekbones. There was a redness on his cheekbones which contrasted rather strangely with his pale skin. He nodded. "Kovrin—yes."

"I have a letter for you, sir."

Karl drew the sodden envelope from his shirt. The ink had run, but Kovrin's name was still there in faint outline. Kovrin frowned and glanced about him before opening the envelope and reading the message inside. His lips moved slightly as he read. When he had finished, he looked down at Karl.

"Who sent you? Pesotsky?"

"A short man. He did not tell me his name."

"You know where he lives?"

"No."

"You know where this address is?" The Russian pointed at the letter.

"What is the address?"

Kovrin scowled at the letter and said slowly: "Trinity Street and Falmouth Road. A doctor's surgery. South—wark, is it?"

"That's on the other side of the river," said Karl. "A long walk. Or you could get a cab." "A cab, yes. You speak English?"

"Yes, sir."

"You will tell the driver where we wish to go?"

There were fewer of the immigrants on Irongate Stairs now. Kovrin must have realized that he was beginning to look conspicuous. He seized Karl's shoulder and guided him up to the exit, showing a piece of paper to the official there. The man seemed satisfied. There was one cab standing outside. It was old and the horse and driver seemed even older. "There," murmured Kovrin in Russian. "That will do, eh?"

"It is a long way to Southwark, sir. I was not told—" Karl tried to break free of the man's grip. Kovrin hissed through his teeth and felt in the pocket of his greatcoat. He drew out half a sovereign and pushed it at Karl. "Will that do? Will that pay for your valuable time, you urchin?"

Karl accepted the money, trying to disguise the light of elation which had fired his eyes. This was twice what the young man had offered him—and he would get that as well if he helped the Russian, Kovrin.

He shouted up to the cabby. "Hey-this gentleman and I wish to go to Southwark. To Trinity Street. Get a move on, there!"

"Ye can pay, can ye?" said the old man, spitting. "I've 'ad trouble wi' you lot afore." He looked meaningfully around him at no one. The rain fell on the sheds, on the patches of dirt, on the brick walls erected for no apparent purpose. Along the lane could just be seen the last of the immigrants, shuffling behind the carts which carried their baggage and their children. "I'll want 'arf in advance."

"How much?" Karl asked.

"Call it three bob. Eighteenpence now-eighteenpence when we get there."

"That's too much."

"Take it or leave it."

"He wants three shillings for the fare," Karl told the Russian. "Half now. Have you got it?"

Wearily and disdainfully Kovrin displayed a handful of

change. Karl took three sixpences and gave them to the driver.

"All right—'op in," said the driver. He now spoke patronizingly, which was the nearest his tone could get to being actually friendly.

The hansom creaked and groaned as the cabby whipped his horse up. The springs in the seats squeaked and then the whole rickety contrivance was off, making quite rapid progress out of the dock area and heading for Tower Bridge, the nearest point of crossing into Southwark.

A boat was passing under the bridge, which was up. A line of traffic waited for it to be lowered again. While he waited Karl looked toward the west. The sky seemed lighter over that part of the city and the buildings seemed paler, purer to him. He had only been to the west once and had seen the buildings of Parliament and Westminster Abbey in the sunshine. They were tall and spacious and he had imagined them to be the palaces of very great men. The cab jerked forward and began to move across the river, passing through a pall of smoke left behind by the funnel of the boat.

Doubtless the Russian, sitting in silence and glaring moodily out of the window, noticed no great difference in the streets on this side of the river, but Karl saw prosperity here. There were more food shops and there was more food sold in them. They went through a market where stalls sold shellfish, fried cod and potatoes, meat of almost every variety, as well as clothing, toys, vegetables, cutlery—everything one could possibly desire. With a fortune in his pocket, Karl's daydreams took a different turn as he thought of the luxuries they might buy, perhaps on Saturday after they had been to the synagogue. Certainly they could have new coats, get their shoes repaired, buy a piece of meat, a cabbage . . .

The cab pulled up on the corner of Trinity Street and Falmouth Road. The cabby rapped on the roof with his whip. "This is it."

They pushed open the door and descended. Karl took another three sixpences from the Russian and handed them up to the driver, who bit them, nodded and was off again, disappearing into Dover Street, joining the other traffic. Karl looked at the building. There was a dirty brass plate on the wall by the door. He read: SEAMAN'S CLINIC. He saw that the Russian was looking suspiciously at the plate, unable to understand the words. "Are you a sailor?" Karl asked. "Are you ill?"

"Be silent," said Kovrin. "Ring the bell. I'll wait here." He put his hand inside his coat. "Tell them that Kovrin is here."

Karl went up the cracked steps and pulled the iron bell handle. He heard a bell clang loudly. He had to wait some time before the door was opened by an old man with a long white forked beard and hooded eyes. "What do you want, boy?" said the man in English.

Karl said, also in English, "Kovrin is here." He jerked a thumb at the tall Russian standing in the rain behind him.

"Now?" The old man smiled in unsuppressed delight. "Here? Kovrin!"

Kovrin suddenly sprang up the steps, pushing Karl aside. After a perfunctory embrace, he and the old man went inside, speaking rapidly to each other in Russian. Karl followed them. He was hoping to earn another half guinea. He heard little of what they said, just a few words—"Saint Petersburg"—"prison" —"commune"—"death"—and one very potent word he had heard many times before—"Siberia." Had Kovrin escaped from Siberia? There were quite a few Russians who had. Karl had heard some of them talking.

In the house, he could see that it was evidently no longer a doctor's surgery. The house, in fact, seemed virtually derelict, with hardly any furniture but piles of paper all over the place. Many bundles of the same newspaper stood in one corner of the hall. Over these a mattress had been thrown and was serving someone as a bed. Most of the newspapers were in Russian, others were in English and in what Karl guessed was German. There were also handbills which echoed the headlines of the newspapers: PEASANTS REVOLT, said one. CRUEL SUPPRESSION OF DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS IN ST. PETERSBURC, said another. Karl decided that these people must be political. His father had always told him to steer clear of "politicals"—they were always in trouble with the police. Perhaps he should leave?

But then the old man turned to him and smiled kindly. "You look hungry. Will you eat with us?"

It would be foolish to turn down a free meal. Karl nodded. They entered a big room warmed by a central stove. From the way in which the room was laid out, Karl guessed that this had been the doctor's waiting room. But now it too stored bales of paper. He could smell soup. It made his mouth water. At the same time there came a peculiar sound from below his feet. Growling, thumping, clanking: it was as if some awful monster were chained in the cellar, trying to escape. The room shook. The old man led Karl and Kovrin into what had once been the main surgery. There were still glass instrument cases along the walls. Over in one corner they had installed a big black cooking range and at this stood a woman, stirring an iron pot. The woman was quite pretty, but she looked scarcely less tired than Karl's mother. She ladled thick soup into an earthenware bowl. Karl's stomach rumbled. The woman smiled shyly at Kovrin. whom she plainly did not know, but had been expecting. "Who is the boy?" she asked.

"Karl," said Karl. He bowed.

"Not Karl Marx, perhaps?" The old man laughed, nudging Karl on the shoulder. But Karl did not recognize the name. "Karl Glogauer," he said.

The old man explained to the woman: "He's Kovrin's guide. Pesotsky sent him. Pesotsky couldn't come himself because he's being watched. To meet Kovrin would have been to betray him to our friends. . . . Give the boy some soup, Tanya." He took hold of Kovrin's arm. "Now, Andrey Vassilitch, tell me everything that happened in Petersburg. Your poor brother I have already heard about."

The rumbling from below grew louder. It was like an earthquake. Karl ate the tasty soup, sitting hunched over his bowl at the far end of the long bench. The soup had meat in it and several kinds of vegetables. At the other end of the bench Kovrin and the old man talked quietly together, hardly aware of their own bowls. Because of the noise from the cellar, Karl caught little of what they said, but they seemed to be speaking much of killing and torture and exile. He wondered why nobody else seemed to notice the noise.

The woman called Tanya offered him more soup. He wanted to take more, but he was already feeling very strange. The rich food was hard to hold down. He felt that he might vomit at any moment. But he persisted in keeping it in his stomach. It would mean he would not need to eat tonight.

He summoned the courage to ask her what the noise was. "Are we over an underground railway?"

She smiled. "It is just the printing press." She indicated a pile of leaflets on the bench. "We tell the English people what it is like in our country—how we are ground under by the aristocrats and the middle classes."

"They want to know?" Karl asked the question cynically. His own experience had given him the answer.

Again she smiled. "Not many. The other papers are for our countrymen. They give news of what is going on in Russia and in Poland and elsewhere. Some of the papers go back to those countries. . . ."

The old man looked up, putting a finger to his lips. He shook his head at Tanya and winked at Karl. "What you don't hear won't harm you, young one."

"My father was a printer in Poland," Karl said. "Perhaps you have work for him. He speaks Russian, Polish and Yiddish. He is an educated man."

"There's little money in our work," said Tanya. "Is your father for the cause?"

"I don't think so," said Karl. "Is that necessary?"

"Yes," said Kovrin suddenly. His red cheekbones burned a little more hotly. "You must stop asking questions, boy. Wait a while longer. I think I will need to see Pesotsky."

Karl didn't tell Kovrin that he didn't know where to find

Pesotsky, because he might get another sum of money for taking Kovrin back to Whitechapel. Perhaps that would do. Also, if he could introduce his father to one of these people, they might decide to give him a job anyway. Then the family would be respectable again. He looked down at his clothes and felt miserable. They had stopped steaming and were now almost dry.

An hour later the noise from below stopped. Karl hardly noticed, for he was almost asleep with his head on his arms on the table. Someone seemed to be reciting a list to what had been the rhythm of the printing press.

"Elzelina Kralchenskaya—prison. Vera Ivanovna—Siberia. Dmitry Konstantinovitch—dead. Yegor Semyonitch—dead. Dukmasovs—all three dead. The Lebezyatnikovna sisters—five years prison. Klinevich, dead. Kudeyarov, dead. Nikolayevich, dead. Pervoyedov, dead. Petrovich, dead. And I heard they found Tarasevich in London and killed him."

"That's so. A bomb. Every bomb they use on us confirms the police in their view. We're always blowing ourselves up with our bombs, aren't we?" The old man laughed. "They've been after this place for months. One day a bomb will go off and the newspapers will report the accident—another bunch of nihilists destroy themselves. It is easier to think that. What about Cherpanski? I heard he was in Germany. . . ."

"They rooted him out. He fled. I thought he was in England. His wife and children are said to be here."

"That's so."

Karl fell asleep. He dreamed of respectability. He and his father and mother were living in the Houses of Parliament. But for some reason they were still sewing coats for Mr. Armfelt.

Kovrin was shaking him. "Wake up, boy. You've got to take me to Pesotsky now."

"How much?" Karl said blearily.

Kovrin smiled bitterly. "You're learning a good lesson, aren't you?" He put another half guinea on the table. Karl picked it up. "You people . . ." Kovrin began, but then he shrugged and turned to the old man. "Can we get a cab?"

"Not much chance. You'd best walk anyway. It will be a degree safer."

Karl pulled his blanket round him and stood up. He was reluctant to leave the warmth of the room but at the same time he was anxious to show his parents the wealth he had earned for them. His legs were stiff as he walked from the room and went to stand by the front door while Kovrin exchanged a few last words with the old man.

Kovrin opened the door. The rain had stopped and the night was very still. It must be very late, thought Karl.

The door closed behind them. Karl shivered. He was not sure where they were, but he had a general idea of the direction of the river. Once there he could find a bridge and he would know where he was. He hoped Kovrin would not be too angry when he discovered that Karl could not lead him directly to Pesotsky. They began to walk through the cold, deserted streets, some of which were dimly lit by gas lamps. A few cats screeched, a few dogs barked and a few voices raised in anger came from the mean houses by which they passed. Once or twice a cab clattered into sight and they tried to hail it, but it was engaged or refused to stop for them.

Karl was surprised at how easily he found London Bridge. Once across the sullen blackness of the Thames he got his bearings and began to walk more confidently, Kovrin walking silently beside him.

In another half hour they had reached Aldgate, brightened by the flaring lamps of the coffee stall which stayed open all night, catering to the drunkards reluctant to go home, to the homeless, to the shift workers and even to some gentlemen who had finished sampling the low life of Stepney and Whitechapel and were waiting until they could find a cab. There were a few women there too—haggard, sickly. In the glare of the stall, their garishly painted faces reminded Karl of the icons he had seen in the rooms of the Russians who lived on the same floor as his family. Even their soiled silks and their faded velvets had some of the quality of the clothes the people wore in the icons. Two of the women jeered at Karl and Kovrin as they passed through the pool of light and entered the gash of blackness which was the opening to the warren of alleys where Karl lived.

Karl was anxious to get home now. He knew he had been away much longer than he had expected. He did not wish to give his parents concern.

He passed the dark and silent pub, Kovrin stepping cautiously behind him. He came to the door of the house. His parents might be sleeping now or they might still be working. They shared a room above the workroom.

Kovrin whispered, "Is this Pesotsky's? You can go now."

"This is where I live. Pesotsky said he would meet me here," Karl told him at last. He felt relieved now that this confession was off his chest. "He owes me five shillings, you see. He said he would come here and pay it. Perhaps he is waiting for us inside."

Kovrin cursed and shoved Karl into the unlit doorway. Karl winced in pain as the Russian's hand squeezed his shoulder high up, near the neck. "It will be all right," he said. "Pesotsky will come. It will be all right."

Kovrin's grip relaxed and he gave a huge sigh, putting his hand to his nose and rubbing it, hissing a tune through his teeth as he considered what Karl had told him. Karl pressed the latch of the door and they entered a narrow passage. The passage was absolutely dark.

"Have you a match?" Karl asked Kovrin.

Kovrin struck a match. Karl found the stump of candle and held it out for Kovrin to light. The Russian just managed to light the wick before the match burned his fingers. Karl saw that Kovrin had a gun in his other hand. It was a peculiar gun with an oblong metal box coming down in front of the trigger. Karl had never seen a picture of a gun like it. He wondered if Kovrin had made it himself. "Now where?" Kovrin said. He displayed the gun in the light of the guttering candle. "If I think you've led me into a trap"

"Pesotsky will come," said Karl. "It is not a trap. He said he would meet me here." Karl pointed up the uncarpeted stairway. "He may be there. Shall we see?"

Kovrin considered this and then shook his head. "You go. See if he is there and if he is bring him down to me. I'll wait."

Karl left the candle with Kovrin and began to grope his way up the two flights to the landing off which was the workroom. He had seen no lights at the window, but that was to be expected. Mr. Armfelt knew the law and protected himself against it. Few factory inspectors visited this part of Whitechapel, but there was no point in inviting their attention. If they closed his business, where else would the people find work? Karl saw a faint light under the door. He opened it. The gas jet was turned, if anything, a trifle lower. At the table sat the women and the children and the men, bent over their sewing. Karl's father looked up as Karl came in. His eyes were red and bleary. He could hardly see and his hands shook. It was plain that he had been waiting up for Karl. Karl saw that his mother was lying in the corner. She was snoring.

"Karl!" His father stood up, swaying. "What happened to you?"

"It took longer than I expected, Father. I have got a lot of money and there is more to come. And there is a man I met who might give you a job as a printer."

"A printer?" Karl's father rubbed his eyes and sat down on his chair again. It seemed he was finding it difficult to understand what Karl was saying. "Printer? Your mother was in despair. She wanted to ask the police to find you. She thought . . . an accident."

"I have eaten well, Father, and I have earned a lot of money." Karl reached into his pocket. "This Russian gave it to me. He is very rich."

"Rich? You have eaten? Good. Well, you can tell me when we wake up. Go up now. I will follow with your mother." Karl realized that his father was too tired to hear him properly. Karl had seen his father like this before.

"You go, Father," he said. "I have slept too. And I have some more business to do before I sleep again. That young man who came today. Has he returned?"

"The one who gave you the job?" His father screwed his eyes up and rubbed them. "Yes, he came back about four or five hours ago, asking if you had returned."

"He had come to pay me my money," said Karl. "Did he say he would be back?"

"I think he did. He seemed agitated. What is going on, Karl?" "Nothing, Father." Karl remembered the gun in Kovrin's hand. "Nothing which concerns us. When Pesotsky comes back it will all be finished. They will go away."

Karl's father knelt beside his mother, trying to wake her. But she would not wake up. Karl's father lay down beside his mother and was asleep. Karl smiled down at them. When they woke, they would be very pleased to see the twenty-five shillings he would, by that time, have earned. And yet something marred his feeling of contentment. He frowned, realizing that it was the gun he had seen. He hoped Pesotsky would return soon and that he and Kovrin would go away for good. He could not send Kovrin off somewhere, because then Pesotsky would not pay him the five shillings. He had to wait.

He saw that a few of the others at the table were staring at him almost resentfully. Perhaps they were jealous of his good fortune. He stared back and they resumed their concentration on their work. He felt at that point what it must be like to be Mr. Armfelt. Mr. Armfelt was scarcely any richer than the people he employed, but he had power. Karl saw that power was almost as good as money. And a little money gave one a great deal of power. He stared in contempt around the room, at the mean-faced people, at his sprawled, snoring parents. He smiled.

Kovrin came into the room. The hand which had held the gun was now buried in his greatcoat pocket. His face seemed paler than ever, his red checkbones even more pronounced. "Is Pesotsky here?"

"He is coming." Karl indicated his sleeping father. "My father said so."

"When?"

Karl became amused by Kovrin's anxiety. "Soon," he said.

The people at the table were all looking up again. One young woman said, "We are trying to work here. Go somewhere else to talk."

Karl laughed. The laughter was high-pitched and unpleasant. Even he was shocked by it. "We will not be here much longer," he said. "Get on with your work, then."

The young woman grumbled but resumed her sewing.

Kovrin looked at them all in disgust. "You fools," he said. "You will always be like this unless you do something about it. You are all victims."

The young woman's father, who sat beside her, stitching the seam of a pair of trousers, raised his head and there was an unexpected gleam of irony in his eyes. "We are all victims," he said, "comrade." His hands continued to sew as he stared directly at Kovrin. "We are all victims."

Kovrin glanced away. "That's what I said." He was disconcerted. He stepped to the door. "I'll wait on the landing," he told Karl.

Karl joined him on the landing. High above, a little light filtered through a patched fanlight. Most of the glass had been replaced with slats of wood. From the room behind them the small sounds of sewing continued, like the noises made by rats as they searched the tenements for food.

Karl smiled at Kovrin and said familiarly, "He's mad, that old man. I think he meant you were a victim. But you are rich, aren't you, Mr. Kovrin?"

Kovrin ignored him.

Karl went and sat on the top stair. He hardly felt the cold at all. Tomorrow he would have a new coat. He heard the street door open below. He looked up at Kovrin, who had also heard it. Karl nodded. It could only be Pesotsky. Kovrin pushed past Karl and swiftly descended the stairs. Karl followed.

But when they reached the passage, the candle was still flickering and it was plain that no one was there. Kovrin frowned. His hand remained in the pocket of his coat. He peered into the back of the passage, behind the stairs. "Pesotsky?"

There was no reply.

And then the door was flung open suddenly and Pesotsky stood framed in it. He was hatless, panting, wild-eyed. "Christ! Is that Kovrin?" he gasped.

Kovrin said quietly, "Kovrin here."

"Now," said Karl. "My five shillings, Mr. Pesotsky."

The young man ignored the outstretched hand as he spoke rapidly to Kovrin. "All the plans have gone wrong. You shouldn't have come here. . . ."

"I had to. Uncle Theodore said you knew where Cherpanski was hiding. Without Cherpanski, there is no point in—" Kovrin broke off as Pesotsky silenced him.

"They have been following me for days, our friends. They don't know about Cherpanski, but they do know about Theodore's damned press. It's that they want to destroy. But I'm their only link. That's why I've been staying away. I heard you'd been at the press and had left for Whitechapel. I was followed, but I think I shook them off. We'd better leave at once."

"My five shillings, sir," said Karl. "You promised."

Uncomprehending, Pesotsky stared at Karl for a long moment, then he said to Kovrin, "Cherpanski's in the country. He's staying with some English comrades. Yorkshire, I think. You can get the train. You'll be safe enough once you're out of London. It's the presses they're chiefly after. They don't care what we do here as long as none of our stuff gets back into Russia. Now, you'll want King's Cross Station. . . ."

The door opened again and two men stood there, one behind

the other. Both were fat. Both wore black overcoats with astrakhan collars and had bowler hats on their heads. They looked like successful businessmen. The leader smiled.

"Here at last," he said in Russian. Karl saw that his companion carried a hatbox under his arm. It was incongruous; it was sinister. Karl began to retreat up the stairs.

"Stop him!" called the newcomer. From the shadows of the next landing stepped two men. They held revolvers. Karl stopped halfway up the stairs. Here was an explanation for the sound of the door opening which had brought them down.

"This is a good cover, Comrade Pesotsky," said the leader. "Is that your name these days?"

Pesotsky shrugged. He looked completely dejected. Karl wondered who the well-dressed Russians could be. They acted like policemen, but the British police didn't employ foreigners, he knew that much.

Kovrin laughed. "It's little Captain Minsky, isn't it? Or have you changed your name too?"

Minsky pursed his lips and came a few paces into the passage. It was obvious that he was puzzled by Kovrin's recognition. He peered hard at Kovrin's face.

"I don't know you."

"No," said Kovrin quietly. "Why have they transferred you to the foreign branch? Were your barbarities too terrible even for Saint Petersburg?"

Minsky smiled, as if complimented. "There is so little work for me in Petersburg these days," he said. "That is always the snag for a policeman. If he is a success, he faces unemployment."

"Vampire!" hissed Pesotsky. "Aren't you satisfied yet? Must you drink the last drop of blood?"

"It is a feature of your kind, Pesotsky," said Minsky patiently, "that everything must be colored in the most melodramatic terms. It is your basic weakness, if I might offer advice. You are failed poets, the lot of you. That is the worst sort of person to choose a career in politics." Pesotsky said sulkily, "Well, you've failed this time anyway. This isn't the printing press. It's a sweatshop."

"I complimented you once on your excellent cover," said Minsky. "Do you want another compliment?"

Pesotsky shrugged. "Good luck in your search, then."

"We haven't time for a thorough search," Minsky told him. He signed to the man with the hatbox. "We too have our difficulties. Problems of diplomacy and so on." He took a watch from within his coat. "But we have a good five minutes, I think."

Karl was almost enjoying himself. Captain Minsky really did believe that the printing press was hidden here.

"Shall we begin upstairs?" Minsky said. "I understand that's where you were originally."

"How could a press be upstairs?" Pesotsky said. "These rotten boards wouldn't stand the weight."

"The last press was very neatly distributed through several rooms," Minsky told him. "Lead on, please."

They ascended the stairs to the first landing. Karl guessed that the occupants of these rooms were probably awake and listening behind their doors. He once again experienced a thrill of superiority to them. One of the men who had been on the landing shook his head and pointed up the next flight of stairs.

The seven of them went up slowly. Captain Minsky had his revolver in his gloved hand. His three men also carried their revolvers, trained on the wretched Pesotsky and the glowering Kovrin. Karl led the way. "This is where my father and mother work," he said. "It is not a printer's."

"They are disgusting," said Minsky to his lieutenant with the hatbox. "They are so swift to employ children for their degraded work. There's a light behind that door. Open it up, boy."

Karl opened the door of the workroom, fighting to hide his grin. His mother and father were still asleep. The young woman who had complained before looked up and glared at him. Then all seven had pushed into the room. Minsky said, "Oh, you do look innocent. But I know what you're really up to here. Where's the press?"

Now everyone put down their work and looked at him in astonishment as he kicked at the wall in which the fireplace was set. It rang hollow, but that was because it was so thin. There was an identical room on the other side. But it satisfied Minsky. "Put that in here," he told the man with the hatbox. "We must be leaving."

"Have you found the press, then?" Karl grinned openly.

Minsky struck him across the mouth with the barrel of his revolver. Karl moaned as blood filled his right cheek. He fell back over the sleeping bodies of his parents. They stirred.

Kovrin had drawn his gun. He waved it to cover all four members of the secret police. "Drop your weapons," he shouted. "You—pick that hatbox up again."

The man glanced uncertainly at Minsky. "It's already triggered. We have a few moments."

Karl realized there was a bomb in the box. He tried to wake his father to tell him. Now the people who had been working were standing up. There was a noisy outcry. Children were weeping, women shrieking, men shouting.

Kovrin shot Minsky.

One of Minsky's men shot Kovrin. Kovrin fell back through the door and Karl heard him fall to the landing outside. Pesotsky flung himself at the man who had shot Kovrin. Another gun went off and Pesotsky fell to the floor, his fists clenched, his stomach pulsing out blood.

Karl's father woke up. His eyes widened at what they saw. He clutched Karl to him. Karl's mother woke up. She whimpered. Karl saw that Minsky was dead. The other three men hurried from the room and began to run downstairs.

An explosion filled the room.

Karl was protected by his parents' bodies, but he felt them shudder and move as the explosion hit them. He saw a little boy strike the far wall. He saw the window shatter. He saw the door collapse, driven out into the darkness of the stairwell. He saw fire send tendrils in all directions and then withdraw them. The workbench had come to rest against the opposite wall. It was black and broken. The wall was naked brick and the brick was also black. Something was roaring. His vision was wiped out and he saw only whiteness.

He closed his eyes and opened them again. His eyes stung but he could see dimly, even though the gas jet had been blown out. Throughout the room there was a terrible silence for a second or two. Then they began to groan.

Soon the room was filled with their groaning. Karl saw that the floor sloped where it had not sloped before. He saw that part of the outer wall had split. Through this great crack came moonlight. Black things shifted about on the floor.

Now the entire street outside was alive with noise. Voices came from below and from above. He heard feet on the stairs. Someone shone a lamp onto the scene and then retreated with a gasp. Karl stood up. He was unhurt, although his skin was stinging and he had some bruises. He saw that his father had no right hand anymore and that blood was oozing from the stump. He put his head to his father's chest. He was still breathing. His mother held her face. She told Karl that she was blind.

Karl went out onto the landing and saw the crowd on both the upper and the lower stairs. The man with the lamp was Mr. Armfelt. He was in his nightshirt. He looked unwell and was staring at the figure who leaned on the wall on the opposite side of the door. It was Kovrin. He was soaked in blood, but he was breathing and the strange gun was still in his right hand. Karl hated Kovrin, whom he saw as the chief agent of this disaster. He went and looked up into the tall Russian's eyes. He took the pistol from Kovrin's limp hand. As if the pistol had been supporting him, Kovrin crashed to the floor as soon as it was removed from his grasp. Karl looked down at him. Kovrin was dead. None of the watchers spoke. They all looked on as if they were the audience at some particularly terrifying melodrama. Karl took the lamp from Mr. Armfelt and returned to the room.

Many of the occupants were dead. Karl saw that the young woman was dead, her body all broken and tangled up with that of her father, the man who had said, "We are all victims." Karl sniffed. Minsky's body had been blown under the shattered bench, but Pesotsky had been quite close to the recess where Karl and his parents had lain. Although wounded, he was alive. He was chuckling. With every spasm, more blood gushed from his mouth. He said thickly to Karl, "Thanks—thanks." He waited for the blood to subside. "They've blown up the wrong place, thanks to you. What luck!"

Karl studied the gun he had taken from Kovrin. He assumed that it was basically the same as a revolver and contained at least another five bullets. He held it in both hands and, with both his index fingers on the trigger, squeezed. The gun went off with a bang and a flash and Karl's knuckles were driven back into his face, cutting his lip again. He lowered the gun and picked up the lamp which he had placed on the floor. He advanced on Pesotsky and held the lamp over the body. The bullet had driven through one of Pesotsky's eyes and Pesotsky was dead. Karl searched through Pesotsky's blood-soaked clothes and found two shillings and some coppers. He counted it. Three shillings and eightpence in all. Pesotsky had lied to him. Pesotsky had not possessed five shillings. He spat on Pesotsky's face.

At the sound of the shot, the people on the stairs had withdrawn a few paces. Only Mr. Armfelt remained where he was. He was talking rapidly to himself in a language Karl did not recognize. Karl tucked the gun into the waistband of his trousers and turned Kovrin's corpse over. In the pockets of the greatcoat he found about ten pounds in gold. In an inner pocket he found some documents, which he discarded, and about fifty pounds in paper money. Carrying the lamp high, he shone it on the blind face of his mother and on the pain-racked face of his father. His father was awake and saying something about a doctor. Karl nodded. It was sensible that they should get a doctor as soon as possible. They could afford one now. He held out the money so that his father could see it all, the white banknotes and the bright gold. "I can look after you both, Father. You will get better. It doesn't matter if you cannot work. We shall be respectable."

He saw that his father could still not quite understand. With a shake of his head, Karl crouched down and put a kindly hand on his father's shoulder. He spoke clearly and gently, as one might address a very young child who had failed to gather it was about to receive a birthday present and was not showing proper enthusiasm.

"We can go to America, Father."

He inspected the wrist from which most of the hand had been blown. With some of the rags he bandaged it, stopping the worst of the bleeding.

And then the sobs began to come up from his stomach. He did not know why he was crying, but he could not control himself. The sobs made him helpless. His body was shaken by them and the noise he made was not very loud but it was the worst noise any of the listeners had heard that night. Even Mr. Armfelt, absorbed in his hysterical calculations, was dimly aware of the noise and he became, if anything, even more depressed.

3. THE DOWN LINE TO KIEV, 1920

Karl was fourteen. His mother and father had been thirtyfive when they were killed by the bomb. They came from Kiev but had been driven out during one of the pogroms. They had thought it safer to stay with their relatives in Bobrinskaya. Someone had let a bomb off in a café and Karl had gone to Alexandria, where he had met the army of Makhno, the anarchist. He had joined that army. He had been in several battles since then and now he had a machine gun of his own to look after. He loved the machine gun. He had secured the stand to the flatcar with big horseshoe nails. It was an English machine gun, a Lewis. His greatcoat was English too. It was leather and had a special pocket in the front shaped like a revolver. During their last battle, near Golta, he had managed to acquire a revolver. They had been beaten at that battle. They were now making for Kiev because the railway line direct to Alexandria had been blown up to cut off their retreat. Makhno's black banners flew everywhere on the train. Some of the banners bore his slogan: "Anarchy Breeds Order." But most were plain. Makhno was in a bad mood since Golta.

Over the rattle of the train and the roar of the locomotive came the sounds of laughter, of song, of an accordion's whine. Makhno's army lounged on every available surface-young men mainly, their clothes evidence of a hundred successful raids. One wore a tall silk hat decorated with streaming red and black ribbons. His body was swathed in a sleeveless fur coat with the skirt hacked off to give his legs freedom. He wore green cossack breeches tucked into red leather boots. Over his coat were crisscrossed four bandoliers of bullets. In his hands was a rifle which, intermittently, he would fire into the air, laughing all the time. At his belt was a curved saber and stuck in the belt were a Mauser automatic pistol and a Smith & Wesson .45 revolver. Bottles were passed from hand to hand as they thundered along. The young man in the top hat flung back his head and poured wine over his bearded face and down his throat, breaking into song as the accordion began to play the army's familiar melody, "Arise, Young Men!" Karl himself joined in with the sad, bold last lines. "Who lies under the greensward?" sang the man in the top hat. "We heroes of Makhno," sang Karl, "saddle rugs for shrouds."

There was a great cheer and peaked caps, sheepskin hats, derby hats, stocking caps and the caps of a dozen different regiments were waved or thrown through the steam from the engine. Karl was proud to be of this reckless company which cared nothing for death and very little for life. The cause for which they fought might be doomed but what did it matter? The human race was doomed. They at least would have made their gesture.

There was not a man on the train who was not festooned with weapons. Sabers and rifles and pistols were common to all. Some sported ornate antique weapons, broadswords, maces, scimitars; others had silver-hilted naval daggers, officers' dress swords, pistols inlaid with gold, silver and mother-of-pearl. They wore boaters, solar topees, extravagant German helmets, wide-brimmed felt hats, panamas and every variety of clothing. Near Karl and manning one of the other machine guns, a fat Georgian was stripped to the waist, wearing only a pair of gentleman's blue riding breeches and boots decorated with silver thread. Around his neck he had wound a long feather boa. He was hatless, but had on a pair of smoked glasses with gold rims. At his belt were two military holsters containing matched revolvers. The Georgian claimed that they had belonged to the emperor himself. Sharing a bottle with the Georgian was a sailor from Odessa, his vest open to the navel, displaying a torso completely covered with pink and blue tattoos showing dragons, swords and half-dressed ladies all mixed up together. The freshest of the tattoos ran across his breastbone, a nihilist slogan-"Death to Life." A boy, younger than Karl, wearing a torn and bloodstained surplice and clutching a cooked chicken in one hand, jumped down from the top of the boxcar behind them and swayed toward the sailor, offering him half the chicken in exchange for the rest of the wine. In his other hand he held an enormous butcher's cleaver. The boy was already nine parts drunk.

The train hooted.

Balancing on the carriage ahead, an old man, with a student cap perched on his white hair, hooted back. He steadied himself by means of a cossack lance around which was tied a torn black skirt. Painted on the skirt was a yellow sunrise. The old man hooted again, before falling on his side and rolling dangerously close to the edge of the roof. The lance remained where he had stuck it. The old man lost his cap and began to laugh. The train took a bend. The old man fell off. Karl saluted the tumbling figure as it disappeared down a bank.

On the curve, Karl could see the front section of the train. where Nestor Makhno himself sat. The flatcars on both sides of him were piled with gun carriages, their dirty steel and brasswork shining dully beneath a sun which now only made occasional appearances through the looming clouds. A truck near the engine was full of shaggy horses, their backs covered by Jewish prayer shawls in place of blankets. Makhno's chosen heroes sat all around their leader, their feet dangling over the sides of the cars, but none sat near him. Karl had an impression of nothing but legs. There were legs in riding boots, legs in puttees made from silk dresses or red plush or green baize ripped from a billiard table, legs in yellow silk slippers with velvet pompons bouncing on them, in felt shoes, in laced boots, in sandals and in brogues, or some completely naked, scratched, red, horny, dirty. No songs came from Makhno's guard. They were probably all too drunk to sing.

On Makhno's carriage a huge gleaming black landau had been anchored. The landau's door was decorated with the gilded coat of arms of some dead aristocrat. The upholstery was a rich crimson morocco leather. The shafts of the landau stuck up into the air and on each shaft flapped a black banner of anarchy. On each corner of the wagon was placed a highly polished machine gun and at each machine gun squatted a man in a white cossack cap and a black leather greatcoat. These four were not drunk. Makhno himself was probably not drunk. He lay against the leather cushions of the landau and laughed to himself, tossing a revolver high into the air and catching it again, his feet in their shining black boots crossed indolently on the coach box.

Nestor Makhno was dying. Karl realized it suddenly. The man was small and sickly. His face was the gray face of death. The black cossack hat and the gay embroidered cossack jacket he wore only served to emphasize the pallor of his features. Over his forehead hung a damp fringe of hair which made him look a little like some pictures of Napoleon. And his eyes were alive. Even from where he sat Karl could see the eyes—blazing with a wild and malevolent misery.

Nestor Makhno tossed the revolver up again and caught it. He tossed it and caught it again.

Karl saw that they were nearing a station. The train howled.

The platform was deserted. If there were passengers waiting for a train, they were hiding. People normally hid when Makhno's army came through. Karl grinned to himself. This was not an age in which the timid could survive.

The train slowed as it approached the station. Did Makhno intend to stop for some reason?

And then, incongruously, a guard appeared on the platform. He was dressed in the uniform of the railway line and he held a green flag in his right hand. What a fool he was, thought Karl, still sticking to the rulebook while the world was being destroyed around him.

The guard raised his left hand to his head in a shaky salute. There was a terrified grin on his face, an imploring, placatory grin.

The front part of the train was by now passing through the station. Karl saw Nestor Makhno catch his revolver and cock it. Then, casually, as his landau came level with the guard, Makhno fired. He did not even bother to aim. He had hardly glanced at the guard. Perhaps he had not really intended to hit the man. But the guard fell, stumbling backward on buckling legs and then crumpling against the wall of his office, his whole body shuddering as he dropped his flag and grasped at his neck. His chest heaved and blood vomited from between his lips.

Karl laughed. He swung his machine gun round and jerked the trigger. The gun began to sing. The bullets smashed into the walls and made the body of the guard dance for a few seconds. Karl saw that the placatory smile was still on the dead man's face. He pulled the trigger again and raked the whole station as they went through. Glass smashed, a sign fell down, someone screamed. The name of the station was Pomoshnaya.

Karl turned to the fat Georgian, who had opened a fresh bottle of vodka and was drinking from it in great gulps. He had hardly noticed Karl's action. Karl tapped him on the shoulder. "Hey, old Pyat—where the hell is Pomoshnava?"

The Georgian shrugged and offered Karl the bottle. He was too fuddled to understand the question.

The station was disappearing behind them. Soon it had vanished.

The tattooed sailor, his arm around a snub-nosed girl with cropped hair, a Mauser in her hand, took the bottle from the Georgian and placed it against the girl's thin lips. "Drink up," he said. He peered at Karl. "What was that, youngster?"

Karl tried to repeat his question, but the train entered a tunnel and thick smoke filled their lungs, stung their eyes and they could see nothing. Everyone began to cough and to curse.

"It doesn't matter," said Karl.

The Whimper of Whipped Dogs

Harlan Ellison

On the night after the day she had stained the louvered window shutters of her new apartment on East 52nd Street, Beth saw a woman slowly and hideously knifed to death in the courtyard of her building. She was one of twenty-six witnesses to the ghoulish scene and, like them, she did nothing to stop it.

She saw it all, every moment of it, without break and with no impediment to her view. Quite madly, the thought crossed her mind as she watched in horrified fascination, that she had the sort of marvelous line of observation Napoleon had sought when he caused to have constructed at the *Comédie-Française* theater, a curtained box at the rear, so he could watch the audience as well as the stage. The night was clear, the moon was full, she had just turned off the 11:30 movie on channel 2 after the second commercial break, realizing she had already seen Robert Taylor in *Westward the Women*, and had disliked it the first time; and the apartment was quite dark.

She went to the window, to raise it six inches for the night's sleep, and she saw the woman stumble into the courtyard. She was sliding along the wall, clutching her left arm with her right hand. Con Ed had installed mercury vapor lamps on the poles; there had been sixteen assaults in seven months; the courtyard was illuminated with a chill purple glow that made the blood streaming down the woman's left arm look black and shiny. Beth saw every detail with utter clarity, as though magnified a thousand power under a microscope, solarized as if it had been a television commercial.

The woman threw back her head, as if she were trying to scream, but there was no sound. Only the traffic on First Avenue, late cabs foraging for singles paired for the night at Maxwell's Plum and Friday's and Adam's Apple. But that was over there, beyond. Where *she* was, down there seven floors below, in the courtyard, everything seemed silently suspended in an invisible force-field.

Beth stood in the darkness of her apartment, and realized she had raised the window completely. A tiny balcony lay just over the low sill; now not even glass separated her from the sight; just the wrought iron balcony railing and seven floors to the courtyard below.

The woman staggered away from the wall, her head still thrown back, and Beth could see she was in her mid-thirties, with dark hair cut in a shag; it was impossible to tell if she was pretty: terror had contorted her features and her mouth was a twisted black slash, opened but emitting no sound. Cords stood out in her neck. She had lost one shoe, and her steps were uneven, threatening to dump her to the pavement.

The man came around the corner of the building, into the courtyard. The knife he held was enormous—or perhaps it only seemed so: Beth remembered a bone-handled fish knife her father had used one summer at the lake in Maine: it folded back on itself and locked, revealing eight inches of serrated blade. The knife in the hand of the dark man in the courtyard seemed to be similar.

The woman saw him and tried to run, but he leaped across the distance between them and grabbed her by the hair and pulled her head back as though he would slash her throat in the next reaper-motion.

Then the woman screamed.

The sound skirled up into the courtyard like bats trapped in an echo chamber, unable to find a way out, driven mad. It went on and on. . . .

The man struggled with her and she drove her elbows into his sides and he tried to protect himself, spinning her around by her hair, the terrible scream going up and up and never stopping. She came loose and he was left with a fistful of hair torn out by the roots. As she spun out, he slashed straight across and opened her up just below the breasts. Blood sprayed through her clothing and the man was soaked; it seemed to drive him even more berserk. He went at her again, as she tried to hold herself together, the blood pouring down over her arms.

She tried to run, teetered against the wall, slid sidewise, and the man struck the brick surface. She was away, stumbling over a flower bed, falling, getting to her knees as he threw himself on her again. The knife came up in a flashing arc that illuminated the blade strangely with purple light. And still she screamed.

Lights came on in dozens of apartments and people appeared at windows.

He drove the knife to the hilt into her back, high on the right shoulder. He used both hands.

Beth caught it all in jagged flashes—the man, the woman, the knife, the blood, the expressions on the faces of those watching from the windows. Then lights clicked off in the windows, but they still stood there, watching.

She wanted to yell, to scream, "What are you doing to that woman?" But her throat was frozen, two iron hands that had been immersed in dry ice for ten thousand years clamped around her neck. She could feel the blade sliding into her own body.

Somehow—it seemed impossible but there it was down there, happening somehow—the woman struggled erect and *pulled* herself off the knife. Three steps, she took three steps and fell into the flower bed again. The man was howling now, like a great beast, the sounds inarticulate, bubbling up from his stomach. He fell on her and the knife went up and came down, then again, and again, and finally it was all a blur of motion, and her scream of lunatic bats went on till it faded off and was gone.

Beth stood in the darkness, trembling and crying, the sight filling her eyes with horror. And when she could no longer bear to look at what he was doing down there to the unmoving piece of meat over which he worked, she looked up and around at the windows of darkness where the others still stood—even as she stood—and somehow she could see their faces, bruised purple with the dim light from the mercury lamps, and there was a universal sameness to their expressions. The women stood with their nails biting into the upper arms of their men, their tongues edging from the corners of their mouths; the men were wildeyed and smiling. They all looked as though they were at cockfights. Breathing deeply. Drawing some sustenance from the grisly scene below. An exhalation of sound, deep, deep, as though from caverns beneath the earth. Flesh pale and moist.

And it was then that she realized the courtyard had grown foggy, as though mist off the East River had rolled up 52nd Street in a veil that would obscure the details of what the knife and the man were still doing . . . endlessly doing it . . . long after there was any joy in it . . . still doing it . . . again and again. . . .

But the fog was unnatural, thick and gray and filled with tiny scintillas of light. She stared at it, rising up in the empty space of the courtyard. Bach in the cathedral, stardust in a vacuum chamber.

Beth saw eyes.

There, up there, at the ninth floor and higher, two great eyes, as surely as night and the moon, there were eyes. And . . . a face? Was that a face, could she be sure, was she imagining it . . . a face? In the roiling vapors of chill fog something lived, something brooding and patient and utterly malevolent had been summoned up to witness what was happening down there in the flower bed. Beth tried to look away, but could not. The eyes, those primal burning eyes, filled with an abysmal antiquity yet frighteningly bright and anxious like the eyes of a child; eyes filled with tomb depths, ancient and new, chasm-filled, burning, gigantic and deep as an abyss, holding her, compelling her. The shadow play was being staged not only for the tenants in their windows, watching and drinking of the scene, but for some other. Not on frigid tundra or waste moors, not in subterranean caverns or on some faraway world circling a dying sun, but here, in the city, here the eyes of that other watched.

Shaking with the effort, Beth wrenched her eyes from those burning depths up there beyond the ninth floor, only to see again the horror that had brought that other. And she was struck for the first time by the awfulness of what she was witnessing, she was released from the immobility that had held her like a coelacanth in shale, she was filled with the blood thunder pounding against the membranes of her mind: she had stood there! She had done nothing, nothing! A woman had been butchered and she had said nothing, done nothing. Tears had been useless, tremblings had been pointless, she had done nothing!

Then she heard hysterical sounds midway between laughter and giggling, and as she stared up into that great face rising in the fog and chimneysmoke of the night, she heard *herself* making those deranged gibbon noises and from the man below a pathetic, trapped sound, like the whimper of whipped dogs.

She was staring up into that face again. She hadn't wanted to see it again—ever. But she was locked with those smoldering eyes, overcome with the feeling that they were childlike, though she *knew* they were incalculably ancient.

Then the butcher below did an unspeakable thing and Beth reeled with dizziness and caught the edge of the window before she could tumble out onto the balcony; she steadied herself and fought for breath.

She felt herself being looked at, and for a long moment of frozen terror she feared she might have caught the attention of that face up there in the fog. She clung to the window, feeling everything growing faraway and dim, and stared straight across the court. She was being watched. Intently. By the young man in the seventh-floor window across from her own apartment. Steadily, he was looking at her. Through the strange fog with its burning eyes feasting on the sight below, he was staring at her.

As she felt herself blacking out, in the moment before unconsciousness, the thought flickered and fled that there was something terribly familiar about his face. It rained the next day. East 52nd Street was slick and shining with the oil rainbows. The rain washed the dog turds into the gutters and nudged them down and down to the catch-basin openings. People bent against the slanting rain, hidden beneath umbrellas, looking like enormous, scurrying black mushrooms. Beth went out to get the newspapers after the police had come and gone.

The news reports dwelled with loving emphasis on the twenty-six tenants of the building who had watched with cold interest as Leona Ciarelli, 37, of 455 Fort Washington Avenue, Manhattan, had been systematically stabbed to death by Burton H. Wells, 41, an unemployed electrician, who had been subsequently shot to death by two off-duty police officers when he burst into Michael's Pub on 55th Street, covered with blood and brandishing a knife that authorities later identified as the murder weapon.

She had thrown up twice that day. Her stomach seemed incapable of retaining anything solid, and the taste of bile lay along the back of her tongue. She could not blot the scenes of the night before from her mind; she reran them again and again, every movement of that reaper arm playing over and over as though on a short loop of memory. The woman's head thrown back for silent screams. The blood. Those eyes in the fog.

She was drawn again and again to the window, to stare down into the courtyard and the street. She tried to superimpose over the bleak Manhattan concrete the view from her window in Swann House at Bennington: the little yard and another white, frame dormitory; the fantastic apple trees; and from the other window the rolling hills and gorgeous Vermont countryside; her memory skittered through the change of seasons. But there was always concrete and the rain-slick streets; the rain on the pavement was black and shiny as blood.

She tried to work, rolling up the tambour closure of the old rolltop desk she had bought on Lexington Avenue and hunching over the graph sheets of choreographers' charts. But Labanotation was merely a Jackson Pollock jumble of arcane hieroglyphics to her today, instead of the careful representation of eurhythmics she had studied four years to perfect. And before that, Farmington.

The phone rang. It was the secretary from the Taylor Dance Company, asking when she would be free. She had to beg off. She looked at her hand, lying on the graph sheets of figures Laban had devised, and she saw her fingers trembling. She had to beg off. Then she called Guzman at the Downtown Ballet Company, to tell him she would be late with the charts.

"My God, lady, I have ten dancers sitting around in a rehearsal hall getting their leotards sweaty! What do you expect me to do?"

She explained what had happened the night before. And as she told him, she realized the newspapers had been justified in holding that tone against the twenty-six witnesses to the death of Leona Ciarelli. Paschal Guzman listened, and when he spoke again, his voice was several octaves lower, and he spoke more slowly. He said he understood and she could take a little longer to prepare the charts. But there was a distance in his voice, and he hung up while she was thanking him.

She dressed in an argyle sweater vest in shades of dark purple, and a pair of fitted khaki gabardine trousers. She had to go out, to walk around. To do what? To think about other things. As she pulled on the Fred Braun chunky heels, she idly wondered if that heavy silver bracelet was still in the window of Georg Jensen's. In the elevator, the young man from the window across the courtyard stared at her. Beth felt her body begin to tremble again. She went deep into the corner of the box when he entered behind her.

Between the fifth and fourth floors, he hit the off switch and the elevator jerked to a halt.

Beth stared at him and he smiled innocently.

"Hi. My name's Gleeson, Ray Gleeson. I'm in 714."

She wanted to demand that he turn the elevator back on, by what right did he presume to do such a thing, what did he mean by this, turn it on at once or suffer the consequences. That was what she *wanted* to do. Instead, from the same place she had heard the gibbering laughter the night before, she heard her voice, much smaller and much less possessed than she had trained it to be, saying, "Beth O'Neill, I live in 701."

The thing about it, was that the elevator was stopped. And she was frightened. But he leaned against the paneled wall, very well dressed, shoes polished, hair combed and probably blown dry with a hand dryer, and he *talked* to her as if they were across a table at L'Argenteuil. "You just moved in, huh?"

"About two months ago."

"Where did you go to school? Bennington or Sarah Lawrence?" "Bennington. How did you know?"

He laughed, and it was a nice laugh. "I'm an editor at a religious book publisher; every year we get half a dozen Bennington, Sarah Lawrence, Smith girls. They come hopping in like grasshoppers, ready to revolutionize the publishing industry."

"What's wrong with that? You sound as if you don't care for them."

"Oh, I *love* them, they're marvelous. They think they know how to write better than the authors we publish. Had one darlin' little item who was given galleys of three books to proof, and she rewrote all three. I think she's working as a table-swabber in a Horn & Hardart's now."

She didn't reply to that. She would have pegged him as an antifeminist, ordinarily; if it had been anyone else speaking. But the eyes. There was something terribly familiar about his face. She was enjoying the conversation; she rather liked him.

"What's the nearest big city to Bennington?"

"Albany, New York. About sixty miles."

"How long does it take to drive there?"

"From Bennington? About an hour and a half."

"Must be a nice drive, that Vermont country, really pretty.

They just went co-ed, I understand. How's that working out?

"I don't know, really."

"You don't know?"

"It happened around the time I was graduating."

"What did you major in?"

"I was a dance major, specializing in Labanotation. That's the way you write choreography."

"It's all electives, I gather. You don't have to take anything required, like sciences, for example." He didn't change tone as he said, "That was a terrible thing last night. I saw you watching. I guess a lot of us were watching. It was really a terrible thing."

She nodded dumbly. Fear came back.

"I understand the cops got him. Some nut, they don't even know why he killed her, or why he went charging into that bar. It was really an awful thing. I'd very much like to have dinner with you one night soon, if you're not attached."

"That would be all right."

"Maybe Wednesday. There's an Argentinian place I know. You might like it."

"That would be all right."

"Why don't you turn on the elevator, and we can go," he said, and smiled again. She did it, wondering why it was she had stopped the elevator in the first place.

On her third date with him, they had their first fight. It was at a party thrown by a director of television commercials. He lived on the ninth floor of their building. He had just done a series of spots for "Sesame Street" (the letters U for Underpass, T for Tunnel, lowercase b for boats, C for cars; the numbers 1 to 6 and the numbers 1 to 20; the words *light* and *dark*) and was celebrating his move from the arena of commercial tawdriness and its attendant \$75,000 a year to the sweet fields of educational programming and its accompanying descent into low-pay respectability. There was a logic in his joy Beth could not quite understand, and when she talked with him about it, in a far corner of the kitchen, his arguments didn't seem to parse. But he seemed happy, and his girl friend, a long-legged exmodel from Philadelphia, continued to drift to him and away from him, like some exquisite undersea plant, touching his hair and kissing his neck, murmuring words of pride and barely submerged sexuality. Beth found it bewildering, though the celebrants were all bright and lively.

In the living room, Ray was sitting on the arm of the sofa, hustling a stewardess named Luanne. Beth could tell he was hustling: he was trying to look casual. When he *wasn't* hustling, he was always intense, about everything. She decided to ignore it, and wandered around the apartment, sipping at a Tanqueray and tonic.

There were framed prints of abstract shapes clipped from a calendar printed in Germany. They were in metal Bonniers frames.

In the dining room a huge door from a demolished building somewhere in the city had been handsomely stripped, teaked and refinished. It was now the dinner table.

A Lightolier fixture attached to the wall over the bed swung out, levered up and down, tipped, and its burnished globe-head revolved a full three hundred and sixty degrees.

She was standing in the bedroom, looking out the window, when she realized this had been one of the rooms in which light had gone on, gone off; one of the rooms that had contained a silent watcher at the death of Leona Ciarelli.

When she returned to the living room, she looked around more carefully. With only three or four exceptions—the stewardess, a young married couple from the second floor, a stockbroker from Hemphill, Noyes—everyone at the party had been a witness to the slaying.

"I'd like to go," she told him.

"Why? Aren't you having a good time?" asked the stewardess, a mocking smile crossing her perfect little face.

"Like all Bennington ladies," Ray said, answering for Beth, "she is enjoying herself most by not enjoying herself at all. It's a trait of the anal retentive. Being here in someone else's apartment, she can't empty ashtrays or rewind the toilet paper roll so it doesn't hang a tongue, and being tightassed, her nature demands we go. "All right, Beth, let's say our good-byes and take off. The Phantom Rectum strikes again."

She slapped him and the stewardess's eyes widened. But the smile stayed frozen where it had appeared.

He grabbed her wrist before she could do it again. "Garbanzo beans, baby," he said, holding her wrist tighter than necessary.

They went back to her apartment, and after sparring silently with kitchen cabinet doors slammed and the television being tuned too loud, they got to her bed, and he tried to perpetuate the metaphor by fucking her in the ass. He had her on elbows and knees before she realized what he was doing; she struggled to turn over and he rode her, bucking and tossing, without a sound. And when it was clear to him that she would never permit it, he grabbed her breast from underneath and squeezed so hard she howled in pain. He dumped her on her back, rubbed himself between her legs a dozen times, and came on her stomach.

Beth lay with her eyes closed and an arm thrown across her face. She wanted to cry, but found she could not. Ray lay on her and said nothing. She wanted to rush to the bathroom and shower, but he did not move, till long after his semen had dried on their bodies.

"Who did you date at college?" he asked.

"I didn't date anyone very much." Sullen.

"No heavy makeouts with wealthy lads from Williams and Dartmouth—no Rensselaer intellectuals begging you to save them from creeping faggotry by permitting them to stick their carrots in your sticky little slit?"

"Stop it!"

"Why are you like this? !" She started to move, to get away

from him, and he grabbed her by the shoulder, forced her to lie down again. Then he rose up over her and said, "I'm like this because I'm a New Yorker, baby. Because I live in this fucking city every day. Because I have to play patty-cake with the ministers and other sanctified holy-joe assholes who want their goodness-and-lightness tracts published by the Blessed Sacrament Publishing and Storm Window Company of 277 Park Avenue, when what I *really* want to do is toss the stupid psalmsuckers out the thirty-seventh-floor window and listen to them quote chapter-and-worse all the way down. Because I've lived in this great big snapping dog of a city all my life and I'm mad as a mudfly, for chrissakes!"

She lay unable to move, breathing shallowly, filled with a sudden pity and affection for him. His face was white and strained, and she knew he was saying things to her that only a bit too much Almadén and exact timing would have let him say.

"What do you expect from me?" he said, his voice softer now, but no less intense. "Do you expect kindness and gentility and understanding and a hand on your hand when the smog burns your eyes? I can't do it, I haven't got it. No one has it in this cesspool of a city. Look around you; what do you think is happening here? They take rats and they put them in boxes and when there are too many of them, some of the little fuckers go out of their minds and start gnawing the rest to death. It ain't no different here, baby! It's rat time for everybody in this madhouse. You can't expect to jam as many people into this stone thing as we do, with buses and taxis and dogs shitting themselves scrawny and noise night and day and no money and not enough places to live and no place to go have a decent think-you can't do it without making the time right for some god-forsaken other kind of thing to be born! You can't hate everyone around you, and kick every beggar and nigger and mestizo shithead, you can't have cabbies stealing from you and taking tips they don't deserve, and then cursing you, you can't walk in the soot till your collar turns black, and your body stinks with the smell of flaking brick and decaying brains, you can't do it without calling up some kind of awful—"

He stopped.

His face bore the expression of a man who has just received brutal word of the death of a loved one. He suddenly lay down, rolled over, and turned off.

She lay beside him, trembling, trying desperately to remember where she had seen his face before.

He didn't call her again, after the night of the party. And when they met in the hall, he pointedly turned away, as though he had given her some obscure chance and she had refused to take it. Beth thought she understood: though Ray Gleeson had not been her first affair, he had been the first to reject her so completely. The first to put her not only out of his bed and his life, but even out of his world. It was as though she were invisible, not even beneath contempt, simply not there.

She busied herself with other things.

She took on three new charting jobs for Guzman and a new group that had formed on Staten Island, of all places. She worked furiously and they gave her new assignments; they even paid her.

She tried to decorate the apartment with a less precise touch. Huge poster blowups of Merce Cunningham and Martha Graham replaced the Brueghel prints that had reminded her of the view looking down the hill from Williams. The tiny balcony outside her window, the balcony she had steadfastly refused to stand upon since the night of the slaughter, the night of the fog with eyes, that balcony she swept and set about with little flower boxes in which she planted geraniums, petunias, dwarf zinnias and other hardy perennials. Then, closing the window, she went to give herself, to involve herself in this city to which she had brought her ordered life.

And the city responded to her overtures:

Seeing off an old friend from Bennington, at Kennedy Inter-

national, she stopped at the terminal coffee shop to have a sandwich. The counter circled like a moat a center service island that had huge advertising cubes rising above it on burnished poles. The cubes proclaimed the delights of Fun City. NEW YORK IS A SUMMER FESTIVAL, they said, and JOSEPH PAPP PRESENTS SHAKESPEARE IN CENTRAL PARK and VISIT THE BRONX ZOO and YOU'LL ADORE OUR CONTENTIOUS BUT LOVABLE CABBIES. The food emerged from a window far down the service area and moved slowly on a conveyor belt through the hordes of screaming waitresses who slathered the counter with redolent washcloths. The lunchroom had all the charm and dignity of a steel rolling mill, and approximately the same noise-level. Beth ordered a cheeseburger that cost a dollar and a quarter, and a glass of milk.

When it came, it was cold, the cheese unmelted, and the patty of meat resembling nothing so much as a dirty scouring pad. The bun was cold and untoasted. There was no lettuce under the patty.

Beth managed to catch the waitress's eye. The girl approached with an annoyed look. "Please toast the bun and may I have a piece of lettuce?" Beth said.

"We dun' do that," the waitress said, turned half away as though she would walk in a moment.

"You don't do what?"

"We dun' toass the bun here."

"Yes, but I want the bun toasted," Beth said, firmly.

"An' you got to pay for extra lettuce."

"If I was asking for *extra* lettuce," Beth said, getting annoyed, "I would pay for it, but since there's *no* lettuce here, I don't think I should be charged extra for the first piece."

"We dun' do that."

The waitress started to walk away. "Hold it," Beth said, raising her voice just enough so the assembly-line caters on either side stared at her. "You mean to tell me I have to pay a dollar and a quarter and I can't get a piece of lettuce or even get the bun toasted?" "Ef you dun' like it . . ."

"Take it back."

"You gotta pay for it, you order it."

"I said take it back, I don't want the fucking thing!"

The waitress scratched it off the check. The milk cost 27ϕ and tasted going-sour. It was the first time in her life that Beth had said that word aloud.

At the cashier's stand, Beth said to the sweating man with the felt-tip pens in his shirt pocket, "Just out of curiosity, are you interested in complaints?"

"No!" he said, snarling, quite literally snarling. He did not look up as he punched out 73ϕ and it came rolling down the chute.

The city responded to her overtures:

It was raining again. She was trying to cross Second Avenue: with the light. She stepped off the curb and a car came sliding through the red and splashed her. "Hey!" she yelled.

"Eat shit, sister!" the driver yelled back, turning the corner.

Her boots, her legs and her overcoat were splattered with mud. She stood trembling on the curb.

The city responded to her overtures:

She emerged from the building at 1 Astor Place with her big briefcase full of Laban charts; she was adjusting her rain scarf about her head. A well-dressed man with an attaché case thrust the handle of his umbrella up between her legs from the rear. She gasped and dropped her briefcase.

The city responded and responded and responded.

Her overtures altered quickly.

The old drunk with the stippled cheeks extended his hand and mumbled words. She cursed him and walked on up Broadway past the beaver film houses.

She crossed against the lights on Park Avenue, making hackies slam their brakes to avoid hitting her; she used that word frequently now.

When she found herself having a drink with a man who had

elbowed up beside her in the singles bar, she felt faint and knew she should go home.

But Vermont was so far away.

Nights later. She had come home from the Lincoln Center ballet, and gone straight to bed. One room away, in the living room, in the dark, there was a sound. She slipped out of bed and went to the door between the rooms. She fumbled silently for the switch on the lamp just inside the living room, and found it, and clicked it on. A black man in a leather car coat was trying to get out of the apartment. In that first flash of light filling the room she noticed the television set beside him on the floor as he struggled with the door, she noticed the police lock and bar had been broken in a new and clever manner New York magazine had not yet reported in a feature article on apartment ripoffs, she noticed that he had got his foot tangled in the telephone cord that she had requested to be extra-long so she could carry the instrument into the bathroom, I don't want to miss any business calls when the shower is running; she noticed all things in perspective and one thing with sharpest clarity: the expression on the burglar's face.

There was something familiar in that expression.

He almost had the door open, but now he closed it, and slipped the police lock. He took a step toward her.

Beth went back, into the darkened bedroom.

The city responded to her overtures.

She backed against the wall at the head of the bed. Her hand fumbled in the shadows for the telephone. His shape filled the doorway, light, all light behind him.

In silhouette it should not have been possible to tell, but somehow she knew he was wearing gloves and the only marks he would leave would be deep bruises, very blue, almost black, with the tinge under them of blood that had been stopped in its course.

He came for her, arms hanging casually at his sides. She tried

to climb over the bed, and he grabbed her from behind, ripping her nightgown. Then he had a hand around her neck and he pulled her backward. She fell off the bed, landed at his feet and his hold was broken. She scuttled across the floor and for a moment she had the respite to feel terror. She was going to die, and she was frightened.

He trapped her in the corner between the closet and the bureau and kicked her. His foot caught her in the thigh as she folded tighter, smaller, drawing her legs up. She was cold.

Then he reached down with both hands and pulled her erect by her hair. He slammed her head against the wall. Everything slid up in her sight as though running off the edge of the world. He slammed her head against the wall again, and she felt something go soft over her right ear.

When he tried to slam her a third time she reached out blindly for his face and ripped down with her nails. He howled in pain and she hurled herself forward, arms wrapping themselves around his waist. He stumbled backward and in a tangle of thrashing arms and legs they fell out onto the little balcony.

Beth landed on the bottom, feeling the window boxes jammed up against her spine and legs. She fought to get to her feet, and her nails hooked into his shirt under the open jacket, ripping. Then she was on her feet again and they struggled silently.

He whirled her around, bent her backward across the wrought iron railing. Her face was turned outward.

They were standing in their windows, watching.

Through the fog she could see them watching. Through the fog she recognized their expressions. Through the fog she heard them breathing in unison, bellows breathing of expectation and wonder. Through the fog.

And the black man punched her in the throat. She gagged and started to fade away and could not draw air into her lungs. Back, back, he bent her further back and she was looking up, straight up, toward the ninth floor and higher. . . .

Up there: eyes.

The words Ray Gleeson had said in a moment filled with what

he had become, with the utter hopelessness and finality of the choice the city had forced on him, the words came back. You can't live in this city and survive unless you have protection . . . you can't live this way, like rats driven mad, without making the time right for some god-forsaken other kind of thing to be born . . . you can't do it without calling up some kind of awful—

God! A new God, an ancient God come again with the eyes and hunger of a child, a deranged blood God of fog and street violence. A God who needed worshipers and offered the choices of death as a victim or life as an eternal witness to the deaths of *other* chosen victims. A God to fit the times, a God of streets and people.

She tried to shriek, to appeal to Ray, to the director in the bedroom window of his ninth-floor apartment with his longlegged Philadelphia model beside him and his fingers inside her as they worshiped in their holiest of ways, to the others who had been at the party that had been Ray's offer of a chance to join their congregation. She wanted to be saved from having to make that choice.

But the black man had punched her in the throat, and now his hands were on her, one on her chest, the other in her face, the smell of leather filling her where the nausea could not. And she understood Ray had *cared*, had wanted her to take the chance offered; but she had come from a world of little white dormitories and Vermont countryside; it was not a real world. *This* was the real world and up there was the God who ruled this world, and she had rejected him, had said no to one of his priests and servitors. Save me! Don't make me do it!

She knew she had to call out, to make appeal, to try and win the approbation of that God. I can't . . . save me!

She struggled and made terrible little mewling sounds trying to summon the words to cry out, and suddenly she crossed a line, and screamed up into the echoing courtyard with a voice Leona Ciarelli had never known enough to use.

"Him! Take him! Not me! I'm yours, I love you, I'm yours!

Take him, not me, please not me, take him, take him, I'm yours!"

And the black man was suddenly lifted away, wrenched off her, and off the balcony, whirled straight up into the fog-thick air in the courtyard, as Beth sank to her knees on the ruined flower boxes.

She was half-conscious, and could not be sure she saw it just that way, but up he went, end over end, whirling and spinning like a charred leaf.

And the form took firmer shape. Enormous paws with claws, and shapes that no animal she had ever seen had ever possessed, and the burglar, black, poor, terrified, whimpering like a whipped dog, was stripped of his flesh. His body was opened with a thin incision, and there was a rush as all the blood poured from him like a sudden cloudburst, and yet he was still alive, twitching with the involuntary horror of a frog's leg shocked with an electric current. Twitched, and twitched again as he was torn to shreds, piece by piece. Chunks of flesh and bone and half a face with an eye blinking furiously cascaded down past Beth, and hit the cement below with sodden thuds. And still he was alive, as his organs were squeezed and musculature and bile and shit and skin were rubbed, sandpapered together and let fall. It went on and on, as the death of Leona Ciarelli had gone on and on, and she understood with the blood-knowledge of survivors at any cost that the reason the witnesses to the death of Leona Ciarelli had done nothing was not that they had been frozen with horror, that they didn't want to get involved, or that they were inured to death by years of television slaughter.

They were worshipers at a black mass the city had demanded be staged, not once, but a thousand times a day in this insane asylum of steel and stone.

Now she was on her feet, standing half-naked in her ripped nightgown, her hands tightening on the wrought iron railing, begging to see more, to drink deeper.

Now she was one of them, as the pieces of the night's sacrifice fell past her, bleeding and screaming. Tomorrow the police would come again, and they would question her, and she would say how terrible it had been, that burglar, and how she had fought, afraid he would rape her and kill her, and how he had fallen, and she had no idea how he had been so hideously mangled and ripped apart, but a sevenstorey fall, after all . . .

Tomorrow she would not have to worry about walking in the streets, because no harm could come to her. Tomorrow she could even remove the police lock. Nothing in the city could do her any further evil, because she had made the only choice. She was now a dweller in the city, now wholly and richly a part of it. Now she was taken to the bosom of her God.

She felt Ray beside her, standing beside her, holding her, protecting her, his hand on her naked backside, and she watched the fog swirl up and fill the courtyard, fill the city, fill her eyes and her soul and her heart with its power. As Ray's naked body pressed tightly into her, she drank deeply of the night, knowing whatever voices she heard from this moment forward, they would be the voices not of whipped dogs, but those of strong, meat-eating beasts.

At last she was unafraid, and it was so good, so very good not to be afraid.

The Great Wall of Mexico

John Sladek

I. WASHINGTON CROSSING THE YANGTZE

His predecessor had kept tape recorders running in every room, catching his "thoughts" as he paced. But then his predecessor, Rogers, had always been a flamboyant action-man leader, the first Secret Service agent to be elevated to the position he guarded with his profile. His career spanned a few headlines:

> GBM SAVED FROM SHOOTING HERO BODYGUARD TO RUN FOR SENATE SEN. ROGERS WILL RUN ROGERS WINS! ROGERS ASSASSINATED

Before the assassin could confess, the police station at which he was held blew up, along with a fair piece of Mason City surrounding it. The FBI found the cause to be a gas leak of an unusual type. On succeeding to the office of Great Seal, our man promoted the investigating agent, K. Homer Bissell, to bureau chief.

Our man kept his thoughts on specially printed forms:

Presidential Notes		PIN/1/1/16
President		
Date:		, 199
General Subject:	Committee/Commission/ Cabinet Referral:	Presidential Remarks:

	•••••••	*******

There were also memoranda, agenda, briefs and résumés al-

ways stacked on top of the elegant polished* desk. The Great Seal liked to be well supplied with business at hand. It enabled him to expedite and finalize things with obvious efficiency at any time, really to deal with work and get it out of the way before he relaxed, working hard to play even harder, making his guiding principle Throughput.

MEMO: From the President

I do not tolerate noisy press conferences. If possible, the next press conference should be arranged to maximize silence.

I, the state, further do not like science fiction cops. If it is really necessary for them to wear those helmets, plastic visors, tunics, gauntlets and jump boots, will they please keep out of my sight.

"I can see how this is going to build up into something," Filcup warns. "Remember when he didn't like certain news analysts? My God, remember when he didn't like brown eggs?"

Karl Wax brought up the subject of uniforms at the Tuesday meeting of Special Advisers. His "birthday cake" suggestion was voted down ("We have to make a pleasing offering to the President, but this is ridiculous. Anyway, a naked guard is just the kind of thing that could backfire. We all know how He feels about cakedness") and Dan Foyle gained the upper hand with "a uniform of evening clothes, slightly modified in some distinctive manner—anyone who's seen Turhan Bey and Susanna Foster in *The Climax* will know what I mean. This has been a long and bloody war—though not pointless or without compensations—and He sorely needs a little formal relaxation."

Agenda for Wednesday

Commission stamps to commemorate Walt Disney, Louisa May Alcott, Ty Cobb; provisionally Billy Mitchell, Ralph Nader. Check figs on Indochina: Gen. H. claims 2,250 megatons reqd for reconditioning, Op. Orpheus. Check position on Tanzania vis-à-vis South African bloc. Could recredit our reputation in Brazil, renew Arab franchise. **Presentation of award from Mothers of American Insurrection**

* And bulletproof, another legacy of poor Rogers.

(blue suit). Read speech of Q's for decontamination efforts, constitutional loopholes. Lunch with leading blacks. Press conference on Martha's blood clot. Important: p.m. conference with Bissell, psychologists, police reps on physical/mental reconciliation of disaffiliatees, dealing with radical element.

While Tichner and Groeb arrange his urgent memos, he runs over the morning mail résumé, made up as a composite letter:

Dear Mr. President:

While 47% of me would like to congratulate you on your courageous stand on the Chile question, 21% of me also wonders if you've lived up to our expectations regarding . . . and though 17% of me disagrees, a massive 36% thinks you handled the Moral Pollution bill wisely, and for the rest, I can't make up my mind.

> Sincere good wishes, Your friend, J. Q. Public

Suggested Uniforms for White House Police

Brocade, knee breeks and periwigs Minutemen, "dressed for Sunday" **Student Prince** Uncle Sam Henry Clay gaiters, panamas Christy's Minstrels Custer's cavalry Commodore Perry Rough Riders The Climax **Mysterious** Island Dickensian ragamuffins (struck off, replaced by ''Leopard tuxes and light-up bow ties") Texas A & M Diamond Horseshoe Each Night I Die Zoot blues Nice neat business

The G.S. follows no suggestions, however. For a time, while he reads a digested condensation of the life of FDR, the palace guards are persuaded to imitate that eminence. Bang seventhirty every morning the guardroom doors slide back and out rolls a parade of large-jawed men in gleaming wheelchairs, champing their cigarette holders and assuring the President that he has nothing to fear but fear itself. And even that phase is preferable, they all agree, to his Peter Stuyvesant period.

After the mail, his condensed news digest:

Wednesday, February 12

PRESIDENT SIGNS CONTROVERSIAL DUCK BILL. Conservation leaders praise forward-thinking leader. President disclaims, says only small step forward, but "little strokes fell great oaks." President To Announce New Peace Plan President's Wife Feared III Cabinet Changes?

He was vaguely aware that the real press hardly ever mentioned him; these items had been gleaned from the *Rood City Post*, the Oslo (Nevada) Times and the Budget Junction O'erseer. He knew the press laughed at him for his sincerity, for his supposed vanity, for the way he conducted the war. They crucified him if he looked solemn, and when he smiled there were unkind remarks about his woodenness. The press! What did they know? Let them go on calling him an unsalable commodity, a snap, an empty suit. They would one day look the ape!

Not a Gem

During morning coffee, he felt like a visit to the Reagan Room, but curbed it (PRESIDENT MASTERS OWN CONDITION). There was still the award ceremony (The confounded press! More pix with eyes closed, mouth open) and the luncheon with its precarious handshakes. And first of all there was Operation Orpheus and fat, freckled General Hare. "We call it Orpheus, sir, because there's no turning back. We thought of calling it Operation Lot, but people might get it confused with Operation Sandlot, our talent-recruiting program, and with Operation Big Sandy. Operation Sodom was even worse. So we—"

"Get to the point, Hare. Where do you get this figure of 2,250 megatons?"

The general set down his coffee cup carelessly, so that the cookie fell from its saucer perch. Disorder. Reagan Room. Operation. Or Free Us. The music of the nukebox means a dance with China. I'd like to get you. On a slow boat. China, angina, regina, vagina.

"Let's see now." General Hare jotted figures on the edge of a soggy paper napkin. "We have North Zone, South Zone, Countries Able, Baker, Charlie, Dog . . ."

Slow bull to china.

"That makes 1,939,424 square kilometers, and that comes out to only 749 megatons. Allowing a 300 percent margin for error, we get 2,250 megatons, say 150 warheads. We wouldn't hardly miss it."

"Haha! Oh, excuse me, general, I just thought of something. What kind of—ha—boat would a slow boat to China be? Eh? Eh?"

"I don't exactly get you, sir. You mean—?"

"It's a riddle, man! Just tell me the answer to that, and I may give you the green light on one of these operations."

"Mr. President! I—"

"Give up? Give up?"

There was some argument about whether the general had actually given up before the President told him the answer. To placate him, it finally became necessary to okay Operation Big Sandy, both phases.

A Lexicon of Governmental Report Terms

alienatee: person not sympathetic to the government bugs: demonstrators (hence swatting a swarm: riot control) dealienation: brainwashing decontamination: shock therapy used in dealienation disaffiliatee: anarchist maverick: businessman who defects to radical side opinion analyst: police agent rationalizing an increment: stopping a demonstration reconciliation: interrogation with extreme force rodeo: suspect roundup and intensive reconciliation social therapist: interrogator technicality: prisoner

Souplines

The President has a rich dream life. It soaks through his skin like a rich soup and arranges the wrinkles in his "sober" business suit. Examination of the seat of the President's business pants reveals inmost desires, claims psychologist. A relief map of Indochina, perhaps.

His dreams boil up in projects, plans, operations, advisory committee schemes. His dreaming eye is on the donut, says aide. Operation Big Sandy, for instance. It may seem crazy to wall off Mexico (phase one), but there you are. "It's so crazy," says General Hare, "it just might work. Or not."

The lunch with leading blacks goes even worse than he'd feared. The press conference is canceled and he disappears for half an hour into the Reagan Room. Later, before he goes to meet concerned psychologists and policemen, he checks his chin for lines of sin.

Major Operation

Operation Big Sandy was born on the littered conference table of the Great Seal's team of "creative" advisers. Karl and Dan were cutting and folding maps to rearrange the world. Filcup sought truth in the depths of black coffee.

"A door-to-door instant welfare program? Let me call it Streetheart."

"A national idea bank—"

"Yes, but unemployment."

"Unemployment, sure, but social security deficits."

Filcup held up an atlas. "Think of the United States as a sheep or cow, marked into cuts of meat."

"The United Steaks?"

"Don't laugh, it's the body politic. About to be invaded by hostile germs, coming up the anus from Mexico-"

"Now just hold on a minute!" Texas Dan Foyle demanded that Filcup apologize.

"What we need is antiseptic. Make the Rio Grande radioactive. Build a wall," he continued.

"A wall to write on!" Karl said. "A challenge for our painters." "Sell off advertising space."

Dan cracked his knuckles with unrestrained excitement. "This could be great for the old folks. Give them something to look at, a new interest in life. You realize that there are over a hundred retirement ranches in that area, and that more than half our retired folks live within a hundred miles of Mexico."

Filcup seemed convulsed by a private joke. "Wait till I tell you the rest, Dan. There's something in this for the old folks, all right, in phase two. But for now, we'll not only sell space to advertisers, we'll build gas stations, highways, concessions. A view of the wall. A view over it. Visit the gun emplacements. Amazing plastic replicas of the Grand Canyon, the Great Wall of China, the Wailing Wall of Jerusalem! It'll take up the slack in Mexican tourism, giving our vacationers a new place to go. And of course it'll be a sop for unemployment."

"The Great Wall!" They toasted it in cold coffee.

2. TECHNICALITIES

At Fort Nixon Retraining Center

Dr. Veck was explaining the routine to the new man, Lane. "I know youngsters like you are chock-full of theory, itching to try everything out," he said, clapping him on the shoulder. "Fort Nixon is just the place for it. The normal routine isn't too irksome because most of ours are politicals, as you know. Not much trouble except security—they will try to escape—but I'm afraid they make dull cases."

He slid open a panel depicting the death of Actaeon (or some other deer) to show, through the back of a one-way glass, a dozen retrainees at work on handicrafts. "As you see, dull."

"Oh, I don't know. Who's the old-timer over in the corner? The one doing leather work."

"Old Hank? He's pretty well beyond treatment. I'll show you his record sometime. Looks as if he's making another bridle. He's made three already, one white, one red and one black. This one seems to be beige. Of course he has no idea what he'll do with them. In fact, he told me he knows nothing at all about horses. Poor old Hank!"

Oblivious to their concern, Hank was kicking a water pipe under his bench, tapping out a message to his one friend.

"The government apparently has contingency plans to use some of our people for a work camp. Some construction project. I'd guess it's either another retirement ranch or else a dam on the Rio Grande. But of course they never tell us anything. We only have to deal with the extra security that will mean."

"Do you have many escapes?" asked Dr. Lane.

"We always catch them. And then we give them a taste of the random room. Little invention of my own. The occupant doesn't know what will happen to him, or when—all he knows is that it will be unpleasant. At perfectly random intervals he gets cold water, hot water, shock, strobe lights, whistles, drones, a shower of shit, whispers, heat, cold and so on. Life in the ordinary ward seems pretty good to them after that. They're grateful for a secure, comfortable routine, and escape is—well—remote."

"Ah, yes, I noticed your paper on it in *Political Psychopath*, though I didn't have a chance to read it yet. Sounds interesting."

Dr. Veck acknowledged this half compliment with half a smile. "Your praxis was at Mount Burris, was it not?" He found his hair hurt, and his breath had to be forced.

"Yes, but not with politicals. I worked mainly with the chil-

dren of malcontents. Primary adjustments, corporation workshop. Tame stuff compared to political deviation, which has always been my first love. Are you all right, doctor?"

"Ah, it's nothing. I experience these symptoms, shortness of breath and so on, whenever I leave my office for any length of time. What say we go up to my office now, and I'll show you some typical case histories."

Entering Veck's office, the two men were arrested by a throbbing desert sunset. Dr. Lane sighed. Breaking off in the middle of a discussion of pattern attrition, he murmured:

"Who captains haughty Nature in her flaming hair

Can ne'er rest slothy whilst some lesser groom---"

"What was that?" Veck snapped the blinds shut and turned up the decent office light.

"Nothing, really. I wrote it for a class in Environmental Humanities."

"Good for you! We social engineers can use a smattering of culture around the place. Gives us new perspective on our problems. Like this one, for instance." He threw a dusty folder on the desk. "Mr. C. was a Communist, and he liked being a Communist. We tried damned near everything. Finally we learned that a fellow party member had seduced C.'s wife. We simply told him about this, allowed him to escape, and bingo!"

"Bingo?"

"By killing the seducer, C. proved that he thought of his wife as a piece of property. It was the first beachhead of capitalism in his commie brain. With our help he became vitally interested in other possessions, in getting and spending. His socialism fell away like an old scab. Today C. is a Baptist minister and a Rotarian."

"Amazing!"

"Or take this case, Mr. von J. Von J. was a malcontent, a hater of authority. Arrested for vandalism, jaywalking, nonpayment of taxes, contempt of court. Here we used aversive methods to great effect. The first step was to teach him *self-discipline*. We made him hold his urine twenty hours at a time, memorize chapters of Norman Vincent Peale, and so on. Now, I am given to understand, von J. is more than a model eitizen; he does some work for the FBI.

"Mr. B. was an anarchist. We placed him in a controlled work situation. Among those who worked around him we removed everyone of competence and replaced them with indecisive idiots. They looked to B. for guidance; he became a straw boss, then a real boss. We rewarded his responsibility with more pay and privileges. He became a trusty.

"Naturally he escaped. On his return, B. learned that R., one of the idiot workers who had worshiped him, had, left on his own, committed suicide.

"In this way B. was brought to see that running away doesn't bring liberty, but slavery. He now realized that the truly free aren't rebels and anarchists, but those who have submitted their will to a Higher Authority. The way I put it to him in a little talk was: 'Democracy is like a spaceship. It may seem stuffy inside, but you can't just step out for a breath of outer space!'"

Dr. Lane saw his cue, and chuckled. "But how did you really arrange it? What actually happened to R.? A transfer?"

"Oh, dear me, no." Veck laughed. "We had to string him up in his room, for real. To make it look good. B. was nothing if not skeptical."

Remorse Code Message

O Hank! You have turnt your face to the wall again. Or anyway you've stopped acknowledging my messages. And you won't talk to the other retrainees. Sit there then in the common room, silent and obscure as Gun.* Trying perhaps to etch out a certain territory in the room by exposing it to the acid of your silence. One by one the others move away to far parts of the room where they can kibbitz at Ping-Pong or pretend to study the paper autumn leaves pinned to the bulletin board, wishing all a HAPPY COLUMBUS DAY. Perhaps you can empty the room itself, even the

* War god of the Fon.

wing, or the whole of Fort Nixon, driving away all life and plastering over the crevices with thick hostile silence.

But you just couldn't have such an unconstructive notion. Not to say such an asocial, dangerous notion. Because whatever they say about there being no punishments here, extremely uncomfortable things can happen to the asocial. And your silence can hardly be construed as "making an honest effort" at retraining, can it?

Your obstinate silence. Suppose they feel it necessary to counter it? To bring in the Fort Nixon Silver Band to fill the void? And then certain select retrainees (the "doctors" staying out of it) might hold you to a chair while the Silver Band marches past, playing "Under the Double Eagle" and "Them Basses." Certain select retrainees, known somehow to one another, might hold you to a chair while the Silver Band sharpens up. They sharpen the edges of the bells of their trumpets and sousaphones. Then they extend your tongue and hold it while they saw it off with their shining instruments. Then they pin it to the bulletin board, among the autumn leaves.

Listen, Hank, you have friends in high places. One phone call and you can be out of here, long gone before they put you to work on the Great Project. Just admit that God is pretty firstrate and God's Own Country is, gosh, not so bad either, when you get right down under it. Or say anything, say howdy to your friends and neighbors, the other inmates. Otherwise I hear the Silver Band massing in the anteroom; I see a wet pink leaf upon the bulletin board, HAPPY COLUMBUTH DAY, end of Message.

Dr. Lane's Secret Journal (I)

. . . the question of who he thinks he is trying to contact. Veck claims he was in prison before, tapped out morse code on the water pipes with other prisoners, and just couldn't break the habit. Though no one here seems to listen to his tapping.

Yesterday I tried immobilizing Hank with s.p. and restraints.

As I predicted, he keeps messages going even then, by nearly inaudible tongue clicks.

A challenging case. Hank evidently was some kind of painter and sculptor at one time. Later he made a series of animated cartoons of which I saw only one example. It seemed particularly sadistic to me. The main story seemed to be a quarrel between dogs, cats and mice. This version differed from others mainly in that it strove for realistic violence. Thus when an animal was struck by an enormous wooden mallet, he did not go dizzy with X X eyes and tweeting birds and a pulsating red lump. Instead he screamed, staggered, fell, gushed blood, vomited, lay quivering and died, defecating. I believe the cartoon was called "Suffering Cats." It was seditious.

A challenging case. Today we talked.

LANE: Good morning, Hank. Feeling OK today?

HANK: Try a synthesis of that.

LANE: I'd like to try-

HANK: They're out of it. No good. (Indistinct murmur) Pricks! (Or "bricks")

LANE: I'd like you to look at these cards and tell me what the story is on each. What they remind you of.

HANK: Listen, I'm the pope around here. I'm the mural man and I'm the muracle man. . . .

LANE: What does this remind you of, Hank? (Overturned car)

HANK: It's a picture that's supposed to remind me of the next picture. It reminds me a little of a car accident. And a mural I once did, about fifteen hundred miles long. Incorporated a white line, nothing nicer.

LANE: Do you think doing murals is nice, Hank? Isn't it more fun building things up, painting, than tearing them down?

HANK: Why choose? They don't. It's all part of the same thing, the seduction of the construction. If you're looking for anarchist bombers, arrest God, eh? There's the destruction of the destruction for you!

Anyway, it's too late. You can't exactly make an omelet, can

you? One of these days, "Up against the wall, robot!" and it's good-bye Mexico. Their symbol the cockroach, the meek little bastard that inherits the earth.

I gather he's talking about building walls, painting murals on them and then tearing them down. This doubtless symbolizes his whole life, a tension between creation (art) and destruction (anarchy). A long and wasted life! It's hard to believe, but Hank was born before the great Chesterton died.

A Harsh Physic (I)

The roomful of psychologists and police officials paid little attention when the President entered. Some were gossiping, and those who noticed his scurrying figure turned away with disgusted expressions: "That slick bastard . . . Let's talk about something else. . . ."

It was different when they saw Bissell of the FBI coming straight from the door to the lectern. The admiration, envy and affection they felt for the little guy could not be expressed in ordinary terms—though perhaps Freemasons had a word for the stirring beneath the apron.

Bissell gave his report on surveillance. On the whole, random search and arrest techniques had not proved productive of info on subverts. Intensive infiltration was being tried with more success, but it took time, men and money.

"We managed to infiltrate one group of anarchist bombers in the Southwest, for example, only by an indirect method. Our man on the inside is not actually known to us—we couldn't risk direct contact. Instead he passes information to the Bureau and receives orders from it through a neutral man. We call him a 'circuit-breaker,' because he can break contact in case of trouble.

"Our 'Listening Post' program has been very successful," he continued. "This means bugging public and private places where we hope dangerous subverts might meet. Originally we had planned to use computers to sort through the vast amount of tape we collected this way. The computers would search for key words like *black*, *power*, *liberation*, *revolution* and *government*, and select these portions for further study.

"But we have recruited instead a large number of personnel to do this sorting job for us. These recruits are trustworthy, keen listeners, naturally suspicious and absolutely loyal. Best of all, they work for free."

The President raised his hand. "Just who are these dedicated personnel?"

"I was about to explain, sir, that they are elderly people living in retirement homes. As they have little to do, listening gives them pleasure. Many are retired military men, only too glad to still be of service to their country."

That concluded Bissell's report. Flanked by two of his enormous agents, the little man marched out of the room. The rest realized they had been holding their breaths. Now the place seemed empty, as though it had lost some great dynamic presence—some modern Wilhelm Reich.

At the Rocking R

Brad Dexter peered out of his water-cooled window at America Deserta. As always, hot and quiet. Fifty degrees out there, or so the ranch authorities said, and a laborious calculation told him that this was "a hundred and twenty-two real degrees, Irma! Think of that!"

He propped her up so she could see the shimmering desert. "You know, in the old days, they used to fry an egg on the sidewalk on a day like this. No, I guess they only pretended to fry it. I found out later it was fake, in *Unvarnished Truth* magazine. I got the issue here someplace."

Much of the small room was taken up with towering stacks of magazines. The ranch authorities hadn't liked it, but Brad had insisted on not parting with a single issue of *Unvarnished Truth*. If a man couldn't live in comfort at a retirement ranch, just where in hell could he relax? Just tell Brad that, and he would ask no more. It wasn't much of a ranch. No horses, cattle, barns, corrals or pastures. In fact, it wasn't a ranch at all, except for being stuck out here in the blazing desert. The Rocking R Retirement Ranch consisted of thirteen great hexagonal towers called "bunkhouses," each named after some forgotten child star. Brad and Irma resided on the twentieth story of Donald O'Conner.*

"Now where is that article?" Brad leafed through tattered, yellowed issues containing the latest on the Kennedy assassinations, "I Killed Martin Bormann," "Her Hubby Was a Woman," "Eyeless Sight," "Birth Pills Can Kill!" and "How Oil Companies Murdered the Car That Runs on Water." "I know I had that danged thing someplace— What are you looking at, honey?"

There wasn't much to see outside. Everything was so still it could have been a hologram. The electric fence that marked the future location of the Wall made a diagonal across this picture, starting in the lower right corner and disappearing over a dune at the upper left. Next to it an endless sausage curl of barbed wire followed the same contour. Somewhere beyond the dune lay the work camp where they were building the Wall. Once a week, Brad had been lucky enough to see a great silver airship carrying equipment and supplies to the camp, and now he hoped Irma had spotted another. It was funny about Irma. Even though her eyes never moved, Brad could always tell when she was intent on something.

Now he saw it, a tiny figure trudging along next to the barbed wire coil, coming this way. From here, Brad couldn't make out much except the gray uniform.

"Escapee from the work camp, Irma. And there goes the danged lunch bell. Well, to heck with that—this is worth missing lunch for!" He took out his teeth for comfort.

The work camp prisoners were all political agitators, commies, anarchists and others who had tried to overthrow the govern-

^{*} The other bunkhouses were Shirley Temple, Margaret O'Brien, Butch Jenkins, Baby Leroy, Bobby Driscoll, Jackie Cooper, Elizabeth Taylor, Judy Garland, Luana Patten, Mickey Rooney, Dean Stockwell and Skippy Homeier.

ment by force. Brad had got to see some of them closer up when they came to do some work on the roof of Shirley Temple. They had built an enormous black box up there—something to do with the security system for the Wall. Brad guessed it was radar. The prisoners had all looked well fed and contented, probably better off than a lot of people that had worked hard all their lives, like Brad.

"This should be good," he said, breaking wind with excitement. "That fool has been slogging along God knows how many miles in this heat, and all for nothing. They'll get him. Always do, or so they tell me. I figure they won't even bother looking for him until they've let him bake his brains a little. They know what they're doing, all right. There, what did I tell you?"

A helicopter cruiser had now come over the hill. It moved slowly along the barbed wire as though tracking the fugitive, though he was in plain sight. Looking back, he speeded up his walking movements, though his progress was still hopeless. Gradually the spray of dust raised by the rotors advanced, erasing his footprints.

As the cruiser closed in, the pedestrian threw himself down and tried to dig in like a crab. But the magic circle of blowing dust overtook and enclosed him. The helicopter paused, turning, poking its rear in the air, excited by the kill.

When it rose, the man was flopping in a net, a neat package hanging from the insect belly. Brad watched it out of sight.

"By Godfrey, Irma, wasn't that something? Our boys really know their stuff. It made me proud to be living here in the greatest country on earth. And to think that our boys are building our First Line of Defense right here where we can see it! God, it's grand, old girl!"

The second lunch bell rang, and Brad decided to eat after all. At least today he'd have something to tell Harry Boggs, instead of the other way around. Harry thought the world revolved around him and his Listening Post work. Gossip-gathering was all it really amounted to.

"Only, today I've got better gossip!" Brad slipped in his

teeth and grimaced them into position, then off he went. Irma, being an inflatable, had of course no need to eat.

Captain Middlemass

That week the residents of Donald O'Connor bunkhouse were treated to an official lecture on the Wall. Captain Mallery Middlemass turned out to be all they could have hoped, a wellburnished young man, glowing with health. They all savored the depth of his chest, the breadth of his shoulders, the rich timbre of his voice. So unlike the usual visitors, either down-atheels entertainers like "The Amazing Lepantos" or else retired folk from other bunkhouses, people with frail lungs, uneven shoulders and thin, dry hair. The captain's hair was shiny black as patent leather, and his eyes were dark-glowing garnets.

He explained that the Wall was a population barrier. While our own population was increasing at a reasonable rate, that of Mexico was completely out of control.

"For years the slow poisons have been seeping across the border: marijuana, pornography, VD and cheap labor. They have seeped into America's nervous system, turning our kids into drug addicts, infecting their minds and bodies with filth and stealing away American jobs. Poverty and its handmaidens, crime and vice, are spreading across the nation like cancer. They have one source: Spanish America!"

He showed them the model and explained some of the Wall's special features. It would incorporate (on the Mexican side) sophisticated electronic detection equipment and weapons, capable of marking the sparrow's fall, and (on our side) part of a new highway network connecting retirement ranches with new Will Doody Funvilles.

Brad and Harry got in line to shake the captain's hand. Up close they could see that he was not so young, after all. The sagging patches of yellow skin around his eyes really were a case for Unvarnished Truth.

3. THE BANG GANG

A Harsh Physic (II)

After Bissell, a police training expert spoke on riot control. "The first step is knowing when and where a riot is going to start. We can often control this factor by 'priming the pump,' or staging a catalytic incident ourselves."

"Just a minute!" The Great Seal looked concerned. "Isn't that provocation? Is it legal?"

"It is, the way we do it, yes, sir. We just have one man dressed as a demonstrator 'attacked,' 'brutally beaten' and 'arrested' in sight of the mob. All simulated, of course. My department has never been against using street theater in this way—and it's legal.

"Once things are in motion, we have other choices: We can contain, control or divert a riot. Sometimes we even 'decontrol' it, or let it get out of hand. If a mob does enough damage, we usually find public opinion hardened against them.

"Our actual techniques are too numerous to describe—the menu of gases alone is enormous. I might mention one experiment: giving tactical police a rage-inducing drug prior to their going on duty. A related experiment is hate-suggestion TV in the duty bus. On their way to the scene of action the boys are given a dose of King Mob at his ugliest. This has produced a nine percent increase in arrests, and a whopping seventeen percent increase in nonpolice casualties! It seems worth further investigation.

"A lot of riot work is the job of the evidence and public relations squads. The evidence squad guarantees convictions for riot crimes: conspiracy to disorder, incitement to riot and unlawful assembly. One way of doing this is to issue what we call 'black' publications. These are posters, leaflets and newspapers made to look like real 'underground' items, but we've added to them certain incriminating articles. After all, the *real* intentions of these radicals are to bomb and shoot the ordinary, decent citizens into submission, and it's time we exposed them for what they are! Our evidence squad is headed by a man with considerable experience, the former editor of *Unvarnished Truth* magazine.

"The public relations squad helps edit film and TV tape of riots, to help the public understand what we are doing. They remove portions that might be used to smear our tactical police forces. The national networks have all been very cooperative in this effort to close the 'communications gap' and keep the American public informed. It all adds up to a whale of a lot of work for us, but we like it that way. We believe that there's no such thing as a terrible riot—just bad publicity."

Up the Sleeves

"The question is, why is it legal to be a cop?" Chug asked. The crowd, gathered to watch him and Ayn performing, were caught off balance. "The cop is clearly employed by the criminal, to spread crime and disorder."

"Commie!" A bottle crashed at Chug's feet.

"Another vote for law and order," he remarked, and went right on. "Ever see a cop eat a banana?"

Ayn and Chug usually got a crowd by doing tricks. Ayn, in pink spangled tights and with her black hair flowing free, would swallow fire. Then Chug would take over. In immaculate evening dress, he'd stride about the cleared circle, producing fans of cards and lighted cigarettes from the air. Now that they had Ras to sell pamphlets down front, it became a smoother show. The crowds were bigger, but nastier.

Someone threw another bottle. Ayn picked up a big piece of it and took a healthy bite. The crowd was so quiet that all could hear her crunching glass. After a moment Chug resumed his speech, whipping them up to such wild enthusiasm that one or two reckless citizens bought nickel pamphlets from Ras.

"Why is our corporation government so worried about Mexico?" Chug asked. "Why are they willing to spend more money on building a wall against the Mexican poor than has been spent on the welfare of our own poor in fifty years? Could it be that mere humanity is becoming an embarrassment to our standard oil government?"

"Go back to Russia!"

"Russia is a state of mind. Why don't we all go back to a human state of mind? Why is it more illegal now to blow up an empty government office building, hurting no one, than to drop tons of bombs and burning gasoline on civilian farm families? Is it because the first is something the people do to a government, while the second—"

The next missile was a tire iron. It spun high against the lemon Jell-O sky and down, knocking off Chug's silk hat. Grinning desperately, he produced two bouquets of feather flowers. Under cover of this misdirection, Ayn escaped to get the car. She picked up Ras first, then circled the crowd to get Chug as the rocks and bottles started reaching for him. Ras opened the door and a brickbat clipped Chug in.

"That crowd wasn't angry," he said, mopping blood with a string of bright silk squares. "Someone started that. Someone in back."

"I know, I saw them," said Ras. "Lambs.* Four of them. I noticed when they got out of their Cadillac, with coats over their arms to hide the tire irons and bats. I tried to warn you, but they were too quick."

"Well, it shows they care."

Ayn, Chug & Ras

Although various people drifted in and out of the group centered on OK's Bookstore, Ayn and Chug were its constant twin nuclei. Formerly "The Amazing Lepantos," they had fallen

^{*} Lambs: a vigilante group borrowing rhetoric and enthusiasm from the late "silent patriot," S. Agnew: "They call us pigs, but we are really sacrificial lambs. We will not bandy epithets, but gladly give our lives to sweep this country clean of its plethora of pusillanimous liberals and their drugpushing, parasitical radical associates."

into revolution as a new gimmick, an addition to their repertoire. What a show-stopper, to finish with government for good! But now the gimmick had ensleeved them. Ayn ran the bookstore, which specialized in the occult and so drew those hungering for utopia.

But instead of the indigestible stone of Marxist tracts, Ayn gave them the bread of poetry. OK Press produced pamphlets calling no one brother, exhorting none to rise up or join in, making no demand to stand up and be counted. The Garden of Regularity was a spirited defense of cannibalism on the grounds of its "natural laxative effects," while Think Again, Mr. Big Business! was a pornographic radio play. One unaccountably popular item was a movie scenario by "Phil Nolan," called The U— S— of A—.

Chug was a spare-time anarchist, as he had been a spare-time Lepanto. His real job was mechanical designer for Will Doody Enterprises. It was Chug who choreographed the antics of the robot animals that made up each Doody Funville show.

Bison and beaver were programmed to dance and sing the stories of famous Americans, all of them Unforgettable Characters. A caribou related the musical story of the invention of the telephone by "Mr. Ring-a-ding-dingy Bell." Otters caroled of Abner Doubleday's game. The pleasanter parts of the legend of John D. Rockefeller were repeated by a shy, long-lashed brontosaurus.

In the Doody world it was always Saturday afternoon in a small Midwestern town of 1900. Science was represented by Tom Edison, poetry by Ed Guest, painting by Norm Rockwell and Grandma Moses, literature by Booth Tarkington and Horatio Alger, culture by the ice cream parlor and politics by the barbershop. And all was interpreted by cuddly robots.

Currently Chug was arranging the linkages of a duck to enable it to duckspeak of Thomas Paine:

> Yup, yup! He was a firebrand And his brand of fire Was more than old King George could stand

The song omitted mention of how Paine had died: old, lonely and so despised by the Americans whose freedom he'd labored for that they could not suffer him to sit in a stagecoach with decent folk. In spare moments at work, Chug drew sketches for impossibly elaborate singing bombs.

Ras became the third steadfast member of the group. He was an unemployed high school teacher who apparently drifted to them and stuck. Running the press, minding the store, handing out pamphlets—nothing was too much trouble for him. That's because he was, as everyone knew perfectly well, a police spy.

Ras found it hard to infiltrate them, not because they were secretive, but because they seemed to have no secrets at all. They were careless about publicity, and indeed, the group had never been given a name. Baffled by their openness, Ras kept digging. He never doubted for a moment that they had concealed a sinister purpose, like Chesterton's anarchists, under a cloak of jolly anarchy.

"Where do we keep the bombs?" he would ask.

"Up here," Ayn would say, tapping her head with solemn significance. "Truth be our dynamite."

"And Justice our permanganate," Chug would add. "And our blasting caps be Freedom, Honor and—"

"No, really. The real bombs."

They hated to disappoint him. "You'll know soon enough, Ras. It's just that we hate to tell you too soon, in case you fell into the hands of the police or anything."

Then Chug and Ayn would go off somewhere and laugh, while Ras went to report. It never occurred to them to "deal with" him in any way, or even to withdraw their friendship. He was, after all, a needed romantic figure, an Informer. Without him the group would have been dull indeed.

The Circuit Breaker

Ras was supposed to be giving old Mr. Eric von Jones tuition in mathematics. Shortly after each lesson, Mr. von Jones would take a piano lesson from an FBI agent. In this way Ras and the agent communicated without knowing each other's name or face.

"Have you completed the problems I assigned?"

Somehow asking Mr. von Jones the simplest question set off in him an elaborate cycle of clockwork twitches and tics: hand to mouth, roll of eye, lift of brow and shrug of shoulder. The cycle took a full minute to complete.

"Yes . . . here." The old man slid across the dining table a dozen sheets of carefully written equations. On the last page were Ras's orders.

"Fine. Now here's your corrected work from last time." Ras slid back to him a report on the OK's Bookstore group. "Now, shall we go over some trigonometric ratios?"

The twitches unwound once more. "Yes . . . I'd like that." Squaring his notebook with the corners of the table, he selected one of a dozen pencils all sharpened to the same length and headed the page "Notes."

"You don't need to really take notes," Ras whispered.

"I'm very . . . interested in ratios."

Ras looked at him: a corpse at attention. No doubt Mr. von Jones made the FBI man teach him scales too. That parsnipcolored face seemed to glow only at the prospect of some tiresome duty. Probably he would go on from one chore to another, carrying himself through routine motions for a few more years, until at last he was called to the great treadmill in the sky.

Dr. Lane's Secret Journal (II)

I can't understand how Hank knew they were going to build a wall along the border. One with a "white line . . . fifteen hundred miles long," which is a highway! It all seemed just babbling at the time, but now even the "good-bye Mexico" makes sense. I have also just learned that a Will Doody Funville is to be built somewhere in the area, against the wall. No doubt "Up against the wall, robot!" refers to Doody's robot animals!

This seems to be a genuine case of clairvoyance. There is just no other rational explanation!

Harry Boggs on Life

Harry gave an after-dinner lecture on the subject "Is There Life on Other Planets?" to a dozen other residents of Donald O'Connor bunkhouse. He concluded that there certainly was, and that it was of the utmost importance to get in contact with the Uranians.

"That's the real reason they're building this wall," he said. "With powerful telescopes, the Uranians will be able to see it."

Another important means of communication could be telepathy, he went on, but most of us had our telepathic equipment damaged by a lack of vital sea kelp in our diet. When he'd finished, four or five white heads in the audience nodded, as if in agreement. Brad Dexter's was among them; Harry had seen bundles of *Unvarnished Truth* on a cart, bound for the incinerator. And draped over the top bundle, what looked like a deflated rubber dolly . . .

No time for such thoughts now, of course. Time for Harry's important government work. Red-faced and breathless with vision, he hurried to his room and tuned in on Listening Post.

"Number 764882. Number 764882," said an announcer slowly, so he could copy it down. Two women's voices came on the air. ". . . a slipped disk. But all in all, it wasn't bad."

"Haven't they got any forjias? No? OK, bring me the roast sud. What did you say his name was?"

Harry was happier talking about his important government work than actually doing it, but he soldiered along. The FBI expected him to listen to an hour a day of this:

"Impinging upon my career. The great chain of buying, that's what it is. Impinging and impugning . . . impugn sort . . . Sri Mantovani . . . Einstein and people like Einstein said that the world was flat . . . reliance . . . bargain jay or meep . . ."

Harry vowed that he would never again say anything dull or unimportant in a public place.

MEMO: From the desk of A. Lincoln

I generally find that a man slow to get a joke is slow to win a battle. That is why I like to see my generals piss-eyed with laughter at all times. General Ned Allison tells me he knows of three soldiers, who had been imbibing, and were sent to a certain address in Gettysburg—but I expect that this is just one of Ned's ''leg-pullers.'' Hope you and Martha are well. I and the missus are tolerable.

The Séance

Chug and Ayn had wanted to go, so much so that Ras suspected a secret meeting. Perhaps this "séance" was really the place where they received their orders, from the Central Council of Anarchists. He'd volunteered to go with them, and they'd insisted he go in their place. There was his dilemma: Were they getting him out of the way while they went elsewhere, or were they trying to bluff him out of the séance?

He went, still vaguely expecting the Central Council, men in beards and dark glasses, calling themselves Breakfast, Coffee Break, Lunch, Tea, Dinner, Supper and Midnight Snack. . . .

The medium was an anemic old lady with knotty flesh hanging from her arms, Mrs. Ross. The others were Hank James (an old man with mad eyes), Dr. Lane (looked like a young optician), Mrs. Paris (a plump old lady with an asthmatic Pekingese and a hat of similar material) and Steiner, a young man with erupting skin.

As soon as the lights went out, Ras felt another presence, an enormous fat man who almost filled the room. In the deep blind blackness it was terrifying, for Ras dared not move for fear of touching the fat man.

The medium did not speak. After a moment, Ras said, "I thought it wasn't supposed to work with a skeptic in the room."

A deep, fat voice came back at once: "Don't be an ass. That's what these fraud mediums tell you, but don't listen to them. Actually it *only* works when there is *at least one* skeptic in the room." "Who are you?"

"Some call me God, Allah, Jaweh, the All, the Other, the Great Imponderable, Bingo, Mammon, the Light, names like that. Call me what you like, but call me in time for dinner."

Ras shuddered at the use of that particular noun. "Are you the chief of the anarchists, then?"

"Why must there be a chief? Maybe we all walk shoulder to shoulder, shank to shank. No leaders."

"Not your kind. You need kings to kill, at least. And presidents and bishops and gods—all targets for your bombs."

"Go on. I find it fascinating the way reactionaries assume all the bombs and guns are turned against them. Who raises the armies, builds the rockets, buys the bombs, draws the border and declares war, if not your kings and presidents?"

"I should warn you," Ras said through gritted teeth, "I am an agent of the FBI." The time for caution was past.

"That is obvious, and needs no warning. But you'd better warn me if you feel a change of heart coming on."

"No danger of that, my fat friend!"

"Ah! But if you say that, you are on the very brink of conversion to anarchy!"

"But you are the forces of anarchy. You are they who hate and fear the light, they who hate order because it is orderly, life because it is alive."

"Am I?"

Suddenly it was all wrong. Ras felt as if he had betrayed himself, to himself. *He* was the anarchist, and this voice the spirit of Law and Order, of J. Edgar Hoover, of—

"Damn you!" he shrieked. "Damn you, Chesterton!"

"Chesterton?" said the voice as the lights came up. "But my dear chap, Chesterton is simply other people."

Mrs. Ross opened her eyes and beamed. "My, how successful we have been!" she said. "Two strong emanations! I think I liked the one called Chesterson best, though the late FBI agent was nice too."

Dr. Lane's Secret Journal (III)

Dr. Veck has refused to accept my parapsychological explanation of Hank's predictions. He's refused to even discuss them. But I tried Hank out at a séance and also with ESP cards, with interesting results. At the séance I actually spoke with the spirit of Chesterton, and heard him curse himself! This may not be Hank's influence, of course. Still, there are the ESP scores. His psychosis seems to have brought him near to some crack in the fabric of futurity so that his inner eye sees through! If Dr. Veck continues trying to suppress this discovery of national importance, I may have to unleash Hank's terrible power upon him.

Hank's terrible power is that he knows the future—which means the future is in some way here already! We need only ask him what to do, and receive the awful impress of his ESPing reply.

P.S. I find my concentration on receiving ESP messages is much keener when I restrict my diet to brown foods—brown eggs, bread, sugar and rice—and to iron-rich foods such as molasses. Perhaps the iron sets up induction currents. But I must retain control. Hysteresis is the path to hysteria.

Ratio

"I haven't got any 'corrected problems' for you this time. In fact I feel like giving all this up. Why don't you just tell your piano teacher that I can't find out any more about their bombs. About anything. And I'm not sure I care."

"I... see. Well, then, how about the lesson?" "The lesson?"

"I've already learned some of it." To Ras's horror, the old man closed his eyes and began reciting from memory the tables of sines and cosines.

Maybe I am an anarchist. *The* anarchist. But is this law and order? Sitting here listening to a mad old man?

At 4°15', Ras lurched from the table.

"I . . . haven't finished."

"I know, excuse me, I feel a little sick." He stumbled into the dark hallway and snatched at a doorknob at random.

"No, wait! Don't open that!"

Ras crashed into a closet full of glass gallon jugs. As he recoiled, one jug tipped and fell, splattering its contents. The smell of stale piss rose about him. "My God!"

"I'm sorry. I'm . . . very retentive, you see."

When Ras had slammed out of the house, Mr. von Jones shrugged, cleared his throat, curled his right foot around a table leg, lifted an eyebrow, coughed. A terrible scene. A terrible young man. Damage had been done and repairs were needed. Mr. von Jones counted to ten thousand, to the metronome.

Resist, A Plot Is Brought Home; The Tour

Ras cornered Chug in a café. "Listen, I have a—" He meant "confession to make," but finished "plan." His voice shook, and his eyes reflected the peculiar disagreeable yellow of the Formica tables. "We'll blow up the White House and kill the President."

Keeping his face straight, Chug nodded. "OK. I've got an idea for the bomb to do it with." On the yellow Formica he sketched his design for an enormous steam-driven duck that could sing "Taking a Chance on Love" while delivering an explosive egg.

Harry Boggs could hardly believe his good luck. But by jingo, there was no doubt about it. This "Ras" and his pal "Chug" were plotting assassination. This was the real thing!

Countdown

The piano teacher had brought along a piano tuner. "Listen, Mr. von Jones, we're making the raid today. We have to know the name of our contact man on the inside. I mean, is he still working for us? We haven't had a report for weeks."

"I . . . a report?"

The two men leaned over him. "Mr. von Jones? Are you all right?"

"Look at this, Don. Pupils are different sizes. This guy's had a stroke."

"I'm . . . fine, really. And I know the young man you mean. But his name just . . . I didn't retain it."

The raid proceeded. The FBI succeeded in arresting all members of the gang except the one called "Ras," who they suspected was the ringleader. The rest were interrogated and packed off to Fort Nixon for retraining as good citizens.

My Struggle

Late that night, the President worked at his memoirs in the small office attached to his bedroom.

. . . and all of the Negroes wanted to shake my hand!! Combined with the rest of the day's defeats, the pressures of responsibility for this heaviest office in the land, it was almost enough to shake my faith in my own destiny. But not quite.

I had much to be weary about. Iowa, Kansas and Nebraska were virtually a dustbowl. South Africa and its satellite nations were getting tough about Tanzania. The War still dragged on. The steel and rail strikes still dragged on. The cities—better not spoken of. Yet I had time in the midst of the storm to share a quiet joke with General Hare. I asked if he knew what kind of boat would be a slow boat to China? The answer was, a gravy boat!

The Great Seal enjoyed his joke all over again. It was the only one he'd ever made, unless you counted the Great Wall of Mexico.

The Reagan Room

"What I want to know," said one of the Roosevelts to another as they went off duty, "is what he does in the Reagan Room? I've seen trays of food go in there, and a doctor."

The other smiled the famous Roosevelt smile. "I thought you knew. He keeps a wounded soldier in there. Some say he just sits and chats with him, gives him encouragement. But others say it's very odd that he particularly asked for a soldier with a belly wound."

"Just a minute!" The first FDR scowled. "That's the President you're talking about, mister. Watch yourself!"

"Now calm down. Listen, even the President might do something he's not very proud of now and then, right? I mean, he's only phocine, for Christ's sake. Try to see this thing in the greater perspective of his brilliant career."

"OK, OK. I just said watch it, that's all."

4. THE COCKROACH

Dr. Lane's Secret Journal (IV)

Hank has tapped out his ESP message in no uncertain terms. I see that Dr. Veck is an obstacle to science. My task is clear, for Hank has sent me a picture of Dr. Veck lying in a pool of blood. It must be done. I am but the instrument of fate, or of G. K. Chesterton. Perhaps they are one and the same. O my restless, questioning soul, thirsting for truth!

Later. I did it. I killed Veck in the middle of his work on a very interesting paper on socialism and epilepsy. Hank took the news calmly, considering that he is now off drugs.

"We're all of us doomed anyway," he said.

"Doomed?"

"The Wall. The Wall was my idea in the first place."

"You influenced future ev-"

"I influenced my nephew. A long time ago I told my nephew an idea of mine for a Great Wall of Mexico. It was to be a giant decorated sculpture. My nephew much later became a special 'creative' adviser to the President. Obviously he has put my idea into effect. Young Bill Filcup was always very enterprising." "But the doom?"

"Well, you and I, and this hospital-prison, and a lot of other people and places, are the decoration."

I said I didn't understand. He laughed.

"We just haven't been applied yet," he said.

The meaning of all this escapes me. It may be clear one day. From my window I can see the Wall, and the magnificent sunset. I

Harry

Harry thought he smelled something burning.

The U—— *S*—— *of A*——

A movie scenario by "Phil Nolan"

- Scene I. A peak in Darien. Cortez stands gazing upon the Pacific, which, it is clear from the way his men exchange glances, he has just named. He is silent.
- Scene II. Rapidly turning calendar pages: November 28, 29, Brumaire, 1666, Aries, November 30, 31, Ventose, 6379, 125, Thursday, 5427, New Moon.
- Scene III. The Delaware River. Washington approaches, throws silver dollar across.
- Scene IV. Old Glory flutters in breeze. Offscreen voices hum "God Save the King."
- Scene V. Japanese diplomats walking out of League of Nations. Offscreen lugubrious voice: "The treacherous Japanese insisted they were a peace-loving people, and we believed them. Then—the stab in the back that brought Mr. and Mrs. America
- to their senses. On December 7, 1941—(cut to atomic bomb explosion)—*Pearl Harbor!*"
- Scene VI. Statue of Liberty, holding up a sword. Same voice: "At last, just as Britain has its Neptunia ruling the waves,
- just as France has its 'La belle dame sans merci,' now America has Mrs. Liberty, welcoming the storm-tossed aliens." (Karl Rossman passes.) "Welcome! Welcome to the melting pot!"

Scene VII. (Animation) Caldron marked MELTING POT. Ladle pours in liquified "masses." Caldron slowly sags and melts.

A Special Message from the President

The President's black-and-white image appeared on the television screen surrounded by a black condolence border. He seemed almost too humble to have a clear image. Instead the fuzzy, bleached patches of his face, oddly patterned by liver spots and furrows, gave him the look of a soiled etching.

"My countrymen, it is a grave announcement that I must make to you this evening. What I am about to say is a block of sadness and grief in the neighborhood of my heart, as I am sure it will be in yours.

"Tonight several nuclear explosions occurred at different places along the population barrier between the United States and Mexico. These explosions, let me make this perfectly clear, were accidental. No one is to blame. No one could have avoided them. Certain technical failures in our security system set off a chain of events—and Nature took its course.

"Still, there's no denying that many thousands, millions, rather, of people have been killed. Since these bombs were located on top of high-rise retirement ranches and on top of mental hospitals, they have killed many unfortunate persons, and that is to be regretted. It is also regrettable that a lethal zone has been created along our border."

The black border vanished. Jubilant music swelled behind his voice as our leader intoned: "On the positive side, very few of our troops in the area were injured. The Army reports only a dozen casualties. Some of Will Doody's Funville projects have been destroyed, but I am going to ask Congress to compensate Mr. Doody for this terrible loss. As for the Wall itself, it has been badly burned and cratered in spots. Luckily it protects our border yet with a barrier of radiation. For the present, we are vigilant, but safe. And for the future?"

Suddenly the air about the gray President was filled with tiny, bright-colored figures; animated elves, fairies, butterflies and bluebirds, tiny pink bats in spangled hose, flying chipmunks and dancing dragonflies. Smiling, he too burst into color. "The future is ours, my countrymen! We will rebuild our Wall taller and stronger and safer than ever, so secure that it will last a thousand years! Come! Help me make this country strong!" He extended an arm upon which doves and butterflies were alighting already. And as the chorus sang ". . . from sea to shin-ing sea," twittering bluebirds modestly covered the scene with a Star-Spangled Curtain.

Epilogue

Ras turned up again in Red Square, conspicuous in a black cape and a tall silk hat. The cane in his hand was a sword cane, naturally, and the whiskers hooked over his ears on spectacle bows. A tourist gaped for a moment, as Ras harangued a crowd of pigeons.

When he'd finished, he produced a round black bomb, lit it and tossed it into the crowd. Its small pop was enough to attract the notice of two yawning policemen, who came over to examine the three dead pigeons.

As, still stifling yawns, they escorted him away, Ras shouted slogans into the faces of other tourists. Probably they knew no English, for they stared sullenly, all but one man, who sought an explanation in his guidebook.

The Village

Kate Wilhelm

Mildred Carey decided to walk to the post office early, before the sun turned the two blocks into a furnace. "They've done something to the weather," she said to her husband, packing his three sandwiches and Thermos of lemonade. "Never used to be this hot this early."

"It'll get cooler again. Always does."

She followed him to the door and waved as he backed out of the drive. The tomato plants she had set out the day before were wilted. She watered them, then started to walk slowly to town. With a feeling of satisfaction she noticed that Mrs. Mareno's roses had black .spot. Forcing the blooms with too much fertilizer just wasn't good for them.

Mike Donatti dozed as he awaited orders to regroup and start the search-and-clear maneuver. Stilwell nudged him. "Hey, Mike, you been over here before?"

"Nope. One fucken village is just like the others. Mud or dust. That's the only fucken difference." Stilwell was so new that he was sunburned red. Everyone else in the company was burned black. "Man, could we pass," they liked to say to Latimore, who couldn't.

Mr. Peters was sweeping the sidewalk before the market. "Got some good fresh salami," he said. "Ed made it over the weekend."

"You sure Ed made it, not Buz? When Buz makes it, he uses too much garlic. What's he covering up is what I want to know."

"Now, Miz Carey, you know he's not covering up. Some folks like it hot and strong."

"I'll stop back by after I get the mail."

The four Henry children were already out in the street, filthy,

chasing each other randomly. Their mother was not in sight. Mildred Carey pursed her lips. Her Mark never had played in the street in his life.

She dropped in the five and dime, not to buy anything but to look over the flats of annuals: petunias, marigolds, nasturtiums. "They sure don't look healthy," she said to Doris Offinger.

"They're fine, Miz Carey. Brother bought them fresh this morning from Connors down at Midbury. You know Connors has good stock."

"How's Larry getting along? Still in the veterans' hospital at Lakeview?"

"Yes. He'll be out in a couple of weeks, I guess." Doris's pretty face remained untroubled. "They've got such good doctors down there, I hate to see him get so far from them all, but he wants to come home."

"How can these people stand this heat all the time?" Stilwell said after a moment. The sun wasn't up yet, but it was 86 degrees, humidity near 100 percent.

"People, he says. Boy, ain't you even been briefed? People can't stand it, that's the first clue." Mike sighed and sat up. He lighted a cigarette. "Boy, back home in August. You know the hills where I come from are cold, even in August?"

"Where's that?"

"Vermont. I can remember plenty of times it snowed in August. Nights under a blanket."

"Well, he can help you out here in the store. With his pension and the store and all, the two of you are set, aren't you? Isn't that Tessie Hetherton going in Peters' market?"

"I didn't notice her. Did you want one of those flats, Miz Carey?"

"No. They aren't healthy. Connors must have culled the runts and set them out." She stood in the doorway squinting to see across the way to Peters' market. "I'm sure it was. And she told me she's too arthritic to do any more housework. I'll just go talk to her." "I don't think she will, though. Miz Avery wanted her on Wednesdays and she said no. You know Mr. Hetherton's got a job? With the paper mill."

"Shtt. That won't last. They'll pay off a few of last winter's bills and then he'll start to complain about his liver or something and she'll be hustling for work. I know that man." She left the store without looking back, certain that Doris would be eyeing the price tags of the flats. "You take care of yourself, Doris. You're looking peaked. You should get out in the sun."

"Mrs. Hetherton, you're looking fit again," Mildred Carey said, cornering the woman as she emerged from the store.

"Warm weather's helped some."

"Look, can you possibly come over Thursday morning? You know the garden club meets this week, and I can't possibly get ready without some help."

"Well, I just don't know. . . . Danny's dead set against my going out to work again."

"But they're going to have to close down the mill. And then where will he be?"

"Close it down? Why? Who says?"

"It's been in the papers for weeks now. All those dead fish, and the stink. You know that committee came up and took samples and said they're the ones responsible. And they can't afford to change over the whole process. They're going to move instead."

"Oh, that. Danny said don't hold your breath. They're making a study, and then they'll have to come up with a plan and have it studied, and all in all it's going to take five years or even more before it all comes to a head."

"Hm. Another big kill and the department of health . . ."

Mrs. Hetherton laughed and Mildred Carey had to smile too. "Well, anyway, can you come over just this time? For this one meeting."

"Sure, Miz Carey. Thursday morning? But only half a day."

The school bus turned the corner and rolled noisily down the broad new street. The two women watched it out of sight. "Have you seen the Tomkins boys lately?" Mildred Carey asked. "Hair down to here."

"Winona says they're having someone in to talk about drugs. I asked her point-blank if there are drugs around here and she said no, but you never can tell. The kids won't tell you nothing."

"Well, I just thank God that Mark is grown up and out of it all."

"He's due home soon now, isn't he?"

"Seven weeks. Then off to college in the fall. I told him that he's probably safer over there than at one of the universities right now." They laughed and moved apart. "See you Thursday."

"Listen, Mike, when you get back, you'll go through New York, won't you? Give my mother a call, will you? Just tell her—"

"What? That you got jungle rot the first time out and it's gone to your brain?"

"Just call her. Say I'm fine. That's all. She'll want to have you over for dinner, or take you to a good restaurant, something. Say you don't have time. But it'd mean a lot to her to have you call."

"Sure. Sure. Come on, we're moving."

They walked for two hours without making contact. The men were straggling along in two uneven columns at the sides of the road. The dirt road was covered with recent growth, no mines. The temperature was going to hit 100 any second. Sweat and dirt mixed on faces, arms, muddy sweat trickled down shirts.

The concrete street was a glare now. Heat rose in patterns that shifted and vanished and rose again. Mildred Carey wondered if it hadn't been a mistake to rebuild the street, take out the maples and make it wide enough for the traffic that they predicted would be here in another year or two. She shrugged and walked more briskly toward the post office. That wasn't her affair. Her husband, who should know, said it was necessary for the town to grow. After being in road construction for twentyfive years, he should know. Fran Marple and Dodie Wilson waved to her from outside the coffee shop. Fran looked overdue and miserable. Last thing she needed was to go in the coffee shop and have pastry. Mildred Carey smiled at them and went on.

Claud Emerson was weighing a box for Bill Stokes. Bill leaned against the counter smoking, flicking ashes on the floor. "Don't like it here, get out, that's what I say. Goddamn kids with their filthy clothes and dirty feet. Bet they had marijuana up there. Should have called the troopers, that's what I should have done."

"They was on state land, Bill. You had no call to run them off."

"They didn't know that. You think I'm going to let them plop themselves down right outside my front door? Let 'em find somewhere else to muck about."

Claud Emerson stamped the box. "One seventy-two."

Stilwell and Mike were following Laski, Berat and Humboldt. Berat was talking.

"You let it stick out, see, and come at them with your M16 and you know what they watch! Man, they never seen nothing like it! Scared shitless by it. Tight! Whooee! Tight and hot!"

Stilwell looked as if he saw a green monster. Mike laughed and lit another cigarette. The sun was almost straight up when the lieutenant called for a break. He and Sergeant Durkins consulted a map and Humboldt swore at great length. "They've got us lost, the bastards. This fucken road ain't even on their fucken map."

Mildred Carey looked through the bills and advertising in her box, saving the letter from Mark for last. She always read them twice, once very quickly to be sure that he was all right, then again, word for word, pausing to pronounce the strange syllables aloud. She scanned the scrawled page, then replaced it in its envelope to be reread at home with coffee.

Bill Stokes's jeep roared outside the door, down the street to screech to a halt outside the feed store. Mildred shook her head. "He's a mean man." "Yep," Claud Emerson said. "Always was, always will be, I reckon. Wonder where them kids spent the night after he chased them."

Durkins sent out two scouts and the rest of them waited, cursing and sweating. A helicopter throbbed over them, drowned out their voices, vanished. The scouts returned. Durkins stood up.

"OK. About four miles. The gooks are there, all right. Or will be again tonight. It's a free-fire zone, and our orders are to clean it out. Let's go."

Loud voices drifted across the street and they both looked toward the sound. "Old Dave's at it again," Claud Emerson said, frowning. "He'll have himself another heart attack, that's what."

"What good does arguing do anyway? Everybody around here knows what everybody else thinks and nobody ever changes. Just what good does it do?" She stuffed her mail into her purse. "Just have to do the best you can. Do what's right and hope for the best." She waved good-bye.

She still had to pick up cottage cheese and milk. "Maybe I'll try that new salami," she said to Peters. "Just six slices. Don't like to keep it more than a day. Just look at those tomatoes! Sixty-nine a pound! Mr. Peters, that's a disgrace!"

"Field grown, Miz Carey. Up from Georgia. Shipping costs go up and up, you know." He sliced the salami carefully, medium thick.

A new tension was in them now and the minesweepers walked gingerly on the road carpeted with green sprouts. Stilwell coughed again and again, a meaningless bark of nervousness. Durkins sent him to the rear, then sent Mike back with him. "Keep an eye on the fucken bastard," he said. Mike nodded and waited for the rear to catch up with him. The two brothers from Alabama looked at him expressionlessly as they passed. They didn't mind the heat either, he thought, then spat. Stilwell looked sick.

"Is it a trap?" he asked later. "Who the fuck knows?" "Company C walked into an ambush, didn't they?"

"They fucked up."

Mildred Carey put her milk on the checkout counter alongside the cottage cheese. Her blue housedress was wet with perspiration under her arms and she could feel a spot of wetness on her back when her dress touched her skin. That Janice Samuels, she thought, catching a glimpse of the girl across the street, with those shorts and no bra, pretending she was dressing to be comfortable. Always asking about Mark. And him, asking about her in his letters.

"That's a dollar five," Peters said.

They halted again less than a mile from the village. The lieutenant called for the helicopters to give cover and to close off the area. Durkins sent men around the village to cover the road leading from it. There was no more they could do until the helicopters arrived. There were fields under cultivation off to the left.

"What if they're still there?" Stilwell asked, waiting.

"You heard Durkins. This is a free-fire zone. They'll be gone."

"But what if they haven't?"

"We clear the area."

Stilwell wasn't satisfied, but he didn't want to ask the questions. He didn't want to hear the answers. Mike looked at him with hatred. Stilwell turned away and stared into the bushes at the side of the road.

"Let's go."

There was a deafening beating roar overhead and Mildred Carey and Peters went to the door to look. A green and brown helicopter hovered over the street, then moved down toward the post office, casting a grotesque shadow on the white concrete. Two more of the monstrous machines came over, making talk impossible. There was another helicopter to the north; their throb was everywhere as if the clear blue sky had loosened a rain of them.

From the feed store entrance Bill Stokes shouted something lost in the din. He raced to his jeep and fumbled for something

under the seat. He straightened up holding binoculars and started to move to the center of the street looking through them down the highway. One of the helicopters dipped, banked and turned, and there was a spray of gunfire. Bill Stokes fell, jerked several times, then lay still. Now others began to run in the street, pointing and shouting and screaming. O'Neal and his hired hand ran to Bill Stokes and tried to lift him. Fran Marple and Dodie Wilson had left the coffee shop, were standing outside the door; they turned and ran back inside. A truck rounded the corner at the far end of the street and again the helicopter fired; the truck careened out of control into cars parked outside the bank. One of the cars was propelled through the bank windows. The thunder of the helicopters swallowed the sound of the crash and the breaking glass and the screams of the people who ran from the bank, some of them bleeding, clutching their heads, or arms. Katharine Ormsby got to the side of the street, collapsed there. She crawled several more feet, then sprawled out and was still.

Mildred Carey backed into the store, her hands over her mouth. Suddenly she vomited. Peters was still on the sidewalk. She tried to close the door, but he flung it open, pushing her toward the rear of the store.

"Soldiers!" Peters yelled. "Soldiers coming!"

They went in low, on the sides of the road, ready for the explosion of gunfire, or the sudden eruption of a claymore. The helicopters' noise filled the world as they took up positions. The village was small, a hamlet. It had not been evacuated. The word passed through the company: slopes. They were there. A man ran into the street holding what could have been a grenade, or a bomb, or anything. One of the helicopters fired on him, there was a second burst of fire down the road and a vehicle burned. Now the company was entering the village warily. Mike cursed the slopes for their stupidity in staying.

Home was all Mildred Carey could think of. She had to get home. She ran to the back of the store and out to the alley that the delivery trucks used. She ran all the way home, and panting, with a pain in her chest, she rushed frantically through the house pulling down shades, locking doors. Then she went upstairs where she could see the entire town. The soldiers were coming in, crouched over, on both sides of the road, with their rifles out before them. She began to laugh suddenly; tears streaming, she ran downstairs again to fling open the door and shout.

"They're ours," she screamed toward the townspeople, laughing and crying all at once. "You fools, they're ours!"

Two of the khaki-clad GIs approached her, still pointing their guns at her. One of them said something, but she couldn't understand his words. "What are you doing here?" she cried. "You're American soldiers! What are you doing?"

The larger of the two grabbed her arm and twisted it behind her. She screamed and he pushed her toward the street. He spoke again, but the words were foreign to her. "I'm an American! For God's sake, this is America! What are you doing?" He hit her in the back with the rifle and she staggered and caught the fence to keep her balance. All down the street the people were being herded to the center of the highway. The soldier who had entered her house came out carrying her husband's hunting rifle, the shotgun, Mark's old .22. "Stop!" she shrieked at him. "Those are legal!" She was knocked down by the soldier behind her. He shouted at her and she opened her eyes to see him aiming the rifle at her head.

She scrambled to her feet and lurched forward to join the others in the street. She could taste blood and there was a stabbing pain in her jaw where teeth had been broken by her fall. A sergeant with a notebook was standing to one side. He kept making notations in it as more of the townspeople were forced from their houses and stores into the street.

Mike Donatti and Stilwell herded a raving old woman to the street; when she tried to grab a gun, Mike Donatti knocked her down and would have killed her then, but she was crying, obviously praying, and he simply motioned for her to join the others being rounded up.

The sun was high now, the heat relentless as the people were crowded closer together by each new addition. Some of the small children could be heard screaming even over the noise of the helicopters. Dodie Wilson ran past the crowd, naked from the waist down, naked and bleeding. A soldier caught her and he and another one carried her jerking and fighting into O'Neal's feed store. Her mouth was wide open in one long unheard scream. Old Dave ran toward the lieutenant, clutching at him, yelling at him in a high-pitched voice that it was the wrong town, damn fools, and other things that were lost. A smoothfaced boy hit him in the mouth, then again in the stomach, and when he fell moaning, he kicked him several times about the head. Then he shot him. Mildred Carey saw Janice Samuels being dragged by her wrists and she threw herself at the soldiers who fought with her, their bodies hiding her from sight. They moved on, and she lay in a shining red pool that spread and spread. They tied Janice Samuels to the porch rail of Gordon's real estate office, spread her legs open, and half a dozen men alternately raped and beat her. The sergeant yelled in the gibberish they spoke and the soldiers started to move the people as a lump toward the end of town.

Mike Donatti took up a post at the growing heap of weapons and watched the terrorized people. When the order came to move them out, he prodded and nudged, and when he had to, he clubbed them to make sure they moved as a unit. Some of them stumbled and fell, and if they didn't move again, they were shot where they lay.

The filthy Henry children were screaming for their mother. The biggest one, a girl with blond hair stringing down her back, darted away and ran down the empty street. The lieutenant motioned to the troops behind the group and after an appreciable pause, there was a volley of shots and the child was lifted and for a moment flew. She rolled when she hit the ground again. Marjory Loomis threw herself down on top of her baby, and shots stilled both figures.

The people were driven to the edge of town where the high-

way department had dug the ditch for a culvert that hadn't been laid yet. The sergeant closed his notebook and turned away. The firing started.

The men counted the weapons then, and searched the buildings methodically. Someone cut down a girl who had been tied to a rail. She fell in a heap. Fires were started. The lieutenant called for the helicopters to return to take them back to base camp.

Berat walked with her arm about Stilwell's shoulders, and they laughed a lot. Smoke from the fires began to spread horizontally, head high. Mike lighted another cigarette and thought about the cool green hills of Vermont and they waited to be picked up.

In Behalf of the Product

Kit Reed

Of course I owe everything I am today to Mr. Manuel Omerta, my personal representative, who arranged for practically everything, including the dental surgery and the annulment, but I want all of you wonderful people to know that I couldn't have done any of it without the help and support of the most wonderful person of all, my Mom. It was Mom who kept coming with the superenriched formula and the vitamins, she was the one who twirled my hair around her finger every time she washed it, it was Mom who put Vaseline on my eyelashes and paid for the trampoline lessons because she had faith in me. Anybody coming in off the street might have thought I was just an ordinary little girl, but not my mom; why, the first thing I remember is her standing me up on a table in front of everybody. I had on my baby tapshoes and a big smile and Mom was saying, Vonnie is going to be Miss Wonderful Land of Ours someday.

Even then she knew.

Well, here I am, and I can't tell you all how happy I am to be up here, queen of the nation, an inspiration and a model for all those millions and billions of American girls who can grow up to be just like me. And this is only the beginning. Why, after I spend a year touring the country, meeting the people and introducing them to the product, after I walk down the runway at next year's pageant and put the American eagle floral piece into the arms of my successor, and she cries, anything can happen. I might go on to a career as an internationally famous television personality, or if I'd rather, I could become a movie queen or a spot welder, or I could marry Stanley, if he's still speaking to me, and raise my own little Miss Wonderful Land of Ours. Why, the world is mine, except of course for the iron curtain countries and their sympathizers, and after this wonderful year, who knows?

I just wish Daddy could be here to share this moment, but I guess that's just too much to hope, and I want you to know, Daddy, wherever you are out there, I forgive you, and if you'll only turn yourself in and make a public confession, I know the authorities will be lenient with you.

And that goes for you too, Sal. I know it was hard on you, always being the ugly older sister, but I really don't think you should have done what you did, and to show you how big I can be, if the acid scars came out as bad as I think they did, Mom and I are perfectly willing to let bygones be bygones and sink half the prize money into plastic surgery for you. I mean, after all, it's the least we can do. Why, there aren't even any charges outstanding against you; after all, nobody was really hurt—I mean, since Mr. Omerta happened to come in when he did and bumped your arm, and the acid went all over you instead of me.

I know I am the center of all eyes standing up here, I am the envy of millions, and I love the way the silver gown feels, slithering down over me like so much baby oil. I even love the weight of the twenty-foot-long red, white and blue velvet cloak, and every once in a while I want to reach up and touch the rhinestone stars and lightning bolts in my tiara but of course I can't because I am still holding the American eagle floral piece, the emblem of everything I have ever wanted. Of course you girls envy me. I used to get a stomachache just from looking at the pageant on TV. I would look at the winner smiling out over the Great Seal and I would think: Die, and let it be me. I just want you girls to know it hasn't all been bread and roses, there have been sacrifices, and Mom and Mr. Omerta had to work very hard, so if you're out there watching and thinking: What did she do to deserve that? let me tell you, the answer is, Plenty.

The thing is, without Mr. Omerta, poor Mom and I wouldn't have known where to begin. Before Mr. Omerta, we were just rookies in the ball game of life; we didn't have a prayer. There we were at the locals in the Miss Tiny Miss contest, me in my pink tutu and the little sequined tiara, I even had a wand; it was my first outing and I came in with a fourth runner-up. If it had been up to me I would have turned in my wand right then and there. Maybe Mom would have given up too, if it hadn't been for Mr. Omerta, but there must have been something about me, star quality, because he picked me out of all those other little girls, *me*. He didn't even give the winner a second look, he just came over to us in his elegant kidskin suit and the metallic shoes. We didn't know it then, but it was Mr. Manuel Omerta, and he was going to change my life.

I was a loser, I must have looked a mess; the winner and the first runner-up were over on the platform crying for the camera and pinching each other in between lovey-dovey hugs, it was all over for the day, Mom and I were hanging up our cleats and packing away our uniforms when Mr. Omerta licked Mom's ear and said, "You two did a lot of things wrong today, but I want to tell you I like your style." I said, Oh, thank you, and went on crying but Mom, she shushed me and hissed at me to listen up. She knew what she was doing too; she wasn't just going to say, Oh, thank you, and take the whole thing sitting down. She said, "What do you mean, a few things wrong?" and Mr. Omerta said. "Listen, I can give you a few pointers. Come over here." I couldn't hear what he said to her but she kept nodding and looking over at me and by the time I went over to tell them they were closing the armory and we had better get out, they were winding up the agreement; Mr. Omerta said, "And I'll only take fifty percent."

"Don't you fifty-percent me," Mom said. "You know she's got the goods or you never would have picked her."

"All right," he said, "forty-five percent."

Mom said, "She has naturally curly hair."

"You're trying to ruin me."

First Mr. Omerta pretended to walk out on Mom and then Mom pretended to take me away and they finally settled it; he would become my personal representative, success guaranteed, and he would take forty-two point eight percent off the top. "The first thing," he said. "Tap dancing is a lousy talent. No big winner has ever made it on tap dancing alone. You have to throw in a gimmick, like pantomime. Something really different."

"Sword swallowing," Mom said, in a flash.

"Keep coming, I really like your style." They bashed it back and forth for another few minutes. "Another thing," Mr. Omerta said. "We've got to fix those teeth; they look kind of, I don't know, foreign."

Mom said, "Got it. Mr. Omerta, I think we're going to make a winning team."

It turned out Mr. Omerta was more or less between things and besides, to do a good job he was going to have to be on the spot, so he ended up coming home with us. Dad was a little surprised at first but he got used to it, or at least he acted like he was used to it; he only yelled first thing in the morning, while Sal and I were still hiding in our beds and Mr. Omerta was still out on the sun porch with the pillow over his head, stacking Zs. We fixed the sun porch up for Mr. Omerta; the only inconvenience was when you wanted to watch TV you had to go in and sit on the end of the Hide-a-Bed and sometimes it made him mad and other times it didn't; you were in trouble either way. Sal used to hit him on the knuckles with her leg brace; she said if you just kept smacking him he would get the idea and quit. He didn't bother me much. I was five at the time, and later on I was, you know, the Property; in the end I was going to be up against the Virginity Test and even when you passed that they did a lot of close checking to be sure you hadn't been fooling around. If you are going to represent this Wonderful Land of Ours, you have to be a model for all American womanhood; I mean, you wouldn't put pasties on Columbia the Gem of the Ocean or photograph the Statue of Liberty without her concrete robe, which is why I am so grateful to Mr. Omerta for busting in on Stanley and me in Elkton, Maryland, even if we were legally married by a justice of the peace. We

could have taken care of the married part, but there was the other thing; it isn't widely known but if you flunk the Test in the semifinals you are tied to the Great Seal in front of everybody and all the other contestants get to cast the first stone.

I cried but Mr. Omerta said not to be foolish, I was only engaging in the classic search for daddy anyway, just like in all the books. I suppose he was right, except that by the time Stanley and I ran away together Daddy had been gone for ten years. We were sitting around one night when I was eight. I had just won the state Miss Subteen title and Mr. Omerta and Mom were clashing glasses; before he put the prize check less his percentage into my campaign fund, Mr. Omerta had lost his head and bought us a couple of bottles of pink champagne. Then Daddy got fed up or something, he threw down his glass and stood up, yelling, "You're turning my daughter into a Kewpie doll." Sally started giggling and Mom slapped her and let my father have it all in one fluid motion. She said, "Henry, it's the patriotic thing to do." He said, "I don't see what that has to do with anything, and besides . . ."

I got terribly quiet. Mom and Mr. Omerta were both leaning forward, saying, "Besides?"

I tried to shut him up but it was too late.

"Besides, what's so wonderful about a country that lets this kind of thing go on?"

"Oh, Daddy," I cried, but it was already too late. Mr. Omerta was already on the hot line to the House Un-American Activities Committee Patrol Headquarters; he didn't even hear Daddy yelling that the whole thing was a gimmick to help sell the war. By that time we could hear sirens. Daddy crashed through the back window and landed in the flower bed and that was the last anybody ever saw of him.

Well, we do have to go and visit the troops a lot and we do lead those victory rallies as part of our public appearance tour in behalf of the product, but it's not anything like Daddy said. I mean, any girl would do as much, and if you happen to be named Miss Wonderful Land of Ours, it's an honor and a privilege. I keep dreaming that when I start my nationwide personal appearance tour I will find Daddy standing in the audience in Detroit or Nebraska, he will be carrying a huge UP AMERICA sign and I can take him to my bosom and forgive him and he'll come back home to live.

Now that I think about it, Stanley does look a little bit like Daddy, and maybe that's why I was attracted to him. I mean, it's no fun growing up in a household where there are no men around, unless, of course, you want to count Mr. Omerta, who did keep saying he wanted to be a father to me, but that wasn't exactly what he meant. I was allowed to go to public high school so I could be a cheerleader because that can make or break you if you're going for Miss Teen-Age Wonderful Land of Ours, which of course is only a way station, but it's a lot of good personal experience. As it turned out I only got to the state finals. I could have gone to the nationals as an alternate but Mr. Omerta said it would be bad exposure and besides, we made enough out of the state contest to see us through until it was time for the main event. Anyway, Stanley was captain of the football team the year I made head cheerleader, and at first Mr. Omerta encouraged us because he could take pictures of us sitting in the local soda fountain, one soda and two straws, or me handing a big armful of goldenrod to Stanley after the big game. The thing I liked about Stanley, he wasn't interested in One Thing Only, he really loved me for my soul. When I came in after a date Mr. Omerta would sneak upstairs and sit on the end of my bed in his bathrobe while I told him all about it; you would have thought we were college roommates after the junior prom. Stanley loved me so much I know he would have waited but I decided there were more important things than being Miss Wonderful Land of Ours so the night of graduation we ran off to Elkton, Maryland, and if Mr. Omerta had got there five minutes later it would have been too late.

Whatever you might think about what he did to Stanley, you've got to give him credit for doing his job. He was my personal representative, he got me through the Miss Preteen and

the Miss Adolescent with flying colors, and saw me through Miss Teen-Age Wonderful Land of Ours; he got me named Miss Our Town and it was all only a matter of time, I was a cinch for Miss State, and once I got to the nationals, well, with my talent gig, I was a natural, but here I was in Elkton, Maryland, I was just about to throw it all away for a pot of marriage when Mr. Omerta came crashing in and saved the day. What happened was, I was just melting into Stanley's arms when the door banged open and there were about a hundred people in the room, Mr. Omerta in the vanguard. I could have killed him then and there and he knew it. He took me by the shoulders and he looked me in the eye and said, "Brace up, baby, you owe it to your country. I will not let you smirch yourself before the pageant. Death before dishonor," Mr. Omerta said, and then he yelled, "There he is, grab him," and they dragged poor Stanley away. I'll never know how he managed to tail us, but he had the propaganda squad with him and before I could do a thing they had poor Stanley arrested on charges of menacing a national monument, they threw in a couple of perversion charges so Mr. Omerta could push through the annulment, and now poor Stanley is on ice until the end of next year. By that time my tour as Miss Wonderful Land of Ours will be over and maybe Mr. Omerta will let bygones be bygones and clear Stanley's name so he and I can get married again; after all, that's the only way I will ever be eligible to become Mrs. Wonderful Land of Ours, and you can't let yourself slip into retirement just because you've already been to the top.

But I haven't told you anything about my talent. I mean, it's possible to take lessons in Frankness and Sincerity, but talent is the one thing you can't fake. Mr. Omerta told us right off that tap dancing alone just wouldn't make it, but every time I tried sword swallowing (Mom's idea) I gagged and had to stop, but the trouble with fire eating was that the first time I burned my face, so naturally after that they couldn't even get me to try tapping and twirling the flaming baton. We thought about pantomime but of course that would rule out the tap and just then Mr. Omerta had an inspiration: he got me an accordion. So I went into the Miss Tiny Miss contest the next year tapping and playing the accordion, but there was a girl who sang patriotic songs and tapped the V for Victory in Morse code, and that gave Mr. Omerta an even better idea. To make a long story short, when I got up here tonight to do my talent for the last time, it was a routine we have been working on for years, and I owe it all to Mr. Omerta, with an extra little bow for Mom, whose idea it was to dress me in the Betsy Ross costume with the cutouts and the skirt ripped off at the crotch, our tattered forefathers and all that, and if you all enjoyed my interpretation of "O Beautiful for Spacious Skies" done in song and dance and pantomime with interludes on the accordion, I want to say a humble thank you, thank you one and all.

I guess not many of you wonderful people know how close I came to not making it. First there was that terrible moment in the semifinals when we went back to find that my entire pageant wardrobe had been stolen, but I want you to know that Miss Massachusetts has been apprehended and they made her give me her wardrobe because between the ripping and the ink she had more or less ruined mine, and I have begged them to go easy on her because we are all working under such a terrible strain. And then there was the thing where they wouldn't let my mom into the rehearsals but they settled that very nicely and she is watching right now from her own private room in the hospital and they will let her come home as soon as she is able to relate. Thanks for everything, Mom, and as soon as we get off TV I'm coming over and give you a great big kiss even if you don't know it's me. Then there's the thing about Mr. Omerta, and I feel just terrible, but it had to be done. I mean, he just snapped last night, he got past all the chaperones and came up to my hotel room. I said, "Oh, Mr. Omerta, you shouldn't be here, I could be disqualified," and the next thing I knew he had thrown himself down on my feet. He said, "Vonnie, I love you, I adore you." It was disgusting. He said, "Throw it all over and run away with me." Well, there I was not twenty-four hours from

the big title; it was terrible. I said, "Oh, come on, Mr. Omerta, don't start that now, not after what you did to Stanley," and when he wouldn't stop kissing my ankles I kicked him a couple of times and said, "Come on, all you've ever thought about is money, money," and when he said there were more important things than money I started screaming, "Help me, somebody come and help me, this man is making an indecent advance," and the matrons came like lightning and carried him off to jail. Well, what did he expect? He's spent the last thirteen years training me for this day.

So when the big moment came tonight I was the one with the perfect figure, the perfect walk, the perfect talent, I wowed them in the charm department and . . . I don't know, there has just been this guy up here, the All-American Master of Ceremonies; you thought he was kissing my cheek and handing me another bouquet but instead he was whispering in my ear, "OK, sweetie, enough's enough." There seems to be something wrong; it turns out I am not reaching you wonderful people out there, my subjects. You can see my lips moving but that's not me you hear on the PA system, it's a prerecorded speech. He says . . . he says I'm perfect in almost every respect but there's this one thing wrong, they found out too late so they're going to have to go through with it. I guess they found out when I got up here and tried to make this speech. I am a weeny bit too frank to be a typical Miss Wonderful Land of Ours, he says I have too many regrets, but just as soon as I get down from here and they run the last commercial, they're going to take care of that. He says I'll be ready to begin my nationwide personal appearance tour in behalf of the product just as soon as they finish the lobotomy.

Hour of Trust

Gene Wolfe

You read, let us say, that this or that Corps has tried . . . but before we go any further, the serial number of the Corps, its order of battle are not without their significance. If it is not the first time that the operation has been attempted, and if for the same operation we find a different Corps being brought up, it is perhaps a sign that the previous Corps have been wiped out or have suffered heavy casualties in the said operation; that they are no longer in a fit state to carry it through successfully. Next, we must ask ourselves what was this Corps which is now out of action; if it was composed of shock troops, held in reserve for big attacks, a fresh Corps of inferior quality will have little chance of succeeding where the first has failed. Furthermore, if we are not at the start of a campaign, this fresh Corps may itself be a composite formation of odds and ends withdrawn from other Corps, which throws a light on the strength of the forces the belligerent still has at his disposal and the proximity of the moment when his forces shall be definitely inferior to the enemy's, which gives to the operation on which this Corps is about to engage a different meaning, because, if it is no longer in a condition to make good its losses, its successes even will only help mathematically to bring it nearer to its ultimate destruction. . .

Marcel Proust, Remembrance of Things Past

The north and south walls were pale blue, of painted plaster over stone. A wide door in the north wall, of dark wood and old, dark, discolored brasswork, gave into the hotel corridor, floored (like the big room itself) in dull red tile. Flanking this door were elaborate wrought iron candelabra; their candles would be lit later that night by Clio Morris, on signal from Lowell Lewis, when Force Cougar was pinned down near the 75–94 interchange in Dearborn and he felt things needed cheering up. Clio (that stenographic muse of history) was good for lighting such things: she was tall, and wore high heels and short skirts; and the soft coiffures she favored lent her face a brown and gold aureole when the flames were behind it.

To the right of the candelabrum on the right side of the doorway stood a heavy "library" table with a blue vase full of fresh cinerarias, the blue vase and blue flowers against the blue wall producing a ghostly effect—the shadows of vase and blossoms more visible and distinct than the things themselves. Above this blue ghost was a very large and brightly colored photograph in a massive frame. It depicted a barren hill crowned with the ruins of a large stone building, of which only (what once had been) the foundation of a tower retained any semblance of its original form. At the bottom of the frame a small brass plaque had been let into the wood, and this was engraved with the words *Viana do Castelo*, presumably to guide any tourist who might wish to visit the site.

Next to the candelabrum on the left of the door stood one of the twenty-three large leather-covered chairs which dotted the floor of the room—empty despite the invitation of a small table positioned near its right arm at a height convenient to hold a drink; above this chair was a second photograph of exactly the same size and shape as the first, framed in the same way. It depicted a barren hill topped with the tumbled ashlars of another (but equally demolished) stone building. The atmosphere of this photograph was so similar to that of the first that it was only after a careful process of ratiocination that the viewer (if he troubled) convinced himself that it was not a picture of the same ruin from a different angle, though in fact the two held no detail in common but the bright Portuguese sky. The plaque at the base of this second frame read: *Miró*.

The south wall held three doors, each of them smaller than the large door in the north wall that gave access to the remainder of the hotel, and each leading to a bedroom-sitting room with a bath. The leftmost (east) bedroom looked down

into the patio garden of the hotel, and the central bedroom out (south) toward a wing of this patio, with a wall and a street beyond. All the bedrooms were comfortably furnished with carpets and chairs and (in each case) a large double bed, but this central bedroom had, in addition, a vidlink terminal which Lewis's executive assistant, Peters, would use several times that night. It was a wardrobe-sized gray machine with a screen, a printer, a speaker, keys for coding the addresses of others, and various switches; it had been built by United Services Corporation, the company which employed Peters, as well as Lowell Lewis and Miss Morris and Donovan (five foot eight, two hundred and thirty pounds, thinning blond hair; European sales manager for United Services, a good salesman and a hard worker; he felt he didn't really have to worry if U.S. went down-hell, he'd lived in Europe for the past eight years, his wife was Belgian and he spoke Flemish, German and Swedish like he owned them and he had connections all over and half a dozen European firms would be tickled pink to lay their hands on him. He was right too).

The west wall was entirely of glass and showed the Atlantic Ocean. Because the sun was low now, Peters (a middle-sized young man with a camouflaged face—Peters was one of those people who look a little Jewish but probably aren't, and he played a good game of lacrosse) had drawn gray velvet drapes across this ocean; but later Clio Morris would open these drapes in order to see the stars.

The east wall was also entirely of glass. It was, in fact, one immense vidlink screen fifteen feet high and thirty-five feet wide, originally installed in this permanently leased suite to demonstrate the fact that vidlink, unlike conventional television, employed what United Services referred to as "Infinite Scanning," by which the United Services copywriters meant that a vidlink picture was not divided into a number of scan lines and hence could be magnified—like reality itself—to any extent. When this screen was turned off it was a dark and brooding presence upon which the room instinctively focused, but no drapes were provided that might be used to cover it. (When turned on it was sometimes camera as well as screen, the viewer beheld in his beholding.)

The red tile floor was, except at the edges of the room, covered with a dark Moorish carpet on which were scattered, as smaller and less regularly shaped carpets, the hides of Angora goats. The twenty-two armchairs that did not orient themselves to the north wall were arranged on this floor facing (generally) east in a way suggestive of a loose theater. A portable bar stood close to the west window, and at this bar Peters sat eating scrambled (mexidos) eggs.

The large door in the north wall opened and Donovan came in. He was wearing a light-colored suit and a panama hat. He saw Peters and asked, "Everything set for tonight?"

Peters shrugged.

"It better be. It better be good. I've got people coming from all over." He named an important German industrialist. "------

is coming." He leaned closer to Peters, who was afraid for a moment that the end of his (Donovan's) tie might fall into his (Peters's) eggs, which were covered with a sauce that, without being ketchup, was nonetheless the color of blood. "Do you know what he told me? This'll be the first time he's been outside Germany since 1944. Think of it. Damn near fifty years. The old man himself."

Peters nodded, his mouth full of eggs, and said, "Wow!"

Donovan named a prominent Italian industrialist. "—— is coming too. From Turin. Of course he goes all over, buying art and all that crap. Hell, he spends more time in the States than I do."

"Not now he doesn't," Peters said.

"Well, hell no," Donovan said, offended. "What do you expect?"

The door to the central bedroom opened and Lewis's secretary came in wearing a yellow dress and carrying a tear sheet from the vidlink. She said, "Call for you, Mr. Peters," and Peters took the sheet from her and went into the bedroom. The call was from a modeling agency in another quarter of the city, and he found himself talking to a sharp-featured, crewcut young Englishman who wore jade earrings and a (phallic) jade pendant. The Englishman said, "Tredgold here," and Peters nodded and asked, "What can I do for you, Mr. Tredgold?" and then, unconsciously imitating Donovan, "Everything set?"

"Just what I was going to ask you," Tredgold said, and smiled. "You're going to do it still?"

"Have our little party?" Peters said. "Oh, yes."

"Marvelous. You know, you people have come back wonderfully just in the past few weeks."

"Oh, we're not dead yet," Peters said.

"Spirit."

"The girls will be here?"

"Ten on the dot." Tredgold looked at his watch. "Never fear. They are primping their little hearts out at this very moment."

"The ones Mr. Lewis selected."

"Quite." Tredgold smiled again. "I daresay the old boy enjoyed that; did he say anything after?"

Peters tried to remember, then decided it was one of those cases where a lie—he called such lies "fables" to himself—would serve better, and said, "He talked about it for an hour after we got back, and—you know—told me why he'd picked this one and not that one; all the fine points."

"He has an eye for décolletage, one saw that. For that matter I have myself."

"Interesting business you're in."

"Quite." Tredgold smiled again, his fingers twiddling one of the round jade earbobs. "Peters, I shouldn't ask this if I were a gentleman, but how old are you?"

"Twenty-four."

"Just my own age. Good school and all that?"

"Harvard Business School," Peters said.

"That's good, I suppose. I went to a red-brick university my-

self. You like what you're doing? Following old Lewis about and all that?"

"I suppose so."

"And someday you'll be a big pot yourself—that is, if the hairies don't tear it all down for you—but right now it's a bit of a bore, eh? Big company and all that. Our little agency here is *big company* too, you know. Owned by ————"—he named a British newspaper—"and they're owned by———"—a company Peters had always associated with music tapes. "That's American, you know. Small world."

"It is," Peters said. He was wondering what would happen to Tredgold if they lost the war. Probably nothing.

"So I was once where you are now—not quite so high, of course. At the paper; Mum and Dad had scrimped and put me through, and I was to be a journalist. One is chosen to go up in the first three years—you're aware of that? Or not at all. Only I made a bish. You only make one bish, you know."

"I know," Peters said.

"But I was fortunate: I made a cracking good one, and they sent me here. Old Wellingsford called me into his office just after and said they wished to transfer me—a nice place for a chap like you, was the way he put it. They wanted an Englishman to run it, but the wages were Portuguese—very sorry and all that, but the rule about dismissed if you refused transfer still holds, can't go breaking rules every moment, can we?"

"So you went," Peters said.

Tredgold nodded. "Boring you, aren't I? But you can't say so—that's the fault of a good school."

"You're not boring me," Peters said honestly.

"Ah," said Tredgold. He leaned back in his chair and for an instant Peters thought he was about to put his foot up on the desk, but he did not. "Well, I put up a brave front, you know. Going to be manager there, Mums, and good-bye for a bit, eh? Tear. Dick Whittington and all that. Tear."

"Bye, Dad," Peters said, getting into the spirit of the thing.

"Right. Absolutely. Salary four thousand bloody escudos per month, and never told them the bloody escudo's hardly worth a farthing."

"You can live here cheaply, I suppose, once you know your way around the city."

"I shouldn't know," Tredgold said. "The week I came the really big pots got tired of seeing their little subsidiaries on the bad side of the books and declared a bonus for management three percent of the net; damned little really, you'll say, but I'm the only management we have—and all we're going to have, as long as I'm managing. And I mean to say, a modeling agency with all those great newspapers behind it to threaten the politicians—how can one lose?"

"If you're in the red," Peters remarked wisely, "three percent of nothing is zero."

"Oh, but we didn't stay there, you know-not with that sort of money in view."

"Sounds as though they should have put you in charge long ago," Peters said. It was one of his stock compliments.

"They didn't want it, you know." Tredgold's smile was broader than ever. "I daresay you think profit's what they're generally after, don't you? Went to business school and they taught you that."

"Yes, they did," Peters admitted. "Or I should say they taught us that the object of business management was to maximize the value of the stock—that was the definition we had to learn."

"Oh, son!"

"I know in Britain"—Peters fumbled for words—"there's more concern for, uh, social objectives, but still—" He stopped. Tredgold was laughing. "Well, what is it then?"

"My dear chap . . . my dear old chap, look about you; haven't you ever seen a firm where one of the salesmen started to do really well selling on commission? What do they do, eh? Fire him, take part of the territory from him, possibly make him sales manager—no commission there, you know—something of the kind. Yet he was making the firm a mint and now they haven't got it. He was a mere salesperson, you see, and they'd sooner bankrupt the place than have him make too much. Let me tell you something: the big ones, the ones with offices and works of one sort or another all about, like yours and mine, can buy profits whenever they choose just by offering a thin bit of them to the chaps who do the work. But they don't and they won't, and who can blame them? I mean, what would they do with the bloody stuff?"

"Build more plants, I suppose," Peters said.

"More problems for the big pots, and the government on them too; and should one of those new works not go, their reputations suffer—so why risk it? None of them know the least about manufacturing anyway."

"Give it to the stockholders then."

"Just makes the blighters greedy. No, quite seriously now, Peters, y'know what saved me? Potty little Portugal has to be shown in a separate column in the annual report, and we balance out the limousine thing—so I'm permitted to feather my wee nest. Besides"—Tredgold winked—"there are fringes. Here, love."

A pretty dark-haired girl came on camera. Tredgold said, "Give us a kiss, love, and blow one to the Yank— I say, Peters, your chief is behind you; bet you didn't know it."

Lowell Lewis was coming through the door from the large, chair-strewn room beyond. His face, heavy and unexceptional as ever, might have been a trifle drawn. Peters put Tredgold on Hold.

"Can you get me Hastorf on that thing?" Lewis said. He named a steel company, and when Peters still hesitated, added, "Pittsburgh." Peters keyed the number and got a secretary, who, seeing Lewis, touched a button by which she replaced her own face with the image of a white-haired man of fifty-five or sixty. Peters cleared his throat and slipped out of the console chair; the white-haired man said, "Hi, Lou."

Lewis nodded and said, "Phil."

The white-haired man smiled. "Just about to take myself home, but what can I do for you?"

"I don't want to hold you up," Lewis said. "Any time."

Lewis smiled. "Pittsburgh quieter now?"

"Oh, we've never had trouble out here, Lou. We're twentyfive miles outside the city proper, you understand. What we say is, let them have the damn place for a while and wear themselves out on it. Employees who lived in the central city are free to bed down right here in the offices at night—of course, it's a bit hard on them."

"What I wanted to know, Phil, was about the planes. I was just talking to General Virdon, and he stresses the importance of having air support."

"We're guaranteeing fourteen fighter-bombers," the other man said.

"Good. Couldn't scrape up a few more for us, could you?"

Hastorf shook his head. "Not much in the way of ground crews left now, Lou. We're sending some of our laboratory people over to the base to help out, but of course they're mostly metallurgical specialties. Couldn't spare a few technicians from your outfit, could you? Or some engineers?"

"Would it get me more planes tonight?"

Hastorf said, "I'll talk to the boys."

"I'll tell you what I'll do. An engineer for every plane over the fifteen."

"Fourteen," Hastorf said.

"I thought you said fifteen. In fact I'm sure of it."

For the first time Hastorf appeared to notice Peters. "Young man," he said, "could we hear from you?"

Peters said, "Fifteen."

Hastorf gave him a wry smile before turning back to Lewis. "I've only got fourteen, Lou."

"All right, damn it, an engineer for every plane above fourteen." Afterward he said to Peters, "Knew him in college. Hastorf." Peters nodded.

"Damn funny, isn't it? He went with them, and of course I went with U.S., and hell, I don't think—no, I bumped into him at some kind of trade show once. I remember having a drink with him. A machine tool show."

Peters said, "I guess you talked over old times."

"That's right." The older man turned and walked toward the door, then stopped. "Now here we are working together again." He shook his head. "For thirty years he's been with that steel outfit—a whole different world. Our senior year we were both on the dance committee. It's like you were seeing somebody rise from the dead—you know what I mean, Pete?"

Lewis shut the door behind him, and Peters touched, for an instant, the spot toward which Tredgold's dark girl had blown her kiss. Then he hit Release, wondering if Tredgold had bothered to wait. Tredgold said, "'Lo, Peters. Recovered from my revelations yet?"

Peters smiled. "Not yet. Not quite."

"Red-brick—did I tell you? We like to put the knife in you toffs when we've the chance."

"I wanted to ask if you'd like to come—yourself—to the party tonight," Peters said.

Tredgold whistled. "The old chap-did he endorse this bold move?"

"Don't worry about it. I'll say I suggested you drop by to make sure your girls were on the ball."

"All right," Tredgold said, "but I should tell you I've promised Mum I'll be home before eight."

In the main room the first guests were already drifting in, staring at the wall screen on the east wall, talking in selfconscious groups; several of them carried newspapers. Clio was handing around cocktails, and Donovan was already deep in conversation with a man who looked so much like himself that he might almost be talking to a mirror. Watching them all, Peters had the sensation of having seen just this tableau of elaborate casualness and subdued, content-free speech before. It was only when a woman in a red dress—very obviously the secretary-mistress of the Danish shipbuilder whose arm she held—entered that he could place it: the operatic market scene into which, in a moment, one of the principal singers was sure to come, calling for the thrill of romance or (what is much the same thing) the defense of France. Surely, Peters thought, the curtains have just parted. He looked toward the west window and saw Clio moving toward the cord even as he formed the thought.

The gray velvet rolled back to show tossing Atlantic waves. Peters wanted to incline his head toward them, a very slight bow, but someone took him by the arm and said, "You are one of the Americans?"

"Oh, yes, and you are—" He tried, and failed, to attach a name, then a nationality, to the face. Oh, well, when in Rome. . . . "Senhor . . ."

"Solomos."

"Damn glad you could come," Peters said, taking his hand.

"What is happening in your country is so interesting," Solomos said. "Great art will come from it—have you thought of that? Great art. The blood of a great people is stirred by such things, and there will be so much of what was old blown away."

Someone put an Old Fashioned into Peters's hand, and he sipped it. He said, "I suppose." He thought of the Italian industrialist who collected art, but he was reasonably sure Solomos was not he.

"The armies—do they take pains to preserve such art as your country possesses?"

"Armies?" Peters had never thought of the radicals as an army.

"We soldiers like to loot," Solomos said. "All, that is, except the soldiers of my own country—we regard any art save our own as an aberration." He laughed.

There was a cherry in the bottom of Peters's glass, and he ate it. He said to Solomos, "You're a soldier, then?"

"Oh, no. No more."

A third man joined them; he was tall, and had a mustache. He said, "You are Mr. Peters, I take it. Where do you feel the sympathies of the American people lie, Mr. Peters?"

Peters said, "With the government, unquestionably."

"But since May," the tall man began, "there has been so little government left, and so little of the will to rule in what *is* left—"

"One knows what he intends," Solomos said.

A fat man who had been talking to another group turned (it was a little, Peters thought, like watching a globe revolve in a library) and said, "In the science of realpolitik the sympathies of the population do not matter except insofar as they are nationalistic sympathies. In the event of a civil war the concept of nationalistic sympathy is inapplicable because to the popular mind the nation claiming allegiance is perceived to have vanished. A charismatic leader—"

Peters said, "In the Civil War regional sympathies-"

"Wait," the tall man said. "Something is happening."

Peters turned around and saw that Lowell Lewis was now standing facing the dark screen and rapping (though the sound was inaudible over the hum of talk) with a long pointer on the glass surface.

"He should shoot off a gun, hahaha," Solomos said. "That would quiet them."

Peters said, "I think he's afraid of guns," then realized he should not have, then that no one had heard him anyway. A beautiful dark-haired girl in an evening gown, one of Tredgold's girls, gave him a martini.

The fifteen-by-thirty-five-foot screen behind Lewis flashed with light, showing Lewis's own face, immensely magnified so that every pore could be seen as though through a microscope. It glowered at them, all eyes and nose and mouth, the forehead and chin lost in ceiling and carpet; so magnified it assumed a new quality, like the giants in fairy tales, who are not merely big men but monsters. "Gentlemen," Lewis said. "Your attention, please."

The room fell silent.

"I'm afraid we are not quite all here yet, but we have a definite appointment with General Virdon, and it would be best if I began your orientation now."

Someone said, "Will there be a period for questions?"

The giant answered, "There will be all evening for questions— I want that understood. You may interrupt any speaker—including myself—whenever you have questions. We're not trying to sell you a pig in a poke."

"If the attack tonight succeeds, what benefits do you anticipate?"

"I should think the benefits are obvious."

"I will put it in another way," the questioner continued. "Do you not feel that the real struggle is taking place on your coasts? That they are the important theaters of operations?"

From beside Peters the tall man called, "Some believe we have been brought here to witness a show victory—a Potemkin village of war." Peters had been trying to guess the tall man's nationality, thus far without success.

Lewis disappeared, replaced by a map of America. The real Lewis, seeming suddenly diminutive, tapped Detroit with his wand. "This city may not be known to many of you," he said, "as it is not a cosmopolitan city; but it is a manufacturing center of great importance. Please observe that it is virtually impossible to isolate it without infringing upon Canadian sovereignty."

The man with the mustache said, "Canada cannot allow the passage of war matériel."

"I am speaking of industrial goods, whose passage Canada has guaranteed—machine tools and electronics. Not supplies for the troops in the east. Our aim in this campaign is to restore American productivity." Someone near Peters said, "And American credit." There was a ripple of laughter.

"Precisely." Lewis's flat voice came loudly, cutting through the amusement. "Credit, as you know, is a matter of confidence, of trust. Ours is still a country of great natural resources, with a wonderful supply of skilled labor and unmatched management know-how. I don't have to tell any of you gentlemen that U.S. is one of the world's leading manufacturers, or that we are trying to obtain, currently, financing overseas, but—"

The man standing next to Peters said, "You are having difficulties. What is it you call management if you have such difficulties?"

Peters turned, expecting to see Solomos, but it was a man he had not met, a short, fat man of fifty or so. Peters said, "We mean business management. Maximizing the return on invested capital."

"Management," the fat man said firmly, "iss management." Peters turned back to listen to Lewis.

"End," the fat man continued, "you do not any longer have these resources you speak of, not so much more as other peoples."

Peters said, "There is a great deal left."

"Not so much for each person as Western Europe. Different, yes, but not so much."

Lewis had a map of Detroit on the screen now, stabbed by arrows from the south and west.

On the other side of Peters someone asked, "Do you have a master plan for retaking the country?" and the tall man with the mustache said, "They surely must, but I doubt if this young man knows it, or could confide in us if he did." Peters recalled a conversation he had had with Lewis earlier in which he had asked much the same question. Lewis had said, "Top management knows what it's doing," and Peters had felt better until he remembered that Lewis was top management. One of Tredgold's girls brushed against him, her back arched, her hands and a tray of hors d'oeuvres above her head; he was acutely conscious of the momentary warmth and pressure of her hips; General Virdon was talking on the wall-sized screen, a gray-haired, square-faced man whose hard jaw was betrayed by nervous eyes. Peters had seen the face before, the face of a frightened middle-management man whose career had topped out in his forties, driving his subordinates from habit and his fear of his many-faced, ever shifting superiors. Donovan edged up to him and said, "He looks like old Charlie Taylor, doesn't he? Runs the Duluth plant."

Peters nodded. "I was just thinking the same thing."

"I was out there two years ago," Donovan continued. "You know, go around, see what the boys back home were doing. . . ."

Mentally Peters tuned him out. Someone new, a major, was on the screen. He said, "I regret that Colonel Hopkins was unable to return as scheduled to address this group. He left our headquarters here at fourteen hundred hours and was due back quite some time ago. I don't know just what he had intended to tell you, but I'll answer your questions as well as I can." The major wore paratrooper wings; they went well with his impassive, almost Indian, face. Someone asked, "If your colonel does not return, will you direct the attack?"

"If you mean Force Wolverine," the major said, "I'll lead it. General Virdon will direct it."

From another part of the room: "Isn't it true that you have put clerks and cooks into the fighting ranks?"

"Not as much as I'd like to." Unexpectedly the major smiled, the boyish smile of a man who has got his way when he did not expect it. "They're usually the most able-bodied soldiers we've got, especially the clerks. Now that the government's out and the companies have taken over, all those goofballs with political connections can't write their damn letters anymore."

"Don't you find it difficult to get recruits when you cannot pay?"

"Hell, that would be impossible," the major said. "But we

can pay something—the companies have bankrolled us to some extent, and they buy up some of the stuff we liberate."

Lowell Lewis said, "May I add a bit of explanation of my own there, major? Thank you. Gentlemen, this is, of course, one of the most important reasons for the loans we are trying to secure here—we feel an obligation to deal fairly with the men who are directing these vital operations in our own country. They are going to win, they will win, and we are in a position to secure those loans with the solidest possible collateral victory."

"A question for you, Mr. Lewis. This officer takes order from General Veerdon-"

"Virdon," the major said.

"Thank you. General Veerdon. But from whom does General Veerdon take order?"

There was a long pause. At last Lewis said, "At present General Virdon can't be said to be getting orders from anyone. America feels that as one of its finest commanders he is competent, during this emergency, to exercise his own judgment."

"But he consult with you?"

Lewis nodded. "About finances and supplies, and to a certain extent concerning priorities among objectives." Peters saw Clio Morris hand him a note.

"And General Marteen, at Boston, with who---"

"Excuse me," Lewis said, "but word has just been flashed to us that the troops are jumping off for the attack, and I don't think any of you will want to miss that."

Down an eight-lane highway dotted with the carcasses of burned-out automobiles (casualties of the June fighting that had lost the city) men in green and brown and blue were advancing ahead of three light tanks. Some of the men wore helmets; others did not, and Peters noticed one group in the flat-brimmed campaign hats of state police. The short, fat man called out, "Ees Force Wolpereen?"

"No," Lewis said, "this is Cougar, moving up Interstate

Seventy-five from the Rockwood-Gibraltar area. We'll be seeing Wolverine in a few moments now."

Another voice: "May I ask how we are receiving these pictures? They do not appear to be coming by helicopter."

"That is correct. Although we have a great deal of airpower— I believe you can see some fighter-bomber strikes in the background there—we prefer to use hand-held cameras for this sort of coverage, since they permit us to contact individuals directly. I believe an officer sitting on the roof of a truck is taking this."

"Would it be possible for us to talk to one of the soldiers involved?"

"I'll see if I can't arrange it."

The picture abruptly changed to show a burning building that might have been an apartment house. "This is Wolverine: the skirmish line preceding the main force, which I believe is just now jumping off."

A soldier with an assault rifle dashed past, followed by two dungareed sailors carrying carbines. Abruptly the burning apartment house wobbled and fell away to a street lined with buildings with sandbagged windows, then sky, then the face of General Virdon, who said, "It appears our operator has bought it, sir. We'll have another one for you in a few seconds."

Lewis said, "We quite understand."

Peters, trying to make it appear that he was relaying a question from one of the people near him, asked, "Can you tell us the composition of Force Wolverine, general?"

"Certainly." Virdon leaned forward to glance at a note on his desk before answering, and Peters wondered suddenly where he was—if he was within a hundred miles of the battle. "Wolverine comprises elements of the Thirty-first Airborne, strengthened with naval detachments from the Great Lakes Training Station and armored units of the Wisconsin National Guard—the name, as you may have guessed, has been chosen to honor these last."

In Peters's ear Donovan said, "Belongs to———"—he named a mining company—"and we're getting them on loan. Lou set it up." A tall black man said, "I represent the National Trade Bureau of the Empire of Ethiopia. May I ask a question?"

Lewis said, "Certainly. It isn't necessary, however, for anyone to identify themselves."

"I wish to ask my question of General Virdon."

In the colossal screen the general nodded.

"Would you tell us your prior military experience, sir?"

Solomos, who had reappeared from somewhere, said to Peters, "A very nice party. I enjoy it. But what do you think of the attack as far as this?"

Peters said, "If we win in Detroit it will be the key to opening up the Midwest and splitting the radicals." It was what he had heard Lewis tell a Swiss banker earlier that day.

"No doubt. But will you win?"

"We have to win," Peters said, and found that he had surprised himself. As quickly as he could he added, "The odds are too heavily weighed in our favor. Suppose, for example, Mr. Solomos, that your company was going to open up a new territory, or introduce a new product. You would observe your competitors: not just how much advertising they are doing, but how much they are capable of doing-and how many salesmen they have; how good those salesmen are; any special advantages they may have, like high customer loyalty in this particular area. When you've learned all those things you're in a position to calculate just how much it will take to knock them out of the top spot quickly, and decide whether or not you can do it. If you go in at all, you go in with about double the top ad budget they can afford, free samples, coupon offers and the pick of your sales force-on special bonus incentives. You don't go in until you've asked yourself how can I lose? and found that you can't imagine any possible way you could-and then you can't. Well, that's what we've done"-Peters waved at General Virdon on the screen-"and we're going in."

"Bravo," Solomos said. "Magnificent. You say all that very well. But they have more men than you."

"Ours are better armed and have air support and tanks; and I

doubt that they really have more people—at least not many. A great part of the population of Detroit is still loyal to free enterprise, or just doesn't want to get involved."

"But that was interesting to me," Solomos continued, "about the selling. What if the product you sell is not better?"

"Actually," Peters said, "that hardly matters, unless it's really pretty bad. We—I mean United Services—always try to have the best, and in fact we spend a lot on that sort of thing—R and D, and quality control. But mostly we do it because it energizes the sales force."

The Ethiopian was saying to General Virdon, "Then you have not ever actually fought—you yourself fought."

"What matters in combat is organization and fire support the total firepower that can be directed at the enemy. We learned that in Vietnam. If you can blow up enough jungle you can kill anybody. . . . Now, Mr. Lewis—sir?"

"Yes?"

"Your guests mentioned that they would like to talk directly to one of the enlisted men taking part in this operation. We have that set up now, sir."

"Fine."

A young man appeared. He was handsome in a boyishly appealing way and wore neatly pressed fatigues with a pfe's stripe. To the audience he said, "Private Hale reporting, sir." His forehead was abundantly beaded with sweat, and Peters wondered if it was really that hot in Detroit. After a moment Hale wiped it off. Someone called, "You are a soldier? Don't you know you could be killed in this action?"

Hale nodded solemnly into the screen, then said, "I don't mean to be disrespectful, sir, but you can get killed crossing the street—anyway, you could in the good old days—and I think what my buddies and me are doing here is more important than a whole lot of streets."

"And you are confident this operation will succeed?"

The soldier nodded. "Yes, sir, I am. There's a whole bunch of good guys wrapped up in this thing, and . . ."

Peters became aware that the soldier's voice was fading, and with it his image on the screen.

"... all of us know" It was barely audible. The screen went white, dazzlingly bright.

"What is this?" a new voice asked. The voice was young, unpolished and unprofessional, the muttering of the new tenant next door to himself, heard through the walls at 11 P.M.

Lewis said, "I'm afraid we're having some communications problems here, gentlemen; you'll have to bear with us." Addressing the disembodied voice: "Is this Grizzly Bear?"

"Ken!"

"Grizzly Bear One-General Virdon-come in, please."

As though drawn long ago in invisible ink, and only now called up by heat or the ammoniacal fumes of blood, a face materialized. Peters had expected a beard and the conventional, exotic, vaguely erotic, jewelry, but the boy was too young for the first and had removed—if he ever wore it—the second, save for the rhinestoned frames (each weeping a crystal acrylic tear) of thick glasses. "Well," he said, and then, "ken." He moved toward his screen, appearing to lean out of the illusion, his thin, unlined face suspended above them as it might have been over a cage of white rats. Then his eyes left them and he looked toward the window that was the west wall of the room, and the tossing Atlantic.

"Who are you?" Lewis asked.

"Philadelphia," the boy answered simply. Peters saw Lewis wince; Philadelphia was in radical hands.

From the floor someone called, "We were watching the attack on Detroit."

"Oh," the boy said. And then, "I can get you Detroit. Wait a minute."

The screen flashed, and was filled with a young man whose forehead was painted with hieroglyphics. He said, "This is Free Michigan Five with uninterrupted battle coverage, music and macrobiotic diet tips, except when we are interrupted. Did everyone get to see the pig plane that crashed in Dearborn Heights?"

Someone called, "No!" but the young man appeared not to have heard. "I guess you've got the news that six kenkins are going to donate their bodies to Peace, and we're going to give you that live right now. Hold on."

A bigger man, with a bushy beard, his hair held back by a beaded band. Behind him four men and two women sat crosslegged on ground littered with rubble, their heads bent. "No Roman circus," the bearded man said. "If you're not considering doing this yourself, please tune out."

"This is a television picture," Lewis said at the front of the room. "That's what's giving the streaky effect. Vidlink does not do this."

"Over there"—the bushy-bearded man waved an arm—"is what they eall Cougar—that's the big pig force attacking us from the south. I think you can hear the shooting."

They could. The distant whine of ricocheting bullets, the nervous chattering of assault rifles and machine guns; and below all this (like the bass section of an orchestra, in which ironsouled strings, and horns, and wild kettledrums inherited from Ottoman cavalry, speak of the death of spring and heroes) the double-toned pounding of the quad-fifties—four fifty-caliber machine guns mounted together on a combat car and controlled by a single trigger—as they chewed down stone and brick and sandbags to splash the blood and brains of lonely snipers across the debris.

"It's strictly voluntary whether you talk or not," the man with the beard said. "We've asked everyone who isn't actually thinking about doing this themselves to tune out, but probably there are a lot of them still on. You know how it is. Anybody want to talk?"

For a moment no one moved, then a thin young man with a curly beard stood up. He was wearing only undershorts, boxer shorts dotted with a pattern of acorns. The interviewer said, "This is great, man. In the last two batches nobody would talk." He smiled. He had bad teeth and a good smile.

The curly-bearded young man in shorts said, "What do you want to know?"

The bearded man said, "I guess most of all why."

"If you don't know I can't tell you. Yes, I can; because I want to turn things around. Like, everybody all the time only does it for himself or something he sees being part of him only bigger, an empire or a church, like that. I'm doing it for ants, to set us loose."

The bearded man said, "You stoned?"

"Sure I'm stoned. Ken, I'm stoned blind."

"You don't look stoned, man."

"Trust me."

"You believe in more life after you die?"

The curly-bearded young man in boxer shorts shook his head. "That isn't what it means. When there's no more, that's Death."

"Just the big dark?"

He nodded. "The big dark."

One of the girls stood. She was a thin and rather flat-chested girl, with straggling brown hair and the large, trusting eyes of a fawn. "I don't agree with that," she said. "If Death is Nothing, why have another name for it?"

"That's nominalism," the curly-bearded young man said. "That's camp." After he had said it he seemed sorry he had spoken.

"And I'm not killing myself," the girl continued. "That's up to them—whether I die or not. I don't think this *I* is going to live afterward if they kill me—of course not. But something will continue in existence, and there are a lot of things here"—oddly, she touched her shoulders, each hand against its own so that for a moment her doubled arms seemed wings, small and thin and featherless—"we could do without."

The bushy-bearded man said, "You're going to let them be your judges?"

"My Lord let Pilate be his." She sat down. The curly-bearded young man had turned his back to the screen.

"Anyone else," the bearded man said. "Anybody at all."

No one looked toward him. A girl wearing a motorcycle helmet came trotting up and announced, "Ready." The six stood. The bearded man said, "This is it. We'll follow them as long as we can." In point of fact the six were already off screen, though the bearded man was, presumably, looking toward them. "We get all kinds, I suppose you could say—you just talked to two of them. Truth seekers, Jesus freaks, activists, pacifists, about twice as many boys as girls. No one has to come, and anyone can turn back at any time. The people you just talked to could turn back now if they wanted, although it doesn't look like any of them are going to."

A shot of the six showed them following the girl in the motorcycle helmet. The buildings to either side of them had been largely destroyed by air strikes, and they might have been tourists trailing a guide through some older ruined city.

The camera jumped, and the men Lowell Lewis had gathered together saw the six emerging from an alley choked with rubble. The girl in the motorcycle helmet was no longer visible. Awkwardly they spread to form a single straggling line, three young men on one end, then the two girls, then an older, balding man. Two had contrived, or perhaps been given, white rags on sticks; they waved them. The remaining four advanced with lifted hands.

At Peters's ear Solomos whispered, "How near are they now? To the fighting?" As if to answer him a bullet kicked up dust before one of the young men's feet. He hesitated for a moment, then trotted to catch up.

"Please," the bushy-bearded man's voice said, "if you aren't a potential volunteer we ask you to tune out."

Someone called to Lewis, "Switch it off."

Lewis said, "As you have seen, they have taken control of our channel."

Solomos asked, "He could still deactivate this receiver, could he not?" and Peters answered, "Sure." He felt that he was going to be sick, and was surprised to see one of Tredgold's Portuguese girls still circulating with a tray of drinks and canapés. He took a martini and drained it; when his eyes returned to the screen three of the six were gone. The remaining three, seen now from behind, still advanced. The young man with the curly beard had removed his acorn-printed shorts and walked naked. Whether from a remote mike or by some sound-gathering device, voices came suddenly into the Lisbon hotel room. The naked boy was saying, "Peace! Peace! Don't shoot, look at us!" A girl crooned wordlessly, and the bald man recited the Lord's Prayer. Distantly someone called, "Hey, cease fire. They're giving up. Squad! Hold it!"

The three continued to advance, but diverged as they came; first six, then twelve, then twenty-four or more yards separating each from his or her companions, as though each were determined to die alone. The screen could no longer encompass all three, and began to move nervously from one to the next as though afraid to miss the death of any. A soldier stood and motioned to the curly-bearded young man, indicating the midden of smashed concrete which had sheltered him. As he did so he was shot, and fell backward. The curly-bearded young man turned toward his own lines shouting, "Stop! Stop!" and was shot in the back. For a moment the camera showed him writhing on the dusty pavement, then switched to the girl, now remote and fuzzy with distance but still large in the picture provided by the telephoto lens. Four soldiers surrounded her, and as they watched one put his arms about her and kissed her. Another jerked them apart, shoved the first aside and tore away the girl's thin shirt; as he did she exploded in a sheet of flame that embraced them all.

The bald man was walking rapidly toward a half-tracked combat car mounting quad-fifties; faintly they could hear him saying, "Hey, listen, the Giants won twenty-six straight in 1916, and the biggest gate in baseball was more than eighty-four thousand for a Yankees-Browns game in New York. The youngest big leaguer ever was Hamilton Joe Nuxhall-he pitched for Cincinnati when he was fifteen. Don't you guys care about anything?" The crew of the half-track stared at him until an officer drew a pistol and fired. The bald man leaped to one side (Peters could not tell whether he had been hit or not) and ran toward him shouting something about the Boston Braves. The officer fired again and the bald man's body detonated like a bomb. The voice of the young man with hieroglyphics on his forehead said, "I think we're going to catch the Zen Banzai charge over on the west side now." There was a sudden shift in picture and they saw a horde of ragged people with red cloths knotted around their heads and waists streaming toward a line of soldiers supported by two tanks. Some of them had firearms; more were armed with spears and gasoline bombs. For a moment they were falling everywhere-then the survivors had overwhelmed the tanks. Peters saw a soldier's head still wearing its steel helmet, open-eyed in death and livid with the loss of blood, held aloft on a homemade spear. The picture closed on it as it turned and swaved above the crowd; it became the head of General Virdon, who said, "Now we've got you again. My communications people tell me we lost you for a few minutes, Mr. Lewis." He sounded relieved.

Lewis said, "We had technical difficulties."

The voice of the boy in Philadelphia announced, "I did that fade with the faces—it was pretty good, wasn't it?" Solomos asked Peters, "Why are you attacking? You should be defending. You have lost most of your country already."

"We don't think so," Peters said.

"You have a few army camps and airdromes and some factories remote from centers of population; that is not the country. You survive thus far because they do not know how to fight, but they are learning, they are drilling armies everywhere, and you do not know how to fight either, and are not learning; after the defeat of the Germans and your small war in Korea you allowed your army to become only a consumer of your industrial production. What will this general do if they march from Chicago while his front is entangled in this street fighting?"

Donovan, appearing drink in hand from some remote part of the room, said, "I'm glad you asked that, Colonel Solomos. You see, that's part of our plan—to get these people out into the open where our planes can get at them."

Solomos made a disgusted sound. "Virdon has no reserve to cover his rear?"

"Certainly he does," Donovan said. "Naturally I can't tell you how many." A moment afterward, when Solomos was talking to someone else, he warned Peters, "Be nice to that guy; he represents the Greek army—its business interests. Lou is trying to contract for some Greeks to stiffen things along the coast."

Peters said, "I'd think they'd be worrying about being nice to us, then. They ought to be glad to get the money."

"There's not a lot of real money around. Mostly we're talking trade agreements after the war, stuff like that."

A familiar voice asked, "Suppose one wished to get down a bit of a flier on this row; what's the old firm offering?" It was Tredgold.

Donovan, a little puzzled to see someone he did not recognize, said, "I'm afraid I've already laid out as much as I can afford." Peters asked, "You're betting against us?"

"Only for sport. The fact is, I'd back either, but I shouldn't expect you to turn against your own chaps. Ten thousand escudos?"

"You're on." By a simultaneous operation of instinct both looked up at the screen, where General Virdon, looking much as though he were giving the weather, was outlining his battle plan in chalk.

Tredgold called loudly, "I say, there! Those marks show where you are now, eh? But where shall you be in an hour?" The general began laboriously sketching phantom positions across the heart of Detroit. "Well, we'll see, eh?" Tredgold whispered to Peters.

Peters asked, "Have you had a drink?"

"Well, no, I haven't, actually. Just arrived a moment or so ago, to tell the truth. Are my birds behaving?"

"Yes, they've been fine." Peters waved over a tall dark girl whose hair, gathered behind her head in a cascade of curls, suggested a Greece not represented by Solomos. She smiled at each of them in turn, and they each took a drink—Peters was conscious that it was his third or fourth, he could not be sure which. "Listen," he said to Tredgold when the girl had gone. "I'd like to talk to you for a minute."

They found chairs at the back of the room, next to the window, and Peters said, "Can you set me up with that girl?"

"You didn't need me, old boy; just ask her. Your chief is paying, after all."

They talked of something else, Peters conscious that it was impossible—equally impossible to explain the impossibility. Time passed, and he knew that he would despise himself later for having missed this opportunity, though it was an opportunity that would only exist when it was too late. A few feet away Donovan was taking his wallet from his pocket, making a bet with a tall German; for some reason Peters thought of the recording company which, ultimately, employed Tredgold, and their trademark, a cluster of instruments stamped in gold, recalling the slow way it had turned round and round on the oldfashioned 33 1/3 disk player in his grandmother's house in Palmerton, Pennsylvania. Tredgold was recounting some story about a badger that had hidden from dogs in the cellar of a church, and Peters interrupted him to say, "What's it like in England now?" Tredgold said, "And so you see the poor blighters couldn't explain what they were doing there," and Peters realized that he had not spoken aloud at all and had to say again, "But what is it like in England *now*?"

Tredgold smiled. "I daresay we're fifteen years behind you." "You're expecting all this?" Peters waved a hand at the distant screen. "I mean, are you expecting it?"

"Seems likely enough, I should think. Same problems in both countries, much. Same sort of chaps in authority. And ours look to yours—of course, it won't last nearly so long on our side; we haven't the space."

"If we win," Peters said, "I doubt that it will ever break out in England."

"Oh, but you won't, you know," Tredgold said. "I've money on it."

Peters sipped his drink, trying to decide what kind of whiskey was in it; everything tasted the same. Probably Canadian, he thought. He had checked the supplies sent up by the hotel before the party began, and had noticed how much Canadian whiskey there was; the war had dried up the American market. "You could change things," he told Tredgold suddenly, "before this happens."

"I could change things? I bloody well could not."

"You English could, I mean."

"Could have done the same sort of thing yourselves," Tredgold said. "All your big corporations, owning everything and running everyone, everything decided by the economic test when it was forty or more years out of date. One firm's economies only good because of prices set by another to encourage or discourage something else altogether, and your chemical works ruining your fishing, turning the sea into a dustbin, then selling their chemical foods. Why didn't you change things yourselves, eh?"

Peters shook his head. "I don't know. Everybody was talking about it for years—I remember even when I was in grade school. But nothing was ever done. Maybe it was more complicated than it looked." "Britain's the same. These chaps everyone's been shouting at to change things, they're the very chaps that do so well as things are. Think they're going to make new rules for a game they always win? Not ruddy likely." Tredgold stood up. "Your crowd's thinning out a bit, I fancy. I say"—he took a passing stranger by the arm—"pardon me, sir, but where's everyone off to?"

"The cabaret downstairs," the man said in an accent Peters could not identify. "The last show there—it is ten minutes. Then we come here again and watch again the battle. You wish to come?"

Tredgold glanced at Peters, then shook his head. "Some other time, and thank you very much. You come to Lisbon often? Wait a bit, I've a card here somewhere." He walked as far as the corridor door with the stranger, then returned to Peters. "Nice chap. Hungarian or something. Hope he fancies dark women."

Donovan, who had been standing a few feet away watching the screen, said, "In there, mister," and pointed to the two outside bedrooms. "We can't use the middle one—Lou's on the private vidlink in there."

Tredgold feigned puzzlement and looked around the room. "I don't even see one now."

"Two in each room," Donovan said. "They'll come out when they're ready—that's what most of the guys in the chairs are waiting for."

"How's the attack going?" Peters asked. He was conscious of swaying a little and took hold of the back of a chair with one hand.

"Great," Donovan said. The door of the east bedroom opened and a short man in a wool suit too heavy for Portugal came out sweating; after a moment a man who had been smoking stinking Dutch cigarettes in a chair near the door got up and went in.

"Great?" Peters asked.

"We haven't lost an inch of ground yet. Not an inch."

Peters looked at the screen. It showed a parking lot, apparently part of a shopping complex. Some broken glass lay on the asphalt, and several dead men, but nothing much seemed to be happening. Occasionally the whine of a shot came, its origin and its target equally unknowable.

"This is our side," Donovan explained. "The stuff near the screen. The hairies have still got those buildings over on the far side."

"We're not supposed to be holding ground," Peters said. "We're supposed to be, you know, going forward." He looked at his watch. "They ought to be almost to the lake shore by now."

"We're regrouping," Donovan said.

"Listen. Will you listen to me for a minute?" Peters was aware that he was about to make some kind of fool out of himself, and that he could not prevent it. "We ought to be there, doing something, helping them. I mean we're three men, we're not just nothing." He tried to make a joke of it: "Tredgold here's smart, I'm strong and you're Irish—we could do something."

Donovan looked at him blankly, then slapped him on the shoulder and said, "Yeah, sure," and turned away. Tredgold drawled, "Another thing I forgot to tell you about *l'ancien* régime—the winners are those who don't fight for it. Thought your mum would have put you wise to that already. The mums know." After a second's hesitation he added, "Only works while the chaps who do fight play the game, of course. No profit otherwise—no anything at all."

"Profit?" Peters said. "You said they didn't really want profits, and I've been thinking about that and you're right—for them profit above a certain point is just taking from each other. You said that."

"Did I? I suppose I did. It sounds familiar. Wait a sec, will you? All my bloody birds are nesting and I want a drink."

Peters called after him, "But what is it they do want?" and heard Tredgold mutter, "To hang onto their places, I should think."

"Ah." Lowell Lewis put his hand on Peters's shoulder. "You and Donovan taking care of things for us out here, Pete? How's it going?" "Quiet," Peters said.

"You're up on the battle, I assume?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good. We've been getting quite a number of calls on the private link from other companies—they have a stake in this of one sort or another, and they want to know the situation. To keep from clogging General Virdon's communications with that sort of thing I've arranged that we would handle them. Think you can hold down the hot seat for a while?"

Peters nodded.

"There's one other thing. You remember the soldier we had on screen? The one that hippie-type boy from Philadelphia cut off?"

"Hale," Peters said.

"Right. He was from the PR agency, of course; but when he had made the take that fool major who's replacing Colonel Hopkins grabbed him; he seems to have put him in one of the combat outfits. Naturally the agency is very upset. Try to bail him out, will you?"

Peters nodded again.

"Fine. In an hour I'll send in Donovan or Miss Morris, and you can bring yourself up to date."

Peters went into the center bedroom, trying to walk as steadily as he could, though he knew Lewis had already turned away to talk to someone else.

The bedroom was empty and dark. The vidlink screen was flashing the identity of some caller—Peters did not bother to discover who. He drew the curtains at the far end of the room and looked out over the patio wall at the headlights of the cars on the street outside, and noted vaguely that a diagonal view showed him the same dark Atlantic that sometimes seemed ready to invade the big room from which he had come.

There was a bathroom and he used it. He felt that he might have to vomit, but he did not.

Communicating doors linked this bedroom with those to east and west. He tried them, and found (as he had expected) that they were locked on the other side. Outside each he listened for a moment and heard the creaking of springs and whispered words, but no laughter.

At the vidlink he ignored the incoming calls and coded the Library of Congress, wondering if there was still anyone left there. There was, a plain-looking black girl of about twenty. He asked if she had a taped summary of American history for the last thirty years. She nodded and started to say something else, then asked, "Who is this calling, please?" and he said, "My name is Peters. I'm with United Services Corporation."

"Oh," she said. And then, "Oh!" He asked her if something was the matter.

"It's just that I have this friend—not really a friend, someone I know—that works in the Pentagon. And he says they weren't paid there at all for several months . . . but now they *are* getting paid again . . . only now the checks are from your company. . . . Do you know Mr. Lewis?" This was said with many pauses and hesitations.

"I'm his assistant," Peters said.

"Well, would it be possible . . . The staff here hasn't been paid since January. . . . Most of them are gone, and you wouldn't have to pay them, of course; I live with my mother, and anything you could get for us . . ."

"I don't—" Peters began, then changed it to: "I don't see why we couldn't put you under military administration. I mean, nominally. Then you'd be civilian employees of the Department of Defense."

"Oh," the girl said, and then, "Oh, thank you." And then, "I—I'm sorry, but I've forgotten what it was you wanted. I'm a graduate of Maryland—I really am. Library science."

"The history tape," Peters said. "You ought to get more rest." "So should you," the girl said. "You look tired."

"I'm drunk."

"Well, we've had so many requests for that tape that we just looped it, you know. We run it all the time. I'll connect you."

She pushed buttons on her own vidlink, and her face faded

until only her mouth and bright eyes were visible, overlaying the helmeted figure of an astronaut. "All right?" she said. Peters asked, "Is this the beginning or the end?"

"Sir?"

"I wanted to know—" He heard the door open behind him and hit the Cut button. "Later." The screen filled at once with incoming calls. He turned.

It was Clio Morris. She shut the door behind her and said, "Enough to drive you crazy, isn't it?"

He looked at her and made some commonplace reply, paying no more attention himself to what he had said than she would. She said, "Who do I remind you of?"

"Was I staring?" he said. "I'm sorry. Did you come to relieve me?"

"No, just to get away from the mess out there for a while. All right if I sit down?" She sat on the bed.

He said, "You don't remind me of anyone."

"That's good, because you remind me of somebody, Mr. Peters. I'm going to have a drink—want me to bring you one?"

"I'll get them," Peters said. He stood up.

"No, I will. Back in a minute."

Automatically Peters seated himself at the vidlink again and pressed the first Ready button. A man appeared who said he wanted, quite frankly, to tell Peters his management was worried about the way things were going, and that they already had a great deal sunk in this thing and could not afford to lose more. Peters agreed that things were going poorly (which disconcerted the man) and asked for positive suggestions.

"In what way?" the man said. "Just what do you mean?"

"Well, we clearly need to apply greater force to Detroit than we have so far. The question, I suppose, is how do we raise the force and how we can best apply it."

"You certainly don't expect us to commit ourselves to any plan with this little preparation."

Peters said, "I just hoped you might have a few off-the-cuff suggestions."

The man shook his head. "I can take the question to my management, but that's as far as I can go."

Peters told the man that he had heard certain foreign countries might have soldiers for hire, and that it would be possible for the man to ask among his own employees for volunteers to fight in Detroit. The man said that he would keep that in mind and signed off, and Clio came in with two Old Fashioneds, one of which she handed to Peters. She asked him if he had got anywhere with Burglund.

Peters shook his head. "Is that who I was talking to?"

"Uh huh. He works for——." She named a conglomerate, and Peters, suddenly curious, asked what they made.

"They don't make anything," Clio said. "Not themselves. They own some companies that make things, I suppose, and some oil tankers and real estate. Pulpwood holdings in Georgia."

Peters said, "I guess this is different from running pulpwood holdings in Georgia."

"Sure," Clio said. She sat down on one of the beds. "That's why Lowell is losing his war."

"What do you mean?"

She shrugged. "Four or five months ago when he started all this I thought they could handle it—I really did." When Peters looked at her questioningly she added, "The companies. I thought they could hold things together. So did Lou, I guess."

"So did I," Peters said.

"I know. You're a lot like Lou-when he was younger. That's what I meant when I said you reminded me of somebody: Lou when he was younger."

"You couldn't have known him then," Peters told her.

"I didn't. But about a year ago he showed me some tapes he had. They were training tapes he made twenty or twenty-five years ago. They showed him explaining some kind of machine; he was an engineer originally, you know. He looked a lot like you—he was a handsome man, and I guess he wanted me to see that he had looked like that once."

"You sleep with him, don't you?"

"I used to. Up until about six weeks ago. Now I'm trying to figure out why."

Peters said, "I wasn't asking you for an explanation."

"I know," the girl said. "You just wanted to find out if it was safe to fight with me, right?"

"Something like that."

"The formal business power structure and the informal one." "Something like that."

"You still think there's a chance we'll win and you'll have a career with U.S."

Peters shrugged. "With my education I don't see anything else to shoot for—that's something I didn't understand until recently: you don't get that degree, it gets you. Now, for me, it's this or nothing." He moved away from the vidlink and sat down beside her on the bed. The spread was satin, and he began to stroke it with his fingers.

"You think people like Burglund are going to pull us through? I mean, really?"

Peters was silent for a moment. "You're right," he said. "He won't, but I still don't know why not."

"I do," Clio said. "I've been helping Lou deal with some of them. What do you think it takes to be a successful businessman? Enterprise, lots of guts, hard work, high intelligence—right?"

"Roughly."

"You want to tell me how you use those things to manage a tree farm in Georgia?"

"I don't know," Peters said. "I don't know anything about the lumber business."

"Neither does he. Or if he does, it doesn't do him any good. Look, they've got all this land, with pines growing on it. When it starts getting mature—ready to cut—anyplace, people make them offers for it: paper mills and lumber companies. And since some of it gets mature every year they know quite a bit about price—all they have to do is look up last year's bids. When one comes in that looks good, they can tell that company to go ahead if it's a cash deal, and if it isn't they can look up their credit in Dun and Bradstreet. They've got a regular crew that comes around and replants when the cutting's done."

"You make it sound easy," Peters said.

"No, it isn't easy-but it isn't your kind of hard, either. It takes a special kind of men who can go year in and year out without rocking the boat in any way. People who never get so bored with it they get careless, and that know when they have to bow to the state legislatures and when they ought to threaten to fight a new law through the courts. But now you're telling them to get out and recruit soldiers-well, most of them were in the army themselves at one time or another, they were majors and colonels and all that, at desks, but they don't know anything about soldiers, or thinking, or running anything that doesn't go by routine. We used to say that what we wanted was initiative and creativity and all those things, just like we said we wanted kindness and human values, and the American frontier, while it lasted, actually encouraged and rewarded them; but we've been paying off on something else for a hundred years or so now, and now that's all we've got." Peters had slipped his hand between her thighs, and she looked down at it and said, "That took you a long time."

He said, "I didn't want to interrupt you."

And later, "We still might do it." He took her hand in the dark. "If we can change things just a little before it's too late we still might do it." The girl's body blossomed fire that engulfed and seared and clung; naked and burning he reached the center of the room beyond; but he fell there, on the Moroccan carpet that covered the red tiles; and, though they poured tepid water on him from the spent ice buckets, died there.

Fighting Fascism

Norman Rush

1. Myles was legally blind. Guided by his wife, he walked visibly gamely through the foyer, stood there alone while she left to hang up his coat and search out a place for him. He was handsome, swarthy, imposingly dressed; his face was healthily full; beard shadow showed in his newly shaved cheeks. He was in his early thirties. He tweaked the starched prongs of the handkerchief in the breast pocket of his suit. Mildly and steadily smiling, his eyes closed, he suggested a model pointlessly prolonging a performance of modesty.

His wife returned. They passed through the guests in the first two rooms. When he recognized a voice, he raised his hand in a near-salute and identified the speaker by name. His wife placed him in a low armchair near a coffee table set with bowls of cheese dip and baskets of crackers and breadsticks. He leaned over the refreshments, inhaling and frowning. His wife, behind his chair, began driving it closer to the table. He held his hand up and said, "Don't derange the setting, Jean."

2. Myles declined a drink. "You can't drink and argue or rather you can't drink and argue and win, really."

Jean was a thin, chinless blonde wearing a chastely cut white voile dress. Myles complained to her, in a low voice, "Why do they all have to shout when they see you're blind, where did that originate? Precise shouting."

3. Jean was back from sampling the conversations in progress. She said, "The main one is about Catholics."

"Then never mind it."

"It's not too good. He's a left Catholic."

"The one thing I never argue about is that, the lineaments of that. Anne Fremantle. I hate the idea of a Roman Catholic coming on as left so violently I have to preserve myself, Jean. Although in a way I approve of it as an interim form of political identity; anyway, it's the first step out of the Church but far be it from them to realize it. But if you argue, Jean, you drive them back, you can undo years of their evolution with three minutes of cogent argument, I've seen it. I've done it. And we want them out of the Church. No, find me something else."

Jean said, "But what about how in Catholic countries they have so many traitors when they have revolutionary movements, how in Ireland, how that movement in Ireland is famous for its traitors? I love that point."

"Darling, you have to find something else. I can't possibly do that to the man. Really, when they start to emerge from the Church, that's *when* you can't say a word, really. Can't go up and say, 'Congratulations.' You have to let them alone or they won't make it further, farther, than they have."

"But you hate that type of thinking offering itself."

"Ah, but this isn't Europe. If this were Europe it would be different. But we have to let them get numerous enough first in this country. They have to multiply first, darling, then we can."

"I think he was Irish."

"Darling, they have to multiply first before we can go in and argue."

"He has a strong accent."

4. Myles picked at the cord sewn into the armsleeves of the chair cover.

"Someone is saying about how men literary geniuses always destroy their sons as writers if they make it in their own lifetime, Myles. He has three boys. He mentioned someone you once met, Omar Waite. He knows a lot about the subject. Oh, he said the one exception would be Dumas and his son except if you examine it you found out the son inherited an actual literary factory from his father, with ghost writers hired, so we have no idea what he really did himself on his own; he was more like a foreman."

Myles said, "The assumption is that the son usually wants to do what the father does, I assume from what you say. . . ." "Yes."

"I assume he writes, himself."

"Yes, and the interesting thing is, someone else said he's saving up everything he writes until he's sure his sons establish themselves in some way or other of their own."

"Father love. But is he waiting until he *dies* before he strikes with his works? I doubt it. The only consistent thing would be if he made his whole *oeuvre* posthumous while he worked at petty jobs while they wrote and so on."

"No, just until they establish themselves."

"Wait-what about a pseudonym; why not?"

"He says they never work. Someone asked him. He knows this whole subject. He says the family always knows."

"Ah, but what about the sons of literary *failures*? Literary failures. Literary failures produce in their sons the greatest writers of all. His duty as a father would be to produce and publish some amount of pure tripe for the sake of his boys."

"No one mentioned it."

"Well, go back and mention it before it's all over. Go on, while he's there with his claque. Go on."

"I don't know any examples. I don't know any examples."

"You don't need to. Just go mention that. Go ahead. Just drop it into the discussion and come back. *He* knows the examples. Go mention it. Also I need something to eat besides this lungfish shit. Can you possibly look around in the kitchen, or no? I can't take much more of this lungfish shit. He knows the examples. Yeats is an example. Go and come right back."

"No, I can't. I'll go look for a sandwich."

"Jean!"

5. "I think someone is defending fascism. Right now he's making cigarettes with a machine he has."

"What? You misunderstood. Where is he, what did he say that you—"

"They're not *talking* right now, I said: he's making up cigarettes for people with one of those little presses with rollers."

"You misheard, Jean. What's that on the wall?" Myles was squinting in the direction of a large composition, framed and glassed, in black and gold gesso, by one of the host's young children.

"Nothing; it's by a child."

"You're mistaken about your fascist. On your way. You are, you're wrong."

6. Jean heard: "But now I see everything differently, now I see everything is fascism, the only unique thing about Hitler was the accident of having a very personal attachment to his ideology and having the freedom to realize it . . . But I'm pleased finally to see your liberal democracies are fascist: fascism is the use of force, except that the force is applied, under liberalism, so piecemeal, over such long periods of time, to whole classes: they slowly grind up whole classes, grind them up for money, over long periods of time, we're all used to it, the difference between fascism and liberalism is rate of speed, one is fast and one is slow: liberalism is slow fascism. Hitler speeded up German liberalism to a point where it needed a new name. Hitler was an individualist fascist, which ruined him, which is the only interesting thing and the only thing that separates him from the routine politicians of the period who were all liberal: Ramsay MacDonald was ready and willing to use up the lower classes at the standard rate. Hitler was a little impetuous, that's all. Individualists rarely have the chance to be personally powerful: usually they end up hired as publicists for the normal power seeker who sees himself as a custodian or delegate of some top-dog class. Think of Liberal England, what Liberal England was all set to do to the Irish; Ireland can thank God for the Germans in 1914, or rather England can-she was ready to have a full-scale pogrom in Ireland when World War I

came up. Read George Dangerfield, *The Strange Death of Liberal England*, if you don't believe it. The flower of the Irish intelligentsia, don't forget, wrote or fought alongside the Spanish fascists, maybe out of gratitude to the Germans, who knows? Hitler's program could've been exactly the same thing it was and if he'd diluted it, agreed to put it into effect in forty years instead of five, you'd be calling him a statesman today. . . . 'We are all fascists now. . . .' The minority who hate violence in the little leading edge of the left hate it out of fear of injury to themselves. . . .''

His voice continued through some resistance that was obscure to Jean: ". . . Oh, well, I oppose war because I oppose the expression of contempt! . . . You can't have human society and have the unbridled expression of contempt. War is perfect contempt. I'm dominated personally by contempt or the . . . fear of showing contempt, so I know whereof I . . ." He excused himself and bent down to retrieve the cigarette mill, which had just fallen.

He resumed: ". . . I consider myself part of the partyless. . . . Parliamentary democracy is simply an intellectual accident that is now perfectly assimilated to fascism: an intellectual accident . . . No, I love pacifism from on high, the way you can love a dog. . . ."

7. Jean reported to Myles. "He said war is only contempt, one form of contempt: a form of contempt: he said he was dominated by contempt. He said something about something you talk about sometimes, the Irish fascists that went to Spain. He said the best or greatest people in Ireland were fascist. . . ."

"Ah, Jesus, who did they *invite?* He must be here by some freak accident."

"Well, they all like what he's saying."

"That can't be, Jean."

"He said Hitler was unique. If you gave Hitler a chance or something you'd be calling him constructive, if he had more time, if he had a fair chance." "This is some hideous error. What does he look like?"

"Smaller than you. I couldn't get too close, Myles. Half the time I had to ask what he said from someone. He said parliamentary democracy is an accident. . . ."

Myles pressed his palms together.

"In other words he's simply some sort of clever fascist, Jean."

"Yes, but they like him, they seem to like what he's saying."

"A fascist. So I have to go over, then. Jean, it can't be! I don't have any choice if he's a fascist, I have to go over. But, Jean, this can't be! You'd say he is, definitely?"

"Myles, he said everyone is fascist."

"In other words simply a fascist."

"He said other things. Hitler was impetuous."

"Never mind, I see I have to go over. I can't believe this."

He swept off his lap with his hands.

"I have to get in there, I see it. Did you get me anything I could eat?"

"No, but I looked."

"Can you look again? I'm going over."

"It's next to the piano in the next room."

"I know the way. I need food for this, though: you've got to find something. Take me over and then find something."

"No, I want to be there, Myles: what're you going to say? I want to see how you start."

"Wait and see. Something like, 'Someone introduce me to the—or *lead* me to the fascist, please?' No, I'll think of something better. I don't know. Don't worry. Wait till we get there."

Myles stood, composed himself and said, "I don't want your hand on me once we get there, Jean, remember."

Cold Turkey

Ron Padgett and Dick Gallup

Ι

"Chopped greens with dinner, and some cookies after with brandy. I don't know if you can call that taste, but what can you ask for when you're dining with a senator? No, I paid little mind to his table, though there were others there who turned up their noses. I've never stood for such things in my house, nor my mother before me. . . ."

"Yes, ma'am, but if you'll remember what I was asking you about we could get this meal over with."

"Which was?"

"Which was the matter of your making such a racket at all hours of the night and disturbing the neighbors."

McConnel's ear twitched. He would have sworn he heard, in the infinite distance, the plaintive whistle of a railroad train and there were no railroads anywhere near Dublin, New York.

"The 7:04," said the old lady, smacking her withered lips and hauling a large pocket watch out from under her apron.

And indeed, the sound grew nearer and nearer, like a shape in a nightmare that comes so close to you that you can't imagine its coming any closer, and yet it does.

Ker-ash! Ker-smash! went the 7:04, spewing from its tracks and over the brightly polished shoes of the astonished flatfoot.

"Wall I'll be . . ." said McConnel, pushing his cap back on his head and holding himself around the torso.

"Young man," the old lady began, but then she felt offended and her withered elegant neck swerved above the collar of her simple black evening dress and she pressed her face into the folds of the drapery next to the door.

McConnel never was able to bear the sight of emotion in old people. All he could manage was a mumbled comment about the beauty of her car.

"I'm sorry, young man, it's not you. Every night when the 7:04 comes through"—she became choked with feeling—"I can't help it. It means that that perfectly dreadful person is coming."

"Is *here*," corrected the senator, dragging his tattered but still dignified hulk out from under the wreckage. Near him lay the bleeding corpse of the engineer, his bald head shining with the powerful light of the chandelier.

"This happens every night, every night!" cried the pensioner. McConnel, all six foot four of him, turned and fled.

"Well," sighed the old lady after a decent pause, "now that you're here you may as well stay to dinner."

"Still setting the scene, are you?" The senator looked fire. "Get on with it!"

"Don't be so chipper! When I want to be ordered around I'll hire a gardener."

"Spreading your wings already, Kate?"

Kate smiled that strange, malignant smile of hers, and the senator ambled over to the easy chair and plopped down in front of the raging fire, his hand already resting on a good book.

He could not see the engineer rise from the wreckage of the tiny train, could not see him dust himself off and grin a toothy grin. He could not see the engineer approach the smiling Kate, either, nor could he see her adjusting the wings that now dangled from her shoulders and upper back, nor could he see the engineer dutifully begin lacing up the ties and adjusting the braces and stays. But above the roar of the fire and the dull hum of the transformer he could hear, hesitant at first, the flutter of the artificial wings, and then a great blast of wind swept over him and she was gone. Soon the smell of cooking wafted out of the kitchen and the senator began to lose interest in his book. It was a good book, one of the ten best, in his estimation, and it irked him to have his stomach pulling him like a spent cannonball which rolls over the grassy battlefield, no longer a threat to life and limb, but an object of admiration, smoking and perfectly round, pulling him perversely away from his aesthetic enjoyment and toward the soiled and grimy linoleum which covered the antique dining table.

"Senator, I'm dishing up!"

A chill of pure hatred ran down the senator's spine and out his toes into the raging fire fanned by the beating of Kate's wings as she dished up.

The senator turned to contemplate the table where the steaming dishes glowed in the candlelight. From all over eame the wonderful music of Mozart.

Mozart! The senator was nearly overcome. Angelic days! And then it was clear to him—the old bat was trying to keep him from the chamber! On this day of all days. The fate of the Union riding on his vote. His mouth watering, the senator pushed himself from the table as the tears hung on Kate's lashes.

Like a somnambulist he approached the window and drew aside the curtains, behind which stars sparkled. It was a long way to Washington. He would never make it on time. His stomach sank.

"Mike," he said wearily.

"Yes, senator," answered the faithful engineer, emerging from the shadows.

"Open the window, Mike."

Old Mike hesitated a moment, then did as he was told. He stepped aside, shaking his head sadly.

The senator removed his jacket and rolled up the sleeves of his sweat-soaked shirt, revealing arms of great power and size. Flexing them several times, he seemed to be sizing them up, and as he stooped to open his briefcase, it was clear he had come to no certain conclusion as to their capabilities.

"Well, here goes nothing," he said to himself.

In his hand was the large metal vote, glimmering dimly. On it he had marked his choice. He reared back, spinning his arm over his head, and with a wild and sudden jerk hurled the vote into the night toward Washington.

Where Have All the Followers Gone?

Raylyn Moore

What had happened in Big Sur happened again in Monterey. Though Touhy made the scene at Cannery Row, end to end, even practically looking under rocks, he turned up nobody he knew. Which was particularly weird, because he knew everybody. That is, everybody who followed the Road.

Not that he didn't see some frantic far-out types. Some wore matching socks and smoked straight tobacco in pipes, shuffling along beside their old ladies who had pearly lipstick and plastic curlers bubbling up under a silk scarf; some were bikers with glow-in-the-dark crash helmets, and some were weekend freaks in bare feet and nasty jeans, pale eyes goggling at the Sights behind the thick glasses they wore at the office all week.

And head hunters at nearly every corner, some in plainclothes, some in their mickeymouse suits. They looked blandly, noncommittally out of their pigeyes at Touhy's no shoes, and slept-in bib overalls, and curly matted beard hair last washed under Bixby Creek Bridge (an unfinished job, interrupted by the sudden descent from above of the highway patrol).

It was high summer but an inimical wind off the bay knifed him through his parka. He noticed that a free clothing store he'd visited last time through had been replaced by a Chicken Delight, and that the psychedelic paint job on the old cannery boiler in front of the Oz restaurant was beginning to peel. Even the cars said KEEP OFF THE CRASS and HAVE A NICE DAY and SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL.

He split, and on his way out of town was set down by a driver going only as far as Ord (where—how long ago?—on Armed Farces Day, thousands strong, they all together, with Incidents, and Arrests, and Coverage, but all for nothing, because nothing changed except for the worse, with more little wars going on, and new, tighter draft laws, and people in office now that made yesterday's reactionaries look like freaking radicals), but now the fog rode the wind in and brought him some of his luck back. For ahead on the road he recognized, at last, three he knew. Three waiting, like himself, for a ride. Like himself not fighting it anymore, taking it as it came, going where the road went. Haila and Carma and Rass.

They thumbed north together, feeling bad vibes in Sausalito, spending a night on the beach at Mendocino, where Carma saw a clear sign in a lofting gull that meant stay, not go any farther. But again there was *no one there*, where a year before on this same beach on a summer night hundreds had slept, most of whom could call most of the others by name. Like a family they'd been. Uptown was the same. Around the streets and in the head shops and laundromat no familiar faces, only natives and some stragglers from a film company shooting it up around a fallingdown house up on the hill. Opels and great fat Mercedes sedans said LOVE IT OR LEAVE IT. Nothing to do but get out on the road again and hold up the glow-paint sign ANYWHERE, which they had discovered worked a lot better than the old signs saying LA or SF or ORE.

Because you can't go back, only on, following the Road like Huck followed the River. No leaders, only followers; the Road led. Sometimes Touhy thought of his father back there in Pasadena (where else?), who was project manager for a construction company that was cranking out millions and millions of tracthouses-with-swimming pools (what else?), and together they would conduct (in Touhy's mind) the Dialogue, which was merely a rerun and extension of the real dialogue they'd had day after day until that time, two or three years ago or so, when Touhy had walked out and not gone back. His father would be getting on now—forty-five, maybe—and never free a day of his life but not aware of this, toiling and moiling for the Company, coming back every night, an uptight rat threading a maze learned the hard way, returning to air-conditioned Pasadena and the iced Pimm's Cup and the backyard poolside TV with Walter Cronkite. Touhy's kid sister always shut up in the family room alone, with the drapes pulled, spaced out on "Sesame Street." Touhy's mother in the kitchen pointlessly but devotedly supervising some automatic gadget which would say *ping* when the food was ready.

GRACIOUS LIVING. NOTHING DOWN. SMILE.

"Don't you want to be free, Papa?"

"Don't call me Papa. There are different kinds of freedom."

"There is absolute freedom."

"For that you pay."

"Freedom has got to be free, otherwise it isn't freedom. The truth is I just can't accept your—"

"Hold it. Damnitall! I warned you I would refuse to allow the word 'lifestyle' to be uttered again in this house!"

"You see? I try to be upfront with you about what I believe, but all you do is come down heavy. We can't relate." (Sigh.)

(Sigh.) "So maybe you better go on out and do what you want for a while, whatever the hell it is. Then, when you come back—"

"I won't be back."

Just beyond the Humboldt County line they were picked up by a goofy-looking straight in a farm truck. They piled in back, settling with their bedrolls among some empty feedsacks, an uninflated spare tire, broken crankshaft, a sack of groceries, hunkering down alongside an empty chickencoop stinking of rotten brimstone. The only communication before takeoff was the usual.

Goof: "Anywhere, huh? You mean that?"

Touhy: "You can believe it, friend."

As they took the first steep grade, a shiny camper whooshed past, big as one of Touhy's father's tracthouses, the triple-decker bumpersticker saying, IF YOU HATE THE POLICE, NEXT TIME YOU'RE IN A JAM, CALL A HIPPIE, and causing them all to stand up in the back of the truck, itself traveling at an insane speed for its rackety condition, and cheer and wave over the cab at the camper, the girls blowing kisses.

Ten minutes farther along there was a new diversion as the truck swerved hard right off the highway onto winding gravel. No one spoke, and only Carma shrugged and bit her lip. On the worse road they traveled if anything more recklessly than before. There were foothills, then mountains, the flora changing from dwarf redwoods and digger pines to jack oaks and madroñas and bay. As for the fauna, a lot of it seemed to have been zapped. Bleached and chalky shankbones and some complete small skulls-raccoon and skunk and the like-were strewn here and there along the road's cringing shoulders, while in the tiretracks lay the occasional disemboweled carcasses of rabbits and ground squirrels. Other bodies were too mutilated for identification. From these sites of disaster the truck's advance would flush ravening crows and magpies-and once a wheeling buzzard-the scavengers returning without delay to the carrion before the dust even settled, treading with a militant arrogance before the eyes of the watchers in the truck, the magpies a swirling flash of black and silver in the ultraclear light.

Yet for all this evidence of its havoc, traffic was scarce, even nonexistent; no vehicles were met or overtaken. Nor were any buildings visible and only rarely a tributary lane promising some cabin or logging site at its end.

Of course no one had a watch, but it was evident from the changing position of the sun that several hours passed. It was hot. Touhy had long since removed the parka and two underlying sweaters added in the coastal chill near Fort Bragg early that morning, but even in the air rush from the truck cab the skin of his chest, copper-layered by the Sonora sun the previous month, oozed moisture.

Someone investigated the bag of groceries, mostly cans, which they did not touch except for one tin of sardines. This was opened and shared, the oily pieces scattered limply over the tops of arrowroot cookies. Half the box of cookies and a second tin of sardines were thoughtfully left for the man in the cab. All the way from Fort Ord they had been mostly quiet with one another. But now they rapped awhile, set off by the appearance of another county-line marker at the summit of one of the many ridges. TRINITY. "We been heading straight east," said Rass. "Never get to Oregon this way."

"Could," Touhy disagreed. "Sooner or later we'll hit the highway to Redding and it's an easy haul north from there." And then, "We *want* to go to Oregon?"

"Sure we do. That's where it's at now. Oregon. Where everybody is. Why we don't see anybody. Because they're all there. Maybe."

"Maybe not. Maybe they've all gone to Colorado on account of the earthquake coming. The big one."

"That earthquake talk was all started by *them*," Carma said. "The governor and *them*. They spread the word about quakes and us all splitting for Colorado and Oregon, to get us out of the state. So we wouldn't accidentally get on welfare or anything and cost *them* bread. So we wouldn't ask for food stamps and like that."

"Or go skinny dipping in *their* nice clean creeks full of *their* nice clean industrial wastes, or wearing out the flowers in *their* parks by looking at them too much, or breathing too much of *their* expensive air."

The truck had been slowed at last, baffled by the tortuous bending and unbending of the tops of the mountains, the folding and unfolding and refolding of the gravel road. "My daddy," said Haila, "used to say you can tell when a quake's coming by the weather."

They all looked up at the sky, noticing for the first time the changed condition of the day, the overheated sun gasping at them now from where it was trapped behind a dense puff of yellow gauze. The sulfurous light seemed to be pressing down on them, its weight hampering movement. "But this is not quake weather," Touhy decided. "More like a forest fire." As if in confirmation, a dollop of thick, sooty ash drifted down from nowhere and lit on the back of his hand, clinging there in the sweat.

"Except that wood smoke is blue, isn't it?" Rass said. "Not yellow. And there's a funny smell."

Inhaling, they tried to decide what it smelled like but couldn't, and then drifted back to the previous topic.

"Hoodrobin," Haila said, sitting with her unstrung GI boots beside her, granny skirt rucked above her knees and grimy bare toes airing. "Governor Hoodrobin of the (Police) State of California. He robs the poor to give to the rich."

"But if *they* really wanted to get rid of us," Carma said, "it wouldn't be hard, would it? Why mess around spreading rumors about quakes and that? So much easier to do something direct. Who of us has a PO address? Or a Social Security number? Or a savings account? Or a last name? It would be real easy to get rid of us all, and who would come looking?"

"They can't forget all the arson"—Rass took it up—"and the bank bombings, and the voting age being lowered a while back."

"Not that," Touhy disagreed. "I think *they've* been setting the fires and planting the bombs, so as to frame us. I never set off a fire or bomb, nor know anyone who has. It's *their* kind of thing and none of ours."

"I still say, why would they mess with all that?" Carma insisted. "Only thing they'd need would be a Plan."

"Plan," echoed Haila, dreamily.

"Like a pill," said Carma. "Ram it down the throat of everybody under twenty-five and it would make us all walk to the beaches and on into the water like lemmings."

"Or maybe—" Touhy began, and then said, "Hey, man, look at that," pointing. The truck was taking a steep upcurve in second, groaning; out of the gully on the down side rose a coneshaped heap of charred garbage. It was immense, like a volcano or something, and in various degrees of descent on its sloping flanks were unburned or only partially burned relics, lying as if spewed out of a crater: a carseat, naked springs escaping; moldy bedroll; busted guitar, strings long gone; a heavy rawhide sandal, no mate; a jagged piece of the body of a decorated bus, with the shape of an intricate mandala still bright through creeping rust. But it was not so much on these marvels that the group fixed its attention. On the very peak of the cone someone had stuck up a cardboard sign on a stick, the glow-paint letters washed a little by the weather but still plain. PEACE, it said.

"Right on," Touhy said.

"Outa sight," Haila said.

And after that the silence settled around them again, except for the snuffling and grinding of the truck and the raucous jeering of the crows as they swooped down, tearing at the stiffening bodies, worrying out the entrails, delving and pillaging. The yellow silk curtain still hung over the sun and more ash drifted carelessly down, the oily soot taking the form of tiny commas, small curled black wormlets that clung to flesh and clothing and refused to be brushed away.

Touhy slept and was wakened painfully by the lurch of the truck as it stopped. They had descended into a heavily wooded glen where the haze was pocketed under branches too overlaced to admit raw daylight. There was the sharp scream of the emergency brake being set, then the driver coming around back and looking in over the tailgate, peering critically at them through the yellow twilight. Touhy, who hadn't really looked at their driver before, now saw he had anthracite eyeballs under his big high-priced cowboy hat and a little mean mouth that opened and closed on an incomplete picket row of long, sepia teeth. "Where I turn off," he hollered over the din of the idling motor. But there was no turnoff in sight.

Touhy, feeling an uncharacteristic tremor of unease on account of that forest fire creeping maybe toward them in this god-knows-where wilderness, said, "Can't you take us all the way, friend?"

"This is all the way. There's a camp off to your right, through the woods there. So long." "Later on," they told him forgivingly. "Take care."

They gathered up their stuff and climbed down and watched the truck make its dusty exit up the road, still not turning but going straight ahead.

And Touhy's tremor passed off soon enough there in the quiet woods. He could see almost a kind of beauty in the tendrils of smoke growing in the stillness like thick-stemmed vines which hung for support on the air itself. Haila coughed. A kind of beauty, he thought, in the smoke and in the glister of a million ripe blackberries growing up and down the road, banked solid except for a gap where the path to the camp must be. The camp would be a state park, or, if they were still in Trinity Forest, a national parks facility, with posted Rules and Regulations set up by *them*. But no matter; the four of them would probably have it to themselves, because who else could ever find it? This land is our land.

He watched the others greedily eating the berries, and wanted to say something about feeling good because this was where the Road had brought them, which made it all right, but he spoke no word. Haila had hung her boots around her neck by the laces and Rass had tied the girls' bedrolls to his own and now hoisted all three onto his back, ready to move out. It was maybe because they had somehow become a family now that it mattered less that they were alone, deserted for some unaccountable reason by the whole counterculture, cut off from their peers who had, only yesterday it seemed, also followed the Road and lived on the Land.

Touhy had a thing about being fair, even to his father, and he was ready to admit at last what hadn't seemed reasonable before. In that familiar place at the back of his mind he confronted the old man again. "Hey, Pop, remember what you said, about how it would end sometime? Someday you'll look around, you said, and everybody'll be gone and you know where they'll be? Back at college and back in the army and back working at the filling station. Happens every generation, you said, and you could only hope your son'd wake up in time not to be the sole survivor of an extinct species. Well, so it turns out maybe you were right. About that part of it anyway."

The path rambled for a quarter mile between blackberry canes and sere chaparral, and then a vista opened suddenly. There was a cinderblock kiosk, and a forest ranger or somebody leaning out of it, watching them approach. And a sign on a steel-mesh fence:

ANYWHERE,	CALIF.
Alt.	3,780
Pop.	0

A loose-leaf register lay open on the counter in front of the ranger.

"Is this the camp?"

"This is it. Sign, then take your gear to the main building and they'll process you."

Touhy hesitated, but the others were already signing. Before Touhy wrote his name, he leafed back to the previous page and the one before that. "Man!" he hollered suddenly, calling them back to the counter of the kiosk. "Look at this. Merlin and Roush, and Shad and Bobbie and Zodiac. And over here Stovey and Gemini and Glinda and Valerie. They're here! This is where it's at. Here! Not Oregon. Not Colorado, not back to college. Frieda and Roos and Horse—"

But his companions, having caught his joy, were already pressing past him, hurrying across a clipped and irrigated mall toward the massive gray concrete structure the man had pointed out. Behind that building was another, the second topped by a soaring, blackened smokestack. It came to Touhy there was no danger after all because here's where the smoke was coming from, some kind of powerplant, and not a forest fire. POLLUTION MAKES THE WORLD CO BROWN (but it can't burn you).

He watched the heavy door of the main building swing inward to receive the others, and felt like running to join them, but something made him turn back and say to the ranger, or whoever he was, "If everybody's here that's on the register, then what does that sign mean about the population being nothing?"

And the ranger, or whoever, said, "That's right. Nobody lives here."

"Oh. I get it. Campers don't count. But how about yourself?" "I only work here."

"But it must be like a town. Because the sign-"

"Nobody lives here."

Touhy glanced back to where they'd come on the path through a wicket in the steel fence, seeing all at once how high the fence was, which was pretty freaking high for just a camp, and he was going to say, "What kind of camp is this, anyway?" but just then the whole scene lit up with Big Sound. Rock being blasted at high pressure. Whang. Whang. Whang. Boomba-kong. Coming from that building. A second later he was going through the heavy door, over which hung a sign HOME FREE, and after that he kicked himself a couple of times for being such a freaking fool as to have had any doubts. Because it was all right. In the big windowless waitingroom-like the walls were pasted over with real boss posters; strobes stroked the scene, lingering on the glittering bead festoons hung here and there, ceiling to floor. Hidden speakers pounded the rock, and-he quickly discovered -beside every automatically vibrating waterbed around the floor was a metal box full of joints. He looked for the other three and, not without some difficulty, discovered their faces among the revolving shadows. The faces winked on and off as the lights crossed them, shattering, restoring, shattering. He lit up some of the free grass, chose a bed and crashed, home free for sure.

LIBERATION NOW, LEGALIZE EVERYTHING, LOVE,

There was an interior door in the room, a double portal painted shining-sea blue, and over that still another sign: THIS IS THE TRIP TO END ALL TRIPS.

When the Musak cut out, a recording popped on, dispassionately insinuating its message into Touhy's relaxing brain.

. . . Hot showers. (tick, tick, tick) This is your camp and we are sure you will want to help keep it neat and sanitary. Remove all clothing and leave it, together with other personal property, in the delousing vats, which are to your left as you pass through the blue doors into the hot showers. (tick, tick, tick) This is your camp . . .

Right on, agreed Touhy, who was having beautiful thoughts. Yes, and afterward they would be joining the lost ones, finally.

An Outline of History

Malcolm Braly

He knew by the murmuring in the cells around him that many of the brothers were awake. He knew their thoughts like his own were fixed on the morning, when the gray geese would roll. And he was smiling.

It had taken a decade of bloody rioting. Big Brown remembered the fires lighting all across the country as the prisons blew—Quentin, Attica, Folsom, McAlester, The Walls, Raiford, Dannemora, Atlanta, McNeil Island, Soledad, Deer Lodge, Leavenworth and a number of prisons Brown had never heard of, all had erupted as the brothers joined hands across the walls. Many had died.

Seven cells left of Big Brown and two tiers down, another inmate was unwrapping a candy bar to eat before he went to sleep. He had given five cigarettes for the sweet, trading with another prisoner, who had earned it washing socks. The convict who had paid to have his socks washed had taken in the candy bar as part of a gambling debt and it wasn't a brand he liked. The man who had settled the gambling debt was the head clerk and a notorious manipulator. He was close to the captain of the guards and he peddled the influence others thought he had. The prisoner who had given the bar to the head clerk, presumably to curry favor, had bought the candy at the inmate canteen. He had carefully unwrapped the bar, poisoned it and rewrapped it so it appeared undisturbed.

When it became clear the prisons were not going to quiet down, that they were only going to get bloodier, that it was going to take two guards to hold each prisoner (when the ratio was once thirty prisoners to a single guard) and new guards were impossible to hire, and the old ones demanded pay equal to that earned by the men who handle nitroglycerin—at that point the feds took over and began to run the state prisons with military personnel.

The political left virtually rose in rebellion, and pulled the center after them. Most were outraged and almost no one was pleased. An exception was William Stoke, eighty-seven, of Pasadena, California. He remarked to his neighbor: "I knew it was going to lead to this when they first started showing them bastards moving picture shows. I always said what they needed was a hard hand." He shook his own fist, which was nearly transparent and agitated by a fine tremor.

Big Brown couldn't sleep. He put his head to the bars and called softly to Electric Marvin in the next cell. "What's the first thing you going to do?"

Electric Marvin chuckled. "I'm going to plant some dope." "This just might be rough," Big Brown said. "No squares a day and they don't wash your shit away."

"We'll be fine," Marvin said.

Electric was white, but he was a brother just the same. They had done this all together and they planned a society where there would be no divisions. Many of those who had argued, preached and pressured from the outside—the lawyers, the ministers, the legislators and the journalists—had been white. They had done a great deal, but there had been times when they had amused Big Brown. He knew he was neither a saint nor a candidate for martyrdom, but a man fighting for his life. He had to get the man's hand off him, or die in the attempt. Simply that. But they had billed him as a Black Dreyfus (when he wasn't innocent) and talked and sung him into a legendary figure. Brown's intuition told him at least part of the reason they clustered around the prisons and shouted the prisoner's cause was the unconscious wish that their thin gray cocks would swell with some of the marvelous potency they imagined was bottled here. Brown smiled. He had left an army on his sheets.

Three cells down from Big Brown, his friend and lieutenant, Hagman, was preparing a keister stash, packing a gram of heroin into the severed finger of a rubber glove, to insert in the morning. They might not shake down, but why take chances with anything so precious as scag? In the cell next to Hagman, two queens, one a huge six-foot-six black called Frosty the No Man, the other a slender chicano known as Hot Sauce, were promising that no matter what happened they would remain the same to each other.

Organization had proved the key. In the early days the old hardrocks had torn the prisons up and settled for nothing better than a bath a week and a chicken dinner on Christmas. They were rabid individualists, each single-o, with nothing to unite them except their hatred of authority. But when blacks began to swell the prisons with their consciousness acutely raised, a vast change was set in motion, because if you were black you were a brother whether you wanted to be or not. The Muslims, Brown's faith, and the Panthers were powerful organizations able to compel the loyalty of their members. Add the Young Lords, the Weathermen, the White Panthers and La Raza and you had a big block able to cause sustained and systematic trouble and with sufficient discipline to hold out for major concessions.

Finally the federal government had relinquished the right to govern all those born within its borders. Since it couldn't expel its prisoners as the British had once shipped theirs to Australia, they had closed off a large reservation in the state of Nevada, and the wall they had built around it made the Berlin wall look like a picket fence.

Bureaucracy, as always, wove an enormously complicated web of regulations and guidelines governing who had to go and who didn't unless they wanted to. The civil criminals and the sex offenders were generally allowed a choice, but if they chose to go behind the Nevada Wall it was with the understanding that they would never come out.

Surplus food and clothing, government castoffs of all kinds, would periodically be left inside the gates. They would neither freeze nor starve, but before they could hope to live well they would have to develop their own methods of production.

They would face many desperate problems, but Big Brown was fiercely certain they would conduct themselves with more honor than the nation they were leaving behind.

Next morning as they filed through the double gates to load onto the gray geese, the metal detector rang again and again. Custody had neglected to deactivate it and now like some military warning system still senselessly operating over an abandoned battlefield it told of the large amounts of metal hidden on the men who were boarding the transportation buses. One of the guards overseeing the loading caught another's eyes. He glanced at the clamoring metal detector, winked and drew a finger across his throat.

Brown had never appreciated the magnitude of the land he was now giving up. They drove for two and a half days, and he saw the rivers, the mountains and the plains, and the ghetto had not entirely blurred the instinct that told him all this was good. He sat next to Hagman and he was sure Hagman had a skinful and didn't know or care whether it was day or night. He nudged Hagman. "Ain't going to be no more scag in there."

Hagman smiled mildly. "Our Chinese brothers may send us a taste." Hagman floated his hand down gently like a parachute.

"Shit, you say. Ain't no airplanes coming near, and anyway they're puritans."

They entered through three gates. The outer perimeter was a cyclone fence with gun towers every five hundred feet. In addition to conventional weapons, these towers were linked to a radar station and armed with standard antiaircraft and the latest Tom Paine ground-to-air missiles.

Between the first fence and the second stretched a mile of desert—defoliated, leveled and mined. The second fence was equipped with towers every two hundred feet. A hundred yards inside the second fence rose the wall—fifty feet tall and thirty feet thick. Jeeps would patrol the top and the inner edge had fortified gun emplacements every hundred feet; they were armed with machine guns and flame throwers. The entire system was extensively rigged with proximity alarms, infrared detection and heat sensors. A sparrow couldn't pass.

When Big Brown stepped from the bus and took a good look at the barren land where he would spend the rest of his life, his spirit faltered. Then he told himself: Hell, it's *ours*. He stepped toward one of the MPs guarding the gate. As he approached, the soldier's rifle automatically rose. Big Brown spread his hands and asked, "How many in here so far?"

The soldier smiled unpleasantly. "They've been coming in for a week."

Automatically Brown looked around, and the soldier's smile deepened. "There's twenty of these gates."

They found sleeping bags and tents and made a rough camp. Brown ordered a fire built and they tried to hustle a meal from the sacks of grain, the cartons of powdered eggs and cases of tinned meat. Inexplicably there were twenty cases of French mustard, a broken fork lift, ten kegs of buttons, two crates of blackboards, a case of Scotch tape and a gross of ax handles.

The first morning they discovered a body with its head cut off. It was the former head clerk, and as Big Brown stared down at the mutilated corpse he found himself thinking: Now who did this? Who went and did this? That afternoon Big Brown received a traveling delegation from the Republic of New Filmore. The California prisoners had been among the first in and now a week later they thought of themselves as old-timers. Brown noted with some distaste that many carried spears made by lashing knives to branches and the handles of surplus garden tools. And though it was early spring and mild, many wore capes fashioned from army blankets. Most wore sunglasses.

The leader, a tall, slender man who spoke with an exaggerated elegance, introduced himself as the New Filmore Panthers' minister of indoctrination. As compelling a figure as the minister was, he paled beside the person standing next to him. A bitch. A foxy bitch with her hair haloed around her face in a huge fuzzy cloud, and her black eyes hard as ebony. Big Brown felt a swelling wave of warmth sweep his whole body.

When Big Brown closed with the minister of indoctrination in private counsel, he discovered that the delegation was really a quasi raiding party circling around the various gates to see who and what was coming in.

"We have made our capitol on the shore of a small lake. There was a very nice summer community there and the buildings have proved suitable. Our minister of information and his staff are drafting a constitution, and our minister of agriculture is studying the situation. . . ."

Finally, the minister muted his peroration and drew close to Big Brown to ask if they had found any tinned meat. "Meat is very scarce and our people have not yet developed the skills with which to hunt rabbit and deer."

"What about the woman?" Brown asked.

The minister drew away. "She is a Panther woman and she does not shake with Muslims."

Outside the counsel tent the minister's party stood together, their spears gripped tightly, while Brown's people circled, staring at the woman. She gave no sign she was aware of the intense interest she inspired.

Hagman drew close to speak to the man who appeared to be second in command. "You people holding?" he asked.

The lieutenant shook his head sternly. Then relaxed enough to say, "The dudes from the dope center are about ten miles that way." He pointed north up the wall. "They might have a little stuff."

Electric Marvin took a shovel and walked around the camp looking for fertile soil. He meant to plant marijuana, but while he was at it he would also plant vegetables.

That night Big Brown lay in his bag and thought of the fifteen cases of Spam and the Panther woman. He had never paid for pussy and bragged of never having paid for it, but he hadn't come this far without learning to bend in the winds of change.

A variation of the double standard had been applied to the female prisoners. No woman had been forced to enter the reservation, all were given the option of finishing their sentences in one of the abandoned federal facilities. According to the minister of indoctrination of the Republic of New Filmore, few women had chosen to join the men.

Their own wives, those that had them, had been told they could go behind the wall with their husbands. Again—and here Brown winced with personal bitterness—most had elected to stay outside.

That night Hagman deserted and started the journey north, but when he reached the medical center group he found them scattered. A wounded man told of a raid, but he was near delirium, and Hagman couldn't discern between what might have really happened and what the man was now imagining. He helped the wounded man to the nearest hospital unit, manned by volunteer doctors, and turned him over to their care. He found the unit surrounded by a camp of malingerers; obviously many of them hoped to shuck their way outside the wall, and into a federal hospital.

Hagman continued north and the next day came on a party of whites starting a tunnel under the wall. He joined them. They worked on the tunnel for almost a year and finally came up between the two cyclone fences. Over two-thirds, Hagman among them, were killed.

At that time the Muslim-Panther war had raged for nine months.

The federal authorities reported 30,506 prisoners delivered through the Nevada Gate. By the end of the first year observers at the gates and wall posts and the medical units estimated that over 10,000 men had died—many of exposure, illness, accident, but the vast majority perished in the Muslim-Panther war.

Big Brown survived and became war leader of the United Muslims. When speaking to the brothers he claimed victory, but he knew privately the war had simply ground to a halt. He could, however, display the spoils of victory. The war had been fought for women and Brown now had three, including the Panther woman he had once traded five cases of Spam to spend a single night with. Leticia was his number-one old lady, and in a month she would give him a child. His bodyguard shared his third wife, and there were fifty other women living with his people, most of them pregnant with the choice of a dozen fathers. The people had not taken quietly to polyandry, and the women had inspired dozens of bloody fights. Such fights were now against the wall, and Brown planned severe punishment at the next incident.

With the war quiet, civil disobedience was becoming a problem. In the last week Brown had discovered one of his storekeepers selling supplies, heard a dozen complaints of theft and robbery and was told of a particularly brutal rape. Since the rapist was a valuable lieutenant, Brown had decided to ignore the woman's protest, but for the others some measure would have to be taken.

After some hesitation, Big Brown had instructed his engineers to convert a portion of the central fort into a jail.

Two Sadnesses

Geo. Alec Effinger

It was one of those warm, summery afternoons where you *know* that Something Grand is going to happen, but the only problem is whether you ought to go out to meet it or not, or wait around your house to be pleasantly surprised. Waiting around the house has its points, for you can always say, "Yes, well, perhaps it would be better, *if* Something Grand is to happen *today*, to *me*, *here*, it may be better to Have A Bit Of A Snack just in case. In case Something Grand *does* happen, so that I won't be left All At Sea, as it were."

But going out to look for S.G. has just as many good points, because then you could take A Bit Of A Snack along with you on the search, and you always stood the chance of running into Rabbit or Piglet on the way. It certainly was better to have Something Grand happen with Piglet watching, than to have it alone in your house, as Grand as that may be to tell about afterward. And this is what decided the case. Bear made himself a honey and honey sandwich and set out carelessly, purely by chance in the direction of Piglet's house.

It was one of those summery afternoons out of doors, also. Bear walked along through the Forest happily, not actually laughing-happy but sort of smiling and humming as if he didn't know for sure about that Something. The tall trees of the Forest waved in the wind, as if they didn't know for sure, either, and Bear took that as a Good Sign and felt even Grander. He walked for a while, and after a time to his surprise he found himself in front of Piglet's house. "Ho," thought Bear, "why, here I am at Piglet's, and my sandwich seems to have been left behind. Perhaps Piglet may have found it somewhere, or one like it, and we can discuss *that*, of course, and who knows but that Something might happen?"

Piglet lived in the middle of the Forest in a large beech tree. The front door to the house had neither bell cord nor knocker, as did some of the other, more elegant houses in the Forest. Piglet was always surprised and delighted whenever someone came to visit *him*, but first he stood in the middle of his large room and quivered, not exactly knowing what to expect. He was not the bravest animal in the Forest, and a simple knock on the door was enough to set him quivering, until he actually answered the call and discovered one of his very good friends. Thus it was that Bear generally called to him first, before knocking. "Piglet?" he would cry. "It's just me, Bear, your friend. I'm going to knock on your door so that you'll know that I've come to visit."

Then he would knock, and Piglet would quiver anyway. When at last he opened the door to his house he would say, "Bear! Come in! You gave me quite a start." And Bear would come in.

This morning, though, Bear stopped before he shouted to Piglet in the beech tree. His mouth opened but he didn't say anything, and his brown paw stopped in the air, because over his head in the sky he saw Something. It looked like a flock of little silver birds, or a swarm of big silver bees. Bear frowned to himself, because he could remember some other interesting times that he had had with bees. These silver bees were flying by very fast, and they buzzed so loudly that when he called out to Piglet, Bear couldn't hear his own voice.

Very soon the noise from the silver bees faded away, and Bear knocked on Piglet's door. The door didn't open; instead, Bear heard Piglet's voice from inside. "Oh, Bear!" he squealed. "It's you! Come in!" Bear opened the door to Piglet's house and went in. He couldn't see Piglet anywhere, but he did see a very suspicious quivering beneath a rug on the floor. "I suppose you heard the buzzing of those silver bees," said Bear, as Piglet appeared from under the rug.

"Why, yes," said Piglet, his ears still pink. "I think I heard it when I was . . . I was . . . I was looking for something that I might have lost underneath this rug." He was *still* quivering.

"I see," said Bear.

"Silver bees, you say?" said Piglet.

Bear rubbed his nose, unsure that the Something Grand could be anywhere in Piglet's room, because the room looked exactly the way it had always looked. "Yes," he said.

"They must have been awfully big bees to make such a noise."

"Yes, I suppose." Bear was beginning to think of suggesting a trip to see Owl, whom they hadn't visited since yesterday.

"I wonder what sort of hive they live in. It must be bigger than any that we've *ever* seen in the Forest," said Piglet as he patted the rug flat, taking out all the Piglet-shaped folds.

Now Bear is not known among his friends, who all love him dearly nevertheless, for having the sharpest wits in the Forest. Indeed, he is the one to whom even the simplest Plans of Operation must be explained, and usually more than once. But Bear knew bees, and he knew beehives, being a bear. And so he thought that the silver bees should, indeed, have a great big hive. And, the idea trickled through, a great big hive must have a great deal of HONEY. Now it was plain to see that a Great Deal of Honey would be Something Grand on any occasion. Bear was very proud to have solved the mystery ever so quickly, and even before anyone else knew that there was a mystery, completely by himself (although Piglet had maybe helped just the least bit). The only thing that remained was to get the honey out of the hive, which was always a problem that needed a Careful Scheme.

"Let us go see Owl," announced Bear after this bit of thinking. It had made him quite tired and unable to come up with a Careful Scheme, too. "Perhaps you have some provisions about, and then we could be all set in case Something Grand happens before we get to Owl's, so that we should be able to tell him all about it. And then, if Something Grand *doesn't* happen, we shouldn't be too disappointed."

"Is Something Grand to happen today?" asked Piglet, who really hadn't had the same feeling that morning, and certainly not after the buzzing of the silver bees had shaken up his house.

"Well, one never knows that it will, for sure," said Bear, looking for a moment as if he really did have a prodigious brain in there after all, "but, again, one never knows that it won't, either, on the other hand. In either case, a Bit of Lunch is the safest way." And then he looked like the same dear old Bear.

So Bear and Piglet set out for Owl's house. Bear was thinking that he would like that Something Grand to happen *before* they reached Owl's, because, with Piglet, he already had to give half away, and, should Owl join in the venture, the Something must be further divided. Not, he hastily interrupted himself, that he was so selfish that he didn't want his friends to enjoy his Good Fortune, but rather that the more people who were in on the adventure originally, the less of an appreciative audience he could expect afterward, just in the event that some celebrative poem might suggest itself to him.

The sun lit the beeches and firs of the Forest perfectly, just the way Bear had been taught that the sun ought to on such a summery day. The clouds were small and quick, and were having their own Important Business in the very blue sky. The familiar path unfolded like an old and especially favorite story.

And then the bees returned. Some flew overhead so high that the sun made tiny, bright stars of them, and some flew by closer, so that they screeched louder than anything Bear or Piglet had ever heard. Piglet quivered, and held tight to Bear, who realized that he would have to Be Stout for them both but didn't want to. The bees seemed to spit at them as they flew past, and the ground jumped up in straight little rows, like spouting teakettles going *thitt! thitt! thitt! thitt! thitt!* around them. Sometimes the rows of flying dirt and grass would lead to a tree, and then instead of a *thitt*! there would be a *thokk*! and a piece of the tree would fly off over their heads.

Just before they got to Owl's house they found Owl, lying on the ground as if he had fallen asleep before reaching his bed. He thrashed as though he were having bad dreams, flapping his ruffled wings against the ground. He wouldn't talk except in very small, un-Owl-like noises, and Bear and Piglet decided that he may have been hit by one of the *thitts* or maybe a *thokk*. The best thing seemed to be to carry him home and put him to bed. Bear said that they might be able to fix him up A Bit Of A Snack, which looked like a good idea all 'round.

When they got to Owl's house they put him to bed, and he rested there very quietly, without any of his usual pronouncements. Bear and Piglet found this very strange. Bear explained that it was a day for Something Grand, and not at all a day for Being Still and Mysterious. Unless, Bear thought to himself, unless you were part of some large and secret Something Grand that you didn't want to tell anyone (like Bear) about yet. Bear smiled to himself proudly for figuring out Owl's secret. Two puzzles solved already, before lunchtime! In any event, Owl said nothing and did not seem to move in his bed.

After a time, during which Piglet had fixed them a small and rather incomplete sort of Snack, the bees came back again. Bear and Piglet watched them from Owl's window. The bees did not fly so high as before, and looked larger even than any birds that they had ever seen. The bees roared as they flew, and Bear and Piglet were frightened even though they were in old Owl's home right in the middle of their own Forest. Silver eggs dropped from the bees, and when they fell to the ground they burst into huge, boiling, orange and black clouds of flame. Bear watched silently; Piglet was suddenly nowhere to be found. With every flash of fire there was a horrible thunder that shook the tree that was Owl's home.

After a time the bees went away. Bear stood by the window, watching the flaming trees shrivel and fall. There was a knock

on Owl's door, and a voice called out hoarsely. Bear recognized it as belonging to the gray Donkey. He opened the door for Donkey, and felt a flash of heat from the raging fires outside.

"Hullo, Bear."

"Hullo, Donkey."

"Looks like a busy morning. We're always having Busy Mornings whenever I specially decide to have a little nap. But I don't suppose a nap is very important if everyone else decides to have a Busy Morning." He indicated the burning Forest with a flick of his floppy ears. "Is that your idea? If it is, it certainly busied up the morning. It looks like it will use up most of the afternoon as well. Not that I mind, you understand, I can see how you might forget to notify me; but I would like to schedule that nap sometime."

"No, Donkey, I don't think that is my idea," said Bear, feeling just a little guilty because he knew that he did have that Something Grand feeling. But he wasn't at all sure that this was the sort of Grand Something that he was looking forward to.

"I was standing around in my little part of the bracken," said Donkey. "You know how my little part is more or less marshy and wet and cold and altogether unpleasant. Not that I'm complaining, you see, but someone has to live there, I suppose, while the rest of you live out here in the really comfortable places. And I don't really mind. But, as I was saying, there I was, eating my thistles (which are hardly delicious, but that is all that I have, and I'm not one to complain), when this group of men came running through, splashing around in my stream, turning my little yard into a perfect swamp, if you like swamps, which I don't particularly, especially in my own living room. And I tried to be civil, as much as I can be to men, but do they listen? Why, they do not. They point their machines and start making a horrible racket, and my little spot of home is torn to pieces. Now, it's not the most attractive spot in the Forest, I'll be the first to admit that, but it is home to me, and I was pretty upset when they started knocking it all to bits. But they looked like they were having such a good time running around and shouting and

pointing their fingers and blasting away that I decided that I would just come over here and sit awhile." And Donkey did sit, flopping in a corner of Owl's parlor with a sullen expression, and he didn't say another word.

After a time there was a series of *whumps*! After each *whump*! there would be a terrible clap of thunder and a large part of the Forest would disappear in a black cloud, leaving only a smoking hole. Bear watched this silently, his hands clasped behind his back, until the *whumps*! went away, too. Then the men that Donkey had seen arrived, running around in front of Owl's house and shouting. Some of them had metal tanks strapped on their backs, and these men began to spray more fire from long hoses attached to the tanks. Soon all the gorse and brush in this part of the wood was afire, and the larger trees were beginning to catch, too. Bear thought for a moment about his other friends in the other parts of the Forest.

"Did you see Rabbit on your way here?" he asked Donkey.

"Yes," said Donkey.

"Oh. Perhaps he will come here, too."

"You know that I am hardly an expert in these matters," said Donkey, "but I am of the opinion that Rabbit will not be coming."

"Oh," said Bear. The men outside were rapidly chopping away at whatever of the standing saplings and trees remained. "Perhaps Christ—"

The guns of the men drowned out Bear's voice. He stood by the window and watched; Donkey sat in his corner. Piglet was still off Somewhere, doing Something. During a sudden lull in the noise Bear turned from the window.

"I think that I know what we need," he said. "If only Christ-"

"As I said before," said Donkey, "I'm not the most experienced member of our little band. But I am sure, I am very, very sure, that he will not be coming either."

Bear stared at him sadly for some time, until a crash behind him made them all start. Something had been thrown through the window. It was a rough, gray-green object with a handle. In the few seconds before it went off there was a strange silence, during which they could all hear the distant chuttering of the helicopters.

Π

The summer had very definitely come to its conclusion, running smack into autumn, as it has its way of doing; Mole thought to himself that it was very fortunate indeed that he and Water Rat had managed to finish up this bit of adventure before the really cold weather set in. Now was the time for steaming tea in china cups, and cedar shakes crackling in the fire, and, above all else, *stories* about adventuring. But Mole knew that mucking about the countryside on strange errands had its season, and that time was not autumn. The short breather that Nature in her wisdom permits between the fevers of the warm weather and the sleepy contemplation of winter was for only one thing: sitting comfortably, dry and warm in Ratty's snug rooms at River Bank, planning the excursion of next year.

And as the year found its way to its end, so did this particular day. The sun was going down through the carmine sky, and the late afternoon was so absolutely lovely, in a purely autumn and unhurried way, that both animals kept their own counsel, as if by unspoken mutual consent fearing to disturb that fragile beauty that they thought had passed, too, with the pleasanter temperatures. "It is like this every year," thought the Mole. "Autumn *is* such a wonderful time of year, there is really nothing else quite like it. And the trees now are really without their equal in the sameness of the summer's colors! Why do I always seem to forget that autumn is, after all, my favorite season?" Perhaps the Rat was thinking the same thoughts, for after a time the Mole could hear him whispering his poetry words, about pumpkins and frost and that sort of thing.

As the twilight deepened around the pair while they crossed a meadow yet some distance from their goal, the Rat stopped still in his tracks. "Mole, my good friend and true companion," he said, "it is October." Rat bent back his silky head and gazed silently into the sky, which was growing bluer and darker blue, and already a star or two had edged into view. "Where does the year go?" And then he moved on, his hands clasped behind his back, or shoved into the shallow pockets of his thin coat.

At the other side of the meadow they found a low, brokenbacked fence of timber and, as there did not appear to be a gate, the Mole stood on the lowest beam and vaulted over. Rat made as to follow but, before he grasped the topmost timber, he turned and looked out across the field that next they would cross. He paused for a moment, and Mole knew that he could expect a bit of poetry. And so the Rat recited:

> "Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean, Tears from the depth of some divine despair Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes, In looking on the happy autumn-fields, And thinking of the days that are no more."

"Hmmm," said the Mole, moved but unsure if he were glad or totally melancholy. "Quite lovely, but not without its proper weight of sensibility."

"Tennyson," said the Rat.

"Hmmm." And this was all that was said for a longish period of time, as they made their way over the field of stalks of last summer's corn. The field was set off on the farther side by another barrier like the one that they previously had crossed. They passed over, and were in a large coppice of mountain ash.

"It will take but one good shower to loose these leaves at last," said the Rat. "Then the rowan will stand winter-bare, and we will be left for a time with nothing to remind us of the summer but the cry of the jay."

"Ratty," said the Mole in a small voice, "might I ask of you the least favor?"

"Certainly, Mole. You ought to know that you are my dearest of friends."

"Why, if you please, it is nothing, actually. But you keep saying the most saddening things, so that while I am going along thinking about how wonderful it will be to find River Bank once more, and about how delightful everything will be when we're all tucked in at home again, you say something to make me feel all tumbled about inside and downright *abandoned*. Sometimes I want to stop right here, or turn around and *look* for our lost summer. Certainly it is autumn, and winter is coming on. There's no use saying that it isn't. But it's happened to us before, and I do so wish that you could talk of spring and punting about in the boat for the first time of the new season, or at least, if it must be autumn, then how lovely it is to see Orion again. Because it is hard, it is so hard to be sad and in unfamiliar territory at the same time." This was a rather long speech for the poor Mole, but he was always so affected by poetry. And of course Ratty understood, and thoughtfully made his comments to cheer his companion.

And thus the stand of rowan was passed, and more relics of fields, and open meads where the eyes of animals glared like little glass marbles from the clumps of brown grass. It was night now, no use at all trying to call it "evening," and Mole, whose habits had been set in his later life at retiring early and rising with the sun, began to feel uncomfortable. Even one as adventured as he, who had seen more odd things than ever he could have dreamed in his parochial molish youth, was glad that he was not alone beneath the watchful gaze of the diamond stars. He walked with his head tucked down and his short, stubby arms held at his sides; every once in a while he stumbled, as upon an unseen clod of dirt or half-buried stone, and fell against Water Rat, mumbling apologies and feeling grateful for the solid presence of his friend.

The Mole's thoughts were exclusively of home; he employed the memories of long-out-of-sight friends and out-of-mind, familiar objects to hold back both the pressing darkness and the insistent, cold wind. But the home of his reveries was not always River Bank, where he had gone to live upon discovering the joys of riverside life and meeting River Bank's most generous and gentle tenant, the Water Rat. No, the cozy fires that he imagined burned as often as not in his own relinquished place at Mole End. The more he thought, the cozier the picture became, until he was just on the point of asking the Rat if they might stop there for the night, rather than going on to River Bank. It was very late, of course, and it was getting colder and colder. Mole's hands were nearly without sensation, and his poor feet were his only by virtue of their aching. He knew that there was a small supply of food left in his rooms (mainly a tin of Danish bacon and some capers); a small but sufficient supper might be coaxed from his forsaken pantry. It would be nice to stop by again; it had been so long, and perhaps the detour would be advisable, just to check that all was still in order. And then the trip to River Bank could be continued after a good rest, and perhaps something more undiscovered would appear for a bit of breakfast, although—

"-Beyond that hedge, I should think," said the Water Rat.

"Eh?" said Mole, who realized that the Rat had stopped by the wayside and had been speaking to him for no little time. "I'm sorry, Ratty, but perhaps my ears are a little numb, too."

"I merely suggested that, as I calculate, your very nice Mole End should be in a field very near, perhaps just on the other side of the hedge on that knoll, there. It would be a convenience to spend the night there tonight, for I, at least, have just about had a full time of it. That is, of course, if the plan meets with your approval. I should hate to invite myself around in this way, except that I *am* so infernally exhausted. However, if you would rather remain with our original—"

"Oh, remarkable, Ratty!" cried Mole. "Have you been eavesdropping on my secretest thoughts? Oh, thank you, I would so like to see my old home again." The two companions discussed their situation further, and agreed to pass the night at Mole End, although it would not be as comfortable as had they pressed on to River Bank. The next day would be one of cleaning and tidying up after their long absence, and also of the happy chore of visiting their friends and spending tea, dinner, and supper regaling them with the history of their adventures. The Mole and the Rat began to feel better, warmer inside if not out, and both knew that welcome tingle of anticipation. At last, they were coming home.

The Mole could hardly control his excitement as he topped the low rise and passed through an opening in the hedgerow. It was far too dark to see, but (if Ratty's estimate were correct) he ought to be able to smell the first fair indications of his old neighborhood. And there they were! His nose twitched with pleasure as he scented those familiar signals. But they were arriving somewhat muffled, as though buried under strange and unknown smells. The Mole strained his eyes to try to aid his bewildered nose, but of course all that he could see was a bright glow before him.

"Is that morning already?" he asked.

"No," said Rat, his voice peculiarly grim.

"Because I didn't think that the night had passed so quickly. We must have come much farther than ever we thought. Or else this quite proves my theory that the time you spend asleep is actually less than the equal number of daylight hours," said the Mole, chuckling at his very small joke.

"No, we've been heading west for some time, in any event."

They walked toward the light, upon a curious hard black surface. The ground had been made flat and smooth, and covered over with some material. It was this that the Mole's nose could not identify. As they came closer it became evident that the light was originating from a group of shining lamps placed high on poles. These were situated about the queer field in widely spaced rows.

"Your home ought to be right about here," said the Rat, indicating a spot on the blacktop between two painted yellow lines.

"It looks as though I have a bit of work," said the Mole unhappily. "They seem to have covered over my tunnel." He set to immediately, trying with his freezing paws to get through the pavement to his warm little burrow.

"Oh, Ratty, it . . . won't . . . dig!" And the gasping Mole sat down on the blacktop, tears forming in his tiny eyes. The Rat was stricken by the sadness of his friend, and thought that Mole should at least make another attempt, if only because that seemed so much more positive a plan than nocturnal and earnest lamentation. So the Mole turned to once more, working even harder but with the same lack of success. The hard surface of the parking lot resisted his most practiced efforts.

"What are we to do, Ratty?"

"We'll continue on, of course. It would have been pleasant to stay here, but River Bank isn't an impossible distance. So buck up; we'll have you all tucked in soon enough."

"But that was my home!" said the distressed Mole.

"You'll live with me officially, now. So remember to mind your muddy feet." But the Water Rat was not so unconcerned as he would have his companion believe. He was nearly as sick at heart as the Mole to find the least trace of Mole End obliterated; animals take only one spot for their home, not like we larger folk who may move about several times before finding one last resting place in our dotage. And animals invest in their single residences all the security and love that they hold in their smaller but wiser selves. Thus it takes a major disruption of life, such as that experienced by the Mole when he turned out his solitary existence for the new and exciting life at River Bank, to enable an animal to quit his chosen home. The Rat was wise enough to know this, and he also knew that it could serve no purpose to let his friend languish in despair.

In accordance then with their revised schedule, the Mole and Water Rat turned south, heading across the lot toward the river. It was quite impossible for either to walk along without picturing in his private and gloomy thoughts the beautiful spot of greenery that had been removed to allow the pavement's unsightly intrusion. At the far end of the lot, where once had been a border of low hedges and, beyond that, a row of slender poplars, the Rat could make out the dim lines of a huge, square, dark building. He said nothing to the sorrowful Mole, but waited instead until they were close enough to investigate at first hand. He suspected another of Toad's ephemeral and ill-advised schemes, but surely even Toad had enough romance and enough sense to prevent him from cementing over the countryside.

The building was quite monstrous, and ugly in an efficient sort of way that indicated that it was some sort of factory.

"How long were we gone?" asked the Mole in a hurt tone of voice.

"Much too long, it would seem," said the Rat.

"Toad?"

"I'm not certain. It would be like his old self to catch on to a seemingly easy money-making proposition, and then ruin everyone for miles around. But, of course, to be fair we'll make inquiries in the morning."

"Not many folks around anymore to ask," said a new voice. The Mole and the Water Rat turned around, startled. The voice belonged to a rather small and hungry-looking weasel. He nodded in recognition of the two returned travelers, although neither Mole nor Rat knew him by name.

"Toad's gone, himself," said the weasel.

"Old Toad, gone?" said the Mole.

"Yes, sir. Had a spell of warmish weather along about the end of June. One of those still days, not a breath of air to be had; lot of smoke from this factory just hung there, thicker than fog. Some of the older folk couldn't do it. Apoplexy or something, Mr. Badger called it."

"You mean Toad's passed away?" asked the Rat, astonished. "Yes, sir."

"Silly old Toad . . ."

"Good old Toad . . . dead?"

There was a shocked silence. After a time the weasel spoke again.

"And then, when they built those new homes across the water, a good many fine weasels and others lost theirs. When they tore down the Wild Wood, that is. Most everybody that I grew up with has left the neighborhood entirely. Gone east, I suppose."

"They tore down the Wild Wood?" asked Mole in his very small voice.

"And Badger?" asked Rat.

"Well, that is, Mr. Badger got caught up in a load of concrete. When they was putting in those new homes."

"Badger?" cried the Rat. He was sorely smitten; the Mole just stood, confused, with his long snout wavering in the night air. After a time the Rat roused himself enough to wish the weasel a good evening and grab Mole's elbow. The two travelers hurried off, following a large corrugated-metal pipe toward the river a short distance away.

At the water's edge the conduit ended. From its open maw poured a sluggish and foul-smelling stream. The river itself seemed slow-moving and evil.

"What have they done to my river?" cried the Rat. He stared across in the gloom, but he could not make out the nightshrouded features of his house. After a bit of a search he located the small boat that had been left tied up on the Mole's side of the water so many months previously. The Rat allowed Mole to enter, meanwhile undoing the knotted painter. He threw the line into the boat and pushed off, stepping into the river to do so. The water felt oily and unpleasant, and the Rat shuddered as he hopped into the skiff and grabbed the oars. He rowed in silence, and the Mole was similarly lost in his own thoughts. On the other side Mole leaped out and hauled the boat to shore, where the Rat joined him after shipping the oars.

River Bank was ruined. The outside of the dwelling was coated with a thick, sludgy layer that had seeped inside and spoiled everything: furniture, books, food stores, everything. Rat viewed the scene with growing anger and frustration, but remained quiet. Finally he took the Mole's elbow once again.

"Come along, old friend. It's obvious that we can't stay here, either."

"Where shall we go, Ratty? We have nowhere to go."

"And nothing to take with us. That's fine, I suppose; a new start, new beginnings. Although we're both a bit far along for that sort of thing. But, what's done is done, and no use being resentful. Let us leave soon, while I still have the strength of this impulse, and before I truthfully realize that everything I've ever had is wasted and made into rubbish."

So they took to the water, following the course of the stream and the cold night wind. The Rat took the first turn at rowing while the Mole drowsed. Then they switched; Mole rowed and Water Rat failed in his resolve to stay awake and hunt for a likely place to spend the night. The Rat dropped off to sleep, and the Mole's rowing grew slower and slower as he, too, fell fast asleep. They were both awakened some time later by the lurching of the boat in the strong current.

"Oh, Mole," said the Rat accusingly, "have you lost the oars? Where? Just now?"

"I don't know, Ratty! I suppose that I've drifted off to sleep, and I don't know just when I dropped the oars. Where are we? Oh, I'm so sorry, but I'm just so tired!"

"I don't know where we are, my very good Mole. I'm sorry for speaking to you in that unkind way. I don't recognize any of this shoreline that we're passing, so I assume that we've both been getting back a good share of the night's rest that we have cheated ourselves of so far. It looks as if our adventures *aren't* over yet."

The river had grown broader and stronger than they had ever seen it. The boat and its two weary passengers followed helplessly wherever it led them. The Rat must have dozed again, for he was awakened by the Mole's excited cry.

"Rat, do you see? The dawn, now for sure. At least we won't be traveling in the dark any longer. Oh, how glad I will be to see the sun!"

But Mole was incorrect once more; it was not the sun. The fierce, ruddy glow on the river ahead was caused by artificial means, though not as before in the parking lot. As the crippled rowboat sped nearer in the river's grasp, it became clear to the Water Rat that the light was from a great fire. Indeed, up ahead the thick, orange water of the river itself was blazing in a towering wall of flame.

Everyday Life in the Later Roman Empire

Thomas M. Disch

Ι

The three of them were sitting in the arbor watching the sun go down over her damp melon fields—Alexa herself, her neighbor Arcadius, and the pretty Hebrew bride he'd brought back from Thebes. Arcadius, once again, was describing his recent mysterious experience in Egypt, where in some shattered temple the immortal Plato had addressed the old man, not in Latin but a kind of Greek, and shown him various cheapjack signs and wonders—a phoenix, of course; then a crew of blind children who had prophesied, in perfect strophe and antistrophe, the holocaust of earth; finally (Arcadius drew this miracle from his pocket and placed it on the dial) a piece of wood that had metamorphosed to stone.

Alexa picked it up; a like but much larger hunk of petrified wood dignified G.'s worktable at the Center: russet striations giving way to nebular whorls of mauve, yellow, cinnabar. It had come from a sad and long-since-deleted curio shop on East Eighth. Their first anniversary.

She dropped the stone into the old man's proffered palm. "It's beautiful." No more than that.

His fingers curled round it. Dark veins squirmed across white flesh. She looked away (the lowest clouds were now the color flesh should be), but not before she had imagined Arcadius dead, and swarming.

No, the historical Alexa would have dreamt up nothing so patently medieval. Ashes? At most.

He flung the stone out into the steaming field.

Merriam rose to her feet, one arm extended in a gesture of protest. Who was this strange girl, this wisp of a wife? Was she, as Alexa might have wished, just a new mirror image of herself? Or did she represent something more abstract? Their eyes met. In Merriam's, reproach: in Alexa's, an answering guilt contested against her everyday skepticism. It came down to this, that Arcadius, and Merriam too in a subtler way, wanted her to accept this scrap of rock as proof that lunatics in Syria have died and then risen from their graves.

An impossible situation.

"It's growing chilly," she announced, though this was as patent a fiction as any Arcadius had brought back from the Nile.

The path back home dipped down almost to touch the unfinished pool. A small brown toad squatted on the rib cage of the handsome wrestler that Gargilius had shipped up from the south. He had waited two years so, in mud and dust, for the pool to be done and his pedestal to be raised. Now the marble was discolored.

Merriam said, "Oh, look!" The toad got off. (Have I ever seen a toad alive, or only pictures of toads in *Nature World?* Had there been toads that summer in Augusta? or in Bermuda? in Spain?) Out of the long grass, a deep burp. And again the burp.

The timer on the oven?

No, there was still—she checked her watch—a quarter hour before Willa's pies came out and her own daube went in.

Merriam faded to a gape. Worn strips of maple replaced the damp, elaborate grass, and the toad—

It was the garbage bell. Had she remembered? She rose and rounded the bend of corridor into the kitchen just as the platform inside the shaft dropped. Bags from 7 and 8 came down the chute, rattling, and far below, muffled, it all smashed together into the smasher. But her own garbage was still waiting in the pail, unsorted and unwrapped.

Let it, she thought. She tried to return to the villa, closing her eyes and clutching for the talismanic image that would place her there: a wedge of sunlight, a window, sky and the slight sway of the pine.

Alexa was reclining on the double bed. Timarchus knelt before her, head bowed (he was a new boy, Sarmatian, and rather shy), offering his mistress, on a scalloped tray, a small cake covered with pineae. (She was hungry.)

"But I won't touch it," she told herself.

To Timarchus she said, "This afternoon when the bailiff can spare you, my boy, go down by the pool with a rag and rub the statue where it's stained. Ever so gently, you know, just as though the stone were skin. It will take days, but—"

She sensed that there was something wrong with the boy.

A smile. "Timarchus?"

He raised his head in answer: the olive skin formed two small, smooth hollows where eyes would have been.

It wouldn't do. She ought to have known better, by now, than to try to bull her way through once she'd lost contact. The result was inevitably nightmares and silliness.

She set to work. It was, anyhow, nearly three o'clock. She spread a page of the *Times* across the counter and emptied the pail over it. A story in the second column caught her attention: a plane had been stolen from the Military Fair at Highland Falls. Apparently it had been flown away. But why? To have found out she would have had to brush aside a scum of cggshell, peelings, paper, sweepings and a week's worth of shit and husks from Emily's cage. Actually, she was not that curious. She made a tidy bundle, over and under, around and under once more, the only skill surviving from her flirtation with origami twenty years before. Her Japanese instructor, with whom she had also conducted a flirtation, had had to agree to a vasectomy as a condition of entering the U.S. It left the tiniest scar. His name was Sebastian . . . Sebastian . . . His last name escaped her.

She put the bundle on the platform.

She stopped in the doorway to untie, strand by strand, the knot of muscle from her forehead down to her shoulders. Then four deep breaths. Noises seeped into this brief stillness: the icebox, the higher-pitched purr of the filter and, intermittently, a grinding whine that she had never understood. It seemed to come from the apartment overhead, but she never remembered to ask what it might be.

Was there somewhere she was supposed to have gone?

This time it was the timer. Willa's pies had a fine glaze. Alexa had used one of her own (real) eggs to brush the crust, a courtesy that would probably be invisible to Willa, who was capable of only the broadest gastronomic distinctions, as between beef and ice cream. The casserole squeezed in beside the rice pudding she was doing for Larry and Tom, who, lacking an oven of their own, paid for their time in Alexa's with tickets to the opera from their subscription series, an informal, inflexible contract of many years' standing. She closed the door, reset the timer, rewound and unplugged the instruction cassette.

And that, except for the mail, was that.

The key was in the penny dish, and the elevator, god bless it, was alive and well and only one floor off. Plotting how in coming up she would escape them by reading her mail, she read the graffiti going down: obscenities, the names of politicians, and everywhere (even the ceiling) "love," which some patient cynic edited, each time it was scratched into the paint, to "Glove." The super's endearing theory was that this was all the work of lumpenprole delivery men, the residents themselves being too well-bred and status-conscious to muck up their own walls. Alexa had her doubts about this, since she'd added her own tiny "shit" coming home drunk last year from her section's Xmas party. There it was, just below the cloudy plastic cover of the inspection certificate, as humorless now, as ineloquent as all the rest. The doors opened, stuck, strained, and opened all the way.

The mailman was just beginning to stuff the boxes, so she said, "Hello, Mr. Phillips," and asked the polite question or two from her standard casework repertoire of family, weather, TV. Then she went out to the street and tested the air. It was palatable, but beyond that something suddenly seemed wonderfully right.

A sky of curdled cloud, a bit of breeze that flapped the fringe of the canopy. As it moves from a smaller to a larger space, an answering expansion of the spirit. The concrete swept clean. And?

She only realized what the wonder had been when it was taken from her: out of the third brownstone in the row across the street a woman wheeled a baby buggy. She had been alone.

The buggy descended to the pavement at a controlled jounce and was steered inexorably toward Alexa.

The woman (whose hat was exactly the same dismaying brown as the inside of the elevator) said, "Hello, Mrs. Miller."

Alexa smiled.

They talked about babies. Mr. Phillips, who had finished up inside, told them about the precocities of the two younger Phillipses: "I asked them what the dickens it was, a leaky sieve or what—"

It came to her, where she was supposed to be. Loretta had phoned last night when she was half asleep and she hadn't written it down. (Loretta's middle name was Dickens, and she claimed, in some complicated way, to be a descendant.) The appointment was for one o'clock, and the Lowen School was on the other side of town. Panic whelmed up. It couldn't be done, she told herself: and the panic subsided.

"Do you know what it turned out to be?" Mr. Phillips insisted. "No, what?"

"A planetarium."

She tried to think what this could possibly mean. "That's astonishing," she said, and the woman who had known her name agreed.

"That's what I told my wife later-astonishing."

"A planetarium," Alexa said, as she retreated toward the mailboxes. "Well, well."

There was: the winter number, one season overdue, of *Classics Journal*; a letter with a Burley, Idaho, postmark (from her sister Ruth); two letters for G., one from the Conservation

Corporation that was probably an appeal for funds (as, with equal probability, Ruth's letter would be); and the crucial letter from Stuyvesant High School.

Tank had been accepted. He didn't have a scholarship, but that, considering G.'s income, was only to be expected.

Her first reaction was sodden disappointment. She had wanted to be relieved of the decision, and now it was squarely before her again. Then, when she realized she'd been hoping Stuyvesant would refuse him, she felt as sodden guilt.

She could hear the phone ringing from the elevator. She knew it would be Loretta Couplard wanting to know why she'd missed their appointment. She used the wrong key for the top lock. My house is on fire, she thought, and my children are burning. (And, as a kind of appendix to this thought: Have I ever seen a ladybug alive? or only pictures of them on nursery rhyme cassettes?)

It was a wrong number.

She settled down with the *Classics Journal*, which had gone, as everything did these days, from paper to flimsy. An article on the Sibyl in the *Satyricon*; a compendium of the references in Aristotle's *Poetics*; a new method of dating the letters of Cicero. Nothing she could use for therapy.

Then, with a mental squaring of her shoulders against her sister's devious demands, she began the letter:

March 29, 2025

Dear Alexa—

thank you and god-bless for the bundle of good things. they seem practically new so i guess i should thank Tancred too for his gentleness. thanks, Tank! Remus and the other kids certainly can use clothes, esp. now. it has been the worst winter ever for us—and thats going back 23 yrs. before i arrived—but we are well dug in & cozy as mice.

my news? well, since i last wrote you i have been getting into baskets! it certainly solves the problem of those long winter evenings. Harvey who is our big expert on just about everything —he's 84, would you believe that?—taught me and Budget, tho she has decided to return to dear old Sodom & Gonorreah (pun?) that was right at the low point of the Great Freeze. now with the sap running and birds singing—and its so beautiful, Alexa, i wish you could be here to share it—i get awfully restless sitting in front of my pile of withies, but i seem to be stuck with the job since its our biggest moneymaker now that the preserves are sold. (did you get the two jars i sent you at Christmas?)

i wish you'd write more often since you are so good at it. i always am so happy to hear from you, Alexa, esp. whats been happening to that Roman alter-ego of yours. sometimes i want to return to the 3rd cent. or whenever and try and talk sense into the other "you." she/you seems so much more receptive and open, tho i suppose we all are inside our heads & the hard thing is to get those feelings working on the outside!

but don't let me preach at you. that has always been my worst fault—even here! again you and Tank are invited to come visiting for as long as you like. i'd invite Gene too if i thot there was any chance he'd come, but i know what his opinion is of the Village...

i tried to read the book you sent with the bundle, by that Saint. i thot from the title it would be really trashy & exciting but 10 pages was as far as i could get. i gave it to elder Warren to read & he says to tell you its a great book but he couldn't disagree more. he would like to meet you & talk about the early Christian communities, i feel so committed now to our way of Life that i don't think i'll ever be getting back east. so unless you do visit the Village we may never see each other again. i appreciate your offering the flight fare for me and Remus to come out but the elders won't let me accept money for so light a purpose when we have to do without so many more important things. i love you—you must know that—& i always pray for you and for Tancred & for Gene too.

> your sister, Ruth

p.s. please, Alexa—not Stuyvesant! its hard to explain why i feel as strongly about this as i do without giving offense to G. but do I have to explain? Give my nephew at least half a chance to live a human life! Depression came down on her like August smog, thick and smarting. Ruth's utopian gush, silly as it could be at times, or sinister, always made Alexa see her own life as strenuous, futile and unworthy. What had she to show for all her effort? She'd composed that inventory so often it was like filling out her weekly D-97 for the Washington office. She had: a husband, a son, a parakeet, a psychotherapist, 64 percent equity in her pension fund, and an exquisite sense of loss.

It wasn't a fair summation. She loved G. with a sad, complicated, forty-four-year-old love, and Tancred unequivocably. She even loved Emily Dickinson to the brink of sentimentality. It wasn't just and it wasn't reasonable that Ruth's letters should do this to her, but it did her no good to argue against her mood.

Bernie's advice for coping with these minor disasters was just to go on agonizing at full steam while maintaining oneself in a state of resolute inaction. Finally the boredom became worse than the pain. Going off into the past was escapism at best and could lead to a nasty case of dichronatism. So she sat on the worn-out settee hidden in the setback of the corridor and considered all the ways in which her life was rotten through and through until, at a quarter to four, Willa came for her pies.

Willa's husband, like Alexa's, was in thermal salvage, which was still a rare enough specialization to have made a loose kind of friendship inevitable between them, despite their natural New York-bred reluctance to get involved with anyone living in the same building. Thermal salvage, on the miniature scale of ovensharing, was basically all that united Alexa and Willa too, but it didn't serve them as well for conversational fodder as it did their husbands. Willa, who claimed to have scored a prodigious 167 on the IQ part of her Regents, was a pure specimen of the New French Woman celebrated in the movies of twenty years earlier, and indeed in all French movies. She did nothing and cared for nothing and, with a precise feeling for the mathematics involved, deployed the little green pluses and pink minuses from Pfizer's labs to hold her soul steady at zero. By never for a moment relaxing at the effort, she had made herself as pretty as a Chevrolet and mindless as a cauliflower. Five minutes talking to her and Alexa had regained every shred of her usual self-esteem.

Thereafter the afternoon rolled down the track to evening with a benign predictability, making brief stops at all the local stations. The casserole came out looking as formidable and joyful as the last still on the recipe cassette. Loretta finally did phone and they made a new appointment for Thursday. Tancred came home an hour late, having adventured into the park. She knew; he knew she knew; but as part of his moral education Tank was obliged to invent a pleasant, undetectable fiction (a game of chess with Dicky Myers). At five-fifty she brought out the rice pudding, which had gone all brown and peculiar. Then, just before the news, the office called and took Saturday away a disappointment as usual as rain or dimes lost into telephones.

G. arrived not more than half an hour late.

The casserole was a religious experience.

"Is it real?" he asked. "I can't tell."

"The meat isn't meat, but I used real pork fat."

"It's incredible."

"Yes."

"Is there any more?" he asked.

She doled out the last rosette (Tank got the sauce) and watched, with an immemorial indulgence, husband and son eat her tomorrow's lunch.

After dinner G. took to the tub and meditated. Once he was deep into alpha rhythms Alexa came and stood beside the toilet and looked at him. (He didn't like being looked at; once he'd almost beat up a boy in the park who wouldn't stop staring.) The too hairy body, the drooping, volute lobes and muscled neck, curve and countercurve, the thousand colors of the shadowed flesh called from her the same mixture of admiration and perplexity that Echo must have felt gazing at Narcissus. With each year of their marriage he had become stranger and stranger to her. At times—and these the times she loved him best—he seemed scarcely human. Not that she blinded herself to his flaws (he was—who isn't?—riddled); rather that the core of him seemed never to have known anguish, fear, doubt, even, in any important way, pain. He possessed a serenity that the facts of his life did not warrant, and that (here was the thorn on which she insisted rubbing her finger) excluded her. Yet just when his self-sufficiency seemed most complete and cruelest he would turn round and do something incongruously tender and vulnerable, until she'd wonder if it was all just her own iciness and bitchery that kept them, twenty-five days in a month, so far apart.

His concentration faltered (had she made a noise, leaning back against the sink?) and broke. He looked up at her smiling (and Echo replied): "What are you thinking, A.?"

"I was thinking"—she paused to think—"how wonderful computers are."

"They're wonderful, all right. Any special reason?"

"Well, for my first marriage I relied on my own judgment. This time . . ."

He laughed. "Actually, confess it, you just wanted me out of the bathtub so you could do the dishes."

"Actually, not." (Though she was aware, even as she said this, that the squeeze bottle of disinfectant was in her hand.)

"I'm done anyhow. No, don't bother with the siphon. Or the dishes. We've established a partnership—remember?"

That night as they lay next to each other in bed, sharing each other's warmth but not touching, she fell into a landscape half nightmare and half purposed reverie. The villa had been stripped of its furnishings. The air was urgent with smoke and a continual *cheng-cheng* of finger cymbals. The mystae waited for her to lead them into the city. As they stumbled down Broadway, past heaps of junked-out cars, they chanted the praise of the god in thin, terrified voices—Alexa first, then the god bearer and the cista bearer, the neatherd and the guardian of the cave, and then the whole rout of Bacchae and mutes: "Woo-woo-woo, a-woowoo-woo!" Her fawnskin kept slipping between her legs and tripping her. At Ninety-third Street, and again at Eighty-seventh, unwanted children moldered on compost heaps: it was one of the scandals of the present administration that these little corpses should be left to rot where anyone walking by could see them.

At last they came to the Met (so they couldn't have been going down Broadway after all), and she mounted the crisp stone steps with dignity. A great crowd had gathered in anticipation-many of them the same Christians who had been clamoring for the destruction of the temple and its idols. Once inside, the noise and the stench disappeared, as though some obliging servant had whisked a rain-drenched cloak from her shoulders. She sat, in the semidarkness of the Great Hall, beside her old favorite, a late Roman candy box of a sarcophagus from Tarsus (the first gift the museum had ever received). Stone garlands drooped from the walls of the tiny, doorless bungalow; just below the eaves winged children, Erotes, pantomimed a hunt. The back and lid were unfinished, the tablet for the inscription blank. (She had always filled it in with her own name, and an epitaph borrowed from Synesius, who, praising the wife of Aurelian, had said: "The chief virtue of a woman is that neither her body nor her name should ever cross the threshold.")

The other priests had fled the city at the first rumor of the barbarians' approach, and only Alexa, with a tambourine and a few silk ribbons, now was left. Everything was collapsing civilizations, cities, minds—while she was constrained to wait for the end inside this dreary tomb (for the Met is really more of a charnel house than a temple), without friends, without faith, and pretend, for the sake of those who waited outside, to perform whatever sacrifice their terror demanded.

Π

The teaching assistant, a brisk, muscular boy in tights and a cowboy hat, left Alexa alone in an office no larger than the second bedroom, so called, of a MODICUM apartment. She suspected that Loretta was punishing her for her absence the day before yesterday, so she might as well settle down and watch the reels the assistant had left with her. The first was a pious, somber account of the genius and tribulations of Wilhelm Reich, Alexander Lowen and Kate Wilkenson, foundress of the Lowen School, and still titular president.

The second reel presented itself as being the work of the students themselves. Things wobbled, faces were cerise and magenta, the blurry children were always intensely aware of the camera. All this candid-seeming footage was cunningly edited to suggest that (at least here at the Lowen School): "Learning is a side-effect of joy." Unquote, Kate Wilkenson. The children danced, the children prattled, the children made (so gently, so unproblematically) love, of sorts. Even mathematics, if not an out-and-out ecstasy, became an entertainment. Here, for instance, sat a little fellow about Tank's age in front of a teaching machine. On the screen a frantic mickeymouse, caught in the cleft of a steep, slippery parabola, was shrieking to be saved: "Help! Oh, help me, I'm trapped!"

Dr. Smilax chuckled and the parabolas began filling with water, inexorably. It rose above Mickey's ankles, above his knees, above the two white buttons on his shorts.

Alexa felt an uncomfortable tickle of memory.

"Y equals x-squared *plus* 2, does it?" In his anger the evil scientist's flesh-shield flickered, revealing glimpses of the infamous skull beneath. "Then try *this* on for size, Earthling!" Using his fingerbone as chalk, he scribbled on the magic blackboard (it was actually a computer):

$$\mathbf{Y} = \mathbf{x}^2 - 2$$

The parabola tightened. The water rose level with Mickey's chin, and when he opened his mouth a final wave diminished his would-have-been scream to a mere silly gargle.

(It had been thirty years ago, or longer. The blackboard was wiped clean, and she had punched the keys for a final equation: x^2 , and then 8, and then the operant key for Subtract. She had actually clapped her hands with glee when the pathetic little

mickeymouse had been crushed to death by the tightening of the parabola.)

As, in the movie, he was crushed to death now; as he had been crushed to death each day for decades all about the world. It was a fantastically successful textbook.

"There is a lesson in that," said Loretta Dickens Couplard, entering the room and filling it.

"But not about parabolas especially," Alexa had replied before she'd turned around.

They looked at each other.

The thought that came, unexpected and so undissembled, was: How old she looks! how altered! The twenty years that had merely nibbled at Alexa (twenty-four, in fact) had simply heaped themselves on Loretta Couplard like a blizzard. In '02 she had been a passably pretty girl. Now she was a fat old hen. Dissembling, Alexa stood up and bent forward to kiss the pink doughy cheek (they would not, so long as a kiss lasted, see each other's dismay), but the earphones reined her in inches short of her goal.

Loretta completed the gesture.

"Well, then"—after this memento mori—"let's go into my shambles, shall we?"

Alexa, smiling, disconnected herself from the viewer.

"It's out the door and around the corner. The school is spread out over four buildings. Three of them official landmarks." She led the way, lumbering down the dark hall and chattering about architecture. When she opened the door to the street the wind reached into her dress and made a sail of it. There seemed to be enough orange Wooly © on her to rig up a fair-sized yawl.

East Seventy-seventh was innocent of traffic except for a narrow, not very busy bicycle path. Potted ginkgos dotted the concrete, and real grass pressed up voluptuously through the eracks. Rarely did the eity afford the pleasure of ruins, and Alexa drank it in.

(Somewhere she had seen a wall, all built of massive blocks of

stone. Birds rested in the cracks where mortar had been chipped away and looked down at her. It had been the underside of a bridge—a bridge that had lost its river.)

"Such weather," she said, lingering beside one of the benches. "Yes, April." Loretta, who was still being blown apart, was reluctant to take the hint.

"It's the only time, except for maybe a week in October, that New York is even viable."

"Mm. Why don't we talk out here then? At least until the children claim it for their own." Then, once they'd plunked themselves down: "Sometimes, you know, I almost think I'd like the street rezoned again. Cars make such a soothing noise. Not to mention the graft I have to pay." She made a honking sound through her nose, expressive of cynicism.

"Graft?" Alexa asked, feeling it was expected of her.

"It comes under 'maintenance' in the budget."

They regarded the windy month of April. The young grass fluttered. Strands of red hair whipped Loretta's face. She clamped a hand upon her head.

"What do you think it *costs* to keep this place going for one school year—what do you think?"

"I couldn't begin to . . . I've never . . ."

"A million and a half. Just slightly under."

"It's hard to believe," she said. (Could she have cared less?)

"It would be a lot more if it weren't that half of us, including me, are paid directly from Albany." Loretta went on, with aggrieved relish, to render an accounting of the school's finances circumstantial enough to have satisfied the Angel of Judgment. Alexa could not have felt more embarrassed if Loretta had begun to relate the unseemliest details of her private life. Indeed, between old school chums a friendly tidbit or two might have helped restore a lapsed intimacy. In the old days Alexa had even once been in the same room while Loretta was getting laid by the geology lab assistant. Or was it vice versa? In any case there had been few secrets between them. But to bring up a subject like one's own private income so blatantly, and then to dwell upon it this way—it was shocking. Alexa was aghast.

Eventually a hint of purposefulness became apparent in the drift of Loretta's indiscretions. The school was kept alive by a grant from the Balanchine Foundation. Beyond an annual lump sum of fifty thousand dollars, the foundation awarded scholarships to thirty-two entering students. Each year the school had to round up a new herd of qualified candidates, for the grant was conditional upon maintaining a sixty/forty ratio between paying and scholarship students.

"So now you see," Loretta said, nervously dallying with her big zipper, "why your phone call was such a boon."

"No, I don't see, entirely." Was she angling, god forbid, for a donation? Alexa tried to think of anything she might have said on the phone that could have given Loretta so false an estimate of G.'s tax bracket. Their address, certainly, couldn't have led her to this mistake: West Eighty-seventh was distinctly *modest*.

"You spoke of working for the Welfare Department," Loretta said, with a sense of having laid down all her cards.

The zipper, having reached aphelion, began to descend. Alexa stared at it with candid incomprehension.

"Oh, Alexa, don't you see? You can scout them up for us."

"But surely in all New York City you don't have any trouble finding thirty-two candidates? Why, you told me there was a waiting list!"

"Of those who can pay. The difficulty is getting scholarship students who can meet the physical requirements. There are enough *bright* kids in the slums, especially if you know what tests to use to find them, but by the time they're ten years old, eleven years old, they're all physical wrecks. It's the combination of a cheap synthetic diet and the lack of exercise." The zipper, rising, snagged in orange Wooly ©. "The grant is from the Balanchine Foundation—oh, dear, now see what I've done—so there has to be at least a pretense of these kids becoming dancers. Potentially." The zipper wouldn't budge. The movement of her shoulders slowly spread apart the opened top of the dress, creating a vast décolletage.

"I'll certainly keep my eyes opened," Alexa promised.

Loretta made a final attempt. Somewhere something ripped. She rose from the bench and forced an operatic laugh. "Let's repair inside, shall we?"

On the way to the office Loretta asked all the questions she'd so far neglected—what sports Tancred played, what programs he watched, what subjects he was most apt at, and what his ambitions were, if any.

"Right now he's talking about whaling. In general we've tried not to coerce him."

"Is coming here his own idea then?"

"Oh, Tank doesn't even know we've applied. G. and I—that's Gene, my husband; we call each other by our initials—we thought it would be best if we let him finish out the semester in peace where he is."

"P.S. 166," Loretta said, just to prove that she had gone over the application.

"It's a good school for the early grades, but after that . . ."

"Of course. Democracy can be carried too far."

"It can," Alexa conceded.

They had reached the shambles, which was neither an office nor a bedroom nor yet a restaurant altogether. Loretta rearranged the upper part of her person inside a maroon sweater and tucked the lower, grosser half of herself out of sight behind an oak desk. Alexa at once felt herself more friendly disposed to her.

"I hope you don't think I'm being too poky."

"Not at all."

"And Mr. Miller? What does he do?"

"He's in heat-retrieval systems."

"Oh."

(G. would always add, at this point, "I fight entropy for a living." Should she?)

"Well. Most of our parents, you know, come from the human-

ities. Like us. If Tancred should come to the Lowen School, it's not likely that he'll ever follow in his father's technological footsteps. Does Mr. Miller realize that?"

"We've discussed it. It's funny"— in evidence she laughed, once, meagerly, through her nose—"but it's actually G. who's been more in favor of Tank coming here. Whereas my first thought was to enroll him at Stuyvesant."

"Did you apply there?"

"Yes. I'm still waiting to hear if he's been accepted."

"It would be cheaper, of course."

"We've tried not to let that be a consideration. G. went to Stuyvesant but he doesn't have good feelings about it. And while I enjoyed my education well enough, I can't see that it's enriched my life so awfully much more than G.'s that I can feel justified in my uselessness."

"Are you useless?"

"Yes, relative to an engineer. The humanities! What good has it done for either of us, practically? I'm a caseworker, and you're teaching kids the same things we learned so that they can grow up to do what? At best, they'll be caseworkers and teachers."

Loretta nodded her head consideringly. She seemed to be trying to keep from smiling. "But your husband disagrees?"

"Oh, he feels his life has been wasted too." This time her laughter was genuine.

Loretta, after only a moment more of noncommittal silence, joined her.

Then they had coffee, from actual beans that Loretta ground herself, and small hard cookies covered with pignoli. They were imported from South America.

III

Toward the end of his campaign against the Marcomanni, the emperor Marcus Aurelius wrote: "Consider the past: such great changes of political supremacies. One may foresee as well the things which will be. For they will certainly take the same form. Accordingly, to have contemplated human life for forty years is the same as to have contemplated it for ten thousand years. For what more will you see than you have seen already?"

Dear Ruth, Alexa wrote in ballpoint (it was after eleven; G. was asleep) in the empty back pages of Tank's fifth-grade project about the moon. She remembered to stick in the date: April 12, 2025. Now the page balanced. She tried the sounds of various openings in her head, but they were all stiff with civility. Her usual Introibo, an apology for being late to reply, was this once not so.

(What would Bernie have said? He'd have said, "Clear the air—say what you're really *feeling*!")

First, to clear the air . . .

The pen moved slowly, forming large upright letters.

.... I must say that your P.S. about Tank pissed me off more than somewhat. You and your tone of I Speak for the Human Spirit! You always are so ready to trounce on my values.

It was peanut butter, the very thickest. But she slogged on through it.

As for Tank, his fate still hangs in the balance. Ideally we'd like to send him somewhere (cheap) to be fed orts and crumbs of every art, science, craft and . . .

She waited for the last term of the series.

The new Monsanto commercial came roaring through the wall: YOU LOOK SO PRETTY IN SHOES! YOU LOOK SO NICE IN—

"Turn that down!" she called in to her son, and wrote:

... fashion until he was old enough to decide for himself what he "liked." But I might as well fill in his Modicum application right now as doom him with that kind of education. I'll say this much for the Lowen School—it doesn't graduate a lot of useless Renaissance nincompoops! I know too many of that sort professionally, and the best sweep streets—illegally!

Maybe Stuyvesant is as bad as you say, a kind of institutional Moriah, an altar specialy put up for the sacrifice of my only begotten. I sometimes think so. But I also believe—the other half of the time—that some such sacrifice is required. You don't like G., but it's G. and those like him who are holding our technological world together. If her son could be trained to be either an actor or a soldier, what choice do you think a Roman matron would have made? That's a bit overmuch, but you know what I mean.

(Don't you?)

She realized that, probably, Ruth wouldn't know what she meant. And she wasn't entirely sure she meant it.

At the very beginning of the First World War, as the Germans advanced toward the Marne and the Austrians pressed northward into Poland, a thirty-four-year-old ex-high school teacher living in a Munich rooming house had just completed the first draft of what was going to be the best-selling book of 1919 throughout Germany. In his introduction he wrote:

We are a civilized people: to us both the springtime pleasures of the twelfth century and the harvests of the eighteenth have been denied. We must deal with the cold facts of a winter existence, to which the parallel is to be found not in the Athens of Pericles but in the Rome of Augustus. Greatness in painting, in music, in architecture are no longer, for the West, possibilities. For a young man coming of age in late Roman times, a student abubble with all the helter-skelter enthusiasms of youth, it needn't have been too brutal a disappointment to learn that some of his hopes would, necessarily, come to nothing. And if the hopes that had been blasted were those he held most dear, well, any lad worth his salt will make do, undismayed, with what is possible, and necessary. Say that there is a bridge to be built at Alcantara: then he will build it-and with a Roman's pride. A lesson can be drawn from this that would be of benefit to coming generations, as showing them what can, and therefore must, be, as well as what is excluded from the spiritual possibilities of their own time. I can only hope that men of the next generation may be moved by this book to devote themselves to engineering instead of poetry, to the sea instead of the paintbrush, to politics instead of epistemology. Better than this they could not do.

Dear Ruth, She began again, on a fresh sheet.

Each time I write you I'm convinced you don't understand a word. (In fact, often as not, I don't even send my finished

letter.) It's not just that I think you're stupid, though I suppose I do, but that you have so well trained yourself in that difficult form of dishonesty you call "faith" that you can't any longer see the world the way it is.

And yet (with you there is always that redeeming "and yet") I do continue to invite your misunderstanding, just as I keep on inviting Merriam to the villa. Merriam—have I introduced her yet?—is my latest transfigure of "you." A highly Christian, terribly sexy Jewess who follows heresy the way other women follow the arena. At her worst she can be as sententious as you at yours, but there are other moments when I'm convinced she really does experience . . . whatever it is in a different way than I do. Call it her spirituality, though the word makes me squirm. We will be out in the garden, watching hummingbirds or some such, and Merriam will sink into her own thoughts, and they seem to glow inside her like the flame in an alabaster lamp.

Yet I wonder if this isn't, after all, an illusion. Every lout learns at some point in his life to make his silences seem weighty with unspoken meaning. A single word can extinguish the flame in the lamp. It is, this spirituality of yours and hers, so humorless! "Getting into baskets," indeed!

And yet . . . I would—and this is a confession—love to pack a bag and fly out to Idaho and learn to sit still and make baskets or any other dumb thing, so long as I could throw off the weight of my life here. To learn to breathe! Sometimes New York terrifies me and usually it appalls me, and the moments of High Civilization that should compensate for the danger and the pain of living here are less and less frequent as I grow older. Yes, I would love to surrender myself to your way of life (I fancy it would be something like being raped by a huge, mute and ultimately gentle nigger), though I know I never will. It's important to me, therefore, that you are out there in the wilderness, redeeming my urban sins. Like a stylite.

Meanwhile I'll go on doing what I think is my duty. (We are the daughters, after all, of an admiral!) The city is sinking, but then the city has always been sinking. The miracle is that it works at all, that it doesn't just . . . The second page of the second letter was filled. Reading it over, she realized it could never be mailed to her sister. Their relationship, already rickety, would never support the weight of this much honesty. But she finished the sentence anyhow:

. . . collapse.

A quarter of a millennium after the Meditations and fifteen hundred years before The Decline of the West, Salvian, a priest of Marseilles, described the process whereby the free citizens of Rome were gradually reduced to a condition of serfdom. The upper classes had arranged the tax laws to their own convenience and then administered them crookedly to their further convenience. The entire burden of supporting the army-Rome's army, of course, was vast, a nation within a nation-fell on the shoulders of the poor. The poor grew poorer. Finally, reduced to utter destitution, some fled from their villages to live among the barbarians, even though (as Salvian notes) they did give off a dreadful odor. Others, living far from the frontiers, became Bagaudae, or homemade Vandals. The majority, however, rooted to the land by their property and families, had to accept the terms of the rich potentiores, to whom they made over their houses, their lands, their possessions, and at last the freedom of their children. The birth rate declined. All Italy became a wasteland. Repeatedly the emperors were obliged to invite the politer barbarians across the borders to "colonize" the abandoned farms.

The condition of the cities at this time was even less agreeable than that of the countryside. Burned and pillaged by barbarians and then by the troops (themselves mostly recruits from lands bordering the Danube) that had been sent in to dispel these invaders, the cities existed, if at all, in ruins. "Though doubtless no one wished to die," Salvian writes, "still no one did anything to avoid death," and he welcomes the advent of the Goths into Gaul and Spain as being a release from the despotism of a totally corrupt government. My dear Gargilius, Alexa wrote.

It's one of those days, and has been for weeks. Rain, mud and rumors of Radagaisus north of the city, west of the city, east of the city, everywhere at once. The slaves fret and dither, but so far only two have run off to enlist among our would-be conquerors. On the whole we've done better than our neighbors. Arcadius has nothing left now but that cook of his who has such a mistaken notion of garlic (the one person who should have joined the barbarians!) and the Egyptian girl Merriam brought with her. The poor thing speaks no known language and probably hasn't been told the world is coming to an end. As for the two we lost, Patrobas always was a troublemaker, and so good riddance. I'm sorry to tell you the other one was Timarchus, whom you had had such hopes for. He went into one of his snits and shattered the left arm of the wrestler down by the pool. Then he had no choice but to leave. Or perhaps it was the other way round—he smashed up the statue as a gesture of farewell. Anyhow, Sylvan says it can be repaired, though the damage will always be visible.

My own confidence in the army is undiminished, darling, but I think it wisest that I close the villa till the rumors have abated somewhat. I shall get Sylvan—whom else can I trust now?—to help me bury the plate and the bedposts and the three remaining jugs of Falernian somewhere quite secret (as we discussed the last time). The books, those that matter, I'll bring with me. I wish there were even a morsel of good news. Except for being lonely, I am in good health and good spirits. I do wish you were not so many miles . . .

She crossed out "miles" and wrote "stadia."

. . . stadia away.

For a moment in the mirror of art, for the blinking of an iris, Alexa witnessed her life the wrong way round. Instead of a modern housewife fantasizing herself in classical poses, the past stiffened and became actual and she thought she could see clearly, across the span of years, the other Alexa, the sad contemporary self she usually managed to avoid, a shrill woman in a silly dress who had been equal to the small demands neither of her marriage nor of her career. A failure or (which was possibly worse) a mediocrity.

"And yet," she told herself.

And yet: didn't the world, to keep on going, need just such people as she was?

It had only been a moment. The question had restored a comfortable perspective, and she would end her epistle to Gargilius with some chilly, true-to-life endearment. She would write—

But her pen had disappeared. It was not on the desk, it was not on the rug, it was not in her pocket.

The upstairs noise had begun.

Two minutes to twelve. She might, reasonably, complain, but she didn't know who lived in the apartment above, or even, for certain, that that was where the sound came from. "*Cheng-cheng*," and then, after a pause, "*Cheng-cheng*."

"Alexa?" She could not place the voice (a woman's?) summoning her. There was no one in the room.

"Alexa."

Tancred stood in the doorway, looking a perfect cupid with an old silky shawl knotted at his hips, lemon on chocolate.

"You startled me."

Her left hand had lifted automatically to her lips, and there, lapsing back into existence, was the ballpoint.

"I couldn't sleep. What time is it?" He stepped toward the table soundlessly, and stood with one hand resting on the arm of a chair, his shoulders level with hers, his eyes steady as a laser beam.

"Midnight."

"Could we play a game of cards?"

"And what about tomorrow?"

"Oh, I'll get up. I promise." G., when he begged a favor, always smiled; Tancred, a better tactician, remained perfectly solemn.

"Well, get out the eards. One game and then we both have to get to bed." While Tancred was out of the room, Alexa tore out her own pages from "What the Moon Means to Me." A face clipped from a news magazine came unstuck and fluttered to the rug. She stooped and got it.

"What were you writing?" Tancred asked, beginning, neatly, to shuffle.

"Nothing. A poem."

"I wrote a poem," he admitted, excusing hers.

She cut. He began to deal.

She studied the newsprint face. It seemed oddly devoid of experience despite its years, like a very young actor got up as a very old man. The eyes regarded the camera lens with the equanimity of a star.

Finally she had to ask, "Who is this?"

"That! You don't know who that is? Guess."

"Some singer?" (Could it be Don Hershey? Already?)

It's the last astronaut. You know, the bunch who landed on the moon. All the others are dead." Tank took the scrap of paper from her and returned it to its place in his project. "Now he is too, I guess. You start."

IV

From Roman times until the closing years of the twentieth century the Bay of Morbihan on the southern coast of Brittany had been the source of the world's most delectable seed oysters. Then in the late eighties the oystermen of the Locmariaquer were alarmed to notice that their seedlings sickened when they were transplanted and that soon even those that remained in their native waters had become unpalatable. Researchers hired by the *département* of Morbihan eventually tracked down the source of infection to wastes dumped into the estuary of the Loire, some sixty miles down the coast. (Ironically, the polluter was a subsidiary branch of the pharmaceutical concern that had supplied the investigators.) By the time this was discovered, sad to say, the Morbihan oyster was extinct. However, in death the species bequeathed mankind its final inestimable gift, a monomolecular pearl, Morbihanine.

As synthesized by Pfizer, Morbihanine quickly became the most popular drug in all countries where it was not prohibited, usually in some gentling combination with the traditional. Modified by narcotizing agents it was marketed as Oraline; with caffeine it became Koffee; with tranquilizers, Fadeout. In its crude form it was used only by the half million or so members of the intellectual elite who practiced Historical Analysis.

Unmodified Morbihanine induces a state of intensely experienced "daydreaming" in which usual relationships of figure to field are reversed. During a common hallucinogenic high, the self remains a constant while the environment, as in dreams, undergoes transformation. With Morbihanine the landscape that one inhabits, after the initial "fixing" period, is not much more malleable than our own everyday world, but one is aware of one's slightest action in this landscape as a free, spontaneous, willed choice. It was possible to dream responsibly.

What determines the outlines of the alternate world is the subject's sum knowledge of the period he chooses to fix during his first trips. Without continuous research one was apt to create a fantasy life as monotonous as the afternoon sex features. Most people, sensibly, preferred the mild, multidirectional zonk of Oraline, its euphoric illusion of freedom every which way.

For the few, however, the more strenuous pleasures of Pure Will were worth a greater effort. A century before the same people had covered themselves with useless degrees in the humanities, filling the graduate schools to overflowing. Now, with Morbihanine, there was a *use* for all the history history students are forever studying.

It had often been debated, among analysands, whether Historical Analysis was the best way to work out one's problems or the best way to escape them. The elements of psychotherapy and of vicarious entertainment were inextricably knotted. The past became a kind of vast moral gymnasium in which some preferred a hard workout in the weight room of the French Revolution or the Conquest of Peru while others jiggled lickerishly on the trampoline of Casanova's Venice or Delmonico's New York.

Once a particular stretch of time had been fixed, usually with the help of an expert in that era, one was no more at liberty to depart from it than one could walk away from the month of June. Alexa, for instance, was confined to a period of less than eighty years, from her birth in 334 (which was also, not coincidentally, the address of one of the buildings on East Eleventh Street for which she was responsible at the MODICUM office) up to the lovely pink evening when the twice-widowed Alexa, lately returned from a lifetime in the provinces, was to die of a stroke just a providential few days before the Sack of Rome. If she tried, during contact, to broach either barrier, 334 or 410, she experienced nothing more than a mild pastoral flickering leaves, clouds, a blurry water glass, sounds of troubled breathing, a smell of melons rotting—like the test patterns of some sempiternal TV network.

On Friday morning, despite the weather, Alexa took the malls downtown and arrived at Bernie's office ten minutes early. A good-size hole had been punched through the fiber panel of the outer door, and the furniture inside was in a state of delirium. The couch had been sliced open, its innards garnishing the ruins.

"But," Bernie pointed out cheerfully, sweeping up the fluff and plaster dust, "they never got into the office, thank God. They might have done actual harm there."

"That's a rosy view."

"Well, the way I look at it, this is the best of all possible worlds." Without a doubt he was soothed by the consolations of chemistry, but amid these ruins, why not?

"Do you know who did it?" She picked a lump of plaster off the bench, dropped it into his basket.

"Oh, I think I do. A pair of girls that the council saddled me

with have been threatening to scrub the office for months. I hope it was them-then the council can pick up the bill."

Like most analysts, Bernie Shaw did not make a living from his fees. Unlike most, he didn't teach either. Instead he received a comfortable retainer from the Hell's Kitchen Neighborhood Youth Council for occasional services as a reader and adviser. Bernie had an uncle on the council's advisory board.

"Which is just the same as Historical Analysis, really," he would explain at parties (and thanks to the same uncle he was invited to some very good parties), "except that it doesn't involve history or analysis."

When the basket was full, Bernie slipped on his professional manner, and they entered the inner, vandalproofed office. His face gelled into a handsome, immotile mask. His voice thickened to a droning baritone. His hands froze into a single neat rock of thoughtfulness, which he planted in the middle of his desk.

They faced each other across this rock and began to discuss Alexa's other inner life—first money, then sex, then whatever odds and ends were left.

Moneywise she would soon have to decide whether to accept Arcadius's long-standing offer to buy her melon fields. His price was tempting, but it was hard to reconcile the sale of farmland and her patrimony at that—with an affectation of republican virtue. On the other hand, the land in question could hardly be called ancestral, having been one of Popilius's last speculations before his death.

(Alexa's father, Popilius Flamininus—born 276, died 354 A.D.—lived most of his life as a relatively impoverished senator of Rome. After years of vacillation he decided to follow the empire eastward to its new capital. Accordingly, one fine day Alexa, aged ten, was bundled into an oxcart and told to wave good-bye to the pretty idiot daughter of the superintendent of their apartment house. The journey to Byzantium took them two hundred stadia to the north and no distance eastward at all, for Popilius Flamininus had discovered that his purple stripe, so useless to him in Rome, was a social and financial asset in the hillside towns of Cisalpine Gaul. By the time she'd married Gargilius, Alexa was considered, locally, a tolerable heiress.)

Bernie took up the matter of her legal position, but she could cite Domitian's revival of the Julian laws governing the property rights of married women. Legally the fields were hers to sell.

"So the question remains. Should I?"

The answer remained, adamantly, no. Not because it was hers from her father (who would have probably advised her to take the money and run); her piety was on a grander scale: Rome! Liberty! Civilization! It was to that burning ship that duty bound her. Of course, *she* didn't know it was burning. One of the knottiest problems in analysis was to keep the historical Alexa innocent of the fact that she was fighting, for the short term anyhow, a losing battle. She might have her suspicions who didn't, then?—but this was reason rather for resolution than for faintheartedness. A lost battle is not a lost cause. Take Thermopylae.

The contemporary transfigure of this temptation, whether she ought to keep her job with the MODICUM office, had the same hydra-headed way of surviving her most final decisions. She didn't, except now and then, enjoy her work. She often suspected that the great machineries of the welfare service might actually do more harm than good. Her salary was only large enough to cover the extra expenses the job involved her in. Duty in these circumstances was an article of faith as thorny as the resurrection of the body. Yet it was only this faith—and a vague conviction that a city *ought* to be lived in—that helped her resist G.'s gentle, persistent drift suburbsward.

They breezed through sex by mutual agreement, for in that respect the last three or four months had been unadventurously pleasant. When she indulged in daydreams just for fun they were likelier to be about barbecues than orgies. Alexa could compensate for her stints of dieting in the present with bouts of exquisite excess in the past, fantasies which she lifted whole from Petronius, Juvenal or the younger Pliny—salads of lettuce, leeks and fresh mint; the cheese of Trebula; trays of Picenumine olives, Spanish pickles and sliced eggs; a roasted kid, the tenderest of his flock, with more of milk in him than blood; asparagus covered with the willful anachronism of a Hollandaise sauce; pears and figs from Chios, and the plums of Damascus. Besides, unnecessary talk about sex tended to make Bernie nervous.

With fifteen minutes still to go, a puddle of silence formed between them. She searched through the week's memories for an anecdote to float across it. The letter she'd written last night to Merriam? No, Bernie would accuse her of literature.

The puddle spread.

"Monday night," she said. "On Monday night I dreamed a dream."

"Oh?"

"I think it was a dream. Maybe I tinkered with it a little before I was completely asleep."

"Ah."

"I was dancing out in the street with a lot of other women. In fact I was sort of leading them. Down Broadway, but I wore a palla."

"That's a dichronatism." Bernie's tone was severe.

"Yes, but as I say, I was dreaming. Then I was in the Metropolitan Museum. For a sacrifice."

"Animal? Human?"

"One or the other. I don't remember."

"Blood sacrifices were prohibited in 341."

"Yes, but in a crisis the authorities would look the other way. During the siege of Florence in 405, which was years after the destruction of the temples—"

"Oh, very well." Bernie closed his eyes, conceding the point. "So, once again the barbarians are storming the gates." The barbarians were always storming Alexa's gates. Bernie's theory was that it was because her husband was fractionally a Negro. "Then what happened?"

"That's all I remember. Except one detail earlier in the dream. There were heaps of dead babies in the cess trenches in the middle of Broadway." "Infanticide was a capital offense from the beginning of the third century," Bernie pointed out.

"Probably because it was becoming too common."

Bernie closed his eyes. Then, opening them: "Have you ever had an abortion?"

"Once, ages ago, in high school. I didn't feel much guilt though."

"What did you feel about the children in your dream?"

"Anger, at the untidiness. Otherwise they were just a fact." She looked at her hands, which seemed too large, the knuckles especially. "Like a face in a news magazine." She looked at Bernie's hands folded on the desk. Another silence began to form, but gracefully, without embarrassment. She remembered the moment she'd found herself alone on the street; the sunlight, her pleasure. It seemed quite reasonable that people should expose their children to die. There was what Loretta had said yesterday—"I've stopped trying"—but it went beyond that. As though everyone had come to see that Rome, civilization, the whole burning issue wasn't worth the effort any longer, theirs or anyone's. Every infanticide was the kindness of a philosopher.

"Pish," Bernie said, when she'd said this four or five different ways. "No one sees his own culture declining till around the age of forty, and then everyone does."

"But things had been going downhill for two hundred years." "Or three, or four."

"Farmlands had become deserts. It was visible. Look at the sculpture, the architecture."

"It's visible with hindsight. But *they* could be as blind as their comfort required. Trivial poetasters like Ausonius were declared the equals of Virgil, of Homer even, and the Christians, now that they were *official*, were positively giddy with optimism. They expected to see the City of God shoot up like an urban renewal project."

"Then explain those dead children."

"Explain the living ones. Which reminds me. Last week you still hadn't made up your mind about Tancred."

"I sent off the letter this morning, with a check." "To?"

"Stuyvesant."

The rock on the desk split open and became two hands. "Well —there you have it."

"What?"

"An interpretation for your dream. The blood sacrifice you were ready to make to save the city, the children on the scrap heap—your son."

She denied it.

V

By three that afternoon the tops of buildings were invisible at street level. She had walked crosstown from the office in a lukewarm drizzle, then taken the subway down to East Fourteenth. All the way the argument with Bernie had continued inside her, like some battery-powered toy, a novelty doll with a loop of tape that croaks after each smack of the old smacker, "Oh, don't do that again! Oh, please don't, I can't stand it!"

Before she'd come out through the turnstile she could smell the grease from Big San Juan's, a dark ground of onion polkadotted with plantain. By the time she was up on the street, her mouth was watering. She would have bought a quarter bag, but customers had gathered three deep around the counters (baseball season already?) and she saw Lottie Hanson in the crowd in front of the screen. The plantains weren't worth the risk of a conversation. Lottie's blowzy sexiness always affected Alexa elegiacally, like a roomful of cut flowers.

As she crossed Third Avenue between Eleventh and Twelfth, a sound dopplered at her, swelling in an instant from a hum to a roar. She whirled about, scanning the fog for whatever lunatic truck or . . . The sound as suddenly diminished. The street was empty. A block to the north the lights winked green. She got to the curb before the traffic—a bus and two shrill Yamahas—reached the second stripe of the ped crossing. Then, several beats after she'd figured it out, her idiot heart caught up with her panic.

A helicopter certainly, but flying lower than any she'd ever known.

Her knees took so to trembling that she had to lean against a hydrant. Long after the distant whirr had diffused into the general midday din, the machineries of her glands kept her in a flutter.

Marylou Levin had taken her mother's place at the corner with the broom and the can. A homely, slow, earnest girl who'd grow up to be a day care worker, unless, which would probably be more profitable both for Marylou and for society, she took over her mother's license as a sweep.

Alexa dropped a penny in the can: The girl looked up from her comic book and said thank you.

"I hoped I'd find your mother here, Marylou."

"She's home."

"I've got a declaration she had to fill out. I didn't get it to her last time, and now the office is starting to make a fuss."

"Well, she's sleeping." Marylou turned back to the comic book, a sad story about horses in a Dallas circus, then thought to add: "She relieves me at four."

It meant either waiting or walking up to the seventeenth floor. If the M-28 wasn't cleared through Blake's section by tomorrow Mrs. Levin might lose her apartment (Blake had been known to do worse), and it would be Alexa's fault.

Usually, except for the stink, she didn't mind the stairs, but all the walking today had taken it out of her. A weariness as of heavy shopping bags focused in the small of her back. On the ninth floor she stopped in at Mr. Anderson's to hear the poor tedious old man complain about the various ingratitudes of his adopted daughter. (Though "boarder" described that relationship more accurately.) Cats and kittens climbed over Alexa, rubbed against her, inveigled her.

On eleven her legs gave out again. She sat on the top step and listened to the commingled urgencies of a newscast one flight up and a song one flight down. Her ears filtered Latin words from the Spanish phrases.

Imagine, she thought, actually living here. Would one grow numb eventually? One would have to.

Lottie Hanson hove into sight at the landing below, clutching the rail and panting. Recognizing Alexa and conscious of having to look nice for her, she patted her damp, frizzly wig and smiled.

"Glory, isn't it—" She caught her breath, waved her hand in front of her face, decoratively. "—exciting!"

Alexa asked what.

"The bombing."

"Bombing?"

"Oh, you haven't heard. They're bombing New York. They showed it on TV, where it landed. These steps!" She collapsed beside Alexa with a great *huff*. The smell that had seemed so appetizing outside Big San Juan's had lost its savor. "But they couldn't show—" She waved her hand, and it was still, Alexa had to admit, a lovely and a graceful hand. "—the actual airplane itself. Because of the fog, you know."

"Who's bombing New York?"

"The radicals, I suppose. It's some kind of protest. Against something." Lottie Hanson watched her breasts lift and fall. The importance of the news she bore made her feel pleased with herself. She waited for the next question, all aglow.

But Alexa had begun calculating with no more input than she had already. The notion had seemed, from Lottie's first words, inevitable. The city cried out to be bombed. The amazing thing was that no one had ever thought to do it before.

When she did at last ask Lottie a question, it came from an unexpected direction. "Are you afraid?"

"No, not a bit. It's funny, because usually, you know, I'm just a bundle of nerves. Are you afraid?" "No. Just the opposite. I feel . . ." She had to stop and think what it was that she did feel.

Children came storming down the stairs. With a gentle "God damn," Lottie squeezed up against the crusty wall. Alexa pressed up to the railing. The children ran down through the canyon they'd formed.

Lottie screamed at the last of them, "Amparo!"

The girl turned around at the landing and smiled. "Oh, hi, Mrs. Miller."

"God damn it, Amparo, don't you know they're bombing the city?"

"We're all going down to the street to watch."

Dazzling, Alexa thought. She'd always had a thing for pierced ears on children, and even been tempted to do Tank's for him when he was four, but G. had interposed.

"You get your ass back upstairs and stay there till they shoot that fucking airplane down!"

"The TV said it doesn't make any difference where you are."

Lottie had gone all red. "I don't care about that. I say-"

But Amparo had already run off.

"One of these days I'm going to kill her."

Alexa laughed indulgently.

"I am, just wait and see."

"Not on stage, I hope."

"What?"

"Ne pueros coram," she explained, "populo Medea trucidet. Don't let Medea kill her boys before the audience. It's Horace." She got up and bent around to see if she'd soiled her dress.

Lottie remained on the step, inert. An everyday depression began to blunt the exhilaration of the catastrophe, like fog spoiling an April day, today's fog, today's April day.

Smells filmed every surface like cheap skin cream. Alexa had to get out of the stairwell, but Lottie had somehow caught hold of her and she wriggled in the meshes of an indefinite guilt.

"I think I'll go up to the battlement now," she said, "to watch the siege." "Well, don't wait for me."

"But later there's something I wanted to talk to you about." "Right. Later."

When she was one landing up Lottie called after her. "Mrs. Miller?"

"Yes?"

"The first bomb got the museum."

"Oh. Which museum?"

"The Met."

"Really."

"I thought you'd want to know."

"Of course. Thank you."

Like a theater just before the movie starts, reduced by the darkness to a bare geometry, the fog had erased all details and distances. Uncertain sounds sifted through the grayness—engines, music, women's voices. She felt through her whole body the imminence of the collapse, and because now she *could* feel it, it was no longer debilitating. She ran along the gravel. The roof stretched on and on in front of her without perspective. At the ledge she swerved to the right. She ran on.

She heard, far off, the stolen plane. It neither approached her nor receded, as though it were executing an immense circle, searching for her.

She stood still and lifted her arms, inviting it to her, offering herself to these barbarians, fingers splayed, eyes pressed tightly closed. Commanding.

She saw, beneath her but unforeshortened, the bound ox. She saw its heaving belly and desperate eyes. She felt, in her hand, the sharp obsidian.

She told herself that this was what she had to do. Not for her own sake, of course. Never for her own sake-for theirs.

Its blood drenched the gravel. It gushed and splattered. The hem of the palla was stained. She knelt in the blood and dipped her hands into the opened belly to raise the dripping entrails high above her head, tubes and wires in a slime of thick black oil. She wound herself in the soft coils and danced like some god-drenched girl at the festivals, laughing and pulling the torches from their sockets, smashing sacred articles, jeering at the generals.

No one approached her. No one asked what portents she had read.

She climbed up into the jungle gym and stood peering into the featureless air, her legs braced against the thin pipes, raptured and strong with a dawning faith.

The airplane approached, audibly.

She wanted it to see her. She wanted the boys inside to know that she knew, that she agreed.

It appeared quite suddenly, and near, like Minerva sprung full-grown from the brow of Jupiter. It was shaped like a cross.

"Come then," she said with conscious dignity. "Lay waste."

But the plane—a Rolls Rapide—passed overhead and returned to the haze from which it had materialized.

She climbed down from the gym with a sense of loss: she had offered herself to History, and History had refused. With a sense, equally, of what a fool she'd been.

She felt in her pockets for a pack of hankies, but she'd run out at the office. She had her cry anyhow.

VI

Since the army had begun celebrating its victory, the city no longer seemed a sanctuary. Therefore early the next morning Merriam and Arcadius started back home on foot. During the darkest moments of the siege, with the generosity of despair, Arcadius had given the cook and the Theban girl their freedom, so that they were returning to the villa completely unattended.

Merriam was dreadfully hung over. The road was a slough, and when they came to the cut-off Arcadius insisted on taking the even muddier path that went through Alexa's fields. But for all that, she felt happy as an apricot. The sun was shining, and the fields steamed like some great kitchen full of soup kettles and sauce boats, as though the very earth were sending up its prayers of thanksgiving.

"Lord," she would murmur, "Lord." She felt like a new woman.

"Have you noticed," Areadius pointed out, after they'd gone some distance, "that there is nowhere any sign of them?"

"Of the barbarians? Yes, I've been crossing my fingers." "It's a miracle."

"Oh, yes, it's God's work, beyond a doubt."

"Do you think she knew?"

"Who?" she asked, in not an encouraging tone. Talk always dissipated her good feelings.

"Alexa. Perhaps she'd been sent a sign. Perhaps, after all, she danced in thanksgiving and not . . . the opposite."

Merriam pressed her lips together and made no reply. It was a blasphemous proposition. God did not give signs to the servants of the abominations he loathed and comminated! And yet . . .

"In retrospect," Arcadius insisted, "there's really no other explanation."

(And yet, she *had* seemed altogether jubilant. Perhaps—she had heard this suggested by a priest in Alexandria—there are evil spirits whom God permits, to a limited degree and imperfectly, to see the shape of future things.)

She said, "I thought it was an obscene display."

Arcadius didn't contradict her.

Later, after they had circled round the base of the larger hill, the path sloped upward and grew dryer. The trees fell away on their left and permitted a view eastward across Alexa's melon fields. Hundreds of bodies were scattered over the trampled scenery. Merriam hid her eyes, but it was not so easy to escape the scent of decay, which mingled, almost pleasantly, with the odor of smashed, fermenting melons.

"Oh, dear," said Arcadius, realizing that their path would lead them straight through the midst of the carnage.

"Well, we'll have to do it-that's all," Merriam said, lifting her chin with a show of defiance. She took his hand and they walked through the field of defeated barbarians as quickly as they could.

Later, Lottie came up looking for her. "I was wondering if you were all right."

"Thank you. I just needed a breath of air."

"The plane crashed, you know."

"No, I hadn't heard any more than you told me."

"Yes—it crashed into a MODICUM project at the end of Christopher Street—176."

"Oh, that's awful."

"But the building was just going up. No one was killed but a couple of electricians."

"That's a miracle."

"I thought you might like to come down and watch the TV with us. Mom is making Koffee."

"I'd appreciate that."

"Good." Lottie held open the door. The stairwell had achieved evening a couple of hours in advance of the day.

On the way downstairs Alexa mentioned that she thought she could arrange for Amparo to get a scholarship at the Lowen School.

"Would that be good?" Lottie asked, and then, embarrassed by her question, "I mean, I've never heard of it till just now."

"Yes, I think it's pretty good. My son Tancred will be going there next year."

Lottie seemed unpersuaded.

Mrs. Hanson stood outside the door of her apartment, gesturing frantically. "Hurry up, hurry up! They've found the boy's mother, and they're going to interview her."

"We can talk about it more later," Alexa said.

Inside, on the TV, the boy's mother was explaining to the camera, to the millions of viewers, what she couldn't understand.

Untoward Occurrence at Embassy Poetry Reading

Marilyn Hacker

Thank you. Thank you very much. I'm pleased to be here tonight. I seldom read to such a varied audience. My poetry is . . . what it is. Graves, yes, said love, death and the changing of the seasons were the unique, the primordial subjects.

I'd like to talk about that. One subjects oneself to art, not necessarily pleased to be a colander for myths. It seasons one to certain horrors. Not all. You can read or formulate philosophies; your death is still the kernel of your dawn sweats. Poetry

is interesting to people who write poetry. Others are involved in other subjects. Does the Ambassador consider death on the same scale as you, Corporal? Please stay seated. I've outreached myself. I can read your discomfort. But tonight the seasons

change. I've watched you, in town for the season, nod to each other, nod to poetry represented by me, and my colleagues, who read to good assemblies, good subjects for gossip. You're the audience. Am I pleased to frighten you? Yes and no. It scares me to death

to stand up here and talk about real death while our green guerrillas hurry up the seasons. They have disarmed the guards by now, I'm pleased to say. The doors are locked. Great poetry is not so histrionic, but our subjects choose us, not otherwise. I will not read

manifestoes. Tomorrow, foreigners will read rumors in newspapers. . . Oh, sir, your death would be a tiresome journalistic subject so stay still till we're done. This is our season. The building is surrounded. No more poetry tonight. We are discussing, you'll be pleased

to know, the terms of your release. Please read these leaflets. Not poetry. You're bored to death with politics, but that's the season's subject.

For Apollo 11

Peter Schjeldahl

The Earth is continuously sprouting Inconsolable shapes—cities, Trees, outcroppings of rock such as granite, Limestone, and so on, television relay towers, Antennae of all sorts, mountains and the hills That surround them—things that lead the eye Upward, fixing one's attention At terrific, unserviceable altitudes Helpless and proud

Why not go the moon? We're halfway there already The domes Of our crania are like the dome of the night sky Aren't they? Even a pop fly expands us We think of Tahiti, viewing the same stars The universe pierces our apartments The west wind breathes to us word of New Jersey!

Our simple answer is to build something Put fire in its tail, and "so long!" We'll be seeing it again in a week or so Minus its grosser parts

And you, Astronauts! brave and stupid as the soul Which we disbelieve as much as we disbelieve you But adore, nonetheless, as much! Come back to us as *Gone with the Wind* comes back, Whole, glamorous, and now and then; Tremendous, vulgar, and full of what we are always Ceasing to be, which we will miss when in Heaven As you would miss us on some frigid planet Facing a busted engine Hearing nothing but your perishing heartbeat

Some Notes on the Predynastic Epoch

Robert Silverberg

We understand some of their languages, but none of them completely. That is one of the great difficulties. What has come down from their epoch to ours is spotted and stained and eroded by time, full of lacunae and static; and we can only approximately comprehend the nature of their civilization and the reasons for its collapse. Too often, I fear, we project our own values and assumptions back upon them and deceive ourselves into thinking we are making valid historical judgments.

On the other hand, there are certain aesthetic rewards in the very incompleteness of the record. Their poetry, for example, is heightened and made more mysterious, more strangely appealing, by the tantalizing gaps that result from our faulty linguistic knowledge and from the uncertainties we experience in transliterating their fragmentary written texts, as well as in transcribing their surviving spoken archives. It is as though time itself has turned poet, collaborating belatedly with the ancients to produce something new and fascinating by punching its own inexorable imprint into their work. Consider the resonances and implications of this deformed and defective song, perhaps a chant of a ritual nature, dating from the late predynastic:

Once upon a time you.....so fine, You threw the [?] a [small unit of currency?] in your prime, Didn't you? People'd call, say ''Beware.....to fall,'' You.....to fall,'' You.....laugh..... Everybody..... Now you don't. . . . so loud, Now you don't. . . . so proud About.....for your next meal. How does it feel, how does it feel To be.....home.....unknown....a rolling stone?

Or examine this, which is an earlier predynastic piece, possibly of Babylonian-American origin:

In my wearied....., me..... In my inflamed nostril, me..... Punishment, sickness, trouble.....me A flail which wickedly afflicts,.....me A lacerating rod.....me A.....hand.....me A terrifying message....me A stinging whip.....meme

The Center for Predynastic Studies is a comfortingly massive building fashioned from blocks of some greasy green synthetic stone and laid out in three spokelike wings radiating from a common center. It is situated in the midst of the central continental plateau, near what may have been the site of the ancient metropolis of Omahaha. On clear days we take to the air in small solar-powered flying machines and survey the outlines of the city, which are still visible as indistinct white scars on the green breast of the earth. There are more than two thousand staff members. Many of them are women and some are sexually available, even to me. I have been employed here for eleven years. My current title is Metalinguistic Archaeologist, Third Grade. My father before me held that title for much of his life. He died in a professional guarrel while I was a child, and my mother dedicated me to filling his place. I have a small office with several data terminals, a neatly beveled viewing screen and a modest desk. Upon my desk I keep a collection of artifacts of

the so-called twentieth century. These serve as talismans spurring me on to greater depth of insight. They include:

One gray communications device ("telephone").

One black inscribing device ("typewriter"?) which has been exposed to high temperatures and is somewhat melted.

One metal key, incised with the numerals 1714, and fastened by a rusted metal ring to a small white plastic plaque that declares, in red letters, IF CARRIED AWAY INADVERTENTLY / / / DROP IN ANY MAIL BOX / / / SHERATON BOSTON HOTEL / / / BOSTON, MASS. 02199.

One coin of uncertain denomination.

It is understood that these items are the property of the Center for Predynastic Studies and arc merely on loan to me. Considering their great age and the harsh conditions to which they must have been exposed after the collapse of twentieth century civilization, they are in remarkably fine condition. I am proud to be their custodian.

I am thirty-one years of age, slender, blue-eyed, austere in personal habits and unmarried. My knowledge of the languages and customs of the so-called twentieth century is considerable, although I strive constantly to increase it. My work both saddens and exhilarates me. I see it as a species of poetry, if poetry may be understood to be the imaginative verbal reconstruction of experience; in my case the experiences I reconstruct are not my own, are in fact alien and repugnant to me, but what does that matter? Each night when I go home my feet are moist and chilled, as though I have been wading in swamps all day. Last summer the Dynast visited the Center on Imperial Unity Day, examined our latest findings with care and an apparently sincere show of interest, and said, "We must draw from these researches a profound lesson for our times."

None of the foregoing is true. I take pleasure in deceiving. I am an extremely unreliable witness.

The heart of the problem, as we have come to understand it,

is a pervasive generalized dislocation of awareness. Nightmares break into the fabric of daily life and we no longer notice, or, if we do notice, we fail to make appropriate response. Nothing seems excessive any longer, nothing perturbs our dulled, numbed minds. Predatory giant insects, the products of pointless experiments in mutation, escape from laboratories and devastate the countryside. Rivers are contaminated by lethal microorganisms released accidentally or deliberately by civil servants. Parts of human fetuses obtained from abortions are kept alive in hospital research units; human fetal toes and fingers grow up to four times as fast under controlled conditions as they do in utero, starting from single rods of cartilage and becoming fully jointed digits in seven to ten days. These are used in the study of the causes of arthritis. Zoos are vandalized by children, who stone geese and ducks to death and shoot lions in their cages. Sulfuric acid, the result of a combination of rain, mist and sea spray with sulfurous industrial effluents, devours the statuary of Venice at a rate of 5 percent a year. The nose is the first part to go when this process, locally termed "marble cancer," strikes. Just off the shores of Manhattan island, a thick, stinking mass of floating sludge transforms a twenty-square-mile region of the ocean into a dead sea, a sterile soup of dark, poisonous wastes; this pocket of coagulated pollutants has been formed over a forty-year period by the licensed dumping each year of millions of cubic yards of treated sewage, towed by barge to the site, and by the unrestrained discharge of 365 million gallons per day of raw sewage from the Hudson River. All these events are widely deplored but the causative factors are permitted to remain uncorrected, which means a constant widening of their operative zones. (There are no static negative phases; the laws of expansive deterioration decree that bad inevitably becomes worse.) Why is nothing done on any functional level? Because no one believes anything can be done. Such a belief in collective impotence is, structurally speaking, identical in effect to actual impotence; one does not need to be helpless, merely to think that one is helpless, in order to reach a condition of surrender to accelerating degenerative conditions. Under such circumstances a withdrawal of attention is the only satisfactory therapy. Along with this emptying of reactive impulse comes a corresponding semantic inflation and devaluation which further speeds the process of general dehumanization. Thus the roving gangs of adolescents who commit random crimes in the streets of New York City say they have "blown away" a victim whom they have in fact murdered, and the President of the United States, announcing an adjustment in the par value of his country's currency made necessary by the surreptitious economic mismanagement of the previous administration, describes it as "the most significant monetary agreement in the history of the world."

Some of the topics urgently requiring detailed analysis:

- 1. Their poetry
- 2. Preferred positions of sexual intercourse
- 3. The street plans of their major cities
- 4. Religious beliefs and practices
- 5. Terms of endearment, heterosexual and homosexual
- 6. Ecological destruction, accidental and deliberate
- 7. Sports and rituals
- 8. Attitudes toward technological progress
- 9. Forms of government, political processes
- 10. Their visual art forms
- 11. Means of transportation
- 12. Their collapse and social decay
- 13. Their terrible last days

One of our amusements here—no, let me be frank, it's more than an amusement, it's a professional necessity—is periodically to enter the vanished predynastic world through the gate of dreams. A drug that leaves a sour, salty taste on the tongue facilitates these journeys. Also we make use of talismans: I clutch my key in my left hand and earry my coin in my right-hand pocket. We never travel alone, but usually go in teams of two or three. A special section of the Center is set aside for those who

make these dream journeys. The rooms are small and brightly lit, with soft rubbery pink walls, rather womblike in appearance. tuned to a bland heat and an intimate humidity. Alexandra. Jerome and I enter such a room. We remove our clothing to perform the customary ablutions. Alexandra is plump but her breasts are small and far apart. Jerome's body is hairy and his muscles lie in thick slabs over his bones. I see them both looking at me. We wash and dress; Jerome produces three hexagonal gray tablets and we swallow them. Sour, salty. We lie side by side on the triple couch in the center of the room. I clutch my key, I touch my coin. Backward, backward, backward we drift. Alexandra's soft forearm presses gently against my thin shoulder. Into the dark, into the old times. The predynastic epoch swallows us. This is the kingdom of earth, distorted, broken, twisted, maimed, perjured. The kingdom of hell. A snowbound kingdom. Bright lights on the grease-speckled airstrip. A rusting vehicle jutting from the sand. The eyes and lips of madmen. My feet are sixteen inches above the surface of the ground. Mists curl upward, licking at my soles. I stand before a bleak hotel, and women carrying glossy leather bags pass in and out. Toward us come automobiles, berserk, driverless, with blazing headlights. A blurred column of song rises out of the darkness. Home . . . unknown . . . a rolling stone? These ruins are inhabited.

LIFE-SYNTHESIS PIONEER URGES POLICING OF RESEARCH Buffalo Doctor Says New Organisms Could Be Peril

USE OF PRIVATE PATROLMEN ON CITY STREETS INCREASING

MACROBIOTIC COOKING-LEARNING THE SECRETS OF YANG AND YIN

PATMAN WARNS U.S. MAY CHECK CAMBLING DISEASE IN THE STATES

SOME AREAS SEEK TO HALT GROWTH

NIXON DEPICTS HIS WIFE AS STRONG AND SENSITIVE

PSYCHIATRIST IN BELFAST FINDS CHILDREN ARE DEEPLY DISTURBED BY THE VIOLENCE

GROWING USE OF MIND-AFFECTING DRUGS STIRS CONCERN

Saigon, Sept. 5—United States Army psychologists said today they are working on a plan to brainwash enemy troops with bars of soap that reveal a new propaganda message practically every time the guerrillas lather up. As the soap is used, gradual wear reveals eight messages embedded in layers.

"The Beatles, and their mimicking rock-and-rollers, use the Pavlovian techniques to produce artificial neuroses in our young people," declared Rep. James B. Utt (R.-Calif.). "Extensive experiments in hypnosis and rhythm have shown how rock and roll music leads to a destruction of the normal inhibitory mechanism of the cerebral cortex and permits easy acceptance of immorality and disregard of all moral norms."

Taylor said the time has come for police "to study and apply so far as possible all the factors that will in any way promote better understanding and a better relationship between citizens and the law enforcement officer, even if it means attempting to enter into the learning and cultural realms of unborn children."

Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird formally dedicated a small room in the Pentagon today as a quiet place for meditation and prayer. "In a sense, this ceremony marks the completion of the Pentagon, for until now this building lacked a place where man's inner spirit could find quiet expression," Mr. Laird said.

The meditation room, he said, "is an affirmation that, though we cling to the principle that church and state should be separate, we do not propose to separate man from God."

Moscow, June 19—Oil industry expert says Moses and Joshua were among earth's original polluters, criticizes regulations inhibiting inventiveness and progress.

Much of the interior of the continent lies submerged in a deep sea of radioactive water. The region was deliberately flooded under the policy of "compensating catastrophe" promulgated by

the government toward the close of the period of terminal convulsions. Hence, though we come in dreams, we do not dare enter this zone unprotected, and we make use of aquatic robots bearing brain-coupled remote-vision cameras. Without interrupting our slumber we don the equipment, giggling self-consciously as we help one another with the harnesses and snaps. The robots stride into the green, glistening depths, leaving trails of shimmering fiery bubbles. We turn and tilt our heads and our cameras obey, projecting what they see directly upon our retinas. This is a magical realm. Everything sleeps here in a single grave, yet everything throbs and bursts with terrible life. Small boys, glowing, play marbles in the street. Thieves glide on mincing feet past beefy, stolid shopkeepers. A syphilitic whore displays her thighs to potential purchasers. A giant blue screen mounted on the haunch of a colossal glossy-skinned building shows us the face of the President, jowly, earnest, energetic. His eves are extraordinarily narrow, almost slits. He speaks but his words are vague and formless, without perceptible syllabic intervals. We are unaware of the pressure of the water. Scraps of paper flutter past us as though driven by the wind. Little girls dance in a ring: their skinny legs flash like pistons. Alexandra's robot briefly touches its coppery hand to mine, a gesture of delight, of love. We take turns entering an automobile, sitting at its wheel, depressing its pedals and levers. I am filled with an intense sense of the reality of the predynastic, of its oppressive imminence, of the danger of its return. Who says the past is dead and sealed? Everything comes round at least twice, perhaps even more often, and the later passes are always more grotesque, more deadly and more comical. Destruction is eternal. Grief is cyclical. Death is undying. We walk the drowned face of the murdered earth and we are tormented by the awareness that past and future lie joined like a lunatic serpent. The sorrows of the pharaohs will be our sorrows. Listen to the voice of Egypt.

The highborn are full of lamentation but the poor are jubilant. Every town sayeth, "Let us drive out the powerful." . . . The splendid judgment hall has been stripped of its documents. ... The public offices lie open and their records have been stolen. Serfs have become the masters of serfs. ... Behold, they that had clothes are now in rags. ... He who had nothing is now rich and the high official must court the parvenu. ... Squalor is throughout the land: no clothes are white these days. ... The Nile is in flood yet no one has the heart to plow. ... Corn has perished everywhere. ... Everyone says, "There is no more." ... The dead are thrown into the river. ... Laughter has perished. Grief walks the land. A man of character goes in mourning because of what has happened in the land. ... Foreigners have become people everywhere. There is no man of yesterday.

Alexandra, Jerome and I waltz in the predynastic streets. We sing the Hymn to the Dynast. We embrace. Jerome couples with Alexandra. We take books, phonograph records, kitchen appliances and postage stamps, and we leave without paying, for we have no money of this epoch. No one protests. We stare at the clumsy bulk of an airplane soaring over the tops of the buildings. We cup our hands and drink at a public fountain. Naked, I show myself to the veiled green sun. I couple with Jerome. We peer into the pinched, dead faces of the predynastic people we meet outside the grand hotel. We whisper to them in gentle voices, trying to warn them of their danger. Some sand blows across the pavement. Alexandra tenderly kisses an old man's withered cheek and he flees her warmth. Jewelry finer than any our museums own glitters in every window. The great wealth of this epoch is awesome to us. Where did these people go astray? How did they lose the path? What is the source of their pain? Tell us, we beg. Explain yourselves to us. We are historians from a happier time. We seek to know you. What can you reveal to us concerning your poetry, your preferred positions of sexual intercourse, the street plans of your major cities, your religious beliefs and practices, your terms of endearment, heterosexual and homosexual, your ecological destruction, accidental and deliberate, your sports and rituals, your attitudes toward technological progress, your forms of government, your political processes, your visual art forms, your means of transportation, your collapse and social decay, your terrible last days? For your last days will be terrible. There is no avoiding that now. The course is fixed; the end is inevitable. The time of the Dynast must come.

I see myself tied into the totality of epochs. I am inextricably linked to the pharaohs, to Assurnasirpal, to Tiglath-pileser, to the beggars in Calcutta, to Yuri Gagarin and Neil Armstrong, to Caesar, to Adam, to the dwarfed and pallid scrabblers on the bleak shores of the enfamined future. All time converges on this point of now. My soul's core is the universal focus. There is no escape. The swollen reddened moon perpetually climbs the sky. The moment of the Dynast is eternally at hand. All of time and space becomes a cage for now. We are condemned to our own company until death do us part, and perhaps even afterward. Where did we go astray? How did we lose the path? Why can't we escape? Ah. Yes. There's the catch. There is no escape.

They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone.

In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaster of the wall of the king's palace: and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote.

Then the king's countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another.

And this is the writing that was written: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.

This is the interpretation of the thing: MENE: God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it.

TEKEL: Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting.

PERES: Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.

In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain. And Darius the Median took the kingdom, being about threescore and two years old.

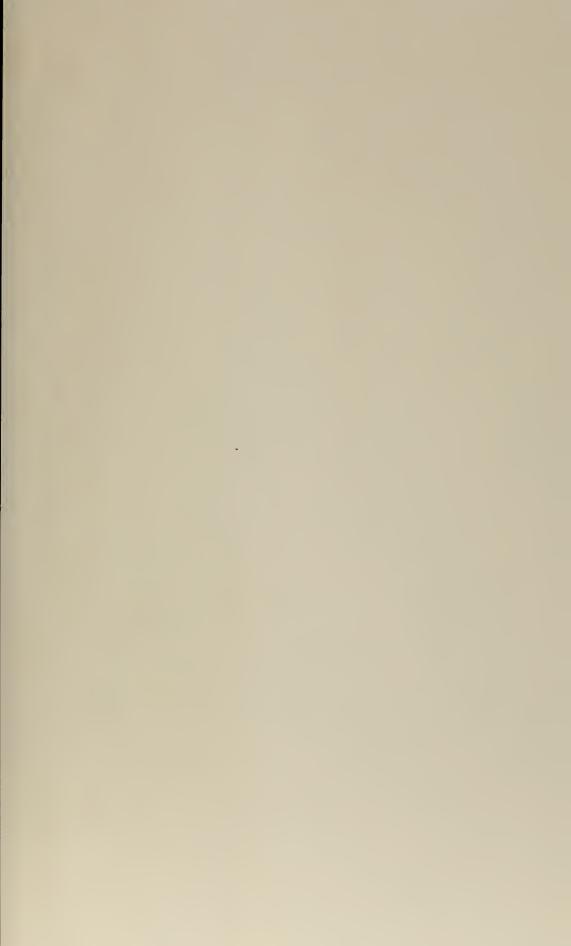
We wake. We say nothing to one another as we leave the room of dreams; we avert our eyes from each other's gaze. We return to our separate offices. I spend the remainder of the afternoon analyzing shards of predynastic poetry. The words are muddled and will not cohere. My eyes fill with tears. Why have I become so involved in the fate of these sad and foolish people?

Let me unmask myself. Let me confess everything. There is no Center for Predynastic Studies. I am no Metalinguistic Archaeologist, Third Grade, living in a remote and idyllic era far in your future and passing my days in pondering the wreckage of the twentieth century. The time of the Dynast may be coming, but he does not yet rule. I am your contemporary. I am your brother. These notes are the work of a predynastic man like yourself, a native of the so-called twentieth century, who, like you, has lived through dark hours and may live to see darker ones. That much is true. All the rest is fantasy of my own invention. Do you believe that? Do I seem reliable now? Can you trust me, just this once?

All time converges on this point of now.

My.....hurts me sorely. The....of my....is decaying. This is the path that the bison took. This is the path that the moa took. This is the....of the dying......[beasts?] Let us not.....that dry path. Let us not.....that bony path. Let us....another path..... O my brother, sharer of my mother's [womb?] O my sister, whose....l..... Listen.....close.....the wall..... Now the cold winds come. Now the heavy snows fall.

Now	
	the suffering
	the solitude
blo	odsleepblood
	blood
	. the river, the sea
me	9



About Thomas M. Disch

"Disch is an *editor*, with a fine sense for balance and impact, unerring taste in what is memorable, and an understanding of the total ambiance a structured collection should ideally present."

-Los Angeles Times

"Very likely the finest intellect in science fiction today is Thomas Disch."

-Ramparts

Contributors to BAD MOON RISING:

Peter Schjeldahl Marilyn Hacker Charles Naylor Carol Emshwiller Geo. Alec Effinger Norman Rush Michael Moorcock Harlan Ellison Robert Silverberg John Sladek Kate Wilhelm Kit Reed Gene Wolfe Ron Padgett and Dick Gallup Raylyn Moore Malcolm Braly Thomas M. Disch

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