WHEN SCIENCE EXPANDS
MAN'S POWERS, WHO KNOWS HOW DEPRAVED
HE CAN BECOME?

FUTURE CORRUPTION

TWELVE ORIGINAL STORIES EXPLORING
THE OUTER LIMITS OF
OUR POTENTIAL FOR EVIL

EDITED BY ROGER ELWOOD

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1. When you swap bodies with someone, is his mate yours—while you're inside his body?

2. If you develop a new theory, are you bound to test it out in the interest of mankind, regardless of its possible effects?

3. If only some of us can survive in an overpopulated world, is each person justified in using any means to keep alive?

4. Is science's perfect world the best of all possible worlds for man?

5. Is "what everyone else does" really man's standard for judging what is right and what is wrong?

YOU BE THE JUDGE
as science fiction's top writers
challenge you with stories of
FUTURE CORRUPTION

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Edited by Roger Elwood

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EDITOR'S PREFACE

Corruption can come in many forms and be different to any given person. *Future Corruption* takes a personal, rather conservative view of these various manifestations.

Howard Goldsmith's "The Last Congregation" deals with what one might call the corruption of religion—how the outward *appearance* can seem pious but, inside, often amounts to a sterile exercise of formal ritual, with little or no true divine feeling.

My own story, "Feast," is concerned with the total corruption of humanity as a whole. When civilization breaks down, when such basics as food and water are threatened, it really doesn't take long for people to lose the veneer of decency and harmony upon which society prides itself and turn to barbarous behavior that includes eating newborn babies when other nourishment is unavailable or in short supply.

J. J. Russ's "Aurelia" hits the exploitation of sex—commercialization of a private act to a point of true obscenity. The Perfect Mistress is depicted here, a woman to whom men flock while she is on stage and whose gyrations offer them a source of sexual excitement. Perverts come to see Aurelia along with "normal" men; she is the woman with whom most would like to spend a night but, until the story's conclusion, none realize the shocking secret she hides.

Carolyn Gloeckner's "Andrew" deals with homosexuality on a one-to-one basis. It is, at once, poignant and shocking—you may not agree with the conclusion, but I do doubt that a more sincere, evocative story has been written on this subject in the science fiction genre.

Barry N. Malzberg's "On the Campaign Trail" covers the corruption of politics. Malzberg has written powerful stories before, but I don't see how this one can escape notice as an example of his ability at its best. He has since written a novel with the same theme —a novel I have read and which is a devastating work.

The other stories in this anthology deal with more or less subtle forms of corruption: the corruption of an ideal, as with Richard Lupoff's "Saltzman's Madness"; the corruption of an individual by his environment, portrayed with great impact by Gardner Dozois in "The Storm"; civilization's corruptive tendencies, illustrated by Bill Pronzini in "Paxton's World"; and the other forms shown in Robin Schaeffer's "Streaking", R. A. Lafferty's "Heart Grow Fonder", and Stephen Goldin's "Prelude to a Symphony of Unborn Shouts." Which leaves Jerry Sohl's "Before a Live Audience," a powerful story about medical corruption as well as that fostered by the wrong kind of ambition.

A number of strong, outspoken stories are included herein. All were written especially for this anthology. And we think you will remember many of them for a long time to come.

Roger Elwood
Linwood, N. J.

SALTZMAN'S MADNESS

by Richard A. Lupoff

Dean Barrett was the only one who refused to concede that Saltzman had simply flipped out under pressure of his work and his peculiar obsession with time. He was the only witness to Saltzman's terrible transformation. He was in Saltzman's house, in his workshop with Ben, when the other personality took over.

And of course it's the other personality, "Neb" or whatever you want to call it, that's been controlling poor Ben Saltzman ever since that icy, bitter night. Gentle, portly, hard-working Ben is gone, and in his place is a personality of anger, violence, incoherence and an obvious, inexplicable disorientation.

He's locked away up in the state hospital; the company policy calls for his wife Rhea to collect his salary indefinitely, so there's no financial problem for her. Rhea visits her sister Dolores and her brother-in-law Dean, she visits her mother in Roslyn, she sees her husband at the hospital when they let her.

That's her life.

Mostly she stays alone in the house hoping for word that her husband is better, but she's less hopeful than she used to be. One day she'll give up.

As for Dean Barrett, Rhea's brother-in-law and Ben's closest friend, he refuses to give up. But he doesn't think Ben is crazy. He thinks he's somewhere else, living on some sort of different plane, and he insists that the personality that has taken Saltzman's body is some sort of changeling from that other plane.

Barrett isn't locked up.

He's given himself over to assembling the background of Ben's case. He claims that he has the thing pretty well traced to its roots, but he isn't very specific about what he hopes to do with it.

Ben was always a fanatic about time. In any other way you could think of he was about as unaggressive and unabrasive a person as you could find. But he was completely adamant about that one subject.

"Time is more than just money," he'd say, "time is everything. Time is what existence is made of. You can waste anything else you have and you can get it back, but time is irretrievable."

Regarding time he was a greedy man. He regarded sleep as an enemy. He would stay up late nights working, reading, doing anything rather than surrender hours of consciousness. He was in a car pool between his home and the computer works, alternating driving days with Dean Barrett as he had, in earlier days, with Rolly Poletsky and David Starke. That was before Starke himself was hospitalized and Poletsky moved to the city, then disappeared.

The casualty rate at the computer works is a serious cause for concern.

Dean Barrett thinks that Saltzman's troubles began with a dream. Rhea Saltzman remembers the night: Ben told her about the dream; later he told Barrett about it. The versions agree pretty well.

Saltzman had had a couple of martinis before dinner. His meal was bouillabaisse and he had wine with it and coffee afterwards and that night he woke up in the gloomy hours and had to relieve himself. So he went into the bathroom and did.

And he felt as if he was never going to stop. He just stood there and it went on and on. He said later that things went through his mind for what seemed like hours. He was surprised that it wasn't morning before he finished.

Finally he went back to bed and looked at the clock and hardly any time had passed at all.

"So?" Rhea asked when he told her about it. "What's so strange?"

But Ben was convinced that he'd somehow slipped

into a different "time mode" while he stood there, that only a matter of seconds had passed for the rest of the world but that he had actually experienced several extra hours.

That was the beginning.

He was already working on the Sarm-X sort-and-retrieve program along with Starke when he had that experience. Rhea insisted that it was a dream. "You were asleep on your feet," she laughed at Ben. But Ben would never accept that.

After David Starke was hospitalized, Sarm-X was in bad shape. Wally Cheng, the project programming manager, got hold of Barrett then, and recruited him to leave the Stoebler Building operation in the city and move up 909 to the computer works proper. "Your career is stymied down there," he told Barrett. "You know that as well as I. If you come up here and take over Sarm-X, you'll wind up with a big promotion."

Barrett had just married Dolores Park, the administrator on the program he'd been working on, and they wanted a house anyway. So he took the transfer. That's how the two sisters, Dolores and Rhea, came to live near each other again, and their husbands to work together.

Dean and Dolores bought Rolly Poletsky's old house near the Saltzmans. Between working together on Sarm-X and visiting each other's home all the time, Dean says he really got to know Saltzman.

"In the car pool," Barrett says, "Ben would never let himself doze off, or just listen to music on the radio or watch the scenery go past. He was always working on papers he'd carried home. When it was his turn to drive he always put on news broadcasts or talk shows. He was always trying to cram more information into his mind. 'You can learn plenty from these people,' he used to say, 'even the dregs of the earth who call up these shows have something to teach us.' "

With poor David Starke hospitalized, Wally Cheng put together a good team to run Sarm-X. He got Dean Barrett to manage the program, Ben Saltzman stayed on as lead programmer, and Mel Marston ran the documentation effort.

Everybody thought that Marston was an odd character. He had a beard and his hair came over the collar of his shirt, and the shirt itself wasn't even official computer-works white. He was more or less the house beatnik, there in the programming center to show how liberal the corporation's policies had become.

He was also a first-class documentation expert, and when anyone ever questioned his appearance he'd point to his work and say, "I'm a tech writer, not a photographer's model. Judge me by *that.*" He sent a lot of people away mumbling and shaking their heads, but he kept his job, and everybody who had to rely on him for manuals or reports wound up among his supporters.

They were a startling crew, at their project meetings. Cool, elegant Wally Cheng with his slicked-down hair and his trace of a Chinese accent, Dean Barrett with his long face and his rangy, big-boned figure, round-faced Ben Saltzman peering out of thick, rimless glasses, and bearded Mel Marston with his invariably rumpled, patterned shirt.

Still, they worked together well and Barrett was able to report steady progress in getting Sarm-X back onto schedule for delivery with the rest of the Series 90 OpSys. "Sort and retrieve is a key component in the operating system," Cheng would say. "The corporation is relying on us to produce." He'd give that tight smile of his and say, "We will reassemble in one week. Please continue your good efforts."

Although Barrett had a management responsibility under Wally Cheng, it was still Saltzman who had the day-to-day job of keeping on top of each programmer's progress. He said over and over again, "There just isn't enough time. If we could just get our people more time to work on this. Look at Francis Luther. He could get that linkage problem licked if he just didn't have so much other work to do."

"You think we need more people?" Barrett asked Saltzman.

"No. It would take too long to work more people into the project."

"How about overtime? Wally will authorize it if we ask him."

Ben took off his glasses and looked across his bare-walled office at Barrett. "Not that, either. You weren't here for the last big push. Headquarters ordered everybody onto overtime and productivity went *down*. It just doesn't work that way."

"Well then . . ."

"I'm convinced that there's some way to squeeze more useful time out of the day. It's . . . something I only have a vague inkling about. I had a strange experience one night, Barrett."

"I know. You told me about your dream."

"Not a dream."

"Whatever."

"All right, whatever. I somehow experienced many minutes, maybe hours of time, while only a couple of minutes elapsed for the rest of the world. I was in some kind of peculiar zone where there was more time available."

"That's nonsense, Ben!" Barrett leaned forward in his chair and pointed one long, bony finger earnestly at his brother-in-law. "That's plain nonsense. You had some kind of subjective experience, all right, I'll concede that to you. It *seemed* to you that a long while was passing. I'll even concede that maybe you could say that more time did pass for you, in some subjective sense of the word. But it was only . . . ah . . . experiential time, subjective time. It didn't *really* happen."

"No, Dean!" Saltzman sat upright, his jovial features set in unaccustomed insistence. "I understand what you're saying and that is absolutely not the nature of the phenomenon. In some way there is such a thing as variable time rates, variable time *masses*. And I *had* more time than my clock, my wife, my house, the rest of this town and probably the rest of the world.

"I don't know why or how it happened—"

"You'd been drinking."

"I was sober."

"And?"

"And there *was* more time. As surely as an hour is longer than a minute, there was more time."

"Par'm me, fellas. I couldn't help overhearing." Saltzman and Barrett looked up. Mel Marston was

lounging in the doorway, peering into the room. "You're pretty hung over time, though."

"Hello, Mel," Barrett said. "Just a matter of interpretation."

"All right if I come in?"

At their nods, Marston slouched into the office, threw himself into a standard corporation office chair as if it had been a lounger. "I think I caught the drift of what you were scratching over," he drawled. "I think I have a suggestion for you."

Saltzman and Barrett waited expectantly.

"You fellas ever cross trails with Joshua Johnson?"

Saltzman said, "I've heard his name, that's all."

Barrett said nothing.

"Spade cat over in the engineering lab. Works for Crawford Faulkner, he's doing some work on a grant from some billionaire now."

"What about him, Mel?"

"Well, I hear he's interested in the theoretical aspects of time. Did a big paper for the spring physics conference. Supposed to be a good man."

"And you think he could explain my—what happened to me?" Saltzman's face was eager.

Marston shook his head. "Have no idea, pal. But he might be interesting to talk to, that's all."

Saltzman had the computer works telephone directory in his hand and open to the J's before Marston had finished. He dialed, talked, hung up, looked at his wristwatch, then spoke again. "I'm going over to meet Johnson in thirty-five minutes. We're going to have lunch."

"Fine, old pal. Tell Joshua hello for me." Marston started to leave.

"I'll call you later, Mel, if anything comes of it. And thanks." Saltzman faced Barrett again. "Do you want to come along, Dean?"

"Sorry. Couple of errands I have to run. I'll see you later on, Ben."

Twenty minutes later Saltzman looked out his office window at the gray, wintry sky. Snowflakes were falling lightly. The naked trees in the courtyard of the computer center still carried a thin sheath of ice from last

week's storm, and the graying, frozen slush beneath them was slowly regaining its white surface as new snow accumulated.

Thirty-five minutes after completing his telephone conversation with Joshua Johnson he put his hand on the doorknob of Johnson's office.

The engineer looked up as Saltzman opened the door. Ben blinked once at the brightly lighted room.

"Dr. Johnson?" he said.

"Dr. Saltzman?"

"Ben, please."

"Of course. Joshua. Come on in."

Saltzman entered the engineer's office, taking in Johnson's person and his work space at a glance. The engineer, Marston's "black cat," sported a huge mass of orange-red hair and piercing, emerald-green eyes that bored into Saltzman as he crossed the room to shake Johnson's hand.

As ever, Ben was startled at the engineer's garb of casual tweeds, button-down oxford-cloth shirt, and paisley tie. In common with many programmers, he'd never quite got past the notion that engineers wore white lab coats and worked surrounded by breadboard models and discharging electrodes.

"Uh, as I mentioned on the phone earlier, Joshua . . ." Saltzman said.

"Yes?"

"It's about time." Saltzman grimaced at his own accidental pun.

Johnson smiled wryly. "Yes, that line occurs to everybody sooner or later. Usually sooner. We are engaged in temporal research. You may have heard of the Partridge project. We have a machine under construction, but my field is theory."

"So Mel Marston told me."

"We don't have as much interplay with software people as I'd like," Johnson said. "So I was glad to get your call. But right now, the inner man is calling. What about some lunch?"

"Fine," said Saltzman. "I hope we can avoid the company cafeteria. I brought my coat."

They trotted through the swirling flakes across the

parking lot. Johnson's car was nearer to the engineering lab so they clambered into it, Saltzman panting slightly as he swung his heavy frame into the crimson Mustang and closed the door.

At Enzo's Italian restaurant they made their way to a vacant table, Ben rubbing his hands as they threaded their way through the narrow aisle, feeling the warmth of the room penetrate his cold skin.

"Now," Johnson said after they'd ordered lunch, "I'd like to know something about your inquiry."

Ben told him about his problem getting Sarm-X completed, mentioned his odd experience with time-flow. "I'm convinced," he concluded, "that there's more time out there."

He gestured vaguely, indicating the direction of *out there.*

"There's more time than we normally get access to. This is very hard to verbalize, to formulate. It's mainly a visceral conviction rather than a piece of logic."

"No, no, Ben." Johnson's emerald eyes were bright. "I understand what you're saying."

"And it fits in with your work?"

Johnson shook his head. "Not exactly. We're trying to develop a machine—that is, the hardware people in our project are—that will provide a kind of vantage point outside the normal aspect of time. It will permit us to look *into* time as we can look into space. In a sense, the operator could be thought of as traveling to the future or the past."

"Like Wells?"

Johnson laughed. "You mean the old chronic argonaut fellow? I suppose a little like that. Only Wells's time traveler left his machine and interacted with the denizens of the future, as I recall."

Saltzman nodded.

The waitress arrived with their food. Ignoring her, Johnson said, "We won't be able to do that, any more than an astronomer can walk around on Mars with the aid of a telescope."

"No," said Saltzman shaking his head. "That isn't what I'm after, anyhow. I don't mean to travel through

time. I mean—ah, this is so peculiar, I can hardly even express it except by some sort of analogy."

"Johnson's Law, that. Analogy is the language of science."

"I thought number was."

"I'm a law unto myself."

"Well, suppose you had a piece of corduroy cloth a foot wide," Saltzman said.

"Okay."

"And you took your fingernail and ran it lightly across the corduroy. Across the wale, the ridges, you know?"

Johnson nodded and ate soup.

"All right, then your fingernail would, ah, 'know' how much cloth there was in a foot of corduroy."

"I'll buy that."

"Good. Now, suppose you moved your fingernail more carefully, up and down each ridge as it went across the cloth. You'd have much more contact, your nail would touch a lot more cloth, yet it would still only be crossing a foot of material. You see what I'm driving at?"

"I think I do," Johnson said. "Wait just a minute, let me run through that in my mind." He sat still, a look of concentration on his face, his eyes closed.

"Okay," he finally said. "What you're saying is that we don't normally experience all of the cloth that's there. If we had a technique we could experience . . . okay! Got it!"

"Now I want to find a way to do that with *time!*"

The waitress brought Saltzman a cup of coffee. Johnson had hot chocolate. They sat stirring their drinks for a minute, then the engineer said, "But you're making an assumption, Ben. You're assuming that time is like corduroy, that there *is* all that additional surface to it down in the grooves.

"But we don't really *know* that. Suppose time is a planar surface—to stay close to your analogy—and those grooves that you're looking for just aren't there?"

"I *know* they're there!" Saltzman put his cup down harder than necessary. Hot coffee slopped over the

saucer edge and soaked into the table cloth. "I *experienced* the extra time. I know that isn't scientific, that you can maintain that it was merely a subjective experience, but I know otherwise. I know it's a real phenomenon, and I want to get at that time that we're all losing."

"All right. I'll posit that you are talking about something real." Johnson signaled the waitress for their check.

"Then what I want to know, Joshua, is whether anything in your work might suggest a technique for getting at that time."

"I'm afraid not."

"Then is there anyone working in your field who could help?"

"Actually it's a rather small field. There are the tachyon boys, but everything points to that line being sheer hooey. Nat Rosenbluth down at LIU has published a couple of interesting papers, but he's working in large theories somewhat related to my own. I don't think he could do much for you."

"Then?"

Their check arrived.

Outside on Davis Street the traffic was slowed to a dismal crawl in the steady, silent snowfall.

As Johnson edged the car out into the dark noontime he said, "Then I'm not really sure how to get ahold of the phenomenon you're talking about, Ben."

The windshield wipers cut twin arcs in the whiteness accumulated during their meal.

"Looks like a real blizzard," said Johnson. "So strange, driving through snow like this, it's like a whole different reality.

"When I was a kid I used to love rides, every kind. Cars, ferries, subway trains. I used to dream that a subway train was a spaceship, the black tunnels were outer space, the lamps were distant suns."

Saltzman slid deeper into the plush leather of his seat, smelling the pungent odor of damp wool. "A spaceship?"

Johnson hit the padded dashboard with his palm. "A

spaceship, right! Listen, Ben, are you familiar with relativity?"

Saltzman looked, surprised, at the engineer. "Relativity? Why, uh, I guess vaguely. E equals em cee squared, so on. Why?"

Johnson laughed. "Right. Well, there's a lot more to it than that, including the interesting notion that time and space are not separate entities. They're just different aspects of something called space-time."

"Okay. So?"

"So Einstein says that you can't just move through one aspect of space-time without affecting the other. When we move through space, we warp time."

"Umm. I suppose I follow that. Somewhat. But where is it leading to?"

"I'm not really certain. Let's explore this a little."

"Yes."

"Now, at normal speeds the differences are negligible, in fact immeasurable. But as an object approaches the speed of light, several very interesting phenomena take place.

"First, the object's mass increases. In theory, at the speed of light it would have infinite mass.

"Second, its length becomes foreshortened. At light speed it would become zero. The object would become two-dimensional.

"Third, and finally, time would become compressed. For people inside our hypothetical spaceship time would move more and more slowly relative to the outside universe. It would seem perfectly normal to them, mind. But it would be moving at a different, slower rate than time outside. In theory, if the ship reached full speed-of-light, time would stand still inside the ship. The whole rest of the universe would experience eternity, while inside the ship no time at all had passed."

While Johnson was talking he'd got off Davis Street and taken the Main Street on-ramp, back onto 909. Now he swung the Mustang back off, and rolled through the guard-gate onto the computer works parking lot.

"I have just one question left, then," said Saltzman

as Johnson pulled the car into his reserved space. "My question is, what would happen if the ship went *faster* than light?"

"Einstein says it couldn't do that. It couldn't even reach light speed. It could approach light speed asymptotically."

"Yes, but *if* it did. Hypothetically."

"What if two and two made five?"

"Exactly."

"Then it would travel into the past. And you know what? That fits right in with tachyon theory."

In a little while Saltzman left Johnson in the engineering lab and made his way down the long corridor to the programming wing. He hung his coat and scarf in his own office and got a cup of machine coffee to drink.

Mel Marston, from the other desk in the room, asked how the meeting had gone.

"I had a great pastrami sandwich and a nice ride in a flashy car."

"Nothing useful?"

"Intriguing theories. I'll tell you all about it, ah . . . Tell you what, Mel, you busy tonight? No? Good. Look, the Barretts are supposed to come over after dinner, anyhow. You know Rhea and Dolores Barrett are sisters; their mother still lives out in Roslyn. They want to talk over family matters. So you come on over, too, and you and Dean and I can talk about this thing. If it interests you."

"Fine."

Ben Saltzman spent the rest of the day at his desk, working over technical reports and checking Sarm-X tests. Dean Barrett was in a meeting with Wally Cheng for most of the day, and neither Saltzman nor Marston saw him before quitting time.

After work Saltzman went to the parking lot and waited in his old Mercury, heater going and a prerelease manual on Series 90 architecture open on the seat. When Barrett arrived, Ben slapped the manual shut, turned on his headlights, and headed out to 909 and the cloverleaf.

At Barrett's house Saltzman pulled up to let his brother-in-law out of the car.

Later, during dinner, Barrett was quiet, answering Dolores's questions with grunts and staring into space. Finally she said, "You'd better tell me what's the matter, Dean."

"Hah?"

"If we're going to visit Ben and Rhea tonight, I think we should talk to each other first, that's all. You're upset about something, won't you tell me what?"

"It's Ben. I'm worried about Ben. That's the trouble."

"What's the matter with Ben?"

"I'm afraid he's really getting too hung up over that time business of his. Just because he had that funny dream. When I heard about it the first time, I thought it was pretty funny. But he won't even admit that it was a dream, and he's getting more and more upset about it."

Dolores sliced a piece of bread and bit into it, waiting for Barrett to continue.

He said, "Ben had a meeting today with a fellow from the engineering lab, a Dr. Johnson. Did some work in theoretical physics, about the nature of time."

Dolores said she didn't see the connection.

"Well, Ben's dream or whatever it was that set him off. You know he's always been funny about the subject of time. He's so much into his work, I think it's the old Protestant work ethic catching up with him."

"With Ben Saltzman? The Protestant work ethic?"

"Come on, Dolores. You know I don't mean any kind of religious thing. At least nobody we know is a religious nut, thank God."

"You just think he wants to do more work, and he can't get it all done."

"Just about, yeah, just about that."

He cleared his plate and pushed back from the table, sighing. "That was first class, Dolores, first class."

"Thank you. Coffee and dessert at Ben and Rhea's house."

"Yeah. But Ben, you see, has this crazy notion that somebody is stealing time from us or something. He

believes that that dream he had was a real experience, that somehow he slipped over into the other portion of time, and really got to experience some hours that nobody else knows about."

"Somebody is *stealing* the extra time? That's a new one!"

"It is, it is."

They cleaned up the table and went into the living room. Barrett put some light Mendelssohn piano pieces on the turntable. It was an experimental audio system that Roland Poletsky had built into the room when he owned the house, the components making a prototype for a company-funded project that had been discontinued after Poletsky's disappearance.

Poletsky had been an audio fanatic, had designed a channel-decoder that separated quad recordings into dozens of separate tracks, one for each instrument and voice. It included a multitrack tape drive, built out of surplus parts from the computer works, for either on- or off-line editing of the music. It was a superb system.

Dean and Dolores sat quietly, listening to the Serkin renditions, till it was time to go upstairs and change clothing for their visit to the Saltzmans.

Barrett drove carefully over the snow-slick streets, listening in the car to news bulletins announcing that more inches of snow were expected to fall before morning. He parked his restored two-seat Thunderbird at the top of Saltzman's driveway. Then he and Dolores made their way past a Jaguar V-12 toward the entrance.

"Well," Barrett remarked to his wife, "that's a surprise. That's Mel Marston's Jag. Ben didn't tell me that Marston was invited tonight."

"Who's Mel Marston?"

"Documentation specialist." Barrett punched the doorbell and waited for the chimes inside the house to sound before he continued. "Little bit eccentric, but he's smart. I think you'll like him."

The door swung back and revealed Rhea Saltzman, her amply rounded figure swathed in a thickly padded hostess gown, her thick, honey-brown hair pulled back from her face. The two sisters embraced. Barrett and

Dolores made their way from the still-falling snow into the foyer of the house, brushing white clods from their shoes, shrugging out of heavy winter coats. Ben Saltzman strode from the living room, shouldering the front door shut to hold out the icy air.

In a minute they were in the Saltzmans' living room. A huge fire crackled in the fireplace. There was an open bottle of Courvoisier on the table before a heavy, padded couch.

Ben introduced Marston to Dolores. "There," he said as they shook hands, "now everybody knows everybody. Now, how about a nice glass of brandy for a cold night? Or would you rather have coffee? Rhea has a pot on the stove, no extra work."

"Brandy, thanks."

They both took snifters.

The Barretts sat on the couch, Saltzman in a huge chair, Rhea perched on its arm and Marston on the stone ledge near the fire. There were a few minutes of desultory talk, mostly about the snow, then Ben Saltzman leaned forward and cleared his throat.

"The reason that I called this meeting . . ."

There was a round of laughter.

"Uh, really, if we could talk about this thing. Ah, Rhea, Dolores, you might not be very interested in shop talk, maybe you want to go into the kitchen or something."

They did.

Saltzman drew his chair forward so that the three of them—Barrett, Marston and himself—formed a tight triangle near the fireplace. "Mel," he began again, "I particularly wanted to ask you about something a little bit . . . ah . . . delicate. I thought maybe it would be better without the girls here."

"What?" Marston asked.

"Well, you don't have to answer, of course, if you don't want to. I'm sure Dean here will respect any confidences, though, and I certainly would never, ah . . ."

"Well, great blazing binary bits, Benjamin, if you won't tell me what it is—sure, just show me where the bug is hidden so I can face it when I talk. What was the question?"

Saltzman looked at Barrett, a quick muscle spasm contracting the pudgy man's soft face. Dean looked back neutrally.

"Yes. Well, Dean . . . uh . . . Mel, it's something that I read somewhere, and ah . . . I thought maybe that you could . . . ah . . . that is that you might be able . . ."

Barrett plunged in to help. "Is it that time matter, Ben?"

Saltzman looked grateful. "It was. Is. Yes."

"Was it what Joshua Johnson had to say, that you wanted to talk about?"

Saltzman picked up the brandy bottle and added to each of their snifters. "Somewhat. That is . . . ah . . . Dean and Mel, you both know that I'm trying to find some way to gain access to the extra time that goes unused."

"How do you know it goes unused?" Marston asked.

Saltzman pulled back into his chair, surprised. "I don't. Yes, I do. We don't use it."

"Maybe somebody else does."

Saltzman sat in shocked silence. Suddenly Marston burst into laughter. "Come on, Benjamin, sure we know about your theory. What about it? What did Johnson say?"

Saltzman leaned forward again. "He didn't have anything very useful for me. Not directly, anyway. He had a lot of theories about time. Talked about Einstein and tachyons and traveling into the future or the past. Fantastic. But not what I was after. No, what I'm after, I'll have to find some other avenue to reach."

"And you think I can help you?" Marston asked.

"I think you might be able to give me some information. I don't know what I can do with it then, but if you don't mind . . ."

"Fire away."

Saltzman looked at Barrett, then back at Marston. "Mel . . . uh . . . I recall reading somewhere that when people take certain drugs that it alters their perception of time. Slows it or speeds it up. And I just wonder if there might be something to that. Some, ah—you understand? And, ah . . ."

"I see. And good ol' boy Melvin is the official office

hippie. Wild, debauched bachelor, alcoholic—" he upended his brandy snifter, held it toward Saltzman to be refilled— "and hence automatically a dope fiend, probably a pusher, as well, who can supply his responsible solid-citizen neighbors with an occasional expensive thrill by procuring some forbidden substance for them!

"Is the bug running, Ben? Is Barrett your witness? Can I take the Fifth and refuse to testify?"

Saltzman tried to placate Marston. "You don't understand, Mel. I'm not trying to get you in trouble."

"I'm sure you aren't. Just picking up the rocks to see what kind of creatures are underneath."

Saltzman turned pleadingly to his brother-in-law. "Would you say something, Dean?"

Barrett hunched forward, his bony shoulders and long skull pointing toward Marston. "You ought to calm down, Mel. This is no plot. Ben has a real concern, you know, and he's trying to investigate every source of information. That's why he was with Joshua Johnson today. If you don't want to help out, let's just talk about something different."

Marston sighed heavily. "Okay, Benjy, ask away. What did you want to know?"

Saltzman shot a grateful look at Barrett. "Thanks." He turned. "Mel, I didn't wish to offend you. It's simply that, as Dean says, I'm trying to obtain some information."

"Yas," drawled Marston. "Well?"

"Um, frankly I'm not certain exactly how to ask. Well, first of all, is it really true that drugs affect your time sense? And if so, how real is the effect? I mean, how effective is it, how useful?"

"How should I know?"

Saltzman looked helplessly at Barrett again. From the kitchen came the odor of freshly-made coffee and the clatter of cups.

Saltzman said, "I just thought, Mel, that you could tell me. I mean, I haven't asked whether you . . . ah . . . personally—"

"—are a felon, right? Whether I think it would be fun to spend a few years in jail. That's what I might do

if I should so much as own anything for my own use. If I should supply you with it, even if I give it to you, the law sees that as selling and they throw away the key."

Saltzman squirmed in his chair.

"But I'll tell you what, Benjy and Deany. All of this information is available in the literature if you want to dig it out. All right? So that's what I did, yes? And I'll give you a little lecture, and you know this is based on research. And if you want to know more, you go and do some research yourselves."

"Ah, thank you, Benjamin." He accepted another refill.

"Now there are a lot of different drugs including aspirins and vitamins and antibiotics and anesthetics. And there are even a lot of psychoactive drugs, the so-called mind drugs.

"Including this one."

He raised his snifter and sipped Courvoisier.

"And that one."

He pointed toward the kitchen with its rich odor of coffee.

"But I assume that you're interested in a couple of groups of drugs, the psychedelics and the amphetamines. Is that right?"

Saltzman made a tentative nod.

Barrett sat stolidly, leaning back on the couch now, his long legs stretched before him, bony fingers steepled beneath his chin.

"Okay," Marston resumed. "We'll take the psychedelics first. There are a lot of those, but the best known are tetrahydrocanabinol and lysergic acid diethylamide."

Saltzman said "Huh?"

Barrett nodded silently.

Marston laughed. "THC is the active ingredient in the canabis plant. Marijuana. Also hashish, bhang, kief. Lysergic acid is LSD."

Saltzman said, "Oh," very quietly. His eyes darted to the kitchen, then back to Marston.

"Don't be frightened, Benjamin. Good grief, have I

suddenly turned into a frothing monster? Besides, this is all from reading, right?

"Now, these psychedelics produce a great many different effects, including a general feeling of relaxation, intensification of sensations, euphoria, and what obviously interests you, a distortion of the time sense. In particular, people claim to have very extended experiences when stoned—that's the term—without the passage of much objective time. Wild flights of fancy, extended trains of thought.

"They claim that when listening to recorded music they discover whole passages they'd never heard before, even entire compositions hidden between the tracks on an LP."

"But is it real?" Saltzman asked.

"Real?"

Saltzman nodded.

Marston rubbed his bearded chin, turning to gaze into the dancing flames nearby. Then he turned back to the others.

"That isn't an easy question, Benjamin. It is certainly a real *experience.* I mean, you really experience it. But you mean, does it correspond to external reality? Is there actually more music in the grooves of the record, or do you just think there is?" Now Marston sighed again.

"I'm tempted to say that no, it isn't real, it's entirely subjective. But that's a trifle too glib for me."

He stood up, strode to the other end of the room with his eyes on the patterned carpet, then returned and stood over Saltzman and Barrett. "We're still playing that game, okay?" he said. "This is all hypothetical. I'm not saying that I've ever been within a hundred miles of anything illegal, but just if I had been . . . Okay?"

The others nodded.

"If I'd ever used any psychedelic, I think I'd be inclined to say that the experience is real. There's more music there than we normally hear. The . . . ah . . . condition of being stoned makes us more perceptive, more *receptive* to what's there.

"You see what I mean?" He looked at the others for nods of comprehension, received them, continued. "There's nothing magical about it. It's a little like putting a drop of MSG on your tongue to stimulate the taste buds. It doesn't really put any more flavor in your gooseliver pate, it just helps you to taste what's already there."

"I see," Saltzman said. "I think I do, anyway."

Marston sat down again and extended his snifter. Ben poured for the three of them. "And there are no hallucinations? You know, we hear about people going berserk when they take that stuff. Does it lead to heroin?"

Marston shook his head. "Hallucinations, maybe. If you have any interest in using psychedelics you really ought to read up on the subject first. Don't just ask me a few questions. But the whole domino theory of drugs —listen, more people go from *this* to heroin—" holding up his snifter again— "than from anything else."

Barrett interjected a question. "What about speed?"

Saltzman turned toward him. "What?"

Marston said, "Speed is the common term for amphetamines. Uppers. They turn your nervous system up. They're in diet pills, stay-awake pills that truck drivers use. People have done amazing amounts of work on speed."

Saltzman sat up straight. "That sounds very encouraging, Mel."

Barrett said, "Then they crash out."

"What?"

"Isn't that right, Mel? You didn't say anything about that. You get onto speed for a couple of weeks, then you crash out. Or you keep on using it—" he smiled sardonically —"and you can keep going. For about five years. Then you're dead. Isn't that right, Mel?"

Marston nodded. "Absolutely. You beat me to it. I absolutely don't recommend speed, Benjy. What it does, in effect, is let your body keep running without nourishment or rest by, essentially, cannibalizing itself. It's like running out of firewood and burning furniture instead. It'll keep you warm for a while, but soon

you're out of furniture and you start chopping out the walls for kindling. After a while, no house.

"You're better off getting yourself a new batch of firewood."

"I see," Ben muttered. "Then you definitely think . . . ah . . . speed is no answer to my question."

"Absolutely."

"And psychedelics?"

Marston stretched, paced up and down, seated himself on the carpet before the fire. "I don't recommend that anyone break the law."

"Hypothetically, then."

"Hypothetically, psychedelics might be interesting. But there's a saying, you know. There are other techniques, and anything you can do with drugs, you can also do without them. It just takes the marshaling of other resources."

"Such as?" put in Barrett.

"Well," Marston replied, "I'd say that anything you can do with drugs you can do with seventy million dollars."

Barrett went, "Ha ha ha." It was halfway between a laugh and the sardonic imitation of a laugh.

The kitchen door rolled back, and Rhea and Dolores emerged carrying a tray with coffee cups and cookies. "You boys having a nice time?" asked Rhea.

"I think we were just about finished," Barrett said.

Rhea lowered the tray onto the table before the couch. While she poured coffee for them all, Dolores went to the window and pulled back the drapes. Snow was still falling. "Dean, I hope we won't have trouble getting home in that stuff."

Barrett half-rose from the couch, turning to look outside. He grunted. "I suppose that's part of the price we pay for living up here. It's a good thing the company pays plenty."

"I'm not so sure that's enough," Dolores said. She let the curtain fall back into place, blotting out the snow. The fire provided the main illumination in the room, turning the cream-colored walls a warmer tint and casting tall shadows of the five people.

"Rhea and I were making some plans in the kitchen," Dolores resumed. "We thought we'd take the train together a week from Friday and go spend the weekend at mother's in Roslyn. Do you and Ben think you can get along for a few days?"

"I'm sure Marston will take care of us if we have any time on our hands."

"Sure."

"Did you solve your problem?" Rhea asked her husband.

Saltzman squirmed uncomfortably in his seat. "Uh, not entirely, dear. But Melvin gave me quite a lot of interesting data. I'm sure I'll get somewhere with it soon. Especially once Sarm-X is out of the way."

"Is that finished?"

Ben looked at Dean Barrett, then back at Rhea. "Very nearly. It's been through testing as a stand-alone and done pretty well. Now we have to integrate it with the model OpSys. If that goes right, the heavy pressure should be off in another week. Don't you think so, Dean?"

Barrett grunted an affirmative.

They drank up their coffee and drove home carefully through the snow-filled darkness. In bed that night Dolores asked Barrett if he minded her being gone for a few days. He said it was all right, it was all right.

For the following week there was no mention of Ben Saltzman's obsession. Instead there were long sessions clustered around computer terminals as remote printouts from the Series 90 prototype room chattered across paper. Error messages, temporary patches while bugs were traced, program integration statements, memory maps, phone calls from Wally Cheng, meetings in Cheng's office.

Thursday night the integration was finished. They sent a full compilation of test data down to the machine room. Most of the programmers stayed at their desks to see the results. Hours later Sarm-X went on-line, running under the operating system. Ninety seconds after that, results began clattering out on line printers in the machine room while terminals typed out cryptic messages.

Fifteen minutes later the final messages were typed out on the terminals.

RUN COMPLETE. SARM-X OFFICIALLY PART OF OPSYS-90. BYE-BYE.

In the morning Dolores took the family station wagon, picked up Rhea Saltzman, and drove to the railroad station. Barrett drove his Thunderbird, picked up Ben Saltzman, and headed for work. In the car Ben worked on a progress report, using a copy of the previous night's terminal messages for reference.

When they arrived at the programming center there was a memo on each desk. They were congratulated on the success of the Sarm-X run and invited to a party after work at Enzo's restaurant. Barrett spent the day combining Saltzman's report with other inputs, then meeting with Cheng to finalize Sarm-X and begin the turnover to the maintenance group.

At quitting time he drove with Saltzman to Enzo's, parked in the big lot behind the restaurant, and they headed for the bar for a couple of drinks before the party got too crowded. The party was separated from the usual crowd of Friday-night diners by a folding partition drawn across the front of the balcony where long tables were set for the Sarm-X group. A banner on the wall spelled out congratulations in the official company colors.

Angie Turner, Chen's rotund secretary, turned up and Barrett ordered drinks for them all. "Here's to Sarm-X," he said, when the glasses appeared.

"Sarm-X," repeated Ben.

"Good riddance and bottoms up," said Angie. She took a long sip of her drink. "What are you boys going to do now that Sarm-X is going into maintenance?"

"I'd expect you to know that better than we do," Barrett said. "Hasn't Wally got that all worked out?"

Angie smiled knowingly. "You ought to ask me that after a couple of stiff ones, Dean, not before."

"Well, I expect I'll get a group together and start work on Sarm-eleven. Onward and upward with the ever-growing OpSys-90. What about you, Ben?"

Saltzman lowered his glass and removed his rimless spectacles. He began to polish them with one of Enzo's

paper cocktail napkins. "I've been thinking about it for a while, now. I'll stay on and help get the next project going, but I think I'd like to put in for a company research grant and work on the time problem. Francis Luther could take over my job pretty easily, and promote one of the little girl coders out of programming school to take over his."

"Little girl coders!" Angie exploded. "What are you talking about? When did Congress repeal the child labor law?"

"Oh . . . uh . . . Angie. I didn't mean *little* little girls. You know, those little college girls who came into the department last fall. You know . . ."

"Oh, those young women. How would you like me to call the young men we get little boys?" She drained her glass. "Damn, out of booze. Drink up, I'll get the next round." She signaled the bartender. "Three martinis. No pimento in my olive."

Barrett said, "All right, Angie. But, Ben—do you think you could get a research grant? Seems to me that Crawford Faulkner's group has that sewed up. Isn't that what you got from Johnson?"

Saltzman made a fluttering motion with his hands.

The bartender arrived with their martinis, and Angie paid for them. The juke box that Enzo stocked with his personal selection of records began to play "Santa Lucia." One channel of stereo was piped into the bar, the other filtered faintly back from the restaurant's main dining room.

"I don't know if an engineering approach is the only one to take," Saltzman said. He hoisted his second martini and sipped from its edge. "I'd hope we could, uh, get something with a software approach. Something like . . . I don't really know yet. I've been looking for a way."

"Not what Mel Marston was telling about, I hope."

Ben's face flushed and he took a large swallow from his drink. "I don't want any part of that, no!"

Somebody turned up the juke box and "Santa Lucia" rose to a crescendo before somebody else turned it back down.

"Then what, Ben? And what makes you think the

company would bankroll you? Faulkner's project has an outside grant."

Saltzman fidgeted with his napkin. "I think . . . uh . . . that we could get up a pretty good proposal on it, to increase production. Uh, not necessarily a speedup for employees." He stopped talking, finished his drink, signaled the bartender.

Before he could resume talking, Amneris's death aria from *Aida* started on the juke box. "Oh damn," Angie grumbled, "that doesn t even sound like the channels are in synch. How can that be?"

"Just the effect of where we are," Barrett said.

"Well, I wish they'd turn the dumb thing off. Thanks for the drink, Ben."

"Well, anyway. Uh, I was thinking that machine time . . . uh . . . besides being so expensive, when we're so short of hardware, like with the Series 90 prototypes . . ."

"Hmm?"

"So I mean that, if we could just get back some of the time that they're taking away from us . . ."

"What's this all about?" Angie asked.

Barrett said, "Oh, Ben has a theory that there's more time around than anybody gets to use. Somebody else is stealing all the extra time."

"Who? Flying saucer people?"

"Don't laugh, you two." Ben spotted a vacant barstool and pulled it up for himself. "You know, there's a lot more empty space than there is matter filling it, and there's a lot more time than there is activity."

Angie gave him a peculiar look, head cocked to one side. An anonymous tenor bled out his life through the loudspeaker in the bar, the instrumentation on the dining room channel arriving a split second later.

"I don't follow," she said. "Are you saying that—well, that a minute isn't a minute?" Frown lines appeared between her eyebrows.

Saltzman considered. "Yes, exactly that."

"How can anybody have such an odd idea? You really believe that?"

"Everybody does, at some time in their lives. Children have an instinctive insight into it. But somehow

we've lost our understanding of it, and we make children lose theirs as they grow up." He ran his hand over his face, knocking his glasses askew. "Those were good drinks."

"I don't understand this, either," Barrett said. But before Saltzman could explain, Barrett added, "I see Wally Cheng waving everybody to sit down. I guess the food's here."

They made their way somewhat unsteadily to the long table and found three chairs.

"What I meant about children," Saltzman said, "about children understanding. Why, there's hardly a child who doesn't know that there are a hundred seconds in a minute and a hundred minutes in an hour."

"That's silly!" blurted Angie.

At the head of the table Wally Cheng stood up and tapped his glass with a spoon. "I'm not going to make a speech," he said. "You've done a good job, and this party is a small token of appreciation. Enjoy it."

He sat down.

"Go on, Ben!" said Angie Turner.

"Why, uh, that's really about it. Children all know that there are a hundred seconds in a minute. They can see that, it's a direct insight. And that there are a hundred minutes in an hour."

"Ben, that's really silly," said Barrett.

"Why?"

"Because there are *sixty* seconds. Not a hundred."

"Now I'll ask you *why*, Dean."

Barrett held up his lengthy, massive hands. "It's purely arbitrary," he said. "Could be ten, could be, oh, fifty-eight and three quarters, *could* even be a hundred. I guess somebody once picked sixty and it stuck."

"But the natural numbering system is decimal. You know that."

Angie laid her plump arm on the table between them, gaining the two men's attention. "Chaldean astrologers divided the circle in 360 degrees. That was their approximation of the length of a year. They made six a sacred number and set everything in multiples of six, including sixty and six-times-sixty, 360."

Barrett exhaled an exclamation. "I think you're right!"

"P-poppycock!" Saltzman stammered. "There *are* a hundred seconds in a minute, and somebody else is getting forty seconds off the top of it. And there are a hundred minutes in an hour, and somebody's getting the top forty of those!"

"Oh, come on, Ben! That isn't even funny!"

"How much difference would that make, anyhow?" Angie asked.

"What do you think?" Ben responded.

She considered briefly. "Oh, I don't know. Maybe a third."

"Dean?"

"Without calculating? I'd guess maybe forty per cent."

Saltzman grinned smugly. "Not bad guesses," he said. "But figure it out. Sixty seconds times sixty minutes makes 3600 seconds per hour that we're getting.

"But a hundred seconds times a hundred minutes," he beamed, "makes 10,000 seconds! Somebody is getting away with almost two-thirds of our time!"

He put down his fork and reached for a bottle of wine.

Barrett drove home and helped his brother-in-law into bed in his own, Barrett's, house. Then he went to sleep himself.

Saturday morning Saltzman woke moaning with a hangover. Barrett asked how he felt, and Ben said terrible. "Good," said Barrett, "I'd be worried if you felt any other way. Here, try this."

He handed Ben a glass filled with tomato juice with a raw egg blended into it. While Ben drank it, Barrett said, "Look, if you just want to hang around here, I'm going down to the shopping center for some bags of salt to throw on the driveway."

Saltzman said, "Fine. Is it okay if I play the hi-fi?"

"Go ahead. You know how it works? Poletsky rigged up some cute gear downstairs."

Ben said, "Yeah. I've fiddled with it a few times when Rhea and I were over here."

"Anything special you want to hear?"

"I'll just put some stuff on." He laughed nervously. "Had a funny dream about those awful opera records at Enzo's last night. Want to try something with the channel synch, and Poletsky's special tape drive should be a big help."

Barrett started down the stairs.

Ben called after him, "Say, how was the party, anyhow?"

"Don't you remember?"

"Up to the shrimp cocktails, I think. I didn't make a pass at Angie, did I?"

"You were okay, Ben." Dean Barrett went down the stairs, and Saltzman heard him slam the door leading to the garage. Saltzman pulled on the same clothes he'd worn the night before, splashed some water on his face, and went downstairs. Before his brother-in-law fought through the standard Saturday traffic jam and the snowbank-narrowed bottlenecks getting back from 909, Ben had eaten and done several hours of work.

He heard the garage door slam once again, and Dean Barrett walked in, ruddy-faced from the crisp outdoor air. "You ought to get out more, Ben," he said. "Do you a world of good. Get away from your work and your crazy theories for a change."

Saltzman, surrounded by scribble-covered yellow pages, waved Dean to a seat. From the custom stereo system built by Rolly Poletsky the crystal guitar of John Cipollina rang, each string through a separate speaker.

"I've just been using this record to get the feel of this separate channel control. What I really want to do is use some . . . uh . . . bigger music to try something. Here, look at this, Dean."

He spread a crudely sketched diagram on a tabletop between them.

"I was thinking about what Mel Marston said last week over at my house," he said.

Barrett looked up sharply. "About drugs?"

"No, about money. Remember, he said anything you can do with drugs you can do with seventy million dollars."

"Yes, sure. Did you take that seriously?"

"Absolutely, Dean, absolutely."

"What are you going to do?"

"Well, you know the analogy I use, about the corduroy, and getting down into the depressions in addition to skimming over the wale, the ridges?"

Barrett nodded.

"I think the way to do it is with the mind."

"But not with drugs."

Saltzman shook his head, his soft jowls shaking as he did so. He leaned back in his seat and stretched his arms out. "Phew! Next party, stop me before that third martini, will you, Dean?

"Anyway . . . uh . . . how can we get a human mind out of the normal flow of time, into those spaces between the wales? I found some literature on experiments away from the day-night cycle, with people getting into things like twenty-eight-hour days instead of twenty-four. But I don't think that approach is exactly what I need, either. They still have the same amount of time, they're just arranging it a little differently.

"The hundred-second minute isn't really just an ordinary minute with forty seconds runover into the next minute. Nor is it the same sixty seconds cut up into smaller lengths to make more units but the same size . . . ah . . . whole."

He got up and walked in a circle, came back to his seat, and again sat down facing Barrett.

"To affect the time rate, we have to . . . ah . . . get the mind out there over that narrow little time-valley between the ridges we all live on. That way we can get into the other forty seconds." He looked at his brother-in-law.

"Ben," Barrett said seriously, "this all sounds very plausible. But so do all sorts of paranoid fantasies. I'm really concerned."

"You think I'm crazy?"

"No. But I think you have some very odd ideas. Especially that idea about flying saucer people stealing away two-thirds of our time."

"I never said anything about flying saucers," Saltzman said angrily. "Somebody else said that! I said that

somebody is getting that time. I don't know who—or what they do with it. I intend to find out!"

Barrett exhaled heavily. "Okay, Ben. Tell me how."

Again the round-faced man bent over his papers. "I've thought about Mel Marston's idea, that seventy million dollars can do anything that drugs can do. And I think I can get results for a lot less than that. I think I can get results with the equipment you have in this house."

"I think I can do it with a pair of earphones and any stereo record."

That was when he explained his system to Dean Barrett. He would take a piece of music—for some reason he picked Biggs's rendition of the Rheinberger Concerto in G Minor—and separate the channels on tape. The organ on one channel, the orchestra on the other.

"What then?" Barrett asked.

"Then . . . ah . . . well . . ." Saltzman folded his hands, opened them again as if expecting to find something within. "I've been thinking of the odd effect at Enzo's when the music was playing in two rooms and the sound . . . uh . . . sounded unsynchronized.

"I think if you—that is, if someone in the right state of mind listened to music that way . . . ah, I suppose it would be best to use earphones, to keep the channels from overlapping . . . ah, then it might be possible to . . . to *divide* the time sense. If one channel slowly moves ahead of the other and the second channel slowly falls back . . ." He gestured with his palms up and open.

"Then your mind will fall between, is that it, Ben?"

Saltzman looked directly at his brother-in-law. "Exactly."

"And you're going to use the Rheinberger?"

Saltzman shrugged. "Unless there's some reason . . ."

"An apt choice. The orchestra is the king of instruments; the organ, the pope. They should separate well."

"You think so? Is that your own opinion of the music?"

"No, Hector Berlioz said that. I just listen to it. Ac-

tually the album is from Dolores's collection." He rose from his seat, went to the window, and looked out. The short winter afternoon had already given way to another ice-dominated night. The snow-clouds had departed and the moon shone brightly on the white, sterile landscape.

Looking beyond Barrett, Saltzman shuddered. "Let's have some food first, then try it," he said.

They made themselves a light meal and consumed it with a bottle of cold wine. Afterwards they set up Poletsky's old gear and transferred the music to tape, then Saltzman pulled back the drapes.

"I think I could get into the mood best with just the moon and starlight."

Barrett turned on the amplifier, handed Saltzman the earphones, and doused the lights. Enough light reflected from the gently sloping, snow-coated lawn to fill the room.

Saltzman clamped the earphones to his head, drew up an easy chair beside the tape deck, and started the tapes running.

Later, Dean Barrett testified that the room speakers had been left on during the experiment, that he had heard the music that Ben Saltzman heard, but nothing else. Still later, he conceded that there had been hints, vague and indistinct suggestions of—something besides music on the speakers. But he declined to clarify his remarks, and still later said that his first story was correct.

Today he refuses to discuss that night, except to insist that his brother-in-law Ben Saltzman did not simply flip out under pressure of his work and his peculiar obsession with time.

Saltzman started the music. The Rheinberger opens with antiphonal statements between organ and orchestra. They were played in perfect synch, of course. But as the composition moved deeper into Rheinberger's *Grave* Ben slid the tape-speed controls in opposite directions, almost imperceptibly speeding up the "pope" and slowing the "king."

Barrett stated later that he was able to follow the slow temporal separation of the two musical threads for

most of the *Grave* but by the time it was into Rheinberger's *Andante,* with its scintillating zigzag structure, he was unable to keep track. The music was degenerating into noise. Saltzman was sitting apparently enraptured, his eyes fixed on the moon-brightened snow, his lips moving as if in subvocalization.

Barrett reached over to the amplifier and turned off the loudspeakers.

He turned back to Saltzman; Ben's eyes were fixed on the lawn, the expression one of terror. Waves of emotion passed over his face: anger, fear, fury, horror.

Barrett ran to pull the earphones off Saltzman. To his amazement the smaller, softer man fought him off. Ben pointed to the lawn. Barrett saw only the bright snow. Then he blinked. Were there—shadows there? suggestions of forms? Mere wind-devils of fresh powder or—something else?

He spun to try again to take the earphones from Saltzman there in that death-quiet room. Again Saltzman fought him away. Barrett dived for the amplifier controls. Saltzman leaped between him and the cupboard where Poletsky had built his components. Suddenly Saltzman stopped battering Barrett's hands away from the switches and instead seized the bigger man's throat.

Barrett was throttled nearly to death. Saltzman, fully half a foot shorter and soft with inactivity, flung the bigger man across the room. Barrett crashed into the wall and slid to the floor.

When he managed to struggle back to his feet, one arm hung limp, broken. Saltzman was adjusting the controls on Poletsky's tape drive, his face still mobile, his mouth moving in silent quarrel. Barrett looked behind Saltzman, onto the lawn. The swirling columns of powdered snow were more solid, more distinct.

He slipped behind Saltzman, into the basement. Through the garage, Barrett stumbled into the bright, icy night. Behind the house, far from the front lawn and its whirling columns, he struggled through meter-deep drifts. He tugged open the house's fuse box with his good hand and pounded the frozen master switch to cut all electric power from the house.

Then he struggled back through the deep snow, past the open garage door and onto the snowplowed driveway. He staggered across the clear flagstones, the front windows on his right, the lawn on the left.

He stood still, staring at the lawn.

There were no snow-columns swirling. He raised his face toward the sky. The night air was cold and utterly still. The snow on the sloping lawn was marked with spirals and other indentations that might or might not have been the impress left by living things. Some of the ridges and grooves, strangely, seemed to be *raised* above the flat surface of the snowfall rather than crushed into it.

Barrett fumbled his housekey out of his trousers and entered by the front door. Inside he found his brother-in-law sitting as if catatonic, the earphones still on his head. Barrett advanced gingerly, saw that Saltzman would make no resistance, and removed the earphones.

Then he went to the cabinet, turned all the amplifier switches and tape-drive controls off, pulled the power lines from their sockets, and unloaded the Rheinberger tape.

He went to the bedroom, dropped the telephone receiver onto the bed, and dialed for help with his usable hand.

The ambulance and the sheriff's patrol arrived simultaneously.

Saltzman has been hospitalized ever since. He seems to alternate between two personalities—his own, constantly in a state of terrorized shock, and another, angry and incoherent, that the doctors have dubbed "Neb," the reverse of Ben. This personality seems totally in contrast with the familiar, good-natured Saltzman.

The doctors' diagnosis, in laymen's terms: Saltzman simply flipped out under pressure of his work and his strange obsession over time.

Barrett disagrees. But he seldom talks about the last night that he and Ben spent in his house, while Rhea and Dolores were out of town visiting their mother. He refuses to give details about the figures he saw—or might have seen—on the lawn. He changed his story

about the voices or other sounds he heard—or might have heard—during the Rheinberger, before he turned the speakers off.

And in the hospital, when the Ben personality is in control of Saltzman, when he can handle his terrible fright enough to speak at all, he pleads with his doctors. "Time enough," he sobs, "there's time enough for both. Let them have the other forty! Let them stay away from us!"

And when the Ben personality disappears, and the other comes to power, he says nothing that the doctors will repeat.

ANDREW

by Carolyn Gloeckner

The shimmering ring named *Helios* turned silently through space. With each revolution the starship winked as great dusky gaps along her periphery rolled starward and then back toward the darkness of the galactic ledge. Gaps—there had not been time enough to place the last of the hull panels.

Much had been left unfinished. The living quarters for sixteen hundred colonists were crude cubicles, bereft of the small touches of comfort so meticulously selected over so many years at such enormous cost. And where were the seeds of the terrestrial plants that were to have mantled the colony world? Where were the zygotes, frozen and cradled until they might be roused to become the fauna of another Earth? Left behind; time did not permit.

What of the people, the survivors?

To cull mankind for the strongest and brightest—that had been the plan. But Apocalypse does not wait on Convenience, and the colonists were chosen, at the last, in brutal haste.

Benjamin Baz awoke to the hoarse cry of the shift-change buzzer. Lights overhead flickered on, offering a dim illumination that grew gradually brighter. The cubicle walls turned from ghosts to shadows to smooth white planes.

The stark austerity of the room suited Baz. Indeed, he more and more frequently spurned the comfort of the lavishly furnished captain's suite, preferring instead

this small enclosed space with its bone-white walls and narrow cot.

He rose, exercised for ten minutes, and gulped down a nutrient wafer and a mug of cafay from the wall dispenser.

He dressed. The silver-and-turquoise dress uniform fitted him exactly. In the year since he had last worn it his body had not changed. But his blond hair was thinning and the flesh about his jaws sagged. Even his daily dose of ultraviolet no longer sufficed to conceal the dark crescents beneath his eyes.

"Old man," he whispered mockingly.

He stepped into the corridor just as his first officer, Anna Scarl, came around the corner.

"Happy Eighteen, Captain," she called out.

"Happy Eighteen," he replied, perfunctorily.

She preceded him to the Control Sector and he studied her slow, stoop-shouldered gait. All of them were aging. But Anna, being older than the rest, had done nothing to conceal it.

Those going off duty greeted Baz wearily, a flock of exotic birds in scarlet-and-saffron dress uniforms. Their replacements were settling behind control consoles as Baz took up his post in the command oval at the room's center.

He checked the log for probe reports. Nothing had come in.

An ensign appeared beside him. "We've got a school tour scheduled for this hour, sir. The instructor specifically requested that you be available to meet the youngsters."

Baz nodded absently. "Fine. Let me know when they get here."

"They're here now, sir."

They were waiting for him in one of the briefing rooms, a dozen youngsters, all in their teens. They stared up with an awe approaching reverence as the captain entered.

Smiling, Baz flicked on the wall display screen behind him and began to tell them about *Helios.*

Then he saw the boy.

He had smooth olive skin and rose-tinged cheeks,

luminous brown eyes, a luxuriant mop of sable curls. His face was childishly rounded, but his features were those of a Greek bust—classic, symmetrical, elegantly defined.

As he spoke to them, Baz's eyes were drawn again and again to the youngster, almost against his will. Once he became aware of it, he deliberately fixed his gaze over the heads of his listeners, turning now and then to the diagram of *Helios* on the display screen to illustrate a point.

He was relieved when he could finish and take his leave.

In the control room, Anna greeted him. "How did it go?"

Baz felt unaccountably jittery, as if the question had some deeper implication. "Well, I think. They seemed interested."

"You left so quickly, Captain—"

Baz turned about to see the instructor who had accompanied the tour group. "What?"

"You left so quickly that I didn't have a chance to ask you if you'd talk to one of the students personally . . . a brilliant boy, very possibly a candidate for control training . . . certainly the brightest of the lot, but not properly motivated. If you'd chat with him, I'm certain . . ."

Baz waved him away. "Yes, yes. I'll be glad to."

"At the end of the shift?"

"No—yes. Fine."

"Where shall I send him?"

"My quarters, I suppose."

"His name is Andrew. Andrew Garland. I'm sure you noticed him, Captain. He's an extraordinarily handsome youngster—dark eyes and hair? In the blue tunic, front row?"

"Yes. Yes, I noticed him."

The desk was a work of art. Hand-rubbed teak gleamed in streaks of gold and brown like pulled taffy. Inlaid woods (representing more than a hundred terrestrial species) formed a stylized border of interconnecting triangles around the edge and on the drawer

veneers. Above the desk a tapestry glowed in muted shades of amber and orange. Part of it rolled silently away at Baz's touch to reveal a microlibrary viewer and speaker.

Choosing a disk, he dropped it into the sound slot and leaned back as Wagner's Prelude to Act III of *Lohengrin* issued forth.

In the early years, Baz had made frequent use of the microlibrary, feeling profligate as he did so. The captain's suite, worthy of Croesus, had been among the few living areas to reach completion. His officers lived comfortably enough, but the other living sectors were starkly functional. Less than a third of the plumbing had been installed. Families had to share kitchen and toilet facilities.

Then, too, there had been the inescapable sense that he did not belong here, that had events pursued their expected course his application would have been quietly filed away. There would have been no shocked discussion, for those involved in the *Helios* project were intelligent, educated, and therefore tolerant.

Tolerance. How he hated the word. No man ought to be merely tolerated, as if one aspect of his life were the sum of the man himself, as if phrases like *deviation from the norm of sexual behavior* and *preference for those of the same sex* defined his worth.

Benjamin Baz had refused to settle for tolerance. He had driven himself, harshly, until at thirty-four, with doctorates in both astrophysics and space engineering, seven years as director of the Neptune project and two as *Ariga*'s captain, he was eminently qualified for the captaincy of *Helios*. His work had left him with little time for socializing; it had been easy, finally, to accept the solitary life.

Aboard *Helios,* while his grieving crew had moved numbly from one task to another, their thoughts on doomed Earth, Baz alone had retained his composure. And he had driven them. Yes—mercilessly. He had made them see by his example that *Helios,* even unfinished, was equal to her journey. He had convinced them of the ship's adequacy and of the inevitability of success.

And, by his intensity and self-imposed solitude, he had forever isolated himself from them.

A few years before, Anna had taken him aside (quaking visibly at her temerity) and cautioned him. "There's a mystique growing up about you. It's not a good thing; people feel that no one can replace you, and suppose that becomes necessary?"

He had responded reassuringly. She was perhaps exaggerating the situation; by year thirty a world suitable for colonization would surely be located; he was in excellent health. In any case, there was a new generation aboard, and it would not be long before replacements would be available for all of them . . .

Andrew Garland.

The name jerked him back into the present. No, not the name. Rather, a mental image of the boy, an image Baz had come to associate with the name. He had been distracted all day by that image and by the thought of the impending meeting between them.

The longings he had thought withered beyond resurrection were in reality as vital as ever. The discovery dismayed him. Had not eighteen years of a monk's existence been sufficient to drown his needs? Would he never be free of them?

Yet, despite incredulity and trepidation, the notion of having the boy here with him, alone in his study, was inexpressibly alluring. He would not have cancelled the appointment—no, not for anything.

"Come in."

The captain sat at a magnificent desk, the match of which the boy had seen only in holos in the Sector Three theater. Behind him subtle colors merged in a skillful abstract of pirouetting figures. Underfoot an off-white carpet spread dazzlingly to the walls. There were a number of low armchairs covered in a nubby brown fabric; low, gleaming teakwood tables; tall plants, several laden with fragrant white blossoms. Music filled the spacious room.

"Come in," Baz repeated. "Sit down. Here—beside me."

The boy sat, curling his fingers over the chair arms and stroking the golden wood.

His visitor had not wanted to come; Baz could sense that. "Well, then," he began. "Your instructor tells me that you have unusual potential, yet you're quite content to slide along in your studies. Haven't you given any thought to the future, Andrew?"

"I've thought about it. Yes, sir."

"Then why aren't you working up to your capabilities? I've taken a look at your second-form comp grades, Andrew, as well as other relevant test scores, and they indicate a brilliant mind. Disorganized, perhaps—yes, even lazy. But with unarguable capacity. If you apply yourself, there's no limit to what you can achieve."

The boy stared at his knees.

Baz tried a different tack. "I know how you feel. You're at a critical point in your life, and you're not certain what to do. You feel pulled in many directions. You view the rewards of years of study as distant and intangible."

"Was it that way with you, sir?"

"Yes."

"But it was worth it?"

"Yes."

"It's hard to decide," Andrew said. "I mean, suppose I go through all those years of study and then at the end I fail the candidacy tests? Then what? It's not as if I can take second best. There are forty Control officers and only one captain. All the rest are low-level tech positions."

"It's a calculated risk. No one can guarantee you a place in Control."

"I know that, sir. I just don't want to end up like my parents," Andrew muttered. "They—" He broke off, slumping in his chair, and intertwined his fingers.

Strong, slender brown fingers, Baz observed, with the smooth, translucent skin of youth. He glanced down at his own hands. The knuckles were knobby, the flesh slack.

Baz said, after a lengthy interval of silence, "All you

have to do is make up your mind to work a little harder."

The boy's lips curled. "Yes, sir." He lurched to his feet. "I guess I'd better be getting home, sir."

A thought occurred to Baz. "Would you like to see the rest of the suite before you go?"

For the first time, Andrew seemed genuinely interested. "Yes, sir."

Baz showed him his quarters.

The bathroom: walls and fixtures of opaline chrome; the immense, sybaritic onyx tub; infrared drying lamps.

The kitchen: cupboards still crammed with cans and packets of food, flasks of wine. Little had been touched here. Baz had never cared what he ate.

The dining room: lucite table that could seat twenty, dark blue carpeting underfoot, crystal chandelier that sparked a million tiny rainbows.

The living room: elegant, vast; containing a fortune in sculpture and painting, much of it commissioned expressly for the captain's quarters.

The bedroom: walls hung in a serene silver-and-grey batik, the curve of a private window on the stars.

Baz had left his uniform jacket crumpled on the bedroom chair. Reaching out, the boy fingered the plushy fabric timidly.

"Try it on if you like."

Almost reverently, Andrew did so. The sleeves were too long and the jacket was tight across the boy's broad chest, but the garment was indisputably the right size. He stood before the mirror preening, his fingers caressing the material as if to memorize its texture.

"I've never worn anything but fiberic, sir," Andrew said, studying his reflection approvingly. "We don't have anything like this."

"There were plans for a separate textile plant, but it was only partially completed," Baz explained. "So they installed prefab fiberic dispensers for general use. Because of the weight limitations, no one was permitted to bring personal clothing, although uniforms and other items were supplied to those of us assigned to Control."

"Everything is so—" Blushing furiously, the boy broke off.

"Go on," Baz urged gently.

"Everything is so different here, sir." Reluctantly, Andrew shrugged out of the jacket. "The other sectors are so bare and cramped compared to things here. Sometimes my brother and I go to the holo theater and we see how people lived on Earth. Until now, I guess I never really believed it could be true."

Again, Baz felt almost overwhelmingly drawn to the youth. Beyond his extraordinary personal beauty, there was the charm of the youngster's naiveté, his frank delight at what he saw around him.

They returned to the study.

"I guess I'd better go," Andrew said. "Thank you for talking to me, sir."

"You're welcome."

They walked together to the door. A potted gardenia lay along their path. Andrew paused to finger glossy leaf and snow-white petal; the scent of the flowers encircled them both—pervasive, ethereal—in a private, fragrant world.

Baz spoke. "It's a pity I'm here so rarely. The flowers bloom, and there's no one to enjoy them. Take some back to your mother, Andrew."

Together they began snapping stems.

"Perhaps," Baz mused, "you'd like to come back later this evening. My microlibrary is rather more extensive than any of those in the sector theaters. We might watch some holos together and talk a little more."

"Could I? I'd like that."

"Sure. Come by around twenty hundred. You can have supper here with me."

Fingers deft on the tiny keyboard, Baz skimmed through the microlibrary catalog. There were some holos he could be certain the boy had never seen; whoever had set up the library had assumed that the captain would desire an occasional reminder of Earth's fleshly pleasures.

He chose a disk at random and dropped it through the playout slot.

On the meter-square viewing screen the gauzy blue

sphere of Earth took shape against star-spattered black. Baz yearned toward it, then recoiled as the ruddy light of Betelgeuse vanished, as if pinched off by giant thumb and forefingers.

"Oh, my God!" He stabbed ineffectively at the retrack button.

It was a simulation, of course. Devised and filmed decades before anyone knew that the dark monster it portrayed would swing toward the sun.

At the outset, astronomers had followed the invader with unconcealed delight. For them the event was a cosmological anomaly, an opportunity to study a black hole at close quarters. For the rest—the billions on Earth, Mars, the Jovian moons, Titan, the hundreds of interplanet stations—the phenomenon sparked interest only as a basis for such chilling theater dramatizations as *Out of Orion* and the critically acclaimed *Caliban*.

The scene now flickering on the microlibrary screen was the eerily accurate exordium of *Caliban*; Baz had seen it often. First in the original holographic theater production, then again and again as a backdrop for news accounts.

And now here, once more. Hand poised over the library controls, Baz stared. He could not look away from the Cyclopean eye of death. Barely a moonlet it was, yet unthinkably massive. It entered the solar system between the orbits of Mars and Jupiter. Flecks of light—asteroids—vanished as they were swallowed up. Jupiter wobbled off course, spewing streamers of methane and ammonia toward the intruder.

The black hole approached Earth. A great solar prominence stretched forth as if in greeting and coiled about the monster. The two stars, one bright, one dark, drew closer.

Mercury melted in their fiery embrace.

Venus, drawn in toward the sun, was drowned in hard X-ray emissions.

Only Earth, a cabochon sapphire on black satin, remained untouched when Caliban deserted the sun to resume its interstellar death-dance.

Except that it had not happened that way. Earth had not survived.

The starbound *Helios* had monitored every radio frequency for months. There had been nothing but the monotonous crackle of background radiation. Nothing from Earth, nor anywhere else. Those aboard the starship were the only survivors.

Baz watched the planet for a moment longer, then hit the retrack button. The screen went black.

A few moments later he had found the disks he wanted. Forming a neat stack of them on the desktop, he went to the kitchen.

If rehydrated foods were not sumptuous fare, neither were they the bland nutrient wafers to which Andrew was certainly accustomed. Baz had chosen well; the odors of hot bread and *pörkölt,* a fine Hungarian stew, mingled enticingly. Three bottles of Burgundy were chilling . . .

"Yes, please," the boy replied, and Baz filled his goblet again.

"Better drink that slowly."

"It's good. So's the food. Holidays we usually get soup or an extra ration of prote, but it's nothing like this." Andrew chattered animatedly between bites, about his parents, his brother Tom, school, his classmates, life in Sector Four.

The captain listened attentively, drawing him out with an occasional nod. The boy's cheeks were flushed, his eyes unnaturally bright. Little wonder, Baz thought, after four glasses of wine.

Baz himself had barely touched his meal.

You can send him home after supper, an inner voice kept urging.

I can't. Not now.

You must. Can't you see what you're doing?

When they rose from the table, Baz escorted his young visitor to the darkened study, an unopened bottle under his arm.

Muzzily they watched the microlibrary screen.

Agile young men and women, only partly clad, writhed there, their mouths slack with lust and their movements langorous. Arms intertwined. Bodies met in

moist embrace. Garments fell away. The tempo of the background music increased to a pounding throb.

Baz stole a look at the boy. His breathing was deep and rapid. He seemed unaware of anything but the naked figures dancing before him.

The captain filled Andrew's glass twice more. When he slid his hand across the firm young thigh, Andrew did not withdraw or resist.

The boy slept the deep, unconscious sleep of the innocent, his arm thrown back over his head, the green silk robe Baz had lent him awry.

But Baz was awake. Awake and terrified. And incredibly happy.

Perhaps it had come from the long years of loneliness and self-denial. Perhaps it was really a product of his infatuation with the youngster in his bed. Perhaps it was the wine. Perhaps a combination of all three.

In any case, it was like a new warmth in his bloodstream. He felt young again, and capable of passion.

They had moved the gardenias into the bedroom. Now an exquisite fragrance filled the air, mingling with the darker, richer odor of their loving.

Baz stirred and sat up. The boy's parents would be worried about him. Perhaps he should wake the sleeping youngster and send him home.

No. Not tonight. He would call them, make excuses. He could surely think of something. He knew there was no reason for suspicion.

He contacted them at last, on a Sector Four public comsys terminal. "Andrew's here. We've been talking and I fed him, but I'm afraid the food was too rich. He didn't feel well, so I gave him something for it and he dozed off. I'd send him home, but I think it might be better if he just slept it off here."

The woman's voice—Andrew's mother's voice—gushed: "That's all right . . . we weren't really worried . . . we're glad you're taking him in hand . . . so much promise . . . of course he can stay. . . thank you for the flowers, they're lovely, really lovely . . ."

Smiling, Baz clicked off. It had been so simple. *The captain's calling. Andrew's with him, imagine!* People

were so easily intimidated by power. He had never used his position in such a manner before, but now that he saw how easily it was done, he would do it again.

He dropped into a study chair, warmed by his easy success.

But his smile faded as he thought about Andrew. He was deceiving himself; he was a fool. The youngster was near the peak of his sexual cycle and deprived of any normal means of satisfaction by the artificial social order that by necessity set great value on delayed gratification. Of course he had responded eagerly. Andrew had never known before the itch, the craving, the hot flash of passion, the release, the ecstatic relaxation that followed orgasm.

He would explain that. He would make Andrew see that what had happened between them was a momentary aberration and he would send the boy home and they would never see one another again. Neither would mention it. In time, both would forget.

He headed purposefully for the bedroom.

Andrew called out in the darkness.

Baz trembled. Tomorrow. He would tell the boy tomorrow.

The woman was plump, with the carmine-streaked lips and forehead that had been fashionable on Earth two decades before. She was looking about uncertainly, as if she had changed her mind about coming, but there was a hint of defiance in the set of her shoulders.

Her husband, a thin, prematurely aged man with the dark eyes Baz had admired so in Andrew, stood behind her. It was apparent that Andrew's mother had initiated this visit.

Baz let himself into the study and closed the doors behind him. Gravely he turned to greet his visitors.

Andrew's father nodded briskly. "Captain."

"Mr. Garland, Mrs. Garland." Baz bent to thumb a switch on his desk. A comfortable couch, covered in soft brown wool, folded down out of the wall.

"Please sit down," Baz said, with a gesture. For himself, he chose the desk chair, turning in it until he faced them.

"We came about Andrew," Mrs. Garland said loudly. "We want to talk to you about Andrew."

Baz regarded her coolly. "Of course."

Words rushed out of her. "I suppose you think we don't know what's been going on. I suppose you think med-techs down in Sector Four are too stupid to figure anything out. Well, Andrew has been talking to our younger boy, Tom, and Tom has been talking to us. We've figured it out about you and our son."

"Just what is it that you've figured out, Mrs. Garland?"

Her eyes blazed, and for an instant Baz was certain she would leap at him. He was prepared for it: the savage flailing fists, the nails, and he knew he would not restrain her or protect himself. Whatever was to come, he would accept it.

Astonishingly, she dropped her eyes. "We know that you and he—have been together."

Bridging his fingers, Baz stared through the slender arch at the Garlands, wondering idly all the while why his hands were not trembling. "What do you intend to do, Mrs. Garland?"

For the first time, the husband spoke. "That depends on you, Captain."

"How?"

"We aren't well, either of us," the man explained. "We don't have much, Eileen and I, and we're looking to the future now. A person can barely survive on basic rations—you need an income to buy extras and go see the holos and what-not. If we get too sick to work—when we get old, for sure—things are going to go hard with us. Tom, that's Andrew's brother, he wants to keep on with school, so we can't expect him to help out. We can't blame him. Why should he support us? But I don't know how much longer we can work. We both have sick spells . . ."

The controversial wage-incentive program, Baz discerned numbly, had been an excellent idea. For people like the Garlands, *Helios* must have had all the appeal of a free meal ticket.

"What are you saying?" Baz asked them.

Mr. Garland replied, "He's lost to us already. We accept that; we know there's nothing we can do for him. So we had an idea that he should get this thing out of his system once and for all. He could come and live with you. We'd give you a term guardianship, renewable . . ." He trailed off and glanced guardedly at his wife.

"And in return . . .?"

"A few credits every month. Enough to get by. That's all we'd want . . ."

So there was to be no outcry. Baz exhaled silently in relief and withdrew his credit forms from the desk drawer.

Andrew, dressed in a pair of loose gray trousers and a flowing long-sleeved shirt from Baz's closet, lounged on a chair in the living room, a flask of ersatz champagne beside him and a glass in one hand.

He grinned when Baz entered. "To me!" he said, lifting the glass high and draining it.

The captain couldn't help smiling as he threw off his jacket. This was such a different homecoming from the one he had known for eighteen years. Sometimes he felt as if he were in a dream from which he would wake at any moment.

"You're home early," Baz observed. "What is it, a school holiday?" He lifted the champagne bottle by its neck. Two-thirds gone. "Did something happen today?"

"Did something happen today?" Andrew laughed. "Did something happen today?" He doubled over with laughter. "Yes, something happened today. I started thinking. I decided I didn't need any of it. I'm prefect —perfrect—*completely* happy here. Why should I go to classes when I'd rather be here? I can listen to music or watch holos any time I want."

"I see." Baz felt a chill creep over him, as if some small demon, perched on his shoulder, were tracing a warning into his flesh with a long, icy fingernail.

"Andrew, I think we'd better have a talk."

Bending his knee the boy balanced the glass on it

and stared through the pale, twinkling liquid. "What about?"

"You haven't been studying."

The glass teetered dangerously, then toppled. With a laugh, the boy scooped it deftly out of the air.

"Control standards are high," Baz said sternly. "They may drop you from the program if you don't keep up with the work."

"I'm sorry."

"You've got to make the effort. No one can do it for you."

"I know. I know, Ben. I'll try to do better."

"I'm sorry," the voice repeated. "You don't know how sorry I am, Captain, but he wasn't keeping up. It seemed pointless to hold the others back when he didn't appear to even care."

"I understand," Baz said.

"It's a shame. He's such a bright young man. I wish it could have been different."

"So do I."

The comsys switch clicked off with a small, solemn sound of finality.

"My brother was here this morning. After you left."

"Was he?" Baz asked, without enthusiasm.

"Yes. He's a candidate for Control school."

"I see."

"He may not make it. Everybody always says I'm smarter than Tommy. I hope he does, though."

"Does what?"

"You're not listening! I said I hope Tommy makes it . . ."

"We'll all miss you, Anna," Baz said, taking her freckled yellow hand in his own.

She smiled at him, and the lines in her cheeks became fissures. "I'll come by now and then to visit, Captain, to see how things are going. But I can't say I'm not looking forward to retirement."

"You have a standing invitation," Baz replied warmly. "Come and see us whenever you feel like it."

"You'll let me know the instant a positive report comes in—"

"Certainly."

"Good. I may not live to see *Helios* to her destination, but I fully intend to be around for the PPR. Captain . . ." She hesitated. "I wanted to tell you before I leave—this is hard to say—but I wanted to tell you that despite everything, I cannot think of any man who would have captained the ship better than you have, nor any under whom I would have served with more pride."

Despite everything. So even Anna knew. Like the rest of them, Anna knew. Somehow she bore him no ill-will.

That night Baz did not sleep well. Dreams plagued him.

Andrew was waiting for him in the study. "Where have you been?"

"We had a systems malfunction. I stayed to help trace the trouble."

Wine sloshed in the glass Andrew held. "I'm having a little private celebration here. Care to join me?"

"What are you celebrating?" Baz sat warily.

"Tom's latest success, of course." Andrew lifted his glass. "To Tom, who made it."

"He passed the exam."

"He did. Ensign Thomas Senaca Garland, of *Helios* Control. Onward and upward, baby brother." Andrew gulped at the wine. "I could have made it, you know. I've been sitting here thinking about that ever since I heard about Tom . . ."

"You didn't want it."

"It was easier not to want it," Andrew replied. "Besides, what does a seventeen-year-old kid know? That's what you said. I remember. You said that I wasn't sure what I wanted to do and that it was normal. You told me that."

"But you made the choice."

"Yes. Yes, I made the choice."

The soft flesh of youth had long since melted away,

leaving the firm contours of an adult's face, yet indolence and drugs had impressed upon the features a kind of roundness that was neither manly nor childlike.

Baz gazed at the face. It seemed suddenly strange to him, the face of someone he did not know.

Andrew, groaning in his sleep, rolled over.

The comsys chimed from the study. Rising from his chair, Baz went to the desk He flicked aside the cover panel and touched a button. "Captain here."

"We've got a PPR, sir. Could you come down and take a look?"

"I'm on my way."

As Baz pulled on his uniform, Andrew shambled into the study. "What is it?"

"A positive probe report. I'm going to Control to check it out."

"I'm coming, too."

"I'd prefer if you didn't."

"I'm coming."

Baz slipped his feet into lightweight boots and left. By the time he reached Control, the room was crowded with staff, both on and off duty. Shouldering his way through the crowd, Baz went straight to the read-out console.

Green numbers and letters roamed endlessly across a long rectangular screen. Tom Garland was sitting before the screen. "Looks good so far, sir," he told Baz.

It did look good.

Someone added, "Shall we initiate deceleration procedures?"

Baz ignored the question and walked shakily to the command oval. He thumbed four switches on the console at his right. A copy of the probe report appeared on a miniature screen near his elbow. He watched the numbers until they blurred.

Decide! a voice hissed in the back of his brain. Look at the numbers. They're good, all good.

Sweat sprang out on his forehead. Suppose one of the readings was wrong. Suppose there was too much atmospheric dust or too little water. Atmospheric composition, surface gravity, magnetic field intensity, wind velocity, meteorite infall rate, volcanic activity, length

of day—suppose just one of those readings was off by a factor of ten.

Decide! the voice insisted. It's up to you.

What are you waiting for?

Baz glanced up. Andrew was standing at the periphery of the bustle, his long, curly dark hair caught up in the black satin skullcap he had recently begun to affect, his expression one of drugged benevolence.

A wave of disgust enveloped the captain. Andrew had no right to be here now. Even the lowliest repair tech had had a hand in the day-to-day maintenance of *Helios,* while Andrew had spent the past nine years in frenetic satisfaction of his insatiable appetite for pleasure.

He summoned Tom Garland. "Get your brother out of here," he ordered harshly. He did not look again in Andrew's direction.

Decide. It's your decision, and you must make it now.

They were clustered at the clear curve of the oriel, staring at the stars, trying to find the sun that offered so much hope. Anna Scarl's slight figure was lost among them; all he could see of her was a wisp of yellow-white hair.

He looked again at the numbers and touched another button. A jade-green light blinked on in the circlet of active-probe indicators. Probe 435-A was functional.

Now.

He stroked his temples and summoned his first officer. "Initiate deceleration procedures."

A cheer went up.

Struggling to his feet, Baz headed for the door. There were shouts of joy all around. People were patting him on the back, clasping his hand, eddying around him.

Baz was glad when the door closed behind him. Someone else would have to make the announcement to the rest of the ship's passengers. He could not.

He strode down the corridor. Red V's gleamed on the sleeping cubicle doors: vacant, vacant, vacant.

He paused. He turned. A door slid open, revealing a darkened interior and shadowed walls.

He sat on the edge of the narrow cot and pulled his boots off, placing them side by side on the floor. Then he stretched out, his eyes open. The lights faded, died.

He stared up at the ceiling.

Twelve years to go. Deceleration, then the tedious process of getting into orbit about the planet.

He would be seventy-two when it was over. Andrew would be—

Baz squeezed his eyelids shut against the thought.

He bore some responsibility for what Andrew had become. He accepted that, and he would find a simple task, perhaps in Med-sector, that Andrew could perform with a modicum of effort. He would see that there were comfortable quarters, a monthly stipend of some kind.

In the morning, once things had settled down, he would give orders.

Andrew was sprawled across the study couch, a vial of pink counterdep tablets held loosely in his fingers. He glanced up languidly as Baz crossed the room to stand over him.

"You didn't come back."

"I slept elsewhere."

Andrew's eyes widened slightly, and his face went taut with fear. In the dimmed light, the expression made him appear vulnerable, a youth again, the beautiful man-child of the past. Startled by this fleeting transformation, Baz stiffened. Unwelcome memories flooded into his mind. He saw Andrew as he had been: bright, innocent, amiable, with every chance of living a normal, productive life. *That* Andrew might have found his way finally to Control, as had his brother; *that* Andrew might now anticipate a position of some importance in the colony on the unclaimed, unnamed world toward which *Helios* turned.

There had been a time when Andrew might have had everything, when he might have been anything. There had been such a time for Baz, too; he could remember

how his first lover, a brilliant, merry, handsome man twenty years his senior, had warned him of the consequences of their continued relationship.

Unhesitatingly, he had chosen to stay with his lover.

Baz had not warned Andrew.

The realization struck him like a physical blow, and he shuddered and turned away, but not before Andrew discerned the change in his mood.

"Ben?"

"You've got to leave me, Andrew," the captain said.

"Leave you?"

"Don't you see what's happened to you? Don't you see what I've done? You could have been in Control today, not as an onlooker, but as an officer. It's because of me that you're here instead, with this—" He grabbed up the vial of mood-brightener and flung it across the room. "—for comfort, instead of a sense of value and purpose."

His lover's tone was soothing. "Ben I have what I want. Here. With you." He rose and embraced Baz. His skilled young hands moved over the captain's body with exquisite, urgent tenderness.

Baz resisted. "Don't—"

"Please, Ben."

As Andrew drew him toward the dark coolness of the bedroom, the captain knew that he would give no orders regarding Andrew, that he could not break it off, that nothing had changed. Or would ever change.

PRELUDE TO A SYMPHONY OF UNBORN SHOUTS

by Stephen Goldin

AP—The Department of Commerce today released more data from the 1990 census report. The figures showed a dramatic resurgence of attendance among the "organized" religions. The National Council of Churches and Synagogues hailed this as a major breakthrough of the century, and a reversal of the trend away from established faiths.

"People have had their fill of the emotion-oriented cults that sprang up in the seventies and eighties," said Rabbi Benjamin Green, co-chairman of the Council. "But the faith that those cults engendered remained. People are now returning to the basic religions that have stood man in good stead for thousands of years."

The statistics released showed gains in attendance by all the established religions, among respondents expressing a preference. Even the percentage of respondents had increased from the census of 1980. The biggest gain of all was registered by the Catholic Church, which showed a whopping 42 percent increase over the last ten years.

When asked to comment on that statistic, Rabbi Green jokingly replied, "Well, what did you expect? They're the ones who don't use birth control."

"In India, I hear, they're giving away free TV sets to men who volunteer to have vasectomies. That's redundant. Late-night TV is already the best contraceptive method ever invented."

Bernie Porter,
comedian

BRIEFLETS IN THE NEWS

The Australian government announced final victory today in its decades-long battle against rabbits. The main weapon? Superbunnies! "A superbunny," explained Dr. Ronald Smith, "father" of the breed, "is a specially designed genetic strain. No ordinary male rabbit can compete with it sexually, because it exudes a musk that is absolutely irresistible to female rabbits. Along with this is the fact that superbunnies are superpotent, and can monopolize the sexual attentions of the females." The kicker? "The superbunnies are sterile. You might say they're long on promises and short on delivery."

UPI—The Irish Republican Army took credit for the bombing of a pharmacy in downtown Dublin yesterday. An IRA spokesman announced that it was the start of their campaign to keep contraceptives out of Ireland and restore the land to its old virtues . . .

"I learned about birth control very early at home. My father kept telling me he wished they'd had it when *he* got married!"

—Bernie Porter

. . . And the news from Tehran today is increasingly pessimistic. Spokesmen for the Traditionalists say that their people will continue to riot in the streets of the city until the government repeals the monogamy law. Government officials are maintaining a hard line and a low profile. They repeat their assertion that the law is necessary to check Iran's suddenly burgeoning population, even though it violates the tenets of the Islamic faith, and they insist that they will maintain order at all costs. The regular army has been called out to take charge after the local police proved incapable of dealing with the violence. So far, more than seventy persons have died in the week-long unrest in the Irani capital . . .

I think that I shall never see
A baby lovely as a tree.

A baby feeding at the breast
Is stealing food from all the rest,

And in some future time it may
Become a parent in its day.

While trees rejuvenate the air,
And shelter Nature's creatures there.

It's man who claims to have a brain,
Yet causes ecologic strain.

Babies are coming constantly;
Will no man stop to save a tree?
(From a pamphlet by the American Conservation Society)

"You know, if they really wanted birth control, they'd simply outlaw aspirin. Then the girls could have as many headaches as they wanted."

—Bernie Porter

... And on the Hollywood scene, Raymona Ingskell announced that she was going to sue her gynecologist for malpractice, claiming that her annual implant did not work properly. The baby's father, director Cesare Itano, was not available for comment.

AP—South Africa-Rhodesia may be in for some turmoil before the week is out. According to government spokesmen, rabble rousers have been at work again on the white reservations, stirring the populace to the point of open rebellion.

"We recognize that there are problems in the biracial atmosphere of our countries," said one official off-the-record. "That's why we've put the whites in those special reservations, so that we can guard them more efficiently from the sometimes rash acts of the black ma-

jority. We have only their own interests at heart, yet they persist in misinterpreting our efforts.

"The latest charge is 'genocide'. They claim that the law forcing contraception and forbidding white couples to have more than one child is an attempt to eliminate their race in our country."

Nothing could be further from the truth, the official went on. The state of the economy in the two aligned countries is blamed as the culprit. "Since the whites are totally dependent on the government for their food and shelter, we have to keep their numbers in hand so that we can afford to handle them all." Otherwise, he hinted, famine and plague might break out in the reservations.

The government did admit that the white population would gradually be reduced as a side-effect of this policy, but stated that that was merely an unavoidable consequence of sound economic policy.

(Handbill)

ARE YOU A MURDERER?

You are if you don't protest! Each year, the government condemns thousands—perhaps tens of thousands —of people to death . . . for committing no greater crime than having been conceived by irresponsible parents who do not want them. We are talking about abortions, which are legal and encouraged in *every state of the Union!* If you can sit silently by and condone these murders, then you are as guilty as Jack the Ripper.

But there *is* something you can do. The Right-to-Live Movement is staging a one-day conceive-in all across the country. Go with your spouse to your nearest abortion clinic tomorrow, and show them once and for all that conception is a grand and glorious endeavor. The lives of uncounted innocent babies are riding with you. *Do not fail them!*

"I know all about the various methods of birth control. Let's see, there's the chemical method, called 'the

Pill'; there's the injection method, called 'the Shot'; there's the mechanical, nicknamed 'IUD'; and there's the rhythm method, otherwise known as 'parenthood'."

—Bernie Porter

UPI—An extraordinary new method of abortion was presented in a paper today to the American Medical Association's annual conclave being held in Atlantic City. Dr. Imogene Stennis said it is now possible to have the mother's body simply reabsorb the fetus as if it had never existed.

The principle, Dr. Stennis explained, was developed from cats. It has long been known that occasionally a pregnant cat can "lose" her babies by secreting a hormone into her bloodstream that will cause the fetuses to regress in their development and eventually disappear altogether. After a six-year study, Dr. Stennis has isolated the hormone and has been able to apply it to human mothers with results that, she says, are now satisfactory.

"Soon, any woman wishing to abort a fetus before the seventh week will simply get a prescription for a series of pills from her doctor. We can bypass even the slight amount of surgery needed heretofore, and thereby eliminate some complications and risks."

Dr. Stennis did caution, however, that acceptance will probably be slow in coming. For one thing, the hormone must still be tested to make sure there are no adverse interactions with other systems of the body. And for another, "There are still people who believe that the soul is introduced into the fetus at the moment of conception. To them, this process of reabsorption would be almost akin to cannibalism."

. . . The Supreme Court today ruled that the Federal government does indeed have the right to demand that women on welfare use birth control procedures. In a 6-3 decision, the Court stated that, since the government is not constitutionally bound to provide welfare relief, such relief is a commodity to be sold and, as such, the government may charge any "price" it wishes. The

Court added, however, that the price must apply uniformly to all people on welfare, men as well as women, or risk violating the Equal Rights Amendment of the Constitution.

AP—Chicago's Pastorini rape case took an unusual twist today. After firing his lawyer and being given permission to act in his own defense, Anthony Pastorini admitted the crimes and defended them as a "holy duty."

"If the Pope is right, that every fetus is a potential human soul," he said, "then the same must be true of every ovum. Every time a woman menstruates, she is killing a potential person." He therefore claimed that the raping of eight women was done to prevent his becoming an accomplice in the murder of their children.

The court was recessed until today, when the judge will reconsider Pastorini's competency to conduct his own defense.

"My girlfriend uses the cheapest contraceptive of all —it's called 'no'."

—Bernie Porter

UPI—The Food Riots that have been ravishing southeast Asia and parts of Africa and South America are now entering their second consecutive year, with no end in sight . . .

——FINIS——

HEART GROW FONDER

by R. A. Lafferty

"Our new neighbor on the west is a creep," Simon Radert said sourly, "and what this neighborhood doesn't need is another creep."

"No, you're the creep in residence," said his sly wife Norah. "Can't stand the competition, can you? But Simon, he doesn't look like a creep to me. He sure doesn't creep around. He bounces around on his heels, and he's as open as a dutch door in a Payne County wind. His name is Swag, and does he ever have a swagger! I wish you were like him. And that wife of his, Buxom Jean (that's really her name), wow, I wish I were like *her*. They sure seem to have a lot of fun at their house."

"Let's swap houses, then, if that's the way you want it."

"Would that work, Simon? Let me think about it a little. I don't think that would do much good. We'd still be the same people wouldn't we?" (Simon was fond of his sly wife. This is a factor in the whole business.)

"Yes, we'd still be almost the same, Norah. Maybe not quite. But he's still a creep. I'm just going to take a look at what that creep put out there. But I'm going to do it without looking like I'm looking. And if he comes bouncing out again with a bunch of conversation in his mouth and mind, I'll leave him there talking to that idiot air."

"Walk out backwards real fast, Simon, and he'll think you're hurrying back in."

It was Tuesday when the people in that block put out their yard trash and their magazines for the trash

men to pick up. (Monday they put out dry garbage; Wesnesday they put out cans; Thursday they put out wet garbage in plastic sacks; Friday they put out newspapers.) Simon Radert went out and pulled a couple more tomato and pepper vines that were finished, now that it had frosted. He threw them into the big plastic container that he used for his yard trash. Then he looked over the fence (red climber rose vines on his side of the fence; honeysuckle growing on Swag's side) to see what that creep Henry H. Swag had put out for the trash men.

Quite a few magazines. There was *Wife Swappers Weekly*; there was *Psychological Adventures*; there were *Mind Wanderer, Get Out of Yourself, Changing Iconographies of Identity, Greener Grass,* and *Straw-Men.*

"What kind of creep would read that stuff?" Simon hooted out loud.

"I would, I do, I read and recommend it," Henry H. Swag burst out, bouncing around on his heels and coming from nowhere at all. "Why don't you take some of these, Radert? Better you take them than the trash men. Here's a good one. You go in for wife-swapping?" Swag was a little bit pudgy, a little bit short.

"No, dammit, no!" Simon said heatedly.

"No need to get angry, friend. It can be a lot of fun. And have you ever had a good look at my wife, Buxom Jean?"

Simon Radert began to get a funny feeling. Yes, he had got some good looks at Buxom Jean, and yet not nearly good enough. Buxom Jean had set something going in his system ever since the Swags moved in Sunday evening. If it were not that Simon was so fond of his own sly wife Norah . . .

Henry Swag had also set some paperback books out for the trash men. They were books like *Change Your Mind, You'll Like It, In Another Man's Shoes, People Exchange Mechanism* (anyone with high-school mathematics can follow the procedures here); there was *Self Renewal,* and *If A Body.*

"This isn't the Tuesday the trash men pick up paperback books," Simon said. "Only yard trash and

magazines. It's only the third Tuesday of the month that they pick up paperbacks."

"Oh, I didn't know," Henry Swag said. "Why don't you take them and read them, then?" He put the books into Simon's hands. "And have one of my cards," Swag said.

"I have four of them already."

"Good start. I have seven sorts of cards, all different."

Simon took the card. It said "Henry H. Swag. Mind-Changer. Let Me Change Your Mind! Highly Scientific Methods. By Appointment Only."

And then Henry H. Swag had gone off bouncing on his heels, and Simon Radert stood there, with his hands full, and with a look on his face as if his hands were full of ordure.

"Creep, creep, creep," Simon said.

"Oh, that's the way a baby grackle goes," Buxom Jean Swag said (where had she come from?), "and the babies of all the other blackbirds go 'Cheep, cheep, cheep.' Are you a bird-watcher?"

How did such chattering people slip up on one so suddenly and silently? And where had Buxom Jean come from, anyhow? Buxom Jean didn't exactly bounce around on her heels. She bounced everywhere with everything. She took the magazine *Wife Swappers Weekly* and put it with the books in Simon's hands.

"Read it," she said. "You might want to do it. We do it all the time, but our bunch does it a different way than you're thinking. There's an advertisement in the magazine about the way we do it, but you won't understand what it means unless you already know about it. Isn't it a shame that we've lived here ever since Sunday night and here it's Tuesday morning and we're not near well enough acquainted?"

"A shame, yes, perhaps, lady. I will read these things, I think, though it isn't at all certain that I will. And it may be that our paths will cross again."

"If you 'change your mind,' come see me," Buxom Jean Swag bubbled. "You have to already know that to understand it. That's kind of a joke, Radert. Don't you get it?"

"No," Simon Radert said. And he went into his house with an anger that he couldn't explain.

"Mmmm, how do you like Buxom Jean?" Norah asked him, and she stuck out her sly tongue.

"Oh, she's got a lot of stuff," Simon said. "All in the wrong places, though."

"I don't think so, Simon," sly wife Norah said. "With Buxom Jean there aren't any wrong places."

It was time to go. Simon Radert went crosstown to his business building to work. He liked his job. It used to worry him that he liked it. He didn't worry about that now, and he didn't care what things people might say. He still liked it. It was a paper-shuffling job, and he shuffled papers until noon. Several times he had dipped into the paperback books, but then he had put all thought of creeps out of his mind.

And at noon he went for a walk. It was bright and crisp and he liked it. Then, in the street there, the wind changed, and other things changed with it. Suddenly Simon was hit in the face by a complex funny feeling. Part of that feeling was the creeps coming back into his mind, and they came with a hint of menace. Part of it was the same feeling that he had experienced that morning when Swag had said, "And have you ever had a good look at my wife, Buxom Jean?" And part of it was a new and wild feeling that his clothes were too tight for him; too tight and too long. This was all wrong stuff. He wore good clothes. He got careful fits. And his clothes had fitted him fine all that morning: they had always fitted him fine. Something else was wrong, wrong, wrong. Simon was bewildered. He stopped in his tracks, and the latter wrongness stopped also. He walked on again, and there was something wrong, wrong, wrong about his walk.

"Why the hell am I bouncing along on my heels?" he jabbered to himself. That silly bouncing was what was wrong with his walk. "That creep Swag has too much influence over me. It's almost as though he had hypnotized me." Simon was angry, and almost afraid. "He's sure got under my skin, boy!" Whyever should Simon be bouncing along in the manner of a creepy neighbor

that he had seen only a few times? But Simon went on and on with it, and he couldn't stop the insane gait. It went on for nearly an hour, and then Simon broke the pattern only by angry effort.

"Get out of my mind, you creep, out, out, out!" Simon cried aggressively. And suddenly, like the breaking of a bubble, it was all over with. Simon walked with his own seemly step and didn't bounce like a simian or creep. And the illusion that his clothes misfitted him had also vanished. They fitted him well, quite well. They were good clothes, and he was in accord with them. He was in accord with the whole world again. He wheeled happily around and returned to his own place, breasting cheerful flocks of people and pigeons.

"It's nice to be home in myself again," he said, and he didn't have any idea what he meant by such a thing. But the afternoon went well for him. Once more he shuffled papers: carefully shuffling; canny and custodial papers. One can make a lot of money shuffling papers. There's a real fulfillment in the cryptic and consequential things. Radert was on the verge of growing quite rich in a gradual and pleasant manner; his sort of paper-shuffling paid well. He liked the labor and he liked the richness accruing to himself.

In the evening he left the business with a feeling of postponed pleasure, and he arrived home in an eerie sort of anticipation. He felt himself eagerly waited for by his sly and pretty (and often passionate) wife. It wasn't a frequent evening feeling. Usually the signals that came from her to him were much more slender things, more of the theme of "Waiting for you? What for?"

But tonight Norah was really happy to see him. She smooched and smirked and purred and sang little songs. She entangled herself with him.

"You have been so nice to me, now I will try to be just as nice to you." She smiled and caressed. Sly Norah was a delight at her best. And whenever she was less than her best, it may have been two people's fault.

But this night it was all gala stuff: the preprandial consorting; the dinner-feast itself which was refined

gluttony by candlelight; and witchy wining; the wit and the walnuts afterwards; and later the quality cigars and the romantic rum; and the sly flesh.

"I knew that it would be all well for us," Norah said, "that it would be well for us now again, and forever. I knew it at noon today."

"What happened at noon?" Simon asked her, understanding hardly more than the rhythm of her words. Here was unhurried passion in every object and in every sound. Here was deep and solid understanding, with all the quick and happy misunderstandings afloat on it where there was no harm in them. "What happened at noon, Norah?" he asked.

"Fun came back to our house, Simon. That's what happened at noon. It was never really gone, I guess, but we had forgotten a part of it for a while. You have been very busy and all. But now we won't forget it ever again."

Simon was so fond of this sly woman that there was intruded a tuneful override to his heartbeat that told all about it. It is good to have the big thing so secure that one doesn't have to understand all the details.

"But what in particular happened at noontime, Norah?" he asked. "Was it just part of a good feeling that came to you?"

"No, it was just part of a good man who came to me. A very good man—you. I'd forgotten that you could be so good like that. It would be wonderful if you could come home at noon every day as you did today. Could you?"

There was a large and full and pleasant silence. And after a while it wasn't quite as full and as pleasant as it had been. Something big had gone out of it, and something small and doubtful had crept in.

"You don't mean today, do you, Norah?" Simon asked. "You don't mean this noon, do you? I didn't come home this noon, Norah."

That was like a stone dropped into a smooth, deep water. It went in softly with a vertical sort of sound. The eddy rings spread out from it. One eddy of it reached Norah, reached her hand and then her throat.

"You slapped me in the face when you said that,"

she mumbled. She was listless now and not caring very much. She was used to such blind obstacles rising between them, blameless and faultless barriers. "Even if you said it in fun, the fun's all gone out of it now, Simon. We've lost it again."

"I didn't say it in fun, Norah. And I didn't come here at noon."

"Has my mind gone? Or yours?"

"I don't know. Maybe neither one."

"Who was it here then? Who else wears your body?"

"I don't know. I'll try to find out."

Had the sly mind of Norah really failed? It was too resilient to crack from a simple, direct jolt. That mind was as tough as it was tricky. It was always full of gentle wit and overdone patience, yes, but it had always been a fine instrument and it had come with a lifetime guarantee. Simon Radert was level-sure that nothing had failed in his wife's mind; that there hadn't been any *new* failure there.

And what of his own? Oh, it was sharper than most minds, but had it come to have a base that was too thin? There is such a thing as myopia of the mind, and it takes rare glasses to correct it. Surely Simon had been out of his mind to drift away from Norah of whom he was so fond, to drift so nearly clear away from her so often. Out of his mind as to such rift things, maybe, *but he had not been home that noontime.*

Simon may have been a little sick. He had certainly felt queer on his noontime walk that day, not quite himself for a while there. But, sick or not, queer-feeling or not, he had not come home that noontime.

He sat in his study and shuffled his thoughts. But he shuffled them without profit. Laughter could be heard from the Swag's house next door, loud laughter even coming through the tight walls. They had a lot of fun at that house, Norah had said. Why do the creeps have all the fun? "I could have a certain kind of low fun with that Buxom Jean myself," Simon said. And just what was it that Swag did anyhow that he could afford to move into a neighborhood that hadn't fallen apart yet?

"Didn't Swag give me a card? Oh, hell yes, he gave me five cards, all different." Simon fished the five cards out of his pocket and spread them out on that paper-shuffling table that he had in his study. Each of the cards was headed "Henry H. Swag," and each of them was tailed "Highly Scientific Methods. By Appointment Only." And these were the messages on the cards:

On the first, "Mind-Changer. Let Me Change Your Mind." On the second, "Personalized Voyages. Go In Person. Fine Trips For *All* Of You." On the third, "Whose Place Do You Want To Take? Not Hypnotism. Not Illusion. This Is The Real Thing." On the fourth, "Change Places With Anyone At All, For Fun And Profit." And on the fifth was printed "The Perfect Disguise. The Perfect Set-Up. You'll Never Know About It If You Don't Investigate."

"Utterly unfascinating," Simon Radert said. "But I'm glad that this hokey observes highly scientific methods." Simon shuffled fiscal papers for a couple of hours. Then he went to bed alone.

And the following day had a background of nagging worry that could not quite be buried in work. Simon had lost (it was at least one dozen times that he had lost it) the thing that he most cared about, the mystical concord with his sly wife. He held for her, as he had always, puzzlement and fondness; and working at the thing that he cared about second most of all would not distract or occupy him today. The morning went badly.

Simon decided that he would not go out from the business building that noontime. He had been bothered on the previous day by either an illness or an anomaly, and he feared running into the same thing again. But he became unaccountably nervous as the twelve o'clock time came around. He sat, in queasy context, and gazed at the walls of his office, as small, brass notes from his timer counted up to twelve. Then the walls changed.

That was fact. It wasn't any trick of the eye. The walls changed; a different place had come to Simon, and he was in that different place. And at the same

moment he had the under-feeling that he himself had also changed in several ways.

Now this was weird, and there was no accepting it without revolt. Simon's body seemed to have become thicker and shorter. He felt himself acquire a pair of jolly jowls. He became fat-headed. His paunch developed into a more spacious thing, and his clothes tightened on him. His hands weren't his own. The hairs on the backs of them were coarser and darker. The hands themselves were shorter and thicker than they had been, and probably they were more powerful. There was a warm clamminess about his hands. Yes, and there were erupting appetites of several sorts in his body. He had become uncomfortably sensual.

Simon knew that he now looked out at the world through black or brown eyes rather than through his old gray eyes. The whole spectrum shifts a notch when filtered through dark eyes instead of light. Well, he couldn't see what he looked like; and he didn't want, just yet, to go to a glass. But he could see what the room looked like. It was a racier office than his own: at least it had racier pictures on the walls. It was flashy, yes, but with luxurious flash.

His picture of Norah was gone from the desk at which he sat. There were other things there, loud and disturbing things. In particular, there was a figurine; an obscene figurine it was. It was not at all the nudity of the mostly (not entirely) female figure that made it obscene: indeed the thing did have a few odd scraps and traps of clothes on it. But it was obscene in every limb and line of it. It had a face of comic, evil impudence, of a comic that wasn't funny. It was a lurid and garish thing. Simon wasn't sure that it wasn't alive; he wasn't sure that it didn't move. And the eyes, the sly eyes of it! Simon went clammy at the look of them, and to go clammy in the body he had acquired was a raunchy and darkly exciting experience. The thing had Norah's own sly eyes, her eyes as they would have been (her eyes as they damned sight were) if she'd suddenly chosen hell and its ways and gone there in a quick passion of deformity.

Damnation, what was Simon into? He would not admit that his mind had slipped, but his case and his world and his person had surely slipped fundamentally. Ah, well, there were papers of every sort on the desk, and there were files full of papers. And Simon Radert was a paper-shuffler of exceptional ability. He could extract the substance of papers rapidly and accurately. He knew about things like this, and the papers he usually shuffled were mostly gilt-edged ones. So were these.

There was money-stuff here. There was a rich set-up in all this. It would be the most outlandish fraud ever, unless it delivered on its promises. There was a hooked clientele of moneyed persons, and the operator of all this was operating on a very deep take. Yes, journeys were promised, journeys clear out of the ordinary. And there were jarringly crooked methods spelled out how the clients might recoup their journey's expense a dozen times in the peculiar scenery to be encountered on the journeys. Simon knew many of the clients, and he knew about many others. This was as big a con-game as had ever been devised. But how did it get its repeat business? It sure did have the smell of something that gave results, yes, pungent results.

A quick-eyed man prowling through this conniving paper could have many a public question answered. He could discover where the bodies were buried: and there *were* bodies, undeniably dead bodies, running all through this elegant contrivance.

And the mastermind behind this all, the man who operated it, was Henry H. Swag.

However had Simon Radert got into this office? However had he got into a wrong body? He was ready to look in a glass now. He found one and looked. Yes, he was Henry H. Swag. Why shouldn't he be there?

"And now I will just discover where I go at noons," said the inner voice of Simon (for the inner voice still belonged to him). He went out of there fast. He took a taxi, for he realized that someone else had a jump of a few minutes on him. He got out of the taxi at the corner of his own block. He started for his own home, and he saw that he was even then being anticipated. A

man was just then going into Simon Radert's house. The man was Simon Radert, in clothes that were too loose for him and too short for him.

"He's holding my own body for hostage," said the inner Simon. "I cannot well throttle to death a body that I hope to inhabit again. Somehow I can't even hate that thing going into my house. It's the non-essential me, but it's myself nevertheless. It's rather the case that I can't look on the reflection of the face that I'm wearing without abomination. I am a temple divided against myself. What will I do now, and where will I go?

"I see. I will go where my borrowed, heel-bouncing feet take me," And he went straightaway into the house of Henry H. Swag, which was next door to his own, if only things were properly sorted out. And talk about a funny feeling when he came in! Here was all the entrail-churning, double-acting, queasiness with attraction that had bothered him for these last several days.

"Oh, Henry! I can hardly wait," Buxom Jean cried. "And I won't wait. Let's see how fast we can get started! Who are you this time? Don't tell me. Make me guess. Oh, I have the most wonderful husband in the world. What other man would be so thoughtful as to come to me in a different trick every day! Oh, we'll never run out of them as long as there are men in the world. Whatever woman ever had such variety in her enjoyments? And there'll be several tonight, besides. Oh, but you don't care about them, do you? They won't be you."

The inner Simon Radert told himself that it didn't matter. He was a man of rectitude, but he had learned the paradox of flexible rectitude in late years. After all, it would be only the body that possessed Buxom Jean, and that body was already Buxom Jean's lawful husband. The inner Simon told himself a variety of things, and some of them were lies. "I could have a certain kind of low fun with Buxom Jean myself," Simon had said just the night before. Well, he'd set it too low. This was high fun. Even Norah (oh my God, Norah!) had said that the way Buxom Jean was stacked, there weren't any wrong places. Anyhow, it was a very bouncy and strenuous encounter.

"I have compromised myself inextricably," the inner Simon said a little later when he was in the street again. "I am caught up in a witchery which may not be as scientific as it claims. Indeed, I will have to check on the scientific aspects of the whole thing. I have transacted devil's business with a devil without even signing on as a formal client of his. Oh, it may be that he hooks them all with the informal hook first: and that he then compels them to be his clients till they are fleeced and flayed completely. Well, if I've been a client of his in this encounter, at least he's not had any money out of me.

"No money, maybe. But I feel that I've been bled of something that prices pretty high. And now I am lost in my bearings, and I'm divided in mind and body, and—

"No, I'm not, either. It happens fast when it happens." It happened so fast that it is hardly noticed, for Simon Radert was back in his own proper body and could at least think of putting himself in control of the situation.

"He has still compromised me in a sordid fashion, and I have still behaved like a creep," the reintegrated Simon said. "Well, if I am compromised again, I bet I make it pay me well. I don't know just how scientific his con is, but I've always had a little bit of my own science held in reserve. There are a lot of unknowns to me in this, and it will take some juggling. I'll bet I'm a better juggler than that creep is, even if he owns the balls."

The afternoon was taut. Simon had contrary feelings. His own case and house were in the middle of the tawdry mystery. There had developed something very shaky about his sly wife Norah, of whom he was fonder than anything else in the world. But for his second fondness: the shuffling and juggling of papers and circumstances with object of thumping profit and elegant triumph, yes, the prospects were very live there.

He'd bring that heel-bouncing creep Swag to heel. He'd move in on the con and suck it dry. Then he'd make a break for greener grass, with everything falling rich and ripe for him. And there might be a way to

have Norah always at her best, and also to have Buxom Jean (what a bouncy widow she'd be then!) at her never-failing finest, and a dozen others besides, or a hundred, or a thousand. Really there was no limit to this sort of science when properly applied.

Down, man, down! Let there be no compromise, no strange venery, no deviation from rectitude, no devil's business (except on the most careful terms and with a clear aim always in sight), no sordidness, no shady stuff, nothing of that sort until a triumphant solution had been attained.

"There will be plenty of time for compromise and deviation and strange venery after this business is regularized," there came the voice of an intermediate Simon. What? Were those his words and his thought? There must be a little piece of Henry H. Swag still stuck in him from their last exchange.

Then Simon had the oddest thought of all his disturbed period.

"I can't be hurt mortally if I set my most important thing out of reach, if I accept that I most enjoy it when it is out of reach," he told himself."Suppose that I do lose Norah? What if I do lose her either for a little while or forever? Well, that would be the end of this world for me, of course. But it could be the beginning of further worlds. I suspect that I will have to pull down my present world in any case; it's grown too close and narrow around me. And I've noticed for a long while (though I've never admitted it and will only half admit it now) that I'm fonder of Norah in her absence than in her presence. There are some paintings that merge beautifully at a fair distance but become blotches at close range (not that Norah is such a blotch). There is really an elegant pleasure in being separated from her: she makes so grand an appearance at a distance.

"Or do I justify myself overmuch here? Sure I do. I get half a look behind the curtain. I have a half-vision of what is going to happen, of the best trade that I can make. Oh, this is going to be a touchy business! I'd wish it never to end. Complete triumph and vindication (doubly fine when it pays its own way a dozen times

over) is nowhere near as sweet as the conflict when one is still behind but sees a chance for coming up even; for coming up more than even, with luck, with craft, with prophecy, with highly scientific methods.

"I don't want the tension eased; I only want it shifted a bit. I don't want to win easily. I may not even want to win. But I do want to keep the winning within sight and to come almost up to it. Let all the world be frozen forever then, with my winning just on the tips of my reaching fingers.

"This is a funny game, but it's the one I want. It will be my own game and I will be good at it. And I'll trick the world into playing this game of mine."

That evening when Simon came home, Norah shifted the tension just enough. Then Simon knew for sure that it was his game and that nobody could rob him of the pleasure of it. Peace was not what he wanted, and relaxation was not.

"Will we be strangers, then?" Norah asked him in her soft, sly way. "Sure we will be, Simon, why not? Strangers and fish stink after three days, they say; but neither does so long as it keeps its strangeness. Did you ever consider just what a strange thing a fish really is, Simon? Or what a strange fish you really are? But you were wonderful at noon, and I understand now why you want to preserve this dissemblance. Last night I didn't understand it. Fate would have to be jealous of us for the intensity of our enjoyment, and to be jealous for blind fate is to destroy. But we hide in the bright noontime where nobody can see us, and we'll not be destroyed. We can swear to every fate and god and judge that we were strangers doing this thing, and that we do not even remember the names or persons of each other.

"But I will say it again as I said it last night, Simon: you have been so nice to me; now I will try to be just as nice to you. We can have the fun and the mystery both, I think, Simon."

Just how sly was Norah, anyhow? Oh, her slyness was bottomless. Was it possible that she didn't know that it wan't Simon in Simon's body at noontime? Oh,

she could always refuse to know anything that she didn't want to know. And now she gave Simon one of the finest evenings and nights in his life.

Fate was jealous of them, and fate *did* know their names and persons at night, however much it might have been hoodwinked at noontime. And fate moved one pawn against them in a careful destructive game. Wait a while. Three or more can play that game.

"When Norah is at her best, it is almost as wonderful as if she were some distance absent," Simon told himself mysteriously in a pleasant and ghostly half-hour just before dawn.

The next morning Simon Radert abandoned his profitable paper-shuffling for a while and went to visit a friend, Baalbek Tyrone, who was a multilateral scientist. Simon explained the phenomena to Baalbek and then he said, "I know what I saw, Baalbek, and I know what buffos and bodies I've been in. If it is hypnotism or illusion, then it is complete beyond anything else: such contingencies would almost require all life and appearance to be hypnotism or illusion. I'm not asking whether such things could happen: I've experienced them happening. I'm asking whether they could happen within a scientific framework."

"Nah, Radert, not really," Baalbek said. "Who is this super con-man?"

"Ah, I'd rather not name his name quite yet, Baalbek. For at least two periods I've *been* that con-man myself, as I told you, so I have to be careful. The things he's doing, someone's likely to kill him for them, and I don't want it to be myself who's killed for him. I don't think an illusion would be trapped by such details, the tightening of the clothes and such. If I had the illusion of taking another man's place, I should have the illusion of taking his place in his clothes. Dammit, Baalbek, it isn't the mind or spirit that goes wandering off to strange places: I could almost understand that. It's the bodies that go wandering off to slip into strange clothes (and those clothes not missing a stride in their moving and doing) and to surround strange minds. Or it is a strange body that comes suddenly

both to infest and to surround me. And how does my own body vanish so slickly at the same time?"

"What is the name of the con-man, Radert? Where does he live?"

"I told you that I wouldn't give you his name just yet, and he lives entirely too close to me. This man cannot be a mental giant. He's only a creep who bounces around on his heels. There is something besides mentality involved here. Could an absolute stumble-bum stumble onto a cosmic secret, and all the erudite scientists miss it completely?"

"Sure he could. If he did it, then he could. And scientists aren't so erudite as all that, Radert. What is the name of this prestidigitator?"

"Why must you know?"

"A couple other gentlemen have also tossed me half a trail on him. I want a whole trail or none. But some of the fruit of his vine sounds pretty tasty. I want in on it. But we'll have to know more about it to go for all of it. We have to be able to make the transfers ourselves, or to put ourselves in the way of their being made. I want to *be* you when you (I) confront him. Do you understand?"

"Yes, though I'm not sure I want to be done out of it. If I find out enough so that we can use a piece of the trick to go for the whole trick, I'll let you know. But, Baalbek, is any of this possible scientifically?"

"Any wild or distorted view of anything can have a picture-frame fitted around it. Then it becomes an ordered view of a possible thing. Our own out-seeing eyes are a binocular-shaped picture-frame that can turn any portion of the world into a reasonable picture. And every scientific discipline is such a picture-frame. If there is a somehow misshapen scene, then we may need a misshapen frame to go around it. Let us consider the science of somamorphology (the shuffling or reshaping of bodies). It's a science of a very funny shape, but it fits around our weird scene exactly. Sure, Radert, the things you describe could fit into a scientific framework, that of the science of somamorphology."

"Well, *is* there such a science, Baalbek?"

"There is now. I just founded it. Don't laugh, Radert. Name me a science that began on a firmer basis."

Simon Radert went to see Monsignor Tupper. Simon described the complex of happenings of the last several days. Then he asked, "Do you suppose that these things could happen from a scientific viewpoint?"

"If diabolism is a science, then they certainly could happen," Msgr. said. "And I guess that they have been happening. The science of devilry has as slippery a content as any of the other sciences. Don't smile like that, Radert. Don't you know that the devil has been out for so long that he's in again now? *Time and Tempest Magazine* has an article (favorable, of course, in accord with the views of T & T) in this week's issue, and he's generally had quite a bit of notice lately. He's on some new kick, and that's always been as murderous as it is tedious. He was always a mean one, but since he's read that new book he's been off on some really weird jags."

"What new book?" Simon asked. Monsignor Tupper named the book.

"Oh, that's one of those that Swag had set out for the trash men to pick up," Simon said. "I think I've got it at home. You're sure that there's a devil's claw in all this, Monsignor?"

"Oh, sure."

"And you're sure that the devil read that particular book?"

"Oh, sure. He stole it from the chancery office. He was seen to do it."

"So much for the experts," Simon said, and he was back in his business place. "I probably know all that I need to know, anyhow. One needn't be an authority on the color green to turn various things into green money."

Simon worked it out in several days there, some of it when he was in his own office, some of it when he was in Swag's office in the front-lash time of one of the changes or jumps. It was always a puzzle how he got to

be in Swag's office. "Does my enemy have a gap in his contrivances?" Simon often questioned himself. "So forgotten a gate in his defense as this one might indicate a trap." It might, but how did the trap work?

And this business of Swag changing bodies with another person didn't seem to be the regular pattern. Swag always had at least one direct swap going, but the bulk of his business was in placing clients in the places and bodies of various moneyed men for purposes of loot and connivance. Many of the clients reaped good harvests at this stand-in fraud game; and Swag seemed to take far more than the miller's tithe as his share of the profit. After all, at this game, Swag had the only mill in town.

Simon had made certain that he signed naturally with Swag's signature whenever he was in Swag's body, and also that he had Swag's fingerprints. He then stole several of Swag's suits when in Swag's house one day, and he discovered a little room somewhere between Swag's office and his own that he could use for a quick-change stash. He made a much more convincing Swag in Swag's clothes.

Simon familiarized himself with Swag's banking procedures: they seemed open and easy, and perfectly clear for an expert paper-shuffler. Simon cashed a few checks on Swag at Swag's bank, nothing big, a thousand dollars one day, five hundred the next, two thousand the day after that. It was just to be familiar with the procedure.

So the looting of Swag (careful, careful, Simon boy, this is really too easy) went apace. Simon came up with some very original ideas of his own in this, and he discovered an amazing repertoire of looting devices in Swag's own files. They were written in double-talk, of course, but Simon had read double-talk since his childhood. There were several hundred such fine-looking documents in cipher there.

But really, though there are a million different devices and tricks of looting, there are only three *degrees* of looting. The first step (the weak-weasel step) is estimating how much may be taken with safety and without suspicion from a fortune, and taking only that

much from it. The second step consists of determining everything that is in a particular holding, and *taking all of it.* Would you believe that some of the greatest and most colorful swindlers of times past have not gone beyond this second step?

But the third step (the third step is kinetic or dynamic looting; none of that static stuff here) had to be fast and daring. Really the thing should all be wrapped up in no more than three days of hidden and hectic activity. Simon Radert, in canny third-step activity, began to raise a very large amount of money on the securities and promises of Henry H. Swag. Simon poured some of this new and hasty money into various accounts of Swag, and some into various accounts of his own. What things cannot be done with mortgages and cross-mortgages, with sight-drafts and with simple bank transfers! What things can not be done by plain old-fashioned kiting, if they are done by a firm and perfervid hand! What rampant borrowings cannot a bold and burgeoning man make for very short-term deals! And, in this particular case, what extraordinary money could be raised from special clients who had had previous promises and expectations fulfilled in a most exuberant way!

Simon Radert had guessed that he could raise about five times as much on Henry H. Swag as Swag was really worth, if he did it fast enough. He did it. And he was cutting it very close, for his target date and destination (Project Greener Grass), set up to allow just about three days of action, was almost upon him.

Henry had to be able to manipulate the bodies, and this isn't something that one learns out of a textbook. He had to be able to possess his own body at the critical moment, and he had to be sure of keeping possession of it. There were limits to the distance at which body-shifting could be carried out. Like all things that suffer a scientific explanation, this shifting was subject to the law of inverse squares. Swag's power to compel body-shifting was strong at short range. (Simon's office was only a block from Swag's. Simon's house was next door to Swag's.) When the distance was doubled, the power was divided by four; when the distance was

tripled, the power was divided by nine. And Swag's power seemed really effective only within a range of two miles or so. Simon had worked up diagrams of the effective locations of Swag and his clients, and of the paired clients and prey by which the best looting was effected. All were within two miles; most were within one mile.

Simon had tested it. A quick three-mile taxi ride at noon took him out of Swag's effective range. He could feel Swag tugging at him after a while, Swag wanting his own body back after the noon-hour dalliance, Swag in near panic wanting his body back a half-hour later (the delay must have infringed on his profit somewhere). The times and seasons seemed important in this. This particular time had better be remembered.

But Simon had now chosen his own time and season and destination exactly.

Should he tell Norah? Should he tell (oh, hell no!) Buxom Jean Swag? But he still had the unruly hope of adding Buxom Jean to his menage when the dead body of Henry H. Swag should have mountains of forgeries and overreachings and hasty claims and due-bills and attainders and suits and writs and million-dollar shortages heaped upon it.

Project Greener Grass involved a flight to Rio, of course. Simon Radert was a traditionalist, and what paper-shuffler does not have a flight to Rio as the climax of his schemes and shufflings? He did tell Norah about it, in a way, though it was much more the case of her slyly guessing it out of him. But they disguised the plans and set them into a queer context. They put it all into their "Familiars and Strangers" game. That "Familiars and Strangers" game was beginning to cloy a little. Well, that phase would soon be over.

"Yes, Norah, we can have both fun and mystery in our house," he presented it. "We can be pleasantly mysterious strangers to each other and not let it grow stale in three days or in three thousand years. But to do this, we must keep certain things secret even from ourselves, even from other parts of us. Our Lord gave us the parable of the man who had the secret of happiness: and to have that secret he had to keep many se-

crets; he could not even let his right hand know what his left hand was doing. This was a generative secret.

"For ourselves it must be very similar. We cannot even let our noontime selves know what our evening selves are up to."

"What, not even let my stranger-lover know that he is taking me to R-I-O?"

"No, Norah, no! Don't spill one damned bean out of the pot to that damned nooner."

"Never a bean, no. I'm too sly for that. Oh, I will be sly about it. I—"

"No, Norah, no! Please don't be sly! Not with the nooner. Don't tell him anything at all."

"Oh, all right, then. But neither will I tell you any of the things that the noontime stranger told me today. I play the same game with you when you come as the noontime person. And he (you) said not to tell you anything."

"Oh." This could be a little bit dangerous. Norah was sly, but she was not intelligent. Simon had always liked her the way she was; for the duration of his juggling act at least, he would rather that she be the way she was somewhere else.

And Buxom Jean Swag was also a danger. She wasn't intelligent, either, but she did rattle through things with considerable of that mental energy that often serves in place of intelligence.

"I think I know who you really are these noontimes, Henry," she said on that last day before the target day. "I think that you are Byron Biggleton. No? Then you are Lambert Hughes, or Simon Radert, or Chester Stork. No? Then you are either Gaspar Okuma or Irving Clive. Yes, you are! You're one of them. Those are the only ones that Henry's doing one-for-one swaps with now. That's what he tells me."

"At least I am in rich company," Simon said (to himself, not to Buxom Jean). "They all have a lot of green moss growing on them, and I've been raking it in all this week. But I didn't know about Gaspar. It may not be too late to let him in on a bad thing."

"Honey, Gaspar honey, I think it is," Buxom Jean was going on, "I'll tell you something. Henry H. used

always to dump an old one and take a new one with him every time. Always in this same good old frame, though. I wonder who wore it first? But since he took up with me I've stayed with him. Twice he thought he'd left me behind for a new one, and each time it turned out that I was the new one. I can copy his tricks. I pick up a lot. And he or whatever will not shake me this time, either. I'll not be left behind. I'm going along."

Yes, Buxom Jean could be dangerous to the intricate planning. There were a lot of dangers to it. But the planning was complete now. Only the execution remained, and it was going to be carried out relentlessly. And loose ends still hanging out were damnsight going to be bloody stumps.

And now it was the ticklish night before the target day. And then it was the early morning hours of target day itself. And Simon Radert was being menaced by the teeth and hooves of a very skittish nightmare.

It was an old-fashioned sort of dream, all in a monochrome, black and white and gray, as all dreams were before color was introduced into them about a hundred years ago. It was the case in the nightmare that Henry Swag, even after he was dead, had the power to shift bodies one more time. He did it, and he took the live Radert body with the gun still smoking in the hand of it. He also took the sly Radert wife, and he was off on Project Greener Grass with both the stolen things. And the inner Simon Radert (nightmarishly conscious in death, and trapped inside the dead Swag body) was taken away and morgued and slabbed and jabbed and eviscerated and embalmed and buried, and left dead but still conscious and still in agony to remain forever in the suffocating underground terror.

"This bodes ill for the day," Simon said in stilted fashion as he woke from that grasping and entangling dream (the dream and the language of it had been stilted and archaic, and the inevitability of it had carried over into waking), "but I will not let it bode ill. I'll package all the ill omen of it, like wet garbage, into a plastic sack and leave it on my rack for the trash men to pick up. And I'll have good luck all this day. Good luck is something that can be willed and worked for.

Well, I've worked for it hectically these few days, and now I will it strongly. That's all it takes."

In spite of Simon's resolve not to tip his hand to fate by breaking his daily routine, he went to work earlier than usual on the morning of target day. He was nervous, and he wanted to be doing something. But he knew that everything he could do was already done.

The readiness had peaked too soon. It is much easier to keep the necessary balance while still in motion than to maintain it in a static or waiting case. Simon felt compelled to actvity, and that is where one makes mistakes. What about a late clipping of Gaspar Okuma, the very wealthy man that Buxom Jean had implied was a client of Swag, but who did not appear in Swag's client lists? Too late, too late for another one. Leave it alone!

Then Simon fell into that bad-luck routine of rechecking his arrangements, and rechecking them again. They shouldn't need rechecking. One shouldn't even give a glance in their direction. Too much attention to arrangements will alert fate that something fishy is going on. And when fate casts a baleful eye on such things, it is likely to be the end come early.

Besides, a very little bit of rechecking revealed a disturbing thing. Simon wasn't the only one who had been tampering with the Simon Radert accounts. Some one was multiplying Simon, just as Simon had multiplied Henry H. Swag. And the someone who was doing it was using about the same projection that Simon had used. Simon discovered that his momentary worth in his accounts was about five times his actual worth. And the only one who could be tampering was Henry Swag. Swag was the only one who could have disguised himself as Simon. He was the only one who had access to the Simon-body; or so Simon hoped.

Simon was tempted to jerk all the accounts then, at midmorning; to convert them all then and there; to cable them to Rio where he could receive and stash them that evening. No, no, let it stand for the two hours or so. To start trimming down stakes now might be to lose everything. Simon hadn't transferred all the

Swag accounts yet, and he couldn't transfer what remained of them until he was Swag again, during the noontime.

"I've made my bet, and I'll ride it out," Simon swore. "I will be much richer than I expected, or I will be nothing at all. Let us see whether Swag or myself is the strongest snake. Let us see which one will swallow the other."

But an idling mind is open to thought in the waiting, idle hours. Simon began again to consider the basis of it all. Of course, the switching couldn't have scientific justification. Somamorphology was a made-up science, and diabolism was no science at all. Body-swapping on a realistic basis would require the transfer, in place and order, of billions of molecules, and many more billions of atoms and sub-atomic particles, the transfer without jumbling them, without killing or kinking them, and all of it done over a considerable distance. It would also require the ordering of many other circumstances to effect the swapping of two bodies. Scientifically this simply would not be possible. Omnipotentially it was possible, but Swag wasn't Radert's idea of the omnipotent one.

But, if it happened, and it didn't happen on a scientific basis, on what basis could it happen? Oh, "scientific" is but one of many categories. The thing might happen on a contingent basis, on an existential basis, on an implicit basis, on an eidetic basis, on a paraontological basis, on a projective basis, on an epicyclic basis. After all, reality itself remains an unproved theory. There were many bases on which these things could have happened, if strict reality were not required.

No matter. What Simon Radert had to do was transfer all remaining Swag funds to the Radert account; he'd do it just as soon as he was Swag again. Then, right after one o'clock, when he had been returned to his proper body, he would withdraw and transmit all the swollen Radert funds. Then he's skip (how he'd skip!) to Greener Grass. Thirty minutes later he would be in the air, and an hour later he would be out of the country.

And he wanted to kill Henry H. Swag while doing all the other things. This killing was the loose piece; it was to be played intuitively with the very fingertips. It was intended to keep the whole business loose: it were best so. The killing could be left out, but only with the deepest regret. One shouldn't leave so powerful an enemy as Swag (he might even be the devil himself) alive behind one. Besides, the killing of Swag was the enjoyment, the fun part. It was the part that made it all worth while. If you can't have fun doing a thing, is that thing worth doing?

It is worth doing only if it stores up future fun for one. And Project Greener Grass would do that.

Noon found Simon Radert walking through the street toward Pan-American Commercial, the bank where both he and Swag did business. Sometimes on these nooner changes he was yanked into Swag's office when the transfer occurred; but sometimes the transformation happened wherever he was. Now it took him in mid-stride, and he completed that stride into the bank building just as the bank chimes began their twelve count. "Punctual," Simon said. "I like that in a situation or a world."

An officious official, probably a vice president, who had been told the day before by the inner Simon in the outer Swag that Swag funds would be transferred this day ("for a very special reason, for a very short time, but do not mention it at all; things like that might make the market nervous") aided and expedited him. And when it was completed, there was really a concentration of funds in the Radert account.

"Simon Radert will probably be doing some massive fund-shifting in an hour or so," the Simon-in-Swag's-body said, "but, as you know, it will be quite all right. Some of us are putting up rather large earnest-money on a special deal, and Radert is our front man. But it should all be completed tonight, and probably all the funds will be back and redistributed tomorrow."

"Fine, fine," said the officious vice president. "Oh, Mr. Swag, have you heard of the Okuma disaster? It just began to come to light a few minutes ago. There's

a shortage of millions, and a complete clear-out. There's a warrant out for Okuma's arrest, but he cannot be found. A terrible thing!"

"Gaspar Okuma?" the Simon-in-Swag gasped in incredulity. "Good God, no! If Gaspar skips with a boodle, whom can we trust?"

Then the inner Simon strode out of Pan-American Commercial. "Not a worry in the world," he said. "Everything on schedule." But he was irritated if not worried. The Swag body that he wore was more distasteful to him than it had ever been before. Dammit, it stunk! And it was not a dishygienic stink. There was a whiff of primordial rottenness to that body.

But the inner Simon walked quickly to his home. Through his garden window he saw, with that daily sour feeling of resentment, that Swag-in-Radert was with Norah. Displeased but patient, the inner Simon shuffled into Henry H. Swag's house to pass the time of day with Buxom Jean.

"Oh, I'm so relieved to see you," she said. "No, it's not you, is it? I mean that I don't believe you're Gaspar. Did you hear the terrible news about Gaspar Okuma?"

"Only a bit of it. Those that live by that caper must perish by that caper. Terrible, terrible, though."

"Henry, you're not Gaspar today, are you? Tell me really if you are."

"No, honestly I'm not, Buxom Jean," the inner Simon said.

"Honey, there's two of you who are very much alike when you come as Henry. There's Gaspar, and there's the other one, you. I think the two of you must be just the same size, the way you rattle around inside Henry (really, that's an odd impression, but that's what it seems like). I am so fond of Gaspar (well, of you, too, it's nice to have men with a little bit of class come as Henry, but you won't tell me who you are) that I almost can't stand to have him in other trouble. There's his wife, Hilda Okuma, you know. She's nice, I suppose, but she's odd; in short left field at least. He's so committed to her, but I really believe he'd be happier if

she were away somewhere. Have you a wife? Is she odd?"

"I have, and she is, Buxom Jean. Hardly in left field, or even short left, but a little bit behind the shortstop. Odd, yes."

Simon Radert passed a pleasant and bouncy time of day with Buxom Jean. Then he put himself on the alert. He saw Henry H. Swag leave the Radert house in the Radert body. So the inner Simon, the Simon-in-Swag, followed him. "Punctuality, punctuality," he said in time to his own Swag-body heel-bouncing that he could not control. "Ah, you've always been so punctual, old Henry H., don't fail me now." Came one o'clock, time for the change. And the change did not happen. Came another five minutes and still it did not happen.

"Whoa, boy," the inner Simon cried, and he gripped his pocketed gun in his strong, stubby Swag-hand. "Will it come to the gunpoint scene and I have to force you to the exchange?"

Swag-in-Radert's-body continued along unchanged and went into the Pan-American Commercial Bank. And Simon-in-Swag's-body followed him.

"Careful, careful," said the inner Simon. "Such a thing need not be a disaster. Each such thing that surfaces in front of me is one less thing that might take me in the back. If he is doing my work, then I will let him do it. I'll let him carry my loot and luggage in his own stomach until the last possible minute. Then, like the good snake that I am, like the no-good snake that he is, I'll stretch my mouth over his and swallow his head. And then I'll swallow the rest of him."

Swag-in-Radert's-body was joined by another man inside the bank. This man seemed to have an hypnotic quality (Simon could sense such things strongly) that rendered him almost invisible to the slow-eyed and the slow-minded. And the man of this hypnotic quality also had a concealing scarf pulled over his face.

"I'll not be complicated by him," Simon swore inwardly. "I will know how to deal with him in a late and tricky second, if he is really a factor."

And the Swag-in-Radert's-body was doing the Radert work for him very well. He was gathering the boodle all up and transmitting it or variously handling it. Swag might be a creep, but he had the magic fingertip touch and the fingertip mind when dealing with money.

Swag-in-Radert and the scarved man turned to go out when they had finished their swift and final transactions. And Simon-in-Swag stood in their way. But that inner Swag glazed his eyes and went by Simon without seeming to see him, and who can say what a man with a scarf over his face might see?

Those two men went out and took what seemed to be a prearranged taxi. Another taxi came out of the Fourth Street alley and followed them. By the time the inner Simon found a taxi, the first two vehicles were out of sight. "To the airport," inner Simon told his driver. "Quickly, friend, quickly." And they picked up the other two cabs when halfway there.

Simon saw that his wife Norah was in the second taxi, the baggage taxi. Norah was supposed to have had that taxi loaded and waiting for Simon at the Radert house. But the nooner-man must have changed her orders for her.

The taxis arrived. "Punctual, yes, punctual as if I had done it myself," Simon said, "and part of it I did."

The baggage from the middle taxi was loaded on the prearranged (by Simon) dray to go to the plane just in time. And Swag-in-Radert with the scarved man, with Norah Radert, with another woman that Simon did not know for sure, hurried to the Trans-Pan-Am-Rio-Lines waiting area whence travelers were already going down a ramp to board the Rio plane.

And it was just outside that waiting area that the Simon-in-Swag shouldered the Swag-in-Simon out of his parade (for he was the last man, the closeup man) and over into a corridor corner below a blasting speaker.

"All right, baggy-pants, we change bodies now," Simon growled, "and then I shoot your body to death just as soon as you are into it. Who will notice a little thing like that?" Simon had his gun into Swag's gut

(though it gave him a twinge to threaten his own body like that), and he was turning on all the hypnotic power that he possessed so that the whole scene might be as invisible as possible. It worked. People bumped into them and bumped around them, but they did not notice the gun-play.

"But not too soon, Simon," the Swag-in-Radert said. "You don't want to shoot your own body, surely."

"No. No hurry," Simon said like ice. "I want to be the last person in that boarding line and to move on quickly when I move."

"That's also what I want to do," Swag said. "You don't like my body, do you, Simon?"

"No, Swag. It's a devil's body, and you are the devil himself."

"Not really, Simon, but I acknowledge that I've swapped bodies with him a few times. He's one of my most valued clients, and he's worn that body that you're wearing now. There's a stench that clings to it, isn't there?"

"Yes."

"I kind of like it," Swag said.

Simon saw his wife Norah go down the ramp in the boarding line. He saw the other woman still waiting for the men. And (this is a little bit tricky) he saw Buxom Jean Swag standing near and a little behind him outside the waiting area.

Simon felt a pleasant pang when he watched Norah disappear down the ramp. "Isle of beauty, Fare thee well," he said, out loud but softly, and he raised his ungunned hand in parting salute. The valediction was from an old verse. And it was really with a touch of disappointment that he then realized that he would be joining her on the plane in just seconds.

"Time enough!" Simon-in-Swag said then, and he practically buried his gun in the gut of Swag-in-Radert. "We change bodies now, or I blast whatever body is in front of this gun. Better to get away in a wrong body than not to get away at all."

"Oh, all right," Swag said in three furry words that began in the Radert voice and ended up in the Swag

voice, and Swag was in his own body again. And Simon felt that queer jolt that meant body change. His clothes fitted him again. He had changed bodies also.

"You aren't forgetting one detail, are you?" the gun-pinned Swag asked insolently.

"No. Hand over everything from your inner coat pocket. Ah, they are a bunch of handy receipts and claims and verification. And my wife Norah will have all the other papers relating to the flight." Simon didn't let his gun waver as he took the papers in his other hand, and he kept his eyes (except for one eye-corner on Buxom Jean Swag) locked on the tricky eyes of Swag. Perhaps he kept them locked too tightly there.

"Drop it, Simon," came a too-familiar voice behind him, and a gun was shoved very sharply into his nether ribs. Simon didn't drop his gun. He crouched, and he spun swiftly on the new menace. It was the scarved man. The scarf fell away, and Simon looked into his own face. And the too familiar voice that he had heard had been his own.

Swag slapped the gun out of the hand of the momentarily bewildered inner Simon. And he slapped the papers out of his other hand.

Police were descending on them. Oh, yes. And they seized Simon-in-Whomever with big hands. "Thank you, Mr. Swag. Thank you, Mr. Radert," said a gentleman who seemed to be in charge of the police. "Your tip-off was invaluable."

"It makes me feel like a Judas," said Swag. "Forgive me, Gaspar, but retribution must be extracted. However could you fall into so vicious a swindle, you who had everything? And how did you hope to get away with it?" And Swag was looking straight at Simon and calling him Gaspar.

"And forgive me also, Gaspar," said the Whoever-in-Radert-body, "but who has the power of forgiving you? It is said that even the angels weep when one of the bright ones falls. Ah, the pity of it!" And this man with Simon's face and body also was looking at Simon and calling him Gasper. That bleeding hypocrite! *He* was Gaspar with his mealy mouth, and he had stolen Simon's body in a three-way switch, and had left

Simon to face the retributory music. And Simon knew that he himself was wearing Gaspar Okuma's face and body.

Simon-in-Gaspar now noticed that the woman waiting at the head of the ramp had become Buxom Jean Swag, and very soon she was joined there by Swag and by Gaspar-in-Simon. But she couldn't be Buxom Jean! Simon had had Buxom Jean in the corner of his eye all that time, even when he had locked eyes with Swag.

He looked. The other woman who for a while had been waiting at the head of the ramp was now where Buxom Jean had been. And she came to Simon-in-Gaspar. "I'll stand by you forever," she said, and Simon knew that she was Hilda Okuma whose mind was somewhere out in short left field. Ah, this was the one who would visit him on visiting days when he was in durance. And it looked like the caught Simon-in-Gaspar was going to be in durance for a long while.

Had Gaspar Okuma been fond of this tilted-brained dame? Likely he had. And would he now be much fonder of her when they were separated forever? Very likely, yes.

But things were bad now.

It wasn't that Simon hadn't been cleaned out before. It wasn't that he hadn't been in lock-up before. But those had been little things that can happen to any man on the rise. What was happening to him now was massive.

And it wasn't that he hadn't been married to and been fond of a loony-June before. Ah, but that had been his own, his other heart (it was mostly left ventricle), his tribulation and his triumph.

He realized with secret pleasure that his own loony, sly Norah, was gone from him forever. Wonderful! Being gone was her best role. He could enjoy her so much more, in the remembered pleasure and exasperation, when she was absent. Ah, that sly absence!

Oh, but not this new loony! Not (Oh, God!) a sympathetic loony.

"I'll stand by you forever," that slant-brained woman said.

"Oh, God, be merciful to me, a sinner," Simon said. He couldn't stand to be stood by forever.

The way of the Transgressor has all those rocks strewn in it. But when it also has—Oh, no, no, not forever!

AURELIA

by J. J. Russ

Ever since the contraceptive plague of '86 I had lived only to see Aurelia strip. She kept me from the transvests, from that easy forgetting of women, of what they meant. I was a *man,* and Aurelia made me know it.

I loved her of course, but so did every man who still held stubbornly to his sex.

Her dance was always the same, but that did not detract. It seemed flawless to us, pilgrims so hungry for the sight of a real woman. Some, like me, had come thousands of miles from the scavenging in the ruins of the old cities. I'd scrubbed grime from my face and elbows and scraped months of beard from my chin—cut down almost to the bone. Every few years, when my turn came up, I journeyed to Aurelia's theatre near Elay. I came to see her dance.

Taped music prepared us for her entrance. Moog throbbed with nearly subsonic beats; contra-saxes bleated and moaned; hip-swiveling syncopation of the drums set the rhythm, pounded into our guts.

"Aurelia!" we shouted, knowing that she would make her entrance in the same way, no matter what we said, but still we groaned, "Aurelia!"

It began with one foot sliding onto the stage from the left, that smoothly curved instep always swelling above the same gold-sequined spike-heel shoe. Music crescendoed; cymbals crashed. We roared.

And then came her narrow ankle, her smooth white calf, her voluptuous knee, a wedge of thigh showing through the multiprismed dress that was slit to her hip.

Sparks of color flashed from the fabric as she swayed, just perceptibly, to the gut-shaking beats: *magenta, ultramarine* . . . She moved to center stage, deceptively, almost-walking, but each separate swing of her legs showed superimposed curving, seductiveness, an animal message that could almost be smelled.

"Aurelia, love!"

Her ankles rocked, just the slightest feminine weakness on the points of her dagger heels. Her hips swelled wide from her waist, then converged to knees that brushed, gently revolved, against each other, as Aurelia walked, danced. By then I was already sweating, aroused as if alone in the packed-in rows of men. I imagined myself only inches from Aurelia's breasts. Twin swellings, quivering with each step she took, a dark line, a depth of strangeness between them.

"Aurelia! Take it off!"

And we knew that she would.

The hair of a man in front of me was full and curling and almost blocked my view as he inched higher in his seat. I wanted to choke him, but controlled my temper. I remembered the murders, the riots for seats. Now we had a plan, had assignments. There was fair rotation of the choice viewpoints. If I made trouble, I would never see Aurelia dance again.

—Aurelia, like now, facing me, facing her audience. She stared with gold-irised eyes, seeming faintly and deliciously startled, as if she were surprised to be watched. Her lips were pursed and impudent. The tip of her tongue could barely be seen moving at the rim of her parted white teeth. Swaying, her hips revolving, she toyed with the left strap of her gown.

"Aurelia, take it off!" Was it my voice that shouted? I felt months of doubt and frustration melt inside me. It had been worth it, resisting transvest seductions and homosex propaganda. I'd kept faith with Aurelia—*woman*—the only woman I had seen in twenty-three years.

She danced on, then slipped both straps of her gown off her shoulders, her breasts rising like moons at the horizon of her bodice. Her hips swung in wider revolutions. Her feet slid apart as she leaned back, her hands

on the back of her thighs, her eyes looking into mine. An expression of hurt flickered around her lips. The music throbbed. She peeled the gown, inch by inch, from her smooth skin.

"TAKE . . . IT . . . OFF!" we chanted.

And she did. She peeled the translucent films from her body like petals from a flower. Streamers of sheer fabric arced out in all directions and crumpled softly on the stage, none of them quite reaching the audience. The sweating gropers in the first row left as empty-handed as the rest of us. Aurelia gave no souvenirs, nothing to become fetishes.

It was hard to believe there had once been millions like her. Of course, we had the books, the photographs, the pornoflicks. Not to mention transvests in growing numbers, glib imitations, claiming to be as good—better—than the originals. Some even did a travesty of Aurelia's dance. I'd seen one once, and it made me sick. My friends said I was old-fashioned, not to change with the times. But I could tell the *difference.*

Eventually Aurelia stripped down to this: small glittering cones on the tips of her breasts, a G-string with a shining gold triangle plunging from beneath her navel to between her legs, yellow-sequined spikes of shoes. Her hair, a bright curtain, fell almost to her knees. Behind it she dodged, flirted, tantalized us as in a waterfall.

I remembered other women, of course. Except for the children only in their twenties, we all remembered them as mothers, as sisters. And as creatures we loved. Memories of their bodies were shared, no doubt exaggerated—and sometimes defended to the death. But I seldom thought about my wife any more. It was so long since she had been killed, like almost all the women, by the contraceptive virus when it mutated.

"TAKE IT OFF!"

There was a limit. Aurelia always kept parts of herself hidden behind small badges of fabric and the living skeins of her hair. The music, which had begun in deep throbbings, had become a shrill chant of wanting, desire embellished with electronic hisses and twangs. Aurelia gyrated. Her breasts shook, her belly moved in

ellipses, her hair shimmered and parted and again flowed together in one golden wave.

"Aurelia, *please!*"

But it was over. Aurelia ran with small steps across the stage, leaned forward, holding her breasts against her with one forearm, scooped up all the clothing she had tossed away. Then, holding the bundle of fabric against her chest, she swayed through a shining gold door at the back of the stage. She gave me one last look over her shoulder, a look of mingled hurt and desire and silent disappointment.

Then Aurelia was gone.

The music had stopped. There was pounding at the theater doors. The men waiting for the next show were impatient. For them, too, it had been years between performances. Aurelia danced six days a week, ten shows a day. We had to wait our turn.

On my way out, I bought a new recording of Aurelia's music and routinely registered at the Park Service booth for another performance. I was trembling so badly I could hardly write.

"How long?" I asked.

"Thirty, forty months. Hard to say."

"Are you sure the notice will get through? The mails where I live, lately—"

"Don't worry, old-timer." The ranger, who was wearing red nail polish, squeezed my arm. "Now put your thumbprints on the registration, on the pass card, and on the notice. Thanks. Next?"

I kept seeing Aurelia dance in my mind. All the long trip back to Sainlooy, she stripped, she stripped. I knew I'd see her again if I survived psychotics, my own depressions, and the rage of the transvests I turned down. Back at work, scavenging in the ruins of the old Sainlooy medical center, I imagined Aurelia dancing, her hand on the strap of her gown . . .

I turned up all sorts of garbage in the ruins: half-burned books, laboratory records with graphs and diagrams I couldn't understand. If my boss thought it was interesting, he sent it on to the embryologists who were trying to grow new women from semen modified with hormones. So far they'd managed to father two-

month-old hermaphrodites with clouded eyes and half of a human brain.

In test tubes! I thought, and laughed deep inside, thinking of Aurelia's belly and smooth thighs. I knew Aurelia and the few other women who survived were supposed to have been made sterile by the plague, but still, compared to test tubes and flasks . . .

Back in my apartment I played my new recording of Aurelia's music and looked at the life-size posters of her that covered my walls. I played the strip-music three, four times a day until the tape ripped, was spliced, ripped again and again. I lived alone. Most men, of course, comforted each other—not all of them transvests. But some like me could not adjust. I kept to myself as much as possible.

Aurelia made my days bearable, and at night I dreamed her into my bed. My work was boring, but I was lucky to have it. There was no shortage of ruins ever since the mad years after the plague, when fire had killed the big cities, beginning with the medical centers that had spawned and inoculated the damn virus.

After a while, even with the pictures and the music and my memory, I began to forget just how Aurelia moved. The sweet curve of her hips, the rock of them when she danced—I began to forget. My days stretched longer, and at night I felt alone, went to sleep, woke up at three in the morning, and cried.

Fortunately, my next turn came sooner than I expected. The tan notice had my thumbprint on one side with my name, and on the other:

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
AURELIA NATIONAL MONUMENT

SIR: THIS IS TO INFORM YOU THAT YOUR RESERVATION HAS BEEN CONFIRMED FOR SHOW #3 AT 10 A.M. ON TUESDAY, OCTOBER 18TH, 2011. PLEASE REPORT AT MONUMENT HEADQUARTERS ONE HOUR PRIOR TO SHOWTIME FOR YOUR PASS.

Among those in line to see Aurelia, more of them than ever were wearing dresses. Why did the transvests

come? Was it to copy Aurelia's movements, her authentic femininity? Maybe they still felt like men, deep down—although they would never admit it.

They made me sick.

A green light blinked on the side of the theater, signaling five more minutes until the next show. The line was buzzing with the latest rumors about the embryologists. Fetuses went to four months now, male organs were smaller, the two cataracted eyes had fused to one that might see. Most important, ovaries were better developed, although there were still no wombs. In five years, they estimated, with luck . . .

"Isn't that just marvelous?" It was the man in line just in front of me. He wore a slick green dress; his long nails were painted ocher. He batted false lashes in my direction and smiled.

I ignored the transvest and pulled out a small photograph of Aurelia from my wallet. In it, she was tossing away her brassiere.

"Pretty nice, eh?" The transvest spoke in a falsetto, his lips now near my ear. "You'd like to do it to *her,* wouldn't you?"

He disgusted me. Despite the powder on his face, I noticed the pocks and stubble of a heavy beard. His red wig was piled in high curls.

"Yes," he said, "why not do it?" The transvest couldn't have been more than thirty. So young, he couldn't understand. He couldn't know what it had been like before . . .

"Yes," he said, holding his hand on his padded hip, "she's one of them left, right? *I'd* do it to her, unless—" Then he giggled to himself as if he'd said something funny.

I turned my back on him. Ignoring transvests had always been the best tactic.

"Hey." I felt a limp hand caress my shoulder. "You're cute, pop. But such a serious face . . ."

"Get away from me," I said, and raised my fist toward his chin.

"Okay, okay." He flicked imaginary dust from the dress over his inflated chest. His cheeks flushed red under his eye-shadow.

Now a yellow light flickered on the theater wall. The second show was over. Ours would be next. Some at the front of the line began to pound their fists on the gates.

"Pop?" The transvest's voice was coy. "I like you . . . you're not from around here, are you?"

"Sainlooy," I said, clenching my teeth, determined not to do anything stupid, not to let an idiot transvest keep me from Aurelia.

"You're cute when you're mad," he said, and brushed my chest with his bright long nails. "Maybe we can get together later. I work near here, over at the An'eim Archives . . ."

The last show's audience were stumbling out now, their faces glistened with sweat, their eyes blinking in the bright light. Our line began to surge forward from behind, pushing me against the transvest. He put one arm around my waist, but I shoved him away.

"You make me sick," I said.

"*I* do?" the transvest squealed. "How about *her*. Why d'you think she never takes everything off? Why—if *she* has nothing to hide."

I grabbed his shining green dress at the neckline "What do you mean by that, sonny?" As long as I could remember there had been rumors, circulated by the transvests, probably, that Aurelia was really a man, a man changed with silicones and hormones and—Disgusting rumors. All you had to do was see Aurelia dance to know that they were false.

"What are you trying to say?" I tightened my hold on his dress as I asked.

"N-nothing!" The transvest raised his palms protectively. I saw a guard looking in our direction and had to let go of the dress. Our line rushed through the gate into the theater.

The transvest stayed with me, all the way to my seat I clenched my fists and dug my fingernails into my palms. Afterwards I could deal with him. This was Aurelia's place.

He sat down beside me, laughing nervously. I ignored him.

I was close to the stage this time, only a few rows

back, nearly in the center. I was panting with anticipation as the last of the audience scuffed to their seats.

"My name is Emil," the transvest whispered into my ear.

I ignored him and concentrated on the golden door at the back of the stage and then on the left wing where I knew Aurelia would appear. The lights dimmed, and only the bright spots remained glowing on the stage.

I felt something on my knee, slowing moving.

"Stop it!"

But the transvest's hand only squeezed my thigh just above the knee.

I swung at his chin, but he ducked, and I hit his nose instead. There was a crunch, then a falsetto whimper. In the light reflected from the stage I could see dark fluid dribble over his lip.

"You'll be sorry!" The transvest jumped up, crying. "You think *she's* so wonderful. You'll see! She'll just do what you want, that's all!" Lifting his skirt he vaulted over the front rows and onto the stage and ran through the spotlights back to the golden door. He held something small and shining to the latch, opened the door and then closed it behind him.

Several guards and men from the front row went after him. They tugged and kicked at the door, and one of the guards pointed his gun at the latch.

But then the music began: the same subsonic beats, contra-saxes, syncopated drumming. Aurelia would dance. Soon. The men scattered and jumped off the stage just in time to see her.

Calf to thigh, she entered from the left. I watched her sway in the spotlight, as beautiful—more beautiful—than before. I forgot the transvest and his lies.

"Aurelia!" The shout tore itself from my throat and was echoed by the roaring audience:

"Aurelia! Take it off!"

At first I lost myself in the richness, the soft curving of Aurelia's body. The music throbbed. Aurelia swayed and toyed with the strap of her iridescent gown. But Aurelia still danced, still threw off her clothing like before. Maddening, careless, reluctant, petulant. And yet . . .

Aurelia twisted and spun and whipped off a turquoise sash from around her waist. It arced in a high glide, snaked through the air, and buried itself in the lap of a bald old man in the first row. He jumped up, waved his trophy at the rest of the audience, shouted, kissed it with his thin old lips, and sat down.

That never happened. Her clothes always fell on the stage.

Always done with animal force, Aurelia's dance was now somehow more wild, uncontrolled. As she stripped she threw her clothing harder, farther. Panties landed in an aisle at the feet of a guard. Her brassiere glided as far as the empty seat beside me. Once, I would have taken it home, hidden it, made love to it at night.

"Aurelia, take it off!"

I listened to the rest of the audience shouting. Something was different. The transvest. The gold door . . . I couldn't help myself. I kept remembering the filthy rumors about Aurelia, about the hormones and the silicones. Soon—I hated myself for it—I was staring at Aurelia's crotch, looking for telltale bulges.

She had stripped faster than usual and was already down to only golden cones and glittering G-string. She flirted behind the veil of her hair. She rocked on her sleek thighs; her breasts shook and seemed to swell.

"More, more!" the audience screamed around me, drowning out all music except the deepest bass rhythms.

Aurelia kept dancing. And then she began to play with the gleaming caps on her breasts, to toy with the string around her hips. By now, everyone seemed to know that something unusual was happening. They chanted with genuine hope, "Take it off! Take it off! Off!"

I was afraid. No, she couldn't be a transvest. I reminded myself of the National Monument plaque outside the theater. *One woman in millions . . . genes to survive mutated virus, contraceptive virus . . . ended population explosion . . . all women sterile except when given interferon* . . . I looked at Aurelia's knees, her belly, even her crotch, tried to imagine her as a man, and couldn't. Why should the Park Service lie? No, it was true. I'd lived through it myself. *Virus turned killer*

in Afghanistan . . . ten-hour incubation period . . . no time . . . Aurelia one of very few . . . sterile but alive . . . The plaque must be right.

"My God, she's doing it!"

For an instant there was total silence. And then cymbal crashes, electronic screeches, and a roar from the audience as Aurelia uncovered the pink nipples of her breasts for the first time in Park Service history.

Pandemonium. We all stood and stamped, drowning out the music. Aurelia still danced, stroking with one hand and the gentle swell of her abdomen between the navel and below. Up and down. Up. Down.

"TAKE . . . IT. . . OFF!"

How many women could there be left besides Aurelia? The *Times* reported one in Brazil. Another was rumored to be in Calcutta. What difference did it make? Aurelia was the only one I'd seen—the only woman any of us had seen—in almost twenty-five years. She danced. We loved her. And now . . .

Her hand still moved up. Up. Down. Up . . . And now she picked at the shining triangle of fabric between her legs.

"TAKE IT OFF! *TAKE IT OFF!*"

And then the audience gasped and moaned.

Aurelia now wore nothing except her glittering shoes and the natural cloak of her hair. Not a man. Not a transvest. Still, Aurelia danced. Beauty.

In the hysteria nobody noticed the door open at the back of the stage. Nobody noticed the transvest with the bloodied nose in the shadows behind the spotlights. Not until he ran close to Aurelia and yelled: "Take it off?" He giggled, and pointed at the audience, pointed in my direction. "Well, honey, don't you hear them? Take it *off!*"

At first Aurelia seemed to ignore him. She danced, her gold-irised eyes serene, her hips swaying, her lips moist and slightly parted. The fingers of her right hand played gently around the nipple of her breast.

Suddenly the nails dug deeply into the flesh, the hand jerked sharply, twisted, and with a ripping sound tore the breast away from her body. Aurelia threw it

into the front row of the audience as easily as if it were a glove.

There was no blood.

In a similar manner Aurelia tore off her other breast, handfuls of flesh from her hips, fragments of her scalp with the long blonde hairs still attached. She moved faster and faster, and threw some pieces of her body so hard that they bounced off the back wall of the theatre. Nobody shouted. Nobody spoke.

She was clawing at her eyes when her dancing step faltered and she fell backwards, her legs apart, unmoving in the bright lake of the spotlights.

I was one of the few to reach the stage before the guards forced us out at gunpoint. I was one of the few who saw the sparking behind Aurelia's flesh. And—so long since I'd been close to a woman—perhaps I was the only one to notice the embossed plug between Aurelia's legs. Flesh-colored, it was almost invisible among the pale curling hairs.

Disney Enterprises, it said.

I hear that she was dancing again within a few days. What happened is just one of many depressing rumors, such as the one that a human placental factor is needed for fetal development—that there will never be children. I have not registered for another performance by the National Monument, Aurelia.

But I find that I've stopped caring, since I'm no longer lonely. I'm happy now in Sainlooy, really I am.

So is my lover, Albert.

ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL

by Barry Malzberg

I

At Fargo another assassination attempt. Small, pockmarked man three or four feet from us in huddle of autograph-seekers was seized by private guards (national security is worthless; I believe that they are merely functioning as spies), taken hurriedly into local shop, Happy Hosiery & Outerwear, where under rough frisking he gave up one thirty-eight-caliber Smith & Wesson, two hunting knives, and a small needle. Disclaimed any interest in hurting the candidate, said that he simply went around with such implements because of dangerous times, etc., but at our insistence he was booked by local police. Candidate shielded from this flurry of activity, although when he came to the door of Happy Hosiery & Outerwear he looked at me peculiarly for a moment or two. "Something wrong?" he said. "Nothing," I said. "Something seems to be wrong," he said, while shaking hands of three female customers (outerwear dept.). I believe that he suspects something amiss but will not bring this up again.

II

Good crowd in Hastings, brought to their feet three times by fighting speech which had been pre-tested in survey areas but never before used in exactly this frame. "New tomorrow, a new vision, a destruction of the forces of evil, the need for purgation and return to our older values," and so on. One woman became hysterical and had to be helped from auditorium, a dismaying moment, since we thought she might be a plant from

the administration. Given first-aid in ladies' room she turned out to be harmless, having hundreds of photographs of the candidate in her purse, scraps of unfinished letters to him, etc. Later at reception raised several thousand dollars in new pledges. Candidate somewhat distracted and wearied from the pace of last few weeks; became inebriated after several cocktails and began to tell intimate sexual reminiscences to mayor, but we were able to get him out of there without further difficulty.

III

Fire in the motel this morning, choking vapors, sparks flying, three wagon companies called, etc. Candidate slept through all of this in rear wing, unaware, but four were overcome by smoke in the east palisade and a busy morning was spent checking them into hospitals, dealing with the press, shielding candidate from the seriousness of the incident, and so on. Some espionage is suspected, but it would be very difficult to prove, and since all in hospital are expected to recover with or without ill effects, state police have suggested that we treat it as an unfortunate accident, act of God, so on. Reports that assassin in Fargo has tested sane on preliminary investigation and thus we may be faced with a decision: do we proceed with formal charges or allow him to be released? Either way, it seems that we lose.

IV

Fire bomb in Huntsville went off during candidate's speech, enormous crowd packed solidly, some panic, the hall vacated as quickly as possible, so on. Local police continuing investigation. Candidate motioned me to come over to him while surrounded by press asking for his opinion; ordered me to see him in his room that night. Quite nervous about this (but how can I be held responsible?), but no way around it. Afterwards, while waiting for new arrangements to clear, had a few ec-

static moments with Mary in a vacated prefabricated classroom behind the senior high school. "I think that someone is trying to disrupt this campaign," she said. I asked her how she possibly could weave together a fire bomb, a fire, an assassination attempt into an intricate network of menace, but she had no reply. She is an attractive girl and one of the few solaces of the difficult swing, but she is rather paranoid.

V

"These incidents must stop," the candidate said to me, hitting his fist into palm (the other palm) in that abrupt forceful gesture which the media have already so exploited. "I don't know if these are unhappy coincidences or a genuine attempt on the part of the opposition or the administration to destroy me, but it is intolerable to continue in such circumstances. I want it stopped! I want better security," and he pounded that abused palm yet again, but in his eyes I saw a certain bleakness and uncertainty, a hint of genuine fear. Is it possible that he is concerned about his own safety? The thought had never occurred to me before. I would certainly think less of him if he was a physical coward, although he was right in adding that a person holding the office for which we are campaigning need not be an expert in self-defense.

VI

Alone with Mary in Wellington for a brief, dry coupling on the unchanged sheets of her motel room, then off to the amphitheater alone for a rally. Candidate at his best tonight but sweating heavily behind the make-up, and his voice cracked twice during last phrases of his speech. Later, at the reception, I found him leaning against a wall, a hand stroking a potted palm whispering, "I can't stand it any more, I can't stand it any more," but I put this down to a temporary neurasthenic episode and brought him back into the center of the room where several people shook his hand and pledged

further new contributions bringing our total now into the hundreds of thousands of dollars.

VI

Back to Fargo, a decision made collectively. Unfortunate assassination attempt cannot prevent us from campaigning in all parts of the nation; we will not be frightened away, etc. Candidate strangely distracted on the plane, but then the decision was not his. At Fargo, debarking, was pulled aside by Mary, who said that she is going home. "I can't take the pressure any more," she said, and then, "besides, I feel that you're just using me." Tried to tell her that this was not the case, felt a genuine and sincere regard for her, etc., but she was adamant. Showed me plane ticket indicating that she was booked on the next eastern flight out of the airport. "What can I say?" I said. "You misunderstand the situation." She pulled me into some recess of the arrival building and kissed me desperately, her mouth uncoiling in a moistness which her cunt had never shown, at least for me, but even as I responded longingly, seeking her with my abused but hidden genitals, she was gone, running at high speed down the slick corridors and toward an exit gate. I stood looking after for a while thinking about the profound union of sexuality and politics, to no real conclusion.

VII

Good crowd at Sea Girt, large enthusiastic audience which applauded everything candidate had to say and which remained quite cheerful despite the presence of police with drawn guns, security forces everywhere, etc. Campaign seems to have sparked and is now picking up momentum. Candidate rather distracted at reception, but this is to be expected; he has been under great strain recently, and rumors of assassins are everywhere. Four militants are in police custody, accused of having masterminded an assassination plot which might have succeeded except for the presence of two agents placed in the group.

Later called Mary to bring her up to date. Initially hostile, she became warmer as we talked, and when I replaced the receiver it was damp with little beads of sweat and saliva that clung to it like aphids.

VIII

Candidate assassinated during rally, apparently by the same man detained by local police during our first visit. Hard to be sure; things, needless to say, are rather confused. Four shots, crossing from hip to temple, the last opening up his face disastrously in a resemblance to a pulped fruit. He fell very quietly behind the rostrum and lay there kicking. Local police, ambulance corps, medical personnel, and so on responded promptly, and the candidate was taken to hospital within five minutes of incident where he died at 12:17 a.m. of massive cerebral damage. The accused assailant is in the hands of police, and a further statement is expected shortly.

PAXTON'S WORLD

by Bill Pronzini

Paxton hated Science. He hated spatial technology and exobiology and astrophysics and robology and all the other -ologies and -physics and -dynamics. He hated the scientists, "those who probe and experiment and create with blind, unhuman fervor, like a horde of Frankensteins." He thought Science was a curse rather than a servant of mankind; he thought it was the direct cause of depersonalization and dehumanization, and that it was responsible for the death of individual freedom. He was a self-admitted anachronism, "a throwback to that ancient time when man could walk completely free in his natural habitat, and there was no Science, and the making and the governing of his personal destiny was in his hands and his mind alone." He longed for that ancient time, or a place where, in his time, he could be completely free of "the bondage of Science."

But on the massively overpopulated, technologically oriented Earth of the 22nd century, there was no such place. Perhaps there *were* such places in that vast part of the universe known as the Uncharted Territories, well beyond the last current outpost of Science—the asteroid mining belt; and yet, to get there an individual was forced to utilize one of the new roboships powered by the Chong-Franzetti Subspatial Drive. And Paxton hated Science.

At first he refused to compromise. He was a very rich man (his father had been one of the pioneers in robology and had willed a considerable fortune to his son: just another bitter pill Paxton had been forced to

swallow). He could afford to live in utter seclusion—save for an occasional visit from a Pleasure Maid—in the basement of a two-hundred-story building in the city-state of New York. He ate natural foods, which were in limited supply and enormously expensive. He collected realbooks—very old and very fragile—and various forms of ancient art. He painted pictures and created montages and sculpted statues that no one ever saw. And he was miserable, because even though he could not see it, Science was all around him.

Life, in Paxton's thirty-third year, became totally unbearable. He knew then that he *had* to compromise, that he *had* to seek out a new dawning world where Science did not exist and where the freedom he craved for would thus be his. Once having made his decision, he acted swiftly. He purchased one of the single-passenger roboships, liquidating most of his assets in order to meet the exorbitant price of the craft. He ordered it filled with as much natural food as it would hold, as well as three hundred of his favorite realbooks and several of his most treasured pieces of ancient art; nothing more. In less than two weeks, the ship had been programmed according to his explicit instructions and all other preparations had been completed; on a yellow-gray morning in the spring of 2134, Paxton walked six miles to the City-State Spaceport, entered his craft, and—as far as the planet Earth was concerned—vanished forever.

The first eighteen months were good. The ship did all necessary work—followed its programmed course perfectly, recycled oxygen and all waste material, manufactured drinking water from outside moisture—and Paxton sat and read, or peered through the viewscreen at the endless, kaleidoscopic wonders of space. Only the knowledge that he was still immediately surrounded by Science prevented him from complete happiness for the first time in his life.

The ship reached the asteroid mining belt, and went beyond, where few ships and few men had ever ventured; and that was when things began to go wrong. Paxton's supply of natural foods ran out, and he was forced to subsist on nutracapsules dispensed by the ro-

bocontrol. A flash fire, caused by a minor short circuit and quickly but not quickly enough extinguished by the ship, destroyed all three hundred of his books and most of his treasured art. Time began then to pass slowly for Paxton; there was nothing to do except to sit at the viewscreen, and while this was still enjoyable, he felt a growing impatience. When would the ship find him a world? When would they land, and he be able to step forever from the suffocating belly of Science?

Another twelve months vanished. During that time, the ship located and scanned and rejected several planets. The viewscreen would show Paxton a new system, a new world, and he would grow excited; then the infallible instruments of the robocontrol would indifferently inform him that the planets were all uninhabitable: iceworlds and seaworlds and deadworlds, worlds with poisonous atmospheres, worlds with a mean surface temperature that was too high or too low, worlds with infertile soil and inedible plant life, worlds with a high danger-factor from this or that type of living organism.

Twelve months became twenty-four, and then thirty-six. Paxton sat before the viewscreen in a state of agitation, staring out at an empty space which was no longer absorbing. There were few suns and few planets now; there was little to see except deep and deeper black.

Seven years. Eight. Nine. The ship—built to withstand all external forces, built to function indefinitely—continued to follow its programmed search pattern . . .

Paxton had been alone in space ten and one-half years when the ship found him a world. A tiny planet, the smallest in a four-planet system revolving about a single, pale sun. Habitable planet, the instruments reported, very like Earth; breathable atmosphere, edible vegetation, drinkable water. And both animal life (I-factor, null; D-factor, null), and intelligent life (I-factor, one-point-seven—primitive; D-factor, negligible).

In the gold warmth of an early morning, the ship set down on a meadow not far from a high, snowcappped mountain and not far from a mud-hutted native vil-

lage. And Paxton, free at last and, of course, quite insane, stepped out upon his world.

Several hundred naked inhabitants came to meet him. They were surprisingly humanoid in appearance: hairless, a dusky purplish-brown color, eyes a peculiar shade of silver, males with extremely long, very thin penises and no visible testicles—females with angular breasts and greatly distended vulva. They exhibited neither fear nor hostility; conversely, their attitude was one of great excitement, of instant worship.

Paxton studied them with his burning eyes, unmoving, listening to them speak. Their language was a soft, liquid whisper, one which human vocal cords would be able to duplicate. Finally, he turned and reentered the belly of Science for the last time, bringing out with him the portable dialectic converter which was part of the ship's complement. Then he shed his frayed clothing and went with the natives to their village, where the converter easily translated the liquid whispers into English, and vice versa.

The planet was called K'na'aran.

But it was soon to be, in every respect, Paxton's World.

The natives brought him food—the tender flesh of the animal ma'rad, which roamed the continent in small herds and was not dissimilar in appearance to the extinct Earth bison; dark gray vegetables tasting faintly like potato; sweet pink fruit reminiscent of nothing on Earth—and immediately began to construct a great hut for his dwelling place. The females came to him with rapid willingness, and although actual copulation was difficult, if not impossible, they gave him pleasure in divergent ways. Runners went to summon all other tribes on the small continent (the only inhabited one on the planet, the other two being densely forested and void of ma'rad), while with the help of the dialectic converter Paxton learned to speak the native language swiftly and fluently.

When all the natives had assembled—some three thousand of them—Paxton stood on a platform of rocks and spoke to them. They listened raptly, and

prepared to obey without question; a god is always obeyed without question.

Destroy the ship in which I came, he said to them. Smash it with rocks, take it apart piece by piece, burn the pieces in a great fire. Take all other equipment, including the language machine, and treat it in the same manner. When the metal is cool, take it to the deepest lake and hide its ugliness forever beneath the surface of the water.

And this would be done.

Science is evil, Paxton said to them. You do not know Science, and you never shall. On this world, there will be no Science.

And there would be none.

A being must walk completely free in his natural habitat, Paxton said to them. A being must make and govern his personal destiny with his hands and his mind alone. He must be free, and to be free he must essentially be alone. Villages are the forerunners of cities, and cities are test tubes of Science, and Science is bondage; therefore, all villages are evil and must be abolished. From this day forward, each male and each female and each child above the age of eight years shall live alone and free and make his own destiny.

And it was done.

The natives finished building the great hut for Paxton, and the ones now living alone nearby brought him food each morning; different females visited him each night. Sometimes he would sit in or by the hut, thinking of Science and hating it. Sometimes he would walk alone to the High Mountain and stand at its crest with his face uplifted to the sun-warm sky and laugh until his stomach ached. Sometimes he would swim great distances in the placid blue seas surrounding the continent, or in the rivers and lakes which dotted it. Sometimes he would run through the tall grasses, singing joyously. And sometimes, on the nights when the heavens were very dark, when the blackness was deep and impenetrable, he would tremble and scream and scream and scream; but when the first light came, he would be tranquil again and all would be well on Paxton's World.

On a morning in the third year following his arrival, Paxton awoke and was filled with a great insight. He had escaped Science, he had forever destroyed it here; he had, in essence, originated complete freedom; he had, in essence, originated a new world. Thus, he *was* a god. The natives were his children, his disciples, and he was *god*—benign and wise, and most importantly, creative. He had always been creative as a man, and as man he had loved the beauty of simple art; now, as a god, he must direct the creation of simple art here—art unlike any other, new and exciting and basic—and therefore teach his children to love its beauty.

Excited, he sought out one of the nearest natives and said to him: It is true you are free, but even a free being must obey god's benevolent will. It is my will that you are, at my direction, to create simple art and thereby learn to love its beauty. To begin, you will construct a curving wall as high as your waist and twenty times the length of your body, of flat red stones.

The native began to construct the wall.

Paxton went to each of the other natives in turn—each male and female and child—and said to them what he had said to the first; then he issued to each a command for the composition of widely diversified forms:

Fabricate a square tower five times as high as your body, of blue and silver stones.

Fell six trees, cut them into round blocks, and with the blocks construct a path from the doorway of your hut to a seventh tree.

Seek out and kill ten ma'rad, and when you have eaten the flesh of each animal, arrange its bones in the shape of suns and mountains and huts and penises and breasts.

And so on.

When he had spoken to each of the natives, Paxton returned to his own dwelling. He rested there for one month, taking pleasure each night from one or more of the females. Then he left again to examine progress.

The results pleased him; each native was performing his task exactly as directed. When he neared the completion of his journey across the continent, he began to

sense a certain tremendous aesthetic quality to the whole —though lacking in unity, lacking in theme. And all at once he recognized the possibilities for the ultimate in simple artistic symmetry: a magnificent tapestry woven of thousands of separate threads, an entire continent reshaped and remolded into a single work of new art. A massive excitement seized Paxton, and he knew instantly that he must dedicate the balance of his life to that tapestry—that only through its creation and its perfection would his children truly learn to love the beauty of simple art.

Paxton told himself he must not rush into the project, for there were many things to be considered. Once more he returned to his hut and meditated for several days, visualizing the contours of the continent and mentally constructing the tapestry. During his three years on this world, he had seen several monuments erected by this generation of natives, and prior ones, to their god—to him; in the past these constructions had not intruded on his consciousness, but now, in the bright clear light of his ardor, he saw them, and they were artless and offensive. They must be destroyed—completely, as he had destroyed the thing of Science in which he had arrived. Artifacts belonging to past generations, and the native burial grounds, would have to be altered according to careful specifications so that they would fit harmoniously into the overall pattern; if they could not be altered, they, too, would be obliterated.

The excitement became a raging inferno inside Paxton; he was ready to begin. He went forth yet again among the natives. Some were commanded to destroy the old monuments; they no longer pleased him, Paxton said, and had no place in the creation of a single unified work of art—the great monument to his glory —which all would join in originating. Others were given commands for new towers and walls and hundreds of other forms. Still others were ordered to reshape such existing objects as the burial grounds.

Paxton from then on roamed the continent tirelessly, examining completed threads, issuing instructions for new ones. Time had no meaning for him—there was

only the tapestry—and ten years passed as if they were ten days. The tapestry had begun to take shape, though it was by no means nearing completion and by no means as perfect as he had visualized it. He continued to travel month after month, ordering something added or subtracted here, something altered or entirely reconstructed there. Another ten years vanished, and Paxton was an old man nearing seventy—and still unpleased. The tapestry was not yet perfect, perhaps would never be perfect; but the work would continue, it *must* continue as long as he remained unsatisfied.

One night at his hut, during an infrequent period of rest, Paxton was visited by two females. But for the first time in two and a half decades, there was no pleasure. This angered him; he chased the females away, and another came, and there was still no pleasure. He grew angrier. At the end of seven successive nights with thirty different females, there was *still* no pleasure—and his anger, then, turned to wrath.

On the morning of the eighth day, Paxton left his hut and set out across the continent. To each of the males he said, "I am a benevolent god, but I have been offended and you must all suffer the consequences. The females no longer give me pleasure; therefore, they can and must no longer give you pleasure. You will mate with them no more."

The males nodded obediently.

To the females he said, "You no longer give me pleasure; this is a sacrilege and must be punished. You will not mate with the males from this day forward. There will be no more mating, and there will be no more children."

The females nodded obediently.

And there was no more mating, and there were no more children.

Paxton continued to direct work on the tapestry for another four years. Then, on a night of deep and impenetrable blackness—the black, the black!—he stood screaming and trembling; but before the first light came, he fell down and was silent. Hours passed, and he could not stand again, he could not move; the realization came that he was dying. The knowledge filled

him with a great sadness—the tapestry was still not complete, there was so much more to be done—but he was not afraid.

One of the natives came to him with food, and Paxton instructed him to summon all males and females and children on the continent; the male left immediately. Paxton waited, and his people began to arrive, but less than half had come when he knew he could wait no longer. With great effort he raised his head and let his voice ring loud and clear.

"I must leave you now, in the physical sense," he said. "But I will always be here, I will always be watching you and what you do. You must never disobey any of my commandments. You must continue the great work I have assigned you, to the best of your abilities. Finally, when all are assembled, you must take my husk to the High Mountain and lay it there beneath the snows, where the free winds blow."

The natives, weeping, said that it would be done.

And Paxton died.

And it was done.

Each and every one of the natives remembered the last words of god, and heeded them well. They continued his great work to the best of their abilities. They lived alone, and they did not mate; they broke none of his commandments.

Ninety-one years later, one hundred and twenty years after the coming of god, the last of them died and the race was extinct.

The second Earth ship did not reach Paxton's World until sixty-two additional years had passed. It was an Explorer, equipped with the new and ultra-sophisticated Wilshefski Drive, and it was one of a team of ships engaged in the task of extending the boundaries of the frontier. The population of the universe was expanding at a staggering rate, and there was always a need for fresh, inhabitable planets. Too, there was a constant necessity for a wide variety of significant natural resources.

And so this ship came, and found the planet to be capable of sustaining human life, and landed in a mead-

ow not far from the High Mountain. Among the disembarking members of its crew were the Captain, who had spent thirty long years in space, and a young exoethnologist-exobiologist, part of whose job it was to investigate any extinct civilization so as to determine if its extinction had been caused or precipitated by some factor which could ultimately prove harmful to colonists.

The ship was there for one full week, while the exoethnologist and others of the crew toured the continent. On the seventh day, the young man returned to the ship and went in to see the Captain in his private quarters.

"The race that once inhabited this world, and not so long ago, defies all laws of probability," he said. His voice was grim. "My God, their civilization was utterly incredible!"

"How do you mean?" the Captain asked.

"The race was a primitive one, as I told you initially; that much was simple to determine. But even in the most primitive of alien societies, there's a purpose, an apparent evolution—a pattern, however intrinsic. Yet here, there is nothing of the kind. Everything is a monstrous crazy-quilt, contradiction built upon contradiction. Nothing makes sense, absolutely nothing at all. That has to be the reason the race died out, though we can find no specific evidence among all the chaos. But that's not the point; the point, damn it, is that the race should never have evolved in the first place!"

The Captain frowned. "You come across a great many strange things out here . . ."

"Of course," the exoethnologist said. "But each and every one of them has a clear scientific explanation. When we get back to Base Two, I intend to request intensive scientific research. There's a logical answer to this enigma, as there is to all enigmas, and you can be certain that the combined efforts of Science will succeed in solving it."

But the exoethnologist was wrong; the combined efforts of Science never did.

Somewhere, perhaps, Paxton has enjoyed a fine

laugh. But the irony is double-edged, far sharper on one side than on the other, and he would not have laughed for long.

The planet which is now called Lukas I was discovered by mineralologists to contain the richest deposits ever found of Valarium and fissionable Borium, two elements vital to the manufacture of the Wilshefski Drive. Scientists are already calling Lukas I the singularly most important world in the galaxy for the continued advancement of spatial exploration. In addition, it has been cleared for colonization and the first mass of colonists is already beginning to gather. Advance robocrews are on their way to commence massive mining operations, to prepare the land for the construction of cities and laboratories and robo-factories—and to erect a modern spaceport in the shadow of the High Mountain.

Oblivious to all mortal beings and all manner of gods, ineluctable Science marches on.

FEAST

by Roger Elwood

I once heard tinkling music. It was the sound of my son's birth, his cries as he—

The rattling sound of an old woman, her lungs gasping for air, her face sunken and parched, the skin splitting with red edges and—

ALL REGULAR PROGRAMMING IS INTERRUPTED FOR A SPECIAL BULLETIN FROM WASHINGTON, D.C.
(whir-click-whhhh)
THE FOOD SHORTAGE SITUATION IS NOW SO SEVERE IN INDIA THAT CANNIBALISM IS BECOMING WIDESPREAD.

(The streets were littered—bones picked dry, the scraps long since grabbed between rat-teeth and scurried away to be munched before the sun—)

Mommy, Mommy, where are you? Mommy, Mommy, I'm afraid.

—Here, son we've found some food. Take it. It's fresh.

But, Mommy, I—I want Mommy.

—Eat, son. We don't know when there will be more.

It started in India but it spread quickly everywhere.

I remember. I remember what I was forced to do before we came here. I went to the store and bought kidney, tongue, severed leg, fresh, from the hospital, tender—babies who could never have made it, what good was it just burying their bodies no good at all, they helped the shortage and—and we, all of us, even grew to like——(broiled thigh was my favorite, it——)

The plant was really an old warehouse. Bodies were shipped in by the cartload—dogs, cats, sparrows, horses, kinkajous, anything that had flesh. The heads were chopped off, the intestinal tracts were scooped out —the feathers pulled, the skin ripped thhhhhhhhhh hhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh

A little boy, maybe five or six years
old, came running down the alleyway.
He tripped and fell, knocking over a
large barrel.
Three hours later, his mother went
looking. She found him, his eyes wide
in shock, his body almost smothered
in heads and eyes and sparrow-guts
and cats
and

Her breath rasps even more now. She is hungry. The pain of her hunger brings death closer. She wants to die. Her swollen stomach

Memories. Quick, spinning.

We met and fell in love and married and she gave birth and the baby died and we sold him for 89¢ a pound.

Martha, let me hold your hand, dear.

—The pain! I can hardly bear it. Is my fever still high?

Yes, my love. It won't be long now.

(Tears stream down her cheeks. She touches my forehead weakly.)

—I'm so glad I won't be a burden any longer.

I sit back and wait. (Where am I? Oh, yes, I am in a cabin. Nobody knows we're here. If they did—)

(The newsreel showed The Great Nursing Home Massacre. It started as a protest, with demonstrators carrying placards: THEY EAT MEAT WHILE THE REST OF US DO WITHOUT. THEY'RE DYING ANYWAY. WHY LET THEM LINGER?

And so on.

(Tempers flared. The home was rushed. The elderly dragged out. Their bones broke easily; the skin was tough but the marrow tasted sweet. The eyes were swallowed in a gulp. Those that still lived could only gurgle when their tongues were torn out. Some of the demonstrators even drank the blood, and it soon covered them from head-to-foot. Police were called, but that was a time of especially acute shortage and there was no room left in the jails and demonstrators didn't taste too bad.)

She breathes hardly at all now, my Martha.

Our second son is out hunting, but he probably won't find anything. Nobody does any more.

I get to my feet. My joints scream. I walk to the door and outside, looking up at the empty sky and then at the barren trees. The birds are gone. The squirrels have long since been digested and spewed out in mountains of dung and pools of urine. Nothing is left. I heard on the old radio, before the battery went dead, that in the cities jungle warfare reigns. Savage bands haunt Broadway and linger in Pershing Square, and Old Chicago is but a mass slaughterhouse (as they all are now) of decapitated heads thumping to the cement, going *squash* like sun-rotten melons and splintered bones crack as skulls give way and gray brain matter becomes prime sirloin.

Forest Lawn is all dug up.

Martha is a few minutes from death. If only she had some red meat. If only the blood could drip down her throat and give her strength. But I brush the foolish thought away and let love die in reality.

Governmental incompetence . . poor management ifififififififififififif

And the gluttons, slobbering their way to disaster, wasting and stuffing and—dear God, don't they see what's coming? Don't they—?

Our second son is off in the distance. He has nothing. I knew he wouldn't find a kill.

—What do you want, miss?
Prime rib.
—We're out of that. (A shortage, you know.) How about T-bone?
Great. Try to make it leaner this time, though. That last steak had a little too much fat.
—How many pounds?
Oh, maybe 50 or so.
—That many, huh?
Yeh, what we don't eat, the dogs get.

A fire. Warm. Two men bundled up against the winter chill. Over the fire the sizzling sound of meat on a spit.

Conversation: "Ever tried it before?" "No. This'll be the first time." "Hear tell it's pretty good." "Maybe so, but never thought I'd be sinking my teeth into nigger meat."

An orphan wanders the streets of London. He cries, but no one answers. He wants his mommy, he wants his daddy, but he cannot find them. He rubs his fat little stomach and remembers, and his laughter bounds off the buildings and echoes down through the sewers.

The blind man—

The smiling mongoloid

The deaf mute

Skewered over flames in Central Park. And those who did the skewering

My throat is dry. I go to the ice box. I take out the glass containing the red liquid.

I lift it to my throat. It is warm—the icebox has long since ceased to perform—sticky, but a little thin.

I turn to Martha—to the tube in her arm.

Our second son is closer . . .

Martha's eyes close. Her breathing stops.

Her grip on my arm loosens.

Knock.

He enters. He takes the red meat from my outstretched hand. He smiles.

And we begin the feast that society has forced upon us.

STREAKING

by K. M. O'Donnell

So I take myself to the infirmary where the girl who ran briefly naked across campus is spending this night and under protection of darkness slip to her bedside where I find her lying quite awake, her eyes fixed open on the ceiling, and say, "I'm conducting a survey. Why did you do it?"

She looks at me bleakly, not discomfited since my voice, as is characteristic with most I address, seems to come from inside her own head and she takes me to be a fragment of her own personality rather than that stark and quizzical spirit which I know myself to be. "It's a fad," she says. "Everybody's doing it, and I thought that it was time for a girl to do it, too. It wasn't much. I just took off all my clothes and left them on the chapel steps, see, and then I ran toward the gymnasium. It was at one-thirty on a Thursday, a slow time, between classes, and I didn't think that more than three or four people would see me. But when I started running back from the gymnasium I could see this whole crowd and someone taking pictures. I think they're going to be in the paper tomorrow."

"Yes," I say gently, "of course, but you haven't answered the question, I think. I seek discovery, not description. Why did you do it?"

She shrugs; the little motion sends little puffs of dust circling into the air, particles which, with my keenness of vision, I can sense even to their agony of displacement. Everything which is part of this earth is sentient; any fool should know this. "It's kind of a thing now. If

I didn't do it, some other girl would have. So I wanted to be the first."

"But why?" I say. Leaning forward, rubbing my invisible palms together, I have been deserted momentarily by my characteristic dispassion; in fact I have forgotten myself and seem to be filled with a dim excitement. "Why did you want to be the first girl?"

Her vision flicks; she looks away from me. "What are you," she says, "a pervert?"

So I watch the revels at the University of the North the next day, or perhaps it is two days after, time having little significance to me, as several hundred freshmen and sophomores, clothing under their arms, run naked from the mathematics building to old Sherwin Hall and then back again. Television trucks from the local station are there, reporters, a few men in clerical dress with bitter expressions. Also coeds, although not as many as I would have thought, the Dean of Women having threatened severe action for any girl suspected of participating or encouraging the spree. Although the University of the North is a rather liberal university by today's standards, the Dean of Women is a dangerous and reactionary old woman who (no one now knows but me) will be forced by illness out of her position by the end of the spring semester. After the freshmen and sophomores reassemble at Sherwin and quickly don their clothing, some with embarrassed expressions, I pursue a group of them to an off-campus bar where some time later I join their discussion in the garb of a middle-aged laborer with a kindly expression. "But why did you do it?" I say.

One of them looks at me narrowly. "None of your business, pops," he says. The others giggle. "Because it's there," he says. "It's like telephone-booth stuffing or goldfish, right?"

"But three years ago you were rioting," I say, "you were burning the campus as a symbol of injustice and repression. Why this now?"

"Some kind of damn moralist," another says, "that's all you are." He looks into his beer meditatively and takes a bitter swallow. "Anyway, that wasn't us," he

says. "That was another generation, another time. We weren't here then. *We* wouldn't have been into that stuff."

"It represents progress," the third says, and then as he notes my somewhat ironic expression says, "or maybe not progress, depending on how you look at it, but it's our lives, right?"

"Right," I say mildly.

"Then why don't you shove off?"

"I will," I say, "I am. I was just curious."

"Get lost," the first says. I can tell that he is embarrassed and that his defensive posture renders him more dangerous than simple hostility would be. "It's our life."

"Oh," I say gently, "I agree absolutely."

Walking from the bar still in disguise I am stricken with a madman's temptation to doff my own clothing and stream from them naked, but this will not do, of course—not yet—and my slow, lumbering gait carries me easily toward the door, from which I instantly depart, still meditating.

So I reassemble to find myself standing next to a nervous boy who is standing unnoticed in the empty wing of a college auditorium; on the stage a Congressman is haranguing the audience about its failure to respond to cues in its inner and outer lives, cues for action. The Congressman is calling for action, but only of the most reasoned sort. The boy, who plans to run naked across the stage in front of the Congressman in thirty seconds, opens his belt buckle and allows his trousers to slip to the floor, kicks them off, then opens his shirt.

"What are you going to accomplish?" I say.

"A certain notoriety," the boy says, "a certain momentary fame. The first to streak a political speech in the state. I consider it a political gesture."

"But it's senseless," I say, "it's only going to get lost in the sensation—any political significance, that is."

"I want the sensation," the boy says. He swallows determinedly and takes off his shirt. "I mean, what better way to do it? Anyway, somebody paid me a

hundred dollars for this, and I don't want to give it back."

"So you admit you're doing it for profit?"

"I admit nothing," the boy says. He drops the last of his clothing, stands only in his socks, takes several deep breaths, inhaling unevenly. Small droplets of sweat may be detected along his limbs. "It's something that has to be done," he says. He takes a massive gulp of air and as the speaker pounds home some devastating point on the rostrum, runs out onto the stage away from me. The dark heart of his buttocks recedes.

It would be interesting to stay and see what happens then, but suddenly, stricken by an idea, I find myself turning from there with a sense of mission.

So I go to the offices of the college chaplain and enter into a discussion with him. The chaplain nods solemnly. "I absolutely agree," he says, "I've been thinking of this for a few days now. It's going to be the subject of my next sermon."

"It isn't corruption," I say excitedly, in the throes of my idea, "and it isn't abandonment of reality either. It's something else."

The chaplain nods. "I was thinking that it might be a generalized sense of rage or impotence," he says, "against which the naked, vulnerable human form by being juxtaposed bears witness to that helplessness. Or then again it may be a mockery of manners which are felt to be oppressive."

I shake my head. "I'm sorry," I say, "I'm truly sorry, but that isn't it. That isn't the point. It's something else entirely."

"Is that so?" the chaplain says. Indulging himself and for the sake of argument, he acts as if I were real (which to him I am not) and decides to engage in disputation. "Then tell me what it is."

"It is what it is," I say, "that's all."

"I don't understand."

"It has no explanation. It merely exists."

"Beg pardon."

"The dancer and the dance," I say somewhat vague-

ly, "the shadow and the act. They cannot be separated; they are bound together."

"You deny sin."

"No, not if it is intertwined with the action."

"Then you deny the very principle of causality."

"Perhaps," I say, "but then if there is no cause, there can be no causality. Neither stimulus nor response. Twitches. Twitches up and down the range of possibility."

The chaplain shakes his head. "This is very puzzling," he says, "too difficult for me. It is a sophistry. Nevertheless I will think about it and perhaps incorporate it into my sermon tomorrow."

"It won't do you any good," I say, more insights flowering within me, popping open like buds. "None whatsoever."

"Leave *me* to decide that," the chaplain says. "After all," he says with a little rumble, "we must do something to stop this. What does this say about our standards? Declining standards, that is. Why at this rate with an increasing tolerance for public nudity we might lose all standards before we know where we are."

"Dancer and the dance. Shadow and the act. Poem and the rhythm," I say, and before the chaplain can say anything further I have gone away from there quickly, dispersed into the smoke, leaving him to ponder this and other questions which I know he will raise through the night.

So the next morning (even though it does not matter) I appear in the chapel just before the sermon and stand there smirking behind a pillar as the chaplain comes wavering to the lectern, braces himself there, and begins to speak. The audience is sparse, as it almost always is for services of this routine type, but there are nevertheless a hundred students, faculty, and staff scattered through the shell of the auditorium, not one of whom—I know with my infinite perception—has ever participated or would consider participating in the act that he is about to condemm.

"I am about to condemm an act," the chaplain says.

I nod. This is the best way to approach the matter. Without ambivalence.

"I refer to a shocking and dangerous act dismissed too often as juvenile which has already swept through —"

Abruptly my attention releases. It is, after all, so predictable. Besides, I have other things to do. Up until this moment I was not sure why I had come, even what had underlain (I must be frank here) my quest. Now I do. It has come upon me and I am seized by conviction.

"Our standards are collapsing," the chaplain says. "The Bible itself points out that Adam and Eve knew their nakedness, and their nakedness was shame."

I feel tinkling laughter overtaking me. It is like little bells being run through the spaces of my flesh. But I am too busy otherwise, doffing my garments, to pay attention to this outburst . . . which fortunately is unheard as I am yet invisible. "We are parading the spectacle of our shame," the chaplain says.

The last of my garments is off. I nod solemnly, agreeing with the sense of what he has said. Truly he has not failed me; he has pondered this sermon all night, and much of what he says is true.

"If we display our nakedness, we dissolve all dignity in shame, all differences in bestiality," the chaplain says.

I nod again. He is making much sense. Quickly I render myself visible. At the same time I can, of course, be heard. My laughter draws attention. All of the congregation turns to look at me. Transfixed, the chaplain follows the line of their gaze. He stares.

"I don't—" he gasps.

"I don't either," I say. "I don't either."

And then I streak. From pew to aisle to pulpit to symbol I run naked, dodging little currents of wind that eddy at me, touch the chaplain a springing touch on his robes, which causes him to shrivel just as it fills me with exaltation . . . and then laughing, laughing, I spring like smoke into the darkness above and barking like the Hound of Heaven leave behind me in a whisk the shouts of my betrayal.

THE LAST CONGREGATION

by Howard Goldsmith

The minister rose upon the rostrum, his features contorted, his eyes turned inward, his lips curved in a sorrowful downward arc.

He stood before the last congregation on Earth. Their heads were bowed in solemn prayer.

The minister's voice rang out. Each sentence was punctuated with a sharp susurrus of pain.

"My words will be brief, as our time is brief.

"It devolves upon us, the final heirs of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, to leave a permanent record of our religious faith.

"We have seen our Bibles burned, our churches looted, our icons smashed. Barbarian hordes have overrun our moribund cities, pillaging and plundering in the wake of nuclear devastation.

"Through the centuries our abiding monotheistic creed has been ridiculed as self-delusion, the comforting atavistic belief of simple, animistic creatures.

"Our progenitors had been asked to adopt the concept of a mechanistic universe operating according to invariant mathematical laws. The universe, they were told, had evolved through chains of inevitable physico-chemical reactions. Yet no explanation of the ultimate derivation of prestellar cosmic matter was offered. It was to be accepted as given: it had simply preceded creation.

"Our ancestors' sense of a transcendent universal consciousness was decried as illusory mysticism. God was dead, by which it was meant that He never lived. How, it was demanded, could God exist without the

dimensions of a material object? Did not every body occupy space, have length, width, volume? Were not forces even invisible to the human eye still capable of measurement? Miracles, so-called, were natural phenomena around which fables had been invented to demonstrate the manifestation of a nonexistent God.

"In His place was substituted an existentialist faith in man as the self-sufficient implement of his own future. Yet this faith soon devolved into nihilistic despair.

"It was succeeded by a philosophy of humanism shorn of religious values. But, as we know from history, this too proved insufficient to stem the downward spiral of hope. Anarchy rushed in to fill the spiritual vacuum left by the renunciation of religion. Political sovereignties clashed in a naked contest for power.

"And tides of war were loosed on the world, followed by the submersion of civilization."

The minister halted and bowed his head. His voice dropped to a vibrant thrum.

"And so we gather now for the last time, the heirs of an ancient discarded faith. The wreckage of organized society lies about us. The invaders stand outside our gates.

"We leave for future ages our most precious possessions: our microdot Bibles. I pray that some other race will make better use of them."

The minister sat down. A silence fell upon the congregation. It consisted of miniature robots encased in a plexiglass church.

Several seconds later, the robot minister rose upon the rostrum, his features contorted, his eyes turned inward, his lips curved in a sorrowful downward arc.

Once again he spoke:

"My words will be brief, as our time is brief.

"It devolves upon us, the final heirs of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, to leave a permanent record of our religious faith . . ."

A Neo-Neanderthal stood with his face pressed against the miniature plexiglass church. His uncomprehending frown suddenly twisted into a grimace of angry consternation. He raised his club and sent it crashing down repeatedly upon the case, smashing it to pieces.

Then, swinging his club over his shoulder, he strode out of the half-demolished building bearing the strange markings: MUSEUM.

BEFORE A LIVE AUDIENCE

by Jerry Sohl

It has always seemed incredible to me that when man first walked on the moon there were people who saw it on television who said it wasn't happening, that what they were really seeing was a Hollywood production, nothing more. No amount of evidence—newspaper stories, pictures taken on the moon, and interviews with the astronauts themselves—was ever able to soften those hardened to this disbelief.

That is why I now say to those of you who don't believe what you saw on the Murray Murcheson Show, which is my television talk show, that you are in the same category, for I can tell you it really did happen; I was there, and I was every bit as surprised as any viewer. Besides, it was videotaped before a live audience.

The network people felt as many of you did, that it was a big put-on, that I did it with mirrors, or that I did personal mayhem on Dr. Sybil Lantry (and I will admit that I have since nutured such urges!), but when the police came and demanded to know what had happened and I was forced to make depositions and was, for a time, suspended by the network because of the incident, then everybody was forced to consider the possibility that perhaps, after all, it really did happen.

Well, it *did*. And now, after some months of work on my own and a considerable expenditure of time and money (the project was funded by the network because the network wants a clean slate every bit as much as I do), I am able to present to you all the facts—or perhaps I should say evidence—I was able to gather, so you can judge for yourself.

That there was more between Dr. Lantry and David Carpenter than Dr. Lantry wanted us to believe, I am sure of now. And yes, I realize you're wanting to know: I believe David Carpenter *did* come from the future. If that makes me mentally off, then so be it; it comforts me to know that I have a lot of company. I also believe Dr. Lantry had an ulterior motive for coming on the show. By exhibiting the artifice, the fris, I think she was hoping to contact others from the future (yes, I *do* believe they are among us!). To me, the fris was then only an egg-shaped clutter of gears, wheels, knobs, and little flashing lights that looked as if it were put together by a mischievous child and powered by a dry cell. To Dr. Lantry it was obviously a priceless vehicle for traveling in time, if she could only learn how to work it.

I was fooled by its size. As you saw on your screen, it was hardly bigger than an ostrich egg. But then, fifty years ago, had I been alive then, I would have been fooled by the size of a printed circuit, plus what it could do.

I think I was taken in by Dr. Lantry (I may seem very sophisticated on the show, but that's show-biz veneer, believe me) because she was a psychiatrist, which was a big thing in itself, but what really sold me on her as a guest was her claim of having innovated a new and controversial treatment for psychoses which she kept writing to me about.

I knew very little of psychiatry (and still do) and so I was an easy mark and told the staff to give her a time. I didn't see her before she left the holding room to step out from behind the curtains to be seen by more than twenty-five million people if you can believe the Nielsons. She was a large woman, taller than I thought she'd be, with jet-black hair pulled back into a severe bun, and cold gray eyes—well, you know whereof I speak if you were watching that night. Anyway, I've edited down the audio transcript to get to the salient points, picking up right after the introduction and the initial exchanges.

Murray: People have been telling me about a new

treatment you've devised for mental illness, Dr. Lantry. If you'd care to elaborate, maybe I can learn something I could use in dealing with my staff. *(Laughter)*

Lantry: I am a believer right out of Szasz, Murray. There's no such thing as mental illness.

Murray: If there's no such thing, then how do you develop a new treatment for it? *(Laughter)* You sound like my producers. They're always making strange statements like that. *(Laughter)*

Lantry: There's just irresponsibility.

Murray: I've seen a lot of that around here. *(Laughter)* Tell me what I can do about it. *(Laughter)*

Lantry: You take their goodies away. *(Laughter)*

Murray: Oh, they wouldn't like that. *(Laughter)*

Lantry: All humor aside, Murray, what I do is withhold privileges for irresponsible behavior. For example, television—

Murray: *(Overlap)* Not television! *(Laughter)*

Lantry: —meals, movies, live programs, comfortable living quarters, food . . .

Murray: When they shape up, you return the three-day passes, is that it? *(Laughter)*

Lantry: That's exactly it, Murray. *(Applause)*

Although people applauded Dr. Lantry's law-and-order prescription, there was something about Sybil Lantry I was not liking, and I didn't think it was that. I've since learned that she was an ardent feminist, which is all right, though I have grown to dislike militancy—mostly, I suppose, because I deal in or with it all the time. But there was something *else*. She kept talking about Pleasant Oaks, which was the sanitarium she was the head of, and at the time I thought it was just an advertisement for herself, and I wondered: why does she think she needs it?

In retracing the events that brought Dr. Lantry to the show, all avenues led to David Carpenter. Why David arrived here in this, our time, I don't know. If it hadn't been for his unfortunate accident, I am sure he would have accomplished his job and returned to the future, none of us the wiser. Yes, I know you're wondering, so I'll say it: Murray Murcheson thinks people

from the future come back to our times for study, perhaps for kicks, but he doesn't know just why. I do know I could not have (certainly would not have) written these lines a year ago. Time and experience change a man.

What I think happened is that David appeared on Sunset Boulevard—*materialized* is perhaps a better word—in front of Orville Hamilton's Mercedes-Benz, which struck him. But let Mr. Hamilton tell it as he told it to me:

"I was traveling about thirty-five miles per hour westbound on Sunset late in the afternoon when suddenly from out of nowhere appears this young man right in front of me. He looked as startled as I was. I slammed on the brakes, skidded in a straight line for twenty feet—the Benz is a wonderful car in a skid—but I still couldn't help striking him head-on and knocked him down.

"Police arrived, the ambulance came and went, my statement was taken, but I wasn't cited. Still, I felt terrible about it. At the hospital, they told me this young man who said his name was David Carpenter but had no identification to prove it suffered shock and a bad shaking up, though no bones were broken. I insisted he stay at the hospital and that all possible tests be run to make sure there was no disablement.

"But as days passed and I visited him, even I was able to see there was something wrong. He seemed rational, yet he didn't know exactly where he was, who the President was, what the month, day, or even the year was, and didn't want to guess. So I ordered and paid for more extensive tests—angiocardiograph, tests for what they said might be responsible, a subdural hematoma, whatever that is—but David Carpenter came through them all right and soon had the answers to the previous questions.

"As President of Hamilton Oil, you see, expense was no deterrent to me, and neither was time, so I became friendly with the young man. I suppose it was guilt I felt. Right after the accident, when he was in a daze at the hospital, he kept asking for Latterby, and later, when he was as recovered as he was ever to get, I

asked him who this Latterby was, but he just looked at me with a blank stare. I thought that would interest you. It interested me, too.

"When he skipped out of the hospital to go to the scene of the accident to pick up that plaything of his, I regretfully had him committed to Pleasant Oaks. I knew Dr. Lantry and I'd heard good things about her, and I told her I would foot the bill no matter how long it took to bring David around. I think it's unfortunate that she was unable to make any progress with him, as good a doctor as she was. But I'll tell you this: I don't think there was much hope, especially when I saw him cradle that egg-like toy in his arms and wouldn't let anybody touch it. I'm sorry everything ended the way it did."

I do not believe the young man's name was David Carpenter; I think he called himself that in our time in an effort to remain unobtrusive. I do believe he thought he could take what was happening and bow out any time he wanted. In that, of course, he was wrong. He had not counted on Dr. Sybil Lantry. Although she did not lay a hand on him, I am sure she is responsible for his death.

Pleasant Oaks is the plush sanitarium you've heard about where the movie stars go to dry out or get straightened out. It's in the mountains north of Santa Barbara and is difficult to find because it's so well hidden. But the people there, both patients and staff, were cordial and cooperative when I visited the place. I was given free rein. I examined David's rooms (he was kept in progressively worse rooms as his behavior "deteriorated"), talked to people who knew him, and was allowed to photocopy his journal, which had been found after his death by one of the attendants, Nicholas Weathersby.

David wrote in code on toilet paper which he hid beneath his mattress. Why it never occurred to anyone at Pleasant Oaks that the code was a code is beyond me. They all thought it was just gibberish, all those lines like 023423125243130011034415l. The numbers don't look like much, I'll grant you, but when I gave them to Barry Ellinger at Zarko Data Sys-

tems in the Valley (Barry's a nut on math and cryptanalysis, anyway, aren't you, Barry?), he took time off and solved it for me.

"It's simple," he told me later, spreading the photocopies on his desk. "It's a five-unit permutation code just written out, that's all. Not even a six-unit, which would have been easier to work with and would have given him more latitude."

"What's he say, anyway?"

"Really wild, man. Far out. You'll really dig it." (Barry didn't talk like a math pro.) He told me he'd had it punched on tape and run off. Then he handed me a sheaf of papers along with my copies. "Have fun," he said, putting an arm around me and guiding me to the door. Evidently I wasn't as much fun as cracking a code. Actually, Barry's a busy guy.

Later, after I'd read it all, I called Barry. "Tell me, I know you said it's wild, but do you believe it?"

Barry was affronted. "Of course I believe it."

"That he's from the future and all that?"

"Murray, for heaven's sake, after what's happened, don't you?"

David Carpenter's way of writing—or should I say his way with numbers, since numbers is all he wrote—is weird, but no more weird than our way of writing would be to those who had nothing but Old English script as their vehicle for expression. The way David forms his numbers seems *labored,* however, and I have decided it's because, in those future times, people don't do much, if any, writing by hand.

In one of his early entries, David says, "If I had not been so disoriented by the accident I would have frissed out. But I didn't have the fris. It was still in the grass in the boulevard strip. Orville asked me who Latterby is. I must have been out of my head. I wonder what Orville would have done if I had told him." That was his first mention of the fris.

A later entry: "It seems I made a mistake in staying to study these people. I could have left any time, but now that I have been separated from the fris I have no other choice. If I had just one caleston, the people I see around me here at Pleasant Oaks would not be here.

Just one tratty caleston. But of course I must bide my time, make my observations, and not interfere. But sometimes, Latterby be damned, I want to change this horrible place." What a caleston is—or a tratty caleston—can only be imagined. I have thought about the context in which David uses it, and It think it must refer to a device or perhaps a measure of chemical or medicine which he would administer to cure the patients.

"Sybil wonders," he writes further on. He never refers to her by her professional name. "I had explained to her when I was first brought here the manner of my arrival in this time, but she did not believe it, and I was surprised. Lately she has been observing me guardedly. I ignore her, for I do not think it would be wise for me to be too aware of what she is up to, for when I first moved among the patients and talked to them, she was always calling me in to ask, 'Why did you say this?' or 'Why did you say that?' It doesn't do any good to deny it. When I have tried to lie or 'dummy up,' as the patients say to do, Sybil forces medicine on me. It is strictly alase. They have not yet passed the primitive era of chlorpromazine." Alase? Your guess is as good as mine. Obviously a derogatory term.

Hamilton went out to see him, and David tried to get him to persuade Dr. Lantry to return the fris to him. "I saw at once it was a mistake," David writes. "Orville thinks I am still disturbed. Sybil no doubt has told him my belief in coming from another time is part of my delusional system. What a pity it is! Orville thinks he is doing me a great service by paying for my 'treatment' here. He is a good man, but at this point in time, when the word of a doctor is law, there is nothing he can do."

One day, David wrote, he realized that Dr. Lantry took him seriously. That was when, for the first time, he was invited to her office in the evening. "Sybil has always mistaken my contempt for competition, but she knows what I want now. She called me in at night for a talk, offered me cigarettes, some brandy, whiskey and scotch, smiling all the while and telling me that she was going to move me to a room next to hers. That is when

I knew she knew, though I will never know what convinced her. If I remember my psychiatric history right, it might even be that she hoped to cure me by entering my so-called psychosis with me, but I doubt it. Something I had said or done had pressed the button of belief in her.

" 'Tell me, David,' she said warmly, the fris in her hand, weighing it and tossing it in the air, 'is it really what you say it is, a machine that can move you from one time period to another?"

"She watched me closely as I answered. I said, 'I have already told you that, Sybil.' Then she demanded, 'Then tell me how to operate it.' I smiled thinly. 'I'm sorry, but I could never do that.' She regarded me coldly, then tossed the fris in the air and let it fall to the floor. But that didn't bother me. Latterby insisted I have one of the best of the fris and I do believe this one is indestructible.

"Just the same, while I looked at it on the thick carpeting of Sybil's office, I weighed my chances of pouncing on it, but of course I would have to plot new coordinates and a new point in time, and I could never have done that before she could call attendants to take it from me. If I had punched it the way it was I would have been thrown in front of Orville's car, and I didn't want to go through that again. So I just sat there wondering how I was ever going to get it. All I can do is wait. I know my chance will come. It *must.*"

Dr. Lantry did not move him into the room next to hers, but moved him to a room smaller than the one he'd been in and cut some of his rations. When she saw him again in her office, she asked him if he'd changed his mind. "I told her I hadn't, and again she taunted me with the fris. I wanted to wrest it from her, but Sybil is a big woman and there is something feral about her that makes me hesitate. She is not like a woman of my own time. Sometimes I think she really wants me to try to get it from her so she can then take some kind of perverse pleasure in inflicting pain and hardship, for that is what she does to those who cross her. Sybil's idea of therapy is one of simple reward and punish-

ment. She would destroy the individuality of every person in this place."

David was not entirely without charm, as witness this passage: "Today I was open and truthful with her. She asked me about the world I'd come from and I told her, and as I did so, her gray eyes grew large and luminous. She looked truly beautiful then. It is true we are free and happy where I come from, and I really think Sybil would like to be free and happy, but she is too inhibited and a stranger to herself. She has not yet learned that happiness is something she must earn. She expects others to provide it, or that she will find it in a book, a secret way of being or of thinking. She does not know happiness is within her if she would only let it capture her as it has captured my people.

"When I finished and her eyes were glowing, she asked me again to tell her how to operate the fris. I told her I could not do that, that if I did she would be gone with it exploring other places and other times and probably would be ill-equipped to do so. Besides, what would I do in this world? I do not belong here. I do not want to be abandoned in this primitive place.

"I was not prepared for her anger. She struck me, knocking me from the chair. Then, as I lay on the carpeting, she kicked me in the abdomen and I vomited. I feel sorry for Sybil. She is sick. Sicker than any of her patients."

Nicholas Weathersby, the attendant at Pleasant Oaks who found the journal, a bright young man himself, was the person assigned to me when I visited the place. I asked him about David and he said, "He was a fine fellow, full of good humor, never complaining, always doing what you asked him."

"Was he crazy, do you think?"

Nick laughed. "No, but then, who is? It was one of Dr. Lantry's theories that none of them were mentally ill, and I believe it for I've seen her therapy work, as cruel as it was sometimes."

"What did she do?"

"She didn't actually *do* anything. What she did was *represent* something to the inmate population, and that

was an authority figure. She believed that people come to a place like this when they have lost faith in everything—in God, in their parents, in their country, in themselves—in whatever was really important to them. Dr. Lantry provided a surrogate faith, which was herself. She was the authority, and the patients got better when they looked to her as God, flag, parent, country, or what have you. It sounds strange, but I can tell you it worked."

"But not with David Carpenter."

"Well . . . " Nick, who was walking around on the lush green grounds with me, turned away. "He was a strange case. I don't think he should have been here, but then I had no say-so. All of us did what we could for him. As Dr. Lantry imposed more and more restrictions on him and made things more stringent, we smuggled things to the boy, like soap or bread or candy and cakes, until she found out about it. She threatened to fire us all if we didn't obey her, and since the pay here is good and the job not too difficult, none of us wanted to leave it, so we did as she said, though it tore our hearts out to do it."

"Where did David die?"

Nick stopped to look at me. "Do you really want to see that?" He seemed surprised.

I said I did, so we started out down a long path and came to a place where the grounds were less well kept up, and after a few hundred yards of weeds and unkempt bushes, we came to a bungalow and he produced a key to the padlock on the front door.

"This is it," he said, unlocking the door.

We went in. There was nothing there. No bed, no chair, nothing but a building with barred windows without any glass. I asked Nick where they had moved the furnishings.

"There never were any," he said stiffly. "She put him in here, and he had to sleep on the floor on a mattress cover but no mattress. He wound himself up in it at night."

"What did he die of?"

"Pneumonia."

That figured. It was a depressing place, and I was

glad when we got out into the sunlight and started back to the administration building. Nick said, "Things are better now that she isn't here any more." I could believe it. Anybody who would put a man in the bungalow without clothes, food or water . . . But I'd better let David tell you about that.

"Sybil called me to her office tonight and said she was asking me for the last time for information about the operation of the fris.

" 'I think I should spell it out for you, David,' she told me. 'If you don't tell me how it works, I am going to remove you room by room, building by building, to the final one in the woods where there are no beds, there is no food, no water, and there is a lock on the door. It may not sound bad to you now, but when a piece of clothing is removed from you each day, you will begin to think at night how foolish it was to resist such a simple request as mine during the day. Do you understand what I am saying to you, David?'

"I told her I understood but that it was no use, I could not do what she wanted me to, that I could never do that, that I would rather die first.

"Her eyes glittered with what I can only say was her hate for me. It saddened me to see it. 'Then you shall surely die, David.' She smiled. 'And for what? It would be neither good for you nor good for me.'

"I confess I was angered at this point. I said, 'Very well, Sybil.' I told her to take the fris in her hands and I said I was releasing the mind-lock I had on it, and she was happy to see that the wheels and gears now moved. She laughed. 'It's working,' she said. I told her it was merely unlocked, that it could now be set for geographical coordinates and a point in time. 'Where would you like to go?' She said she would like to go to the future, to an era that was like the one I had described to her, perhaps to that very one. I asked her how she would explain herself. 'There is a man named Latterby there,' I said. 'He would want to know what happened to me, and he would not be happy that you would have arrived in my place.' She said, 'Then send me to another like period.'

"I reached out my hands. 'Let me have it, then.' But

she was too clever. 'No,' she said. 'Just tell me what to do.' I told her. I had her set the coordinates I had in my mind. I had her set the point in time. Then we just sat there and I mind-locked the fris.

"Finally, she said, 'Well?' And when I said nothing, she said, 'Isn't there a button or something I push?'

"I could not do it. I said, 'I have mind-locked it again. I have decided to spare you the trip.' Then her face went white, and she said, 'Is that your answer?' I said, 'Yes, it is.' She said, 'Your answer for all time?' I said, 'Yes.' She blinked and said, 'Even unto your death?' I replied, 'Even unto my death.'

"She looked at me for a long time and then said I was free to return to my room, which I did. I told Nick some terrible things were going to happen to me, but he said he'd take care of me, he'd sneak things to me, but I feel he will probably be found out and the materials stopped.

"I am prepared to die, though it grieves me that I shall never see Latterby again."

Entries are briefer and more fragmentary from then on, describing mostly how Dr. Lantry demeaned him and withdrew all support, piece by piece, and moved him closer and closer to the bungalow.

"This is it," David writes after he reached the bungalow. "This is where I shall die. Nick has been reprimanded for bringing me things, and I see him no more. One of his last acts was to provide the materials so that I could record these last moments."

After several days: "I have had nothing to eat for three days, and the last of my clothes are gone, yet I feel remarkably well. Perhaps it is the euphoria that is the companion of the fast, as I have read. The worst thing is the thirst."

And then: "The worst has happened. This afternoon it clouded up, and I was looking forward to rain, hoping that I should somehow be able to catch some water, and thereby quench my thirst. It did rain, but it turned to snow and now, though I was able to wet my lips on the bars of the windows which ran with water, I have taken a chill and I know that I am not well and that my time has come."

Later writings tell of his fever and a visit from Dr. Lantry, which may have been real or hallucinatory:

"She stood there in the darkness, her fur coat wrapped securely about her, her breath a white plume in the cold night air as she told me there was still time, that she would provide the necessary antibiotics, that it was obvious I had a fever and probably would go into pneumonia, that I should think of myself, of a girl, of warm bodies and children. And then she was gone."

In the morning: "I am weak and my breath comes fast. The fever has gone, I think, but my lungs ache so I can hardly draw a breath, much less write this entry."

His last entry: "I am so glad that I set . . . " It goes no further.

Nick told me that after David died and was taken away, he, Nick, looked for and found the journal in the bungalow in a hole in the wall where a floor register used to be and where David must have thrust it after writing his last entry.

When I said I would like to see the journal and perhaps photocopy it, he shrugged and said I would be disappointed. "It's just numbers he was putting down, one after the other, numbers one through five." He shook his head. "I'll never understand why he did that. I thought he was writing his experiences, his thoughts. Many of them do, you know. Sometimes Dr. Lantry would even suggest it as a form of therapy. It's one way to get the patient's feelings out."

I told him I wanted to see the journal and copy it nonetheless, and now you know the result—as does Nick who telephoned not too long ago, when he heard, expressing his amazement to learn there was something to the numbers and how glad he was to have been able to help David. "It's too bad I wasn't allowed to do more." And: "I had no idea he was going to die, or I would have done something to stop it. As it was, I was just following orders."

Perhaps it wasn't Nick's fault, but there was a hauntingly—and depressingly—familiar ring about his words about how he was only following orders.

I didn't know any of this, of course, when Dr. Lan-

try came on the show. As I've said, she had propelled herself single-handedly into the limelight of the Murray Murcheson Show, and as you've seen, she and I engaged in the usual badinage which is my hallmark. But we finally did get around to what was on her mind in a serious way, as a presentation of part of the audio transcript again will show.

Murray: Some of my best friends have been to Pleasant Oaks. Perhaps even some of my staff. *(Laughter)* Though most of them still drink on the sly. *(Laughter)*

Lantry: We're not exclusively the dry-out station we're reputed to be. We have quite a few disturbed persons we're treating.

Murray: If you have some spare rooms, I have some likely prospects. *(Laughter)* Guys, if the shoe fits . . . *(Laughter)* But seriously . . . *(Laughter)* I mean it . . . Doctor, I imagine you've had some interesting cases out there.

Lantry: That would be perceptive of you, Murray. *(Laughter)* And that would be a surprise to me. *(Laughter)*

Murray: Do you intend to come back on this show —ever? *(Laughter)*

Lantry: I thought you'd never ask! *(Laughter)*

Murray: All right, I give up. Tell me, what's that thing you've put on the table, anyway? I know you must be itching to tell us all about it.

Lantry: Actually, I am. It belonged to one of my patients.

Murray: Can you talk about a patient? Or do I have to check with our legal department first?

Lantry: If I don't mention names, it will be all right.

Murray: So what's the gadget?

Lantry: The young man who made this said it was a time machine.

(She picked up the fris at this point and showed it to me. All I could think of was how to get her off the show.)

Murray: You've got to be kidding, of course. It looks like something out of Rube Goldberg.

Lantry: It *is* fascinating, isn't it?

Murray: If you like that sort of thing. Do those parts move?

Lantry: The patient set them, and I haven't been able to get them to move again.

Murray: Maybe the gears are frozen.

Lantry: Could you get a close-up so your viewers could get a look at it?

Murray: I suppose.

You will remember I told her to put it on the table so it would remain stationary. In the meantime, the man working Camera Three moved in for a closeup and the frame was filled with the egg thing and our voices were over the picture.

Murray: What are those numbers?

Lantry: Coordinates, I think.

Murray: Too many for a digital clock. *(Laughter)* Well, Doctor . . .

I figured we were losing viewers by the thousands, the network at the moment carrying nothing but an obloid of wheels and cogs. I wanted Dr. Lantry out of there, off the stage, so I could bring out our next guest, luscious Alicia Fathergill, who'd maybe bring back some of the viewers we'd lost.

It was at that point that Dr. Lantry leaned over, reached out and started to pick up the thing, putting a hand on one side and a hand on the other.

And that is when she disappeared. Right there before a live audience.

One second she was there . . . Then she was not.

You remember the havoc, the calls, the confusion. You remember how I played it straight, laughed like I knew it all the time, and how I had to practically pull Alicia Fathergill out there. I could see how pale she was even through the makeup they'd layered her with. That's why I held her hand until the end of the show. She was afraid she was going to be the next one to go. Her hands were like ice. So were mine. How I ever got through the rest of the show I'll never know, but I managed.

So now you know it all, except the last part, and that part is with Barry Ellinger, whom I saw again when I asked him to come to the studio projection room so I could have the tape run for him. I wanted to see what he'd make of it.

Barry's just like everybody else. He laughed in all the right places as the show went on, and he was also interested in the videotape process, and some of the engineers explained it to him when it was over.

"Barry," I said, interrupting. "Did you see anything?"

"See anything?" He turned from a deep and technical discussion. "Like what?"

"Well, you saw Dr. Lantry, didn't you?"

"Sure, I did. I saw her touch both sides of the egg when she picked it up. I think that completed the circuit."

"And then you didn't see her, right?"

"Right. When David died, the mind-lock was released. Is that what you're getting at? It's just luck she didn't handle it that way before. Otherwise she'd have gone before she ever got on your show."

"Where'd she go, Barry?"

"Go?" He looked at me blankly.

"Yes, *go.*"

He considered it. "You read David's material, didn't you?"

"Of course I did. According to him she must have gone to the future. I want to know where and when."

He blinked at me. "Is it important?" He saw my face. "All right, have them roll it again and let me sit by the controls. They say I can freeze-frame." He was learning fast. But that was Barry.

The projection-room lights went out, and we sat through it. Every once in a while he stop-framed, mostly when there was a clear view of the fris. When it came to the point where the fris occupied the entire frame he stopped it and studied the position of the wheels and the numbers. Then he signaled for the lights, at the same time picking up the phone, muttering to himself. He talked softly to someone at the other end. Then he put the phone down and turned to me. I

saw shock in his face. "You remember David's last entry . . . 'I am so glad that I set . . . '?"

"Yes, I remember. What does it mean?"

"He was dying, and he was saying he was glad he had set the coordinates the way he did, plus the point in time. You remember earlier, when the situation wasn't so critical with him, he couldn't let her go?"

I nodded. "What are you getting at?"

"Well, the point in time wasn't forward, Murray. It was back."

"Back?"

"Back." He referred to a piece of paper where he'd made notes while he'd been watching the screen. "What does the sixth of August, nineteen forty-five mean to you?"

"She went back to that date?"

"At eight o'clock in the morning. I called my office to check on the coordinates. They place her at ground zero beneath the atom bomb which exploded at eighteen hundred feet over Hiroshima a few minutes later." Barry was lost in his thoughts for a few moments as the awfulness of Dr. Lantry's predicament hit me. "She would have time to turn toward the B-29s that were headed for the city," Barry said. "She would look around, and see where she was. Dr. Lantry was no dummy. She would know where she was. She probably started running. While she was running, she probably had a few moments to think."

"I hope she thought of David Carpenter."

"So do I, Murray," Barry said grimly, making a ball of his notes and throwing them in a waste basket before he got up to go. "So do I."

Barry moved out, the door swishing closed behind him.

"Run it any more, Murray?" From the projection room.

"No," I said. "I never want to see it again."

I don't, either.

THE STORM

by Gardner Dozois

The sky had been ominous all that afternoon—a lurid yellow-green to the south, darkening overhead to blood and rust and soot. East, out over the ocean, there were occasional bright flashes and flares in rapid sequence, all without sound, as though a pitched artillery battle were being fought somewhere miles away and out of earshot. To the north and to the west, the sky was a dull dead black, like an immense wall of obsidian going up to heaven. The boy's house was silhouetted against that black sky, all slate and angles and old wooden gables, with a single silver light coming from the kitchen window. The house was surrounded by several big old horse-chestnut trees, and, to the boy, the moving silhouettes of their branches in the gathering wind seemed to be spelling out a message to God in some semaphoric sign language that he could recognize but not entirely understand. He wished that he could decipher the movement of the trees, because the same message was being whispered and repeated down through the long soughing fields of summer grass, and retold by the infinitesimal scraping of twig on twig deep in the tangled secret heart of the rhododendron and blackberry thickets, and rehearsed in a different register by the flying black cloud-scuts that now boiled out across the sky, and caught up and re-echoed and elaborated upon in the dust-devil dance of paper-scraps and leaves along the blacktop-and-gravel road to town. Spirits were moving. Something big was going to happen, and spirits were scuttling all about him through land and sky and water. Something big and

wonderful and deadly was coming, coming up from behind that southern horizon like a muted iron music, still grumbling and rumbling far away, but coming steadily on all the same, coming inexorably up over the horizon and into the boy's world. The boy wished with all his heart that it would come.

"You stay close to the house, Paulie," the boy's mother called from the kitchen door. "This's going to break soon."

The boy didn't need to be told that there was a storm coming, nor did he need to go into the screened kitchen porch to know how fast the barometer was dropping. If the testimony of the hostile sky were not enough, then he could feel the storm as an electric prickling all along his skin, he could almost reach out and touch it with his fingertips. He could smell it, he could taste it. It was in the air all around him; it crackled around his feet as he swished them through the grass, and it thrilled him to his soul. If the boy had been magically given wings at that moment, he would have flown unhesitantly south to meet the storm—because it was marvelous and awful and even the rumor of its approach awed the world, because it was the greatest concentration of sheer power that had yet come into his life. The boy had made a brief foray down to the sea wall a few moments before, and even the ocean had seemed to be subdued by the power of the storm. It had been flat and glossy, with only the most sluggish of seas running, more like oil than water, or like some dull heavy metal in liquid form.

"Paulie!" his mother repeated, more stridently. "I mean it now—don't you go running off. You hear me, Paulie?"

"Okay, Ma!" the boy shouted.

The boy's mother stared suspiciously at him for a moment, distrustful of his easy capitulation. She started to say something else to him, hesitated, shook her head, and almost wiped her face absent-mindedly with the dirty dust rag she was holding. She caught herself, and grimaced wearily. Her hair was tied back in a tight, unlovely bun, and her face was strained and tired. She

pulled her head back into the house. The screen door slammed shut behind her.

Released, the boy slid off through the trees.

With the canny instinct of children, he immediately circled the house to get out of sight. A moment later, his mother began calling him again from the kitchen door, but he pretended not to hear. He wouldn't go *very* far away, after all. His mother called again, sounding angry now. The boy wasn't worried. This side of the house was blind except for the windows on the second floor, and his mother would never go all the way up there just to look for him. She was easy to elude. Unconsciously, she seemed to believe in sympathetic magic: she would keep looking out the kitchen door for him, expecting to find him in the backyard because that was the last place she had seen him, and she couldn't really believe that he was anywhere else. The boy heard the front door open, and his mother called briefly for him from the front stoop. That was her concession to logic. Then the front door closed, and, after a moment, he heard her calling from the kitchen again. The boy had never heard of the Law of Contagion, but he knew instinctively that it was safe to play out front now. His mother would not look for him out in the front yard again. Somewhere inside she had faith in the boy's eventual reappearance in the backyard, and she would maintain an intermittent vigil at the kitchen door for hours, if need be, rather than walking back through the house to look for him again.

He sat down on the front lawn to think, well satisfied with himself.

There were other children in the neighborhood, but none of them were outside today. The boy was smugly pleased that he was the only one who had been able to dodge parental restraint, but after a while he began to feel more lonely than elated. Now that he had his freedom, he began to wonder what to do with it. He was too excited by the approaching storm to stay still for long, and that ruled out many of the intricate little games he'd devised to play when he was by himself, which was much of the time. The Atlantic was only a

quarter-mile from his kitchen door, through a meadow and a stand of scrub woods he knew in every twig and branch, and ordinarily he would have gone down there to hunt for periwinkle shells or tide-worn pebbles or to run dizzily along the top of the seawall. But the thought made him uncomfortable—it would be cheating too much to go down there. He'd promised his mother that he would stay close to the house, and he only meant to bend his word a little, not break it. So he set off down the road instead, kicking at weeds and watching the ominously spreading bruise in the sky that marked the distant approach of the storm.

The neighborhood was more thickly settled down this way. It was about four hundred yards along the road from the boy's house to Mr. Leidy's house, the next one down. But just beyond Leidy's house was Mrs. Spinnato's house, almost invisible behind a high wall of azalea and ornamental hedge, and beyond that were three or four other houses grouped on either side of a little street that led away from the main road at a right angle. The boy turned off onto the side road. It had a real paved sidewalk, just like in town, and that was irresistible. The road led eventually, he knew, to a landfill in a marsh where the most wonderful junk could occasionally be found, but he didn't intend to go that far today. He'd be careful to keep his house in sight across the back of Mr. Coggin's yard, and that way he'd be doing pretty much what his mother had said, even if the house did dwindle to the size of a matchbook in the distance. And he could do without the dump, the boy thought magnanimously. There were sidewalks and driveways and groupings of houses all along this road, and a hundred places to explore—no matter that he'd explored them all yesterday, they could very well all be different today, couldn't they?

After a while, he found a feather on the sidewalk.

The birds hadn't needed to be told about the storm, either, the boy thought as he nudged at the feather with his toe. They had all flown north and west that morning, rising up out of the treetops like puffs of vapor in the sun to condense into bright feathered clouds that stretched out across the sky for miles. Later, in another

county, it would rain birds. Pigeons, sparrows, crows, robins, jays, wrens, a dozen other species—the boy's world seemed amazingly empty without them. Even the gulls were gone. On an ordinary day you could almost always see a gull in the sky somewhere, rising up stiff-winged from the land as if on an invisible elevator, then tilting and sliding down a long slope of air to skim across the sea. They hung above the fishing docks in town in such a raucous, fish-stealing, thousand-headed crowd that the boy usually could hear the clatter and cry of it all the way out here. Today they had all vanished before noon. Maybe they had gone far out to sea, or way up the coast—but they were gone. All that morning the boy had watched the birds go, and the scissoring, semaphore beat of their wings in the sky had been the first thing to spell out the message that now the trees and all the world repeated.

He picked up the feather.

A few feet farther on, he found another feather.

And then another one.

And another.

With growing excitement, the boy followed the trail of feathers.

Surely it must be leading him to an enchanted place, surely there must be something mysterious and wonderful at the end of the trail: a magic garden, a glass house, a tree with a door in it that led to another world. He began to run. The trail led diagonally across a driveway and disappeared behind a garage. There were more feathers to be found now, two or three of them in each clump.

At the end of the trail of feathers was a dead bird.

The boy stopped short, feeling a thrill of surprise and horror and supernatural awe. Involuntarily, he dropped the handful of feathers he had gathered, and they swirled around his ankles for a moment before settling to the ground. The bird had been struck by a glancing but fatal blow by something—a car, a hawk—and it had fluttered all this way to die, shedding feathers across the sidewalk, fighting to stay aloft and stay alive and losing at both. This was the enchanted thing at the end of the trail: a dead pigeon, glazed eyes and

matted feathers, sad, dowdy, and completely unmagical. An emotion he could not name swept through the boy, making the short hairs bristle along the back of his neck. He looked up.

The southern sky was still a welter of lurid color, but there was more red in it now, as though blood was slowly being poured into the world.

Paul himself could not have told you why he first began to withdraw from the world. Breaking up with his fiancée Vivian—a particularly sordid and drawn-out process that had taken almost half a year all told—certainly had something to do with it. His best friend, Joseph, had recently become his most bitter enemy, and was now busy spreading poisonous tales about him throughout the rest of Paul's circle of acquaintances and colleagues. Much of the blame for these ugly affairs was unquestionably Paul's—paradoxically, that knowledge fed his guilt without abating in the least the hatred he now felt for Vivian and Joseph. Paul's father had just died, still bitterly unreconciled with his son, and that left an unpleasant taste in Paul's mouth. All his relatives were dead now. He had quit his job, ostensibly because he wanted to. But his career had been dead-ended by business adversaries, and he'd had no place to go in it but down. And he had been ill. Nothing major: just a case of flu—or rather, a series of flus and colds running in succession—that had stuck with him throughout the entire fall and early winter and had left him feeling wretched, dull, and debilitated. These were the obvious reasons, at least. There were probably hundreds of others that Paul himself did not consciously know about—small humiliations, everyday defeats, childhood tragedies, long-forgotten things that had settled down into him like layer after layer of sediment until they choked his soul with sludge.

Above all else, he lived in Manhattan, and Manhattan was a place that fed you hate, contempt, bitterness, and despair in negligible daily doses that—like cleverly administered arsenic—became cumulatively fatal.

Paul had an apartment on East Tenth Street between First and Avenue A, a neighborhood that is depressing

even at its best. In January, with the freezing winds skimming down the avenue like razors, and the corrugated gray sky clamped down like a lid, and the first sooty snowfall coming down over the frozen garbage on the sidewalks, it is considerably worse than 'depressing.' Even his seamy fifth-floor walkup began to seem a more desirable place to be than the frozen monochrome world outside.

He began to "stay in."

He had few friends left in the city any more, and certainly none who were worth sallying out through a Manhattan winter to visit. His bank balance was too low to afford him luxuries like movies or nightclubs or the theater, or even dining out. He had gotten out of the habit of going to the newstand for newspapers or magazines. He wasn't looking for work, so he didn't need to go out for job interviews. And he had become a bad-luck magnet—every time he left the apartment, disaster followed at his heels: he tore a ligament falling down the stairs, he sprained an ankle on a slushy sidewalk, he was bitten by dogs, drenched by the freezing gutter-water thrown up by speeding cars, knocked down by a bicycle on First Avenue, splattered with garbage, and mugged three times in two weeks. It seemed that every time he went outside now he caught another cold, and had to suffer out the next few days with chills and headaches and congestion. Under these circumstances, it was just easier to stay inside as much as possible, and even easier than that to let the days he spent inside turn themselves almost unnoticed into weeks. He fell into the habit of doing all his shopping in one trip, and planning frugal meals so that each carton of groceries would last as long as possible.

He no longer went out for any other reason whatsoever.

This self-enforced retreat of Paul's might eventually have turned out to be good for him if he had been able to do any work during it. He had ostensibly quit his advertising job in order to write a novel, but the typewriter sat idle on the folding table in the living room for week after week. It wasn't so much that he could think of nothing to write, but that everything he did put

on paper seemed banal, inconsequential, jejune. Eventually he gave up even trying to write, but left the typewriter set up in case sudden inspiration should strike. It didn't. The typewriter became covered by a fine film of dust and soot. He watched television almost continuously then, until a tube burned out in the set. He didn't have enough money to get it fixed, so he pushed the set against the wall, where it glowered out over the apartment like the glazed eye of a dead Cyclops. Dust settled over that, too. He read every book he owned, then read them again. Eventually he reached a point where he would just sit around the apartment all day, not doing anything, too listless even to be bored.

He didn't realize it, but he was changing. He was being worn away by an eroding process as imperceptible and inexorable as the action of the tide on soft coastal rock.

Now, when necessity drove him out on a shopping trip, the world seemed as bizarrely incomprehensible and overwhelming to him as it might have to Kaspar Hauser. Everything terrified him. He would slink along the sidewalk with one shoulder close to a wall for comfort, shrinking from everyone he met, his eyes squinted to slits against the harsh and hostile daylight or strained wide so that he could peer anxiously through the threatening shadows of night, and he would shake his head constantly and irritably to drive away the evil babble of city sounds. Once in the store, he would have to consciously remember how to talk, explaining what he wanted in a slow, slurred, thick-tongued voice, having to pause and search through his memory like a Berlitz-course linguist asking directions to the Hauptbahnhof. And he would count out the money to pay for his order with painstaking slowness, penny by penny, like a child. When at last he did get safely back inside his apartment, he would be trembling and covered with cold sweat.

At last, he made a deal with the landlord's teenage son: the boy agreed to deliver a cartonful of groceries to Paul's apartment every other week, for a price. For a few dollars more, the boy eventually agreed to pick

up Paul's rent check when it was due and deliver it to his father, and to carry the garbage downstairs a couple of times a month if Paul would bag it and leave it outside his door. In effect, this deal meant that Paul no longer had to go outside at all, for any reason. It was much better that way. Perhaps his savings would not hold out long at this rate, but he could no longer worry about that. It was worth it to have to cope only with a wedge of the world—the crack of a half-opened door.

Behind that door, Paul continued to erode.

Supper was beans and franks and brownbread. The boy didn't mind the beans and the brownbread, but his mother had insisted on boiling the frankfurters, and he hated them that way—he hated watching them plump up and float to the surface of the boiling water, and he especially hated the way they would split open and ooze out their pinkish innards when they were done. His mother had been making beans and franks a lot the past few months, because they were cheap and very quick and easy to make. Once she had made more intricate meals, but she was so distracted and tearful and busy lately.

Now she was always having to leave him to Mrs. Spinnato while she went into town unexpectedly, or talking on the phone for hours with her voice pitched low so that he couldn't overhear, or talking in that same low voice to Mr. Halpern the lawyer as she served him coffee in the parlor, or to her cousin Alice or Mrs. Spinnato or Mrs. DeMay in the kitchen, the *bss bss bss* of their whispering filling the air with moth wings and secrets.

And so supper was usually late, and he got beans and franks, or what his mother called "American chop suey," which was a frying pan full of hamburger and garlic powder with a can of Franco-American spaghetti dumped into it. Or TV dinner. Or hamburgers, or tuna-fish salad. Or spaghetti noodles with just butter and garlic on them instead of spaghetti sauce with ground meat. Any of which he liked better than boiled frankfurters, but his mother was still being mad at him for running off, and she wasn't in a mood to listen to

complaints or to let him get away without finishing his supper. So he ate, affecting an air somewhere between sullen and philosophical.

His mother ate only half of her own meal, and then sat staring blankly at the stove and pushing the rest of her food aimlessly back and forth on her plate. Too restless to sit down at the table, she had pulled a stool up to the kitchen divider to eat, and she kept getting up to pace across the kitchen for condiments she subsequently forgot to use. She had been packing and cleaning all day; her eyes were shadowed and bloodshot, and there was a grimy streak across her forehead. She had forgotten to take off her apron. Some hair had pulled loose from the bun she'd tied it in; it scraggled out behind her head like an untidy halo, and one thick lock of it had fallen down over her brow. She kept brushing it out of her eyes with absentminded irritation, as if it was a fly. She didn't speak during supper, but she smoked one cigarette after another, only taking a few nervous puffs of each before she stubbed it out and lit another. The ashtray in front of her had overflowed, spilling an ash slide out across the porcelain countertop.

The boy finished his supper, and, getting no response at all when he asked if he could be excused, essayed a cautious sortie toward the door. His mother made no objection; she was staring at her coffee cup as though she'd never seen one before. Encouraged, the boy pushed the screen door open and went out on the porch.

The lurid welter of color in the south had expanded to fill half the sky. The boy stopped on the bottom step of the porch, sniffing at the world like a cautious, curious dog. There was no wind at all now, but the crackly electric feel of the air was even more pronounced, as was a funny electric smell that the boy could not put a name to. The sun had been invisible all day; now it showed a glazed red disk just as it was going down behind the western horizon. It looked wan and powerless against that smothering black sky, as if it was no longer able to provide either heat or light—a weary bloodshot eye about to close at the edge of the world. But the landscape was bathed in a strange em-

pyreal radiance that had nothing to do with the sun, a directionless undersea light that seemed to come from the sky itself, and which illuminated everything as garishly and pitilessly as neon. In that light the big chestnut trees seemed dry and brittle, as if they were made out of coral. Their branches were still now, held high like arms thrown up in horror. There was a halcyon quiet everywhere. The world was holding its breath.

"Don't think you're going to run off again," his mother warned. She had come up behind him silently on the porch.

"I don't, Ma," said the boy, who had been thinking of doing just that. "I ain't going nowhere."

"You bet you aren't," his mother said grimly. She glanced irritably at the threatening sky, then glanced away. The eerie light turned her face chalk-white, made her lips a pale, bloodless gash—it almost seemed as if you could see the shadow of her bones inside her flesh, as though the new radiance enabled you to see by penetrating rays rather than by ordinary light. "The only place you're going now, young man, is up to bed."

"Aw, Ma!" the boy protested tragically.

"I mean it now, Paulie."

"Aw, Ma. It ain't even dark yet."

She softened a little, and came forward to rumple his hair. "I know you're excited by the storm, baby," she said, "but it's only a storm, and you've seen storms before, haven't you—this's just a bigger kind of storm, that's all." She smoothed down the hair she'd ruffled, and her voice came brisker. "Mrs. Spinnato will be coming over in a little while to help me pack the rest of the china, and I don't want you underfoot. And I know what you're like on a long car trip, and I don't intend to have you all tired and crotchety for it tomorrow. So you go to sleep early tonight. Get on up to bed now, young man. Scoot now! Scoot!"

Reluctantly, the boy let her herd him back inside. He said goodnight and went into the parlor, headed for the stairs. He felt spooky and oddly out-of-place in the parlor now, and he transversed it as quickly as he could. The furniture had been moved back against the

walls, and the room was full of boxes and cartons, some only partially packed, some sealed up securely with masking tape. Dishes and glasses and oddments were stacked everywhere, and the curtains had been taken down and folded. The parlor looked strange stripped of all its familiar trappings, knicknacks, paintings, lace doilies, things that had been there for as long as the boy could remember. Without them, the parlor was suddenly a different place, alien and subtly perverse. Seeing the room like that made the boy sad in a way he had never been before. It was as if his life was being dismantled and packed away in musty cardboard boxes. Tomorrow they were going to Ohio to live, because his mother had family there, and after that he wouldn't have a father any more. The boy didn't understand that part of it, because he knew his father was living in a house on Front Street, but his mother had told him that he didn't have a father any more, and somehow it must be true because he certainly wasn't coming to Ohio with them.

The boy went upstairs and changed into his pajamas, but before going to bed he got up on a stool and peeked out of the high bedroom window. The clouds in the southern sky had thickened and darkened, and they were streaming toward him like two great out-thrust arms. Although the trees outside were still not stirring, the clouds were visibly moving closer, as though there were a wind blowing high in the sky that had not yet reached the earth.

One gritty, rain-filled morning Paul was roused from a somnolent daze by a loud hammering at the apartment door. He swam up from the living-room couch, bewildered by the sound. Automatically, he crossed to the door, and then stood shivering and bemused behind it, his fingertips touching the wood. More pounding. He snatched his hand away from the vibrating door-panel, hesitated, and then looked through the spyhole. He could see nothing outside but a hulking, shapeless figure standing too close to the lens.

"You in there?" came a muffled voice from the corridor.

Cautiously, Paul opened the door a crack and peeked out.

It was the landlord. Behind him were two men in work clothes, hung about with tools and loops of wire cable.

Paul could not think of anything to say to them.

"We come in," the landlord said rapidly, without a question mark. "Gutter's clogged up ona roof ana roof's filling up with rain. Water's coming down inta the apartment down t'otha end d'hall. See?" He pushed forward, shouldering the door wide, Paul backpedaling to get out of his way. "Cain't reach it up 'are but maybe wecun git through ta t'sonuvabitch frumin y'apartment, right? Okayifwecumen," he said in one breath, and without waiting for an answer he was inside, followed by the two plumbers. They pushed by Paul and went into the kitchen.

In a daze, Paul retreated to the living room.

They were stomping around inside the bathroom now. "There's an airspace behind this bathroom wall here," one of the plumbers was shouting. "See, it used t'be a window and somebody plastered it over. We knock a hole through the plaster, we can get out inta the airspace and get a pump extension up to that outside drain on this side, right?"

The other plumber came back with a sledgehammer and they began knocking the bathroom wall down. They dragged in cables and a spotlight, an electric drill, and a long hose-and-pump contraption that came up the stairs and snaked all the way through the apartment to the bathroom. Soon the air was full of dust and powdered plaster, the smell of wet ceramic-covered pipes and damp old wood. The spotlight dazzled like a sun in a box. Machines whined and pounded and snarled; people shouted messages back and forth. The pump thumped and thudded, and made a wheezing, rattling sound like an asthmatic gargling.

Paul hid from this chaos in the living room. Occasionally he would peek out through the living room archway, trembling, aghast, gathering a ragged bathrobe tighter around him at the neck. The workers ignored him, except for a curious sidelong glance

every so often as they strode in or out of the apartment. Paul tried to keep out of their sight. He felt dirty and weak and unwholesome, like some wet pallid thing that had lived out its life under a rock, traumatically exposed to wind and sunlight and predators when the rock is rolled away.

At last, the workmen were finished, they gathered up their tools, rolled up their hoses and cables, and left. The landlord turned at the door and said, "Oh, I'll send somebody around in a couple days t'fix up the hole in the wall, okay, buddy?"

He went out.

Hesitantly, Paul emerged from the living room. The kitchen floor was crisscrossed with wet dirty footprints, and there were little puddles of dirty water here and there. There was a large, ragged hole in the bathroom wall, with gray daylight showing through it. Plaster and bits of lathing had fallen down into the bathtub and the toilet, and formed an uneven heap on the bathroom floor. There was a strong musty smell, like wet wallpaper.

Paul shivered and quickly retreated to the living room again. The broken wall filled him with shame and horror and helpless outrage, as if he had been raped, as if some integral part of him had been shattered and violated. He shivered again. It was no longer safe here. The rock ceiling had been torn away from his cave; his nest had been shaken down from the tree by the storm. He sat down on the couch and found that he couldn't stop shaking. Where did he have to go now? Where could he go in all the world to be safe?

The apartment was getting colder. He could hear the rain outside, dripping and mumbling past the hole in the wall.

Eventually the shakes stopped, and he could feel himself going numb. He would have given anything for a working radio, just to get some noise in the apartment other than his own spidery breathing, but he had gone through the last of his spare batteries weeks ago, and it had never occurred to him to have the landlord's son bring him some in the next grocery order. Instead he sat in the semi-darkness as the evening grew old

and listened to the distant sound of other radios and televisions in other apartments that came to him through the paper-thin walls: faint, scratchy, and tuned to the confusion of a dozen different stations so that nothing was ever quite clear enough to comprehend. They sounded like whispering Gödelized messages reaching him from star-systems millions of light-years away. Toward dawn the other radios were turned off one by one, leaving him at the bottom of a well of thick and dusty silence. He sat perfectly still. Occasionally the glow of car headlights from the street would sweep across the ceiling in oscillating waves. It was so quiet he could hear the scurry of a cockroach behind the burlap that covered the walls.

His mind was blank as slate. In spite of his enforced idleness, he was not doing any deep thinking or meditating or soul-searching, nor had he done any throughout the entire process. If any cogitation was taking place, it was happening on a deep, damaging level too remote and ancient to ever come under conscious review.

When he thought about it at all, he supposed that he must be having a breakdown. But that seemed much too harsh a word. "Breakdown," "cracking-up," "flying to pieces," "losing your grip"—they were all such dramatic, violent words. None of them seemed appropriate to describe what was happening to him: a slackening, a loosening, a slow sliding away, an almost imperceptibly gradual relinquishment of the world. A very quiet thing. A fall into soot and silence.

Dawn was a dirty gray imminence behind drawn curtains.

Outside it was by now a cold and gritty early spring, but Paul never noticed. He never looked out any of the windows during all his months of seclusion, not even once, and he kept the curtains drawn at all times.

A needle-thin sliver of daylight came in through the crack in the curtains. Slow as a glacier, it lengthened out across the floor to touch the couch where Paul sat.

A toilet flushed on the floor above. After a moment or two, a water tap was turned on somewhere, and the water pipes knocked and rattled all the way down the

length of the building. Footsteps going down the stairs outside Paul's door. Voices calling back and forth in the stairwell. A child crying somewhere. The sound of a shower coming from the apartment down the hall. And then, on the floor below, the first radio of the day began to bellow.

One by one, then, over the next two hours, all the radios and televisions came on again, and there was the Gödelized babble of the previous night, although because people played their sets more loudly during the day, it now sounded like a thousand demon-possessed madmen shouting in tongues from deep inside metal rain barrels.

Still Paul did not move.

He sat motionless as marble on his couch while the living room curtains bled from gray-white to shadow-black again, and day once more dissolved into night. Twice during the day he had gotten up to go to the bathroom, and each time he had returned to the couch immediately afterward. He had eaten nothing, nor taken any drink. Except for the occasional motion of his eyes as he sat in the darkened room, he might have been a statue, or he might have been dead.

The night slowly decayed toward morning. Once there was a shot and a series of piercing screams somewhere outside in the street. Paul did not stir or turn his head. The sound of screaming police sirens came and went outside the building. Paul did not move.

The radios and televisions faded one by one. The last radio whispered on in Spanish far into the night, and then it, too, died.

Silence.

When dawn shone gray at the window once again, Paul got creakily to his feet. His eyes were strange. He had gone very far away from humanity in the last forty-eight hours. He no longer remembered his name. He was no longer sure where he was, what kind of a place he was in. It didn't seem to matter—the apartment had become the world, the womb, the sum total of creation. The Continuum. It might as well have been Plato's cave, where Paul sat watching shadows on the burlap walls. A biological pressure touched off the fir-

ing of a synapse somewhere inside Paul's brain, and a deeply ingrained behavioral pattern took over. In response to that pattern, he shambled slowly toward the bathroom. His way led through the kitchen, which was still in deep darkness, as it was on the shadowed side of the building. Paul hesitated in the kitchen doorway, and a flicker of returning awareness and intelligence passed through him. He groped around for the light-switch, found it, and clicked it on. He squinted against the light.

Almost every surface in the kitchen was covered with cockroaches, thousands and thousands of them.

The sudden burst of light startled them and sent them into violent boiling motion. They came swarming up out of dirty cups and plates, up out of the sink, up out of overflowing garbage bags; they scuttled out across the kitchen table, across the floor, across the cabinet sideboard, across the stove. In an instant, the burlap walls were black and crawling with them as they scurried for their hidey-holes in the woodwork and the window moldings and the baseboards and the cabinets. Thousands of scuttling brownish-red insects, so many of them that their motion set up a slight chitinous whisper in the room.

Disgust struck Paul like a fist.

Shuddering, he sagged back weakly against the doorframe. Bile rose up in his throat, and he swallowed it. He reached out reflexively and shut off the light. The chitinous rustling continued in the darkness.

Still shivering, Paul went back into the living room. Here the dawn had imposed a kind of gray twilight, and there were only five or six cockroaches to be seen, scurrying across the floor with amazing rapidity. Paul shuddered again. His skin itched as though bugs were crawling over him, and he brushed his hands repeatedly down along his arms. He was reacting way out of proportion to this—he was reacting symbolically, archetypically. He had been sickened and disgusted by this on some deep, elemental level, and now there was something reverberating through him again and again like the tolling of a great soundless bell. He could sense that thoughts were rippling just under the conscious surface

of his mind, like swift-darting fish, like a computer equation running—to what end he did not know. Without conscious motivation, he reached out and suddenly tapped the spacebar of his typewriter. More cockroaches boiled out of the typewriter mechanism, scuttling out from under the machine, crawling up from between the keys on the keyboard, crawling up from beneath the roller.

Paul shuddered convulsively from head to foot.

That's it, he thought irrationally, *that's all.*

You're finished, he thought.

Suddenly he was unbelievably, unbearably, overwhelmingly tired. He staggered to his bed and fell down upon it. That great soundless bell was tolling again, beating through blood and bone and meat. His vision blurred until he was unable to clearly see the dawn-ghost of the ceiling. The bed seemed to be spinning in slow, slow circles. A cockroach scurried over his hand. He was too beaten-out physically to do anything other than twitch, but another enormous wave of disgust and loathing and rage and self-hate rolled through him and flooded every cell of his being. His eyes filled with weak tears. He grimaced at the ceiling like an animal in pain. His head lolled.

Sleep was like a long hard fall into very deep water.

As with every sentient creature, there was a part of Paul that never slept and that knew everything. Racial subconscious, organic computer, overmind, genetic memory, superconsciousness, immortal soul—it not only knew everything that had happened to Paul and to all the race of man, it also knew everything that *might* have happened: the web of possibilities in its entirety. Since there is really no such thing as time, it also knew everything that *will* and *might* happen to Paul and to everyone else, and what *will* and *might* happen to everyone who ever will (or might) be born in what we fatuously call "the future." It is hopeless, of course, to try to talk about these matters in any kind of detail—our corporeal, conscious minds can not even begin to grasp the concepts involved, and the language is too inadequate to allow us to discuss them even if they

could be understood. Suffice it to say that in Paul the superconsciousness-organic computer et cetera had always been much more accessible to him than is usually the case. And now that he had been partially freed from the bonds of ego by deprivation, exhaustion, starvation, fever, madness and hate, Paul's dreaming mind was finally able to reach the superconsciousness and operate it to his own ends.

He ran the "memory" of the superconsciousness back until it had reached one of the key junctions and turning-points of his life, and then had it sort through the billions of possible consequences arising out of that junction until it found the one possibility that would best facilitate the peculiar sentence of oblivion that Paul had mercilessly handed down upon himself in the High Court of his own soul. The one that Paul finally decided upon was probably the least likely and most bizarre of all the myriad possibilities stemming from that particular junction of his life—a number which *is* finite, but which is also enormous far beyond our range of conscious comprehension. It was a corner that had never been turned.

He went back. He turned that corner.

The boy woke to night and silences. He lay quietly on his back and stared at the shadowy ceiling, half-relieved, half-disappointed. It had been only another storm, after all. *Just like Ma said,* he thought. It must have passed and spent itself while he was sleeping. *And tomorrow I'm going to Ohio.*

But even as he was thinking this, the wind puffed up out of nowhere and slammed against the windows, rattling the glass in their frames. The boy could hear the wind scoop up the big metal garbage cans out front and send them rolling and clattering and clanging far down the street like giant dice. Suddenly there was a torrent of water slamming and rattling the window along with the wind, as if a high-pressure hose had been turned against the glass. The house groaned and shook.

The boy lay trembling with fear and delight. The storm hadn't passed, after all! Maybe he had awakened during a lull, or maybe he hadn't slept as long as he

had thought and the storm was just beginning. The boy sat up eagerly in the bed.

As he did, the room filled with blinding blue-white light, so dazzling that it almost seemed to sear the retinas. A split-second later there was a buffeting, ear-splitting explosion. Then another blast of light, then another monstrous thunderclap, and so on in such fast and furious alternation that the boy couldn't catch his breath for the shock of it. It was as if a heavy howitzer were firing salvos right outside his bedroom window. Another moment or two of this, the lightning certainly striking right outside the house, and then there came a silence that could only upon reflection be recognized as identical with the highest previous level of noise.

Joy! the boy thought. He was leaning dazedly back against the headboard, eyes wide. He hoped that he hadn't made in his pants.

More thunder, not quite so overwhelmingly right-on-top-of-him any more. While it was still booming and rumbling, the bedroom door opened and his mother came in. She didn't turn on his light, but she stood in the doorway where she herself was illuminated by the bulb in the hall. "Are you all right, baby?" she asked. Her voice sounded funny somehow.

"I'm okay, Mom."

"Don't let it scare you, Paulie," she said. "It's only a hurricane; it'll be over soon."

There *was* something funny about her voice. It had a strained, wild note to it. Tension under restraint.

"I'm not scared, Ma, I'm okay."

"Try to get some sleep, then," she said. And her face changed alarmingly, expressions melting and shifting across it faster than the boy could catch them. When she spoke again, her voice had gone gravelly and dropped in register, as though she was straining to keep it under control. "But if—" She started again. "But if you can't sleep, then come downstairs and be with me for a while." She stopped abruptly, whirled around and left. He could hear her footsteps clicking away down the hallway, fast and agitated.

The same funny thing had been in her face as well as

her voice. Dimly, almost instinctually, the boy recognized what it was: it was fear.

She was the one who was afraid, in spite of her reassurances to him. *His mother* was afraid.

Why?

It was completely out of accord with her mood earlier that evening. Then she had been somewhat distracted, the way she always was lately—but that was somehow all tied up with him not having a father any more. She had been tense and snappish—but that was because she'd been packing all day. She hadn't been afraid then. She'd been a little bit nervous about the approaching storm, but not afraid—mostly irritated by the thought of all the bother and nuisance it was going to cause her, maybe they wouldn't be able to leave tomorrow if the weather was still bad. Why was she afraid now?

The boy got out of bed and padded across to the door. He opened it and slipped out into the upstairs hallway. A few feet down the hallway he stopped, head up, "sniffing the air."

Something was very wrong.

He didn't know what it was, he couldn't identify it or put a name to it, but somehow everything was wrong. Everything was the same, but it was somehow also completely different. He could smell it, the way he'd been able to smell the storm when it was behind the horizon. It was in the air itself, his mother, the house around him—the most subtle and nearly imperceptible of differences. But the air, the house, his mother, *they were not the same ones he'd had before.*

It was as if he'd gone to sleep in one world and awakened in another. A world exactly the same except for being completely different.

The thought was too big for his mind, too complex for him to begin to appraise it. The whole concept slipped sideways in his head and then right on out of it, leaving him not even quite sure what it was he'd been struggling to comprehend a moment before. But it also left behind a legacy of oily panic. For the first time he began to become really afraid.

He crept stealthily to the head of the stairs and listened at the stairwell. He could hear his mother's voice talking downstairs, and Mrs. Spinnato's voice, but he couldn't make out what they were saying. With utmost caution, he went down four treads and crouched next to the railing. They had the radio or the television on down there, but between the wind and the thunder outside and the crackling frying-egg static on the set itself, it was almost impossible to hear what it was saying, either. The boy strained his ears. " . . . fall . . . " it said and the rest was swallowed by the wind.The boy went down another tread. " . . . falling . . . " it repeated.

The rest was garble and static-hiss, wind, more eggs frying, a thunderclap, and then it said " . . . roche . . . "

After another moment, his mother and Mrs. Spinnato came by the foot of the stairs, heading toward the kitchen. He froze, but neither woman looked up as she passed. Their voices came to him in snatches through the sound of the wind.

" . . . lieve it?" his mother was saying.

" . . . don't know what . . . now . . . but if . . . " said Mrs. Spinnato.

" . . . we do? . . . how . . . "

" . . . what *can* we . . . if it's . . . that . . . "

" . . . pray, that's . . . "

Unenlightened, the boy returned to his bedroom. The note of fear was in Mrs. Spinnato's voice, too, and she was a powerful, strong-willed woman, ordinarily afraid of nothing.

The boy went to his window and stood looking out at the storm. It was raining hard. The trees were lashing violently back and forth as if they had gone mad with pain. Dislodged slate roofing and shingles were flying and swirling around in the air like confetti. The sky was a mad luminescent indigo, except when lightning turned it a searing white. Some power lines were already down, writhing and spitting blue sparks in the street, and trees were beginning to have their branches torn off. There was a sudden high-pitched tearing sound over his head, and something scraped heavily across the roof before it tumbled down into the yard. That was their television antenna being blown away. A

moment later the light in the hall flickered and went out. All their lights were gone. He stood in the dark, looking out the window—excited, exalted, and terrified.

That was when the real storm front hit.

The boy sensed the blow coming, an irresistible onrush of fire-shot darkness, and instinctively dropped flat to the floor. The window exploded inward in a fountain of shattered glass. There was a series of flat explosions, and wood chips sprayed and geysered from the wall opposite the window, exactly as if someone was raking the room with a heavy-caliber machine gun. The boy would never know it, but the damage was being done by chestnuts from the horse-chestnut trees outside, stripped from their branches by a 150 m.p.h. gust and whipped into the room with all the shattering force of heavy-caliber bullets.

The wind struck again. This time the window-frame was splintered and pulverized, and the house itself screeched, rocked, and seemed to strain up toward the sky for a moment before it settled back down. A jagged crack shot the length of one wall. The boy hugged the floor while bits of plaster and lathing came down on his back. He wasn't even particularly afraid. What was happening was too huge and immediate and overwhelming to leave any room in his mind for fear. During a lull in the wind he could hear his mother and Mrs. Spinnato screaming downstairs. He himself was making a little dry panting noise that he wasn't even aware of, *ahnnn, ahnnn, ahnnn,* like a winded animal.

The lull seemed as if it was going to last for a while. The boy tried to get to his feet and was knocked flat again by wind and water. He had forgotten that this was a "lull" only by comparison with the unbelievable gust that had struck a minute before. He pulled himself up again, hanging on to the shattered window frame and not lifting his head much higher than the window ledge. In a heartbeat he was drenched to the bone. If the rain had been hard before, it was now like a horizontal waterfall driving against the house. But by keeping his head close to the frame and squinting he found that he could see a little. He got his vision right just in time to see another tremendous gust destroy Mr. Lei-

dy's house, a gust that was fortunately blowing in a different direction. Fortunately for the boy, anyway. Leidy's place was built on a rise, denying it even the minimum shelter that the small hills to the southeast afforded the boy's house. One moment the Leidy house was there, a solid three-story structure, and the next moment—in an eyeblink—it was gone, demolished, smashed to flinders, turned into a monstrous welter of flying debris that looked for all the world like a Gargantuan dust devil.

Somewhere on the other side of the house he could very faintly hear his mother calling desperately for him. Probably she was trying to make it up the stairs to his bedroom.

She didn't make it, because at that moment, unbelievably, the earthquake struck.

At first the boy thought it was the wind again, but then the entire house began to rattle and buck and plunge, and there was a rumbling freight-train sound that was even louder than the storm. Terrified and helpless, the boy could no nothing but cling like a burr to the windowsill while the room around him bounced and jigged and staggered. Hairline cracks shot out across the walls and ceiling and floor, widened, spread. A section of the far wall suddenly slid away, leaving a ragged five-foot gap. The house *whammed* the ground once with finality, bounced again, and settled. The ground stopped moving. Nothing happened for perhaps a minute, and then the entire front half of the house collapsed. Plaster powder and brick dust were puffed from all the windows on the boy's side of the house, like steam from a bellows. For a heartbeat the boy was coated with dust and powder from head to foot, and then the rain came rushing back in the window and washed him clean again.

Another lull, the most complete one yet, as though the universe had taken a deep, deep breath.

In that abrupt hush the boy could hear someone close at hand screaming and sobbing. He realized with surprise that it was himself. Almost casually, the portion of his mind not occupied with terror noticed a sudden rush of sea-water sweeping in across the

ground. Mrs. Spinnato's house had been determinedly smouldering in spite of the rain but it went out in a hissing welter of steam when the wave indunated it. That first wave had been a fake, only waist-deep and made mostly of spume, but there were a whole series of other waves marching in behind it—storm waves, tsunami, maybe actual tidal waves, who knows?—and some of them were pale horrors twelve, twenty, thirty feet high.

I'm stuck in it, said a voice in the boy's head that was the boy's voice and yet somehow not the boy's voice. *I can't stop it. I can't get out.*

I didn't know it would be like this, the voice said.

The universe let out that deep, deep breath.

The wind came back.

This time it gusted to 220 mph and it flattened everything.

It uprooted one of the huge chestnut trees in the boy's yard and hurled it like a giant's javelin right at the window where the boy was crouching.

The boy had a timeless moment to himself before the tree smashed him into pulp, and he used it to wonder what it would have been like to live in Ohio.

The boy had a timeless moment to himself before the tree smashed him into pulp, and he used it to wonder why he was thinking of feathers and soot.

The boy had a timeless moment to himself before the tree smashed him into pulp, and he used it to wonder who the man was who was crying inside his head.

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