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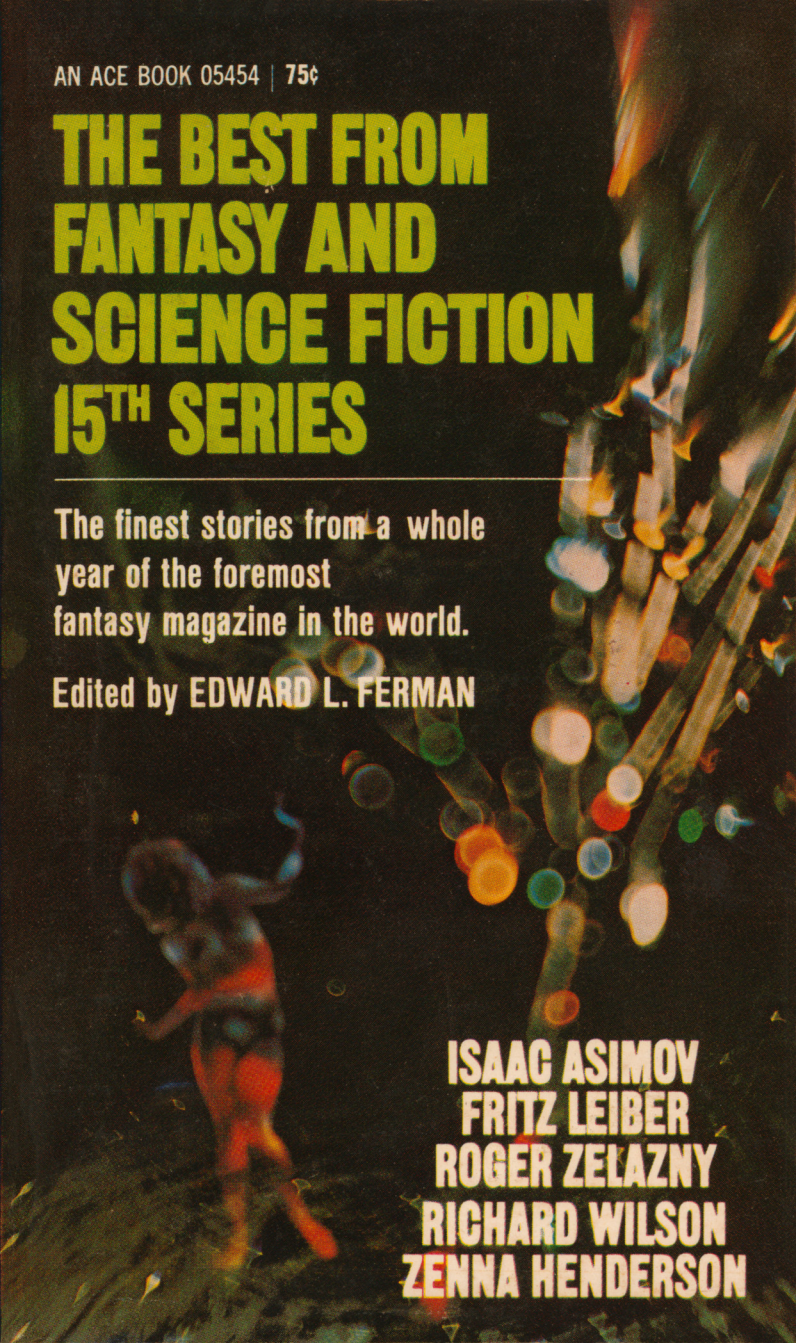

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- The King of New York and his memorable trip downtown . . .

Bulletin: At the 1969 World Science Fiction Convention, *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* once again won the *Hugo* as the best s-f magazine of the year.

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R. A. Lafferty for *Hog-Belly Honey.*
John Ciardi for *Love Letter from Mars.*
Walter H. Kerr for *Treat.*
Doris Pitkin Buck for *From Two Universes.*
Gahan Wilson for the cartoons.

The Best from FANTASY and SCIENCE FICTION

Fifteenth Series

Edited by

EDWARD L. FERMAN

AN ACE BOOK

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15th Series

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For AUDREY and EMILY

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INTRODUCTION

Some time ago, partly to answer the graphic questions of advertising agencies, and partly to satisfy our own curiosity, we attempted to find out "What sort of a person reads *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*?" Apart from the solid figures that 66 per cent of our readers are men and that 77 per cent have been to college, the results of the questionnaire were overwhelmingly inconclusive. No great surprise. Indeed, we would have been startled had 14 per cent of our readers turned out to be washing machine repairmen, or coin collectors, or owners of two or more cars. For fifteen years, the magazine has been edited not for teen-agers or urban males or homemakers, but instead for those in each and every group who still find a bit of magic in the printed word. Is there an advertising slogan to reach them? We wonder, for they are as different and individual as the stories in this volume —for which we can find no all-encompassing descriptive phrase.

Among other things, you will read about: a New York City with eight billion people; a stagehand who may be William Shakespeare; fishing for a Leviathan on Venus; a woman who turns into a horse; a nullifier which knows junk when it sees it and sends the no-good stuff clear over the edge; an extraterrestrial jazz musician. Shall we offer a pithy generalization about the kinship of this unique medley? We shall not. Instead, we'll follow the advice of the late William Strunk, Jr., who once won an award for pith: "Omit needless words!" The vital ones follow.

EDWARD L. FERMAN

A note of thanks to Avram Davidson, my able and uncommon predecessor. Some of the stories in this volume were acquired under his editorship.

Here is a good strong story with a good strong plot and good strong characters. It carries with it such a degree of conviction that we are half-persuaded that Mr. Roger Zelazny, its author, has himself been a member of the perilous profession of baitman in the perilous seas of Venus. Do not begin this story now unless you can read it right through, ignoring all interruptions.

THE DOORS OF HIS FACE, THE LAMPS OF HIS MOUTH

by Roger Zelazny

I'm a baitman. No one is born a baitman, except in a French novel where everyone is. (In fact, I think that's the title, *We are All Bait.* Pfft!) How I got that way is barely worth the telling and has nothing to do with neo-exes, but the days of the beast deserve a few words, so here they are.

The Lowlands of Venus lie between the thumb and forefinger of the continent known as Hand. When you break into Cloud Alley it swings its silverblack bowling ball toward you without a warning. You jump then, inside that fire-tailed tenpin they ride you down in, but the straps keep you from making a fool of yourself. You generally chuckle afterwards, but you always jump first.

Next, you study Hand to lay its illusion and the two middle fingers become dozen-ringed archipelagoes as the outers resolve into green-gray peninsulas; the thumb is too short, and curls like the embryo tail of Cape Horn.

You suck pure oxygen, sigh possibly, and begin the long topple to the Lowlands.

Then, you are caught like an infield fly at the Lifeline

landing area—so named because of its nearness to the great delta in the Eastern Bay—located between the first peninsula and "thumb." For a minute it seems as if you're going to miss Lifeline and wind up as canned seafood, but afterwards—shaking off the metaphors—you descend to scorched concrete and present your middle-sized telephone directory of authorizations to the short, fat man in the gray cap. The papers show that you are not subject to mysterious inner rottings and etcetera. He then smiles you a short, fat, gray smile and motions you toward the bus which hauls you to the Reception Area. At the R.A. you spend three days proving that, indeed, you are not subject to mysterious inner rottings and etcetera.

Boredom, however, is another rot. When your three days are up, you generally hit Lifeline hard, and it returns the compliment as a matter of reflex. The effects of alcohol in variant atmospheres is a subject on which the connoisseurs have written numerous volumes, so I will confine my remarks to noting that a good binge is worthy of at least a week's time and often warrants a lifetime study.

I had been a student of exceptional promise (strictly undergraduate) for going on two years when the *Bright Water* fell through our marble ceiling and poured its people like targets into the city.

Pause. The Worlds Almanac re Lifeline: ". . . Port city on the eastern coast of Hand. Employees of the Agency for Non-terrestrial Research comprise approximately 85% of its 100,000 population (2010 Census). Its other residents are primarily personnel maintained by several industrial corporations engaged in basic research. Independent marine biologists, wealthy fishing enthusiasts, and waterfront entrepreneurs make up the remainder of its inhabitants."

I turned to Mike Dabis, a fellow entrepreneur, and commented on the lousy state of basic research.

"Not if the mumbled truth be known."

He paused behind his glass before continuing the slow swallowing process calculated to obtain my interest and a few oaths, before he continued.

"Carl," he finally observed, poker playing, "they're shaping Tensquare."

I could have hit him. I might have refilled his glass with

sulfuric acid and looked on with glee as his lips blackened and cracked. Instead, I grunted a noncommittal.

"Who's fool enough to shell out fifty grand a day? ANR?"

He shook his head.

"Jean Luharich," he said, "the girl with the violet contacts and fifty or sixty perfect teeth. I understand her eyes are really brown."

"Isn't she selling enough face cream these days?"

He shrugged.

"Publicity makes the wheels go 'round. Luharich Enterprises jumped sixteen points when she picked up the Sun Trophy. You ever play golf on Mercury?"

I had, but I overlooked it and continued to press.

"So she's coming here with a blank check and a fishhook?"

"*Bright Water*, today," he nodded. "Should be down by now. Lots of cameras. She wants an Ikky, bad."

"Hmm," I hummed. "How bad?"

"Sixty day contract, Tensquare. Indefinite extension clause. Million and a half deposit," he recited.

"You seem to know a lot about it."

"I'm Personnel Recruitment. Luharich Enterprises approached me last month. It helps to drink in the right places.

"Or own them," he smirked, after a moment.

I looked away, sipping my bitter brew. After awhile I swallowed several things and asked Mike what he expected to be asked, leaving myself open for his monthly temperance lecture.

"They told me to try getting you," he mentioned. "When's the last time you sailed?"

"Month and a half ago. The Corning."

"Small stuff," he snorted. "When have you been under, yourself?"

"It's been awhile."

"It's been over a year, hasn't it? That time you got cut by the screw, under the Dolphin?"

I turned to him.

"I was in the river last week, up at Angleford where the currents are strong. I can still get around."

"Sober," he added.

"I'd stay that way," I said, "on a job like this."

A doubting nod.

"Straight union rates. Triple time for extraordinary circumstances," he narrated. "Be at Hangar Sixteen with your gear, Friday morning, five hundred hours. We push off Saturday, daybreak."

"You're sailing?"

"I'm sailing."

"How come?"

"Money."

"Ikky guano."

"The bar isn't doing so well and baby needs new minks."

"I repeat—"

". . . And I want to get away from baby, renew my contact with basics—fresh air, exercise, make cash . . ."

"All right, sorry I asked."

I poured him a drink, concentrating on H_2SO_4, but it didn't transmute. Finally I got him soused and went out into the night to walk and think things over.

Around a dozen serious attempts to land *Ichthyform Leviosaurus Levianthus,* generally known as "Ikky," had been made over the past five years. When Ikky was first sighted, whaling techniques were employed. These proved either fruitless or disastrous, and a new procedure was inaugurated. Tensquare was constructed by a wealthy sportsman named Michael Jandt, who blew his entire roll on the project.

After a year on the Eastern Ocean, he returned to file bankruptcy. Carlton Davits, a playboy fishing enthusiast, then purchased the huge raft and laid a wake for Ikky's spawning grounds. On the nineteenth day out he had a strike and lost one hundred and fifty bills' worth of untested gear, along with one *Ichthyform Levianthus.* Twelve days later, using tripled lines, he hooked, narcotized, and began to hoist the huge beast. It awakened then, destroyed a control tower, killed six men, and worked general hell over five square blocks of Tensquare. Carlton was left with partial hemiplegia and a bankruptcy suit of his own. He faded into waterfront atmosphere and Tensquare changed hands four more times, with less spectacular but equally expensive results.

Finally, the big raft, built only for one purpose, was

purchased at auction by ANR for "marine research." Lloyd's still won't insure it, and the only marine research it has ever seen is an occasional rental at fifty bills a day—to people anxious to tell Leviathan fish stories. I've been baitman on three of the voyages, and I've been close enough to count Ikky's fangs on two occasions. I want one of them to show my grandchildren, for personal reasons.

I faced the direction of the landing area and resolved a resolve.

"You want me for local coloring, gal. It'll look nice on the feature page and all that. But clear this— If anyone gets you an Ikky, it'll be me. I promise."

I stood in the empty Square. The foggy towers of Lifeline shared their mists.

Shoreline a couple eras ago, the western slope above Lifeline stretches as far as forty miles inland in some places. Its angle of rising is not a great one, but it achieves an elevation of several thousand feet before it meets the mountain range which separates us from the Highlands. About four miles inland and five hundred feet higher than Lifeline are set most of the surface airstrips and privately owned hangars. Hangar Sixteen houses Cal's Contract Cab, hop service, shore to ship. I do not like Cal, but he wasn't around when I climbed from the bus and waved to a mechanic.

Two of the hoppers tugged at the concrete, impatient beneath flywing haloes. The one on which Steve was working belched deep within its barrel carburetor and shuddered spasmodically.

"Bellyache?" I inquired.

"Yeah, gas pains and heartburn."

He twisted setscrews until it settled into an even keening, and turned to me.

"You're far out?"

I nodded.

"Tensquare. Cosmetics. Monsters. Stuff like that."

He blinked into the beacons and wiped his freckles. The temperature was about twenty, but the big overhead spots served a double purpose.

"Luharich," he muttered. "Then you *are* the one. There's some people want to see you."

"What about?"

"Cameras. Microphones. Stuff like that."

"I'd better stow my gear. Which one am I riding?"

He poked the screwdriver at the other hopper.

"That one. You're on video tape now, by the way. They wanted to get you arriving."

He turned to the hangar, turned back.

"Say 'cheese.' They'll shoot the close closeups later."

I said something other than "cheese." They must have been using telelens and been able to read my lips, because that part of the tape was never shown.

I threw my junk in the back, climbed into a passenger seat, and lit a cigarette. Five minutes later, Cal himself emerged from the office Quonset, looking cold. He came over and pounded on the side of the hopper. He jerked a thumb back at the hangar.

"They want you in there!" he called through cupped hands. "Interview!"

"The show's over!" I yelled back. "Either that, or they can get themselves another baitman!"

His rustbrown eyes became nailheads under blond brows and his glare a spike before he jerked about and stalked off. I wondered how much they had paid him to be able to squat in his hangar and suck juice from his generator.

Enough, I guess, knowing Cal. I never liked the guy, anyway.

Venus at night is a field of sable waters. On the coasts, you can never tell where the sea ends and the sky begins. Dawn is like dumping milk into an inkwell. First, there are erratic curdles of white, then streamers. Shade the bottle for a gray colloid, then watch it whiten a little more. All of a sudden you've got day. Then start heating the mixture.

I had to shed my jacket as we flashed out over the bay. To our rear, the skyline could have been under water for the way it waved and rippled in the heatfall. A hopper can accommodate four people (five, if you want to bend Regs and underestimate weight), or three passengers with the sort of gear a baitman uses. I was the only fare, though, and the pilot was like his machine. He hummed and made no unnecessary noises. Lifeline turned a somersault and evaporated in the rear mirror at about the same time. Ten-

square broke the fore-horizon. The pilot stopped humming and shook his head.

I leaned forward. Feelings played flopdoodle in my guts. I knew every bloody inch of the big raft, but the feelings you once took for granted change when their source is out of reach. Truthfully, I'd had my doubts I'd ever board the hulk again. But now, now I could almost believe in predestination. There it was!

A tensquare football field of a ship. A-powered. Flat as a pancake, except for the plastic blisters in the middle and the "Rooks" fore and aft, port and starboard.

The Rook towers were named for their corner positions—and any two can work together to hoist, co-powering the graffles between them. The graffles—half gaff, half grapple—can raise enormous weights to near water level; their designer had only one thing in mind, though, which accounts for the gaff half. At water level, the Slider has to implement elevation for six to eight feet before the graffles are in a position to push upward, rather than pulling.

The Slider, essentially, is a mobile room—a big box capable of moving in any of Tensquare's crisscross groovings and "anchoring" on the strike side by means of a powerful electromagnetic bond. Its winches could hoist a battleship the necessary distance, and the whole craft would tilt, rather than the Slider come loose, if you want any idea of the strength of that bond.

The Slider houses a section operated control indicator which is the most sophisticated "reel" ever designed. Drawing broadcast power from the generator beside the center blister, it is connected by shortwave with the sonar room, where the movements of the quarry are recorded and repeated to the angler seated before the section control.

The fisherman might play his "lines" for hours, days even, without seeing any more than metal and an outline on the screen. Only when the beast is graffled and the extensor shelf, located twelve feet below waterline, slides out for support and begins to aid the winches, only then does the fisherman see his catch rising before him like a fallen Seraphim. Then, as Davits learned, one looks into the Abyss itself and is required to act. He didn't, and a hundred meters of unimaginable tonnage, undernarcotized

and hurting, broke the cables of the winch, snapped a graffle, and took a half-minute walk across Tensquare.

We circled till the mechanical flag took notice and waved us on down. We touched beside the personnel hatch and I jettisoned my gear and jumped to the deck.

"Luck," called the pilot as the door was sliding shut. Then he danced into the air and the flag clicked blank.

I shouldered my stuff and went below.

Signing in with Malvern, the de facto captain, I learned that most of the others wouldn't arrive for a good eight hours. They had wanted me alone at Cal's so they could pattern the pub footage along twentieth-century cinema lines.

Open: landing strip, dark. One mechanic prodding a contrary hopper. Stark-o-vision shot of slow bus pulling in. Heavily dressed baitman descends, looks about, limps across field. Closeup: he grins. Move in for words: "Do you think this is the time? The time he *will* be landed?" Embarrassment, taciturnity, a shrug. Dub something—"I see. And why do you think Miss Luharich has a better chance than any of the others? Is it because she's better equipped? [Grin.] Because more is known now about the creature's habits than when you were out before? Or is it because of her will to win, to be a champion? Is it any one of these things, or is it all of them?" Reply: "Yeah, all of them." —"Is that why you signed on with her? Because your instincts say, 'This one will be it'?" Answer: "She pays union rates. I couldn't rent that damned thing myself. And I want in." Erase. Dub something else. Fadeout as he moves toward hopper, etcetera.

"Cheese," I said, or something like that, and took a walk around Tensquare, by myself.

I mounted each Rook, checking out the controls and the underwater video eyes. Then I raised the main lift.

Malvern had no objections to my testing things this way. In fact, he encouraged it. We had sailed together before and our positions had even been reversed upon a time. So I wasn't surprised when I stepped off the lift into the Hopkins Locker and found him waiting. For the next ten minutes we inspected the big room in silence, walking through its copper coil chambers soon to be Arctic.

Finally, he slapped a wall.

"Well, will we fill it?"

I shook my head.

"I'd like to, but I doubt it. I don't give two hoots and a damn who gets credit for the catch, so long as I have a part in it. But it won't happen. That gal's an egomaniac. She'll want to operate the Slider, and she can't."

"You ever meet her?"

"Yeah."

"How long ago?"

"Four, five years."

"She was a kid then. How do you know what she can do now?"

"I know. She'll have learned every switch and reading by this time. She'll be up on all the theory. But do you remember one time we were together in the starboard Rook, forward, when Ikky broke water like a porpoise?"

"How could I forget?"

"Well?"

He rubbed his emery chin.

"Maybe she can do it, Carl. She's raced torch ships and she's scubaed in bad waters back home." He glanced in the direction of invisible Hand. "And she's hunted in the Highlands. She might be wild enough to pull that horror into her lap without flinching.

". . . For Johns Hopkins to foot the bill and shell out seven figures for the corpus," he added. "That's money, even to a Luharich."

I ducked through a hatchway.

"Maybe you're right, but she was a rich witch when I knew her.

"And she wasn't blonde," I added, meanly.

He yawned.

"Let's find breakfast."

We did that.

When I was young I thought that being born a sea creature was the finest choice Nature could make for anyone. I grew up on the Pacific coast and spent my summers on the Gulf or the Mediterranean. I lived months of my life negotiating coral, photographing trench dwellers, and playing tag with dolphins. I fished everywhere there are fish, resenting the fact that they can go places I can't.

When I grew older I wanted bigger fish, and there was nothing living that I knew of, excepting a Sequoia, that came any bigger than Ikky. That's part of it . . .

I jammed a couple extra rolls into a paper bag and filled a thermos with coffee. Excusing myself, I left the galley and made my way to the Slider berth. It was just the way I remembered it. I threw a few switches and the shortwave hummed.

"That you, Carl?"

"That's right, Mike. Let me have some juice down here, you doublecrossing rat."

He thought it over, then I felt the hull vibrate as the generators cut in. I poured my third cup of coffee and found a cigarette.

"So why am I a doublecrossing rat this time?" came his voice again.

"You knew about the cameramen at Hangar Sixteen?"

"Yes."

"Then you're a doublecrossing rat. The last thing I want is publicity. 'He who fouled up so often before is ready to try it, nobly, once more.' I can read it now."

"You're wrong. The spotlight's only big enough for one, and she's prettier than you."

My next comment was cut off as I threw the elevator switch and the elephant ears flapped above me. I rose, settling flush with the deck. Retracting the lateral rail, I cut forward into the groove. Amidships, I stopped at a juncture, dropped the lateral, and retracted the longitudinal rail.

I slid starboard, midway between the Rooks, halted, and threw on the coupler.

I hadn't spilled a drop of coffee.

"Show me pictures."

The screens glowed. I adjusted and got outlines of the bottom.

"Okay."

I threw a Status Blue switch and he matched it. The light went on.

The winch unlocked. I aimed out over the waters, extended the arm, and fired a cast.

"Clean one," he commented.

"Status Red. Call strike." I threw a switch.

"Status Red."

The baitman would be on his way with this, to make the barbs tempting.

It's not exactly a fishhook. The cables bear hollow tubes, the tubes convey enough dope for an army of hopheads, Ikky takes the bait, dandled before him by remote control, and the fisherman rams the barbs home.

My hands moved over the console, making the necessary adjustments. I checked the narco-tank reading. Empty. Good, they hadn't been filled yet. I thumbed the Inject button.

"In the gullet," Mike murmured.

I released the cables. I played the beast imagined. I let him run, swinging the winch to simulate his sweep.

I had the air conditioner on and my shirt off and it was still uncomfortably hot, which is how I knew that morning had gone over into noon. I was dimly aware of the arrivals and departures of the hoppers. Some of the crew sat in the "shade" of the doors I had left open, watching the operation. I didn't see Jean arrive or I would have ended the session and gotten below.

She broke my concentration by slamming the door hard enough to shake the bond.

"Mind telling me who authorized you to bring up the Slider?" she asked.

"No one," I replied. "I'll take it below now."

"Just move aside."

I did, and she took my seat. She was wearing brown slacks and a baggy shirt and she had her hair pulled back in a practical manner. Her cheeks were flushed, but not necessarily from the heat. She attacked the panel with a nearly amusing intensity that I found disquieting.

"Status Blue," she snapped, breaking a violet fingernail on the toggle.

I forced a yawn and buttoned my shirt slowly. She threw a side glance my way, checked the registers, and fired a cast.

I monitored the lead on the screen. She turned to me for a second.

"Status Red," she said levelly.

I nodded my agreement.

She worked the winch sideways to show she knew how.

I didn't doubt she knew how and she didn't doubt that I didn't doubt, but then—

"In case you're wondering," she said, "you're not going to be anywhere near this thing. You were hired as a baitman, remember? Not a Slider operator! A baitman! Your duties consist of swimming out and setting the table for our friend the monster. It's dangerous, but you're getting well paid for it. Any questions?"

She squashed the Inject button and I rubbed my throat.

"Nope," I smiled, "but I am qualified to run that thingamajigger—and if you need me I'll be available, at union rates."

"Mister Davits," she said, "I don't want a loser operating this panel."

"Miss Luharich, there has never been a winner at this game."

She started reeling in the cable and broke the bond at the same time, so that the whole Slider shook as the big yo-yo returned. We skidded a couple feet backwards as it curled into place, and she retracted the arm. She raised the laterals and we shot back along the groove. Slowing, she transferred rails and we jolted to a clanging halt, then shot off at a right angle. The crew scrambled away from the hatch as we skidded onto the elevator.

"In the future, Mister Davits, do not enter the Slider without being ordered," she told me.

"Don't worry. I won't even step inside if I am ordered," I answered. "I signed on as a baitman. Remember? If you want me in here, you'll have to *ask* me."

"That'll be the day," she smiled.

I agreed, as the doors closed above us. We dropped the subject and headed in our different directions after the Slider came to a halt in its berth. She did say "good day," though, which I thought showed breeding as well as determination, in reply to my chuckle.

Later that night Mike and I stoked our pipes in Malvern's cabin. The winds were shuffling waves, and a steady spattering of rain and hail overhead turned the deck into a tin roof.

"Nasty," suggested Malvern.

I nodded. After two bourbons the room had become a

familiar woodcut, with its mahogany furnishings (which I had transported from Earth long ago on a whim) and the dark walls, the seasoned face of Malvern, and the perpetually puzzled expression of Dabis set between the big pools of shadow that lay behind chairs and splashed in corners, all cast by the tiny table light and seen through a glass, brownly.

"Glad I'm in here."

"What's it like underneath on a night like this?"

I puffed, thinking of my light cutting through the insides of a black diamond, shaken slightly. The meteor-dart of a suddenly illuminated fish, the swaying of grotesque ferns, like nebulae—shadow, then green, then gone—swam in a moment through my mind. I guess it's like a spaceship would feel, if a spaceship could feel, crossing between worlds—and quiet, uncannily, preternaturally quiet; and peaceful as sleep.

"Dark," I said, "and not real choppy below a few fathoms."

"Another eight hours and we shove off," commented Mike.

"Ten, twelve days, we should be there," noted Malvern.

"What do you think Ikky's doing?"

"Sleeping on the bottom with Mrs. Ikky, if he has any brains."

"He hasn't. I've seen ANR's skeletal extrapolation from the bones that have washed up—"

"Hasn't everyone?"

". . . Fully fleshed, he'd be over a hundred meters long. That right, Carl?"

I agreed.

". . . Not much of a brain box, though, for his bulk."

"Smart enough to stay out of our locker."

Chuckles, because nothing exists but this room, really. The world outside is an empty, sleet-drummed deck. We lean back and make clouds.

"Boss lady does not approve of unauthorized fly fishing."

"Boss lady can walk north till her hat floats."

"What did she say in there?"

"She told me that my place, with fish manure, is on the bottom."

"You don't Slide?"

"I bait."

"We'll see."

"That's all I do. If she wants a Slideman she's going to have to ask nicely."

"You think she'll have to?"

"I think she'll have to."

"And if she does, can you do it?"

"A fair question," I puffed. "I don't know the answer, though."

I'd incorporate my soul and trade forty percent of the stock for the answer. I'd give a couple years off my life for the answer. But there doesn't seem to be a lineup of supernatural takers, because no one knows. Supposing when we get out there, luck being with us, we find ourselves an Ikky? Supposing we succeed in baiting him and get lines on him. What then? If we get him shipside will she hold on or crack up? What if she's made of sterner stuff than Davits, who used to hunt sharks with poison-darted air pistols? Supposing she lands him and Davits has to stand there like a video extra.

Worse yet, supposing she asks for Davits and he still stands there like a video extra or something else—say, some yellowbellied embodiment named Cringe?

It was when I got him up above the eight-foot horizon of steel and looked out at all that body, sloping on and on till it dropped out of sight like a green mountain range . . . And that head. Small for the body, but still immense. Flat, craggy, with lidless roulettes that had spun black and red since before my forefathers decided to try the New Continent. And swaying.

Fresh narco-tanks had been connected. It needed another shot, fast. But I was paralyzed.

It had made a noise like God playing a Hammond organ . . .

And looked at me!

I don't know if seeing is even the same process in eyes like those. I doubt it. Maybe I was just a gray blur behind a black rock, with the plexi-reflected sky hurting its pupils. But it fixed on me. Perhaps the snake doesn't really paralyze the rabbit, perhaps it's just that rabbits are cowards by constitution. But it began to struggle and I still couldn't move, fascinated.

Fascinated by all that power, by those eyes, they found me there fifteen minutes later, a little broken about the head and shoulders, the Inject still unpushed.

And I dream about those eyes. I want to face them once more, even if their finding takes forever. I've got to know if there's something inside me that sets me apart from a rabbit, from notched plates of reflexes and instincts that always fall apart in exactly the same way whenever the proper combination is spun.

Looking down, I noticed that my hand was shaking. Glancing up, I noticed that no one else was noticing.

I finished my drink and emptied my pipe. It was late and no songbirds were singing.

I sat whittling, my legs hanging over the aft edge, the chips spinning down into the furrow of our wake. Three days out. No action.

"You!"

"Me?"

"You."

Hair like the end of the rainbow, eyes like nothing in nature, fine teeth.

"Hello."

"There's a safety rule against what you're doing, you know."

"I know. I've been worrying about it all morning."

A delicate curl climbed my knife then drifted out behind us. It settled into the foam and was plowed under. I watched her reflection in my blade, taking a secret pleasure in its distortion.

"Are you baiting me?" she finally asked.

I heard her laugh then, and turned, knowing it had been intentional.

"What, me?"

"I could push you off from here, very easily."

"I'd make it back."

"Would you push me off, then—some dark night, perhaps?"

"They're all dark, Miss Luharich. No, I'd rather make you a gift of my carving."

She seated herself beside me then, and I couldn't help but notice the dimples in her knees. She wore white shorts

and a halter and still had an offworld tan to her which was awfully appealing. I almost felt a twinge of guilt at having planned the whole scene, but my right hand still blocked her view of the wooden animal.

"Okay, I'll bite. What have you got for me?"

"Just a second. It's almost finished."

Solemnly, I passed her the wooden jackass I had been carving. I felt a little sorry and slightly jackass-ish myself, but I had to follow through. I always do. The mouth was split into a braying grin. The ears were upright.

She didn't smile and she didn't frown. She just studied it.

"It's very good," she finally said, "like most things you do —and appropriate, perhaps."

"Give it to me." I extended a palm.

She handed it back and I tossed it out over the water. It missed the white water and bobbed for awhile like a pigmy seahorse.

"Why did you do that?"

"It was a poor joke. I'm sorry."

"Maybe you're right, though. Perhaps this time I've bitten off a little too much."

I snorted.

"Then why not do something safer, like another race?"

She shook her end of the rainbow.

"No. It has to be an Ikky."

"Why?"

"Why did you want one so badly that you threw away a fortune?"

"Man reasons," I said. "An unfrocked analyst who held black therapy sessions in his basement once told me, 'Mister Davits, you need to reinforce the image of your masculinity by catching one of every kind of fish in existence.' Fish are a very ancient masculinity symbol, you know. So I set out to do it. I have one more to go.—Why do you want to reinforce *your* masculinity?"

"I don't," she said. "I don't want to reinforce anything but Luharich Enterprises. My chief statistician once said, 'Miss Luharich, sell all the cold cream and face powder in the System and you'll be a happy girl. Rich, too.' And he was right. I am the proof. I can look the way I do and do anything, and I sell most of the lipstick and face powder in the System—but I have to be *able* to do anything."

"You do look cool and efficient," I observed.

"I don't feel cool," she said, rising. "Let's go for a swim."

"May I point out that we are making pretty good time?"

"If you want to indicate the obvious, you may. You said you could make it back to the ship, unassisted. Change your mind?"

"No."

"Then get us two scuba outfits and I'll race you under Tensquare.

"I'll win, too," she added.

I stood and looked down at her, because that usually makes me feel superior to women.

"Daughter of Lir, eyes of Picasso," I said, "you've got yourself a race. Meet me at the forward Rook, starboard, in ten minutes."

"Ten minutes," she agreed.

And ten minutes it was. From the center blister to the Rook took maybe two of them, with the load I was carrying. My sandals grew very hot and I was glad to shuck them for flippers when I reached the comparative cool of the corner.

We slid into harnesses and adjusted our gear. She had changed into a trim one-piece green job that made me shade my eyes and look away, then look back again.

I fastened a rope ladder and kicked it over the side. Then I pounded on the wall of the Rook.

"Yeah?"

"You talk to the port Rook, aft?" I called.

"They're all set up," came the answer. "There's ladders and draglines all over that end."

"You sure you want to do this?" asked the sunburnt little gink who was her publicity man, Anderson yclept.

He sat beside the Rook in a deckchair, sipping lemonade through a straw.

"It might be dangerous," he observed, sunken-mouthed. (His teeth were beside him, in another glass.)

"That's right," she smiled. "It *will* be dangerous. Not overly, though."

"Then why don't you let me get some pictures? We'd have them back to Lifeline in an hour. They'd be in New York by tonight. Good copy."

"No," she said, and turned away from both of us.

She raised her hands to her eyes.

"Here, keep these for me."

She passed him a box full of her unseeing, and when she turned back to me they were the same brown that I remembered.

"Ready?"

"No," I said, tautly. "Listen carefully, Jean. If you're going to play this game there are a few rules. First," I counted, "we're going to be directly beneath the hull, so we have to start low and keep moving. If we bump the bottom, we could rupture an air tank . . ."

She began to protest that any moron knew that and I cut her down.

"Second," I went on, "there won't be much light, so we'll stay close together and we will *both* carry torches."

Her wet eyes flashed.

"I dragged you out of Govino without—"

Then she stopped and turned away. She picked up a lamp.

"Okay. Torches. Sorry."

". . . And watch out for the drive-screws," I finished. "There'll be strong currents for at least fifty meters behind them."

She wiped her eyes again and adjusted the mask.

"All right, let's go."

We went.

She led the way, at my insistence. The surface layer was pleasantly warm. At two fathoms the water was bracing; at five it was nice and cold. At eight we let go the swinging stairway and struck out. Tensquare sped forward and we raced in the opposite direction, tattooing the hull yellow at ten-second intervals.

The hull stayed where it belonged, but we raced on like two darkside satellites. Periodically, I tickled her frog feet with my light and traced her antennae of bubbles. About a five meter lead was fine; I'd beat her in the home stretch, but I couldn't let her drop behind yet.

Beneath us, black. Immense. Deep. The Mindanao of Venus, where eternity might eventually pass the dead to a rest in cities of unnamed fishes. I twisted my head away and touched the hull with a feeler of light; it told me we were about a quarter of the way along.

I increased my beat to match her stepped-up stroke, and narrowed the distance which she had suddenly opened by a couple meters. She sped up again and I did, too. I spotted her with my beam.

She turned and it caught on her mask. I never knew whether she'd been smiling. Probably. She raised two fingers in a V-for-Victory and then cut ahead at full speed.

I should have known. I should have felt it coming. It was just a race to her, something else to win. Damn the torpedoes!

So I leaned into it, hard. I don't shake in the water. Or, if I do it doesn't matter and I don't notice it. I began to close the gap again.

She looked back, sped on, looked back. Each time she looked I was nearer, until I'd narrowed it down to the original five meters.

Then she hit the jatoes.

That's what I had been fearing. We were about halfway under and she shouldn't have done it. The powerful jets of compressed air could easily rocket her upward into the hull, or tear something loose if she allowed her body to twist. Their main use is in tearing free from marine plants or fighting bad currents. I had wanted them along as a safety measure, because of the big suck-and-pull windmills behind.

She shot ahead like a meteorite, and I could feel a sudden tingle of perspiration leaping to meet and mix with the churning waters.

I swept ahead, not wanting to use my own guns, and she tripled, quadrupled the margin.

The jets died and she was still on course. Okay, I was an old fuddyduddy. She *could* have messed up and headed toward the top.

I plowed the sea and began to gather back my yardage, a foot at a time. I wouldn't be able to catch her or beat her now, but I'd be on the ropes before she hit deck.

Then the spinning magnets began their insistence and she wavered. It was an awfully powerful drag, even at this distance. The call of the meat grinder.

I'd been scratched up by one once, under the Dolphin, a fishing boat of the middle-class. I *had* been drinking, but it was also a rough day, and the thing had been turned

on prematurely. Fortunately, it was turned off in time, also, and a tendon-stapler made everything good as new, except in the log, where it only mentioned that I'd been drinking. Nothing about it being off-hours when I had a right to do as I damn well pleased.

She had slowed to half her speed, but she was still moving crosswise, toward the port, aft corner. I began to feel the pull myself and had to slow down. She'd made it past the main one, but she seemed too far back. It's hard to gauge distances under water, but each red beat of time told me I was right. She was out of danger from the main one, but the smaller port screw, located about eighty meters in, was no longer a threat but a certainty.

Each air bubble carried a curse to daylight as I moved to flank her from the left.

She had turned and was pulling away from it now. Twenty meters separated us. She was standing still. Fifteen.

Slowly, she began a backward drifting. I hit my jatoes, aiming two meters behind her and about twenty back of the blades.

Straightline! Thankgod! Catching, softbelly, leadpipe on shoulder SWIMLIKEHELL! maskcracked, not broke through AND UP!

We caught a line and I remember brandy.

Into the cradle endlessly rocking I spit, pacing. Insomnia tonight and left shoulder sore again, so let it rain on me—they can cure rheumatism. Stupid as hell. What I said. In blankets and shivering. She: "Carl, I can't say it." Me: "Then call it square for that night in Govino, Miss Luharich. Huh?" She: nothing. Me: "Any more of that brandy?" She: "Give me another, too." Me: sounds of sipping. It had only lasted three months. No alimony. Many $ on both sides. Not sure whether they were happy or not. Wine-dark Aegean. Good fishing. Maybe he should have spent more time on shore. Or perhaps she shouldn't have. Good swimmer, though. Dragged him all the way to Vido to wring out his lungs. Young. Both. Strong. Both. Rich and spoiled as hell. Ditto. Corfu should have brought them closer. Didn't. I think that mental cruelty was a trout. He wanted to go to Canada. She: "Go to hell if you want!" He: "Will you go along?" She: "No." But she did, anyhow. Many

hells. Expensive. He lost a monster or two. She inherited a couple. Lot of lightning tonight. Stupid as hell. Civility's the coffin of a conned soul. By whom?—Sounds like a bloody neo-ex . . . But I hate you, Anderson, with your glass full of teeth and her new eyes . . . Can't keep this pipe lit, keep sucking tobacco. Spit again!

Seven days out and the scope showed Ikky.

Bells jangled, feet pounded, and some optimist set the thermostat in the Hopkins. Malvern wanted me to sit it out, but I slipped into my harness and waited for whatever came. The bruise looked worse than it felt. I had exercised every day and the shoulder hadn't stiffened on me.

A thousand meters ahead and thirty fathoms deep, it tunneled our path. Nothing showed on the surface.

"Will we chase him?" asked an excited crewman.

"Not unless she feels like using money for fuel," I shrugged.

Soon the scope was clear, and it stayed that way. We remained on alert and held our course.

I hadn't said over a dozen words to my boss since the last time we went drowning together, so I decided to raise the score.

"Good afternoon," I approached. "What's new?"

"He's going north-northeast. We'll have to let this one go. A few more days and we can afford some chasing. Not yet."

Sleek head . . .

I nodded. "No telling where this one's headed."

"How's your shoulder?"

"All right. How about you?"

Daughter of Lir . . .

"Fine. By the way, you're down for a nice bonus."

Eyes of perdition!

"Don't mention it," I told her.

Later that afternoon, and appropriately, a storm shattered. (I prefer "shattered" to "broke." It gives a more accurate idea of the behavior of tropical storms on Venus and saves lots of words.) Remember that inkwell I mentioned earlier? Now take it between thumb and forefinger and hit its side with a hammer. Watch yourself! Don't get splashed or cut—

Dry, then drenched. The sky one million bright fractures as the hammer falls. And sounds of breaking.

"Everyone below!" suggested loudspeakers to the already scurrying crew.

Where was I? Who do you think was doing the loudspeaking?

Everything loose went overboard when the water got to walking, but by then no people were loose. The Slider was the first thing below decks. Then the big lifts lowered their shacks.

I had hit it for the nearest Rook with a yell the moment I recognized the pre-brightening of the holocaust. From there I cut in the speakers and spent half a minute coaching the track team.

Minor injuries had occurred, Mike told me over the radio, but nothing serious. I, however, was marooned for the duration. The Rooks do not lead anywhere; they're set too far out over the hull to provide entry downwards, what with the extensor shelves below.

So I undressed myself of the tanks which I had worn for the past several hours, crossed my flippers on the table, and leaned back to watch the hurricane. The top was black as the bottom and we were in between, and somewhat illuminated because of all that flat, shiny space. The waters above didn't rain down—they just sort of got together and dropped.

The Rooks were secure enough—they'd weathered any number of these onslaughts—it's just that their positions gave them a greater arc of rise and descent when Ten-square makes like the rocker of a very nervous grandma. I had used the belts from my rig to strap myself into the bolted-down chair, and I removed several years in purgatory from the soul of whoever left a pack of cigarettes in the table drawer.

I watched the water make teepees and mountains and hands and trees until I started seeing faces and people. So I called Mike.

"What are you doing down there?"

"Wondering what you're doing up there," he replied. "What's it like?"

"You're from the midwest, aren't you?"

"Yeah."

"Get bad storms out there?"

"Sometimes."

"Try to think of the worst one you were ever in. Got a slide rule handy?"

"Right here."

"Then put a one under it, imagine a zero or two following after, and multiply the thing out."

"I can't imagine the zeroes."

"Then retain the multiplicand—that's all you can do."

"So what are you doing up there?"

"I've strapped myself in the chair. I'm watching things roll around the floor right now."

I looked up and out again. I saw one darker shadow in the forest.

"Are you praying or swearing?"

"Damned if I know. But if this were the Slider—if only this were the Slider!"

"*He's out there?*"

I nodded, forgetting that he couldn't see me.

Big, as I remembered him. He'd only broken surface for a few moments, to look around. *There is no power on Earth that can be compared with him who was made to fear no one.* I dropped my cigarette. It was the same as before. Paralysis and an unborn scream.

"You all right, Carl?"

He had looked at me again. Or seemed to. Perhaps that mindless brute had been waiting half a millennium to ruin the life of a member of the most highly developed species in business . . .

"You okay?"

. . . Or perhaps it had been ruined already, long before their encounter, and theirs was just a meeting of beasts, the stronger bumping the weaker aside, body to psyche . . .

"Carl, dammit! Say something!"

He broke again, this time nearer. Did you ever see the trunk of a tornado? It seems like something alive, moving around in all that dark. Nothing has a right to be so big, so strong, and moving. It's a sickening sensation.

"Please answer me."

He was gone and did not come back that day. I finally made a couple wisecracks at Mike, but I held my next cigarette in my right hand.

The next seventy or eighty thousand waves broke by with a monotonous similarity. The five days that held them were also without distinction. The morning of the thirteenth day out, though, our luck began to rise. The bells broke our coffee-drenched lethargy into small pieces, and we dashed from the galley without hearing what might have been Mike's finest punchline.

"Aft!" cried someone. "Five hundred meters!"

I stripped to my trunks and started buckling. My stuff is always within grabbing distance.

I flipflopped across the deck, girding myself with a deflated squiggler.

"Five hundred meters, twenty fathoms!" boomed the speakers.

The big traps banged upward and the Slider grew to its full height, m'lady at the console. It rattled past me and took root ahead. Its one arm rose and lengthened.

I breasted the Slider as the speakers called, "Four-eighty, twenty!"

"Status Red!"

A belch like an emerging champagne cork and the line arced high over the waters.

"Four-eight, twenty!" it repeated, all Malvern and static. "Baitman, attend!"

I adjusted my mask and hand-over-handed it down the side. Then warm, then cool, then away.

Green, vast, down. Fast. This is the place where I am equal to a squiggler. If something big decides a baitman looks tastier than what he's carrying, then irony colors his title as well as the water about it.

I caught sight of the drifting cables and followed them down. Green to dark green to black. It had been a long cast, too long. I'd never had to follow one this far down before. I didn't want to switch on my torch.

But I had to.

Bad! I still had a long way to go. I clenched my teeth and stuffed my imagination into a straitjacket.

Finally the line came to an end.

I wrapped one arm about it and unfastened the squiggler. I attached it, working as fast as I could, and plugged in the little insulated connections which are the reason it

can't be fired with the line. Ikky could break them, but by then it wouldn't matter.

My mechanical eel hooked up, I pulled its section plugs and watched it grow. I had been dragged deeper during this operation, which took about a minute and a half. I was near—too near—to where I never wanted to be.

Loathe as I had been to turn on my light, I was suddenly afraid to turn it off. Panic gripped me and I seized the cable with both hands. The squiggler began to glow, pinkly. It started to twist. It was twice as big as I am and doubtless twice as attractive to pink squiggler-eaters. I told myself this until I believed it, then I switched off my light and started up.

If I bumped into something enormous and steel-hided my heart had orders to stop beating immediately and release me—to dart fitfully forever along Acheron, and gibbering.

Ungibbering, I made it to green water and fled back to the nest.

As soon as they hauled me aboard I made my mask a necklace, shaded my eyes, and monitored for surface turbulence. My first question, of course, was: "Where is he?"

"Nowhere," said a crewman, "we lost him right after you went over. Can't pick him up on the scope now. Musta dived."

"Too bad."

The squiggler stayed down, enjoying its bath. My job ended for the time being, I headed back to warm my coffee with rum.

From behind me, a whisper: "Could you laugh like that afterwards?"

Perceptive Answer: "Depends on what he's laughing at."

Still chuckling, I made my way into the center blister with two cupfuls.

"Still hell and gone?"

Mike nodded. His big hands were shaking, and mine were steady as a surgeon's when I set down the cups.

He jumped as I shrugged off the tanks and looked for a bench.

"Don't drip on that panel! You want to kill yourself and blow expensive fuses?"

I towelled down, then settled down to watching the un-

filled eye on the wall. I yawned happily; my shoulder seemed good as new.

The little box that people talk through wanted to say something, so Mike lifted the switch and told it to go ahead.

"Is Carl there, Mister Dabis?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Then let me talk to him."

Mike motioned and I moved.

"Talk," I said.

"Are you all right?"

"Yes, thanks. Shouldn't I be?"

"That was a long swim. I—I guess I overshot my cast."

"I'm happy," I said. "More tripletime for me. I really clean up on that hazardous duty clause."

"I'll be more careful next time," she apologized. "I guess I was too eager. Sorry—" Something happened to the sentence, so she ended it there, leaving me with half a bagful of replies I'd been saving.

I lifted the cigarette from behind Mike's ear and got a light from the one in the ashtray.

"Carl, she was being nice," he said, after turning to study the panels.

"I know," I told him. "I wasn't."

"I mean, she's an awfully pretty kid, pleasant. Headstrong and all that. But what's she done to you?"

"Lately?" I asked.

He looked at me, then dropped his eyes to his cup.

"I know it's none of my bus—" he began.

"Cream and sugar?"

Ikky didn't return that day, or that night. We picked up some Dixieland out of Lifeline and let the muskrat ramble while Jean had her supper sent to the Slider. Later she had a bunk assembled inside. I piped in "Deep Water Blues" when it came over the air and waited for her to call up and cuss us out. She didn't, though, so I decided she was sleeping.

Then I got Mike interested in a game of chess that went on until daylight. It limited conversation to several "checks," one "checkmate," and a "damn!" Since he's a poor loser it also effectively sabotaged subsequent talk, which was fine

with me. I had a steak and fried potatoes for breakfast and went to bed.

Ten hours later someone shook me awake and I propped myself on one elbow, refusing to open my eyes.

"Whassamadder?"

"I'm sorry to get you up," said one of the younger crewmen, "but Miss Luharich wants you to disconnect the squiggler so we can move on."

I knuckled open one eye, still deciding whether I should be amused.

"Have it hauled to the side. Anyone can disconnect it."

"It's at the side now, sir. But she said it's in your contract and we'd better do things right."

"That's very considerate of her. I'm sure my Local appreciates her remembering."

"Uh, she also said to tell you to change your trunks and comb your hair, and shave, too. Mister Anderson's going to film it."

"Okay. Run along, tell her I'm on my way—and ask if she has some toenail polish I can borrow."

I'll save on details. It took three minutes in all, and I played it properly, even pardoning myself when I slipped and bumped into Anderson's white tropicals with the wet squiggler. He smiled, brushed it off, she smiled, even though Luharich Complectacolor couldn't completely mask the dark circles under her eyes; and I smiled, waving to all our fans out there in videoland.—Remember, Mrs. Universe, you, too, can look like a monster-catcher. Just use Luharich face-cream.

I went below and made myself a tuna sandwich, with mayonnaise.

Two days like icebergs—bleak, blank, half-melting, all frigid, mainly out of sight, and definitely a threat to peace of mind—drifted by and were good to put behind. I experienced some old guilt feelings and had a few disturbing dreams. Then I called Lifeline and checked my bank balance.

"Going shopping?" asked Mike, who had put the call through for me.

"Going home," I answered.

"Huh?"

"I'm out of the baiting business after this one, Mike. The Devil with Ikky! The Devil with Venus and Luharich Enterprises! And the Devil with you!"

Up eyebrows.

"What brought that on?"

"I waited over a year for this job. Now that I'm here, I've decided the whole thing stinks."

"You knew what it was when you signed on. No matter what else you're doing, you're selling facecream when you work for facecream sellers."

"Oh, that's not what's biting me. I admit the commercial angle irritates me, but Tensquare has always been a publicity spot, ever since the first time it sailed."

"What, then?"

"Five or six things, all added up. The main one being that I don't care any more. Once it meant more to me than anything else to hook that critter, and now it doesn't. I went broke on what started out as a lark and I wanted blood for what it cost me. Now I realize that maybe I had it coming. I'm beginning to feel sorry for Ikky."

"And you don't want him now?"

"I'll take him if he comes peacefully, but I don't feel like sticking out my neck to make him crawl into the Hopkins."

"I'm inclined to think it's one of the four or five other things you said you added."

"Such as?"

He scrutinized the ceiling.

I growled.

"Okay, but I won't say it, not just to make you happy you guessed right."

He, smirking: "That look she wears isn't just for Ikky."

"No good, no good," I shook my head. "We're both fission chambers by nature. You can't have jets on both ends of the rocket and expect to go anywhere—what's in the middle just gets smashed."

"That's how it *was*. None of my business, of course—"

"Say that again and you'll say it without teeth."

"Any day, big man," he looked up, "any place . . ."

"So go ahead. Get it said!"

"She doesn't care about that bloody reptile, she came

here to drag you back where you belong. You're not the baitman this trip."

"Five years is too long."

"There must be something under that cruddy hide of yours that people like," he muttered, "or I wouldn't be talking like this. Maybe you remind us humans of some really ugly dog we felt sorry for when we were kids. Anyhow, someone wants to take you home and raise you—also, something about beggars not getting menus."

"Buddy," I chuckled, "do you know what I'm going to do when I hit Lifeline?"

"I can guess."

"You're wrong. I'm torching it to Mars, and then I'll cruise back home, first class. Venus bankruptcy provisions do not apply to Martian trust funds, and I've still got a wad tucked away where moth and corruption enter not. I'm going to pick up a big old mansion on the Gulf, and if you're ever looking for a job you can stop around and open bottles for me."

"You are a yellowbellied fink," he commented.

"Okay," I admitted, "but it's her I'm thinking of, too."

"I've heard the stories about you both," he said. "So you're a heel and a goofoff and she's a bitch. That's called compatability these days. I dare you, baitman, try keeping something you catch."

I turned.

"If you ever want that job, look me up."

I closed the door quietly behind me and left him sitting there waiting for it to slam.

The day of the beast dawned like any other. Two days after my gutless flight from empty waters I went down to rebait. Nothing on the scope. I was just making things ready for the routine attempt.

I hollered a "good morning" from outside the Slider and received an answer from inside before I pushed off. I had reappraised Mike's words, sans sound, sans fury, and while I did not approve of their sentiment or significance, I had opted for civility anyhow.

So down, under, and away. I followed a decent cast about two hundred-ninety meters out. The snaking cables burned black to my left and I paced their undulations

from the yellowgreen down into the darkness. Soundless lay the wet night, and I bent my way through it like a cockeyed comet, bright tail before.

I caught the line, slick and smooth, and began baiting. An icy world swept by me then, ankles to head. It was a draft, as if someone had opened a big door beneath me. I wasn't drifting downwards that fast either.

Which meant that something might be moving up, something big enough to displace a lot of water. I still didn't think it was Ikky. A freak current of some sort, but not Ikky. Ha!

I had finished attaching the leads and pulled the first plug when a big, rugged, black island grew beneath me . . .

I flicked the beam downwards. His mouth was opened.

I was rabbit.

Waves of the death-fear passed downwards. My stomach imploded. I grew dizzy.

Only one thing, and one thing only. Left to do. I managed it, finally. I pulled the rest of the plugs.

I could count the scaley articulations ridging his eyes by then.

The squiggler grew, pinked into phosphorescence . . . squiggled!

Then my lamp. I had to kill it, leaving just the bait before him.

One glance back as I jammed the jatoes to life.

He was so near that the squiggler reflected on his teeth, in his eyes. Four meters, and I kissed his lambent jowls with two jets of backwash as I soared. Then I didn't know whether he was following or had halted. I began to black out as I waited to be eaten.

The jatoes died and I kicked weakly.

Too fast, I felt a cramp coming on. One flick of the beam, cried rabbit. One second, to know . . .

Or end things up, I answered. No, rabbit, we don't dart before hunters. Stay dark.

Green water, finally, to yellowgreen, then top.

Doubling, I beat off toward Tensquare. The waves from the explosion behind pushed me on ahead. The world closed in, and a scream, "He's alive!" in the distance.

A giant shadow and a shock wave. The line was alive, too.

—Good-bye Dabis, Violet Eyes, Ikky. I go to the Happy Fishing Grounds. Maybe I did something wrong . . .

Somewhere Hand was clenched. What's bait?

A few million years. I remember starting out as a one-celled organism and painfully becoming an amphibian, then an air-breather. From somewhere high in the treetops I heard a voice.

"He's coming around."

I evolved back into homo sapience, than a step further into a hangover.

"Don't try to get up yet."

"Have we got him?" I slurred.

"Still fighting, but he's hooked. We thought he took you for an appetizer."

"So did I."

"Breathe some of this and shut up."

A funnel over my face. Good. Lift your cups and drink . . .

"He was awfully deep. Below scope range. We didn't catch him till he started up. Too late, then."

I began to yawn.

"We'll get you inside now."

I managed to uncase my ankle knife.

"Try it and you'll be minus a thumb."

"You need rest."

"Then bring me a couple more blankets. I'm staying."

I fell back and closed my eyes.

Someone was shaking me. Gloom and cold. Spotlights bled yellow on the deck. I was in a jury-rigged bunk, bulked against the center blister. Swaddled in wool, I still shivered.

"It's been eleven hours. You're not going to see anything now."

I tasted blood.

"Drink this."

Water. I had a remark but I couldn't mouth it.

"Don't ask how I feel," I croaked. "I know that comes next, but don't ask me. Okay?"

"Okay. Want to go below now?"

"No. Just get me my jacket."

"Right here."

"What's he doing?"

"Nothing. He's deep, he's doped but he's staying down."

"How long since last time he showed?"

"Two hours, about."

"Jean?"

"She won't let anyone in the Slider. Listen, Mike says come on in. He's right behind you in the blister."

I sat up and turned. Mike was watching. He gestured; I gestured back.

I swung my feet over the edge and took a couple deep breaths. Pains in my stomach. I got to my feet and made it into the blister.

"Howza gut?" queried Mike.

I checked the scope. No Ikky. Too deep.

"You buying?"

"Yeah, coffee."

"Not coffee."

"You're ill. Also, coffee is all that's allowed in here."

"Coffee is a brownish liquid that burns your stomach. You have some in the bottom drawer."

"No cups. You'll have to use a glass."

"Tough."

He poured.

"You do that well. Been practicing for that job?"

"What job?"

"The one I offered you—"

A blot on the scope!

"Rising, ma'am! Rising!" he yelled into the box.

"Thanks, Mike. I've got it in here," she crackled.

"Jean!"

"Shut up! She's busy!"

"Was that Carl?"

"Yeah," I called. "Talk later," and I cut it.

Why did I do that?

"Why did you do that?"

I didn't know.

"I don't know."

Damned echoes! I got up and walked outside.

Nothing. Nothing.

Something?

Tensquare actually rocked! He must have turned when he saw the hull and started downward again. White water to my left, and boiling. An endless spaghetti of cable roared hotly into the belly of the deep.

I stood awhile, then turned and went back inside.

Two hours sick. Four, and better.

"The dope's getting to him."

"Yeah."

"What about Miss Luharich?"

"What about her?"

"She must be half dead."

"Probably."

"What are you going to do about it?"

"She signed the contract for this. She knew what might happen. It did."

"I think you could land him."

"So do I."

"So does she."

"Then let her ask me."

Ikky was drifting lethargically, at thirty fathoms.

I took another walk and happened to pass behind the Slider. She wasn't looking my way.

"Carl, come in here!"

Eyes of Picasso, that's what, and a conspiracy to make me Slide . . .

"Is that an order?"

"Yes—No! Please."

I dashed inside and monitored. He was rising.

"Push or pull?"

I slammed the "wind" and he came like a kitten.

"Make up your own mind now."

He balked at ten fathoms.

"Play him?"

"No!"

She wound him upwards—five fathoms, four . . .

She hit the extensors at two, and they caught him. Then the graffles.

Cries without and a heat lightning of flashbulbs.

The crew saw Ikky.

He began to struggle. She kept the cables tight, raised the graffles . . .

Up.

Another two feet and the graffles began pushing.

Screams and fast footfalls.

Giant beanstalk in the wind, his neck, waving. The green hills of his shoulders grew.

"He's big, Carl!" she cried.

And he grew, and grew, and grew uneasy . . .

"*Now!*"

He looked down.

He looked down, as the god of our most ancient ancestors might have looked down. Fear, shame, and mocking laughter rang in my head. Her head, too?

"Now!"

She looked up at the nascent earthquake.

"I can't!"

It was going to be so damnably simple this time, now the rabbit had died. I reached out.

I stopped.

"Push it yourself."

"I can't. You do it. Land him, Carl!"

"No. If I do, you'll wonder for the rest of your life whether you could have. You'll throw away your soul finding out. I know you will, because we're alike, and I did it that way. Find out now!"

She stared.

I gripped her shoulders.

"Could be that's me out there," I offered. "I am a green sea serpent, a hateful, monstrous beast, and out to destroy you. I am answerable to no one. Push the Inject."

Her hand moved to the button, jerked back.

"Now!"

She pushed it.

I lowered her still form to the floor and finished things up with Ikky.

It was a good seven hours before I awakened to the steady, sea-chewing grind of Tensquare's blades.

"You're sick," commented Mike.

"How's Jean?"

"The same."

"Where's the beast?"

"Here."

"Good." I rolled over. ". . . Didn't get away this time."

So that's the way it was. No one is born a baitman, I don't think, but the rings of Saturn sing epithalamium the sea-beast's dower.

LOVE LETTER FROM MARS

by John Ciardi

Dear cell, the Martian winter ends.
The tubes run green again, and green
the hydroponic hills are seen
without their glass. Our ship ascends
through a new vapor. And the Frogs
grow restless in their locks. Unrest
is on us all. This gravity
works through me. No psychometry
keeps its adjustment. Everywhere
the Frogs are hating us, hating us.
(Can we shut out what we shut in?)
Sometimes I tense myself to tear
my filter off, gulp, and be damned.
"A lot of extra-sensory fuss,"
I tell myself, but can't command
the balance of my mood. My dear,
something is happening to Spring:
we've come too far from everything.

Our favorite stand-up comic, Woody Allen, tells about the escape of a dozen chain-gang prisoners who slip past the guards by posing as an immense charm bracelet. For some truly startling effects of a similar nature, you will want to start immediately this story about Ben Jolson of the Chameleon Corps.

RAKE

by Ron Goulart

The lunged stun rod missed and tipped over the barmaid. Beer suds washed across the nearwood flooring and the android barmaid slithered on its back, sputtering.

On top of the long dining table Ben Jolson spun and jumped again. Two of the Monitors circled the table, both lunging. The black attache case locked to his wrist made Jolson slightly lopsided and he didn't quite land as he'd planned. He hunkered and one of the grey cloaked Monitors sailed over him and clattered into the deep simulated fireplace.

That left only three of Dean Riding's men to dodge. The few patrons of the little tavern near the space port had huddled against the small bar. All the thumping had done something to the andy bartender and he kept drawing tankards of green ale and setting them up. Jolson spotted a stairway and ran for it. He had to leap up first, to avoid one stun rod and then hunch almost into the wall to avoid another.

Blocking a blow with his attache case Jolson backed up the curving staircase. "You guys better quit now or it gives trouble."

"Surrender, Waycross," said a Monitor. "This isn't doing your academic standing any good."

"Down with the Unyoke Movement," shouted the second Monitor, pressing upward toward Jolson.

"You mentioned that before," Jolson said, getting out of the way of another blow. "I'm warning you. Go away and don't bother me."

"You went too far this time, Waycross," said the first

Monitor. "This summons from the Dean's office is not to be ignored." He almost got Jolson's foot.

Jolson put his fingers on the snap of the attache case and said, "Remember. You wouldn't listen." He started to open it.

A little over a day before Ben Jolson of the Chameleon Corps had arrived here on the planet Taragon. He'd been sent on a special mission by the Political Espionage Office on Barnum, the planet that ruled all the planets in the Barnum System.

Step one had been a rendezvous, in his own person, at a coffee and gaming house near sprawling, pseudo-ivied Taragon University.

The windows of the low ceilinged smoke-blurred coffee house were leaded shards of bottle glass. Fragmented blotches of colored afternoon sunlight filled the place. Jolson, loosening the coat seam on his bland civilian suit, moved through the clutter of students toward booth 8.

Tankards clicked all around. The ivory counters of Venusian bingo clacked from a curtain hidden back room. The word *Unyoke* blocked Jolson's progress. It was on a placard, the first of a line of six that had just been raised by a group of students.

There had been trouble at Taragon University for several weeks now. The Student Unyoke Movement was demanding concessions from Dean Riding. Jolson had been sleep briefed on all that but it was not a major concern of his.

Horses were heard approaching and the signs dropped. Jolson worked his way forward. The horsemen passed and the signs came up. The student he was meeting was not involved with Unyoke, or with much of anything academic. He was the mostly hell-raising son of a Barnum ambassador named Waycross. His father called him a rake and a profligate. So did the Political Espionage Office. They had a use for young Waycross. Jolson was going to impersonate him for the next twenty-four hours.

Unyoke Immediately! the sign that masked booth 8 read. Jolson pushed it aside and found Miguel Waycross holding its stick. "You, Waycross?"

Waycross was about twenty, taller and leaner than Jolson. He wore his dark hair short with the exaggerated wid-

ow's peak most of the Taragon men students seemed to favor. "Well," said the student, apparently recognizing Jolson from the briefing PEO's agent had given him, "I've had a change of heart, sir."

"Oh, so?" Jolson eyed the plump young man who was sitting across from Waycross stirring a jar of paint with a brush tip.

"This is Stu Marks," said Miguel Waycross. "He's been my best and closest friend since a week ago Monday."

"You mean," said Jolson, easing onto the bench next to him, "you've joined the Unyoke Movement."

"Yes," said Waycross, with an eyes down grin. "I know you were expecting nothing but a rakehell, sir. I'm dedicated and motivated now."

"A cause," pointed out Marks, "does that for you." His widow's peak wasn't affixed properly and it snapped up. He slapped it back in place.

Jolson narrowed his eyes, turned again to Waycross. "So now?"

"Stu," said Waycross. "Let me talk to this guy alone."

"Okay." Marks rose. To Jolson he said, "That's the first conservative suit I've seen that I've liked in a long time." His own outfit was orange, fringed with green.

After Marks had been sucked into the crowd Waycross said, "It's like being reborn, Lt. Jolson. I'm really up to here in worthwhile activity."

"Don't tell me you're even attending classes?"

"No time for that," said Waycross. "Listen, Lt. Jolson, I'm still willing to co-operate with PEO. After all, I owe it to my dad. I have some speeches to write. See, Walter R. Scamper himself, the grand old man of all the Unyoke Movements is arriving at the space port tomorrow night. I've been picked to make the welcoming speech." He grinned and then let it fade. "You will be finished with my identity by then?"

"Yes," said Jolson.

"Good. Then I'll hole up at a place I know and write away. Meanwhile my identity will ease your access to the campus. Okay?"

"I'll go there with you and you can fill me in on the small details of the set up at Taragon University."

Waycross nodded. "You're seeing Professor Nibblett two hours from now, aren't you?"

"Yes," said Jolson. "How'd you know that?"

"Oh, what with dad's reputation. Your POE man told me most everything." He studied Jolson. "You must be over thirty."

"Thirty-two."

"Yet you can change yourself right into an exact replica of me."

It had taken the Chameleon Corps twelve years to condition him for this kind of job. "With no trouble."

"I guess you're proud."

Jolson, when CC didn't call on him for urgent assignments, ran a wholesale pottery business. "Let's go, huh?" He eased out of the booth.

More hoofbeats sounded. This time the mounts drew up outside the coffee house.

"Oops," said Waycross. "Dean Riding's Monitors are making a checkup. Come on." He guided Jolson toward the gaming rooms. "Back way."

In a moment Jolson and Waycross and some twenty student agitators and gamesters were running down a yellow brick alley.

The espionage people hadn't briefed Jolson about any of this.

The permanent autumn leaves were programmed to drift down when the campanile struck the hour. Jolson ducked to avoid a big one and turned down a gravel path that led toward the Science Complex. He was now an exact physical duplicate of Miguel Waycross, wearing a borrowed lemon yellow coat and sky blue ruffle-ankled pants.

The Political Espionage Office, and they ran CC, felt it would be more efficient if Professor Nibblett were contacted by someone in the guise of a student. Waycross' father had probably sat in on either a planning or a preplanning conference. Jolson, as an artificial breeze fluttered his ankles, yearned for the pottery business. Once the Chameleon Corps got you, though, you were always on call.

"Ah ha," shouted a sharp nasal voice.

Jolson halted and turned. This stretch of path was passing through a grove of real trees. Over on a rococo iron

work bench a middle-aged man, long and lank, was sneering at him. "Sir?" said Jolson.

The man, whose straight black hair was parted in the middle, fluffed his moustache. "You ignored my summons for a chat, Waycross." From the bench he picked up a pair of spiked gloves. "I must say I liked you better when you were a harmless drunken sot and hellbent rake."

The gloves flew at Jolson and he stepped aside, letting them clatter on the gravel. "Could we make another appointment, sir?"

"An appointment missed allows me other recourse," said the man. He was tugging on spiked gloves of his own. "You know the rules of the Dean's office. First a summons, then a reprimand, then the field of honor."

Yes, Waycross was looking more and more like an unwise selection. "Oh, really?" Jolson dropped to one knee and picked up the gloves. "Well, okay, sir." This was obviously Dean Riding.

Riding had his gloves on and he went into a crouch. "Let us proceed, Waycross. I'm burning for satisfaction." He skittered across the synthetic grass and landed one footed in front of Jolson.

"Isn't this really an ideological conflict?" said Jolson. The second glove was not going on right. His thumb kept slipping into the middle finger slot.

Dean Riding snarled and feinted with a mailed left. "I refuse to upgrade the Unyoke Movement by calling it ideological." He jabbed a right into Jolson's stomach.

"Oof," said Jolson, bicycling.

"Set up card tables on faculty grounds, will you?" cried the Dean, slashing Jolson's cheek. "Hand out leaflets during lectures." Another cut. "Demand equal time on the educational channel. I'll teach you there's no equality around here, upstart."

"Well," said Jolson, not liking to bleed. He suddenly caused himself to shrink several inches. This threw Dean Riding's next swing off. Then Jolson sidestepped and elongated his right arm to about triple its length. He snapped it out like a whip and let it wind and tighten around the Dean's throat. The mailed fist slammed into Riding's temple at the end of its spin. Riding collapsed. Jolson unwound his arm and retracted it, started running.

A few students had come up during the fight's final phase. They applauded now, then scattered.

Professor Nibblett's round ringed eyes squinted behind the Judas hole in the lab door. "I'd feel safer with a password," he said. His voice was throaty, breaking occasionally into a falsetto.

"Liberte, egalite, fraternite," said Jolson. "Is that okay?" PEO hadn't given him any passwords or numbers on this assignment. "I think the Dean may be after me. May I come in?"

The window shut and the blue door slid open. "I shouldn't ask for passwords, should I?" said Nibblett. He was a medium sized man with curly grey hair and a rounded stomach. "Afterall, the keynote of the Nibblett Project is doing things right out in the open. So that Anti-Barnum forces won't wonder about any hush-hush. Come in. Political Espionage wanted to call my work Project Upgrade or Taragon Doomsday but I insisted on simply the Nibblett Project. I like to see my name on things. Your name again?"

"Ben Jolson," he said, following the professor across a large empty class room. The door slid shut behind them.

"That over there," said the professor, "is an oldfashioned blackboard. I write assignments on it with something they used to call chalk." He moved through the shadowy clusters of chairs to the big blackboard and picked up two erasers. Slamming them against two preselected spots he said, "Watch now."

The blackboard quivered and then rolled away. There was a corridor behind it.

"Step over the eraser trough," said Nibblett, doing that.

Beyond the corridor was a door locked with a ten finger whorl lock. Beyond that a small laboratory.

When they were shut in the professor said, "Now then. I have most of them at my home to be packed. You will pick them up there tomorrow evening at five. Is that all right."

His ship didn't leave till ten. "Yes."

"You'll come as Waycross."

"About that," said Jolson. "Waycross' status seems to have

changed in the past week." He told Nibblett about Unyoke and Dean Riding's attack.

"I never involve myself in politics, on a student level," said the professor. "However, I'm too busy to think about new faces. I'm conditioned to your being Waycross. Please don't cross me up at this stage. Be Waycross, come at five tomorrow. You know my home address?"

"They briefed me, yes."

Behind a small blackboard there was a wall safe. "I like hiding things behind these old blackboards," said Professor Nibblett. "I've kept a sample of them here." He drew a small transparent container out of the safe. It looked like something potato salad had come in. "It elates me that I'll soon be fondly referred to as the father of upgraded germ warfare."

"And your wife will become the mother of upgraded germ warfare."

"No, I'll take all the credit," said Nibblett, unlidding the container. "Watch how they work. Oh, wait. I need a rabbit. Hand me one. From those cribs there."

Jolson selected a piebald one. "Do you have to kill him? I'll take your word."

"A demonstration's not a demonstration without it," explained the professor. "We kill a rabbit now, but in the long run we save millions of lives."

"Pro-Barnum lives."

"That's the side we happen to be on." Nibblett caught the rabbit by the ears and dropped it on a black topped table. The open container stayed on a white metal table several feet away. "Watch now. Attention. Forward march."

Little black dots began pouring over the lip of the container. They marched in pairs down the leg of the white table.

"Attack the rabbit," ordered Nibblett, clapping his hands.

The dots trooped across the buff flooring and up the leg of the black topped table. The rabbit hopped to the edge. Then shot off and into a corner of the room. Calmly the little dots marched down to the table and then broke into two flanks and surrounded the agitated rabbit.

"Charge," Nibblett cried.

The dots surged ahead, swarmed over the spotted ani-

mal. The rabbit cried out once, then toppled back. In under thirty seconds it was dead and glowing faintly green.

"Retreat to your container," ordered the smiling professor. When the giant germs had marched home he closed them in and put the container again in the wall safe. "That's how they work."

"Intelligent germs?" said Jolson.

"Smart enough to drill, do the manual of arms if need be and carry out simple commands. They can't be counteracted in any way at the moment." He paused and his head bobbed. "Warfare takes a step ahead today. Or rather four and a half weeks ago when my six years of work culminated in success."

Jolson moved so he wouldn't have to look at the dead rabbit. "How do I transport them back to Barnum?"

"They like to go on trips. I'll deliver you six containers of them tomorrow and verbally give you instructions to pass on to PEO." He shrugged and lines jiggled under his eyes. "You can carry them in an attache case."

"Will they obey me?"

"They are conditioned to obey any Pro-Barnum authority."

"They can tell who's pro and who's anti?"

"Loyalty wasn't that hard a thing to program into them."

Jolson left in a few moments. He had to remain Waycross in the corridors of the lab complex because a heavy set wide young professor was looking at him funny and took to following him through two levels.

When Jolson had shook free of the possible tail he put his hands up to his face and changed to a less controversial face than Waycross'.

Nobody was supposed to know Jolson was staying at the Urban Manor hotel, which made the visit of Professor Gurney Tishamingo the next day unsettling from the start.

Tishamingo, who was the big wide guy who'd eyed Jolson yesterday in the Science Complex, showed up at the door a half hour before Jolson was to leave for Nibblett's home.

Jolson was using his own appearance now but it still upset him to have Tishamingo open with, "Ben Jolson?"

"Who are you?" Jolson asked, not moving away from the door.

"I'm with the University. Professor Gurney Tishamingo, Department of Agricultural Psychiatry."

"All our plants are in good mental health." Jolson began to close the door.

"It's about the Nibblett Project," Tishamingo whispered.

There was a growing lack of security on this mission. "Yes?"

"Inside I'll explain."

Jolson let the big man in and made the mistake of turning his back for an instant. His view from the glass wall of the room was dotted with stars of pain. Gurney Tishamingo had jabbed a needle into his left buttock. "Some explanation," said Jolson, toppling over. He was paralyzed now, going rigid.

"Nothing permanent," said the professor. "You Chameleon Corps boys are tricky. That shot'll keep you as is for several hours. Long enough for us to get the stuff from old Nibblett."

Jolson couldn't respond.

The wide Tishamingo hoisted him up on the bed. "No use tying you. You CC boys can slither out of bonds like snakes." He punched Jolson's shoulder in a comradely fashion. "I notice that puzzled expression frozen on your face. Never trust those Political Espionage boys for current reports on the lay of the political land. What you don't know, Jolson, is that today Ambassador Waycross has bolted and gone over to the Anti-Barnum side. The side I'm on. This whole thing with his son was a set up so we, the Anti-Barnum boys, could get those smart little germs with a minimum of trouble."

It had long ago seemed like too much trouble to Jolson.

Mounted police were galloping toward the space port. It was after eight now, a sharp chill night.

Jolson was still a little stiff in the joints. He'd confirmed the snatch. Professor Nibblett had handed over the germs to the real Waycross, thinking he was Jolson, promptly at five.

If young Waycross was really going to welcome Walter R. Scamper at the space port there might be a chance to catch him and get the germs back.

The paralyzing drug hadn't knocked him out for as long

as Tishamingo had intended. Jolson's system, after all the years the Chameleon Corps had worked on it, tended to be unpredictable like that.

A makeshift platform stood near the dome shaped restaurant closest to the gate. Three hundred or so bright clad students were circled around it already. Against the night Jolson saw that the ship that must have brought Walter R. Scamper was unloading its passengers.

Just climbing up on the simulated wood platform was Miguel Waycross, in a formal orange pullover and buff knickers.

Jolson was tired of round about action. He ducked into a thick clump of decorative brush.

"We have the right," Waycross' amplified voice was saying, "to put up card tables wherever we choose. Academic life isn't all studies and duels. No."

Jolson shucked his clothes, shook himself once and turned into a gigantic black eagle. He flapped up into the night. He rose high and circled.

"There is nothing as important," continued Waycross, "as the right to hand out leaflets. Right?"

Jolson swooped and caught up Waycross in his talons. He flew to a more remote gathering of trees and shrubs back of the space port and dropped Waycross from a height sufficient to stun him.

He landed next to the groggy student and changed back to himself. He took Waycross' clothes and put them on.

Waycross woke up, shivered, and said, "I thought you Chameleon Corps guys were in favor of free speech."

"I'm against spies and guys who give me unsolicited shots in the ass," said Jolson. "Where are the damn germs?"

"No," said Waycross.

"I'll drop you again. From higher up."

"When you put it that way," said Waycross. "My friend Marks has the stuff. He's waiting near here, at the Cock 'N Bull Tavern. I was going to take a flight out at ten. But I had to welcome old Walter R. Scamper." He frowned. "You spoiled that pretty well."

"Sure," said Jolson. He knocked Waycross out with a right to the chin and rolled him under a row of yellow rose bushes. He shook his head and changed his appearance. As Waycross again he headed for the Cock 'N Bull.

He found Stu Marks well enough and got the attache case. The black case even had a handcuff set up and Jolson decided to hook it to his wrist. As he was stepping out of the tavern four of Dean Riding's mounted Monitors reined up in front of the place.

"Not at the rally, eh, Waycross?" cried one, drawing a sword-like stun rod.

Jolson swore and dived back into the tavern.

So now he was half way up the stairs. "I'd advise you guys to back off," he told the Monitors. "The only weapon I've got is unfortunately pretty deadly." He hesitated. Turned and ran on upstairs. He ducked into a half open door, hoping they wouldn't make him use the trained germs.

Jolson crossed the half empty store room and shoved up a window. He put the attache case handle in his mouth and jumped out on a slanted roof. Behind him three Monitors dived into the store room.

He catwalked a gable and ducked behind a chimney. He got the student outfit off and switched back to the eagle. The handcuff slipped off his wing tip but he had the case in his big beak. He rose up before the first Monitor reached the chimney.

Back at the space port the rally had turned into a riot. Jolson retrieved his clothes from behind the brush and, becoming himself, quickly clicked the germ case to his wrist.

In his coat pocket was a ticket on the ten o'clock flight to Barnum. He used it.

Because of the trouble the ship took off a half hour late. In the cocktail lounge after the space ship had risen a thin freckled man next to Jolson at the small bar put down his glass and asked, "What do you think about this student Unyoke Movement?"

Jolson shifted the case of germs to a more comfortable position on his lap. "Hell," he said. "I never think any more."


DR. TR
VETE
Gahan Wilson

Roderic C. Hodgins writes: "I am 31, and work as a psychological counselor at Harvard. My past jobs (the usual writer's odd lot) include messenger boy, assistant director on a movie crew (the old March of Time newsreel), science reporter (LIFE), writer-engineer for the technical manuals of an army computing machine, and teacher of speed reading and English composition at Harvard. I have an A.B. in math from Harvard, and my most recent piece of writing is a teaching-machine program on symbolic logic." There is a symbolic logic of another sort in Mr. Hodgins' first story for us—in which he offers a fresh and compelling view of a classic fantasy theme.

THE HISTORY OF DOCTOR FROST

by Roderic C. Hodgins

Consider a room. Consider that room packed, crammed, stuffed with papers and books until the floor sags downward under the load. Think of that room in a house on a late October night. There was only one light in the room, shining out the window on the road leading to the house. The road was empty.

Consider the world at an hour before moonrise, with only a few stars showing like peppergrains between the clouds which slid across the sky. The first killing frost of autumn had come, and the night held no insect sounds. The earth was cold enough to crunch like cinders under the heel of a shoe, and over it everywhere was a layer of dry brown leaves, ready to be crushed into powder underfoot. Usually from the room a few lights could be seen across the valley, but there were none tonight. The house hung suspended like a fish on a line, in the center of a tremendous darkness.

Dr. Johannes Frost sat at his desk in the middle of the room. Before him, on a sheet of the expensive white paper

he preferred, were six equations in the notation of the tensor calculus. They represented eight years work, and three drawers of the green filing cabinet behind him held the elaborate calculations which had served as justification for the symbols on that one white page.

For the third time that day Dr. Frost approached the fifth equation. He paused, and shrugged his shoulders to ease a painful tension in the muscles of the back of his neck. He was cramped and tired from three weeks work at his desk, pausing only for meals and a walk or two. He had lived, during those weeks, in that high land where human lungs were never meant to breathe, and where the mind, merely to move about, was forced to assume a discipline more rigorous than that of a ballet dancer or a concert pianist.

The work was a little, Dr. Frost reflected, like a game he had played as a child. Once he had saved his pennies for a year, and had tried to make a tower of the coins. It could be built higher and higher until the point when the last penny caused the collapse of the whole structure, leaving nothing to do but start again from the beginning. Or a little like trying to fill a cup with water so that the meniscus rose above the edge of the vessel. Finally, no matter how carefully the last drop was added, the cup overflowed.

Dr. Frost began work on the fifth equation again. For an hour he sat nearly motionless in his chair, his right hand moving from time to time on a second sheet of paper he used for preliminary calculations. As he approached the heart of the problem even that hand was stilled, and he sat utterly frozen, hardly breathing, paralyzed by thought so intricate it approached mysticism.

Then his thoughts collapsed. The bright coins of confusion jingled down, the cup overflowed, the train of ideas was lost. Dr. Frost sat staring at the paper before him with a gaze of hatred and despair.

As he sat looking at the papers, he became aware that a shadow in the deep black chair across the room was taking on form and color. For a small part of a second, enough to count to three rapidly, he sat quite still, wondering if the lamp had formed some after-image on his retina. The strangeness of the shadow persisted. He looked up.

"Who are you?" he asked. There was no answer. The

face of the figure on the chair was poorly lit, but even so Dr. Frost thought that he could see a peculiar expression. "Who are you?" he asked again.

The figure stirred. "You should know better than to ask that question," it said. "You were just thinking of me." The hand of the figure moved slightly on the arm of the chair. Even in the poor light it could be seen that the fingernails were gray, the color of slate in a schoolroom.

"I never saw you before in my life," said Dr. Frost.

The figure raised its hand slowly to its face and squeezed its cheeks with long tapering fingers. The cheeks gave under the fingers, like putty, or a child's rubber mask. Then the arm began to straighten, and the face came away from the head. Dr. Frost looked at what was behind the mask, and then was violently sick in the dark green wastebasket beside his desk. It was over in a moment. When he looked up again the figure was as it had been before.

"My name," said the figure, "is Azuriel. You have never heard of me, but I figure slightly in your mythology. I am mentioned twice in the Book of Revelations and more frequently in certain of the Apocrypha. The name is Hebrew, of course. Its meaning is quite unflattering, if one traces the word roots back far enough. That is understandable enough. I apologise for the effect which my appearance produced. Our kind is not pretty to your kind."

"What do you want?" asked Dr. Frost.

"An agreement," said the figure. "There is no need to worry. I can see precisely what is in your mind, and I find it remarkable that a man of your abilities should carry such a freight of nonsense. I am afraid I must start from the beginning.

"In the first place, I ask you to suspend judgment on my motives until I have finished telling you precisely what is on my mind. Secondly, I am not *the* devil, I am *a* devil. I would prefer that you abandon that word entirely, if possible, and think of me as Azuriel, an individual like yourself."

The figure shifted slightly in its chair, producing the faint hissing sound of cloth on leather. A piece of paper slid across Dr. Frost's desk. Dr. Frost picked it up, and unfolded it. "To prove:" it began, "That every even number is the sum of two prime numbers. . . ."

Dr. Frost looked up at the figure opposite him. "Really?" he asked.

"The solution is complete on that page," said Azuriel. "I have several others here." He patted a plain black leather briefcase.

At the top of the page, in his own hand, was his name: "Johannes Frost."

"This is not my work," said Dr. Frost. "Do you mean that I . . ."

"I am well aware of your professional ethics," said Azuriel, "and also of the fact that you could find no satisfaction in plagiarism or forgery, even were it undetectable. Or at any rate, you believe that so strongly that I would be forced to use valuable time to convince you of the contrary. But this is not my work, I assure you. It is yours, or rather, will be, provided you do not have an accident six months hence."

"Do you mean," asked Dr. Frost, "that you will kill me if I do not do whatever it is you want me to do?"

Azuriel shook his head. "That is one thing which I may not do," he said. "Or at least, not directly. You are vulnerable to me because I have information which will save your life six months from now. But aside from that I cannot do anything to influence your actions directly or to affect you physically. This is inherent in my nature."

"What is your nature?" asked Dr. Frost.

"I can only explain by analogy," said Azuriel. "I am composed of what you would call information, in a very broad sense of the word, but information without a physical carrier. The information you are familiar with is transmitted by the ink on the pages of a book, an electrical pulse in a wire, or a smile on the flesh of a friend. All these forms of information are transmitted by physical objects. The information of which I am composed has no carrier whatever, unless you count certain cells in your brain which register my presence."

"You aren't real then," said Dr. Frost.

For the first time, Azuriel seemed to smile. "I am a demon," he said, "not a metaphysician. I will confess this much: I can no more be damaged with Martin Luther's inkwell than the air can be wounded with a knife. I can neither affect, nor be affected by, any physical object."

"How can I perceive you, then?" asked Dr. Frost.

This time Azuriel grinned. "Do you?" he asked.

There was silence in the room for several minutes. Dr. Frost looked at the paper in his hand. After a time, he said, "What do you want from me?" without looking up.

"I do not want anything *from* you at all," said Azuriel. "I want your *self*, in the same way that you want a lettuce leaf, or a lamb chop. Your aims are in the universe of information, but you must eat the tissues of dead plants and animals to survive. My aims are on the next plane higher, and I must have crude information to pursue them.

"You are a remarkably intelligent man. You contain a great deal of information. I am willing to place you under cultivation, to rid you of pests, to satisfy your wishes, as you would satisfy a steer's wishes, and to feed you fat with experience. Then, when your natural lifespan is up, I will absorb you into myself, with your consciousness and thinking powers intact. You will be a part of me then, in the same sense that your food becomes part of you. I offer you a lifetime of wishes fulfilled, plus a share in my own immortality."

"You want my soul," said Dr. Frost.

"How quaint," said Azuriel. "No. That is precisely the part of you which I do *not* want. I am surprised that you would use such a semantically sloppy term, Doctor, but since you have, you must see that what you call a 'soul' is the part of you which determines the use to which you will put your knowledge, your information. That part of you would conflict with *my* wishes and objectives."

"What will you do with my soul?" asked Dr. Frost.

"Discard it," said Azuriel, simply.

"And what becomes of it then?" asked Dr. Frost.

"It vanishes," said Azuriel. "If your brain is the carrier for the information in your mind, your mind is the carrier for the stuff which forms your soul. What happens to the information in a book when the book is burned? But why should this concern you? Half an hour ago you would not have admitted that you had a soul. Would you exchange what I have just offered you for something whose existence you doubted so recently?"

"I don't know about . . ."

"As a matter of fact," said Azuriel, "to what extent do

you own your 'soul' right now? Perhaps you will think it rude of me to suggest it, but was the decision to work on fusion experiments entirely your own? Was it your soul which prompted you to join the weapons project, or was it something else? Disinterested scientific curiosity? The judgments of your fellow scientists? Patriotism? The simple fact that research money was to be found there and nowhere else in such quantity? Are any of these your 'soul'? Your work is the largest part of your life. If decisions *there* are made by forces external to you, why should you worry about losing your soul? Don't be a hypocrite, Doctor. Some men want money. Others want women. What you want is in this briefcase, or rather, in your own head. I offer you the time to get it and eternity to exploit it. I will return in precisely twenty-four hours for your decision."

As Dr. Frost looked at Azuriel, the figure in the chair blurred, faded, lost color and outline, until nothing was left but a shadow in a black leather armchair, and the white wilderness of papers in front of him, covered with calculations in his own hand.

For a long time after the chair was empty, Dr. Frost sat looking at the shadows. It was more than an hour until the shaking stopped. Then he left his office, taking care to avoid the chair Azuriel had occupied. There were three people whom he wanted to see: a young Jesuit, Father Paul, a psychiatrist, Dr. Eckmann, and a friend, Jean Connor.

The priest's telephone was the first to answer. He was cordial, and invited Dr. Frost to come to see him immediately.

Dr. Frost had known Father Paul for some time. They first met at a cocktail party at the University. Dr. Frost's upbringing, in a small and strictly Protestant town, had left him with a mild sense of surprise at the sight of a man in a clerical collar with a drink in his hand, and he had joined the group of students around the priest with considerable interest. The conversation involved one of the very few novels Dr. Frost had read since his undergraduate days, and he joined in the discussion.

Later, when the party ended, Dr. Frost offered to drive the priest home, and their conversation in the car led to a

luncheon at the Faculty Club. The lunch had been pleasant, and revealed to Dr. Frost that the priest was a symbolic logician of no small ability, although not quite of professional grade. Dr. Frost had left the lunch convinced that while the Catholic Church might be a lot of nonsense (he knew nothing of the matter personally, and didn't care), nevertheless Father Paul was a good talker and no fool.

They lunched together regularly after that, sometimes at Dr. Frost's table in the Faculty Club, sometimes at Father Paul's favorite restaurant in town. For some reason or other, Dr. Frost usually did the talking. Father Paul displayed a keen interest in mathematics and physics, and when Dr. Frost was sure that it was not the priest's intention to preach sermons to him, he found the younger man's interest rather flattering.

"Come in, John," said Father Paul when Dr. Frost arrived at his apartment. "You sounded worried over the telephone." He was dressed in a sweatshirt, an old pair of gray pants, and loafers. "I'm afraid you caught me a little off guard, but any time . . ." Then he saw Dr. Frost's face. He whistled softly. "You *have* got troubles," he said. "Come in, sit down, let me get you a drink."

A few minutes later Dr. Frost was sitting in a large armchair, next to a fireplace. Father Paul sat opposite him.

"Does the name 'Azuriel' mean anything to you?" asked Dr. Frost. Father Paul's eyebrows shot up. Then he rose, walked to a bookcase and pulled down a large brown volume.

"A devil," he said. "The name comes from a Hebrew word meaning 'liar.' Why are you interested in this?"

"I've seen him," said Dr. Frost.

Father Paul looked very intently at Dr. Frost for a moment. He seemed about to speak, but changed his mind and sat down suddenly in his chair, holding the book open across his knees. "Tell me about it," he said.

When Dr. Frost had finished his story there was silence in the room for several minutes. "You must think I'm insane," he said.

"No," said Father Paul. "I'm one of about six men in town who would believe you. I know you too well to think you're insane. I never met a saner man in my life. You

aren't the sort given to practical jokes, and you would have had to do a lot of research to find out as much about Azuriel as you have told me. No, I believe you completely. You saw what you thought you saw."

"We've never talked about religious matters before," said Dr. Frost. "What do you think I should do?"

Father Paul drew out his rosary. "Hold this," he said, extending the small silver crucifix at the end of the chain. Dr. Frost took the cross in his right hand. "Good," said Father Paul. "The fact that you can touch it indicates that you are not possessed, at any rate. Wait here." Father Paul went to his bedroom and returned with a bottle of water and a small black book. He took a phylactery from between its pages, kissed it, and put it over the back of his neck. Then he poured a little water into the palm of his left hand, dipped the fingers of his right hand into it, and touched them to Dr. Frost's forehead. He traced the sign of the cross in the air over Dr. Frost's head, and said *"Ego te baptiso in nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sanctus."* The singsong of the Latin words sounded strange in the quiet of the apartment. Then, opening the book, he began to read the formula of exorcism: *"Exorciso te, immundissime spiritus, emnis incursio adversarii, omne phantasma, omnis legio, in nomine Domine Nostri Jesus Christi; eradicare et effugare ab hoc plasmate Dei."* The words rolled on for several minutes. Finally Father Paul stopped. "Say 'Amen,' " he said to Dr. Frost.

"Amen." Father Paul sighed and sat down. "Well," he said smiling, "that's that." He removed his phylactery, kissed it, and put it beside him on the chair.

"What did all that mean?" asked Dr. Frost.

"The first was the ceremony of Baptism," said Father Paul. "It usually takes a bit longer than that, but the Church permits the shorter version to persons in mortal danger. The next was exorcism. The third was a general confession and act of contrition. Then I said 'Whatever the Church believes, I believe,' and you said 'Amen' to that. I don't believe you are in any immediate danger now, but I *would* go to mass every morning if I were you, for quite a while."

"Go to mass?" said Dr. Frost, puzzled.

"Certainly," said Father Paul, smiling. "You want to be a good Catholic now, don't you?"

"But I'm not a Catholic at all!"

"But you are," said Father Paul. "Did you think it would take a brass band? There are a number of other things which should be done, but there's no great hurry. Come back to see me when you feel a little better. Tomorrow, perhaps. I'll give you the necessary instruction."

"But I never agreed to be a Catholic," said Dr. Frost. "What are you trying to tell me?"

Father Paul's expression changed from satisfaction to astonishment. "What did you come to see me for, then?" he asked.

"Why, you're a friend of mine. I hoped you could give me some advice. I thought maybe if you believed me you could do something about all this."

"You don't have the idea at all," said Father Paul. "*I* can't do anything. I'm only an intermediary. Only God can help you, and even *He* can do nothing unless you accept Him willingly. Did you think what I said was magic? That I was pronouncing some sort of hocus-pocus over you which would set things right? The only thing I could do was to formalize your assent to God's will, which now you tell me did not exist, even after I had tried for so long!"

"What do you mean by that?" asked Dr. Frost.

"Why, I'm a priest," said Father Paul. "Ever since I met you I have been praying for your conversion. The Church needs more men like you, especially in her temporal affairs. And you need the Church, as this incident has shown so clearly. I had hoped to see you converted in four or five years' time, with God's help."

"But I thought you were my *friend*," said Dr. Frost.

"So I am, John, so I am, but my spiritual duty comes first. And what is an attempt to save your soul but an act of friendship? You talk as though I was trying to do something to hurt you. I confess I was forced to dissemble a little, and I apologise for that. But ask yourself what you would have said if I'd approached you directly." Father Paul plucked once, at the neck of his sweatshirt.

"So I took the long route. I tried to gain your respect and confidence with the little mathematics I know, hoping to break down your distorted image of the Church."

"But I don't have any image . . ."

"Of course you do," said Father Paul. "You may not realize it, but it's there. Have any of your fellow-physicists ever told you that Catholicism is anti-intellectual? All right. A man like you could hardly help possessing anti-Catholic attitudes in the atmosphere of this university. Anti-Catholicism is the anti-semitism of the intellectual, John. I had to try to put you in a receptive mood before I could appeal to you directly."

"I see," said Dr. Frost. "And if I go along with you and join the Church I will be *bound* to believe everything the Church believes, under threat of damnation? That's the way it works, isn't it?"

"The way you speak proves my point about your prejudices," said Father Paul. "Your ideas are . . ."

"Isn't it true that I would have to believe the Pope to be infallible?" asked Dr. Frost.

"Only when speaking *ex cathedra* on matters of faith and morals," said Father Paul.

"What else do you people talk about?" said Dr. Frost. "Look, forgive me for speaking bluntly, but you want the same things Azuriel wanted, and *he* at least laid his cards on the table. You want my brain for your 'temporal affairs,' but *you* are going to determine what gets done with it."

"I'm sorry, John," said Father Paul. "If you feel that way, the failure has been mine. I must warn you that if you leave here now you will go in mortal sin, and your danger would have existed even if Azuriel had never appeared. Your sin is the sin of pride. Like all too many scientists you hope to understand the universe through intellect alone. I tell you that you will find the task impossible. Faith is necessary. You must learn that the sort of freedom you want is an illusion. Perfect freedom is the freedom to obey the will of God."

"I'm sorry, Father," said Dr. Frost. "I have no time." As he left the apartment he heard the voice of Father Paul behind him echoing in the corridor. "Remember pride," it said, "remember pride."

The corridor was too dark for Dr. Frost to see the indecision on Father Paul's face as he turned to telephone the bishop, and by the time the Jesuit was explaining to his superior why such drastic action had been taken with-

out authorization, Dr. Frost was too distant to hear anything at all.

Dr. Frost went next to the apartment of Dr. Eckmann. He was an older man, growing stout from sitting still all day, listening to the desperate and the frightened. Dr. Frost had met him when one of his graduate students had a nervous breakdown two weeks before his oral examinations were due. The boy had withdrawn from the world completely, even to the extent that his muscles had been affected. If one of his arms were lifted above his head it would remain there for hours like a branch of a tree. The boy had collapsed while in Dr. Frost's laboratory, and Dr. Frost had been impressed by the gentleness and competence with which Dr. Eckmann had taken charge of the situation.

"I see," said Dr. Eckmann when Dr. Frost had finished. "Wait here a minute." He returned in a moment with a glass of water and three small red capsules.

"What are these?" asked Dr. Frost.

"They'll make you feel better," said Dr. Eckmann. "You seem badly upset, and I think they will do you good."

"Don't mince words with me," said Dr. Frost. "What the hell is in these pills? Either you tell me right now or I leave."

"Please don't be disturbed," said Dr. Eckmann. "Certainly I'll tell you. This is seconal—a sleeping pill. Surely you aren't concerned about those drugs, Doctor? I remember reading a paper of yours comparing their effect on the brain to certain types of shunts in switching networks."

"Don't try to sidetrack *me*, either. What do you expect me to do with a sedative? I'm not a medical man, but I know enough to see that those pills are a knockout dose."

Dr. Eckmann had been practicing for a long time. He considered for a moment and then put the water and the pills down within easy reach of Dr. Frost's hand.

"Buy a little time," he said. "You are obviously very upset. I am sure that there is nothing the matter with you which I or some other doctor cannot cure, given time. But I can do nothing for you while you are in this state. I am sure you will realize that that is reasonable. Psychiatry takes time."

"You think I am insane then?" asked Dr. Frost.

"The word is not used in modern medicine," said Dr. Eckmann. "I have no idea yet what may be the matter with you, but unless you realize that something is the matter, why are you here? You say that you have seen a devil. I say that you have been working too hard for three weeks and have revealed some childhood injury done to your mind. You have pushed yourself past the mental and physical dangerpoint, and your subconscious is giving you warnings in the form of these visions."

"But how can you account for the piece of paper which Azuriel left with me," said Dr. Frost. "I have it right here." He reached inside his jacket.

"I am sure you have a piece of paper there," said Dr. Eckmann, "but that does not prove it was given to you by a devil. I am not mathematician enough to understand it, but it *is* in your own hand, is it not? You wrote it yourself, and then suppressed the memory of the act."

"What about my knowing about Azuriel? How would I have known that there was a demon by that name? I never heard the name before in my life."

"I suggest that you did," said Dr. Eckmann. "You must realize that nothing we know is ever wholly forgotten. You pulled the memory of the name from your subconscious and wove this fantasy around it. Why you should have picked this particular pattern, I cannot imagine. We must investigate this, but it will take time. Come, please take the medicine. You will have a good night's sleep and we can talk about this in the morning when you are more relaxed."

Dr. Frost looked at the capsules and the glass of water. He reached out his hand and then drew it back. "No," he said.

"Why not?" asked Dr. Eckmann.

Dr. Frost looked very tired. "When I was studying in Europe before the war," he said, "I had a course with Schrodinger. I remember what he said to us in a lecture one day: 'Gentlemen, your instruments cannot lie to you. You may misinterpret them, you may read into them a significance which they do not possess. You may even be observing only the results of a short circuit. But you can not deny that your instruments have readings, nor that those readings have meaning.' No, Doctor, I know what I saw

with my own eyes, and I do not have time for years of treatment. Azuriel gave me only twenty-four hours. Is there nothing you can do for me now?"

Dr. Eckmann said nothing, but gestured toward the capsules on the table near Dr. Frost's hand. Dr. Frost hesitated, and then put them in his pocket. "I'll take them with me," he said.

"If you leave," said Dr. Eckmann, "I will be forced to recommend that you be committed to an institution. Your visions might lead you to harm yourself or someone else."

"I also know a little law," said Dr. Frost. "You will need the opinions of two other psychiatrists and a court order before you can do that. It will take several days. By that time I will know whether you are right or wrong. I have only eighteen hours left."

He stood up and walked toward the door. "Please call me if I can help you," said Dr. Eckmann. "Thank you," said Dr. Frost and left the apartment. Dr. Eckmann sat still in his chair for a few minutes and then shook his head. He stood up and walked to his telephone.

The last place Dr. Frost visited was the home of a woman, Jean Connor. Dr. Frost had never married, for reasons which were never clear to him nor to his friends. He enjoyed the company of women, and as a young man had enjoyed a full social life. He was a good dancer, although he was a little heavy, now, for that, and he had a sense of humor, of the passive sort: he seldom told a joke, but was quick to laugh at one.

He had a young man's gestures with his hands, and a young man's innocence where women were concerned. This innocence was not an innocence of the flesh, but of the mind. He saw women as like himself, dressed in bodies of another shape, and was surprised and hurt when this conclusion led him to the inevitable mistakes of judgment.

In spite of this defect, or perhaps because of it, Jean Connor loved Dr. Frost with an intensity which would have surprised him, had he guessed that she loved him at all. His relationship with her had been much the same as his friendships with professional acquaintances, except for the outward forms of paying the check at dinners with her, and the holding of her coat. Being innocent, he did

not realize that all such relationships between men and women are inherently unstable, bound to end either in marriage or angry separation. Jean Connor, however, knew more of such matters than Dr. Frost. Being a gently reared girl she had never flung herself at his head—and such a course might have been unwise in any event. But she had waited for two years, doing so in the belief that she would not wait in vain.

When he entered her apartment that evening she noticed the expression on his face and ran to put her arms around him. Concerned as he was, Dr. Frost noticed this, and was mildly surprised. But she recovered herself quickly and set about making him comfortable. She led him to a chair and asked him when he had last eaten. When he confessed that he had missed lunch entirely she gave a small hiss of affectionate exasperation and left the room to return in a few minutes with sandwiches and coffee. Only when he had eaten would she listen to him. She sat on the footstool while he talked for two hours.

When Dr. Frost finished he ran his hand over his eyes. "Well," he said, "what do you think?"

"You've been to these other people and asked them," she said. "What do *you* think?"

"I don't know," he said. "I don't know. I think I really saw him, I can't help that. But what should I believe? I can't accept Father Paul's idea that the universe is run by two opposing tyrants. Even if he's right, I can't see that a god who wants to use a man in the same way as Azuriel does should get my allegiance. Dr. Eckmann may be right, but I haven't enough time to find out. There's *never* enough time. But I do know what I saw."

"All right, John," she said. Then, looking at the tiredness in his face, she said, "You've got to get some rest."

"You're right," he said. "I'll call a cab."

"No, you won't," she said. She took him by the hand like a weary child and led him to her bedroom. He lay down on the bed, docile with fatigue, and she loosened his tie before she lay down beside him. She put her hand on the back of his neck and pulled his face toward her shoulder. For a moment, until he fell asleep, Dr. Frost felt at peace.

Later that night as she lay by his side in the darkness she felt sure that he was hers entirely.

In the morning Dr. Frost awoke. There were sounds in the kitchenette of the apartment and the faint domestic perfume of coffee was in the air. He ate breakfast gratefully, but a growing realization of the significance of her manner as she moved about the table to serve him made him feel nervous. When she asked him for his plans he told her that he wanted to walk and think the problem out. She looked unhappy, but agreed.

At the door he kissed her and said, "Even you, my darling, even you." He smiled a little sadly and went out, leaving her puzzled face behind him.

Dr. Frost walked through the city for hours. Once he saw a riveter standing on a girder, high above the street, and watched for twenty minutes as the man walked back and forth on the orange beam, uncovered by the dreadful fall below him. Once he thought the man was about to fall, and almost shouted until he understood that he had seen only the motion of the clouds behind the figure. Then he turned and walked home.

Entering his study, he looked at the chair where Azuriel had been. It was empty. He moved behind his desk and sat down. For a long time he waited, looking at the dull reflection of the afternoon sun on the polished black leather of the chair. Then he reached into his pocket and pulled out the pills which Dr. Eckmann had given him. He dropped them into the wastebasket, and they made a faint musical sound against its metal sides. He settled himself to wait for whatever was going to happen.

After a while a sheet of paper on his desk caught his eye. Was it really true that he had never seen these expressions before? How strange they were! How elegant! He took up his pen and began to work again.

At first, he did not even notice as the shadow in the armchair opposite him began to change once more, and his attention was so deeply absorbed that he was startled, looking up, to see that the two bright eyes observing him were blazing with triumph.

It may be true that those who study the works of William Shakespeare for the purpose of casting some light upon the enigma of his personality are wasting their time. "A man's life of any worth," wrote Keats, "is a continual allegory—and very few eyes can see the Mystery of his life." So that an answer to that mystery is no more likely to be found in an analysis of his works than in, say, a performance of *Hamlet* by a theatrical company in a small-town theater with a "supernatural smell." We think that all of you will be utterly charmed and pleased by this story of Fritz Leiber's.

FOUR GHOSTS IN HAMLET

by Fritz Leiber

Actors are a superstitious lot, probably because chance plays a big part in the success of a production of a company or merely an actor—and because we're still a little closer than other people to the gypsies in the way we live and think. For instance, it's bad luck to have peacock feathers on stage or say the last line of a play at rehearsals or whistle in the dressing room (the one nearest the door gets fired) or sing God Save the Sovereign on a railway train. (A Canadian company got wrecked that way.)

Shakespearean actors are no exceptions. They simply travel a few extra superstitions, such as the one which forbids reciting the lines of the Three Witches, or anything from *Macbeth,* for that matter, except at performances, rehearsals, and on other legitimate occasions. This might be a good rule for outsiders too—then there wouldn't be the endless flood of books with titles taken from the text of *Macbeth*—you know, *Brief Candle, Tomorrow and Tomorrow, The Sound and the Fury, A Poor Player, All Our Yesterdays,* and those are all just from one brief soliloquy.

And our company, the Governor's company, has a rule

against the Ghost in *Hamlet* dropping his greenish cheesecloth veil over his helmet-framed face until the very moment he makes each of his entrances. Hamlet's dead father mustn't stand veiled in the darkness of the wings.

This last superstition commemorates something which happened not too long ago, an actual ghost story. Sometimes I think it's the greatest ghost story in the world—though certainly not from my way of telling it, which is gossipy and poor, but from the wonder blazing at its core.

It's not only a true tale of the supernatural, but also very much a story about people, for after all—and before everything else—ghosts are people.

The ghostly part of the story first showed itself in the tritest way imaginable: three of our actresses (meaning practically all the ladies in a Shakespearean company) took to having sessions with a Ouija board in the hour before curtain time and sometimes even during a performance when they had long offstage waits, and they became so wrapped up in it and conceited about it and they squeaked so excitedly at the revelations which the planchette spelled out—and three or four times almost missed entrances because of it—that if the Governor weren't such a tolerant commander-in-chief, he would have forbidden them to bring the board to the theater. I'm sure he was tempted to and might have, except that Props pointed out to him that our three ladies probably wouldn't enjoy Ouija sessions one bit in the privacy of a hotel room, that much of the fun in operating a Ouija board is in having a half exasperated, half intrigued floating audience, and that when all's done the basic business of all ladies is glamour, whether of personal charm or of actual witchcraft, since the word means both.

Props—that is, our property man, Billy Simpson—was fascinated by their obsession, as he is by any new thing that comes along, and might very well have broken our Shakespearean taboo by quoting the Three Witches about them, except that Props has no flair for Shakespearean speech at all, no dramatic ability whatsoever, in fact he's the one person in our company who never acts even a bit part or carries a mute spear on stage, though he has other talents which make up for this deficiency—he can throw together a papier mache bust of Pompey in two hours, or

turn out a wooden prop dagger all silvery-bladed and hilt-gilded, or fix a zipper, and that's not all.

As for myself, I was very irked at the ridiculous alphabet board, since it seemed to occupy most of Monica Singleton's spare time and satisfy all her hunger for thrills. I'd been trying to promote a romance with her—a long touring season becomes deadly and cold without some sort of heart-tickle—and for a while I'd made progress. But after Ouija came along, I became a ridiculous Guildenstern mooning after an unattainable unseeing Ophelia—which were the parts I and she actually played in *Hamlet*.

I cursed the idiot board with its childish corner-pictures of grinning suns and smirking moons and windblown spirits, and I further alienated Monica by asking her why wasn't it called a Nenein or No-No board (Ninny board!) instead of a Yes-Yes board? Was that, I inquired, because all spiritualists are forever accentuating the positive and behaving like a pack of fawning yes-men?—yes, we're here; yes, we're your uncle Harry; yes, we're happy on this plane; yes, we have a doctor among us who'll diagnose that pain in your chest; and so on.

Monica wouldn't speak to me for a week after that.

I would have been even more depressed except that Props pointed out to me that no flesh-and-blood man can compete with ghosts in a girl's affections, since ghosts being imaginary have all the charms and perfections a girl can dream of, but that all girls eventually tire of ghosts, or if their minds don't, their bodies do. This eventually did happen, thank goodness, in the case of myself and Monica, though not until we'd had a grisly, mind-wrenching experience—a night of terrors before the nights of love.

So Ouija flourished and the Governor and the rest of us put up with it one way or another, until there came that three-night-stand in Wolverton, when its dismal uncanny old theater tempted our three Ouija-women to ask the board who was the ghost haunting the spooky place and the swooping planchette spelled out the name S-H-A-K-E-S-P-E-A-R-E . . .

But I am getting ahead of my story. I haven't introduced our company except for Monica, Props, and the Governor—and I haven't identified the last of those three.

We call Gilbert Usher the Governor out of sheer respect

and affection. He's about the last of the old actor-managers. He hasn't the name of Gielgud or Olivier or Evans or Richardson, but he's spent most of a lifetime keeping Shakespeare alive, spreading that magical a-religious gospel in the more remote counties and the Dominions and the United States, like Benson once did. Our other actors aren't names at all—I refuse to tell you mine!—but with the exception of myself they're good troupers, or if they don't become that the first season, they drop out. Gruelingly long seasons, much uncomfortable traveling, and small profits are our destiny.

This particular season had got to that familiar point where the plays are playing smoothly and everyone's a bit tireder than he realized and the restlessness sets in. Robert Dennis, our juvenile, was writing a novel of theatrical life (he said) mornings at the hotel—up at seven to slave at it, our Robert claimed. Poor old Guthrie Boyd had started to drink again, and drink quite too much, after an abstemious two months which had astonished everyone.

Francis Farley Scott, our leading man, had started to drop hints that he was going to organize a Shakespearean repertory company of his own next year and he began to have conspiratorial conversations with Gertrude Grainger, our leading lady, and to draw us furtively aside one by one to make us hypothetical offers, no exact salary named. F. F. is as old as the Governor—who is our star, of course—and he has no talents at all except for self-infatuation and a somewhat grandiose yet impressive fashion of acting. He's portly like an opera tenor and quite bald and he travels an assortment of thirty toupees, ranging from red to black shot with silver, which he alternates with shameless abandon—they're for wear offstage, not on. It doesn't matter to him that the company knows all about his multicolored artificial toppings, for we're part of his world of illusion, and he's firmly convinced that the stage-struck local ladies he squires about never notice, or at any rate mind the deception. He once gave me a lecture on the subtleties of suiting the color of your hair to the lady you're trying to fascinate—her own age, hair color, and so on.

Every year F. F. plots to start a company of his own—it's a regular midseason routine with him—and every year it comes to nothing, for he's as lazy and impractical as he

is vain. Yet F. F. believes he could play any part in Shakespeare or all of them at once in a pinch; perhaps the only F. F. Scott Company which would really satisfy him would be one in which he would be the only actor—a Shakespearean monologue; in fact, the one respect in which F. F. is not lazy is his eagerness to double as many parts as possible in any single play.

F. F.'s yearly plots never bother the Governor a bit—he keeps waiting wistfully for F. F. to fix him with an hypnotic eye and in a hoarse whisper ask *him* to join the Scott company.

And I of course was hoping that now at last Monica Singleton would stop trying to be the most exquisite ingenue that ever came tripping Shakespeare's way (rehearsing her parts even in her sleep, I guessed, though I was miles from being in a position to know that for certain) and begin to take note and not just advantage of my devoted attentions.

But then old Sybil Jameson bought the Ouija board and Gertrude Grainger dragooned an unwilling Monica into placing her fingertips on the planchette along with theirs "just for a lark." Next day Gertrude announced to several of us in a hushed voice that Monica had the most amazing undeveloped mediumistic talent she'd ever encountered, and from then on the girl was a Ouija-addict. Poor tight-drawn Monica, I suppose she had to explode out of her self-imposed Shakespearean discipline somehow, and it was just too bad it had to be the board instead of me. Though come to think of it, I shouldn't have felt quite so resentful of the board, for she might have exploded with Robert Dennis, which would have been infinitely worse, though we were never quite sure of Robert's sex. For that matter I wasn't sure of Gertrude's and suffered agonies of uncertain jealousy when she captured my beloved. I was obsessed with the vision of Gertrude's bold knees pressing Monica's under the Ouija board, though with Sybil's bony ones for chaperones, fortunately.

Francis Farley Scott, who was jealous too because this new toy had taken Gertrude's mind off their annual plottings, said rather spitefully that Monica must be one of those grabby girls who have to take command of whatever they get their fingers on, whether it's a man or a planchette,

but Props told me he'd bet anything that Gertrude and Sybil had "followed" Monica's first random finger movements like the skillfulest dancers guiding a partner while seeming to yield, in order to coax her into the business and make sure of their third.

Sometimes I thought that F. F. was right and sometimes Props and sometimes I thought that Monica had a genuine supernatural talent, though I don't ordinarily believe in such things, and that last really frightened me, for such a person might give up live men for ghosts forever. She was such a sensitive, subtle, wraith-cheeked girl and she could get so keyed up and when she touched the planchette her eyes got such an empty look, as if her mind had traveled down into her fingertips or out to the ends of time and space. And once the three of them gave me a character reading from the board which embarrassed me with its accuracy. The same thing happened to several other people in the company. Of course, as Props pointed out, actors can be pretty good character analysts whenever they stop being egomaniacs.

After reading characters and foretelling the future for several weeks, our Three Weird Sisters got interested in reincarnation and began asking the board and then telling us what famous or infamous people we'd been in past lives. Gertrude Grainger had been Queen Boadicea, I wasn't surprised to hear. Sybil Jameson had been Cassandra. While Monica was once mad Queen Joanna of Castile and more recently a prize hysterical patient of Janet at the Salpetriere —touches which irritated and frightened me more than they should have. Billy Simpson—Props—had been an Egyptian silversmith under Queen Hatshepsut and later a servant of Samuel Pepys; he heard this with a delighted chuckle. Guthrie Boyd had been the Emperor Claudius and Robert Dennis had been Caligula. For some reason I had been both John Wilkes Booth and Lambert Simnel, which irritated me considerably, for I saw no romance but only neurosis in assassinating an American president and dying in a burning barn, or impersonating the Earl of Warwick, pretending unsuccessfully to the British throne, being pardoned for it—of all things!—and spending the rest of my life as a scullion in the kitchen of Henry VII and his son. The fact that both Booth and Simnel had been actors of

a sort—a poor sort—naturally irritated me the more. Only much later did Monica confess to me that the board had probably made those decisions because I had had such a "tragic, dangerous, defeated look"—a revelation which surprised and flattered me.

Francis Farley Scott was flattered too, to hear he'd once been Henry VIII—he fancied all those wives and he wore his golden blonde toupee after the show that night—until Gertrude and Sybil and Monica announced that the Governor was a reincarnation of no less than William Shakespeare himself. That made F. F. so jealous that he instantly sat down at the prop table, grabbed up a quill pen, and did an impromptu rendering of Shakespeare composing Hamlet's "To be or not to be" soliloquy. It was an effective performance, though with considerably more frowning and eye-rolling and trying of lines for sound than I imagine Willy S. himself used originally, and when F. F. finished, even the Governor, who'd been standing unobserved in the shadows beside Props, applauded with the latter.

Governor kidded the pants off the idea of himself as Shakespeare. He said that if Willy S. were ever reincarnated it ought to be as a world-famous dramatist who was secretly in his spare time the world's greatest scientist and philosopher and left clues to his identity in his mathematical equations—that way he'd get his own back at Bacon, or rather the Baconians.

Yet I suppose if you had to pick someone for a reincarnation of Shakespeare, Gilbert Usher wouldn't be a bad choice. Insofar as a star and director ever can be, the Governor is gentle and self-effacing—as Shakespeare himself must have been, or else there would never have arisen that who-wrote Shakespeare controversy. And the Governor has a sweet melancholy about him, though he's handsomer and despite his years more athletic than one imagines Shakespeare being. And he's generous to a fault, especially where old actors who've done brave fine things in the past are concerned.

This season his mistake in the last direction had been in hiring Guthrie Boyd to play some of the more difficult older leading roles, including a couple F. F. usually handles: Brutus, Othello, and besides those Duncan in *Macbeth,* Kent in *King Lear,* and the Ghost in *Hamlet.*

Guthrie was a bellowing hard-drinking bear of an actor, who'd been a Shakespearean star in Australia and successfully smuggled some of his reputation west—he learned to moderate his bellowing, while his emotions were always simple and sincere, though explosive—and finally even spent some years in Hollywood. But there his drinking caught up with him, probably because of the stupid film parts he got, and he failed six times over. His wife divorced him. His children cut themselves off. He married a starlet and she divorced him. He dropped out of sight.

Then after several years the Governor ran into him. He'd been rusticating in Canada with a stubborn teetotal admirer. He was only a shadow of his former self, but there was some substance to the shadow—and he wasn't drinking. The Governor decided to take a chance on him—although the company manager Harry Grossman was dead set against it—and during rehearsals and the first month or so of performances it was wonderful to see how old Guthrie Boyd came back, exactly as if Shakespeare were a restorative medicine.

It may be stuffy or sentimental of me to say so, but you know, I think Shakespeare's good for people. I don't know of an actor, except myself, whose character hasn't been strengthened and his vision widened and charity quickened by working in the plays. I've heard that before Gilbert Usher became a Shakespearean, he was a more ruthlessly ambitious and critical man, not without malice, but the plays mellowed him, as they've mellowed Props's philosophy and given him a zest for life.

Because of his contact with Shakespeare, Robert Dennis is a less strident and pettish swish (if he is one), Gertrude Grainger's outbursts of cold rage have an undercurrent of queenly make-believe, and even Francis Farley Scott's grubby little seductions are probably kinder and less insultingly illusionary.

In fact I sometimes think that what civilized serenity the British people possess, and small but real ability to smile at themselves, is chiefly due to their good luck in having had William Shakespeare born one of their company.

But I was telling how Guthrie Boyd performed very capably those first weeks, against the expectations of most of us, so that we almost quit holding our breaths—or snif-

fing at his. His Brutus was workmanlike, his Kent quite fine—that bluff rough honest part suited him well—and he regularly got admiring notices for his Ghost in *Hamlet*. I think his years of living death as a drinking alcoholic had given him an understanding of loneliness and frozen abilities and despair that he put to good use—probably unconsciously—in interpreting the small role.

He was really a most impressive figure in the part, even just visually. The Ghost's basic costume is simple enough—a big all-enveloping cloak that brushes the groundcloth, a big dull helmet with the tiniest battery light inside its peak to throw a faint green glow on the Ghost's features, and over the helmet a veil of greenish cheesecloth that registers as mist to the audience. He wears a suit of stage armor under the cloak, but that's not important and at a pinch he can do without it, for his cloak can cover his entire body.

The Ghost doesn't switch on his helmet-light until he makes his entrance, for fear of it being glimpsed by an edge of the audience, and nowadays because of that superstition or rule I told you about, he doesn't drop the cheesecloth veil until the last second either, but when Guthrie Boyd was playing the part that rule didn't exist and I have a vivid recollection of him standing in the wings, waiting to go on, a big bearish inscrutable figure about as solid and un-supernatural as a bushy seven-foot evergreen covered by a gray tarpaulin. But then when Guthrie would switch on the tiny light and stride smoothly and silently on stage and his hollow distant tormented voice boom out, there'd be a terrific shivery thrill, even for us backstage, as if we were listening to words that really had traveled across black windy infinite gulfs from the Afterworld or the Other Side.

At any rate Guthrie was a great Ghost, and adequate or a bit better than that in most of his other parts—for those first nondrinking weeks. He seemed very cheerful on the whole, modestly buoyed up by his comeback, though sometimes something empty and dead would stare for a moment out of his eyes—the old drinking alcoholic wondering what all this fatiguing sober nonsense was about. He was especially looking forward to our three-night-stand at Wolverton, although that was still two months in the

future then. The reason was that both his children—married and with families now, of course—lived and worked at Wolverton and I'm sure he set great store on proving to them in person his rehabilitation, figuring it would lead to a reconciliation and so on.

But then came his first performance as Othello. (The Governor, although the star, always played Iago—an equal role, though not the title one.) Guthrie was almost too old for Othello, of course, and besides that, his health wasn't good—the drinking years had taken their toll of his stamina and the work of rehearsals and of first nights in eight different plays after years away from the theater had exhausted him. But somehow the old volcano inside him got seething again and he gave a magnificent performance. Next morning the papers raved about him and one review rated him even better than the Governor.

That did it, unfortunately. The glory of his triumph was too much for him. The next night—*Othello* again—he was drunk as a skunk. He remembered most of his lines—though the Governor had to throw him about every sixth one out of the side of his mouth—but he weaved and wobbled, he planked a big hand on the shoulder of every other character he addressed to keep from falling over, and he even forgot to put in his false teeth the first two acts, so that his voice was mushy. To cap that, he started really to strangle Gertrude Grainger in the last scene, until the rather brawny Desdemona, unseen by the audience, gave him a knee in the gut; then, after stabbing himself, he flung the prop dagger high in the flies so that it came down with two lazy twists and piercing the groundcloth buried its blunt point deep in the soft wood of the stage floor not three feet from Monica, who plays Iago's wife Emilia and so was lying dead on the stage at that point in the drama, murdered by her villainous husband—and might have been dead for real if the dagger had followed a slightly different trajectory.

Since a third performance of *Othello* was billed for the following night, the Governor had no choice but to replace Guthrie with Francis Farley Scott, who did a good job (for him) of covering up his satisfaction at getting his old role back. F. F., always a plushy and lascivious-eyed Moor, also did a good job with the part, coming in

that way without even a brush-up rehearsal, so that one critic, catching the first and third shows, marveled how we could change big roles at will, thinking we'd done it solely to demonstrate our virtuosity.

Of course the Governor read the riot act to Guthrie and carried him off to a doctor, who without being prompted threw a big scare into him about his drinking and his heart, so that he just might have recovered from his lapse, except that two nights later we did *Julius Caesar* and Guthrie, instead of being satisfied with being workmanlike, decided to recoup himself with a really rousing performance. So he bellowed and groaned and bugged his eyes as I suppose he had done in his palmiest Australian days. His optimistic self-satisfaction between scenes was frightening to behold. Not too terrible a performance, truly, but the critics all panned him and one of them said, "Guthrie Boyd played Brutus—a bunch of vocal cords wrapped up in a toga."

That tied up the package and knotted it tight. Thereafter Guthrie was medium pie-eyed from morning to night —and often more than medium. The Governor had to yank him out of Brutus too (F. F. again replacing), but being the Governor he didn't sack him. He put him into a couple of bit parts—Montano and the Soothsayer—in *Othello* and *Ceasar* and let him keep on at the others and he gave me and Joe Rubens and sometimes Props the job of keeping an eye on the poor old sot and making sure he got to the theater by the half hour and if possible not too plastered. Often he played the Ghost or the Doge of Venice in his street clothes under cloak or scarlet robe, but he played them. And many were the nights Joe and I made the rounds of half the local bars before we corraled him. The Governor sometimes refers to Joe Rubens and me in mild derision as "the American element" in his company, but just the same he depends on us quite a bit; and I certainly don't mind being one of his trouble-shooters—it's a joy to serve him.

All this may seem to contradict my statement about our getting to the point, about this time, where the plays were playing smoothly and the monotony setting in. But it doesn't really. There's always something going wrong in a theatrical company—anything else would be abnormal; just as the Samoans say no party is a success until some-

body's dropped a plate or spilled a drink or tickled the wrong woman.

Besides, once Guthrie had got Othello and Brutus off his neck, he didn't do too badly. The little parts and even Kent he could play passably whether drunk or sober. King Duncan, for instance, and the Doge in *The Merchant* are easy to play drunk because the actor always has a couple of attendants to either side of him, who can guide his steps if he weaves and even hold him up if necessary—which can turn out to be an effective dramatic touch, registering as the infirmity of extreme age.

And somehow Guthrie continued to give that same masterful performance as the Ghost and get occasional notices for it. In fact Sybil Jameson insisted he was a shade better in the Ghost now that he was invariably drunk; which could have been true. And he still talked about the three-night-stand coming up in Wolverton, though now as often with gloomy apprehension as with proud fatherly anticipation.

Well, the three-night-stand eventually came. We arrived at Wolverton on a non-playing evening. To the surprise of most of us, but especially Guthrie, his son and daughter were there at the station to welcome him with their respective spouses and all their kids and numerous in-laws and a great gaggle of friends. Their cries of greeting when they spotted him were almost an organized cheer and I looked around for a brass band to strike up.

I found out later that Sybil Jameson, who knew them, had been sending them all his favorable notices, so that they were eager as weasels to be reconciled with him and show him off as blatantly as possible.

When he saw his childrens' and grandchildrens' faces and realized the cries were for him, old Guthrie got red in the face and beamed like the sun, and they closed in around him and carried him off in triumph for an evening of celebrations.

Next day I heard from Sybil, whom they'd carried off with him, that everything had gone beautifully. He'd drunk like a fish, but kept marvelous control, so that no one but she noticed, and the warmth of the reconcilation of Guthrie to everyone, complete strangers included, had been wonderful to behold. Guthrie's son-in-law, a pugnacious chap,

had got angry when he'd heard Guthrie wasn't to play Brutus the third night, and he declared that Gilbert Usher must be jealous of his magnificent father-in-law. Everything was forgiven twenty times over. They'd even tried to put old Sybil to bed with Guthrie, figuring romantically, as people will about actors, that she must be his mistress. All this was very fine, and of course wonderful for Guthrie, and for Sybil in a fashion, yet I suppose the unconstrained nightlong bash, after two months of uninterrupted semi-controlled drunkenness, was just about the worst thing anybody could have done to the old boy's sodden body and laboring heart.

Meanwhile on that first evening I accompanied Joe Rubens and Props to the theater we were playing at Wolverton to make sure the scenery got stacked right and the costume trunks were all safely arrived and stowed. Joe is our stage manager besides doing rough or Hebraic parts like Caliban and Tubal—he was a professional boxer in his youth and got his nose smashed crooked. Once I started to take boxing lessons from him, figuring an actor should know everything, but during the third lesson I walked into a gentle right cross and although it didn't exactly stun me there were bells ringing faintly in my head for six hours afterwards and I lived in a world of faery and that was the end of my fistic career. Joe is actually a most versatile actor—for instance, he understudies the Governor in Macbeth, Lear, Iago, and of course Shylock—though his brutal moon-face is against him, especially when his make-up doesn't include a beard. But he dotes on being genial and in the States he often gets a job by day playing Santa Claus in big department stores during the month before Christmas.

The Monarch was a cavernous old place, very grimy backstage, but with a great warren of dirty little dressing rooms and even a property room shaped like an L stage left. Its empty shelves were thick with dust.

There hadn't been a show in the Monarch for over a year, I saw from the yellowing sheets thumbtacked to the callboard as I tore them off and replaced them with a simple black-crayoned HAMLET: TONIGHT AT 8:30.

Then I noticed, by the cold inadequate working lights, a couple of tiny dark shapes dropping down from the flies

and gliding around in wide swift circles—out into the house too, since the curtain was up. Bats, I realized with a little start—the Monarch was really halfway through the lich gate. The bats would fit very nicely with *Macbeth,* I told myself, but not so well with *The Merchant of Venice,* while with *Hamlet* they should neither help nor hinder, provided they didn't descend in nightfighter squadrons; it would be nice if they stuck to the Ghost scenes.

I'm sure the Governor had decided we'd open at Wolverton with *Hamlet* so that Guthrie would have the best chance of being a hit in his children's home city.

Billy Simpson, shoving his properties table into place just in front of the dismal L of the prop room, observed cheerfully, "It's a proper haunted house. The girls'll find some rare ghosts here, I'll wager, if they work their board."

Which turned out to be far truer than he realized at the time—I think.

"Bruce!" Joe Rubens called to me. "We better buy a couple of rat traps and set them out. There's something scuttling back of the drops."

But when I entered the Monarch next night, well before the hour, by the creaky thick metal stage door, the place had been swept and tidied a bit. With the groundcloth down and the *Hamlet* set up, it didn't look too terrible, even though the curtain was still unlowered, dimly showing the house and its curves of empty seats and the two faint green exit lights with no one but myself to look at them.

There was a little pool of light around the callboard stage right, and another glow the other side of the stage beyond the wings, and lines of light showing around the edges of the door of the second dressing room, next to the star's.

I started across the stage, sliding my shoes softly so as not to trip over a cable or stage-screw and brace, and right away I got the magic electric feeling I often do in an empty theater the night of a show. Only this time there was something additional, something that started a shiver crawling down my neck. It wasn't, I think, the thought of the bats which might now be swooping around me unseen, skirling their inaudibly shrill trumpet calls, or even of the rats which *might* be watching sequin-eyed from behind trunks and flats, although not an hour ago Joe had told me

that the traps he'd actually procured and set last night had been empty today.

No, it was more as if all of Shakespeare's characters were invisibly there around me—all the infinite possibilities of the theater. I imagined Rosalind and Falstaff and Prospero standing arm-in-arm watching me with different smiles. And Caliban grinning down from where he silently swung in the flies. And side by side, but unsmiling and not arm-in-arm: Macbeth and Iago and Dick the Three Eyes—Richard III. And all the rest of Shakespeare's myriad-minded good-evil crew.

I passed through the wings opposite and there in the second pool of light Billy Simpson sat behind his table with the properties for *Hamlet* set out on it: the skulls, the foils, the lantern, the purses, the parchmenty letters, Ophelia's flowers, and all the rest. It was odd Props having everything ready quite so early and a bit odd too that he should be alone, for Props has the un-actorish habit of making friends with all sorts of locals, such as policemen and porters and flower women and newsboys and shopkeepers and tramps who claim they're indigent actors, and even inviting them backstage with him—a fracture of rules which the Governor allows since Props is such a sensible chap. He has a great liking for people, especially low people, Props has, and for all the humble details of life. He'd make a good writer, I'd think, except for his utter lack of dramatic flair and story-skill—a sort of prosiness that goes with his profession.

And now he was sitting at his table, his stooped shoulders almost inside the doorless entry to the empty-shelfed prop room—no point in using it for a three-night-stand—and he was gazing at me quizzically. He has a big forehead—the light was on that—and a tapering chin—that was in shadow—and rather large eyes, which were betwixt the light and the dark. Sitting there like that, he seemed to me for a moment (mostly because of the outspread props, I guess) like the midnight Master of the Show in *The Rubaiyat* round whom all the rest of us move like shadow shapes.

Usually he has a quick greeting for anyone, but tonight he was silent, and that added to the illusion.

"Props," I said, "this theater's got a supernatural smell."

His expression didn't change at that, but he solemnly

sniffed the air in several little whiffles, adding up to one big inhalation, and as he did so he threw his head back, bringing his weakish chin into the light and shattering the illusion.

"Dust," he said after a moment. "Dust and old plush and scenery water-paint and sweat and drains and gelatin and greasepaint and powder and a breath of whisky. But the supernatural . . . no, I can't smell that. Unless . . ." And he sniffed again, but shook his head.

I chuckled at his materialism—although that touch about whisky did seem fanciful, since I hadn't been drinking and Props never does and Guthrie Boyd was nowhere in evidence. Props has a mind like a notebook for sensory details—and for the minutia of human habits too. It was Props, for instance, who told me about the actual notebook in which John McCarthy (who would be playing Fortinbras and the Player King in a couple of hours) jots down the exact number of hours he sleeps each night and keeps totting them up, so he knows when he'll have to start sleeping extra hours to average the full nine he thinks he must get each night to keep from dying.

It was also Props who pointed out to me that F. F. is much more careless gumming his offstage toupees to his head than his theater wigs—a studied carelessness, like that in tying a bowtie, he assured me; it indicated, he said, a touch of contempt for the whole offstage world.

Props isn't *only* a detail-worm, but it's perhaps because he is one that he has sympathy for all human hopes and frailties, even the most trivial, like my selfish infatuation with Monica.

Now I said to him, "I didn't mean an actual smell, Billy. But back there just now I got the feeling anything might happen tonight."

He nodded slowly and solemnly. With anyone but Props I'd have wondered if he weren't a little drunk. Then he said, "You were on a stage. You know, the science-fiction writers are missing a bet there. We've got time machines right now. Theaters. Theaters are time machines and spaceships too. They take people on trips through the future and the past and the elsewhere and the might-have-been—yes, and if it's done well enough, give them glimpses of Heaven and Hell."

I nodded back at him. Such grotesque fancies are the closest Props ever comes to escaping from prosiness.

I said, "Well, let's hope Guthrie gets aboard the spaceship before the curtain up-jets. Tonight we're depending on his children having the sense to deliver him here intact. Which from what Sybil says about them is not to be taken for granted."

Props stared at me owlishly and slowly shook his head. "Guthrie got here about ten minutes ago," he said, "and looking no drunker than usual."

"That's a relief," I told him, meaning it.

"The girls are having a Ouija session," he went on, as if he were determined to account for all of us from moment to moment. "They smelt the supernatural here, just as you did, and they're asking the board to name the culprit." Then he stooped so that he looked almost hunchbacked and he felt for something under the table.

I nodded. I'd guessed the Ouija part from the lines of light showing around the door of Gertrude Grainger's dressing room.

Props straightened up and he had a pint bottle of whisky in his hand. I don't think a loaded revolver would have dumbfounded me as much. He unscrewed the top.

"There's the Governor coming in," he said tranquilly, hearing the stage door creak and evidently some footsteps my own ears missed. "That's seven of us in the theater before the hour."

He took a big slow swallow of whisky and recapped the bottle, as naturally as if it were a nightly action. I goggled at him without comment. What he was doing was simply unheard of—for Billy Simpson.

At that moment there was a sharp scream and a clatter of thin wood and something twangy and metallic falling and a scurry of footsteps. Our previous words must have cocked a trigger in me, for I was at Gertrude Grainger's dressing-room door as fast as I could sprint—no worry this time about tripping over cables or braces in the dark.

I yanked the door open and there by the bright light of the bulbs framing the mirror were Gertrude and Sybil sitting close together with the Ouija board face down on the floor in front of them along with a flimsy wire-backed chair, overturned. While pressing back into Gertrude's costumes

hanging on the rack across the little room, almost as if she wanted to hide behind them like bedclothes, was Monica, pale and staring-eyed. She didn't seem to recognize me. The dark-green heavily brocaded costume Gertrude wears as the Queen in *Hamlet*, into which Monica was chiefly pressing herself, accentuated her pallor. All three of them were in their streetclothes.

I went to Monica and put an arm around her and gripped her hand. It was cold as ice. She was standing rigidly.

While I was doing that Gertrude stood up and explained in rather haughty tones what I told you earlier: about them asking the board who the ghost was haunting the Monarch tonight and the planchette spelling out S-H-A-K-E-S-P-E-A-R-E . . .

"I don't know why it startled you so, dear," she ended crossly, speaking to Monica. "It's very natural his spirit should attend performances of his plays."

I felt the slim body I clasped relax a little. That relieved me. I was selfishly pleased at having got an arm around it, even under such public and unamorous circumstances, while at the same time my silly mind was thinking that if Props had been lying to me about Guthrie Boyd having come in no more drunken than usual (this new Props who drank straight whisky in the theater could lie too, I supposed) why then we could certainly use William Shakespeare tonight, since the Ghost in *Hamlet* is the one part in all his plays Shakespeare himself is supposed to have acted on the stage.

"I don't know why myself now," Monica suddenly answered from beside me, shaking her head as if to clear it. She became aware of me at last, started to pull away, then let my arm stay around her.

The next voice that spoke was the Governor's. He was standing in the doorway, smiling faintly, with Props peering around his shoulder. Props would be as tall as the Governor if he ever straightened up, but his stoop takes almost a foot off his height.

The Governor said softly, a comic light in his eyes, "I think we should be content to bring Shakespeare's plays to life, without trying for their author. It's hard enough on the nerves just to *act* Shakespeare."

He stepped forward with one of his swift, naturally

graceful movements and kneeling on one knee he picked up the fallen board and planchette. "At all events I'll take these in charge for tonight. Feeling better now, Miss Singleton?" he asked as he straightened and stepped back.

"Yes, quite all right," she answered flusteredly, disengaging my arm and pulling away from me rather too quickly.

He nodded. Gertrude Grainger was staring at him coldly, as if about to say something scathing, but she didn't. Sybil Jameson was looking at the floor. She seemed embarrassed, yet puzzled too.

I followed the Governor out of the dressing room and told him, in case Props hadn't, about Guthrie Boyd coming to the theater early. My momentary doubt of Prop's honesty seemed plain silly to me now, although his taking that drink remained an astonishing riddle.

Props confirmed me about Guthrie coming in, though his manner was a touch abstracted.

The Governor nodded his thanks for the news, then twitched a nostril and frowned. I was sure he'd caught a whiff of alcohol and didn't know to which of us two to attribute it—or perhaps even to one of the ladies, or to an earlier passage of Guthrie this way.

He said to me, "Would you come into my dressing room for a bit, Bruce?"

I followed him, thinking he'd picked me for the drinker and wondering how to answer—best perhaps simply silently accept the fatherly lecture—but when he'd turned on the lights and I'd shut the door, his first question was, "You're attracted to Miss Singleton, aren't you, Bruce?"

When I nodded abruptly, swallowing my morsel of surprise, he went on softly but emphatically, "Then why don't you quit hovering and playing Galahad and really go after her? Ordinarily I must appear to frown on affairs in the company, but in this case it would be the best way I know of to break up those Ouija sessions, which are obviously harming the girl."

I managed to grin and tell him I'd be happy to obey his instructions—and do it entirely on my own initiative too.

He grinned back and started to toss the Ouija board on his couch, but instead put it and the planchette carefully down on the end of his long dressing table and put a second question to me.

"What do you think of some of this stuff they're getting over the board, Bruce?"

I said, "Well, that last one gave me a shiver, all right—I suppose because . . ." and I told him about sensing the presence of Shakespeare's characters in the dark. I finished, "But of course the whole idea is nonsense," and I grinned.

He didn't grin back.

I continued impulsively. "There was one idea they had a few weeks back that impressed me, though it didn't seem to impress you. I hope you won't think I'm trying to butter you up, Mr. Usher. I mean the idea of you being a reincarnation of William Shakespeare."

He laughed delightedly and said, "Clearly you don't yet know the difference between a player and a playwright, Bruce. Shakespeare striding about romantically with head thrown back?—and twirling a sword and shaping his body and voice to every feeling handed him? Oh no! I'll grant he might have played the Ghost—it's a part within the scope of an average writer's talents, requiring nothing more than that he stand still and sound off sepulchrally."

He paused and smiled and went on. "No, there's only one person in this company who might be Shakespeare come again, and that's Billy Simpson. Yes, I mean Props. He's a great listener and he knows how to put himself in touch with everyone and then he's got that rat-trap mind for every hue and scent and sound of life, inside or out the mind. And he's very analytic. Oh, I know he's got no poetic talent, but surely Shakespeare wouldn't have that in *every* reincarnation. I'd think he'd need about a dozen lives in which to gather material for every one in which he gave it dramatic form. Don't you find something very poignant in the idea of a mute inglorious Shakespeare spending whole humble lifetimes collecting the necessary stuff for one great dramatic burst? Think about it some day."

I was doing that already and finding it a fascinating fantasy. It crystalized so perfectly the feeling I'd got seeing Billy Simpson behind his property table. And then Props did have a high-foreheaded poet-schoolmaster's face like that given Shakespeare in the posthumous engravings and woodcuts and portraits. Why, even their initials were the same. It made me feel strange.

Then the Governor put his third question to me.

"He's drinking tonight, isn't he? I mean Props, not Guthrie."

I didn't say anything, but my face must have answered for me—at least to such a student of expressions as the Governor—for he smiled and said, "You needn't worry. I wouldn't be angry with him. In fact, the only other time I know of that Props drank spirits by himself in the theater, I had a great deal to thank him for." His lean face grew thoughtful. "It was long before your time, in fact it was the first season I took out a company of my own. I had barely enough money to pay the printer for the three-sheets and get the first-night curtain up. After that it was touch and go for months. Then in mid-season we had a run of bad luck—a two-night heavy fog in one city, an influenza scare in another, Harvey Wilkins' Shakespearean troupe two weeks ahead of us in a third. And when in the next town we played it turned out the advance sale was very light—because my name was unknown there and the theater an unpopular one—I realized I'd have to pay off the company while there was still money enough to get them home, if not the scenery.

"That night I caught Props swigging, but I hadn't the heart to chide him for it—in fact I don't think I'd have blamed anyone, except perhaps myself, for getting drunk that night. But then during the performance the actors and even the union stagehands we travel began coming to my dressing room by ones and twos and telling me they'd be happy to work without salary for another three weeks, if I thought that might give us a chance of recouping. Well, of course I grabbed at their offers and we got a spell of brisk pleasant weather and we hit a couple of places starved for Shakespeare, and things worked out, even to paying all the back salary owed before the season was ended.

"Later on I discovered it was Props who had put them all up to doing it."

Gilbert Usher looked up at me and one of his eyes was wet and his lips were working just a little. "I couldn't have done it myself," he said, "for I wasn't a popular man with my company that first season—I'd been riding everyone much too hard and with nasty sarcasms—and I hadn't yet learned how to ask anyone for help when I really needed it. But Billy Simpson did what I couldn't, though he had

to nerve himself for it with spirits. He's quick enough with his tongue in ordinary circumstances, as you know, particularly when he's being the friendly listener, but apparently when something very special is required of him, he must drink himself to the proper pitch. I'm wondering . . ."

His voice trailed off and then he straightened up before his mirror and started to unknot his tie and he said to me briskly, "Better get dressed now, Bruce. And then look in on Guthrie, will you?"

My mind was churning some rather strange thoughts as I hurried up the iron stairs to the dressing room I shared with Robert Dennis. I got on my Guildenstern make-up and costume, finishing just as Robert arrived; as Laertes, Robert makes a late entrance and so needn't hurry to the theater on *Hamlet* nights. Also, although we don't make a point of it, he and I spend as little time together in the dressing room as we can.

Before going down I looked into Guthrie Boyd's. He wasn't there, but the lights were on and the essentials of the Ghost's costume weren't in sight—impossible to miss that big helmet!—so I assumed he'd gone down ahead of me.

It was almost the half hour. The house lights were on, the curtain down, more stage lights on too, and quite a few of us about. I noticed that Props was back in the chair behind his table and not looking particularly different from any other night—perhaps the drink had been a once-only aberration and not some symptom of a crisis in the company.

I didn't make a point of hunting for Guthrie. When he gets costumed early he generally stands back in a dark corner somewhere, wanting to be alone—perchance to sip, aye, there's the rub!—or visits with Sybil in her dressing room.

I spotted Monica sitting on a trunk by the switchboard, where backstage was brightest lit at the moment. She looked ethereal yet springlike in her blonde Ophelia wig and first costume, a pale green one. Recalling my happy promise to the Governor, I bounced up beside her and asked her straight out about the Ouija business, pleased to have something to the point besides the plays to talk with her

about—and really not worrying as much about her nerves as I suppose I should have.

She was in a very odd mood, both agitated and abstracted, her gaze going back and forth between distant and near and very distant. My questions didn't disturb her at all, in fact I got the feeling she welcomed them, yet she genuinely didn't seem able to tell me much about why she'd been so frightened at the last name the board had spelled. She told me that she actually did get into a sort of dream state when she worked the board and that she'd screamed before she'd quite comprehended what had shocked her so; then her mind had blacked out for a few seconds, she thought.

"One thing though, Bruce," she said. "I'm not going to work the board any more, at least when the three of us are alone like that."

"That sounds like a wise idea," I agreed, trying not to let the extreme heartiness of my agreement show through.

She stopped peering around as if for some figure to appear that wasn't in the play and didn't belong backstage, and she laid her hand on mine and said, "Thanks for coming so quickly when I went idiot and screamed."

I was about to improve this opportunity by telling her that the reason I'd come so quickly was that she was so much in my mind, but just then Joe Rubens came hurrying up with the Governor behind him in his Hamlet black to tell me that neither Guthrie Boyd nor his Ghost costume was to be found anywhere in the theater.

What's more, Joe had got the phone numbers of Guthrie's son and daughter from Sybil and rung them up. The one phone hadn't answered, while on the other a female voice—presumably a maid's—had informed him that everyone had gone to see Guthrie Boyd in *Hamlet*.

Joe was already wearing his costume chain-mail armor for Marcellus—woven cord silvered—so I knew I was elected. I ran upstairs and in the space of time it took Robert Dennis to guess my mission and advise me to try the dingiest bars first and have a drink or two myself in them, I'd put on my hat, overcoat, and wristwatch and left him.

So garbed and as usual nervous about people looking at my ankles, I sallied forth to comb the nearby bars of Wolverton. I consoled myself with the thought that if I

found Hamlet's father's ghost drinking his way through them, no one would ever spare a glance for my own costume.

Almost on the stroke of curtain I returned, no longer giving a damn what anyone thought about my ankles. I hadn't found Guthrie or spoken to a soul who'd seen a large male imbiber—most likely of Irish whisky—in great-cloak and antique armor, with perhaps some ghostly green light cascading down his face.

Beyond the curtain the overture was fading to its sinister close and the backstage lights were all down, but there was an angry hushed-voice dispute going on stage left, where the Ghost makes all his entrances and exits. Skipping across the dim stage in front of the blue-lit battlements of Elsinore—I still in my hat and overcoat—I found the Governor and Joe Rubens and with them John McCarthy all ready to go on as the Ghost in his Fortinbras armor with a dark cloak and some green gauze over it.

But alongside them was Francis Farley Scott in a very similar getup—no armor, but a big enough cloak to hide his King costume and a rather more impressive helmet than John's.

They were all very dim in the midnight glow leaking back from the dimmed-down blue floods. The five of us were the only people I could see on this side of the stage.

F. F. was arguing vehemently that he must be allowed to double the Ghost with King Claudius because he knew the part better than John and because—this was the important thing—he could imitate Guthrie's voice perfectly enough to deceive his children and perhaps save their illusions about him. Sybil had looked through the curtain hole and seen them and all of their yesterday crowd, with new recruits besides, occupying all of the second, third, and fourth rows center, chattering with excitement and beaming with anticipation. Harry Grossman had confirmed this from the front of the house.

I could tell that the Governor was vastly irked at F. F. and at the same time touched by the last part of his argument. It was exactly the sort of sentimental heroic rationalization with which F. F. cloaked his insatiable yearnings for personal glory. Very likely he believed it himself.

John McCarthy was simply ready to do what the Gov-

ernor asked him. He's an actor untroubled by inward urgencies—except things like keeping a record of the hours he sleeps and each penny he spends—though with a natural facility for portraying on stage emotions which he doesn't feel one iota.

The Governor shut up F. F. with a gesture and got ready to make his decision, but just then I saw that there was a sixth person on this side of the stage.

Standing in the second wings beyond our group was a dark figure like a tarpaulined Christmas tree topped by a big helmet of unmistakable general shape despite its veiling. I grabbed the Governor's arm and pointed at it silently. He smothered a large curse and strode up to it and rasped, "Guthrie, you old Son of a B! Can you go on?" The figure gave an affirmative grunt.

Joe Rubens grimaced at me as if to say "Show business!" and grabbed a spear from the prop table and hurried back across the stage for his entrance as Marcellus just before the curtain lifted and the first nervous, superbly atmospheric lines of the play rang out, loud at first, but then going low with unspoken apprehension.

"Who's there?"

"Nay, answer me; stand, and unfold yourself."

"Long live the king!"

"Bernardo?"

"He."

"You come most carefully upon your hour."

" 'Tis now struck twelve; get thee to bed, Francisco."

"For this relief much thanks; 'tis bitter cold and I am sick at heart."

"Have you had quiet guard?"

"Not a mouse stirring."

With a resigned shrug, John McCarthy simply sat down. F. F. did the same, though *his* gesture was clench-fisted and exasperated. For a moment it seemed to me very comic that two Ghosts in *Hamlet* should be sitting in the wings, watching a third perform. I unbuttoned my overcoat and slung it over my left arm.

The Ghost's first two appearances are entirely silent ones. He merely goes on stage, shows himself to the soldiers, and comes off again. Nevertheless there was a determined little ripple of handclapping from the audience—the second,

third, and fourth rows center greeting their patriarchal hero, it seemed likely. Guthrie didn't fall down at any rate and he walked reasonably straight—an achievement perhaps rating applause, if anyone out there knew the degree of intoxication Guthrie was probably burdened with at this moment—a cask-bellied Old Man of the Sea on his back.

The only thing out of normal was that he had forgot to turn on the little green light in the peak of his helmet—an omission which hardly mattered, certainly not on this first appearance. I hurried up to him when he came off and told him about it in a whisper as he moved off toward a dark backstage corner. I got in reply, through the inscrutable green veil, an exhalation of whisky and three affirmative grunts: one, that he knew it; two, that the light was working; three, that he'd remember to turn it on next time.

Then the scene had ended and I darted across the stage as they changed to the room-of-state set. I wanted to get rid of my overcoat. Joe Rubens grabbed me and told me about Guthrie's green light not being on and I told him that was all taken care of.

"Where the hell was he all the time we were hunting for him?" Joe asked me.

"I don't know," I answered.

By that time the second scene was playing, with F. F., his Ghost-coverings shed, playing the King as well as he always does (it's about his best part) and Gertrude Grainger looking very regal beside him as the Queen, her namesake, while there was another flurry of applause, more scattered this time, for the Governor in his black doublet and tights beginning about his seven hundredth performance of Shakespeare's longest and meatiest role.

Monica was still sitting on the trunk by the switchboard, looking paler than ever under her make-up, it seemed to me, and I folded my overcoat and silently persuaded her to use it as a cushion. I sat beside her and she took my hand and we watched the play from the wings.

After a while I whispered to her, giving her hand a little squeeze, "Feeling better now?"

She shook her head. Then leaning toward me, her mouth close to my ear, she whispered rapidly and unevenly, as if she just had to tell someone, "Bruce, I'm frightened.

There's something in the theater. I don't think that was Guthrie playing the Ghost."

I whispered back, "Sure it was. I talked with him."

"Did you see his face?" she asked.

"No, but I smelled his breath," I told her and explained to her about him forgetting to turn on the green light. I continued, "Francis and John were both ready to go on as the Ghost, though, until Guthrie turned up. Maybe you glimpsed one of them before the play started and that gave you the idea it wasn't Guthrie."

Sybil Jameson in her Player costume looked around at me warningly. I was letting my whispering get too loud.

Monica put her mouth so close that her lips for an instant brushed my ear and she mouse-whispered, "I don't mean another *person* playing the Ghost—not that exactly. Bruce, there's *something* in the theater."

"You've got to forget that Ouija nonsense," I told her sharply. "And buck up now," I added, for the curtain had just gone down on Scene Two and it was time for her to get on stage for her scene with Laertes and Polonius.

I waited until she was launched into it, speaking her lines brightly enough, and then I carefully crossed the stage behind the backdrop. I was sure there was no more than nerves and imagination to her notions, though they'd raised shivers on me, but just the same I wanted to speak to Guthrie again and see his face.

When I'd completed my slow trip (you have to move rather slowly, so the drop won't ripple or bulge), I was dumbfounded to find myself witnessing the identical backstage scene that had been going on when I'd got back from my tour of the bars. Only now there was a lot more light because the scene being played on stage was a bright one. And Props was there behind his table, watching everything like the spectator he basically is. But beyond him were Francis Farley Scott and John McCarthy in their improvised Ghost costumes again, and the Governor and Joe with them, and all of them carrying on that furious lip-reader's argument, now doubly hushed.

I didn't have to wait to get close to them to know that Guthrie must have disappeared again. As I made my way toward them, watching their silent antics, my silly mind became almost hysterical with the thought that Guthrie

had at last discovered that invisible hole every genuine alcoholic wishes he had, into which he could decorously disappear and drink during the times between his absolutely necessary appearances in the real world.

As I neared them, Donald Fryer (our Horatio) came from behind me, having made the trip behind the backdrop faster than I had, to tell the Governor in hushed gasps that Guthrie wasn't in any of the dressing rooms or anywhere else stage right.

Just at that moment the bright scene ended, the curtain came down, the drapes before which Ophelia and the others had been playing swung back to reveal again the battlements of Elsinore, and the lighting shifted back to the midnight blue of the first scene, so that for the moment it was hard to see at all. I heard the Governor say decisively, "*You* play the Ghost," his voice receding as he and Joe and Don hurried across the stage to be in place for their proper entrance. Seconds later there came the dull soft hiss of the main curtain opening and I heard the Governor's taut resonant voice saying, "The air bites shrewdly; it is very cold," and Don responding as Horatio with, "It is a nipping and an eager air."

By that time I could see again well enough—see Francis Farley Scott and John McCarthy moving side by side toward the back wing through which the Ghost enters. They were still arguing in whispers. The explanation was clear enough: each thought the Governor had pointed at him in the sudden darkness—or possibly in F. F.'s case was pretending he so thought. For a moment the comic side of my mind, grown a bit hysterical by now, almost collapsed me with the thought of twin Ghosts entering the stage side by side. Then once again, history still repeating itself, I saw beyond them that other bulkier figure with the unmistakable shrouded helmet. They must have seen it too for they stopped dead just before my hands touched a shoulder of each of them. I circled quickly past them and reached out my hands to put them lightly on the third figure's shoulders, intending to whisper, "Guthrie, are you okay?" It was a very stupid thing for one actor to do to another—startling him just before his entrance—but I was made thoughtless by the memory of Monica's fears and by the rather frantic riddle of where Guthrie could possibly have been hiding.

But just then Horatio gasped, "Look, my lord, it comes," and Guthrie moved out of my light grasp onto the stage without so much as turning his head—and leaving me shaking because where I'd touched the rough buckram-braced fabric of the Ghost's cloak I'd felt only a kind of insubstantiality beneath instead of Guthrie's broad shoulders.

I quickly told myself that was because Guthrie's cloak had stood out from his shoulders and his back as he had moved. I had to tell myself something like that. I turned around. John McCarthy and F. F. were standing in front of the dark prop table and by now my nerves were in such a state that their paired forms gave me another start. But I tiptoed after them into the downstage wings and watched the scene from there.

The Governor was still on his knees with his sword held hilt up like a cross doing the long speech that begins, "Angels and ministers of grace defend us!" And of course the Ghost had his cloak drawn around him so you couldn't see what was under it—and the little green light still wasn't lit in his helmet. Tonight the absence of that theatric touch made him a more frightening figure—certainly to me, who wanted so much to see Guthrie's ravaged old face and be reassured by it. Though there was still enough comedy left in the ragged edges of my thoughts that I could imagine Guthrie's pugnacious son-in-law whispering angrily to those around him that Gilbert Usher was so jealous of his great father-in-law that he wouldn't let him show his face on the stage.

Then came the transition to the following scene where the Ghost has led Hamlet off alone with him—just a five-second darkening of the stage while a scrim is dropped—and at last the Ghost spoke those first lines of "Mark me" and "My hour is almost come, When I to sulphurous and tormenting flames Must render up myself."

If any of us had any worries about the Ghost blowing up on his lines or slurring them drunkenly, they were taken care of now. Those lines were delivered with the greatest authority and effect. And I was almost certain that it was Guthrie's rightful voice—at least I was at first—but doing an even better job than the good one he had always done of getting the effect of distance and otherworldliness and hopeless alienation from all life on Earth. The theater be-

came silent as death, yet at the same time I could imagine the soft pounding of a thousand hearts, thousands of shivers crawling—and I *knew* that Francis Farley Scott, whose shoulder was pressed against mine, was trembling.

Each word the Ghost spoke was like a ghost itself, mounting the air and hanging poised for an impossible extra instant before it faded towards eternity.

Those great lines came: "I am thy father's spirit; Doomed for a certain term to walk the night . . ." and just at that moment the idea came to me that Guthrie Boyd might be dead, that he might have died and be lying unnoticed somewhere between his children's home and the theater—no matter what Props had said or the rest of us had seen—and that his ghost might have come to give a last performance. And on the heels of that shivery impossibility came the thought that similar and perhaps ever eerier ideas must be frightening Monica. I knew I had to go to her.

So while the Ghost's words swooped and soared in the dark—marvelous black-plumed birds—I again made that nervous cross behind the backdrop.

Everyone stage right was standing as frozen and absorbed—motionless loomings—as I'd left John and F. F. I spotted Monica at once. She'd moved forward from the switchboard and was standing, crouched a little, by the big floodlight that throws some dimmed blue on the backdrop and across the back of the stage. I went to her just as the Ghost was beginning his exit stage left, moving backward along the edge of the light from the flood, but not quite in it, and reciting more lonelily and eerily than I'd ever heard them before those memorable last lines:

"Fare thee well at once!
"The glow-worm shows the matin to be near,
"And 'gins to pale his uneffectual fire;
"Adieu, adieu! Hamlet, remember me."

One second passed, then another, and then there came two unexpected bursts of sound at the same identical instant: Monica screamed and a thunderous applause started out front, touched off by Guthrie's people, of course, but this time swiftly spreading to all the rest of the audience.

I imagine it was the biggest hand the Ghost ever got in

the history of the theater. In fact, I never heard of him getting a hand before. It certainly was a most inappropriate place to clap, however much the performance deserved it. It broke the atmosphere and the thread of the scene.

Also, it drowned out Monica's scream, so that only I and a few of those behind me heard it.

At first I thought I'd made her scream, by touching her as I had Guthrie, suddenly, like an idiot, from behind. But instead of shrinking or dodging away she turned and clung to me, and kept clinging too even after I'd drawn her back and Gertrude Grainger and Sybil Jameson had closed in to comfort her and hush her gasping sobs and try to draw her away from me.

By this time the applause was through and Governor and Don and Joe were taking up the broken scene and knitting together its finish as best they could, while the floods came up little by little, changing to rosy, to indicate dawn breaking over Elsinore.

Then Monica mastered herself and told us in quick whispers what had made her scream. The Ghost, she said, had moved for a moment into the edge of the blue floodlight, and she had seen for a moment through his veil, and what she had seen had been a face like Shakespeare's. Just that and no more. Except that at the moment when she told us —later she became less certain—she was sure it was Shakespeare himself and no one else.

I discovered then that when you hear something like that you don't exclaim or get outwardly excited. Or even inwardly, exactly. It rather shuts you up. I know I felt at the same time extreme awe and a renewed irritation at the Ouija board. I was deeply moved, yet at the same time pettishly irked, as if some vast adult creature had disordered the toy world of my universe.

It seemed to hit Sybil and even Gertrude the same way. For the moment we were shy about the whole thing, and so, in her way, was Monica, and so were the few others who had overheard in part or all what Monica had said.

I knew we were going to cross the stage in a few more seconds when the curtain came down on that scene, ending the first act, and stagelights came up. At least I knew that I was going across. Yet I wasn't looking forward to it.

When the curtain did come down—with another round of

applause from out front—and we started across, Monica beside me with my arm still tight around her, there came a choked-off male cry of horror from ahead to shock and hurry us. I think about a dozen of us got stage left about the same time, including of course the Governor and the others who had been on stage.

F. F. and Props were standing inside the doorway to the empty prop room and looking down into the hidden part of the L. Even from the side, they both looked pretty sick. Then F. F. knelt down and almost went out of view, while Props hunched over him with his natural stoop.

As we craned around Props for a look—myself among the first, just beside the Governor, we saw something that told us right away that this Ghost wasn't ever going to be able to answer that curtain call they were still fitfully clapping for out front, although the house lights must be up by now for the first intermission.

Guthrie Boyd was lying on his back in his street clothes. His face looked gray, the eyes staring straight up. While swirled beside him lay the Ghost's cloak and veil and the helmet and an empty fifth of whisky.

Between the two conflicting shocks of Monica's revelation and the body in the prop room, my mind was in a useless state. And from her helpless incredulous expression I knew Monica felt the same. I tried to put things together and they wouldn't fit anywhere.

F. F. looked up at us over his shoulder. "He's not breathing," he said. "I think he's gone." Just the same he started loosing Boyd's tie and shirt and pillowing his head on the cloak. He handed the whisky bottle back to us through several hands and Joe Rubens got rid of it.

The Governor sent out front for a doctor and within two minutes Harry Grossman was bringing us one from the audience who'd left his seat number and bag at the box office. He was a small man—Guthrie would have made two of him—and a bit awestruck, I could see, though holding himself with greater professional dignity because of that, as we made our way for him and then crowded in behind.

He confirmed F. F.'s diagnosis by standing up quickly after kneeling only for a few seconds where F. F. had. Then he said hurriedly to the Governor, as if the words

were being surprised out of him against his professional caution, "Mr. Usher, if I hadn't heard this man giving that great performance just now, I'd think he'd been dead for an hour or more."

He spoke low and not all of us heard him, but I did and so did Monica, and there was Shock Three to go along with the other two, raising in my mind for an instant the grisly picture of Guthrie Boyd's spirit, or some other entity, willing his dead body to go through with that last performance. Once again I unsuccessfully tried to fumble together the parts of this night's mystery.

The little doctor looked around at us slowly and puzzledly. He said, "I take it he just wore the cloak over his street clothes?" He paused. Then, "He *did* play the Ghost?" he asked us.

The Governor and several others nodded, but some of us didn't at once and I think F. F. gave him a rather peculiar look, for the doctor cleared his throat and said, "I'll have to examine this man as quickly as possible in a better place and light. Is there—?" The Governor suggested the couch in his dressing room and the doctor designated Joe Rubens and John McCarthy and Francis Farley Scott to carry the body. He passed over the Governor, perhaps out of awe, but Hamlet helped just the same, his black garb most fitting.

It was odd the doctor picked the older men—I think he did it for dignity. And it was odder still that he should have picked two ghosts to help carry a third, though he couldn't have known that.

As the designated ones moved forward, the doctor said, "Please stand back, the rest of you."

It was then that the very little thing happened which made all the pieces of this night's mystery fall into place—for me, that is, and for Monica too, judging from the way her hand trembled in and then tightened around mine. We'd been given the key to what had happened. I won't tell you what it was until I've knit together the ends of this story.

The second act was delayed perhaps a minute, but after that we kept to schedule, giving a better performance than usual—I never knew the Graveyard Scene to carry so much feeling, or the bit with Yorick's skull to be so poignant.

Just before I made my own first entrance, Joe Rubens snatched off my street hat—I'd had it on all this while—and I played all of Guildenstern wearing a wristwatch, though I don't imagine anyone noticed.

F. F. played the Ghost as an off-stage voice when he makes his final brief appearance in the Closet Scene. He used Guthrie's voice to do it, imitating him very well. It struck me afterwards as ghoulish—but right.

Well before the play ended, the doctor had decided he could say that Guthrie had died of a heart seizure, not mentioning the alcoholism. The minute the curtain came down on the last act, Harry Grossman informed Guthrie's son and daughter and brought them backstage. They were much moved, though hardly deeply smitten, seeing they'd been out of touch with the old boy for a decade. However, they quickly saw it was a Grand and Solemn Occasion and behaved accordingly, especially Guthrie's pugnacious son-in-law.

Next morning the two Wolverton papers had headlines about it and Guthrie got his biggest notices ever in the Ghost. The strangeness of the event carried the item around the world—a six-line filler, capturing the mind for a second or two, about how a once-famous actor had died immediately after giving a performance as the Ghost in *Hamlet*, though in some versions, of course, it became Hamlet's Ghost.

The funeral came on the afternoon of the third day, just before our last performance in Wolverton, and the whole company attended along with Guthrie's children's crowd and many other Wolvertonians. Old Sybil broke down and sobbed.

Yet to be a bit callous, it was a neat thing that Guthrie died where he did, for it saved us the trouble of having to send for relatives and probably take care of the funeral ourselves. And it did give old Guthrie a grand finish, with everyone outside the company thinking him a hero-martyr to the motto The Show Must Go On. And of course we knew too that in a deeper sense he'd really been that.

We shifted around in our parts and doubled some to fill the little gaps Guthrie had left in the plays, so that the Governor didn't have to hire another actor at once. For me, and I think for Monica, the rest of the season was very

sweet. Gertrude and Sybil carried on with the Ouija sessions alone.

And now I must tell you about the very little thing which gave myself and Monica a satisfying solution to the mystery of what had happened that night.

You'll have realized that it involved Props. Afterwards I asked him straight out about it and he shyly told me that he really couldn't help me there. He'd had this unaccountable devilish compulsion to get drunk and his mind had blanked out entirely from well before the performance until he found himself standing with F. F. over Guthrie's body at the end of the first act. He didn't remember the Ouija-scare or a word of what he'd said to me about theaters and time machines—or so he always insisted.

F. F. told us that after the Ghost's last exit he'd seen him—very vaguely in the dimness—lurch across backstage into the empty prop room and that he and Props had found Guthrie lying there at the end of the scene. I think the queer look F. F.—the old reality-fuddling rogue!—gave the doctor was to hint to him that *he* had played the Ghost, though that wasn't something I could ask him about.

But the very little thing— When they were picking up Guthrie's body and the doctor told the rest of us to stand back, Props turned as he obeyed and straightened his shoulders and looked directly at Monica and myself, or rather a little over our heads. He appeared compassionate yet smilingly serene as always and for a moment transfigured, as if he were the eternal observer of the stage of life and this little tragedy were only part of an infinitely vaster, endlessly interesting pattern.

I realized at that instant that Props could have done it, that he'd very effectively guarded the doorway to the empty prop room during our searches, that the Ghost's costume could be put on or off in seconds (though Prop's shoulders wouldn't fill the cloak like Guthrie's), and that I'd never once before or during the play seen him and the Ghost at the same time. Yes, Guthrie had arrived a few minutes before me . . . and died . . . and Props, nerved to it by drink, had covered for him.

While Monica, as she told me later, knew at once that here was the great-browed face she'd glimpsed for a moment through the greenish gauze.

Clearly there had been four ghosts in *Hamlet* that night—John McCarthy, Francis Farley Scott, Guthrie Boyd, and the fourth who had really played the role. Mentally blacked out or not, knowing the lines from the many times he'd listened to *Hamlet* performed in this life, or from buried memories of times he'd taken the role in the days of Queen Elizabeth the First, Billy (or Willy) Simpson, or simply Willy S., had played the Ghost, a good trouper responding automatically to an emergency.

TREAT

by Walter H. Kerr

There was one day a year we could relax
and be our plastic selves, one day or, rather,
night, when we could let go, dismiss the bother
of daily fossil faking, the rigid hoax
of identity which rodded our aching backs
and turned our ego covering to leather,
one day in all the year to loose the tether
and frolic in the meadows of their tricks.

What lettings go we had, what meltings of
tension, what suspenseful waitings for the
gatherings and the soft shrieking of dusk.
And yet, despite the season's grotesque love,
the little monsters may have wondered why
we answered the bell in what they thought were masks.

"I don't have much of a biography," writes Robert Rohrer, "since I haven't been alive very long. I'm a student at Emory University; I have lived most of my life in Atlanta; I started writing when I was 8; and intend to go on writing in some form or another until I am dead or otherwise debilitated. My favorite composer is Brahms; my favorite writers are Shakespeare and Ernest Hemingway; my favorite movie is *Citizen Kane*."

Society had used death by law to avenge its injuries for more than 4,000 years, and although the list of capital crimes has diminished, it is still fair to say that public opinion is against abolition. What does the future hold? Mr. Rohrer speculates in the grim and terse shocker below.

KEEP THEM HAPPY

by Robert Rohrer

The oblong "GUILTY" light flashed green from the surface of Kincaid's desk. Kincaid put the fingertips of his two huge hands together and watched with emotionless eyes the door-panel in the wall on his left. The panel slid open, and a plump man in a glistening gray one-piece stepped into the hall where Kincaid always sat.

The plump man was surprised. He was not surprised by Kincaid. He had been surprised before he opened the panel and saw Kincaid sitting in the antiseptic whiteness of the departure hall. He had been surprised in the courtroom that he had just come from. Kincaid knew why the plump man had been surprised, but he did not tell the plump man that he knew, because that would have spoiled it.

The muscles of the plump man's face were straining and pulling the flesh of his cheeks, and lips, and forehead, and chin, into an openness that let his emotion pour into the air, let his joy roll from his pores in invisible billows. Drops of fear-perspiration stood evaporating on his forehead. "God!" he breathed.

Kincaid smiled. He said, "Congratulations."

The plump man saw Kincaid for the first time. The fat

balled up around the man's eyes as he grinned. "I'm free!" he said in a shouting whisper. "Free!"

"That you are," said Kincaid, opening a drawer in his desk. "You'll want your things, won't you?"

"Things? Oh, things! Things! Yes, please!" The man joggled to Kincaid's desk. "Things. I thought . . ."

Kincaid spread the plump man's personal effects over the desk top. "You thought?" he said, smiling.

"Well, I—I didn't think—well, that they'd let me off." His words were light with wonder.

"The courts are usually fair," said Kincaid.

"Oh, but, yes, I know, but I—but I thought they would convict me. I was sitting in there and I—was afraid. I was so afraid. I was guilty, you see, but they let me off! Guilty, and they let me off!"

"Oh, now, you shouldn't say a thing like that," said Kincaid. "You've been acquitted."

"But I *was*, I *was*," the plump man insisted. "I went out and bought a blaster and killed her. I was guilty."

"Well then, I guess you deserved a few uncomfortable moments, didn't you?"

"He he, yeah. But by God, I feel better now."

"Good. Wallet, watch, lighter, cigarettes, ten dollars and twenty-four cents. Correct?"

"Correct, correct!" said the man. His face was set in the half-smile of joy and astonishment which Kincaid saw so often. "Absolutely! Thanks, thank you!" The man fumbled with his wrist watch, then his wallet and the other articles. "Man, I can't wait to—to—"

"To see the open sky?"

"Yes, yes. To see the open sky. I thought—"

"I know," said Kincaid understandingly. "Here." He pressed a button on his desk and a huge panel in the ceiling slid open, and above was the blue cape of the sky, threaded with long, thin clouds.

"Aaahh," said the man. "Aaah."

Kincaid drew back his arm and brought the open edge of his hand down on the man's neck. The man's neck broke with a snap. The man collapsed like a deflated balloon.

Kincaid lowered the dark goggles that sat up on his moulded skull-helmet and walked behind the desk. There was a green switch on the desk. Kincaid threw the switch.

A floor-panel zipped from under the dead man, and a seething, protean mass of white fire snatched the corpse down and tore at it. Kincaid pulled the green switch back and the panel closed.

Kincaid raised his goggles and sat down behind his desk and waited. Finally Berg from Assignments came down.

Berg put a psych analysis on the desk before Kincaid. The square I. D. on the brown folder said, "Lisa Medtner, M.D."

"A woman this time," said Berg unnecessarily.

"A sure thing?" asked Kincaid, leafing through the analysis.

"Uh-huh. Got her on tape, right in the act. Husband. Cold as ice."

"Hm. When's the trial?"

"Day after tomorrow. She'll be here in about two hours, I think."

Kincaid nodded. He was reading the psych report. "Thanks."

"Sure thing. Remember," said Berg, tapping the black plate with white letters which was screwed to Kincaid's desk, "keep 'em happy." He laughed at the good-natured banality and moved away.

Kincaid looked for a second at the plate that Berg had touched. KEEP THEM HAPPY.

Lisa Medtner came into the hall between two matrons. One of the matrons, who Kincaid knew, said, "This is Doctor Lisa Medtner."

Kincaid stood up, and smiled at Lisa Medtner. "I'm glad to meet you, Doctor Medtner," he said.

Lisa Medtner half-smiled and said, "I am not glad to meet you. I had rather not be here at all." She spoke with a noticeable accent.

"I know," said Kincaid. "That's all," he said to the two matrons.

Lisa Medtner was blonde and had striking pale features. She had ripped her husband in half with a force-pistol. "You will be here for as long as your trial lasts," said Kincaid.

"That should not be long," said Lisa Medtner with a humorless laughing sound.

"You sound bitter."

"I know what the verdict will be."

"Did you do it?"

The muscles of her jaw tensed and squared the cold white beauty of her face.

"It's all right to tell me. I've taken an oath not to divulge anything that passes between me and a prisoner."

Lisa Medtner paused. Then she said, "Yes, I killed him."

One wall down. "Why?"

"I would rather not discuss it."

"Of course." The Alpine slopes radiated their own peculiar heat. For the first time, Kincaid noticed Lisa Medtner's face.

"What does this mean?"

"What?"

She was looking at the black plate on the desk. She read, "KEEP THEM HAPPY."

"That's the code of the Penal College," said Kincaid. "I am to make you as comfortable as I can for as long as you are here."

She looked at him with cynical amusement. "And how will you know how to do this?"

"I've had intensive training in psychology."

"You have read the psych analysis they ran on me."

"Yes."

"So now you know all about me."

"That's right."

Again her lips curved in a one-sided half-smile. "What am I like?"

"Don't you know that?"

The smile jumped away. She did not answer.

Kincaid said, "Your cell is this way."

That night before he turned in Kincaid went into the chamber that opened off the main hall, and looked at Lisa Medtner through the bars of her cell. She was already asleep on the single cot that crouched beside one polished-iron wall. Her head was resting stiffly on the pillow and her face was upturned. Kincaid stood outside the cell for a long while and studied carefully her face and the rest of her, outlined beneath the sheets. Then he turned in.

In the morning he came to her cell. She was eating the breakfast that had come through the automat in one wall of the cell.

"Do you want to talk?" he asked.

"No." She did not look up.

"It would be easier if you talked."

She stopped eating and looked up. "No it wouldn't," she said. "Not for me. Perhaps it would be easier for a man, or for the whores you probably have here most of the time, but I do not wish to talk."

"We don't get many whores. Not genuine ones, anyway."

"I was speaking figuratively. Please go away."

"You aren't happy, are you?"

"No, I am not happy. I am about to be tried and executed for killing my husband and I am not happy."

"Why did you kill him?"

She stared furiously away from him.

"Why did you kill him?" Kincaid repeated.

"I killed him because he cheated on me! Are you satisfied?"

"Did you love him?"

The struggle was brief. "No. I hated him. I hate—I—"

"You hate me?"

She laughed a short, painful laugh. "Hardly. I am sure that I will, if you will not leave me alone. I can learn to hate you quite easily. Go away. Go away."

"You need someone very badly."

She looked up at that, and fixed his eyes with hers. He let his eyes complete the thought of his words, and she saw it and drew in a sharp breath of rage and wheeled from her chair and turned her back to him. She stood facing the opposite wall with her arms close around her as though she were very cold. Kincaid left.

That night Kincaid came to her cell. She was standing facing the wall, in much the same position he had left her in. Kincaid made the key clatter loudly in the lock, and he swung the cell door open and let it bang back into the bars. She did not turn. She said nothing.

Kincaid stood in the doorway for several moments, looking at her back. Then he closed the door behind him. He

closed the door slowly so that the snap of the latch crazed the air.

Lisa Medtner gave a little start. She turned around, very slowly pivoting on one heel, and looked at Kincaid. Kincaid had sat in the small wooden chair beside the bars, and was looking at Lisa Medtner with his arms crossed.

Lisa Medtner stood still and stared beyond Kincaid for a long moment with her head cocked to one side. "The executioner's tax, is it?" she said finally. "My soul goes to the state and my body goes to you."

"You're very bitter."

"I do not wish to talk of my bitterness. I wish to be left alone."

"You are very beautiful."

"I have been told that. Many times."

"I'm telling you this time."

"And you are my jailor. You are violating your oath, you know that. You have made a mockery of it ever since I came, with your questions, your whining innuendos, your—"

"What I said this morning is true. The psych analysis showed it. You need—"

"I do not need you. I hate you."

Good. Kincaid shook his head slowly and made reproving noises with his tongue.

"I will report you," hissed Lisa Medtner.

"Nothing leaves this division that I don't want to leave it," said Kincaid.

Lisa Medtner's face was much paler than it was normally, and her neck was red with anger. She shouted, "Very well, then, come ahead, collect your hangman's fee!"

"You think I won't?"

"No, I think that you will. And it will mean *nothing* to me!"

Kincaid pursed his lips. He remained in the wooden chair, rocking back and forth gently on two of the legs at a perilous angle.

Lisa Medtner said in a furious whisper, "Get out. Get out of here."

Kincaid laughed. "Those bars are inclusive, not exclusive. I'll stay here as long as I like. I'll stay here 'til morning."

Lisa Medtner took a breath. "You are supposed to make

me as comfortable as possible until the trial is finished. Make me comfortable and *leave me.*"

Kincaid said, "Make yourself comfortable. I'm busy. Looking."

Dr. Medtner did not spit the obscenity Kincaid expected. Instead she sat suddenly on the edge of her cot, holding her narrowed, gleaming eyes on him always. She looked at him for several minutes. The stark hatred that pulsed from her eyes never diminished in fury.

Then she snapped the eyes from him and lay mechanically back onto the cot. For a long while she glared at the ceiling with the same hate. Then her eyes closed.

Kincaid watched her for a long time. She was very beautiful. She was much more beautiful than the ones that usually came here. He let her beauty burn fuzzily into his throat for a while. Then he rose and walked to her cot and looked down at her face.

She was trembling. Her eyes were shut, but they twitched, and her entire body trembled, trembled. Kincaid stooped slightly over her. He cupped his hand and outlined the curve of her cheek with his thumb and forefinger, touching only the thin fuzz that stood out from her skin. Her trembling increased, but her eyes stayed shut.

Kincaid straightened and turned and walked out of the cell and closed the cell door quietly as though he thought she were asleep.

There was the hum of the electric generators in the walls. "How is the trial?"

"How can it be? They have it on tape. I know they must."

"There aren't cameras everywhere. They may not have it on tape. If they have it on tape, why haven't they executed you already?"

"You should know that better than I."

"Yes, I should, but I don't. For all I know they may try only prisoners who they haven't taped."

"You are trying to make me feel better."

"If I knew I would tell you."

"Would you?"

"I would tell you."

"I love you."

"I love you."

"Oh, God, I love you."

Her hands were cold against his back. The cot was very small, but they did not care.

After a few minutes she said, "What if I am to die?"

He did not answer.

"You are the one, aren't you."

"Yes."

"You will—you will—"

He waited. Then he said, "I can get you out of here."

Her body tensed. "You can get me out."

"Yes. After it is over you would come in here and I would k—execute you. There is no one else in here during an execution. There is a sky panel in the ceiling. If it comes to that, I can get you out."

"But what—what about you, when they find out—"

"I am supposed to cremate the bodies after it is over. They would not check the incinerator before I could get something a dog, two dogs, in it for ashes."

He could feel that she was very happy. Her face remained set. "You would do that," she said. Then she knew that he was lying, that the ashes would be checked and that dogs' ashes would never be mistaken for a human being's. "You would do that for me." She kissed him again, hard and for a long time.

Kincaid sat behind his desk and waited and then the "GUILTY" light flashed. Kincaid waited some more, with his hands wide on his knees, and finally the panel slid open and Dr. Lisa Medtner stepped from the dark courtroom into the glaring whiteness of the hall.

She looked to Kincaid, and the surprise was much more beautiful on her face than on any other he had ever seen. "I am free," she said.

"I know. I told you they might not have a tape." He opened the drawer and began taking her things from it and putting them on the desk.

She stood very still on the edge of his eye as he did this. When he looked at her again she was not looking at him and she was moving. She was staring down past a corner of his desk.

He did not interrupt her in her silence. He waited for her to find the way to say what he knew she must say.

He rose, and she knew that he was waiting, but she did not look out from her cubicle. When finally she spoke, it was not to say what Kincaid had expected at all.

"Come with me."

"What?"

"Come with me, *please*," she said fiercely. Still she did not look at him.

"Look at me," said Kincaid.

She turned her face to his.

"You meant it?" said Kincaid.

"Yes," said Lisa Medtner. "I meant it. I wanted to escape, yes, but I—I *mean* it—" She halted in her words.

Kincaid knew what she could not say. He knew. *I need you. I need you.* He held her eyes for a moment. Then he said, "All right. Let's go."

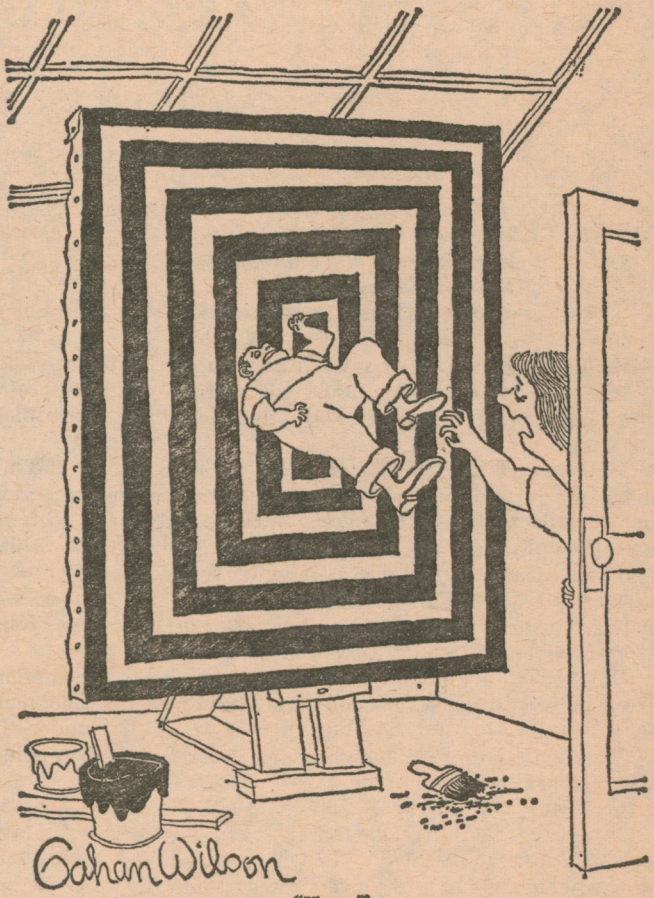
She was in his arms and holding to him and trembling against him. He held one arm around her back tightly and stroked the nape of her neck with the free hand. They stood quietly for several minutes.

Finally she pulled away and looked at him and smiled. "Go," she said.

He smiled back, thinly. He followed her from behind the desk. He slowed his step slightly and let her move a few inches ahead of him. Then he drew back his open hand and brought it home.

She fell suddenly and heavily, as they all did. He looked down at her. The smile still played across his lips. It was more like a sneer than a smile. *Keep them happy. Keep them happy every time.*

He walked behind his desk and pulled the dark goggles down over his eyes. He threw the green switch. The body disappeared into the crystalline ball of white fire under the floor. Then the panel closed, and the floor itself was white and spotless, as though no one had ever stood there.



"Harry!"

Here is a sparkling jet-age fantasy, in which a bit of Irish folklore finds its way to the Green Mountains of Vermont.

A MURKLE FOR JESSE

by Gary Jennings

"Children, leprechauns,
women beutifulle and yonge,
these be forrainers alle."
—SIR EUSTACE PEACHTREE

"All the other kids went up," Jesse pouted. "Why can't I?"

"For two good reasons," said his mother. "Because I say you can't. And because, with that leg, you just plain couldn't."

Jesse glared balefully at the cast on his right leg. When it had been new and white, he had been the envy of every unbroken-legged boy in town. But the cast had been on now for a weary eternity, and was anything but white, and today it was Jesse's turn to envy his fellows.

"Durned old leg," he mumbled.

"Lan-guage," said his mother warningly. "And don't blame the leg. If you hadn't fallen out of that tree . . ."

"You can't have a tree-house anywhere else but in a tree," Jesse pointed out. "Mom, couldn't I try to go up the mountain?"

"No. Your father will tell you all about it when he comes down from there."

Jesse stumped around the kitchen, seething.

"Anyway, the other kids aren't going to see anything," Mrs. Farreway consoled. "They'll get spanked right back down again, out of the way. That airplane didn't crash just for you children to gawk at. It's a miracle that all those people weren't killed."

"I wouldn't get in the way," Jesse protested. "I just want to see the airplane pilot. I want to tell him that when I get

to be a pilot, I'm gonna be a real sharp one, and not crash into any old mountains."

"He'd appreciate hearing that, right about now," his mother said drily. "Go and play outside, or there's going to be another crash right here."

Jesse limped forlornly through the house. From the front porch he gazed yearningly up at the mountain that loomed above the town. Last night, the familiar old hump had been a dazzling stranger, what with the National Guard searchlights and flares, and the faraway echoes of the rescue workers calling back and forth as they searched the wreckage of the big airliner. Today the mountain had resumed its usual air of broody aloofness, at least from where Jesse stood. There was nothing to be seen up there, not even a scar of mowed-down trees.

There wasn't much to be seen down here, either. The street was almost eerily empty. All the men of the town were still up on the mountainside, and all the women were indoors preparing hot food against their return. All the children, too—as soon as they could escape from the breakfast tables—had gone swarming for the trail that zigzagged up the mountain face. All but Jesse.

He blinked away tears of angry frustration, then decided to go around back and hate the tree-house. This blameless agent of his current quarantine was situated some hundred yards behind and out of sight of the house. It was a rickety accretion of packing crates, perched in the crotch of a sycamore. The tree stood beside a little creek that marked the rear boundary of the Farreway property.

For the first time since his accident, Jesse grumbled to himself, "Why couldn't I have fell in the water?"

Suddenly he noticed that someone apparently *had*. There was a little girl—no one he knew—splashing quietly in the shallows of the creek.

He edged closer to look her over, and decided that this was a very strange stranger indeed. She was little and she was a girl, but somehow "little girl" didn't exactly describe her. She was kneeling in the water, scooping up handsful of it and—as well as Jesse could make out—bathing her nose with it.

She caught sight of him and cheerfully waved a dripping hand, then sloshed out of the creek.

"Bathing my nose, I was," she announced, as she bent over to wring out the hem of her filmy frock.

"Your nose," Jesse parroted, stupefied.

"Trying to cool it off. Skinned it somethin' fierce. See?"

She did have a fiery red scrape right at the tip of her button nose. It was almost as red as her hair.

"Tore my lovely wing, too," she murmured mournfully. "Will ye look at that now?"

Jesse looked, and asked curiously, "What are you wearing them things for?"

"What are you wearing *that* for?" she countered, pointing.

"I busted my leg."

"Oh. Ah. I mistook it for a seven-league boot. I did wonder why you had only the one."

"Say, I bet you got bunged up in the airplane crash," said Jesse, just now realizing it.

"Didn't I though," she said ruefully. "I'd seen less wear and tear if I'd come over the natural way, like, instid of relying on that uproarious monster."

"Mom said it was a murkle nobody got killed."

"Losh, I couldn't let that happen, could I now?" she said offhandedly. "Not with me amongst 'em."

Jesse pondered this, and asked tentatively, "Are you a murkle?"

She trilled a merry laugh. "Tell *that* to County Rosecommon—and them that glad to be rid of me! But man dear, where is it I'm at now?"

"Here? This is Millborough, Vermont."

She frowned thoughtfully and muttered, "*Tain a' gol amu*," then inquired, "Is it near the city of New York?"

"Gee, I don't think so. I'll go ask my—"

She stopped him with a gesture. "I'll not be moving on for a bit. Can't flounce in on New York sassiety with me nose peeled like it is, and these raggedy wings to me back."

"My pop's been to New York," Jesse contributed helpfully.

"Has he now? And would he be knowing my dear brother —him that goes by the name of Seamus O'Cluricain?" Without waiting for an answer, she chattered blithely on. "He flew over just two years agone, and already it's the foreman he is in a shoe manufactory. The land of oppor-

chunity, he wrote me, and I'm promised a fine position in the needle trades. 'Tis rich I'll be, before you can say sit-by-the-hob."

"That's swell," said Jesse.

The girl studied him, then stepped over to stand close by his side. They were exactly the same height. She asked warily, "Are all the men in America no bigger than this?"

"I'm not a man," said Jesse. "Yet."

"La, of course," she said, relieved. "It's me poor brain is addled by the commotion. For a trice I thought the riches wouldn't be worth it, having to settle for a wee little American husband."

"I'm only almost eight," said Jesse.

"Are you now?" Her green eyes twinkled. "Sure and you don't look a minute over seven years, five months and twelve days."

Jesse would have liked to sit down and do some calculations, but he had a queer suspicion that she was precisely right. Now her eyes sort of glowed at him, as she said musingly, "And ye'll top out at—um—eight spans and a third. Och, *very* good! Mayhap when I'm rich, and ye're grown . . ."

They were interrupted by a distant bonging sound.

"That's the dinner bell," said Jesse. "Pop must be home."

"Dinner . . ." the girl said wistfully.

"Well, lunch. Come on with me and—"

"Oh, no," she said quickly. "The big people mustn't see me. Not till I get to New York and my wings shrink away."

Jesse nodded; this was understandable. "I'll sneak you down some lunch," he promised, then turned back. "But where are you gonna stay while you're here?"

"Luck o' the Irish, I found me a wee house nobody's using." She pointed up.

"My tree-house," Jesse grinned. "Just don't fall out of it."

He found his father slumped wearily in a chair at the kitchen table, stroking his unshaven blue chin. Mrs. Farreway was at the stove, pouring steaming black coffee into a large mug.

"I tell you, Mildred, that's—"

"Hi, Pop!"

"—the durndest freak of an accident I ever heard of. There's not a piece of that plane left intact that a man

couldn't pick up with one hand. By all the laws, every human being aboard should have been—" he groped for a word "—vaporized!"

"Pop, was it a murkle that saved 'em?"

"It sure must have been, son."

Jesse nodded approvingly. "She's pretty durned good."

His father looked at him quizzically, then went on. "A couple of them got knocked out, a few more have minor fractures, bruises, contusions and what-not. But they hit that mountain at *three hundred* miles an hour!"

"Are they all foreigners, Vince?" his wife asked.

"And tourists. The plane came from Shannon. Refueled at Gander before it wound up here. That's another thing. The whole mountain absolutely reeks of gasoline. God only knows why it didn't—"

"Pop," said Jesse, as Mrs. Farreway set a platter of hot ham sandwiches on the table. "How big is eight spans and a third?"

Mr. Farreway looked blank for a moment, then scratched his head. "A span was an old-time measure of nine-inches. What have you been reading? That's, let's see—seventy-two—seventy-five inches. Six feet and three inches, Jesse."

"Och, *very* good," said Jesse to himself.

His father stared again, then helped himself to a sandwich and took a hungry bite. "There is one casulty, Mil," he sid between chews. "A little girl lost. Just Jesse's age."

"Oh, dear!" Mrs. Farreway exclaimed, and impulsively reached out a hand to touch her son's shoulder. "How did she die, when all the others—?"

"Not dead. At least we hope not. Lost. Vanished. In all the confusion last night, no one noticed, but a stewardess remembered her this morning. The kid was traveling alone —on her way to visit grandparents in New York."

"What do you suppose happened to her?"

"Probably stunned or scared out of her wits, and she wandered off in the dark before the town woke up, or else she'd have made her way down toward the town lights. Instead she must have got round to the other slope of the mountain. The searchers are out now."

"Pray they'll find her," Mrs. Farreway said softly. "The poor dear must be terrified."

"No, she's not," said Jesse, from deep within his sandwich. "She just don't want the big people to see her."

This time both of his parents stared at him, and Mr. Farreway muttered to his wife, "Has he fallen off something again?"

"Jesse," said his mother. "What are you talking about?"

"Same thing you are. I seen—saw the little girl. Only I don't think she's really a little girl. Anyhow, she don't want to go to New York till her wings shrink."

Now Mr. and Mrs. Farreway looked at each other. "She could have suffered a bad concussion," the woman said. "Talking about wings and all."

"Young man, where did you see this little girl?"

"Maybe I better not tell. She don't want—"

The stern paternal voice: "Jesse."

"Okay, okay. She's down by the sycamore. But she's gonna be mad."

The adults exchanged glances again. "Won't hurt to have a look," said Mr. Farreway, cramming the last of his sandwich into his mouth. As they went out the kitchen door he was saying, "But I can't see how she could have got this far, this soon, unless she flew. A little kid, not knowing the trails . . ."

When they were gone, Jesse surveyed the table. The sandwich plate was empty, but half a loaf of bread remained. He put that into a paper bag, then opened the refrigerator and found the rest of the meat. It was a tinned Danish ham, and a good third of it still sat pink and pretty in the can. He put the whole thing, and a quart container of milk, into the bag with the bread.

When he heard the voice of his parents returning, he tip-limped out of the kitchen in the opposite direction. He went out the front door as Mrs. Farreway opened the back one, saying ". . . just disappointed at not getting to go, so now he's making up his own version of what happened . . ."

The girl's skinned nose was no redder than the rest of her pixie face when she blazed down at him from the treehouse, "Is it the paterollers in it, now? I had to lie doggo under the water till they left off poking about!"

"I tried to stop 'em," Jesse apologized.

The girl fluttered rather lopsidedly down to the ground, like a wounded moth. "Next time I'll put the *foidin seach-*

rain on 'em," she threatened. Then she looked into the bag that Jesse held out, cooed delightedly and said, "Faith and you're forgiven! That's enough here to choke the pooka himself!"

"I would've made a sandwich," said Jesse, "but I'm not allowed to play with knives."

The girl seemed not to mind the absence of niceties. Like a cub vixen, she attacked the meat with sharp, white little teeth.

"Mom and Pop came snooping," Jesse explained, "because they think you're too little to be out alone by yourself." When she made no comment, he ventured, "How old are you, anyway?"

"As you'd count it—oh, four hundred or so." She began to repack what little was left of the ham, bread and milk.

Jesse stared at her for a moment, then blurted, "You're older than Mom!"

"More'n likely," murmured the girl, with a distant smile.

"Durn!" said Jesse, crushed. "I can't ever catch up."

"Sure and you can, maneen dear." She put her tiny hand on his. "Now that I'm going amongst people, and going into trade and all, I'll be giving up such triflin' advantages. What it amounts to—we'll be keeping pace from then on."

Jesse could only think to say, "Well, anyhow, Pop and Mom and everybody ain't gonna quit looking for the lost little girl—"

Abruptly she flared like a firecracker. "The lost little girl is it? Here I'm after forsaking immortality for a place among such as you, and you can only prate about some other female crayture!"

Jesse tried to explain, "The lost girl I mean is—"

"By the sod, I've not a jealous bone in me body!" she fussed. "But before I'll sit here and listen to mooning about some other colleen, I'll *swim* back to Ballaghadereen! Are you a ruddy English king, ye gossoon, that you can't make do with one woman at a time?"

Jesse squeaked, "I meant *you*," but she refused to hear.

"Man nor boy, America nor Roscommon, divil a bit of difference! Go on about your tom-catting, bucko. I'm off for me beauty nap."

Jesse tried to expostulate, but she took her sack of provender and fluttered back up to the tree-house, where

he could not follow. The tree-house continued to twitch and creak angrily for some time after she had vanished inside.

"Good gosh," Jesse mumbled wonderingly.

"Don't know why anybody'd *want* to find her," he growled, when he was out of earshot.

Prudence in the matter of the purloined ham dictated that he stay away from the house for a while. Thus the afternoon would have been a dreary one, if he hadn't discovered a fortuitously loose tooth in his lower jaw. Practicing a judicious system of unhurried twiddling, he was able to prolong the extraction process until the dinner bell bonged again. Tooth in hand, Jesse started for the house; but an idea struck him.

He crept back to the sycamore, from which came not a sound. He found a discarded piece of the bread paper, folded the tooth into it, and stuck the little package to the tree trunk with a wad of antiquated chewing gum, right where she couldn't help seeing it. Then he stumped off to the house, rather glowing with magnanimous self-sacrifice. The glow lasted right up until the minute his mother confronted him.

"Have you been sneaking goodies to the Petersens' dog again, young man?" she demanded.

"Why no, Mom," he said, with the righteousness of unassailable innocence. "Remember, last time, you whaled the heck—"

She gestured impatiently. "Have you been feeding some old stray?"

"Gosh, no, Mom. I won't ever forget that whaling—"

"Oh, never mind. Just so long as you've been behaving yourself. Go wash up for dinner." Jesse marched off, the epitome of filial obedience. As he toiled upstairs to the bathroom, he heard his mother saying, "Do you know, Vince, I must have bundled that ham up in the scraps I took out to the garbage. All this excitement . . ."

After dinner, Mr. Farreway called them out to the front porch. In the darkness the mountain was quite discernible from the equally black sky; like the sky, it had its own scattering of stars. But if you watched closely, these stars could be seen to move minutely here and there. They were

the lanterns of the search parties, sleeplessly probing the tangles of the forest and underbrush.

"Poor little babe in the woods," Mrs. Farreway said tearfully.

"Babe!" said Jesse under his breath. "Huh!"

"They'll have helicopters out if she isn't found by morning," said Mr. Farreway. "And her grandparents are on their way up."

"I feel so sorry for them," said Mrs. Farreway.

"So do I," her son said feelingly.

The next morning Jesse was diverted, on his way down to the tree-house, by the three Petersen children from across the street. They *had* climbed all the way up to the wreck yesterday, and now they were bursting to tell the stay-at-home all about it.

"Saw a p'peller tied up like a Scout knot!"

"Found me this rabbit's foot hangin' on the inst'ment panel!"

"Shoes all over the place!"

Jesse listened with the amused supercility of a connoisseur in such matters. The Petersens gradually became aware of his silent hauteur, and the excitement died out of their babble. Jesse switched them off entirely with the pronouncement, "*I* know where the lost little girl is." The three children stared at him, demolished. Their tales were all of yesterday; here was the man of the hour.

They might have glued themselves to him and forced him to take them along to meet the girl, but just then a clatter began in the air overhead and an odd shadow flailed along the sidewalk. "Here come the helicopters!" yelled the Petersens. They deserted the man of the hour and scampered off in a body, trying to stay in the shade of the churning blades.

"Humph," said Jesse, at the futility of children and helicopters alike; and he stumped on down through the back field to the sycamore.

His gift package appeared to have restored the girl's good humor. She giggled as she held out the tooth on her palm and said, "What in the ever-lovin' was this for?"

"Didn't you put it under your pillow?"

"Och, yes," she said with gentle sarcasm. "Just cast your eyes on all my fine silken pillows hereabout."

"Well, I'll bring you one tonight. What you do, see, you put the tooth under your pillow and in the morning there's a dime there."

"Is that a fact?" she said, sincerely interested. "And what's a dime?"

"Ten cents. Money."

"Ah-h," she breathed, and stared at the tooth, enthralled. "Well, would ye think it? Not even Biddy Early ever had such a trick."

Jesse pointed to the helicopters, three of them now, hovering around the crown of the mountain. "They're still looking—" he began, but the girl's green eyes snapped warningly. "—in the wrong place," he trailed off.

Rudely, the dinner bell began to bong again, an urgent and commanding clangor this time.

"Your mither," the girl said spitefully, "must have been a blooming sexton in some other life."

"I'll be back," Jesse promised, and made off for the house as fast as he could limp.

He greeted his mother breezily, before he noticed the other people in the room, "Mom, you must've been a bloomer sexton in some other life! Oops, Hullo, Mr. Petersen."

Mr. Petersen, who was a trooper in the State Police, flicked an embarrassed glance at the speechless and scarlet Mrs. Farreway, cleared his throat and said, "Jesse, my sprats came and told me some mishmosh about you have a line on little Frederika."

"Frederika?" Jesse said huskily.

"The child who got lost from the airplane," Mr. Petersen said. "Frederika Anastasia Cabot."

"All *that*?"

The other man in the room, a stranger carrying a tremendous camera, said, "If you know anything about her, son, we'd sure like to hear it."

Jesse frowned in concentration.

"The waif's been lost for thirty-six hours now," Mr. Petersen prompted. "And she hasn't had a bite to eat in longer than that."

The camera man added, wheedingly, "If you've found her, you'll get your picture in the paper. Maybe on television, even."

Jesse suddenly shook his head. "I haven't found her."

Neither of the men noticed the slight emphasis on the last word. They both looked at Mrs. Farreway.

"You can ask Mom," Jesse added. In some way he couldn't have explained, he was certain now that he *hadn't* found *her.*

Mrs. Farreway nodded unhappily. "I'm afraid Jesse was just—compensating—for not getting to visit the scene of the wreck."

"I hope you wouldn't mind, Mildred," said Mr. Petersen, "if I brought the grandparents around to meet Jesse, anyhow? They're all het up, you can understand, and any little semblance of hope . . ."

"But—false hope, Mr. Petersen?"

"Well, we're bound to find her." He coughed uncomfortably. "Sooner or later. And just talking to your boy—whatever kind of fantasy he spins for them—will keep the Cabots occupied, give 'em something to hold onto, better than moping around at the station."

"Of course. I understand. Bring them anytime."

Mrs. Farreway walked the men to the front door, while Jesse sidled toward the back. Mr. Petersen was still talking, ". . . been living in Athens since the end of the war. Married a Greek girl there. This would have been the first time his parents had seen the little girl . . ."

Jesse was safely over the rise from the house when he heard his mother calling, her voice freighted with jeopardy. Daringly, he paid no heed, and stumped along—toward the sycamore and a showdown—repeating to himself the name of the lost grandchild.

His quarry was idly braiding some blossoms of larkspur into a delicate chain. He planted himself in front of the girl, pointed at her as imperiously as an enchanter, and demanded, "Are you Frederika and a Space Ship Captain?"

"Glory," she added, and blinked. "Whatever is a Frederika and—?"

"That's the girl that got lost from the airplane."

"Do I look like a Frederika?" she asked hotly. "Cushlamachree, do I *sound* like a Frederika?"

"You made me think you are!" said Jesse, just as angrily. With a flash of mature acuity, he accused, "You made all that fuss about the other girl just so I wouldn't know there *was* one."

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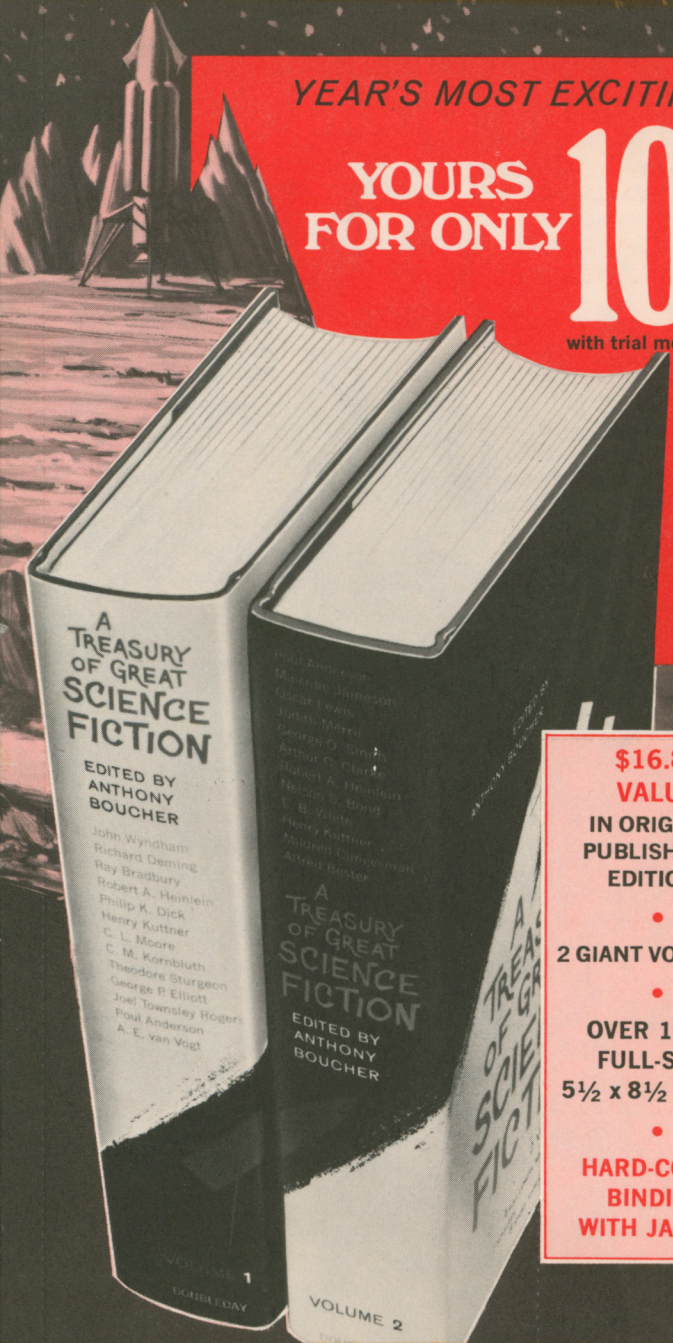



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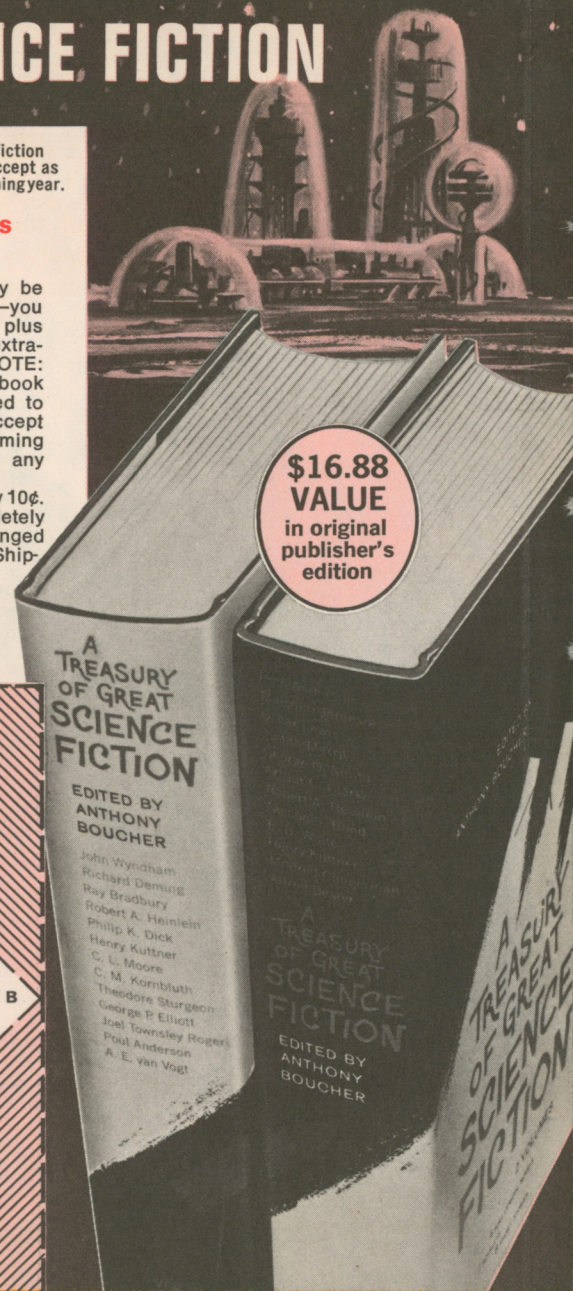

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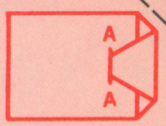

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1. Place dime on spot indicated.
2. Fold section (1) down over dime.
3. Fold section (2) up over dime.
4. Fold section (3) along scored line.
5. Insert point (B) of triangular pocket into slot (A-A)
6. Fill in name and address and mail in an envelope to address above.



She dropped her gaze. "And what is the silly spalpeen to me?"

"You can find her."

"Whisht! She has me to thank that she's still in one piece. Now if she's gossoon enough to get lost, she's no loss."

"We're both gonna get in trouble," Jesse predicted.

"Ye still don't appreciate the bird in hand!" she erupted. "Go along and moon after her yourself! Certes, I did not come all these weary miles to play the bloodhound."

"Well, okay, then," he growled, and stumped firmly away. So he did not see how she started to beckon, then checked the gesture and simply gazed after him, crestfallen.

Jesse had intended an air of deliberate finality in his departure, but actually he was at a loss to know what to do next. He skirted the fringes of his home property and crossed the street to where the Petersen children were at play. Naturally, he had to endure a nominal amount of yah-yah-ing about the "whopper" he had been caught in. But he managed to convince them that he had just been kidding all along, and was forgiven so far as to be asked to stay for lunch.

He played with the Petersen trio for the rest of the afternoon. He would have been content to lurk there until everything in general got back to normal. But his hideout was breached when Mr. Petersen came home unexpectedly.

"Ah, there you are," said he. "Hoof it home, Jesse. You've got company, and you mother's looking high and low."

Jesse hoofed it, but joylessly.

"You and I have things to discuss," Mrs. Farreway said to him at the front door, in a voice he knew well. "But right now, Mr. and Mrs. Cabot are waiting to talk to you. They're little Frederika's grandparents."

"I know."

"Then hear this, young man. You are not to tell them a single itty-bitty one of your fibs or stretchers or little white lies. I want you to tell them nothing but the plain, unvarnished truth. Do you understand?"

"But Mom, what if they ask—"

"Do you understand?"

With a sepulchral sigh, "Yes, Mom."

He found his father and the newspaper camera man also in the living room when he limped in. Both of the new-

comers were white-haired. Mrs. Cabot was all the time crying noisily into a soggy handkerchief, and Mr. Cabot was all the time patting and shushing her.

"So this fine young fellow is just the same age as our dear granddaughter," said Mr. Cabot.

"So young," said Mrs. Cabot. "Oh, woo-hoo-hoo."

"Easy, mother," said Mr. Cabot, patting her. "They tell me, son, you thought for a while you had seen a little girl like ours."

"Well," said Jesse uneasily, "prolly not like yours."

"But you did see a little girl, a stranger?"

The boy writhed, suffered and finally choked out, "Yes, sir."

"Jesse!" Mr. and Mrs. Farreway barked simultaneously. "I did! You told me not to lie."

Mr. Cabot looked around perplexedly, as if suspecting a conspiracy. Mrs. Cabot rummaged in her purse and extended a snapshot. "Did she look like this, little boy?"

Jesse peered at it and said, "Gee, I dunno. This girl I seen—saw—well, her nose is all skinned up and . . ."

"Oh, her beautiful nose is ruined!"

"Steady, mother," said Mr. Cabot, patting her.

"Well, anyhow," said Jesse, still scrutinizing the photograph, "the girl I seen is older than her."

Mr. Cabot said, with a note of hope, "That picture was taken two years ago. She is older, now. Jesse, how old would you say *your* little girl is?"

"The way you'd count it," Jesse recited from memory, "four hundred or so."

The Cabots backed away from him with a gasp. The camera man chuckled. The Farreways looked ready to pounce.

"Well, that's what she said."

Mr. Cabot recovered slightly. "You *have* talked to her, then?"

"Yeah. She talks funny."

"Funny?"

"Sometimes she mumbles to herself in some funny languish."

Mr. Farreway interrupted, glowering at the boy. "Mr. Cabot, I really don't think you ought to take any of this too seriously."

"Oh, but don't you see?" said the old man eagerly. "Our granddaughter *would* talk funny. I mean differently. Greek is her second language."

"This is all Greek to me," muttered the camera man, who was now taking notes.

"This girl of yours," said Mr. Cabot to Jesse. "Could you bring her here?"

"She won't come. See, she's hurt her wing—"

"Eee, her poor wing is broken!" wailed Mrs. Cabot.

"Mother, will you hush up! Our Frederika's wing . . . Oh, for the love of Pete, what am I saying?"

"Jesse," said the boy's father in a frosty voice. "I think you'd better apologize to Mr. Cabot."

"But Pop, it's all true! The girl I seen is not the one they want."

Mr. Cabot said wretchedly, "Is it at all possible there were two small girls on that plane?"

"Not on the passenger manifest," said the camera man.

"But there was!" said Jesse. He tried desperately to explain from the beginning. "Mom, Pop, remember how you said it was a murkle that saved everybody from getting—"

Mr. Cabot interrupted. "Jesse, do you know where this girl of yours is right now?"

Jesse swallowed and looked sidelong at his father. "In my tree-house."

"In a *tree!*" bleated Mrs. Cabot.

"Don't distress yourselves," said Mr. Farreway grimly. "There's no one there, but we'll go down and look anyway, just to put your minds at ease."

Mr. Cabot helped Mrs. Cabot totter out through the kitchen, and the Farreways followed with flashlights. At the last moment, the camera man said, "Oh, what the heck," picked up his gear and went along. Jesse yelled after them as they disappeared, "Look under the water!" and heard Mrs. Cabot wail despairingly, "Oh-woo-hoo-hoo!"

Left alone, Jesse snuffled in self-pity. The girl was sure to elude them, and Pop was sure to come back with fire in his eye.

"Pst!" came a whisper from outside the living room window.

Jesse looked at her. "You've fixed me good."

"You *are* in hot water, maneen dear. I heard the whole

rigmarole. And I'm truly sorry, cross my heart. Come on and we'll set everything to rights."

"How?" Jesse asked suspiciously.

"How else? We'll fetch the brat for them."

It took Jesse a while to circle through the house, around the front and join her on the side lawn.

"Hurry it up," she urged. "They're on their way back and they're rampaging like O'Rory's bull. The old woman fell in the creek."

"I'm hurrying as fast as I can."

She stopped and looked down. "Och, that boot. You can't go climbing the mountain in that. Let's have it off." Before he could explain that it had to stay on for three more weeks, she knelt, did something, and it was off.

"Gee," said Jesse, hesitantly testing his weight on the liberated limb and finding it as good as new. "Thanks!"

"Now scurry. Scurry!"

The girl apparently could see in the dark. She seized his hand and hauled him breathlessly along, avoiding the town streets to plunge through back yards, scramble over fences, duck clothes lines, and wake what sounded like a thousand watchdogs. Not until they were clear of the last habitations and on the mountain's first rising slope did she slacken the pace.

When he could speak without rasping, Jesse asked, "Do you know where Frederika is?"

"Sitting at the bottom of a clay pit that she can't climb out of. 'Tis all covered over with greenery, which is why the seekers did never see her." She added scornfully, "And the ninny is too proud to screech her lungs out, what any right-minded female would do."

The girl could probably have scaled the mountain in a tenth the time it finally took. The trails were inky black, and Jesse did not have her remarkable vision. Also, though the leg that had been broken was now as strong as ever, it had come out of the cast bare-footed and vulnerable to briers, twigs and stones.

The first light of pre-dawn was in the sky by the time they reached their objective. When Jesse parted the screen of shrubbery and leaned over the edge of the clay pit, he could just make out the shape huddled at the bottom. The shape stood up and became a blonde little girl, somewhat

wan and disheveled, but as poised as a princess when she greeted him, "So good of you to come."

"I'll go look for something to pull you out with," Jesse said. He meandered through the surrounding woods, but could find nothing until he came back to the pit. There was a fallen limb lying there that looked strong enough for Frederika to climb up, if it could be slid to the brink and leaned in. But it was too heavy for him to manage alone, and he had to wait a few minutes until his companion came fluttering back from some errand of her own.

"Very well, I'll lend hand for the crayture," she said, when Jesse explained the maneuver. "But I'll be gone when she comes out."

"Gone!" Jesse echoed tragically.

"One woman at a time," she twitted him, then said seriously, "I've found an owl who knows the way to New York City. I'll go with him now, I'm that anxious to start me seamstressin' career in the needle trades." Jesse couldn't think what to say, but he felt suddenly desolate.

The two of them together were able to move the big limb forward by jerks until its far end overbalanced and slowly tilted down to the floor of the clay pit. Frederika began at once to struggle up it, amateurishly but doggedly.

The other girl waited with Jesse until Frederika's tousled platinum hair showed above the edge of the pit. Then she murmured, half to herself, "Aye, I'll *need* riches to compete."

She turned and gave Jesse a quick, hard hug. "Mind you remember me now, till ye're grown tall . . ." She pecked a cool kiss on his forehead and released him. Jesse blinked as the rising sun suddenly caught him full in the eyes; when he could see again, only Frederika was beside him.

They descended the mountain in that serene radiance that comes with certain dawns, as if the sun were shining through opals. Gallumphing downhill by daylight was a quick trip, and they arrived at the Farreway residence in short order—to find the whole household in a swivet.

Jesse's mother had found his cast-off cast and was upstairs having hysterics. Mrs. Cabot's weight of grief had apparently been dissolved through immersion, to be replaced by what she assured everybody was triple pneumonia. Now she was loudly telephoning her New York lawyers to sue the Farreways for letting her fall in the

creek, and the camera man for taking a picture of it. The camera man was telling anyone who would listen that it was the only picture he'd taken during the entire disaster that was worth printing. Mr. Cabot and Mr. Farreway were breakfasting on cooking sherry in the kitchen and mulling plans to set up bachelor quarters together in the tree-house. Mr. Petersen and a couple of other troopers were trooping in and out, trying to make some sense of the night's goings-on.

Of course, the arrival of Jesse and Frederika calmed the troubled turmoil. There were feverish huggings and kissings, hosannahs and hallelujahs. Mr. Petersen hurried off to order all the town's bells, whistles and sirens sounded. The camera man dashed about taking pictures and making excited phone calls. The Cabots nearly smothered both the children with affection and gratitude, while the Farreways plied them with a breakfast that Paul Bunyan couldn't have eaten. The lightning cure of Jesse's broken leg ("well, it was a murkle . . .") went almost unremarked in the general rejoicing, for which he was glad. Under protest, he submitted to having a picture taken with Frederika slavishly adoring him. The Cabots and Farreways chummily agreed that yes, darling Frederika *must* come to spend many a future summer in Vermont with her manly little rescuer.

Somehow, eventually, Jesse managed to slip away from the gushing bonhomie. He trudged unnoticed down to the sycamore and climbed up into the tree-house.

In one corner there lay an oblong parcel. It was the paper bag that had once contained provisions, now neatly stitched into a pillow shape and stuffed with dandelion fluff. When he picked it up he found a silver sixpence underneath.

Drowsily, he lay down with his head on the wee pillow. Just before he drifted off to sleep, Jesse told himself that mere Frederikas might come and go, but he was going to wait—right here if possible—for the promised return of a certain wealthy seamstress from New York City.

And who knows? Murkles do happen.

On April 5, 1965, Dr. Asimov was honored at the 149th national meeting of The American Chemical Society, where he was presented with the Society's $1000.00 James T. Grady Award—the highest honor a science writer can receive in this country. The award is intended to recognize and stimulate outstanding science writing which materially increases the public's knowledge and understanding of science.

This honor is richly deserved. The only melancholy (if selfish) note is that Dr. Asimov has not written much fiction lately. The brief and poignant tale which follows is an exception. It is also proof that next to the Abacus on Isaac Asimov's desk, still lies the Rose.

EYES DO MORE THAN SEE

by Isaac Asimov

After hundreds of billions of years, he suddenly thought of himself as Ames. Not the wave-length combination which, through all the universe was now the equivalent of Ames—but the sound itself. A faint memory came back of the sound waves he no longer heard and no longer could hear.

The new project was sharpening his memory for so many more of the old, old, eons-old things. He flattened the energy vortex that made up the total of his individuality and its lines of force stretched beyond the stars.

Brock's answering signal came.

Surely, Ames thought, he could tell Brock. Surely he could tell somebody.

Brock's shifting energy pattern communed, "Aren't you coming, Ames?"

"Of course."

"Will you take part in the contest?"

"Yes!" Ames's lines of force pulsed erratically. "Most certainly. I have thought of a whole new art-form. Something really unusual."

"What a waste of effort! How can you think a new varia-

tion has not been thought of in two hundred billion years. There can be nothing new."

For a moment Brock shifted out of phase and out of communion, so that Ames had to hurry to adjust his lines of force. He caught the drift of other-thoughts as he did so, the view of the powdered galaxies against the velvet of nothingness, and the lines of force pulsing in endless multitudes of energy-life, lying between the galaxies.

Ames said, "Please absorb my thoughts, Brock. Don't close out. I've thought of manipulating Matter. Imagine! A symphony of Matter. Why bother with Energy. Of course, there's nothing new in Energy; how can there be? Doesn't that show we must deal with Matter?"

"Matter!"

Ames interpreted Brock's energy-vibrations as those of disgust.

He said, "Why not? We were once Matter ourselves back—back—Oh, a trillion years ago anyway! Why not build up objects in a Matter medium, or abstract forms or—listen, Brock—why not build up an imitation of ourselves in Matter, ourselves as we used to be?"

Brock said, "I don't remember how that was. No one does."

"I do," said Ames with energy, "I've been thinking of nothing else and I am beginning to remember. Brock, let me show you. Tell me if I'm right. Tell me."

"No. This is silly. It's—repulsive."

"Let me try, Brock. We've been friends; we've pulsed energy together from the beginning—from the moment we became what we are. Brock, please!"

"Then, quickly."

Ames had not felt such a tremor along his own lines of force in—well, in how long? If he tried it now for Brock and it worked, he could dare manipulate Matter before the assembled Energy-beings who had so drearily waited over the eons for something new.

The Matter was thin out there between the galaxies, but Ames gathered it, scraping it together over the cubic light-years, choosing the atoms, achieving a clayey consistency and forcing matter into an ovoid form that spread out below.

"Don't you remember, Brock?" he asked softly. "Wasn't it something like this?"

Brock's vortex trembled in phase. "Don't make me remember. I don't remember."

"That was the head. They called it the head. I remember it so clearly, I want to say it. I mean with sound." He waited, then said, "Look, do you remember that?"

On the upper front of the ovoid appeared HEAD.

"What is that?" asked Brock.

"That's the word for head. The symbols that meant the word in sound. Tell me you remember, Brock!"

"There was something," said Brock hesitantly, "something in the middle." A vertical bulge formed.

Ames said, "Yes! Nose, that's it!" and NOSE appeared upon it. "And those are eyes on either side." LEFT EYE—RIGHT EYE.

Ames regarded what he had formed, his lines of force pulsing slowly. Was he sure he liked this?

"Mouth," he said, in small quiverings, "and chin and Adam's apple, and the collarbones. How the words come back to me." They appeared on the form.

Brock said, "I haven't thought of them for hundreds of billions of years. Why have you reminded me? Why?"

Ames was momentarily lost in his thoughts. "Something else. Organs to hear with; something for the sound waves. Ears! Where do they go? I don't remember where to put them?"

Brock cried out, "Leave it alone! Ears and all else! Don't remember!"

Ames said, uncertainly, "What is wrong with remembering?"

"Because the outside wasn't rough and cold like that but smooth and warm. Because the eyes were tender and alive, and the lips of the mouth trembled and were soft on mine." Brock's lines of force beat and wavered, beat and wavered.

Ames said, "I'm sorry! I'm sorry!"

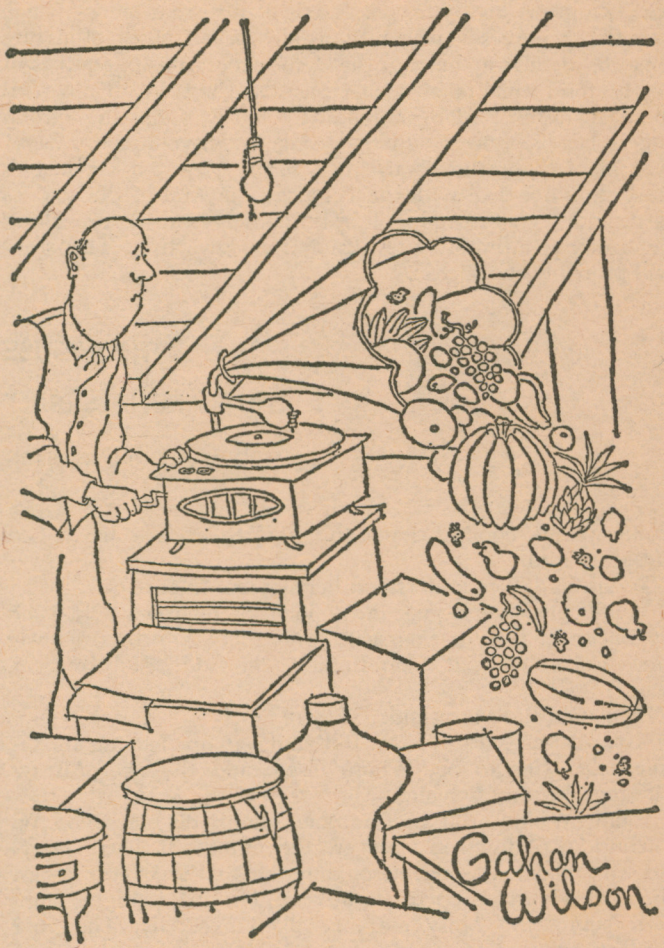
"You're reminding me that once I was a woman and knew love; that eyes do more than see and I have none to do it for me."

With violence, she added matter to the rough-hewn head and said, "Then let *them* do it" and turned and fled.

And Ames saw and remembered, too, that once he had

been a man. The force of his vortex split the head in two and he fled back across the galaxies on the energy-track of Brock—back to the endless doom of life.

And the eyes of the shattered head of Matter still glistened with the moisture that Brock had placed there to represent tears. The head of Matter did that which the energy-beings could do no longer and it wept for all humanity, and for the fragile beauty of the bodies they had once given up, a trillion years ago.


Gahan
Wilson

In 1742 a man named Samuel King came to the U.S. from Europe and settled in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. Either Mr. King or his wife possessed a recessive gene—which geneticists now say was responsible for 49 cases of a rare type of dwarfism among the Lancaster Amish, equivalent to the total number of such cases elsewhere in all recorded medical history! The inbreeding of the Lancaster group (there has been no "new blood" since pre-revolutionary days) was blamed for the dwarfism deformity. Avram Davidson's story does not deal with the Pennsylvania Amish. But it does deal with genetic and cultural isolation—and the resulting deformity is infinitely more tragic than dwarfism. This story will probably startle you.

THE HOUSE THE BLAKENEYS BUILT

by Avram Davidson

"Four people coming down the Forest Road, a hey," Old Big Mary said.

Young Red Tom understood her at once. "Not ours."

Things grew very quiet in the long kitchenroom. Old Whitey Bill shifted in his chairseat. "Those have's to be Runaway Little Bob's and that Thin Jinnie's," he said. "Help me up, some."

"No," Old Big Mary said. "They're not."

"Has to be." Old Whitey Bill shuffled up, leaning on his canestick. "Has to be. Whose else could they be. Always said, me, she ran after him."

Young Whitey Bill put another chunk of burnwood on the burning. "Rowwer, rowwer," he muttered. Then everyone was talking at once, crowding up to the windowlooks. Then everybody stopped the talking. The big foodpots bubbled. Young Big Mary mumble-talked excitedly. Then her words came out clearsound.

"Look to here—look to here—I say, me, they aren't Blakeneys."

Old Little Mary, coming down from the spindleroom,

called out, "People! People! Three and four of them down the Forest Road and I don't know them and, oh, they funny-walk!"

"Four strange people!"

"Not Blakeneys!"

"Stop sillytalking! Has to be! Who elses?"

"But not Blakeneys!"

"Not from The House, look to, look to! People—not from The House!"

"Runaway Bob and that Thin Jinnie?"

"No, can't be. No old ones."

"Children? Childrenchildren?"

All who hadn't been lookseeing before came now, all who were at The House, that is—running from the cowroom and the horseroom and dairyroom, ironroom, schoolroom, even from the sickroom.

"Four people! Not Blakeneys, some say!"

"Blakeneys or not Blakeneys, not from The House!"

Robert Hayakawa and his wife Shulamith came out of the forest, Ezra and Mikicho with them. "Well, as I said," Robert observed, in his slow careful way, "a road may end nowhere, going in one direction, but it's not likely it will end nowhere, going in the other."

Shulamith sighed. She was heavy with child. "Tilled fields. I'm glad of that. There was no sign of them anywhere else on the planet. This must be a new settlement. But we've been all over that—" She stopped abruptly, so did they all.

Ezra pointed. "A house—"

"It's more like a, well, what would you say?" Mikicho moved her mouth, groping for a word. "A . . . a *castle*? Robert?"

Very softly, Robert said, "It's not new, whatever it is. It is very much not new, don't you see, Shulamith. *What*—?"

She had given a little cry of alarm, or perhaps just surprise. All four turned to see what had surprised her. A man was running over the field towards them. He stopped, stumbling, as they all turned to him. Then he started again, a curious shambling walk. They could see his mouth moving after a while. He pointed to the four, waved his hand, waggled his head.

"Hey," they could hear him saying. "A hey, a hey. Hey. Look to. Mum. Mum mum mum. Oh, hey . . ."

He had a florid face, a round face that bulged over the eyes, and they were prominent and blue eyes. His nose was an eagle's nose, sharp and hooked, and his mouth was loose and trembling. "Oh, hey, you must be, mum, his name, what? And she run off to follow him? Longlong. Jinnie! Thin Jinnie! Childrenchildren, a hey?" Behind him in the field two animals paused before a plow, switching their tails.

"Michiko, look," said Ezra. "Those must be cows."

The man had stopped about ten feet away. He was dressed in loose, coarse cloth. Again he waggled his head. "Cows, no. Oh, no, mum mum, freemartins, elses. Not cows." Something occurred to him, almost staggering in its astonishment. "A hey, you won't know me! Won't know me!" He laughed. "Oh. What a thing. Strange Blakeneys. Old Red Tom, I say, me."

Gravely, they introduced themselves. He frowned, his slack mouth moving. "Don't know them name," he said, after a moment. "No, a mum. Make them up, like children, in the woods. Longlong. Oh, I, now! Runaway Little Bob. Yes, that name! Your fatherfather. Dead, a hey?"

Very politely, very wearily, feeling—now that he had stopped—the fatigue of the long, long walk, Robert Hayakawa said, "I'm afraid I don't know him. We are not, I think, who you seem to think we are . . . might we go on to the house, do you know?" His wife murmured her agreement, and leaned against him.

Old Red Tom, who had been gaping, seemed suddenly to catch at a word. "The House! A hey, yes. Go on to The House. Good now. Mum."

They started off, more slowly than before, and Old Red Tom, having unhitched his freemartins, followed behind, from time to time calling something unintelligible. "A funny fellow," said Ezra.

"He talks so *oddly*," Mikicho said. And Shulamith said that all she wanted was to sit down. Then—

"Oh, look," she said. "*Look!*"

"They have all come to greet us," her husband observed.

And so they had.

Nothing like this event had ever occurred in the history of the Blakeneys. But they were not found wanting. They brought the strangers into The House, gave them the softest chairseats, nearest to the burning; gave them cookingmilk and cheesemeats and tato-plants. Fatigue descended on the newcomers in a rush; they ate and drank somewhat, then they sank back, silent.

But the people of the house were not silent, far from it. Most of them who had been away had now come back, they milled around, some gulping eats, others craning and staring, most talking and talking and talking—few of them mumbletalking, now that the initial excitement had ebbed a bit. To the newcomers, eyes now opening with effort, now closing, despite, the people of the house seemed like figures from one of those halls of mirrors they had read about in social histories: the same faces, clothes . . . but, ah, indeed, not the same dimensions. Everywhere—florid complexions, bulging blue eyes, protruding bones at the forehead, hooked thin noses, flabby mouths.

Blakeneys.

Thin Blakeneys, big Blakeneys, little Blakeneys, old ones, young ones, male and female. There seemed to be one standard model from which the others had been stretched or compressed, but it was difficult to conjecture what this exact standard was.

"Starside, then," Young Big Mary said—and said again and again, clearsound. "No elses live to Blakeneyworld. Starside, Starside, a hey, Starside. Same as Captains."

Young Whitey Bill pointed with a stick of burnwood at Shulamith. "Baby grows," he said. "Rower, rower. Baby soon."

With a great effort, Robert roused himself. "Yes. She's going to have a baby very soon. We will be glad of your help."

Old Whitey Bill came for another look to, hobbling on his canestick. "We descend," he said, putting his face very close to Robert's, "we descend from the Captains. Hasn't heard of them, you? Elses not heard? Funny. Funnyfunny. We descend, look to. From the Captains. Captain Tom Blakeney. And his wives. Captain Bill Blakeney. And his wives. Brothers, they. Jinnie, Mary, Captain Tom's wives. Other Mary, Captain Bob's wife. Had another wife, but we don't re-

member it, us, her name. They lived, look to, Starside. You, too? Mum, you? A hey, Starside?"

Robert nodded. "When?" he asked. "When did they come from Starside? The brothers."

Night had fallen, but no lights were lit. Only the dancing flames, steadily fed, of the burning, with chunks and chunks of fat and greasy burnwood, flickered and illuminated the great room. "Ah, when," said Old Red Tom, thrusting up to the chairseat. "When we children, old Blakeneys say, a hey, five hundredyear. Longlong."

Old Little Mary said, suddenly, "They funnywalk. They funnytalk. But, oh, they funnylook, too!"

"A baby. A baby. Grows a baby, soon."

And two or three little baby Blakeneys, like shrunken versions of their elders, gobbled and giggled and asked to see the Starside baby. The big ones laughed, told them, soon.

"Five hundred . . ." Hayakawa drowsed. He snapped awake. "The four of us," he said, "were heading in our boat for the Moons of Lor. Have you—no, I see, you never have. It's a short trip, really. But something happened to us, I don't know . . . how to explain it . . .we ran into something . . . something that wasn't there. A warp? A hole? That's silly, I know, but—it was as though we felt the boat *drop*, somehow. And then, after that, our instruments didn't work and we saw we had no celestial references . . . not a star we knew. What's that phrase, 'A new Heaven and a new Earth?' We were just able to reach here. Blakeneyworld, as you call it."

Sparks snapped and flew. Someone said, "Sleepytime." And then all the Blakeneys went away and then Hayakawa slept.

It was washtime when the four woke up, and all the Blakeneys around The House, big and little, were off scrubbing themselves and their clothes. "I guess that food on the table is for us," Ezra said. "I will assume it is for us. Say grace, Robert. I'm hungry."

Afterwards they got up and looked around. The room was big and the far end so dark, even with sunshine pouring in through the open shutters, that they could hardly make out the painting on the wall. The paint was peeling, anyway, and a crack like a flash of lightning ran through it; plaster or something of the sort had been slapped onto it, but this

had mostly fallen out, its only lasting effect being to deface the painting further.

"Do you suppose that the two big figures could be the Captains?" Mikicho asked, for Robert had told them what Old Whitey Bill had said.

"I would guess so. They look grim and purposeful . . . When was the persecution of the polygamists, anybody know?"

Current social histories had little to say about that period, but the four finally agreed it had been during the Refinishing Era, and that this had been about six hundred years ago. "Could this house be that old?" Shulamith asked. "Parts of it, I suppose, could be. I'll tell you what I think, *I* think that those two Captains set out like ancient patriarchs with their wives and their families and their flocks and so on, heading for somewhere where they wouldn't be persecuted. And then they hit—well, whatever it was that *we* hit. And wound up here. Like us."

Mikicho said, in a small, small voice, "And perhaps it will be another six hundred years before anyone else comes here. Oh, we're here for good and forever. That's sure."

They walked on, silent and unsure, through endless corridors and endless rooms. Some were clean enough, others were clogged with dust and rubbish, some had fallen into ruin, some were being used for barns and stables, and in one was a warm forge.

"Well," Robert said at last, "we must make the best of it. We cannot change the configurations of the universe."

Following the sounds they presently heard brought them to the washroom, slippery, warm, steamy, noisy. Once again they were surrounded by the antic Blakeney face and form in its many permutations. "Washtime, washtime!" their hosts shouted, showing them where to put their clothes, fingering the garments curiously, helping them to soap, explaining which of the pools were fed by hot springs, which by warm and cold, giving them towels, assisting Shulamith carefully.

"Your world house, you, a hey," began a be-soaped Blakeney to Ezra; "bigger than this? No."

Ezra agreed, "No."

"Your—Blakeneys? No. Mum, mum. Hey. Family? Smaller, a hey?"

"Oh, much smaller."

The Blakeney nodded. Then he offered to scrub Ezra's back if Ezra would scrub his.

The hours passed, and the days. There seemed no government, no rules, only ways and habits and practices. Those who felt so inclined, worked. Those who didn't . . . didn't. No one suggested the newcomers do anything, no one prevented from doing anything. It was perhaps a week later that Robert and Ezra invited themselves on a trip along the shore of the bay. Two healthy horses pulled a rickety wagon.

The driver's name was Young Little Bob. "Gots to fix a floorwalk," he said. "In the, a hey, in the sickroom. Needs boards. Lots at the riverwater."

The sun was warm. The House now and again vanished behind trees or hills, now and again, as the road curved with the bay, came into view, looming over everything.

"We've got to find something for ourselves to *do*," Ezra said. "These people may be all one big happy family, they better be, the only family on the whole planet all this time. But if I spend any much more time with them I think I'll become as dippy as they are."

Robert said, deprecatingly, that the Blakeneys weren't *very* dippy. "Besides," he pointed out, "sooner or later our children are going to have to intermarry with them, and—"

"Our children can intermarry with each other—"

"Our grandchildren, then. I'm afraid we haven't the ancient skills necessary to be pioneers, otherwise we might go . . . just anywhere. There is, after all, lots of room. But in a few hundred years, perhaps less, our descendants would be just as inbred and, well, odd. This way, at least, there's a chance. Hybrid vigor, and all that."

They forded the river at a point just directly opposite The House. A thin plume of smoke rose from one of its great, gaunt chimneys. The wagon turned up an overgrown path which followed up the river. "Lots of boards," said Young Little Bob. "Mum mum mum."

There were lots of boards, just as he said, weathered a silver grey. They were piled under the roof of a great open shed. At the edge of it a huge wheel turned and turned in the water. It, like the roof, was made of some dull and unrusted metal. But only the wheel turned. The other machinery was dusty.

"Millstones," Ezra said. "And saws. Lathes. And . . . all sorts of things. Why do they—Bob? Young Little Bob, I mean—why do you grind your grain by hand?"

The driver shrugged. "Have's to make flour, a hey. Bread."

Obviously, none of the machinery was in running order. It was soon obvious that no living Blakeney knew how to mend this, although (said Young Little Bob) there were those who could remember when things were otherwise: Old Big Mary, Old Little Mary, Old Whitey Bill—

Hayakawa, with a polite gesture, turned away from the recitation. "Ezra . . . I think we might be able to fix all this. Get it in running order. *That* would be something to do, wouldn't it? Something well worth doing. It would make a big difference."

Ezra said that it would make all the difference.

Shulamith's child, a girl, was born on the edge of a summer evening when the sun streaked the sky with rose, crimson, magenta, lime, and purple. "We'll name her *Hope*," she said.

"Tongs to make tongs," Mikicho called the work of repair. She saw the restoration of the water-power as the beginning of a process which must eventually result in their being space-borne again. Robert and Ezra did not encourage her in this. It was a long labor of work. They pored and sifted through The House from its crumbling top to its vast, vast colonnaded cellar, finding much that was of use to them, much which —though of no use—was interesting and intriguing—and much which was not only long past use but whose very usage could now be no more than a matter of conjecture. They found tools, metal which could be forged into tools, they found a whole library of books and they found the Blakeney-made press on which the books had been printed; the most recent was a treatise on the diseases of cattle, its date little more than a hundred years earlier. Decay had come quickly.

None of the Blakeneys were of much use in the matter of repairs. They were willing enough to lift and move—until the novelty wore off; then they were only in the way. The nearest to an exception was Big Fat Red Bob, the blacksmith; and, as his usual work was limited to sharpening plowshares, even he was not of much use. Robert and Ezra

worked from sunrise to late afternoon. They would have worked longer, but as soon as the first chill hit the air, whatever Blakeneys were on hand began to get restless.

"Have's to get back, now, a hey. Have's to start back."

"Why?" Ezra had asked, at first. "There are no harmful animals on Blakeney world, are there?"

It was nothing that any of them could put into words, either clearsound or mumbletalk. They had no tradition of things that go bump in the night, but nothing could persuade them to spend a minute of the night outside the thick walls of The House. Robert and Ezra found it easier to yield, return with them. There were so many false starts, the machinery beginning to function and then breaking down, that no celebration took place to mark any particular day as the successful one. The nearest thing to it was the batch of cakes that Old Big Mary baked from the first millground flour.

"Like longlong times," she said, contentedly, licking crumbs from her toothless chops. She looked at the newcomers, made a face for their baby. A thought occurred to her, and, after a moment or two, she expressed it. "Not ours," she said. "Not ours, you. Elses. But I rather have's you here than that Runaway Little Bob back, or that Thin Jinnie . . . Yes, I rathers."

There was only one serviceable axe, so no timber was cut. But Ezra found a cove where driftwood, limbs and entire trees, was continually piling up; and the sawmill didn't lack for wood to feed it. "Makes a lot of boards, a hey," Young Little Bob said one day.

"We're building a house," Robert explained.

The wagoner looked across the bay at the mighty towers and turrets, the great gables and long walls. From the distance no breach was noticeable, although two of the chimneys could see seen to slant slightly. "Lots to build," he said. "A hey, whole roof on north end wing, mum mum, bad, it's bad, hey."

"No, we're building our own house."

He looked at them surprised. "Wants to build another room? Easier, I say, me, clean up a noone's room. Oh, a hey, lots of them!"

Robert let the matter drop, then, but it could not be

dropped forever, so one night after eats he began to explain. "We are very grateful for your help to us," he said, "strangers as we are to you and to your ways. Perhaps it is because we *are* strange that we feel we want to have our own house to live in."

The Blakeneys were, for Blakeneys, quiet. They were also uncomprehending.

"It's the way we've been used to living. On many of the other worlds people do live, many families—and the families are all smaller than this, than yours, than the Blakeneys, I mean—many in one big house. But not on the world we lived in. There, every family has its own house, you see. We've been used to that. Now, at first, all five of us will live in the new house we're going to build near the mill. But as soon as we can we'll build a second new one. Then each family will have its own . . ."

He stopped, looked helplessly at his wife and friends. He began again, in the face of blank nonunderstanding, "We hope you'll help us. We'll trade our services for your supplies. You give us food and cloth, we'll grind your flour and saw your wood. We can help you fix your furniture, your looms, your broken floors and walls and roofs. And eventually—"

But he never got to explain about eventually. It was more than he could do to explain about the new house. No Blakeneys came to the house-raising. Robert and Ezra fixed up a capstan and hoist, block-and-tackle, managed—with the help of the two women—to get their small house built. But nobody of the Blakeneys ever came any more with grain to be ground, and when Robert and Ezra went to see them they saw that the newly-sawn planks and the lathe-turned wood still lay where it had been left.

"The food we took with us is gone," Robert said. "We have to have more. I'm sorry you feel this way. Please understand, it is not that we don't like you. It's just that we have to live our own way. In our own houses."

The silence was broken by a baby Blakeney. "What's 'houses'?" he asked.

He was shushed. "No such word, hey," he was told, too. Robert went on, "We're going to ask you to lend us things. We want enough grain and tatoplants and such to last till we can get our own crops in, and enough milk-cattle and

draft-animals until we can breed some of our own. Will you do that for us?"

Except for Young Whitey Bill, crouched by the burning, who mumbletalked with "Rower, rower, rower," they still kept silence. Popping blue eyes stared, faces were perhaps more florid than usual, large, slack mouths trembled beneath long hook-noses.

"We're wasting time," Ezra said.

Robert sighed. "Well, we have no other choice, friends . . . Blakeneys . . . We're going to have to take what we need, then. But we'll pay you back, as soon as we can, two for one. And anytime you want our help or service, you can have it. We'll be friends again. We *must* be friends. There are so many, many ways we can help one another to live better—and we are all there are, really, of humanity, on all this planet. We—"

Ezra nudged him, half-pulled him away. They took a wagon and a team of horses, a dray and a yoke of freemartins, loaded up with food. They took cows and ewes, a yearling bull and a shearling ram, a few bolts of cloth, and seed. No one prevented them, or tried to interfere, as they drove away. Robert turned and looked behind at the silent people. But then, head sunk, he watched only the bay road ahead of him, looking aside neither to the water nor the woods.

"It's good that they can see us here," he said, later on that day. "It's bound to make them think, and, sooner or later, they'll come around."

They came sooner than he thought.

"I'm so glad to see you, friends!" Robert came running out to greet them. They seized and bound him with unaccustomed hands. Then, paying no attention to his anguished cries of "Why? Why?" they rushed into the new house and dragged out Shulamith and Mikicho and the baby. They drove the animals from their stalls, but took nothing else. The stove was now the major object of interest. First they knocked it over, then they scattered the burning coals all about, then they lit brands of burnwood and scrambled around with them. In a short while the building was all afire.

The Blakeneys seemed possessed. Faces red, eyes almost popping from their heads, they mumble-shouted and raved. When Ezra, who had been working in the shed, came run-

ning, fighting, they bore him to the ground and beat him with pieces of wood. He did not get up when they were through; it seemed apparent that he never would. Mikicho began a long and endless scream.

Robert stopped struggling for a moment. Caught off-guard, his captors loosened their hold—he broke away from their hands and his bonds, and, crying, "The tools! The tools!" dashed into the burning fire. The blazing roof fell in upon him with a great crash. No sound came from him, nor from Shulamith, who fainted. The baby began a thin, reedy wail.

Working as quickly as they could, in their frenzy, the Blakeneys added to the lumber and waste and scraps around the machinery in the shed, soon had it all ablaze.

The fire could be seen all the way back.

"Wasn't right, wasn't right," Young Red Bob said, over and over again.

"A bad thing," Old Little Mary agreed.

Young Big Mary carried the baby. Shulamith and Mikicho were led, dragging along. "Little baby, a hey, a hey," she crooned.

Old Whitey Bill was dubious. "Be bad blood," he said. "The elses women grow more babies. A mum mum," he mused. "Teach them better. Not to funnywalk, such." He nodded and mumbled, peered out of the windowlook, his loose mouth widening with satisfaction. "Wasn't right," he said. "Wasn't *right*. Another house. Can't be another *house*, a second, a third. Hey, a hey! Never was elses but The House. Never be again. No."

He looked around, his gaze encompassing the cracked walls, sinking floors, sagging roof. A faint smell of smoke was in the air. "The House," he said, contentedly. "The House."

Richard Wilson has published three novels and 69 short stories, but says that he is basically a newsman (editor with Transradio Press and Reuters for many years, now chief of the news bureau at Syracuse University). THE EIGHT BILLION derives its title from O. Henry's THE FOUR MILLION and Meyer Berger's THE EIGHT MILLION. The "serried bristling city" of New York does not, of course, contain eight billion people. If it did . . . well, read on. If this is not the overpopulation story to end all overpopulation stories, it will at least give them pause.

THE EIGHT BILLION

by Richard Wilson

The vizier told the King of New York: "It's time to go downtown, Your Majesty."

Because of the throng and the hubbub he spoke with his lips pressed to the King's ear. The vizier, who was old, could remember when the little throne-room had seemed crowded with a mere hundred courtiers in it. Now, 40 years later, there were a thousand. He turned his head half right and the King graciously turned his head to put his lips to the vizier's ear.

"Is it really time?" the King asked. He made a happy, involuntary gesture and dislodged the crown of his Queen. "Sorry, dear."

"What?" the Queen said. She retrieved the crown from the shoulder of the first lady in waiting, which was as far as it had been able to fall. "We can't hear a word you say."

The King ignored her. The vizier got his lips back to the King's ear and said, "Yes, Sire. Your gracious presence would be most welcome." He spoke in the pre-arranged code.

The circle of nobles closest to the King became aware that a discussion of import was under way and fell silent. They shifted their feet a quarter inch and inclined their heads.

The vizier glared at them. "Hubba-hubba!" he barked.

"Hubba-hubba!" they responded, and not until their chatter had resumed did he again put his lips to the King's

ear. "The Supervisors are thinking of legalizing death," he said, knowing he would be overheard and deliberately reviving an old rumor for the benefit of the eavesdropping nobles.

"We should not be displeased," the King said. "They could start right here."

"Under the plan the nobles would be exempt," the vizier said. "I think a committee of nobles helped draft the plan."

"That would be a pity," the King said, not bothering to get the vizier's ear back. "Our wish would be to distribute such a blessing democratically, if we may use that word. Hubba-hubba, there!"

The nobles' conversation, which had dropped to a murmur, rose in volume.

"They were thinking of starting at the outskirts," the vizier said. "As you know, the beneficent protection of immortality extends five hundred feet beyond the borders of the county. The thought was to bring it to the very edges, so that if anyone fell off the island he'd be gone, Pfut! like that. There'd be a law against shoving, of course."

"Very sound," the King said. "But what of those whose business takes them beyond the borders? Some are authorized by us to travel to the Kingdoms of Bronx or Richmond. We must not discourage trade, such little as there is."

Chimes sounded and the voice of the Royal Chef said: "Chow is now down." He was a former mess sergeant.

The voices of the nobles automatically rose again and there was a shifting of feet as they braced themselves. Under cover of this the King sought the vizier's ear and said: "Are they through downtown?" He sounded excited.

"Very close, Your Majesty. They wait only your presence."

"We'll go right after chow."

A mist began to descend from the feeder nozzles in the ceiling. "Odd numbers inhale," the voice of the Chef said. "Deep breaths now. Exhale. Even numbers inhale. Now out. Odd in, even out. Even in, odd out. Keep the rhythm or you'll burst the walls." The Royal Chef talked to the nobles as if they were half-witted privates.

"Oh, damn," the King said. "Essence of plankton again."

"Nourishing, though," the vizier said on the exhale. Then he breathed in hungrily.

"We keep forgetting whether we're odd or even," said

the King, who had been breathing at random to the discomfort of his chief minister. "We know we have dispensation but we like to cooperate."

"Your Majesty is odd; I'm even."

"How Our Gracious Queen manages to get far on this stuff I'll never know," the King said. He turned to her. "*Exhale*, dear, while we're inhaling."

"What?" she said.

"Never mind, dear." To the vizier he said: "Holy Moly. Can we start now?"

"To the Board of Supervisors' meeting, Sire?" It was on the agenda, and the King must not seem to be rushing downtown.

The King nodded and inch by inch they left, the vizier starting the cry that the nobles took up: "Gutzin for the King! Gutzin for the King!"

The nobles weren't the only idle ones.

There were few jobs other than those connected with essential services such as Communications (skyvision, grown-in radio), Waste Disposal (the daily garbage rocket into space), Feeding, Health, Subways and Sports.

Sports was really part of Communications but had insisted on its own Dukedown. Thus it managed to perpetuate the fiction that its football, baseball and hockey games were live, contemporary contests. Actually they were all on tape or film and hardly a player was still alive.

There was a sound reason. Spectator sports involving mass transportation of people had long since had to be banned. It was no longer possible to get 100,000 or more people in and out of Central Park Stadium for a game—because there were already 800,000 people living there permanently, stacked up in tiers.

The Board of Supervisors' meeting was scheduled to discuss an incident which had occurred on the Harlem River Overbuild.

The 63 supervisors were jammed erect in their meeting room, which had once been a secretary's office in the County Building. There was no room to sit down, even for the King, who stood near a window from which he had a good view of the teeming, spiry colossus he ruled.

The supervisors nearest him were all talking at once, tak-

ing advantage of the King's rare visit to advance their private causes. The King listened politely but his mind obviously was downtown.

"I said we can handle it," the Chairman shouted to the vizier. "All we have to do is coordinate menus with the King of the Bronx. His people come crowding across the line when we have parabeef mist and they only have plankton. Our people get trampled. Then they fight. That's what happened at the Overbuild. Near-riot."

"I hear there are people who *never* have plankton," the vizier said. "They circulate around the kingdoms and know just where to be at chowdown. There must be a leak from the Royal Kitchens."

"We'll look into it but it would be better to coordinate. Then it wouldn't matter where they were." The Chairman asked: "Have you visited maternity lately? They're delivering them like shad roe."

"Sounds like an enforcement-problem there," the vizier said impatiently, with a look across to the King, who had obviously had the word that a breakthrough was near in Project Mohole. "Holy Moly," he had said, hadn't he?

"How do you mean, enforcement?" the Chairman asked. "You can't legislate a pregnancy stretchout. Nine months and there they are. And the incidence of multiple births is rising, I might add."

"I'm talking about the mating berths," the vizier said. "I know the permits are supposed to be rigidly controlled but I think a shakeup would be in order among the keepers of the keys."

"That's not it. The problem is I.I."

"I.I.?"

"Illegal impregnation. They tell me it's flourishing. Especially at the compulsory sex education lectures. Jam them in like that, co-ed, and then talk about it, and things are bound to happen."

"Shocking," said the vizier, who was unshockable.

"The younger generation seems to be taking it as a matter of course. I've heard one youngster say to another, 'I got a standing start.' "

"Really, Mrs. Chairman?" It was an old skyvision joke actually.

"Facts are facts, Your Excellency. And people are people. Every last mother's son of the eight billion of them."

"Eight billion? I didn't think we were anywhere near that figure."

"As of the noon census estimate," the Chairman said. "It's eight billion, one million forty-two thousand some odd. I tell you, they're like shad roe."

The skyscraper office buildings had long since been taken over as dwellings. This followed naturally after big business fled, driven away by increasing taxes and traffic congestion. No one had really counted noses, but it was considered likely that the office buildings were being utilized at maximum efficiency—between four and eight families could fit comfortably into a suite of offices formerly occupied by one executive and two secretaries. Maybe even 16 or 32 families could squeeze in if you considered the number of high-ceilinged offices which had been duplexed, at least to the extent of stacking up the sleepers in rooms cut horizontally in half.

The vizier got the King away from the supervisors by crying: "We're late! Gutzin! Gutzin for the King!"

What they were late for was the annual Mingle Day. The King obviously was determined to go through with it on his way downtown.

Its full name was Mingle with the Masses Day. The law decreed that once each year the King and Queen, accompanied by their first minister, the vizier, must go forth among the multitude to see how unbearable things had become and to listen to complaints.

The vizier dreaded every second of Mingle Day and in recent years had tried to beg off on various pretexts, none of which the King had found acceptable. The King rather enjoyed the custom; he slithered amiably through the crush in his Silicoat, smiling, chatting, shaking hands, signing autographs and generally having a royal time. The vizier did the work.

The Queen, who had joined the King after the meeting, was not so good at slithering, due to her girth, but she was game. Her way was to fix a smile on her face and maintain a steady pace, relying on the agility of her subjects to avoid

touching her royal person with their hands, as protocol required. She also wore one of the plastic Silicoats which a clever Japanese commuter had developed early in the history of overpopulation. The Queen called it her slipcover.

The vizier had no such protection. His job was to stand still for the populace and record their complaints. These came at him from all sides as he aimed a button mike at the complainer's lips, cutting him off after 15 seconds, then moving on to the next. Thus the vizier constantly fell behind and had to make wild dashes through virtually solid flesh to regain his place behind Her Majesty.

It was unfortunate that the word that it was time to go downtown fell on Mingle Day, but there had been no way of knowing exactly when the breakthrough would take place. The secret project—boring into the bedrock in search of a legendary vast cavern capable of being converted into living space—had been pushed ahead with all possible speed and now only the King's presence was needed to complete it.

But he must give no appearance of haste lest he prematurely reveal the secret. One could not be sure the Mohole project would be a success, even after the breakthrough.

Within minutes of the time the royal VTO had set the royal party down, the normal crush had progressed from unbearable to next to impossible.

As always, the temper of the crowd changed as it flowed past the King, who received affection, to the Queen, who was accorded respect, to the vizier, who got the complaints.

Some of the complaints were more in the nature of suggestions and used up less than the maximum 15 seconds, such as "Drop dead, Jack," or "Go———, you old———."

The vizier rather welcomed these brief imperatives, which helped him make up the time lost in recording the comments of those who took their full quarter minute.

Another suggestion he had been hearing frequently in recent years was "Invade Brooklyn; they got lots of room there."

Brooklyn was probably worse off than Manhattan. People had been breeding in Brooklyn in greater numbers, and for decades longer, than in Manhattan and, though interborough statistics were secret, it was doubtful whether Manhattan could survive a man-to-man war with Brooklyn, should the unthinkable ever become think-about-able.

It was likely that the invade-Brooklyn advocates had been subtly misled by the titles of the boroughs' respective rulers into thinking Brooklyn would be a pushover for Manhattan. What the confusion stemmed from, probably, was that Brooklyn had only a Prince, whereas Manhattan had a King. (Nobody suggested invading the Bronx, which also had a King.)

The situation went back to the founding of the dynasties, which had their origin in a newspaper promotion.

One year the journalistic colossus, the *Daily News*, turned from the various publicity queens it had sponsored over the decades and let its readers choose a king.

By chance the winner, in addition to being the handsomest of the candidates, possessed a good brain and a fine speaking voice. Thus the mayor, to whom the *Daily News* had given its powerful support in his election campaign, was delighted to agree to turn over to the "king" some of his ceremonial duties.

Now, therefore, it was the "king" who rode with visiting heads of state up Broadway-High (the upper-level road through the financial district) under the simulated ticker-tape showers, who spoke at Knights of Columbus and United Jewish Appeal functions, who opened new old people's homes, who attended banquets for important business organizations and who went to crucial ball games. As a result the mayor had more time for his job and family.

So well did the "king" carry out his duties that he was overwhelmingly re-elected in the newspaper's poll the following year. In time the quotation marks were withdrawn from around his title, first by the *Daily News* and then even by the more conservative papers, which had given up trying to ignore this creation of their rival. Finally the King, elevated to capitalization and assured of permanent employment and a salary commensurate with his position, became known simply as the King of New York. New York County (Manhattan), that is.

Similarly, after another newspaper promotion, there was elected a Quuen of Queens (County), an euphonious title. But naturally the promotion to name a King of Kings (every schoolchild surely knows that Brooklyn is Kings County) had to be aborted as blasphemous. Brooklyn chose a Prince instead. His inferior-sounding title notwithstanding, the

Prince of Brooklyn was co-equal with the Queen of Queens and the Kings of New York, Bronx and Richmond.

In New York one year, the mayor failed the city in a crisis which the King quietly solved. Soon afterwards the King ousted the mayor from power in a gentlemanly coup. The four other counties being agreeable, the post of mayor was abolished and the Kings, Queens and Prince took over as heads of the autonomous county governments. Later their children succeeded them, either because they had been treated as royalty anyway or through the lethargy of the electorate, and the posts became hardly hereditary, as in the old-fashioned monarchies.

The current monarch in Manhattan was King V, the fifth in his line. By this time they had dropped their common names and started putting on airs, such as talking in the first person plural.

"The plankton ain't what it used to be," a new complainer said to the vizier. "Look into that, will ya?"

"I certainly shall, sir. Next." He was within a yard of the Queen's ample rear.

"The skyvision stinks lately," another said. "Not to mention the way the stars shine through from the back. They even let the moon get in once in a while. Then you can't see nothing."

"I'll take it up with the Royal Communication Commission," the vizier said. "It's ridiculous to be expected to look at the moon when it's skyvision time, isn't it?"

He was a step closer to the Queen, who was virtually at the King's elbow.

"Holy Moly," a strange voice said in his ear.

The vizier looked around sharply. A grinning, crafty-faced man said: "Means something to you, don't it? What are you trying to hide from us, Viz? You're not digging for gold, that's for sure."

"Digging?"

Others in the crowd echoed the word. The two syllables flew off in all directions.

"*Downtown*," the man said meaningfully. "You know where and why. How about telling the rest of us?"

The King and Queen had gone ahead and were already separated from the vizier by thousands of people.

"What is it?" the crafty-faced man persisted; "an escape-hatch for higher ups?"

"Whatever is done is done for all," the vizier declared, but the truth sounded unconvincing. He was surrounded by unfriendly faces.

Suddenly a knife appeared in the hand of the crafty man.

The vizier sucked in his breath, less from fear than from shock. Never had he seen a weapon outside the Royal Armory.

"Take us downtown," the man said. "We'll help you dig."

Then, as if miraculously, the broad, beloved, Silicoated figure of the Queen slid majestically through the multitude, who fell back respectfully for her.

She fixed the crafty man with an imperial eye and said: "How *dare* you threaten Our Minister?" To no one in particular she said: "Seize the malefactor."

Instantly, as he tried to hide the knife and slink away, he was grabbed by his erstwhile cronies.

The Queen whispered to the vizier: "We heard everybody saying 'digging' and came at once."

Then the King was also there, at the side of his Queen and minister. The vizier had never loved them more.

"Our people," the King said softly, confident that his words would be carried swiftly through the multitude; "we deplore this attempted violence against our honored minister because we deem any such action an attack on ourselves." There was a horrified murmur from the nearer edges of the vast pack of humanity.

"But worse," the King went on, "our heart is sore to think that anyone would impute to us a selfish motive. Therefore we invite each of you to go downtown with us."

When some of the excitement generated by this statement had died down he continued: "The project has been kept secret for one reason only: the possibility that it would fail, thus dashing hopes prematurely raised."

Somehow they got downtown, the teeming swarm of them, coursing excitedly along.

As they went the King explained Project Moly. His words, carried from group to group, told of the thrilling possibility that there were vast caverns below, where a man and his family might have space—room to breathe—a little privacy.

It mattered little that such space would be underground. Nine-tenths of the people already lived at lower or inner levels of vast surface honeycombs where the sun was never seen.

Finally they were "downtown." At the King's bidding, many hundreds were allowed through the doors of the huge warehouse whose cellar had become a massive excavation. Others formed human pyramids, took turns peering in through windows high above street level and told those below what they saw.

The chief digger led the King down the slope to the excavated depths.

The moment was at hand. The King rolled up his sleeves, grasped the pickaxe firmly with two hands and sank its point into a tissue-thin partition. It went through.

Great cheers went up. The King stepped back and workmen enlarged the hole.

It was obvious, as the scientists had forecast, that there were great caverns below and that they were capable of holding millions—perhaps billions—of people.

For several blessed moments the King and his people stared with awe and silent thanksgiving into the yawning, empty depths.

But soon, first with a whisper, then with a murmur and finally with shouts and cheers similar to those voiced by the Manhattanites only minutes ago, there issued from the depths of the cavern, from cracks and crevices where they must have been hiding and watching, scores, then hundreds of ugly livid people who looked as if neither they nor their ancestors had ever known the sun.

Sensing daylight above, although only the most diffuse of rays could have penetrated these deep workings, the livid people, their sunken eyes asquint and obviously hurting, streamed up along the sloping tunnel as relentlessly as a rising tide in the Bay of Fundy.

Now there were thousands of them—hundreds of thousands.

Ragged, thin, barefoot, their voices a babble of thanksgiving, they pattered past the King and his subjects who pressed back against the rock wall as the gray tide flowed by.

Their tongue was strange but some root it had in common

with the King's English made it possible for him to understand them.

They were saying that their quest had ended; that their prayers to a dimly-remembered topside god had been answered; that their upward borings had not been in vain and that there was surely room at the surface for the teeming, expanding population of the gray people who had been inhabiting the caverns inside the Earth—all eight billion of them.

Jazz and science fiction share several characteristics, among which are a freedom from inhibition and a penchant for surprise. There is a good deal about jazz in this poignant story by Robert J. Tilley, but you will not have to recognize the tunes to appreciate an unusually fine performance—one which says more about communication and alienation than any story we have read in a long time.

SOMETHING ELSE

by Robert J. Tilley

The equatorial region of the planet that the "Cosmos Queen" crashed on was liberally decorated with mountains, one of which it missed by a relative hairsbreadth before disintegrating noisily in a wide clearing that separated the forest from its stolid granite foot. The dust and wreckage took some time to settle, and it was several minutes after that that Dr. Sidney Williams, having surmised correctly that he was the sole survivor, emerged from the only section of the ship that had remained in one piece. He gazed forlornly at the alien landscape.

Locally, this consisted of multicolored and highly attractive flora, backed by a picturesquely purple range of hills. Dr. Williams shuddered, hastily turned his back, and rooted feverishly among the bits and pieces until he found the subwave transmitter, a tangle of wires and dented casing that even his inexperienced eye told him was out of order. He kicked it, yelped, then limped across to a seat that projected miraculously upright among the debris. Slumped on it, he glowered at the landscape again.

He mistrusted nature in the raw. His first experience of its treachery had included being stung by a wasp, blundering innocently into a bed of nettles and being chased by a cow. The result of this encounter, a supposed treat that had been provided by his parents when he was six years old, had been to instil a deep loathing of all things green and insect-ridden. Concrete, plastic and the metallic hubbub of urban existence formed his natural habitat, and he was unhappy away from it. The travelling necessitated by his

lecturing chores was a nuisance, but he simply stuffed himself with tranquillizers and kept his eyes firmly closed most of the time between cities.

His undertaking of a tour of the Alphard system had been occasioned by sheer financial necessity. Unrelenting pressure from his wife for the benefits to be derived from a further step up the professional and social scale, coupled with the recent unearthing in Singapore of a reputedly complete collection of the prolific Fletcher Henderson band's original 78 rpm recordings for which a mere cr. 5000 was being asked, had coincided with the offer from the Department of Cultural History (Colonial Division). Following reassurance that accidents were nowadays virtually unheard of and that unlimited sedation facilities were available, he signed the agreement with a shaking hand, packed his personal belongings and equipment and left.

The ship hadn't even got halfway to its destination. Due to some virtually unheard of mechanical mishap, they had been forced back into normal space on the outskirts of a small and obscure planetary system, short of fuel and in dire need of emergency repairs. It had been decided that these could be tackled more effectively on the ground, an unfortunate choice in view of the resultant situation.

Dr. Williams got up and wandered about the wreckage, kicking bits out of the way as he went. He didn't know whether to cut his throat then or wait until later, but in the meantime he didn't want to sit looking at the surroundings any longer than he had to. They both depressed and terrified him. He could feel the ominous proximity of greenery and smell its undisguised, unfiltered presence, hear its gentle stirring and rustling at the perimeter of the clearing, see its fragmentary movement from the corner of his eye as he moved, head down, among the forlorn remains of the ship.

What did it conceal? Life? It had to, he supposed. What sort of life? Peaceful? Threatening? A timid, herbivorous creature that was shyly concealing itself, or a prowling, slavering carnivore that watched him leeringly from the green darkness, savoring his obvious defenselessness, waiting only until his fear was sweet enough in its nostrils and then emerging to take him in its claws (tentacles?), preparatory to rending and devouring him . . .

He swallowed, and looked around for something sharp. A mustard-colored, familiar shape caught his eye, protruding from beneath a crumpled section of panelling.

Dr. Williams croaked an ejaculation of relief, partially occasioned by the reorientation gained from finding something familiar and also because it appeared at first glance to be undamaged. He dropped to his knees and eased the panelling to one side, his mouth dry with excitement, crooning softly and trying to keep his hands steady.

The case itself was thick with dust, but intact. The contents, though— He swallowed again. He wasn't worried overmuch about his clarinet, snugly cushioned on all sides in its special compartment, and it was doubtful that anything had happened to the spools themselves, but their playing apparatus was another matter. Although it was almost completely transistorised it inevitably contained a minimal number of moving parts, and despite their being made to withstand moderately rough handling they had recently been subjected to rather more than they could be reasonably expected to survive.

He unlocked the lid, and opened it. Excellent insulation had ensured that the contents had remained firmly in place, but that in itself was no guarantee against havoc having been wreaked at any one of several vital points. He licked his lips, said a brief silent prayer, and eased the machine up and out of the box.

Nothing tinkled. He held his breath, and shook it by his ear, very gently. Still nothing. Dr. Williams placed it on the ground, and stared at it hopefully.

As far as he could tell without actually trying it, it was undamaged. Had he been a man of mechanical aptitude, Dr. Williams would no doubt have carried out at least a cursory inspection as a precautionary measure before switching it on, but he was not. All he knew about its workings was that it was mercifully battery operated and that it carried a two year guarantee covering mechanical failure.

He wondered how many million miles away the nearest authorised repair agency was, and laughed, hysterically. If the machine was broken, it at least meant that further procrastination regarding his future would be quite pointless. Operative, it could at least save him from going insane as long as the batteries lasted (the case held several spares);

also, it would almost certainly distract any marauding locals, if not exactly deter them. It was also possible, he was reluctantly forced to concede, that it would actually attract them, but that was a chance he would simply have to take. With the solace that he could derive from it, life would be tolerable for at least a brief while; without it, unthinkable.

With a fixed and slightly demented smile on his face, Dr. Williams picked out a spool at random, fitted it, and pressed the "ON" button. There was a click, a faint whisper of irremovable surface wear from the original recording that he had always found an endearingly essential part of the performance, and Duke Ellington's *Ko Ko* racketed into the stillness of the alien afternoon.

Dr. Williams sat cross-legged in front of the machine and laughed, deliriously and uncontrollably. Eyes closed, he immersed himself thankfully in the brassily percussive clamor that now drove back his darkly threatening surroundings, warming himself at the blessed fire of its familiarity. He roared ecstatic encouragement to the ensemble, whooped maniacally at the brief solo passages, and accompanied the final chorus with frenzied palm-slapping of his knees.

The performance crashed to a close, but Dr. Williams' cackling laugh still held the sombre clutter of the forest at bay as he switched off the machine with a triumphant forefinger, and sprawled back among the debris. He had been spared. It meant only a brief respite, it was true; weeks, a month or two possibly, but with the pick of his life's researching to sustain him, his final days would be made tolerable, perhaps in a bitter-sweet way even happy. He would smother his loneliness with the greatest performances of the archaic musical form that he loved and which had been his life's work, seeking out each nuance, each subtle harmonic and rhythmic coloration, so that when the time came, when the batteries were finally exhausted, then he would take his leave smilingly and with a full heart, grateful for the opportunity that Fate had seen fit to . . .

Some distance away, the opening bars of Duke Ellington's *Ko Ko* grunted springily into being beyond the muffling barrier of the trees.

Dr. Williams leaped to his feet, a galvanized reflex that toppled him again immediately as his legs were still crossed.

Slightly stunned by his fall, he sprawled amid the wreckage, listening with a mixture of disbelief, puzzlement and sheer terror to the unmistakable (and yet oddly different) Ellingtonian voicing of brass and reeds that blared from the surrounding forest.

Despite his confusion, a small corner of Dr. Williams' mind analytically considered the possible causes of this phenomenon. His initial wild guess, that the construction of the local terrain produced some sort of freak echo effect, was hastily rejected. He was no geologist, but he was pretty certain that an echo that took approximately four minutes to become activated was quite beyond credence.

That seemed to leave two possibilities, the first of which was tenuous to the point of invisibility, the second simply distasteful. Either (1) another castaway such as himself, coincidentally equipped with identical machinery and recordings, had chosen to respond in kind upon hearing Dr. Williams' announcement of his presence, or (2) he was already crazy.

The music, he realised, was becoming louder. It was now accompanied by other sounds: the crashing of displaced undergrowth, a muffled thunder that could have been the tread of heavy feet. He felt the ground vibrate beneath him, a gigantic pulse-beat that was, he was suddenly and sickly aware, in rhythmic sympathy with the performance, matching perfectly the churning swing of guitar, bass and drums.

Giddily, he pushed himself to his feet. Whatever it was, delusion or nightmare reality, he had to get away. He bundled the machine back into its container, and glared wildly around him. An opening the size of a manhole cover showed blackly at the foot of the nearby cliff. Without pausing to consider that it might be inhabited, Dr. Williams lurchingly covered the fifty yards that separated him from it, and dived inside.

It was a small, round cave, little bigger than a telephone booth, and mercifully empty. He huddled as far back from the entrance as he could, clutching the machine protectively in front of him, and peered squintingly out into the clearing.

Beyond the wreckage of the ship, he saw the greenery part. To the accompaniment of shouting trumpets and thrust-

ing saxophones, a figure emerged into the open. It was approximately the size of a full-grown elephant, bright cerise, and the upper part of its unpleasantly lumpy body was surrounded by a sinuously weaving pattern of tendrils that ended in fringed, cup-like openings. It was apparently headless, but two eyes, nostrils and a generous mouth were visible behind the threshing fronds. Four squat legs supported its enormous bulk, each the diameter of a fair sized tree.

It was rather, Dr. Williams sweatingly concluded, like a cross between an outsized potato sack and an octopus, but whatever it was one thing was abundantly and deafeningly certain. It was the source of the music that now rang about the clearing in unshielded, cacophonous triumph, uproarious accompaniment to the creature's ground-shaking gait.

It trotted cumbrously round the wreckage, blaring as it went. As it passed Dr. Williams' hiding place, it rendered a creditable imitation of the initial statement by double-brass, muscular strumming that came to an abrupt and sinister halt as it passed out of his sight.

He shrank into a near-fetal position as one of the cup-like objects thrust its way through the entrance. It hesitated in front of him, then pounced, an exuberant movement that strangely reminded the almost fainting Dr. Williams of a small dog that he had once owned.

The cup explored him, the individual serrations on its edge prodding and stroking like independent, curious fingers. Another entered the cave and joined in the inspection. Their touch was warm, dry, and not unpleasant, and they gave off a mildly lemon-like odor.

After what seemed an eternity, they retreated. Dr. Williams steeled himself for the next move, fervently wishing that he'd cut his throat when he had the opportunity. None of this, of course, was real. He must still be on the ship, delirious—possibly even dying—from the effects of the crash. Perhaps they hadn't crashed at all. Perhaps this was simply some atrocious nightmare engendered by his fear of travel and its imagined consequences. The ingredients, after all, were all there; his lone survival, the grotesquely impossible musical performance and its equally ludicrous

perpetrator that now lurked outside his place of shelter, his . . .

Ko Ko pumped its way into existence again, this time containing a distinctly alien added quality. Instead of its customary animal-like elation, it sounded positively plaintive.

Dr. Williams listened for a brief awe-struck period, then smeared the sweat from his eyes with a wobbling hand and tried to think.

Accepting purely for the sake of argument that the situation was real, what for pity's sake *was* the creature that now sat outside the cave making noises like the long-dead Duke Ellington band in full cry? He laboriously reviewed its actions, trying to build up some sort of composite picture that would give him a clue as to its nature and purpose.

The conclusions that he eventually drew, while outside the fifth straight rendition of "Ko Ko" thundered towards its conclusion, were absurd but inescapable. Somehow, in some multidexterous way that was quite beyond his imagining, it was capable of memorising or recording what it heard and then repeating it in minute detail, even to the extent of approximately simulating the individual timbres necessary to achieve the final collective sound. This was sheer lunacy, of course, but Dr. Williams doggedly faced up to the fact that on the present evidence there was no other possible explanation. Secondly, it was either quite young or relatively stupid. Its attitude was clearly that of a dog or small child that wanted to play, the unmistakably plaintive note now having taken on a whining quality that grated unpleasantly on his already highly strung nerves.

His experience of both dogs and children had been limited of late years, a situation largely dictated by his wife, who had no interest in either, but he knew that both had a tendency to sulk when denied their immediate interest. Discipline, of course, was the correct treatment, but he couldn't see how he was going to apply any under the existing circumstances. All things considered, co-operation seemed the better part of valor, a decision aided by the fact that absence of anything that could be remotely construed as aggressive intent had at last permitted Dr. Williams' curiosity to at least partially overcome his fear.

He opened the container, placed the machine on the floor of the cave, selected and fitted another spool, and pressed the "ON" button again. "Potato Head Blues" by the Louis Armstrong Hot Seven clattered from the speaker, well-nigh deafening him until he made hasty adjustments to the controls. Beyond the cave entrance, he could detect signs of excited movement. A tentacle tip appeared, jigging solemnly, shortly to be joined by others.

Dr. Williams took a deep breath, said yet another silent but fervent prayer, and crawled outside with the machine blaring under one arm.

The greeting that he received, he had no doubt, was friendly. Tendrils patted, smoothed and tickled him from all angles, sometimes clumsily, but all with a marked absence of animosity. Dr. Williams clung grimly to the still performing machine and bore the buffeting with as much equanimity as he could muster, flinching only occasionally.

The music chirruped to a close, provoking obvious consternation and an abrupt halt to the amiably excited pawing. This recommenced, briefly, as the caustic virtuosity of Charlie Parker's saxophone scurried from the speaker, then ceased altogether as the creature carefully lowered itself to a squatting position, its tendrils now moving in gently bobbing patterns that made Dr. Williams think light-headedly of dancing flowers. Gingerly, and wearing a fatuously polite smile, he joined it on the ground, offering thanks for the apparently safe opportunity to do so before his legs gave way of their own accord.

The spool took some twenty minutes to run its course. During that time they were regaled by the thickly textured sonorities of Coleman Hawkins, a brace of roaring pieces from the Woody Herman and Count Basie bands, an Art Tatum solo and several sourly elated numbers by an Eddie Condon group. Apart from a cautiously twitching foot Dr. Williams sat motionless, eyeing his incredible companion and its movements with wary fascination. Occasionally and startlingly the creature would counterpoint the current ensemble or solo with a phrase of its own, intrusions that initially did little to aid the subsidence of Dr. Williams' state of tension, but which he eventually came to await with eager anticipation. These embellishments took a vari-

ety of forms, each displaying an astonishing degree of sympathy with the performance.

The final number on the spool commenced, a dryly dragging performance of the blues. With a certain stiff embarrassment. Dr. Williams got to his feet, returned to his former place of refuge, and procured the component parts of his clarinet. He assembled it with hands that now shook only slightly, religiously moistened the reed, then returned to sit in his former position.

He joined in cautiously at first, adding a muttered, almost apologetic embroidery to the trombone solo, inserting his phrases carefully between and around its familiar ruminations. Other instruments joined in for the final comments that were interspersed with the occasional squeak brought about by nervousness and lack of practice and listening with one eagerly attentive ear to the now more frequent and brassily stated interjections supplied by the extraordinary figure before him.

The performance sank to a muted close. There was a brief, solemn silence, and then the creature began to make music of its own, single-voiced and softly at first, but swelling gradually to a richly textured fortissimo; jagged, dissonant sounds that caused the hairs at the nape of Dr. Williams' neck to lift ecstatically and his foot to match its insistent pulse.

It was some minutes before he fully realised what was happening. The music contained passages that he found vaguely familiar, but recognition, when it came, still startled him. A chromatic passage that was nothing more or less than pure Tatum or Hawkins would be followed immediately by the creature's own variations, spine-tingling patterns that meshed perfectly with the rambling yet oddly coherent structure of the music.

Dr. Williams became dimly aware that at some point in the proceedings he had joined in again, contributing strangely angular phrases that he would never normally have been capable of conceiving, let alone attempting to perform. He ducked and bobbed and weaved with the music, instinctively following the tantalising zig-zag of modulations, somehow seeking out the right note, the apt harmonic aside.

At long last, it faded and died. Dr. Williams twiddled a

startlingly intervalled and totally fitting coda, then sat in deep reverie, inexpressibly content. The skies might fall, he could be stricken with some dread and unheard of disease that was beyond his curing, he might even suddenly find himself viewed in a rather more edible light by the odd and now silent and motionless figure that sat not eight feet away from him, but nothing could destroy the happiness that he felt at that moment. In the past he had added his not altogether unaccomplished embellishments to countless recorded performances, but absence of willing fellow participants had always ensured that these were solitary intrusions onto already familiar ground. Now, for the very first time, the crutch of foreknowledge had been removed, leaving him dependent entirely on his own imagination, his own abilities.

And it hadn't been half bad, Dr. Williams thought. He felt a muffled surge of vanity, then let it come jauntily through in all its unabashed swagger. No, by God, it hadn't been *half* bad.

He glanced briefly at the creature, placed his clarinet back in his mouth, tapped his foot briskly four times, then blew.

Some little time after that, the strains of an exuberant and quite unique performance of "Tea for Two," played by an extraordinary collection of instruments that included bassoon-like croakings and something that sounded vaguely like a plunger-muted sousaphone racketed raspingly through the slowly darkening forest.

Despite his occasional recourse to prayer in times of stress, Dr. Williams was not a religious man and correspondingly had little faith in miracles, but he couldn't help feeling that his finding himself in his present surroundings constituted something closely akin to such a happening. But whatever the cause, he existed in a place of earth and rock and water, bountifully equipped with fruit and vegetables that cautious experiment soon proved tastily edible, abundant shelter, a total absence of any other life-form larger than a rabbit, and its immediate region otherwise populated solely by himself and the brightly hued being that had become his constant companion and sharer of endless musical excursions that soon left him with a lip like iron and an instrumental

technique that he had never dreamed could possibly be his.

There were minor inconveniences, it was true. Insects were frequently present in both variety and abundance, but while they were an undoubted nuisance, he was, oddly, never bitten. Also, it rained, not often but torrentially when it did happen. Dr. Williams found these things moderately unpleasant, but readily acknowledged that they were a remarkably small price to pay when viewing the picture in toto.

During the early days of his relationship with the creature, understandably excited by what seemed to him to be the perfectly reasonable possibility of establishing verbal contact, he attempted simple conversational training, but it soon became apparent that his efforts in this direction were to be in vain. It obligingly aped his carefully enunciated phrases—always, disconcertingly, mimicking his own light baritone—but there it ended. It was plain that this activity was simply regarded as some inexplicable diversion on his own part which it was willing to humor, and Dr. Williams was forced to the reluctant conclusion that its own mode of communication took some entirely different course to that of his own species. Possibly it was telepathic, an achievement that still remained little more than a dream in the minds of men. But his disappointment was short-lived. Musically, they daily reached a degree of rapport that spoke effortlessly of universal feelings and reactions, an emotional link that invoked his own immediate responses and from which he derived enormous comfort.

If there was a happier man anywhere in the universe, Dr. Williams would have laughed with uproarious disbelief on being informed of his existence. He still found it beyond him to fully accept that his present circumstances were anything other than a dream, but since he was a thinking man and therefore one who had frequently pondered on the true nature of reality, he was not unduly perturbed. Perhaps this was reality and the man-made clutter of plastic, steel and concrete that he had suddenly and astonishingly come to loathe was the dream, a nightmare peopled with uncaring, uncomprehending individuals with whom he had never really communicated and whose idly uniform

acceptance of the multi-sensory exercises that now constituted their staple entertainment he scorned with the fervor of the true purist. Occasionally he thought about his wife, and shuddered. Was it possible that such a person really existed, that such a bizarre liaison had been formed! At such times he would hastily assemble his clarinet, and then immerse himself in a positive fury of invention that successfully, if only temporarily, dispelled such horrifying shadows.

The pattern of his new existence was soon formed. During the days they would wander through the placid confines of the forest, Dr. Williams engaged in desultory exploration, his companion plainly content to let itself be led by its new-found friend. Occasionally, they came across evidence of a civilization, oddly deserted machinery that lay rusting and overgrown in the green shadows, always without any hint of its nature or clue to its ownership. At such times the creature would lurk at a distance, its customary exuberance stilled, only returning when they moved on and the corroded enigma was well behind them. Once, they came to a village, a bleakly regimented block of impractically pyramidal buildings that squatted silent and deserted among the encroaching fronds. Dr. Williams entered one, and found its walls and floor liberally decorated with huge and rusting shackles. They departed, hastily, his companion tooting its obvious relief and his own ethnological suspicions further confirmed by what he had seen.

The creature's amiable lack of intelligence, coupled with its particular musical capabilities, was the key. Clearly, it was a member, possibly the sole survivor, of a subject race; slaves and entertainers, the playthings of a technically advanced but cruel species who had, for reasons that would almost certainly remain unexplained (plague?), deserted them, fleeing the forests to seek the shelter and assistance to be found in their cities. Dr. Williams hoped with grim fervency that these were either several thousand miles away or preferably on another planet altogether.

Each evening, as they rested in the darkening shadows, he would produce the machine, solemnly select a spool, and for a while the brassy effervescence or sadly declamatory strains of jazz, performances that spanned the ninety brief years of its existence as an entity, would stir the stillness of the sleeping forest. Then, when the final blast or sigh

had died and the rhythmic pulse was stilled, the recital would begin again, and he would listen, head bowed, to the patterns of simulated brass and reed that hummed and chortled in the darkness, marvelling at the now hair-fine accuracy of the copy, yet always conscious of the minutely subtle differences that labelled it as such.

For Dr. Williams understood his chosen music well, and his knowledge that in its moments of greatness it became a highly personal means of statement he found both heartening and sad. It meant, simply, that when the last of the batteries had been used, access to the music in its true form would be gone forever. Yet might this not be, he reflected, in some ways for the best? He was living a new life in a new world, and nostalgia could all too easily imprison him in a cocoon of memories, only partially aware of the truths of his miraculously compatible existence.

Weeks later, a spool faltered for the last time. Sadly but firmly, as though unable to bear the death agonies of a dear friend, Dr. Williams pressed the switch, cutting Chu Berry off in uncharacteristically faltering mid-solo. He packed machine and spools neatly in their case, and when morning came scooped a hole at the base of a tree and buried them. The creature stood some little distance away, respectfully silent, its posture one of sadness and commiseration. Dr. Williams marked the tree with the five lines of the stave, carefully carved the notations of the flatted third and fifth in the key of Bb, then turned and walked away without a backward glance.

The effects of his loss soon passed. It still echoed in their own musical forays, sudden glaring reminders of lifelong idols and favorite performances that he learned to accept with equinimity and use as harmonic springboards to creations of their own. Each passing day found him increasingly aware of the understanding that integrated their musical conception, something that had existed from the beginning but was now of an interweaving complexity beyond anything that he had ever remotely envisaged. The barrier between them, composed of space and environment, was shredding, and they were moving inexorably towards a blending of musical thought and tradition that he sensed would be the greater both for its fusion and the inevitable discarding of parts of both.

This hitherto untrod plateau was reached one sultry afternoon some weeks later. Dr. Williams lay beneath a tree at the edge of a large clearing, drowsily contemplating the profuse and picturesque greenery in the near distance, while his companion wandered close by, droning a pleasant but seemingly aimless pattern of sound that played softly and at first soothingly.

A sudden and unexpected modulation occurred, a tonal and harmonic obliquity that caused Dr. Williams to stiffen abruptly and twist his head towards the now still figure that faced him from the centre of the clearing. The creature sang on, sounds that built gradually to a complex of timbres that he had never heard before yet which flicked tantalisingly against his mind, stimulating areas of reaction that were contradictorily both new and hauntingly familiar. Something boiled sharply inside his consciousness and as suddenly subsided, an abruptly cleansing explosion that left him shaking with unfulfilled awareness.

He sat up, removed the sections of his clarinet from his haversack, and assembled them with a trancelike deliberateness. Sill seated beneath the tree he began to play, probing low-register adornments that added harmonic sinew to the bubbling search, shepherding the other's inventions firmly towards the ultimate cohesion that he knew had come at last, and suddenly, like an exultant shout, the pattern was resolved into a sustained sonic tapestry that rang about the clearing, dissolving their surroundings and the very ground beneath them; timeless, placeless sound that seemed to radiate out to the farthest reaches of infinity. Eyes closed, Dr. Williams let his now unbidden fingers seek out the ingredients that were his contribution to this miracle, never faltering in their search, surely predestined in the unhesitating rightness of their choice. He soared and plummetted in a vast sea of sound of which he was an integral part, filled with a sense of completeness that he had never known or dreamed could possibly be. Time was without meaning, space a boundless vista that echoed the triumph of their empathy. Weeping and unresisting, Dr. Williams let himself be reborn.

Soft and distant at first, so faint that he at first accepted it as a not yet integrated part of this happening, an oddly discordant note infiltrated his awareness, a gradually swell-

ing intrusion that bored implacably into this emotional narcosis. Vaguely, he wondered if he had suddenly become acceptable to the native insect population, perhaps about to pay a symbolic toll that marked his physical as well as spiritual acceptance into his new world. He flapped a temporarily unoccupied hand by his ear. The buzzing persisted, loudly now, a pointless, jarring obbligato to the music which flooded about him, its creator seemingly lost in an ecstasy of sound and movement that grew in intensity as it progressed.

His inability to ever fully accept the reality of his surroundings had been a natural precaution on Dr. Williams' part, an instinctively erected barrier against the possible presence of insanity that he had only lowered completely minutes before. Now, suddenly, as the dark pool of shadow swept across the clearing and the huge and writhing figure faced him, it was as though it had snapped back into place of its own volition, insulating him, so that he watched what followed in a detached way, warily waiting for its completion before committing himself to accept it as fact.

The shadow passed on, yet somehow it had remained, a wispily fringed darkness that now dulled the customarily bright body of his friend. Dr. Williams watched stiffly as its movements accelerated explosively from a graceful weaving pattern to grotesque and terrifying frenzy. Simultaneously, the music dissolved into screaming clamor.

The creature's collapse was slow. To Dr. Williams' disbelieving eyes it seemed to shrink upon itself, movement that was blurred by the thickening haze of smoke around it and which now touched his nostrils, acrid and sickening. He watched its tendrils aimlessly collide and intertwine, still blaring their dissonant agony but weaker by the second, a dying fall of sound that slid jerkingly down in deathly accompaniment to the movements of its maker.

Its final fall was punctuated by various unpleasant sounds. It lay before him, a charred and convulsively deflating thing that bubbled offensively at irregular intervals. Otherwise, it was quite silent.

From the corner of his eye, Dr. Williams saw other movement. He turned his head to watch the small scout ship that had just landed and disgorged two men who now

made their way hurriedly towards him. As they passed the still smoking mound they produced weapons and fired them in its direction.

How pointless, he thought. Anyone can see that it's dead.

They reached him and assisted him to his feet, sudden movement that made him feel violently ill. He stared at them, serious faces above blue uniforms.

"We had a hell of a job finding you," one face said. "The automatic signal got through all right, so we didn't have any trouble with the co-ordinates, but this place is all trees. You must be best part of a hundred miles from the ship. Why didn't you stay close to it?" There was a pause. After a moment, the other face said, "It's lucky for you you were out in the open when we did find you. We couldn't have happened along at a better time if we'd rehearsed it. What was that thing, anyway?"

Dr. Williams found that he was still unexpectedly holding his clarinet. He shook his head, focussed squintingly, grasped it with both hands, and swung it like a club at the nearest face. There was a startled ejaculation, a blur of movement, and he was thrown face down onto the ground. Someone straddled him, and he felt moist coldness dabbing on his arm.

"Poor guy," a panting voice said. "He must have really taken off. If anybody saved me from a thing like that, the last thing I'd do would be to try and brain them." There was a prick that he hardly felt, and the voice faded, abruptly.

And then Dr. Williams slept and dreamed dreams that were full of huge shadows and burning men in blue uniforms who screamed and sang mad songs while they danced and died. He watched their fuming gyrations critically, applauding as they disintegrated into ashes at his feet. Occasionally it seemed to him that they loomed close, smiling down at him and talking to him in soothing voices, and then he in turn would scream at them until they were momentarily snuffed out, reappearing through the diffusing pall of smoke, once more singing their tortured and incoherent songs and performing their burning dance against the darkness beyond.

When the ship reached Earth he was immediately rushed to a place where doctors and machines were waiting to

seal off the nightmares forever behind impregnable doors, and after a time they succeeded. Under treatment, his experiences shrank and grew misty in his mind until they finally winked feebly out, pushed firmly and efficiently beyond the boundaries of recall. He still knew—because he was told—that he had been involved in an accident of some kind, but the doctors prudently fabricated a suitable story as to its supposed nature and whereabouts. Knowledge of the truth was the key to memory and possible disaster, and the treatment was an expensive business that the insurance people were reluctant to pay for more than once per claimant. Consequently, he was encouraged to believe that he had been the victim of a piece of careless driving on the part of an unapprehended jetster, and was indignantly content to accept this as the cause of the blank spot that persisted in his mind. He was also reunited with his wife, whose tearful solicitude was quite genuine and which lasted for all of three weeks before being replaced by the verbal prodding that he somehow found rather less bearable now.

Following a period of convalescence, Dr. Williams resumed his professional activities, lecturing to bored or faintly amused audiences on campuses and in sparsely filled halls, only rarely encountering a flicker of genuine interest or understanding. He had grown accustomed to this a long time before, but now, at times, he somehow shared their apathy. The music still stirred him with its brassy melancholy, but there were occasions when it seemed that its vitals had been suddenly and inexplicably removed, leaving behind a thin and empty shell of sound that rang hollowly on his ear. When this happened, Dr. Williams would feel something that was inescapably buried inside him stir faintly, a dim and fading cadence that sounded far beyond his remembering but which briefly moved him to wonderment and an intangible longing.

And at night he would stare up at the sky, never knowing why, seeking something that he could not name among the distant and glittering stars, the dying echo of a song that had once (and only once) been sung, and which would never now be sung again.

Unless you are Welsh you may not be able to swallow this story about Aunt Milly with the nice level croup and the pasterns smooth and true. We think you will enjoy its taste, though, for Mr. Guttridge has written a story with such genuine charm and flavor as to make it irresistible.

AUNT MILLICENT AT THE RACES

by Len Guttridge

You've heard what they say about the Rhondda Valley. How the spread of industry cast a blight upon the verdant land and just as ineradicably scarred with fear and suspicion the souls of its people, etc. That more or less is the popular romantic notion. But it wasn't the coal mines and smelting furnaces which stamped the faces of Pontypandy at least, my birthplace, with permanent expressions of gall. Instead, I blame the economic crisis which struck following my father's exploitation of Aunt Millicent's overnight transformation into a horse.

Interior alterations may already have begun, so to speak, but the first surface indications that Aunt Milly was not her usual self appeared halfway through my tenth birthday party, forever wrecking my father's long reign as life and soul of such occasions. He had just supervised the usual gamut of infant games and our carpet was littered with small panting bodies, mine included. His sergeant-major bellow jerked us then into giggling attention and he began his standard trio of funny stories.

We had heard them before, without comprehension. As usual, we sat through the first in grave and baffled silence. As usual, Father convulsed with mirth before he could complete the punch line of the second. The third, not as usual, was rewarded by a spirited neigh from the prim pink lips of my mother's cousin Millicent.

She neighed for several seconds and ended with a triumphant *arpeggio* squeak. It was the squeak, I recall, which flipped us. We spun like cartwheels all over the room, we clawed each other's clothes, we turned crimson and we

choked. Had Father told fifty stories, all new and uproarious, he could never have achieved such spectacular effects and by the hand of the Lord, he knew it.

His brow grew blacker than summer thunder clouds over Gerrig Llan and his words spat down like hail. "I'll trouble you, Millicent, to keep your blasted animal impersonations to yourself!"

Aunt Milly gulped. Her hands fluttered like blind birds. She hated to be the center of attention. But she could no more retreat from the spotlight now than explain why she occupied it.

From certain of his sulphuric soliloquies, I knew that Father had long felt the time overdue when his wife's cousin should have found herself a husband, preferably one of means. I don't think Millicent was unattractive. But since she swathed herself from chin to ankles in the tweedy puritan garb considered proper uniform for a twenty-five year-old Welsh assistant librarian, it was hard to tell whether she was emphatically curved or indeed if she had any curves at all.

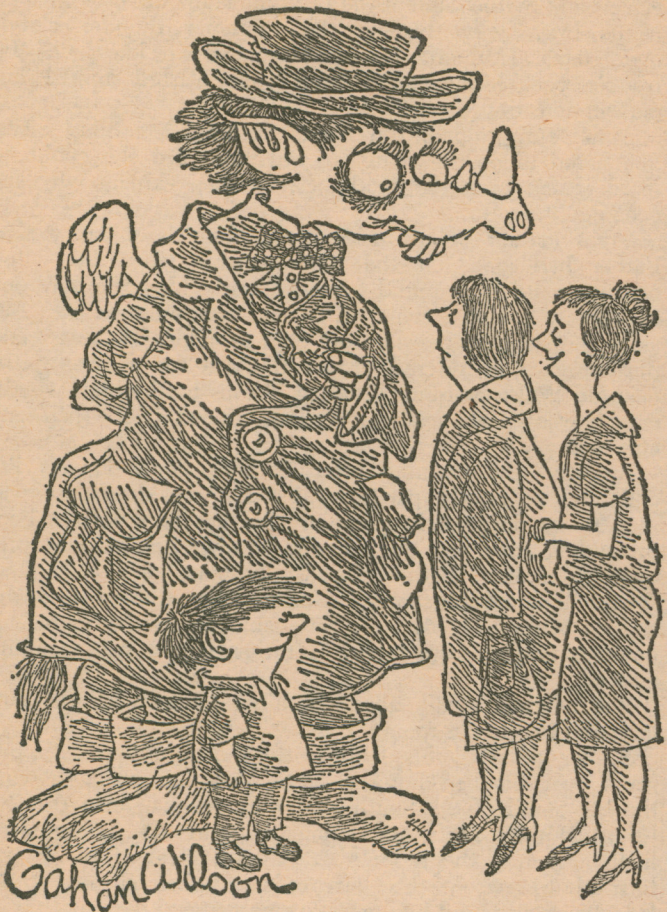
Anyway, the morning after Father's deposition as life and soul of family parties, Aunt Milly at breakfast was seen to be desperately grappling for her fork with a hoof protruding from one thick sleeve. Mother blinked and prepared to swoon. Father glared. My aunt gave a helpless shrug. "I'm terribly sorry." Her apology tiptoed into the sudden tension. "This . . . this came on in the night." A penitent neigh escaped her. "I rather hoped you wouldn't notice."

She neighed again, abandoned her labors with the cutlery, and fled to her room.

Father adjusted his features into a familiar cast. Upstairs over his bed hung a large Victorian print showing the last stand of the South Wales Borderes against the Zulus at Rorke's Drift, its dominant figure the beleaguered lieutenant atop the redoubt, a dashing ideal of pluck and fortitude. Precisely this bearing my father always strove for when confronted by domestic emergency.

"Son." He addressed me with the gruffness of a commander dispatching a scout to bring up the cavalry. "Go and fetch Doctor O'Toole. *On the double!*"

The doctor was for Mother. When I returned with him,



"This is Willy, and this is Willy's imaginary playmate."

Father was buckling his old Sam Browne army belt, another symbolic gesture, and gazing resolutely upstairs where from Aunt Milly's room echoed a rhythmic sound. An anxious drumming. As of hoofbeats.

Doctor O'Toole sighed and turned to Mother but she threw one swoon after another, which quickly infuriated O'Toole and drew forth in loud Belfast accents his oft-proclaimed intention of quitting this lunatic land for a sane and profitable practise in Harley Street.

Then Milly's room door banged wide and downstairs galloped a great bay mare. With a shriek Mother fainted again and Dr. O'Toole, about to apply brandy, quickly diverted it to his own gaping mouth.

The mare staggered nervously. Her flanks barged into our century-old grandfather clock and she butted an equally antique Welsh oak dresser. Chinaware flew. A silver cup Father had won in a regimental prize fight tournament toppled to the carpet. His ornate pipe-rack (hand-cared in Italy) followed, scattering English briars, Dutch porcelains and rich brown meerschaums. Uncertain hoofs kicked them right and left.

Throughout, Father stood unbowed in the center of the room, Gibraltar against a storm, although the military wing-tips of his delta mustache quivered. Twice he muttered, "*Steady, lads, steady,*" and I could almost hear bugles. Behind him the bruised grandfather clock burst into a frantic chiming though it was nowhere near the hour, and then it slid to silence like a halfwound gramophone. And Aunt Milly came to rest and braced on trembling legs, and peered self-consciously over Father's squared shoulder.

Thus Millicent's equine debut. Naturally, it summoned Father's strongest qualities, particularly his instinct for exploiting the unexpected, the at first glance *perplexing*, to his own greedy ends. That afternoon his mind was already exploring ways and means as, watched peaceably by Aunt Milly grazing in our cabbage patch, he made over the toolshed out back into a cozy stable.

After we had pushed and prodded her into it, she turned to survey us with modest complacency, as when she used to relate some minor personal triumph attained at the Pontypandy Reading Circle. Father grinned. "Milly, my gal," he said. "You was never in better shape."

Father of course *accepted* what had happened. Despite his brief career in the army (exaggerated by him in retrospect), he believed whole-heartedly in magic. Name me the Welshman who doesn't. But instead of showing the proper awe for it, he took it like everything else in his military stride. And I'm sure he had felt that sooner or later, something strange was bound to happen to Milly . . .

Shy and demure though she was, Milly had positively wallowed in wizardry. Night upon night she would read to me from books old and full of wonder whose words bewitched the very pages so, I swear, they turned untouched. And I would shiver with dread, that was no west wind keening across the valley but spirit hounds baying at the moon, and once pajamaed for sleep I would keep my eyes from the bedroom window to avoid a fatal glimpse of death candles flickering in procession around the foot of Cerrig Llan or the Little People up to no good among the ash groves. . . .

Well, Pontypandy soon hummed with gossip. Inevitably it reached the vigilant ears of Pastor Goronwy Jones, familiar to his flock as Goronwy the Sin-killer. That Sunday, with hotter than usual eloquence, he kindled a special hellfire for those who would dabble in dark powers, and although he did not mention us by name, all knew that the target for his fiery shafts was the Pritchard brood, of which I was the only one in chapel. Obedient to the hint of its spellbinder, the congregation turned its multiple gaze on me, and as if pinned by a circle of flamethrowers I squirmed, sizzled, and finally melted in shame.

Rumors spread beyond the Welsh border and attracted a sniffing pack of newspapermen. A disarmament conference in Paris, an earthquake in Peru, and the defrocking of a Sussex bishop for scandalous conduct were elbowed off the front-pages by speculation upon Aunty Milly, the Pontypandy Wonder. Pontypandy, we would say today, hogged the headlines. But not for long. Alien students of psychic phenomena who camped on the slopes of Cerrig Llan caught pneumonia and went home. A professional ghost-hunter materialized at our front door but was himself so rudely interrogated by Father that he vanished more quickly than any apparition. An attractive lady evangelist from California delivered a sermon on Signs and Por-

tents to Goronwy the Sin-killer's fold, then sailed off to America, her choral retinue augmented by some dozen endlessly singing young miners whose conversion had been instantaneous the moment they emerged from the bituminous depths to behold her.

All the visitors in fact departed before Father had a fair chance to profit from the publicity, for nobody really believed the whirl of stories about Milly. Nobody, I mean, who wasn't Welsh.

But Father was far from dashed. One morning after the fuss had died down, he marched off to the library in his best no-surrender manner while I trotted alongside him. The library staff numbered three, not counting Milly, whose absence they sorely lamented. "How is she?" they asked Father.

"Off her oats this morning," he replied curtly and demanded to see their stock of horse books. It was slim. We left with "Turf and Paddock," "Illustrated Horsebreaking" and "The Complete Horsewoman," all more than thirty years out-of-print. The last title didn't seem wholly appropriate but for some reason Father savored it with great glee.

He also wrote to London and bought a subscription to *Horse and Track*. And that is how we met Arlington Mellish, wealthy horse breeder, patron of the races, frequent contributor to *Horse and Track*. It was something in a Mellish article, we learned later, that led Father to ponder seriously Aunt Milly's track potential.

"I've written to Mr. Mellish," Father announced one evening, "with a view to introducing our Milly to the Sport of Kings."

Important decisions, Father believed, deserved the grandiose phrase.

Mother was horrified. *"Mogwen Sion Pritchard!"* Going the full distance with Father's name shows how shocked she was. "You can't . . . Why, it isn't decent. My own cousin a . . . *racehorse?* Indeed no, not while I still breathe."

Mother's lungs were functioning at their usual robust rate two weeks later as she pored with growing enthusiasm over *Horse and Track* while Father conferred with Arlington Mellish himself, a plump check-suited Englishman addicted to long cigars which he snatched from his

mouth at intervals to talk out of partly closed lips as if his every word were guarded. Since security was impossible to maintain in the Red Lion public house, Mellish and my father ascended Cerrig Llan every morning for a week to conduct literally what a later generation would call summit talks. Each afternoon we all gathered to watch Aunt Milly canter in Madoc Meadow, Mellish emitting rapid grunts of approval from the edge of his mouth, Father pleasurably caressing his mustache. And Mother's eyes gleaming. You couldn't, after all, live sixteen years with my father and remain altogether immune to his genial avarice.

Mellish inspected Milly from forelock to fetlocks. He removed his cigar with lightning speed and snapped, "Good lean head. Muscular loins, nice level croup."

"Croup?" Father frowned.

"Rump," explained Mellish. He snapped Milly by way of further amplification then sprang back as she bared her teeth and lunged for his cigar.

"That's good, too," panted Mellish. "High-spirited. Mark of a thoroughbred." He replaced his cigar.

"Naturally Milly's a thoroughbred," Mother murmured a trifle stiffly.

Mellish continued his appraisal. He wrenched the cigar from his teeth. "Sixteen hands at the withers, I'd say. Hindquarters firmly developed." He bent. "Pasterns smooth and true."

"Pasterns?" Father was stroking his mustache almost ferociously.

Mellish straightened. "Ankles, if you like."

And that night, before driving off from Pontypandy, he offered Father the use of his training stables in Somerset. "Expect you as soon as you can come," he puffed twice then whipped the cigar aside. "And Milly, of course."

A bubbling cold kept me from school. Mother and Father were in the village shopping for suitable stable wear. Aunt Milly grazed placidly in the garden. I had the house to myself. I don't know what impulse moved me, I had not entered Millicent's old room since her transfer to more fitting quarters. But now, in the quiet of a fading day, I pushed open the door and crept in.

It was a pretty room and neat, with a large window

overlooking the valley. On a chair beside the bed rested a tattered book, from its decrepit condition obviously one of the collection bequeathed the previous winter to Pontypandy Library by a Welsh bard turned hermit who had dabbled heavily in Druidic mysticism and at the age of 104 was found dead on Cerrig Llan by a posse of town tipplers chasing a mountain goat for fun.

I opened the book where a pink feather marked the pages. They splintered like rust-flakes between my fingers, the print was tiny and half-obscured by footnotes, marginal notes, and notes between the lines, the scribbled interjections of the late bard. But I learned a few things, nevertheless. Aunt Millicent hadn't been the first around these parts to lose human form. Twm Shon Catti, a mountain scamp, had beaten her by a century, though what he had turned *into* wasn't clear. There was also a luscious witch named Blodwenwedd who changed rather pointlessly into an owl. Gilvaethwy hadn't known when to stop: he became a deer, then a hog, then a wolf, then a snake, and finally forgot what he had started out as.

Dusk crept down from Cerrig Llan. I found a match, touched flame to an oil lamp's wick and read on. My tongue fought aloud with the difficult words and the house crouched listening, now and then clearing its throat with wind gusts down the chimney.

What I was reading was nothing less than a text-book on sorcery, a handy "how-to" tome on transmogrification, a step-by-step guide in the art of switching shapes. To that of a lion for strength, a bird for its flight. To a horse for fleetness. A rabbit for . . . for . . . *fecundity*. I didn't know the word but I must have partly divined its meaning for I felt a spasm of regret that Aunt Milly had not become a rabbit.

Transformation was big league magic, attainable only by eating the fruit which grew from the sacred grave of Wyn Ab Nudd, the King of the Little People. While you ate, you wished like blazes. That old bard had eaten and wished, then, but as a mountain goat he'd had the singular bad luck to run into a covey of drunks. And Millicent, she too must have found Wyn Ab Nudd's grave, and . . .

At the approaching footsteps of my parents, I snuffed

out the lamp, closed the book and ran downstairs, my mind a riot.

"Why," asked Mr. Conway next morning, "are you so interested in Wyn Ab Nudd's grave?"

Bald and beaked, Mr. Conway was our history teacher. If anybody could tell me where Ab Nudd was buried, it had to be old Beaky Conway. And once I knew, then I would go there, snatch some fruit, smuggle it after bedtime into Milly's stable.

I felt sure she must be wishing herself back in her old shape, she had only transmogrified for a bit of daring, she never got much fun out of life really, but a joke was a joke and time now to end it. Moreover, Milly had been with us since before I was born and she was, in some ways, closer to me than either parent. So I was all for restoring her, library tweeds and all.

"I was reading about him," I answered Beaky Conway truthfully.

"Well, child." Conway's nose hooked down at me as if to pierce my heart. I wondered suddenly if Beaky—of course *Beaky*—knew about the grave, had guzzled fruit from it and almost but not quite changed into an eagle. "Nobody knows for sure where King Ab Nudd is buried. Some say beneath Bala Lake. Others, the crown of Cerrig Llan. Personally," he chuckled sepulchrally and I tensed for feathered wings to spread from his underarms and claws to burst through his polished boots. "Personally, I suspect he is buried nearby. Perhaps the mound on Farmer Pugh's land."

The mound. Of course. I had read how in olden times they burned the bodies of the Celtic kings and put the ashes in pots and raised huge heaps of earth and stones over them, and many such mounds we took today to be natural hillocks. "There is such a mound, child," Mr. Conway loomed over me, his eyes flashing down the bony comma between them, "in Farmer Pugh's apple orchard."

The sun was a molten penny dipping beyond distant Bala Lake, the sky overhead a purple silence. The road home to Pontypandy curved out of sight behind the bare slope of Cerrig Llan. I was nearly halfway up the mountain overlooking Farmer Pugh's orchard, and there it was

in the middle, the *mound,* crested with apple trees and encircled by ash like petrified high priests. A wind stirred and the trees whispered and scraped their branches on the wall as if they knew someone was watching. It was a lonely spot all right, but I had to go through with it, had to climb that wall . . .

When I shinned back out again, my pockets were stuffed. Dusk had fallen. Rooks cawed above my head and the nearest tiny lamplight in the Pugh farmhouse glimmered a thousand miles far off. Choir practice echoed remotely from Gornwy the Sin-killer's chapel, but holy music was no match for the unnameable force I suddenly felt tug-o'-warring me back to an age of dark ritual among cromlechs, crags and Druids' circles. The apples I'd poached now tingled through good Welsh cloth to my goose-pimpling skin, and with a yell I ran headlong down the mountain and covered the last mile from Cerrig Llan to our safe house faster than any future Bannister.

And I was too late. Father and Aunt Milly had just departed for Somerset.

Just how Arlington Mellish, who had bought part ownership in Millicent, satisfied the Jockey Club, those traditional arbiters of the British turf, concerning her pedigree when none of her ancestors could be found in the General Stud Book, is and will forever remain a tightly guarded Mellish secret. Anyway, Millicent proceeded to win several county events with ease and it was only a matter of time before Father talked of entering her for the Glamorgan Plate. Father was just home from Somerset on what he called a brief furlough from the field.

"The Glamorgan Plate?" Mother glanced up from the *Racing Calendar* she was studying. "Do you think Milly's ready for the big time yet?"

"Mellish does," replied Father at once, and rewarded Mother with a smacking kiss for her display of professional caution. I could see he was proud of her.

The main event of the South Wales racing season, the Glamorgan Plate was run at Ely, a mile-long oval course not, in those days anyhow, exactly Ascot. Much of it in fact curved out of general view behind huge commercial hoardings.

But my chief worry of course was to get the apples into

Aunt Milly. The original looted fruit had gone moldy by now (magic or not), requiring a second poaching foray into Farmer Pugh's orchard.

I took the apples down to Ely with us, but when I thrust one at Milly during the short period Mother and I were permitted to the paddock, Father swept my hand away and Mellish confirmed sagely from the corner of his mouth that whole apples might well give Millicent stomach cramps.

We were briefly introduced to the jockey, Cobey Sharpe, a ginger-headed man no larger than myself whose vocabulary was as stunted as his stature, resulting in a frequent reliance upon the word "strike" and its derivatives. When paddock colleagues warned Sharpe of the odd rumors surrounding Millicent's origin (she went to the post as "Millicent"), he had replied that he had struck a lot of queer things in his lifetime, he didn't care a strike whether she had been a woman, a witch, or even a striking walrus, she was a bay horse now, wasn't she, and strike him happy he would ride her. All the way to victory. This was especially sanguine of Sharpe because he had ridden in the annual Plate for twelve years and never won once.

The crowd roared *they're off,* the sun hurried behind a slab of cloud, and the horses leaped forward.

They thundered past us, streaming down the track, and Millicent shot into the lead at once. Father tossed his hat in the air as if she had already won. Arlington Mellish kept nudging him and firing from the side of his mouth, "Didn't I tell you, Mog?" They were on a first-name basis. "Didn't I ruddy well tell you?"

The horse vanished behind the hoardings. HANCOCK'S —WALES' BEST BEER blotted Millicent from view briefly but she reappeared still leading by a length and evidently with strength in reserve. They vanished again, behind PLAYERS NAVY CUT TOBACCO. Father rocked gently on his heels. "Got the race in her pocket, Milly has," he murmured happily. "Knew a drop of cider would do the trick."

Under the mottled green canopy of a hat she had bought for Ely, Mother's ears quivered. "Cider, Mog?" She turned to him. "Drinking, were you?"

"Not me, woman." He grinned and pointed. "Milly out there." He winked strenuously at me and his mustache ends

oscillated. "Brought a pot of Farmer Pugh's cider down with me. Thought Milly might like some too. Dropped a spit or two in her pail. Give her more spirit, like."

At first, his words didn't register with me. Mother though was pained. "Mogwen Pritchard," she scolded, "you know our Milly never touched—"

"Dash it all, woman, it isn't slowing her, is it?" He lowered his field-glasses and gestured at the distant hoardings. "Besides, Arly said a little spit wouldn't do any harm. Right, Arly?"

"Not to worry," Mellish told Mother. "Apple cider never slowed a thoroughbred in my experience."

Apple cider. *Farmer Pugh's apple cider.*

Grabbing the field-glasses which swung from Father's shoulder I readjusted them and scanned the track. One by one the horses emerged from the shadow of the hoardings. I didn't see Millicent.

"Father." The climax of the race was approaching, and my small voice foundered in the roaring tide of excitement. "*Father,*" I bawled. "Where's Aunt Milly?"

He glared at me, then turned to address nearby spectators. "Is my only son daft?" He retrieved his glasses and squinted. "Where's Aunt Milly indeed." He fingered the focussing screw with mounting panic. "Out in front, she's got to be." His voice trailed off. He rallied gallantly. "Blasted cheap glasses," he snorted. "Blurred or something."

But again he was silent. I looked up. "Not there, is she?" I said briskly.

The race was over. The crowds had gone, except for the Rhondda Valley contingent which had bet heavily on Millicent and were now contemplating Father ominously. Then everyone's gaze turned to the track. A small figure had popped from behind PROTHEROE'S ATHLETIC WEAR and springing towards us assumed clarity as Cobey Sharpe. His face was the color of chalk. So now was his hair. He didn't throttle down as he drew near, and every few paces he gasped, "*O strike . . . O strike me 'appy.*"

Angrily Father stepped forward. "Sharpe," he roared, "pull yourself together. Where's your mount, sir?"

"Struck if I know," panted Sharpe. Dodging Father, he accelerated and vanished over the fields into the sunset.

Father's jaw suddenly sagged. We all stared in silence

at Aunt Millicent advancing timorously and unclothed across the turf. She clutched a saddle modestly before her and she trailed reins. She must have been wishing awfully fierce to be herself again, in proper shape. So all it had needed was Farmer Pugh's fruit or the juice thereof. And Father had provided it. Just a little spit, he had said. Trust Father.

He wheeled and stalked from the track. Mother flung herself at Millicent in welcoming embrace. Men nearby gulped, clenched their fists and averted their eyes. Only Arlington Mellish seemed unshaken. That veteran horse fancier continued to measure Milly with a connoisseur's eye but, I know now, there was a somewhat different glow in it.

The lawsuits with which indignant Welsh gamblers threatened Father were dropped when a Jockey Club inquiry into the affair at Ely ended in frustration. Cobey Sharpe, discovered after a nationwide manhunt, proved wholly incapable of coherent testimony. Moreover, it was as well known to the Jockey Club as to everybody else that in Wales odd things are always happening, so due allowances have to be made.

And Father? He was silent for weeks while Mother berated him: Millicent's racing form had been impeccable, what right had he to tamper with it? But then, he had never fully trusted his own wife's relatives. And he was greedy into the bargain. Well, Mother said, that's what you got for overreaching. Teach him a lesson, it would.

Maybe. Then again, maybe not. Affluent Arly Mellish married Millicent following the Ely fiasco and carried her off to his Somerset retreat. And after a decent pause, we Pritchards descended upon the lovebirds for an indefinite stay during which Father freeloaded like wildfire.

They were happy days. Nostalgic perusal of Arlington's bound *Horse and Track* volumes would alternate with merry banter over whether he had lost his heart to a bay mare in Madoc Meadow or a shapely assistant librarian *sans* uniform on the Ely Racetrack. And Father, reaching for the fruit dish to sample one of Arly's unenchanted Somerset apples, would remark with consummate authority that it had, in any case, been love at first sight.

Hal Moore is a writer and photographer whose work has appeared in a wide variety of publications. Perhaps the combination of the two occupations explains the striking visuality of this fine story of a young girl who, in one brief and terrible incident, begins to move from the innocence of youth toward something more than womanhood.

SEA BRIGHT

by Hal R. Moore

She materialized out of settling surf foam, laughing, her hair caked with sand, salt water streaming along the sides of her face, exhilarated after a long, white-water thrill ride, body surfing from out where the largest breakers curl. She might have been Poseidon's daughter; certainly she was a child of beach and sea. She dug her tiny fingers into the sand, still laughing, resisting momentarily the back wash of out-flowing water, gathering the strength of her eleven-year-old body to plunge surfward again for yet another race with the sea god's white maned horses.

He came trudging along the sand, the frail lad who feared the sea as she loved it, stepping gingerly so as not to wet his feet, blue eyes wide with apprehension and mistrust of the sea, yet obviously pleased to find Kellie there.

Kellie held her breath briefly, as if it might make herself invisible, wishing he would go away. He would spoil the mood. Spoil the sea.

Not that she disliked the boy. He had been brought to the winter beach to regain his lost health, she knew. And perhaps he would, if a wind did not blow him away, or a piper frighten him to death, or a sand flea devour him whole. But the sea was her playmate now and she wanted no other.

Reluctantly, though, she put aside the urge to race the ebb surfward, for Grange had something in his hands, something which delighted him, making his too-round eyes shine, and he was bringing it to show her, braving much, for him, in the sucking wetness of sea soaked sand at water's edge. That valor alone demanded she wait for him,

even without the force of a first chill of apprehension to stay her.

"Look, Kellie, at the shell I found!" He held it out to her, gleaming milk white in the late afternoon sun.

Kellie separated herself with effort from the sea, wrenching spirit and body from the caress and cradle of the cold Pacific. She stared at the gleaming, tapered shell Grange clutched so happily, and the apprehension settled dew-like upon her, pimpling her skin.

"Where did you get that?" Kellie demanded, fearful without knowing why.

"I found it on the beach. I guess a wave washed it up."

"There aren't any shells like that on this beach."

Grange did not seem to hear. "I found it on the beach."

"Throw it away," Kellie commanded.

"I found it."

"It isn't from this beach," Kellie said, not understanding her own feelings of revulsion the shell suddenly had kindled, but yielding readily enough to them.

"I'll bet you can hear the ocean in it." He raised it toward his ear, childish delight already widening his pinched face into a monkey-like grin.

Kellie was not one to reason every breath of the day. There were times, riding a wave, or scuttling crab-like across a sandy bottom, or stroking cross grain to a rip when you just *did*. That was how it was in the sea. You just lived. Now, living, Kellie did not reason. From her oneness with the sea she acted.

"Stop that!" she cried. In a bound she was at his side. She seized the shell, wrenched it from him, hid it behind her back. "Go home," she said.

Astonishment tore his face. "I want my shell!" The wail ripped from his throat, tore the beach air.

"Go home!" Kellie slapped him, hard, too hard across the face with her open hand. She was immediately sorry, and as bewildered at the act as he was. But it was done. She clutched the shell tightly behind her.

Trailing his scream behind him like visible sparks in the afternoon air, he ran. She watched him go, and tears briefly clouded her eyes. *Now* there'd be the devil to pay.

It was not a long way home, but it might have been miles, from the time taken and the way his cries penetrated

the seashore block. Everyone heard, and everyone knew that Grange was in trouble again. Some winced. Some shrugged. A few worried.

Grange's father waited, assessing the quality of the keening as it drew closer, assessing it correctly as anguish, not disaster. He tried to square his shoulders, but the weight of life was too much, and he yielded to the easier posture of long habit.

Melda, at least, was not home. That was something to be thankful for at a time like this.

"Maa-ma!" Grange screamed. He ducked through the lower half of the two-piece counter-door that was the entrance to the Sheldon Popcorn Shop. He spent one wary look on his father, but shrieked again the piercing plea for Melda.

"She's out. What happened?"

"Kellie took my shell!"

"I see." Morton Sheldon drew his breath in slowly, and stared out the open front of the stand, past the hopper of fresh-made corn, and he stared across the winter-bare sidewalk and past the beach and out along the stark lines of the fishing pier as if he really did see.

He breathed very slowly, savoring the sudden silence wrought by his son's knowledge that his mother was not there. There was nothing basically wrong with the boy, he knew, if only Melda . . .

"She took it from me, and if Mother was here she'd slap Kellie!"

Morton Sheldon spent a long, curious look on his son. Such a violent child for such a frail body, he thought.

"Well, she would," Grange said.

"I'm sure," Morton Sheldon said. In his mind he turned the problem this way and that. He *was* the boy's father. And if Grange was quick to call hurt, he *was* frail. He did need protection. But not over protection. That was the problem.

"It wouldn't be nice to slap Kellie," he said at length, having arrived at the decision after rejecting all other trends of thought.

"But she—"

"We must not go around slapping people, Grange. 'Blessed are the meek.' Remember, they tell you that in Sunday school."

"She took my shell!" Grange's face clouded, and tears shined readily in his dark blue eyes.

An indignity had been practiced. Violence must answer. It was the law of the land.

Morton Sheldon swallowed a long sigh. He laid a brown, weather cracked hand on his son's shoulder, and the boy burrowed instinctively into the warmth of the protection offered.

"Grange, I'm sure Kellie had a good reason."

A face appeared over the bottom half of the door then, a solemn, brown face, wet as sea sand, and seemingly half wet sand in itself, with ropes of algae for hair.

"Yes, sir," Kellie said, her thin voice resonant from the depth of a burdening conviction. "I had a reason."

"She—"

"What was the reason, Kellie?" Morton Sheldon asked, shushing his son.

"I can't explain it, Mr. Sheldon."

"I see."

And if Morton Sheldon saw no more than the line of fishermen waiting on the pier, waiting for him to join them, if he saw only himself with faded jacket and a few bits of fishing tackle, with salt wind cracking his lips and hands, he saw enough that Kellie took her leave with permission.

She ran down the wide, empty walk, her feet curling wisps of December sand behind her, clutching the gleaming white shell, grasping the offender, imprisoning it against the rippled rib cage of her lithe body, ran toward home.

She met her father and mother half way home, or caught up with them, as they strolled peacefully along the walk, and she slowed.

Each of them noticed the shell. Her mother viewed it with mild curiosity, assessing it briefly with dark eyes dwelling in a sand-blasted face seared walnut dark from more than forty beach summers.

Her father touched it lightly with a pale blue gaze that had seen everything there was to see in all the ports of the world, and now paid attention to little except his wife and daughter.

Neither questioned her, but she sighed, and said: "You might as well know. I took it away from Grange."

"You shouldn't have done that," her mother said.

"I thought I should have."

"Why?"

"I just thought I should. I don't know why, exactly."

"Well, you'd better give it back."

"No. I can't do that."

Her mother laughed. She put a gentle hand on Kellie's shoulder, and spoke quietly, and with pride, but not to Kellie. "She's just like Mother. Same will of iron."

The sentiment was not new to Kellie. She had never known her grandmother, but her mother's rare references to her always cast Kellie in the same image and role.

"Is there a reason you can't give it back, Kellie?"

"I think so."

"What is it?"

"I can't explain it, Mother. It's—just something I feel."

They had stopped now at the front entrance of the combination beer parlor-home which had sustained the Bushner family, Kellie, Carrie and Ralph, for all of Kellie's years and more before. In all her eleven years Kellie had never been allowed inside the taproom itself, though the family lived directly above it. Always she climbed the back stairs to the apartment, and to her room which looked directly out upon the ocean. Only her parents went in the front way, through the deep saloon smells of the taproom.

"Supper will be ready in about an hour, Kellie," Carrie Bushner said. "Either give the shell back to Grange or bring me a reason why you can't do so when you come in. Understand?"

"Yes. I understand."

Carrie smiled and brushed sand from Kellie's forehead. She glanced at her husband, but he shook his head quietly, and Carrie went on in to the mysterious darkness alone.

Kellie stood silently, eyeing her father, waiting. He had stayed to tell her something. But for a long while he just rubbed the stubble of whiskers on his chin and stared out to sea.

"Why did you take it from him, Kellie?" he asked at last.

"I don't know, Daddy. I just had to."

Ralph Bushner said nothing for a long while again, though he did glance curiously at the shell. "Odd thing," he said, after a time.

"I don't think it came from this beach," Kellie said.

"No. Looks something like a Panama fighting conch. Except that the spines are too sharp. I don't remember seeing many conches with spines like that."

"It's—funny," Kellie said, searching for an appropriate word to describe the shell, but finding none. It was odd, and somehow, she knew, it was *wrong*. But she could not say why. From her closeness with the sea she just knew it was.

"I don't remember ever seeing anything like it before," Ralph Bushner agreed.

"I just know it didn't come from this beach."

"No. Well—you'd better give it back, or have a good reason for your mother at supper time."

"I don't have a reason I can speak, Daddy. But I just can't let him have it."

"But if you don't give her a reason . . ."

"I know." As punishment for her deed she would be kept in her room for a week. The standard punishment. With nothing to do but stare out at the ocean and long for the embrace of the surf. "But couldn't you just explain to her?"

"Your mother and I don't interfere with each other in certain things," he said, looking away.

Kellie sighed softly. Her father was so—so—*helpless* around her mother.

"All you have to do is give her a *reason*, Kellie."

"Daddy, I don't have a reason I can speak."

He rubbed the stubble on his chin, and looked long and searchingly at her. "There are reasons and reasons, Honey. Without some kind of reason there'll be the devil to pay."

"What do you mean?"

"Well—all she wants is a *reason*, Honey."

Kellie turned that puzzle over and over in her mind. When she found the answer it frightened her worse than any punishment she might receive. She was stunned at the thought of lying to her mother. Even a little, sort of invited lie.

"I don't know the reason, Daddy. I only feel it," she said, and she turned and ran across the cracked, tilted sidewalk and onto the grey beach, and ran to the edge of the water, and stared at the waves, still clutching the shell, tears pushing from behind her eyes.

She stood and watched the breakers rolling, spreading themselves, their long journey over.

Just a few minutes ago her life had been so happy. And now, for no reason she could understand, it was shattered. For no reason she could tell even herself there was sudden fear, and anger, and hurt.

Why *had* she taken the shell from Grange? What had possessed her? *Why* had she done it?

Kellie did not know. There had been—a moment there in the sea ebb when laughter had faded and fear had struck and she had done the thing without reasoning. There was no *why*. Now, even the tears which should have flowed failed her.

Kellie spun suddenly in fear at the sound of footsteps crunching the sand behind her. She had been so deep in thought she had not heard the man until he was upon her.

"Hello there, Kellie." The voice was cheerful, but there was a tarry quality to it, like the black on the bottoms of people's feet sometimes when big tankers lay offshore.

"Hello, Mr. Rellman," she said, reluctantly, avoiding the curiously penetrating stare.

"That's a handsome shell you have, Kellie. Where did you get it?"

Kellie knew he knew where she got it. Everyone would know by now. "I took it away from Grange."

"Oh—well, I remember hearing now." He failed to conceal his surprise at her honesty. "Do you suppose I could see it, Kellie?" he asked, abashed.

"You're looking at it," Kellie said. Again he was abashed, this time at the rude answer.

She made no move to offer it for inspection. Instead she moved it to a tighter embrace. And it was as if by the same move she wished to move herself into the same protective hug.

Rellman knew she did not like him, and this cut him deeply. She always seemed to be hiding from him. Kellie's mother did not like him, either, he knew, though she had never said as much to him. Rellman was offended at this, because he was genuinely fond of Kellie, and of her mother, despite their coolness toward him.

Rellman knew he was not much to look at. A small man, wrinkled with time, and with a tendency to squint, eyes

that watered too much from the sun's harsh glare, and nervous hands seeming to search endlessly through his pockets despite conscious efforts to control the nervous habit.

But he did not think of himself as a bad sort. He loved children, especially girls, and even more especially Kellie, though he was somehow never popular with either children or adults, much to his distress.

"I'd like to listen to it, Kellie. I bet if I held it up to my ear I could hear the roar of the sea in it."

"Oh—no!" Kellie said, and unexplainable terror at the thought struck deep into her sun-bronzed belly, and turned her knees to paste. "No, you mustn't do that!"

"Just let me listen for a minute," he wheedled, trying a smile. But the smile was lacking teeth to even it out, and lacking real warmth, so it came out a grimace, frightening Kellie even more. And in a flash of insight well beyond her age or experience Kellie realized he cared nothing for listening to the shell. He wanted only for her to give it to him, to do as he said, to yield this small request so that he might make another small one, and then another—though to what end Kellie could not then divine.

But she saw suddenly, in awful clarity, into the depths of his eyes, past the veins wavering over yellowed whites, through the shielding wateriness bathing them, and she saw what he was. There were no words in her vocabulary or experience in her life to give a name to pederasty, but she knew instinctively and the revelation plunged her into an icy bath of shock.

She stared speechless, until suddenly fear firmed up the joints of her knees and she was mobile again, and moving, running down the beach, away, moving from under the cloud which had enveloped her sea bright world.

She ran blindly, hurtled unseeing until she crashed headlong into a woman's skirts, and clung there, breathing in sandy gasps, afraid to look behind her.

"Kellie, you could have hurt me!" The voice cut through her fog of terror, lifted her bodily back to the world she knew, had always and only known.

"I'm sorry," she said, meaning it truly. "I didn't know where I was going."

"I can see that."

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Sheldon."

"Well, no harm done. Provided, of course, you are sorry about taking Grange's shell away from him."

"No, I'm not sorry about that," Kellie said, conscious again of her problem with the shell, clutching it tightly to her. She was conscious, too, of Grange lurking just behind his mother, shielded by her skirts as from an ogre.

"Well, you'll give it back at once!"

She was a stern woman, a little older than Kellie's mother, and pale, untouched by the beach sun, her features not exactly ugly, but set into a permanent frown.

"I can't give it back, Mrs. Sheldon."

"You do so this instant!"

"I can't."

Kellie did not wait to reason or argue. She knew the woman would slap her if she did not give back the shell. Grange had said so.

Again she ran, beachward this time, to the edge of the water. Behind her Grange wailed, and his mother howled threats. She ran on, pursued by terrors unclothed in mere flesh, and she flung herself into the sea, falling headlong when water weight slowed her churning legs, and, falling, hurled the offending shell far, deep into the chewing mouth of a breaker which moments later gobbled up her too, to spit her out disdainfully at beach edge, exhausted, trembling with fear.

She lay in the ebb, and waves washed around her, and she moved her head up on her arm so she could breathe. She made no move to rise as she heard footsteps approaching, and water carved away the sand, lowering her gently into a shallow pit.

She wished it would bury her, or wash her out to sea. But she knew neither would happen. She would have to get up, to face the suddenly warped new world she could not yet understand, but she resisted the move. She could not face explaining why she had thrown away the shell. She did not know herself. She knew only she was impelled, perhaps by the sea itself, to do so.

But the footsteps shuffling along the sand were not those of Mrs. Sheldon. That stern, disapproving woman had gone, probably to seek out Kellie's mother with her complaints.

"Aha!" the sticky voice said, and Rellman picked up

the bright white sea shell from where it had washed up near Kellie. "Now I have it!"

Kellie raised herself on one elbow, stared fearfully at the man grinning crookedly at her. "Throw it back in the ocean," she pleaded.

"Oh, no. I want to hear the roar of the sea in it." He moved it toward his ear, teasingly.

"No!" Kellie screamed, seized by a warning from the waves she could feel but not understand.

He lowered it, raising his pale eyebrows. "No? What will you give me if I don't?"

Kellie had no idea what he thought she could give him, but the very thought terrified her, and she let herself fall limply to the sand again, crying now at last, the tears spilling away into the salt water, uniting with the ocean, an inverse communion between Kellie and her god father, Poseidon.

Laughing, ridicule in his tone, Rellman lifted the shell to his ear.

Kellie could not guess what it was he heard, but it was not the roar of the sea. That was swelling around them, a symphony of ocean sounds which played on endlessly for all to hear.

Only Rellman knew, and he would never be in condition to tell. Because of the juxtaposition in time and space which had placed Kellie, uniquely, in control of the shell, no one would ever know what he heard. Only Rellman, free of the delirium of his madness now and again, would recall what the shell had told him.

In rare and brief moments of lucidity he would remember, before he slipped away into half-light again, that the shell had delivered to him its sinister message. It had told him what he was, had stripped away the protective, polished veneer of what he thought he was, and revealed him to himself, naked and without defense in the glare of reality. And as an added fillip, the shell had projected a scene out of some dim, miserable future in which Rellman was caught by a mob of maddened men and handled as many feel such as he should be handled. A scene in which he was torn and plucked and ripped by raging hands for a crime he could no more have avoided committing than

could he have avoided living and dying. It was more than he, or any mortal could bear.

It would have been more than Grange could have borne, to know his nature and future. To see himself darting through life forever pursued by nameless fears and phantom foes, finally to be driven over the brink by insecurity when his mother died.

Nor were there many who could have borne it, human frailties being what they are. And the magnifying, distorting, malevolent evil of the shell being what it was.

Rellman screamed just once, choking on the sound, and the shell fell from limp fingers. He ran down the beach, his legs rubber, wobbling crazily as sand clutched at his feet. He ran until he collapsed on the sand and lay there, staring vacantly at the sky.

Numb with shock, Kellie watched as three men came from somewhere and stood over Rellman. One of them kneeled and loosened his collar, then rose again, and the men stood talking among themselves, wondering.

Slowly Kellie's fear washed away with the changing tide. She lifted herself slowly from the sand. Numbly she picked up the shell a last time and took it to the broad sidewalk, and searched until she found a stone large enough, and she pounded fiercely at the shell. It cracked, then shattered, splitting into a handful of pieces, and she pounded, kept pounding, blindly, mindlessly, until there was nothing left except a scattered pile of dirty fragments, and still she pounded, her fingers cracked and bleeding now, until her father, out looking for her as dusk swept over the beach and out seaward, found her there.

"Why did you do that?" he asked, squatting down to be near her.

"I don't know," she said wearily. But she stopped pounding, tossed the rock aside, scattered the fragments into deep sand.

"It's time to go home, supper is almost ready."

"All right."

"Your mother is angry."

Kellie bit her lip, saying nothing.

"You'll just have to give her a pretty good reason. About the shell, I mean, or you know what will happen."

"I don't know the reason."

"Kellie, she doesn't *want* to punish you. Just give her a *reason.*"

"I can't do that."

Together they climbed the grey, scarred old back stairs to the apartment over the taproom. Kellie could smell spaghetti cooking, and onions and meat sauce. One of her favorite dishes. But it was late, and her mother would be angry.

Her father held the door open for her, and she went in, he closing the door softly.

"That you, Kellie?" from another room.

"Yes, Mother."

"All right. Wash up for supper."

"Yes, Mother."

She shot one last look at her father. He appealed mutely, his hands palms out, half in anguish, half in resignation.

Kellie, in a brief moment, thought of a thousand lies she could tell her mother to avoid punishment. But she knew that she could tell none of them. No more than she could tell the truth. No more than she knew the truth.

She knew only, subjectively, as intuitive children do, that her world would never be the same again. Kellie had not grown up, and would not, except through the usual process of passing years. But she knew that when again she was let out of her room, back to her fiercely possessive love affair with the sea, much of childhood would lay behind her.

Gone forever would be the freedom of childhood's unchallenging innocence. In its place the weight of a new responsibility would be thrust upon her, as upon precious few, to understand much that was lost to other humans. There would be challenges she would meet as unpopularly as she had met the challenge of the shell. And there would be explanations no more possible then than there were now.

"I don't know," she said simply without waiting to be questioned when her mother appeared. "I just don't know why I took it away from him."

And, for the first time in such punishments, there were no tears.

FROM TWO UNIVERSES . . .

by Doris Pitkin Buck

The Univac, the Unicorn—
  I love them both, but never find
A story where this noble pair
  Have been in any way combined.

I'm sure that if a Univac
  Were made in 'faery lands forlorn'
It would rehearse in deathless verse
  The glories of the Unicorn;

And does perhaps the Unicorn
  Behind some scientific back
Sneak up to see the magic he
  Senses within a Univac?

"If I had an interesting biography I wouldn't be writing SF and Fantasy," writes R. A. Lafferty. "I am, not necessarily in that order, fifty years old, a bachelor, an electrical engineer, a fat man." Although we've never met Mr. Lafferty, we think we can safely add to that: A Funny man. Witness this wonderful piece of clowning about one bushy-tailed machine—a nullifier which can posit moral and ethical judgments, set up and enforce categories, which knows junk when it sees it and sends the no-good stuff clear over the edge.

HOG-BELLY HONEY

by R. A. Lafferty

I'm Joe Spade—about as intellectual a guy as you'll find all day. I invented Wotto and Voxo and a bunch of other stuff that nobody can get along without anymore. It's on account of I have so much stuff in my head that I sometimes go to a head-grifter. This day all of them I know is out of town when I call. Lots of times everybody I know is out of town when I call. I go to a new one. The glass in his door says he is a anapsychologist, which is a head-grifter in the popular speech.

"I'm Joe Spade the man that got everything," I tell him and slap him on the back in that hearty way of mine. There is a crunch sound and at first I think I have crack his rib. Then I see I have only broke his glasses so no harm done. "I am what you call a flat-footed genius, doc," I tell him, "with plenty of the crimp-cut greenleaf."

I take the check card away from him and mark it up myself to save time. I figure I know more about me than he does.

"Remember, I can get them nine dollar words for four-eighty-five wholesale, doc," I josh him and he looks at me painful.

"Modesty isn't one of your failings," this head-grifter tell me as he scun my card. "Hum! Single—significant."

I had written down the "Single" in the blank for it, but he had seen for himself that I am a significant man.

"Solvent," he read for the blank about the pecuniary stuff, "I like that in a man. We will arrange for a few sessions."

"One will do it," I tell him. "Time is running and I am paying. Give me a quick read, doc."

"Yes, I can give you a very rapid reading," he says. "I want you to ponder the ancient adage: It is not good for Man to be Alone. Think about it a while, and perhaps you will be able to put one and one together."

Then he add kind of sad, "Poor woman!" which is either the nonsecular of the year or else he is thinking of some other patient. Then he add again, "That will be three yards, in the lingo."

"Thanks, doc," I say. I pay the head-grifter his three hundred dollars and leave. He has hit the nail on the noggin and put his toe on the root of my trouble.

I will take me a partner in my business.

I spot him in Grogley's and I know right away he's the one. He's about half my size but otherwise he's as much like me as two feet in one shoe. He's real good looking—just like me. He's dressed sweet, but has a little blood on his face like can happen to anyone in Grogley's for five minutes. Man we're twins! I know we will talk alike and think alike just like we look alike.

"*Eheu! Fugaces!*" my new partner says real sad. That means "Brother this has been one day with all the bark on it!" He is drinking the Fancy and his eyes look like cracked glass.

"He's been having quite a few little fist fights," Grogley whispers to me, "but he don't win none. He isn't very fast with his hands. I think he's got troubles."

"Not no more he don't," I tell Grogley, "he's my new partner."

I slap my new partner on the back in that hearty way I have, and the tooth that flew out must have been a loose one.

"You don't have no more troubles, Roscoe," I tell him, "you and me is just become partners." He looks kind of sick at me.

"Maurice is the name," he says, "Maurice Maltravers. How are things back in the rocks? You, sir, are a troglodyte.

They always come right after the snakes. That's the only time I wish the snakes would come back."

Lots of people call me a troglodyte.

"Denied the sympathy of humankind," Maurice carries on, "perhaps I may find it in an inferior species. I wonder if I could impose on your ears—gahhhh!—" (He made a humorous sound there)—"are those things ears? What a fearsome otological apparatus you do have!—the burden of my troubles."

"I just told you you don't have none, Maurice," I say. "Come along with me and we'll get into the partner business."

I pick him up by the scruff and haul him out of Grogley's.

"I see right away you are my kind of man," I say.

"My kind of man—*putridus ad volva*," Maurice gives me the echo. Hey, this guy is a gale! Just like me.

"My cogitational patterns are so intricate and identatic oriented," says Maurice when I set him down and let him walk a little, "that I become a closed system—unintelligible to the exocosmos and particularly to a chthonian like yourself."

"I'm mental as hell myself, Maurice," I tell him, "there ain't nothing the two of us can't do together."

"My immediate difficulty is that the University has denied me further use of the Computer," Maurice tells me. "Without it, I cannot complete the Ultimate Machine."

"I got a computer'll make that little red schoolhouse turn green," I tell him.

We come to my place which a man have call in print 'a converted horse barn, probably the most unorthodox and badly appointed scientific laboratory in the world.' I take Maurice in with me, but he carries on like a chicken with its hat off when he finds out the only calculator I got is the one in my head.

"You livid monster, I can't work in this mares'-nest," he screeches at me. "I've got to have a calculator, a computer."

I tap my head with a six pound pien hammer and grin my famous grin. "It's all inside here, Maurice boy," I tell him, "the finest calculator in the world. When I was with the Carnivals they billed me as the Idiot Genius. I'd run races with the best computers they had in a town, multi-

plying twenty-place numbers and all the little tricks like that. I cheated though. I invented a gadget and carried it in my pocket. It'd jam the relays of the best computers and slow them down for a full second. Give me a one second hop and I can beat anything in the world at anything. The only thing wrong with those jobs is that I had to talk and act kind of dumb to live up to my billing The Idiot Genius, and that dumb stuff was hard on an intellectual like I."

"I can see that it would be," Maurice said. "Can you handle involuted matrix Maimonides-conditioned third-aspect numbers in the Cauchy sequence with simultaneous non-temporal involvement of the Fierschi manifold?"

"Maurice, I can do it and fry up a bunch of eggs to go with it at the same time," I tell him. Then I look him right in the middle of the eye. "Maurice," I say, "you're working on a nullifier."

He look at me like he take me serious for the first time. He pull a sheaf of papers out of his shirt, and sure enough he is working on a nullifier—a sweet one.

"This isn't an ordinary nullifier," Maurice points out, and I see that it ain't. "What other nullifier can posit moral and ethical judgments? What other can set up and enforce categories? What other can really discern? This will be the only nullifier able to make full philosophical pronouncements. Can you help me finish it, Proconsul?"

A Proconsul is about the same as an alderman, so I know Maurice think high of me. We throw away the clock and get with it. We work about twenty hours a day. I compute it and build it at the same time—out of Wotto-metal naturally. At the end we use feed-back a lot. We let the machine decide what we will put in it and what leave out. The main difference between our nullifier and all others is that ours will be able to make decisions. So, let it make them!

We finish it in about a week. Man it is a sweet thing! We play with it a while to see what it can do. It can do everything.

I point it at a half-bushel of bolts and nuts I got there. "Get rid of everything that ain't standard thread," I program it, "half that stuff is junk."

And half that stuff is gone right now! This thing works!

Just set in what you want it to get rid of, and it's gone without a trace.

"Get rid of *everything* here that's no good for nothing," I program it. I had me a place there that has been described as cluttered. That machine blinked once, and then I had a place you could get around in. That thing knew junk when it saw it, and it sure sent that no-good stuff clear over the edge. Of course anybody can make a nullifier that won't leave no remains of whatever it latches on to, but this is the only one that knows what to leave no remains of by itself. Maurice and me is tickled as pink rabbits over the thing.

"Maurice," I say, and I slap him on the back so his nose bleeds a little, "this is one bushy-tailed gadget. There ain't nothing we can't do with it."

But Maurice looks kind of sad for a moment.

"*A quo bono?*" he ask, which I think is the name of a mineral water, so I slosh him out some brandy which is better. He drink the brandy but he's still thoughtful.

"But what good is it?" he ask. "It is a triumph, of course, but in what category could we market it? It seems that I've been here a dozen times with the perfect apparatus that nobody wants. Is there really a mass market for a machine that can posit moral and ethical judgments, that can set up and enforce categories, that is able to discern, and to make philosophical pronouncements? Have I not racked up one more triumphant folly?"

"Maurice, this thing is a natural-born garbage disposal," I tell him. He turn that green color lots of people do when I shed a big light on them . . .

"A garbage disposal!" he sings out. "The aeons labored to give birth to it through the finest mind—mine—of the millennium, and this brother of a giant ape says it is a garbage disposal! It is a new aspect of thought the *nova instauratio*, the mind of tomorrow fruited today, and this obscene ogre says it is a Garbage Disposal! The Constellations do homage to it, and Time has not waited in vain—and you, you splay-footed horse-herder, you call it a GARBAGE DISPOSAL!!!"

Maurice was so carried away with the thought that he cried a little. It sure is nice when someone agrees with you as long and loud as Maurice did. When he was run

out of words he got aholt of the brandy bottle with both hands and drunk it all off. Then he slept the clock around. He was real tired.

He looked kind of sheepful when he finally woke up.

"I feel better now, outside of feeling worse," he says. "You are right, it's a garbage disposal."

He programmed it to get all the slush out of his blood and liver and kidneys and head. It did it. It cured his hangover in straight-up no time at all. It also shaved him and removed his appendix. Just give it the nod and it would nullify anything.

"We will call it the Hog-Belly Honey," I say, "on account of it will eat anything, and it work so sweet."

"That is what we will call it privately," Maurice nodded, "but in company it will be known as the Pantophag." That is the same thing in Greek.

It was at the time of this area of good feeling that I split a Voxo with Maurice. Each of you have one half of a tuned Voxo and you can talk to each other anywhere in the world, and the thing is so nonconspicuous that nobody can see it on you.

We got a big booth and showed the Hog-Belly Honey, the Pantophag, at the Trade Fair.

Say, we did put on a good show! The people came in and looked and listened till they were walleyed. That Maurice could give a good spiel, and I'm about the best there is myself. We sure were two fine-looking men, after Maurice told me that maybe I detracted a little bit by being in my undershirt, and I went and put a shirt on. And that bushy-tailed machine just sparkled—like everything does that it made out of Wotto-metal.

Kids threw candy-bar wrappers at it, and they disappeared in the middle of the air. "Frisk me," they said, and everything in their pockets that was no good for nothing was gone. A man held up a stuffed brief case, and it was almost empty in a minute. A few people got mad when they lost beards and moustaches, but we explained to them that their boscage hadn't done a thing for them; if the ornaments had had even appearance value the machine would have left them be. We pointed out other people who kept their brush; whatever they had behind it, they must have needed the cover.

"Could I have one in my house, and when?" a lady asks.

"Tomorrow, for forty-nine ninety-five installed," I tell her. "It will get rid of anything no good. It'll pluck chickens, or bone roasts for you. It will clear out all those old love letters from that desk and leave just the ones from the guy that meant it. It will relieve you of thirty pounds in the strategic places, and frankly lady this alone will make it worth your while. It will get rid of old buttons that don't match, and seeds that won't sprout. It will destroy everything that is not no good for nothing."

"It can posit moral and ethical judgments," Maurice tells the people. "It can set up and enforce categories."

"Maurice and me is partners," I tell them all. "We look alike and think alike. We even talk alike."

"Save I in the hieratic and he in the demotic," Maurice say. "This is the only nullifier in the world able to make full philosophical pronouncements. It is the unfailing judge of what is of some use and what is not. And it disposes neatly."

Man, the people did pour in to see it all that morning! They slacked off a little bit just about noon.

"I wonder how many people have come into our booth this morning?" Maurice wondered to me. "I would guess near ten thousand."

"I don't have to guess," I say. "There is nine thousand three hundred and fifty-eight who have come in, Maurice," I tell him, for I am always the automatic calculator. "There is nine thousand two hundred and ninety-seven who have left," I go on, "and there are forty-four here now."

Maurice smiled. "You have made a mistake," he says. "It doesn't add up."

And that is when the hair riz up on the back of my neck. I don't make mistakes when I calculate, and I see now that the Hog-Belly Honey don't make none either. Well, it's too late to make one now if you're not trained for it, but it might not be too late to get out of the way of the storm before it hits.

"Crank the cuckoo," I whisper to Maurice, "make the bindlestiff, hit the macadam!"

"*Je ne comprends pas,*" says Maurice, which means "Let's hit the road, boys," in French, so I know my partner understands me.

I am out of the display hall at a high run, and Maurice racing along beside me so lightfoot that he don't make no noise. There is a sky-taxi just taking off.

"Jump for it, Maurice!" I sing out. I jump for it myself, and hook my fingers over the rear rail and am dangling in the air. I look to see if Maurice make it. Make it! He isn't even there! He didn't come out with me. I look back, and I see him through a window going into his spiel again.

Now that is a mule-headed development. My partner, who is as like me as two heads in one hat, had not understand me.

At the port I hook onto a sky-freight just going to Mexico. I don't never have to pack no bag. I say that a man who don't always carry two years' living in that crimp green stuff in his back pocket ain't in no condition to meet Fate. In thirty minutes I am sit down in a hotel in Cueva Poquita and have all the pleasantries at hand. Then I snap on my Voxo to hear what Maurice is signaling about.

"Why didn't you tell me that the Pantophag was nullifying people?" he ask kind of shrill.

"I did tell you," I say. "Nine thousand two hundred and ninety-seven added to forty-four don't come to nine thousand three hundred and fifty-eight. You said so yourself. How are things on the home front, Maurice? That's a joke."

"It's no joke," he say kind of fanatic like. "I have locked myself in a little broom closet, but they're going to break down the door. What can I do?"

"Why, Maurice, just explain to those people that the folks nullified by the machine were no good for nothing, because the machine don't make mistakes."

"I doubt that I can convince the parents and spouses and children of the nullified people of this. They're after blood. They're breaking down the door now, Spade. I hear them say they are going to hang me."

"Tell them you won't settle for anything less than a new rope, Maurice," I tell him. That's an old joke. I switch off the Voxo because Maurice is not making anything except gurgling noises which I cannot interpret.

A thing like that blow over real fast after they have already hang one guy for it and are satisfied. I am back in town and am rolling all those new ideas around in my head

like a bunch of rocks. But I'm not going to build the Hog-Belly Honey again. It is too logical for safety, and is a little before its time.

I am looking to get me another partner. Come into Grogley's if you are interested. I show up there every hour or so. I want a guy as like me as two necks in one noose—what make me think of a thing like that?—a guy who look like me and think like me and talk like me.

Just ask for Joe Spade.

But the one I hook onto for a new partner will have to be a fellow who understands me when the scuppers are down.



"Marsha, you're tending to lead again!"

This is the latest of Zenna Henderson's stories about The People, with all the warmth and richness of plot and character which readers have come to expect of Miss Henderson. If you are new to this series, you have a pleasant surprise in store. If you are familiar with it, you are undoubtedly already reading.

NO DIFFERENT FLESH

by Zenna Henderson

Meris watched the darkness rip open and mend itself again in the same blinding flash that closed her eyes. Behind her eyelids the dark reversals flicked and faded. Thunder jarred the cabin window where she leaned and troubled her bones. The storm had been gathering all afternoon, billowing up in blue and white thunderheads over the hills, spreading darkly, somberly, to snuff the sunset. The wind was not the straight blowing, tree-lashing, branch-breaker of the usual summer storm. Instead, it blew simultaneously from several directions. It mourned like a snow wind around the eaves of the cabin. It ripped the length of the canyon through the treetops while the brush below hardly stirred a twig. Lightning was so continuous now that glimpses of the outdoors came through the windows like sudden blows.

Lights in the cabin gasped, recovered, and died. Meris heard Mark's sigh and the ruffle of his pushed-back papers.

"I'll get the lantern," he said. "It's out in the store room, isn't it?"

"Yes." Lightning flushed the whole room, now that the light no longer defended it. "But it needs filling. Why don't we wait to see if the lights come back on. We could watch the storm—"

"I'm sorry." Mark's arm was gentle across her shoulders. "I'd like to, but I can't spare the time. Every minute—"

Meris pressed her face to the glass, peering out into the chaotic darkness of the canyon wall. She still wasn't quite used to being interested in anything outside her own grief and misery—all those long months of painful numbness that at the same time had been a protesting hammering at the

Golden Gates and a wild shrieking at God. What a blessed relief it was, finally to be able to let go of the baby—to feel grief begin to drain away as though a boil had been lanced. Not that sorrow would be gone, but now there could be healing for the blow that had been too heavy to be mortal.

"Take good care of her," she whispered to the bright slash of the lightning. "Keep her safe and happy until I come."

She winced away from the window, startled at the sudden audible splat of rain against the glass. The splat became a rattle and the rattle a gushing roar and the fade-and-flare of the outdoors dissolved into streaming rain.

Mark came back into the cabin, the light in his hands flooding blue-white across the room. He hung the lantern on the beam above the table and joined Meris.

"The storm is about over," said Meris, turning in the curve of his arm. "It's only rain now."

"It'll be back," he said. "It's just taking a deep breath before smacking us amidships again."

"Mark." The tone of Meris' voice caught his attention. "Mark, my baby—our baby—is dead." She held out the statement to him as if offering a gift—her first controlled reference to what had happened.

"Yes," said Mark, "our baby is dead." He accepted the gift.

"We waited for her so long," said Meris softly, "and had her for so short a time."

"But long enough that you are a mother and I am a father," said Mark. "We still have that."

"Now that I can finally talk about her," said Meris, "I won't have to talk about her any more. I can let her be gone now.

"Oh, Mark!" Meris held his hand to her cheek. "Having you to anchor me is all that's kept me from—"

"I'm set in my ways," smiled Mark. "But of late you've been lifting such a weight off me that I don't think I could anchor a butterfly now!"

"*Love* you, Mark!"

"*Love* you, Meris!" Mark hugged her tightly a moment and then let her go. "Back to work again. No flexibility left in the deadline any more. It has to be done on time this time or—"

Lightning splashed brightness against the wall. Meris moved back to the window again, the floor boards under her feet vibrating to the thunder. "Here it comes again!" But Mark was busy, his scurrying fingers trying to catch up with the hours and days and months lost to Meris' grief and wild mourning.

Meris cupped her hands around her temples and leaned her forehead to the window pane. The storm was truly back again, whipping the brush and trees in a fury that ripped off leaves and small branches. A couple of raindrops cracked with the force of hail against the glass. Lightning and a huge explosion arrived at the same moment, jarring the whole cabin.

"Hit something close?" asked Mark with no pause in the staccato of his typing.

"Close," said Meris. "The big pine by the gate. I saw the bark fly."

"Hope it didn't kill it," said Mark. "We lost those two in back like that last summer, you know."

Meris tried to see the tree through the darkness, but the lightning had withdrawn for the moment.

"What was that?" she cried, puzzled.

"What?" asked Mark.

"I heard something fall," she said. "Through the trees."

"Probably the top of our pine," said Mark. "I guess the lightning made more than bark fly. Well, there goes another of our trees."

"That's the one the jays liked particularly, too," said Meris.

Rain drenched again in a vertical obscurity down the glass and the flashes of lightning flushed heavily through the watery waver.

Later the lights came on and Meris, blinking against the brightness, went to bed, drawing the curtain across the bunk corner, leaving Mark at work at his desk. She lay awake briefly, hearing the drum of the rain and the mutter of the thunder, hardly noticing the clatter of the typewriter. She touched cautiously with her thoughts the aching emptiness where the intolerable burden of her unresolved grief had been. Almost, she felt without purpose—aimless—since that painful focusing of her whole life was gone. She sighed into her pillow. New purpose and new aim would come—would have to come—to fill the emptiness.

Somewhere in the timeless darkness of the night she was suddenly awake, sitting bolt upright in bed. She pulled the bedclothes up to her chin, shivering a little in the raw, damp air of the cabin. What had wakened her? The sound came again. She gasped and Mark stirred uneasily, then was immediately wide awake and sitting up beside her.

"Meris?"

"I heard something," she said. "Oh, Mark! Honestly, I heard something."

"What was it?" Mark pulled the blanket up across her back.

"I heard a baby crying."

She felt Mark's resigned recoil and the patience in his long indrawn breath.

"Honest, Mark!" In the semi-obscurity her eyes pleaded with him. "I really heard a baby crying. Not a tiny baby—like—like ours. A very young child, though. Out there in the cold and wet."

"Meris—" he began, and she knew the sorrow that must be marking his face.

"There!" she cried. "Hear it?"

The two were poised motionless for a moment, then Mark was out of bed and at the door. He flung it open to the night and they listened again, tensely.

They heard a night bird cry and, somewhere up canyon, the brief barking of a dog, but nothing else.

Mark came back to bed, diving under the covers with a shiver.

"Come warm me, woman!" he cried, hugging Meris tightly to him.

"It did sound like a baby crying," she said with a half question in her voice.

"It sure did," said Mark. "I thought for a minute—. Must have been some beast or bird or denizen of the wild—" His voice trailed away sleepily, his arms relaxing. Meris lay awake listening—to Mark's breathing, to the night, to the cry that didn't come again. Refusing to listen for the cry that would never come again, she slept.

Next morning was so green and gold and sunny and wet and fresh that Meris felt a-tip-toe before she even got out of bed. She dragged Mark, protesting, from the warm nest

of the bedclothes and presented him with a huge breakfast. They laughed at each other across the table, their hands clasped over the dirty dishes. Meris felt a surge of gratitude. The return of laughter is a priceless gift.

While she did the dishes and put the cabin to rights, Mark, shrugging into his Levi jacket against the chill, went out to check the storm damage.

Meris heard a shout and the dozen echo-shouts returning diminishingly from the heavy stand of timber around the cabin site. She pushed the window curtain aside and peered out as she finished drying a plate.

Mark was chasing a fluttering something, out across the creek. The boisterous waters were slapping against the bottom of the plank bridge and Mark was splashing more than ankle-deep on the flat beyond as he plunged about trying to catch whatever it was that evaded him.

"A bird," guessed Meris. "A huge bird waterlogged by the storm. Or knocked down by the wind—maybe hurt—" She hurried to put the plate away and dropped the dish towel on the table. She peered out again. Mark was half-hidden behind the clumps of small willows along the bend of the creek. She heard his cry of triumph and then of astonishment. The fluttering thing shot up, out of reach above Mark and seemed to be trying to disappear into the ceaseless shiver of the tender green and white aspens. Whatever it was, a whitish blob against the green foliage, dropped down again and Mark grabbed it firmly.

Meris ran to the door and flung it open, stepping out with a shiver into the cold air. Mark saw her as he rounded the curve in the path.

"Look what I found!" he cried. "Look what I caught for you!"

Meris put a hand on the wet, muddy bundle Mark was carrying and thought quickly, "Where are the feathers?"

"I caught a baby for you!" cried Mark. Then his smile died and he thrust the bundle at her. "Good Lord, Meris!" he choked. "I'm not fooling! It *is* a baby!"

Meris turned back a sodden fold and gasped. A face! A child face, mud-smudged, with huge dark eyes and tangled dark curls. A quiet, watchful face—not crying. Maybe too frightened to cry?

"Mark!" Meris clutched the bundle to her and hurried

into the cabin. "Build up the fire in the stove," she said, laying her burden on the table. She peeled the outer layer off quickly and let it fall soggily to the floor. Another damp layer and then another. "Oh, poor messy child!" she crooned, "poor wet, messy little girl!"

"Where did she come from?" Mark wondered. "There must be some clue—" He changed quickly from his soaked sneakers into his hiking boots. "I'll go check. There must be something out there." His hands paused on the knotting of the last bootlace. "Or someone." He stood up, settling himself into his jeans and boots. "Take it easy, Meris." He kissed her cheek as she bent over the child, and left.

Meris' fingers recalled more and more of their deftness as she washed the small girl-body, improvised a diaper of a dishtowel, converted a teeshirt into a gown, all the time being watched silently by the big dark eyes that now seemed more wary than frightened, watched as though the child was trying to read her lips that were moving so readily in the old remembered endearments and croonings. Finally, swathing the small form in her chenille robe in lieu of a blanket, she sat on the edge of the bed, rocking and crooning to the child. She held a cup of warm milk to the small mouth. There was a firming of lips against it at first and then the small mouth opened and two small hands grasped the cup and the milk was gulped down greedily. Meris wiped the milky crescent from the child's upper lip and felt the tenseness going out of the small body as the warmth of the milk penetrated it. The huge dark eyes in the small face closed, jerked open, closed slowly and stayed closed.

Meris sat cradling the heavy warmth of the sleeping child. She felt healing flow through her own body and closed her eyes in silent thanksgiving above the child before she put her down, well back from the edge of the bed. Then she gathered up the armful of wet muddy clothes and reached for the box of detergent.

When Mark returned some time later, Meris gestured quickly. "She's sleeping," she said. "Oh, Mark! Just think! A baby!" Tears came to her eyes and she bent her head.

"Meris," Mark's gentle voice lifted her face. "Meris, just don't forget that the baby is not ours to keep."

"I know—!" She began to protest and then she smoothed the hair back from her forehead, knowing what Mark

wanted to save her from. "The baby is not ours—to keep," she relinquished. "Not ours to keep.

"Did you find anything, or anyone," she hesitated.

"Nothing," said Mark, "except the top of our pine is still there, if you've bothered to check it. And," his face tightened and his voice was grim, "those vandals have been at it again. Since I was at the picnic area at Beaver Bend they've been there and sawed every table in two and smashed them all to the ground in the middle!"

"Oh, Mark!" Meris was distressed. "Are you sure it's the same bunch?"

"Who else around here would do anything so senseless?" asked Mark. "It's those kids. If I ever catch them—"

"You did once," said Meris with a half smile, "and they didn't like what you and the ranger said to them."

"Understatement of the week," said Mark. "They'll like even less what's going to happen to them the next time they get caught."

"They're mad enough at you already," suggested Meris.

"Well," said Mark, "I'm proud to count that type among my enemies!"

"The Winstal boy doesn't seem the type," said Meris.

"He was a good kid," acknowledged Mark, "until he started running with those three from the Valley. They've got him hypnotized with that car and all their wild stories and crazy pranks. I guess he thinks their big-town fooling around has a glamor that can't be duplicated here in the mountains. Thank heaven it can't, but I wish he'd wise up to what's happening to him."

"The child!" Meris started towards the bed, her heart throbbing suddenly to the realization that there was a baby to be considered again. They looked down at the flushed, sleeping face and then turned back to the table. "She must be about three or four," said Meris over the coffee cups. "And healthy and well cared-for. Her clothes—" she glanced out at the clothes line where the laundry billowed and swung. "They're well-made, but—"

"But what?" Mark stirred his coffee absently, then gulped a huge swallow.

"Well, look," said Meris, reaching to the chair. "This outer thing she had on. It's like a trundle bundle—arms but no legs—just a sleeping bag thing. That's not too surprising,

but look. I was going to rinse off the mud before I washed it, but just one slosh in the water and it came out clean—and dry! I didn't even have to hang it out. And Mark, it isn't material. I mean fabric. At least it isn't like any that I've ever seen."

Mark lifted the garment, flexing a fold in his fingers. "Odd," he said.

"And look at the fasteners," said Meris.

"There aren't any," he said, surprised.

"And yet it fastens," said Meris, smoothing the two sections of the front together, edge to edge. She tugged mightily at it. It stayed shut. "You can't rip it apart. But look here." And she laid the two sides back gently with no effort at all. "It seems to be which direction you pull. There's a rip here in the back," she went on. "Or I'll bet she'd never have got wet at all—at least not from the outside," she smiled. "Look, the rip *was* from here to here." Her fingers traced six inches across the garment. "But look—" She carefully lapped the edges of the remaining rip and drew her thumb nail along it. The material seemed to melt into itself and the rip was gone.

"How did you find out all this so soon?" asked Mark. "Your own research lab?"

"Maybe so," smiled Meris. "I was just looking at it—women look at fabrics and clothing with their fingers, you know. I could never choose a piece of material for a dress without touching it. And I was wondering how much the seam would show if I mended it." She shook the garment. "But how she ever managed to run in it."

"She didn't," said Mark. "She sort of fluttered around like a chicken. I thought she was a feathered thing at first. Every time I thought I had her, she got away, flopping and fluttering, above my head half the time. I don't see how she ever—Oh! I found a place that might be where she spent the night. Looks like she crawled back among the roots of the deadfall at the bend of the creek. There's a pressed down, grassy hollow, soggy wet, of course, just inches above the water."

"I don't understand this fluttering bit," said Meris. "You mean she jumped so high you—"

"Not exactly jumped—" began Mark.

A sudden movement caught them both. The child had

wakened, starting up with a terrified cry, "Muhlala! Muhlala!"

Before Meris could reach her, she was fluttering up from the bed, trailing the chenille robe beneath her. She hovered against the upper window pane, like a moth, pushing her small hands against it, sobbing, "Muhlala! Muhlala!"

Meris gaped up at her. "Mark! Mark!"

"Not exactly—jump!" grunted Mark, reaching up for the child. He caught one of the flailing bare feet and pulled the child down into his arms, hushing her against him.

"There, there, muhlala, muhlala," he comforted awkwardly.

"Muhlala?" asked Meris, taking the struggling child from him.

"Well, she said it first," he said. "Maybe the familiarity will help."

"Well, maybe," said Meris. "There, there, muhlala, muhlala."

The child quieted and looked up at Meris.

"Muhlala?" she asked hopefully.

"Muhlala," said Meris as positively as she could.

The big wet eyes looked at her accusingly and the little head said no, unmistakably, but she leaned against Meris, her weight suddenly doubling as she relaxed.

"Well now," said Mark. "Back to work."

"Work? Oh Mark!" Meris was contrite. "I've broken into your work day again!"

"Well, it's not every day I catch a child flying in the forest. I'll make it up—somehow."

Meris helped Mark get settled to his work and, dressing the child—"What's your name, honey? What's your name?"—in her own freshly dried clothes, she took her outside to leave Mark in peace.

"Muhlala!" said Meris, smiling down at the upturned wondering face. The child smiled and swung their linked hands.

"Muhlala!" she laughed.

"Okay," said Meris, "we'll call you Lala." She skoonched down to child height. "Lala," she said, prodding the small chest with her finger. "Lala!"

Lala looked solemnly down at her own chest, tucking her

chin in tightly in order to see. "Lala," she said, and giggled. "Lala!"

The two walked towards the creek, Lala in the lead, firmly leashed by Meris' hand. "No flying," she warned. "I can't interrupt Mark to have him fish you out of the treetops."

Lala walked along the creek bank, peering down into the romping water and keeping up a running commentary of unintelligible words. Meris kept up a conversation of her own, fitting it into the brief pauses of Lala's. Suddenly Lala cried out triumphantly and pointed. Meris peered down into the water.

"Well!" she cried indignantly. "Those darn boys! Dumping trash in our creek just because they're mad at Mark. Tin cans—"

Lala was tugging at her hand, pulling her towards the creek.

"Wait a bit, Lala," laughed Meris. "You'll fall us both into the water."

Then she gasped and clutched Lala's hand more firmly. Lala was standing on the water, the speed of the current ruffling it whitely against the sides of her tiny shoes. She was trying to tug Meris after her, across the water towards the metallic gleam by the other bank of the creek.

"No, baby," said Meris firmly, pulling Lala back to the bank. "We'll use the bridge." So they did and Lala, impatient of delay, tried to free her hand so she could run along the creek bed, but Meris clung firmly. "Not without me!" she said.

When they arrived at the place where the metallic whatever lay under the water, Meris put Lala down firmly on a big grey granite boulder, back from the creek. "*Stay* there." Then she turned to the creek. Starting to wade, sneakers and all into the stream, she looked back at Lala. The child was standing on the boulder visibly wanting to come. Meris shook her head. "*Stay* there," she repeated.

Lala's face puckered but she sat down again. "*Stay* there," she repeated unhappily.

Meris tugged and pulled at the metal, the icy bite of the creek water numbing her feet. "Must be an old hot water tank," she grunted as she worked to drag it ashore. "When could they have dumped it here? We've been home—"

The current caught the thing as it let go of the mud at

the bottom of the creek. It rolled and almost tore loose from Meris' hands, but she clung, feeling a fingernail break, and, putting her back to the task, towed the thing out of the current into the shallows. She turned its gleaming length over to drain the water out through the rip down its side.

"Water tank?" she puzzled. "Not like any I ever—"

"Stay there?" cried Lala excitedly. "Stay there?" She was jumping up and down on the boulder.

Meris laughed. "Come here," she said, holding out her muddy hands. "Come here!" Lala came. Meris nearly dropped her as she staggered under the weight of the child. Lala hadn't bothered to slide down the boulder and run to her. She had launched herself like a little rocket, airborne the whole distance.

She wiggled out of Meris' astonished arms and, rummaging, head hidden in the metal capsule, came out with a triumphant cry, "Deeko! Deeko!" And she showed Meris her sodden treasure. It was a doll, a wet, muddy, battered doll, but a doll nevertheless, dressed in miniature duplication of Lala's outer garment they had left in the cabin.

Lala plucked at the wet folds of the doll's clothes and made unhappy noises as she wiped the mud from the tiny face. She held the doll up to Meris, her voice asking and coaxing. So Meris squatted down by the child and together they undressed Deeko and washed her and her tiny clothes in the creek then spread the clothes on the boulder in the sun. Lala gave Deeko a couple of soggy hugs, then put her on the rock also.

Just before supper, Mark came out to the creek-side to see the metallic object. He was still shaking his head in wonderment over the things Meris had told him of Lala. He would have discounted them about ninety per cent except that Lala did them all over again for him. When he saw the ripped cylinder, he stopped shaking his head and just stared for a moment. Then he was turning it, and exploring in it, head hidden, hefting the weight of it, flexing a piece of its ripped metal. Then he lounged against the grey boulder and lipped thoughtfully at a dry cluster of pine needles.

"Let's live dangerously," he said, "and assert that this is the How that Lala arrived in our vicinity last night. Let

us further assert that it has no earthly origin. Therefore, let us, madly but positively, assert that this is a space capsule of some sort and Lala is an extraterrestrial."

"You mean," gasped Meris, "that Lala is a little green man! And that this is a flying saucer?"

"Well, yes," said Mark. "Inexact, but it conveys the general idea."

"But Mark! She's just a baby. She couldn't possibly have traveled all that distance alone—"

"I'd say that she couldn't have travelled all that distance in this vehicle, either," said Mark. "Point one, I don't see anything resembling a motor or fuel container or even a steering device. Point two, there are no provisions of any kind—water or food—or even any evidence of an air supply."

"Then?" said Meris, deftly fielding Lala from the edge of the creek.

"I'd say—only as a guess—that this is a sort of life boat in case of a wreck. I'd say something happened in the storm last night and here's Lala, Castaway."

"Where did you come from, baby dear?" chanted Meris to the wiggly Lala. "The heavens opened and you were here?"

"They'll be looking for her," said Mark, "whoever her people are. Which means they'll be looking for us." He looked at Meris and smiled. "How does it feel, Mrs. Edwards, to be looked for by denizens of Outer Space?"

"Should we try to find them?" asked Meris. "Should we call the sheriff?"

"I don't think so," said Mark. "Let's wait a day or so. They'll find her. I'm sure of it. Anyone who lost a Lala would comb the whole state, inch by inch, until they found her."

He caught up Lala and tossed her, squealing, into the air. For the next ten minutes Mark and Meris were led a merry chase trying to get Lala down out of the trees! Out of the sky! She finally fluttered down into Meris' arms and patted her cheek with a puzzled remark of some kind.

"I suppose," said Mark, taking a relieved breath, "that she's wondering how-come we didn't chase her up there. Well, small one, you're our duckling. Don't laugh at our unwebbed feet."

That evening Meris sat rocking a drowsy-eyed Lala to sleep. She reached to tuck the blanket closer about the small bare feet, but instead cradled one foot in her hand. "You know what, Mark," she said softly. "It's just dawned on me what you were saying about Lala. You were saying that this foot might have walked on another world! It just doesn't seem possible!"

"Well, try this thought, then." Mark pushed back from his desk, stretching widely and yawning. "If that world was very far away or their speed not too fast, that foot may never have touched a world anywhere. She may have been born en route."

"Oh, I don't think so," said Meris. "She knows too much about—about—*things* for that to be so. She knew to look *in* water for that—that vehicle of hers and she knew to wash her doll in running water and to spread clothes in the sun to dry. If she'd lived her life in space—"

"Hmm!" Mark tapped his mouth with his pencil. "You could be right, but there might be other explanations for her knowledge. But then, maybe the real explanation of Lala is a very pedestrian one."

Meris was awake again in the dark. She stretched comfortably and smiled. How wonderful to be able to awaken in the dark and smile—instead of slipping inevitably into the aching endless grief and despair. How pleasant to be able to listen to Mark's deep breathing and Lala's little murmur as she turned on the camp cot beside the bed. How warm and relaxing the flicker of firelight from the cast-iron stove patterning ceiling and walls dimly. She yawned and stopped in midstretch. What was that? Was that what had wakened her?

There was a guarded thump on the porch, a fumbling at the door, an audible breath and then, "Mr. Edwards! Are you there?" The voice was a forced whisper.

Meris' hand closed on Mark's shoulder. He shrugged away in his sleep, but as her fingers tightened, he came wide awake, listening.

"Mr. Edwards!"

"Someone for Lala!" Meris gasped and reached towards the sleeping child.

"No," said Mark. "It's Tad Winstal." He lifted his voice.

"Just a minute, Tad!" There was a muffled cry at the door and then silence. Mark padded barefoot to the door, blinking as he snapped the lights on, and, unlatching the door, swung it open. "Come on in, fellow, and close the door. It's cold." He shivered back for his jacket and sneakers.

Tad slipped in and stood awkwardly thin and lanky by the door, hugging his arms to himself convulsively. Mark opened the stove and added a solid chunk of oak.

"What brings you here at this hour?" he asked calmly.

Tad shivered. "It isn't you, then," he said, "but it's bad trouble. You told me that gang was no good to mess around with. Now I know it. Can they hang me for just being there?" His voice was very young and shaken.

"Come over here and get warm," said Mark. "For being where?"

"In the car when it killed the guy."

"Killed!" Mark fumbled the black lid lifter. "What happened?"

"We were out in the Porsche of Rick's, just tearing around seeing how fast it could take that winding road on the other side of Sheep's Bluff." Tad gulped. "They called me chicken because I got scared. And I am! I saw Mr. Stegemeir after his pickup went off the road by the fish hatchery last year and I—I can't help remembering it. Well, anyway—" his voice broke off and he gulped. "Well, they made such good time that they got to feeling pretty wild and decided to come over on this road and—" His eyes dropped away from Mark's and his feet moved apologetically. "They wanted to find some way to get back at you again."

Then his words tumbled out in a wild spurt of terror. "All at once there was this man. Out of nowhere! Right in the road! And we hit him! And knocked him clear off the road. And they weren't even going to stop, but I grabbed the key and made them! I made them back up and I got out to look for the man. I found him. All bloody. Lying in the bushes. While I was trying to find out where he was bleeding—they—they went off and left me there with him!" His voice was outraged. "They didn't give a darn about that poor guy! They went off and left him lying there and me with not even a flashlight!"

Mark had been dressing rapidly. "He may not be dead," he said, reaching for his cap. "How far is he?"

"The other side of the creek bridge," said Tad. "We came the Rim way. Do you think he might—"

"We'll see," said Mark. "Meris, give me one of those army blankets and get Lala off the cot. We'll use that for a stretcher. Build the fire up and check the first aid kit." He got the Coleman lantern from the store room, then he and Tad gathered up the canvas cot and went out into the chilly darkness.

Lala fretted a little, then, curled in the warmth Mark had left, she slept again through all the bustling about as Meris prepared for Mark's return.

Meris ran to the door when she heard their feet in the yard. She flung the outer door wide and held the screen as they edged the laden cot through the door. "Is he—?"

"Don't think so." Mark grunted as they lowered the cot to the floor. "Still bleeding from the cut on his head and I don't think dead men bleed. Not this long, anyway. Get a gauze pad, Meris, and put pressure on the cut. Tad, get his boots off while I get his shirt—"

Meris glanced up from her bandage as Mark's voice broke off abruptly. He was staring at the shirt. His eyes caught Meris' and he ran a finger down the front of the shirt. No buttons. Meris' mouth opened, but Mark shook his head warningly. Then, taking hold of the muddied shirt, he gently turned both sides back away from the chest that was visibly laboring now.

Meris' hands followed the roll of the man's head, keeping the bandage in place, but her eyes were on the bed where Lala had turned away from the light and was burrowed nearly out of sight under the edge of Mark's pillow.

Tad spoke from where he was struggling with the man's boots. "I thought it was you, Mr. Edwards," he said. "I nearly passed out when you answered the door. Who else could it have been? No one else lives way out here and I couldn't see his face. I knew he was bleeding because my hands—" He broke off as one boot thumped to the floor. "And we knocked him so far! So high! And I thought it was you!" He shuddered and huddled over the other boot. "I'm cured, honest, Mr. Edwards. I'm cured. Only don't let him die! Don't let him die!" He was crying now, unashamed.

"I'm no doctor," said Mark, "but I don't think he's badly

hurt. Lots of scratches, but that cut on his head seems to be the worst."

"The bleeding's nearly stopped," said Meris. "And his eyes are fluttering."

Even as she spoke, the eyes opened, dark and dazed, the head turning restlessly. Mark leaned over the man. "Hello," he said, trying to get the eyes to focus on him. "You're okay. You're okay. Only a cut—"

The man's head stilled. He blinked and spoke, his eyes closing before his words were finished.

"What did he say?" asked Tad. "What did he say?"

"I don't know," said Mark. "And he's gone again. To sleep, this time, I hope. I'm quite sure he isn't dying."

Later when Mark was satisfied that the man was sleeping in the warm pajamas he and Tad had managed to wrestle him into, he got dressed in clean clothes and had Tad wash up, and put on a clean flannel shirt in place of his blood-stained one.

"We're going to the sheriff, after we find the doctor," he told Tad. "We're going to have to take care of those kids before they do kill someone or themselves. And you, Tad, are going to have to put the finger on them whether you like it or not. You're the only witness—"

"But if I do, then I'll get in trouble, too—" began Tad.

"Look, Tad," said Mark patiently, "if you walk in mud, you get your feet muddy. You knew when you got involved with these fellows that you were wading in mud. Maybe you thought it didn't matter much. Mud is easy to wash off. That might be true of mud, but what about blood?"

"But Rick's not a juvenile anymore—" Tad broke off before the grim tightening of Mark's face.

"So that's what they've been trading on. So he's legally accountable now? Nasty break!"

After they were gone, Meris checked the sleeping man again. Then, crawling into bed, shoving Lala gently towards the back of the bunk, she cuddled, shivering under the bedclothes. She became conscious of the steady outflow of warmth from Lala and smiled as she fanned her cold hands out under cover towards the small body. "Bless the little heater!" she said. Her eyes were sleepy and closed in spite of her, but her mind still raced with excitement and wonder. What if Mark was right? What if Lala had come from a

space ship! What if this man, sleeping under their own blankets on their own cot, patched by their own gauze and adhesive, was really a Man from Outer Space! Wouldn't that be something? "But," she sighed "no bug-eyed monsters? No set, staring eyes and slavering teeth?" She smiled at herself. She had been pretty bug-eyed herself, when she had seen his un-unbuttonable shirt. People are pretty much people, anywhere.

Dr. Hilf arrived, large, loud and lively, before Meris got back to sleep—in fact, while she was in the middle of her *Bless Mark, bless Tad, bless Lala, bless the bandaged man, bless*— He examined the silently cooperative man thoroughly, rebandaged his head and a few of the deeper scratches, grabbed a cup of coffee and boomed, "Doesn't look to me as if he's been hit by a car! Aspirin if his head aches. No use wasting stitches when they aren't needed!" His voice woke Lala and she sat up, blinking silently at him. "He's not much worried himself! Asleep already! That's an art!" The doctor gave Meris a practiced glance. "Looking half alive again yourself, young lady. Good idea having a child around. Your niece?" He didn't wait for an answer. "Good to help hold the place until you get another of your own!" Meris winced away from the idea. The doctor's eyes softened, but not his voice. "There'll be others," he boomed. "We need offspring from good stock like yours and Mark's. Leaven for a lot of the makeweights popping up all over." He gathered up his things and flung the door open. "Mark says the fellow's a foreigner. No English. Understood though. Let me know his name when you get it. Just curious. Mark'll be along pretty quick. Waiting for the Sheriff to get the juvenile officers from county seat." The house door slammed. A car door slammed. A car roared away. Meris automatically smoothed her hair, as she always did after a conversation with Dr. Hilf.

She turned wearily back toward the bunk. And gasping, stumbled forward. Lala was hovering in the air over the strange man like a flanneled angel over a tombstone crusader. She was peering down, her bare feet flipping up as she lowered her head toward him. Meris clenched her hands and made herself keep back out of the way.

"Muhlala!" whispered Lala, softly. Then louder, "Muhlala!"

Then she wailed, "Muhlala!" and thumped herself down on the quiet sleeping chest.

"Well," said Meris aloud to herself as she collapsed on the edge of the bunk. "There seems to be no doubt about it!" She watched—a little enviously—the rapturous reunion, and listened—more than a little curious—to the flood of strange sounding double conversation going on without perceptible pauses. Smiling, she brought tissues for the man to mop his face after Lala's multitude of very moist kisses. The man was sitting up now holding Lala closely to him. He smiled at Meris and then down at Lala. Lala looked at Meris and then patted the man's chest.

"Muhlala," she said happily, "Muhlala!" and burrowed her head against him.

Meris laughed. "No wonder you thought it funny when I called you Muhlala," she said. "I wonder what Lala means."

"It means 'daddy'," said the man. "She is quite excited about being called daddy."

Meris swallowed her surprise. "Then you do have English," she said.

"A little," said the man. "As you give it to me. Oh, I am Johannan." He sagged then, and said something unEnglish to Lala. She protested, but even protesting, lifted herself out of his arms and back to the bunk, after planting a last smacking kiss on his right ear. The man wiped the kiss away and held his drooping head between his hands.

"I don't wonder," said Meris, going to the medicine shelf. "Aspirin for your headache." She shook two tablets into his hand and gave him a glass of water. He looked bewilderedly from one hand to the other.

"Oh dear," said Meris. "Oh well, I can use one myself," and she took an aspirin and a glass of water and showed him how to dispose of them. The man smiled and gulped the tablets down. He let Meris take the glass, slid flat on the cot and was breathing asleep before Meris could put the glass in the sink.

"Well!" she said to Lala and stood her, curly-toed, on the cold floor and straightened the bedclothes. "Imagine a grown-up not knowing what to do with an aspirin! And now," she plumped Lala into the freshly made bed. "Now, my Daddy-girl, shall we try that instant sleep bit?"

The next afternoon, Meris and Lala lounged in the thin

warm sunshine near the creek with Johannan. In the piney, waterloud clearing, empty of unnecessary conversation, Johannan drowsed and Lala alternately band-aided her doll and unband-aided it until all the stickum was off the tape. Meris watched her with the sharp awareness that comes so often before an unwished-for parting from one you love. Then, with an almost audible click, afternoon became evening and the shadows were suddenly long. Mark came out of the cabin, stretching his desk-kinked self widely, then walking his own long shadow down to the creek bank.

"Almost through," he said to Meris as he folded himself to the ground beside her. "By the end of the week barring fire or flood, I'll be able to send it off."

"I'm so glad," said Meris, her happiness welling strongly up inside her. "I was afraid my foolishness—"

"The foolishness is all past now," said Mark. "It is remembered against us no more."

Johannan had sat up at Mark's approach. He smiled now and said carefully, "I'm glad my child and I haven't interrupted your work too much. It would be a shame if our coming messed up things for you."

"You have a surprising command of the vernacular if English is not your native tongue," said Mark, his interest in Johannan suddenly sharpening.

"We have a knack for languages," smiled Johannan.

"How on earth did you come to lose Lala?" Meris asked, amazed at herself for asking such a direct question.

Johannan's face sobered. "That was quite a deal—losing a child in a thunderstorm over a quarter of a continent." He touched Lala's cheek softly with his finger as she patiently tried to make the wornout tape stick again on Deeka. "It was partly her fault," said Johannan, smiling ruefully. "If she weren't so precocious—. You see, we do not come into the atmosphere with the large ship—too many complications about explanations and misinterpretations and a very real danger from trigger-happy—or unhappy—military, so we use our life-slips for landings."

"We?" murmured Meris.

"Our People," said Johannan simply. "Of course there's no Grand Central Station of the Sky. We are very sparing of our comings and goings. Lala and I were returning be-

cause Lala's mother has been Called and it is best to bring Lala to Earth to her grandparents."

"Her mother was called?" asked Mark.

"Back to the Presence," said Johannan. "Our years together were very brief." His face closed smoothly over his sorrow. "We move our life-slips," he went on after a brief pause, "without engines. It is an adult ability, to bring the life-slips through the atmosphere to land at the Canyon. But Lala is precocious in many Gifts and Persuasions and she managed to jerk her life-slip out of my control on the way down. I followed her into the storm—" he gestured and smiled. He had finished.

"But where were you headed?" asked Mark. "Where on Earth—?"

"On Earth," Johannan smiled. "There is a Group of The People. More than one Group, they say. They have been here, we know, since the end of the last century. My wife was on Earth. She returned to the New Home on the ship we sent to Earth for the refugees. She and I met on the New Home. I am not familiar with Earth—that's why, though I was oriented to locate the Canyon from the air, I am fairly thoroughly lost to it from the ground."

"Mark," Meris leaned over and tapped Mark's knee. "He thinks he has explained everything."

Mark laughed. "Maybe he has. Maybe we just need a few years for absorption and amplification. Questions, Mrs. Edwards?"

"Yes," said Meris, her hand softly on Lala's shoulder. "When are you leaving, Johannan?"

"I must first find the Group," said Johannan, "so, if Lala could stay—" Meris' hands betrayed her. "For a *little* while longer," he emphasized, "it would help."

"Of course," said Meris, "not ours to keep."

"The boys," said Johannan suddenly. "Those in the car. There was a most unhealthy atmosphere. It was an accident, of course. I tried to lift out of the way. . . . But there was little concern—"

"There will be," said Mark grimly. "Their hearing is Friday."

"There was one," said Johannan slowly, "who felt pain and compassion—"

"Tad," said Meris. "He doesn't really belong—"

"But he associated—"

"Yes," said Mark. "Consent by silence—"

The narrow, pine-lined road swept behind the car, the sunlight flicking across the hood like pale, liquid pickets. Lala bounced on Meris' lap, making excited, unintelligible remarks about the method of transportation and the scenery going by the windows. Johannan sat in the back seat being silently absorbed in his new world. The trip to town was a three-fold expedition—to attend the hearing for the boys involved in the accident—to start Johannan on his search for the Group—and to celebrate the completion of Mark's manuscript.

They had left it blockily beautiful on the desk, awaiting the triumphant moment when it would be wrapped and sent on its way and when Mark would suddenly have large quantities of uncommitted time on his hands for the first time in years.

"What is it?" Johannan had asked.

"His book," said Meris. "A reference textbook for one of those frightening new fields that are in the process of developing. I can't even remember it's name, let alone understand what it's about."

Mark laughed. "I've explained a dozen times. I don't think she wants to remember. The book's to be used by a number of universities for their textbook in the field *if*, if it can be ready for next year's classes. If it can't be available in time, another one will be used and all the concentration of years—" He was picking up Johannan's gesture.

"So complicated—" said Meris.

"Oh yes," said Johannan. "Earth's in the complication stage."

"Complication stage?" asked Meris.

"Yes," said Johannan. "See that tree out there? Simplicity says—a tree. Then wonder sets in and you begin to analyze it—cells, growth, structure, leaves, photosynthesis, roots, bark, rings—on and on until the tree is a mass of complications. Then, finally, with reservations not quite to be removed, you can put it back together again and sigh in simplicity once more—a tree. You're in the complication period in the world now."

"Is true!" laughed Mark. "Is true!"

"Just put the world back together again, someday," said Meris soberly.

"Amen," said the two men.

But now the book was at the cabin and they were in town for a day that was remarkable for its widely scattered, completely unorganized confusion. It started off with Lala, in spite of her father's warning words, leaving the car through the open window, headlong, without waiting for the door to be opened. A half-a-block of pedestrians—five to be exact—rushed to congregate in expectation of blood and death, to be angered in their relief by Lala's laughter that lit her eyes and bounced her dark curls. Johannan snatched her back into the car—forgetting to take hold of her in the process—and unEnglished at her severely, his brief gestures making clear what would happen to her if she disobeyed again.

The hearing for the boys crinkled Meris' shoulders unpleasantly. Rick appeared with the minors in the course of the questioning and glared at Mark the whole time, his eyes flicking hatefully back and forth across Mark's face. The gathered parents were an unhappy, uncomfortable bunch, each over-reacting according to his own personal pattern and the boys either echoing or contradicting the reactions of their own parents. Meris wished herself out of the unhappy mess.

Midway in the proceedings, the door was flung open and Johannan, who had left with a wiggly Lala as soon as his small part was over, gestured at Mark and Meris and unEnglished at them across the whole room. The two left, practically running, under the astonished eyes of the judge and, leaning against the securely closed outside door, looked at Johannan. After he understood their agitation and had apologized in the best way he could pluck from their thoughts, he said,

"I had a thought." He shifted Lala, squirming, to his other arm. "The—the doctor who came to look at my head—he—he —" He gulped and started again. "All the doctors have ties to each other, don't they?"

"Why I guess so," said Meris, rescuing Lala and untangling her brief skirts from under her armpits. "There's a medical society—"

"That is too big," said Johannan after a hesitation. "I

mean, Dr.—Dr.—Hilf would know other doctors in this part of the country?" His voice was a question.

"Sure he would," said Mark. "He's been around here since Territorial days. He knows everyone and his dog—including a lot of the summer people."

"Well," said Johannan, "there is a doctor who knows my People. At least there was. Surely he must still be alive. He knows the Canyon. He could tell me."

"Was he from around here?" asked Mark.

"I'm not sure where here is," Johannan reminded, "but a hundred miles or so one way or the other."

"A hundred miles isn't much out here," confirmed Meris. "Lots of times you have to drive that far to get anywhere."

"What was the doctor's name?" asked Mark, snatching for Lala as she shot up out of Meris' arms in pursuit of a helicopter that clacked overhead. He grasped one ankle and pulled her down. Grim-faced, Johannan took Lala from him.

"Excuse me," he said, and, facing Lala squarely to him on one arm, he held her face still and looked at her firmly. In the brief silence that followed, Lala's mischievous smile faded and her face crumpled into sadness and then to tears. She flung herself upon her father, clasping him around his neck and wailing heart-brokenly, her face pushed hard against his shoulder. He unEnglished at her tenderly for a moment then said, "You see why it is necessary for Lala to come to her grandparents. They are Old Ones and know how to handle such precocity. For her own protection she should be among the People."

"Well, cherub," said Mark, retrieving her from Johannan. "Let's go salve your wounded feelings with an ice cream cone."

They sat at one of the tables in the back of one of the general stores and laughed at Lala's reaction to ice cream, then, with her securely involved with a glass full of crushed ice, they returned to the topic under discussion.

"The only way they ever referred to the doctor was just Doctor—"

He was interrupted by the front door slapping open. Shelves rattled. A can of corn dropped from a pyramid and rolled across the floor. "Darn fool summer people!" trumpeted Dr. Hilf. "Sit around all year long at sea-level get-

ting exercise with a knife and fork then come roaring up here and try to climb Devil's Slide eleven thousand feet up in one morning!"

Then he saw the group at the table. "Well! How'd the hearing go?" he roared, making his way rapidly and massively toward them as he spoke. The three exchanged looks of surprise, then Mark said, "We weren't in at the verdict." He started to get up. "I'll phone—"

"Never mind," boomed Dr. Hilf. "Here comes Tad." They made room at the table for Tad and Dr. Hilf.

"We're on probation," confessed Tad. "I felt about an inch high when the judge got through with us. I've had it with that outfit!" He brooded briefly. "Back to my bike, I guess, until I can afford my own car. Cheel" He gazed miserably at the interminable years ahead of him. Maybe even five!

"What about Rick?" asked Mark.

"Lost his license," said Tad uncomfortably. "For six months, anyway. Gee, Mr. Edwards, he's sure mad at you now. I guess he's decided to blame you for everything."

"He should have learned long ago to blame himself for his own misdoings," said Meris. "Rick was a spoiled-rotten kid long before he ever came up here."

"Mark's probably the first one ever to make him realize that he was a brat," said Dr. Hilf. "That's plenty to build a hate on."

"Walking again!" muttered Tad. "So okay! So t'heck with wheels!"

"Well, since you've renounced the world, the flesh and Porsches," smiled Mark, "maybe you could beguile the moments with learning about vintage cars. There's plenty of them still functioning around here."

"Vintage cars?" said Tad. "Never heard of them. Imports?"

Mark laughed, "Wait. I'll get you a magazine." He made a selection from the magazine rack in back of them and plopped it down in front of Tad. "There. Read up. There might be a glimmer of light to brighten your dreary midnight."

"Dr. Hilf," said Johannan, "I wonder if you could help me."

"English!" bellowed Dr. Hilf. "Thought you were a for-

eigner! You don't look as if you need help! Where's your head wound? No right to be healed already!"

"It's not medical," said Johannan. "I'm trying to find a doctor friend of mine. Only I don't know his name or where he lives."

"Know what *state* he lives in?" Laughter rumbled from Dr. Hilf.

"No," confessed Johannan. "But I do know he is from this general area and I thought you might know of him. He has helped my People in the past."

"And your people are—" asked Dr. Hilf.

"Excuse me, folks," said Tad, unwinding his long legs and folding the magazine back on itself. "There's my Dad, ready to go. I'm grounded. Gotta tag along like a kid. Thanks for everything—and the magazines." And he dejectedly trudged away.

Dr. Hilf was waiting for Johannan, who was examining his own hands intently. "I know so little," said Johannan. "The doctor cared for a small boy with a depressed fracture of the skull. He operated in the wilderness with only the instruments he had with him." Dr. Hilf's eyes flicked to Johannan's face and then away again. "But that was a long way from where he found one of Ours who could make music and was going wrong because he didn't know who he was."

Dr. Hilf waited for Johannan to continue. When he didn't, the doctor pursed his lips and hummed massively.

"I can't help much," said Johannan, finally, "but are there so many doctors who live in the wilds of this area?"

"None," boomed Dr. Hilf. "I'm the farthest out—if I may use that loaded expression. Out in these parts, a sick person has three choices—die, get well on his own, or call me. Your doctor must have come from some town."

It was a disconsolate group that headed back up-canyon. Their mood even impressed itself on Lala and she lay silent and sleepy-eyed in Meris' arms, drowsing to the hum of the car.

Suddenly Johannan leaned forward and put his hand on Mark's shoulder. "Would you stop, please?" he asked. Mark pulled off the road onto the nearest available flat place, threading expertly between scrub oak and small pines. "Let me take Lala." And Lala lifted over the back of the seat

without benefit of hands upon her. Johannan sat her up on his lap. "Our People have a highly developed racial memory," he said. "For instance, I have access to the knowledge any of our People have known since the Bright Beginning, and, in lesser measure, to the events that have happened to any of them. Of course, unless you have studied the technique of recall, it is difficult to take knowledge from the past, but it's there, available. I am going to see if I can get Lala to recall for me. Maybe her precocity will include recollection also." He looked down at his nestling child and smiled. "It won't be spectacular," he said. "No eyeballs will light up. I'm afraid it'll be tedious to you, especially since it will be sub-vocal. Lala's spoken vocabularly lags behind her other Gifts. You can drive on, if you like." And he leaned back with Lala in his arms. The two to all appearances were asleep.

Meris looked at Mark and Mark looked at Meris, and Meris felt an irrepressible bubble of laughter start up her throat. She spoke hastily to circumvent it.

"Your manuscript," she said.

"I got a box for it," said Mark, easing out onto the road again. "Chip found one for me when you took Lala to the restroom. Couldn't have done better if I'd had it made to measure. What a weight—" he yawned in sudden release. "What a weight off my mind. I'll be glad when it's off my hands, too. Thank God! Thank God it's finished!"

The car was topping the Rim when Johannan stirred, and a faint twitter of release came from Lala. Meris turned sideways to look at them inquiringly.

"May I get out?" asked Johannan. "Lala has recalled enough that I think my search won't be too long."

"I'll drive you back," said Mark, pulling up by the road.

"Thanks, but it won't be necessary." Johannan opened the door and, after a tight embrace for Lala and an unEnglish word or two, stepped out. "I have ways of going. If you will care for Lala until I return."

"Of course!" said Meris, reaching for the child, who flowed over the back of the seat into her arms in one complete motion. "God bless, and return soon."

"Thank you," said Johannan and walked into the roadside bushes. They saw a ripple in the branches, the turn of a shoulder, the flick of a foot, one sharp startling glimpse

of Johannan rising against the blue and white of the afternoon sky and then he was hidden in the top branches of the trees.

"Shoosh!" Meris slumped under Lala's weight. "Mark, is this a case of *folie a deux*, or is it really happening?"

"Well," said Mark, starting the car again. "I doubt if we two could achieve the same hallucination simultaneously, so let's assume it's really happening."

When they finally reached the cabin and stopped the motor, they sat for a moment in the restful, active silence of the hills. Meris, feeling the soft warmth of Lala against her and the precious return of things outside herself, shivered a little remembering her dead self who had stared so blankly so many hours out of the small windows, tearlessly crying, soundlessly wailing, wrapped in misery. She laughed and hugged Lala. "Maybe we should get a leash for this small person," she said to Mark. "I don't think I could follow in Johannan's footsteps."

"Supper first," said Mark as he fumbled with the padlock on the cabin door. He glanced, startled, back over his shoulder at Meris. "It's broken," he said. "Wrenched open—" He flung the door open hastily, and froze on the doorstep. Meris pushed forward to look beyond him.

Snow had fallen in the room—snow covered evyerthing—a smudged, crumpled snow of paper, flour, sugar and detergent. Every inch of the cabin was covered by the tattered, soaked, torn, crumpled snow of Mark's manuscript! Mark stooped slowly, like an old man, and took up one page. Mingled detergent and maple syrup clung, clotted, and slithered off the edge of one of the diagrams that had taken two days to complete. He let the page fall and shuffled forward, ankle deep in the obscene, incredible chaos. Meris hardly recognized the face he turned to her.

"I've lost our child again," he said tightly. "This—" he gestured at the mess about them, "this was my weeping and my substitute for despair. My creation to answer death." He backhanded a clutter of papers off the bunk and slumped down until he lay, face to the wall, motionless.

Mark said not a word nor turned around in the hours that followed. Meris thought perhaps he slept at times, but she said nothing to him as she cautiously scrabbled through the mess in the cabin. She found, miraculously undamaged,

a chapter and a half of pages under the cupboard. With careful hands she salvaged another sheaf of papers from where they had sprayed across the top of the cupboard. All the time she searched and sorted through the mess in the cabin. All the time she searched, Lala sat, unnaturally well-behaved and solemn and watched her, getting down only once to salvage Deeko from a mound of sugar and detergent, clucking unhappily as she dusted the doll off.

It was late and cold when Meris put the last ruined sheet in the big cardboard box they had carried groceries home in, and the last salvageable sheet on the desk. She looked silently at the clutter in the box and the slender sheaf on the desk, shivered and turned to build up the dying fire in the stove. Her mouth tightened and the sullen flicker of charring, wadded paper in the stove painted age and pain upon her face. She stirred the embers with the lid lifter and rebuilt the fire. She prepared supper, fed Lala and put her to bed. Then she sat on the edge of the lower bunk by Mark's rigid back and touched him gently.

"Supper's ready," she said. "Then I'll need some help in scrubbing up—the floor, the walls, the furniture." She choked on a sound that was half laughter and half sob. "There's plenty of detergent around already. We may bubble ourselves out of house and home."

For a sick moment she was afraid he wouldn't respond. *Just like I was,* she thought achingly. *Just like I was!* Then he sat up slowly, brushed his arm back across his expressionless face and his rumpled hair, and stood up.

When they finally threw out the last bucket of scrub water and hung out the last scrub rag, Meris rubbed her water-wrinkled hands down her weary sides and said, "Tomorrow we'll start on the manuscript again."

"No," said Mark. "That's all finished. The boys got carbon-copy and all. It would take weeks for me to do a rewrite if I could ever do it. We don't have weeks. My leave of absence is over, and the deadline for the manuscript is this next week. We'll just have to chalk this up as lost. Let the dead past bury the dead."

He went to bed, his face turned again from the light. Meris, through the blur of her slow tears, gathered up the crumpled pages that had pulled out with the blankets

from the back of the bunk, smoothed them onto the salvage pile and went to bed, too.

For the next couple of days Mark was like an old man. He sat against the cabin wall in the sun, his arms resting on his thighs, his hands dangling from limp wrists, looking at the nothing that the senile and finished find on the ground. He moved slowly and reluctantly to the table to push his food around, to bed to lie, hardly breathing, but wide-eyed in the dark, to whatever task Meris set him, forgetting in the middle of it what he was doing.

Lala followed him at first, chattering unEnglish at her usual great rate, leaning against him when he sat, peering into his indifferent face. Then she stopped talking to him and followed him only with her eyes. The third day she came crying into Meris' arms and wept heart-brokenly against her shoulder.

Then her tears stopped, glistened on her cheeks a moment and were gone. She squirmed out of Meris' embrace and trotted to the window. She pushed a chair up close to the wall, climbed up on it, pressed her forehead to the chilly glass and stared out into the late afternoon.

Tad came over on his bike, bubbling over with the new idea of old cars.

"Why, there's parts of a whole bunch of these cars all over around here—" he cried, fluttering the tattered magazine at Mark. "And have you seen how much they're asking for some of them! Why I could put myself through college on used parts out of our old dumps! And some of these vintage jobs are still running around here! Kiltie has a model A—you've seen it! He shines it like a new shoe every week! And there's an old Overland touring car out in back of our barn, just sitting there, falling apart—"

Mark's silence got through to him then, and he asked, troubled, "What's wrong? Are you mad at me for something?"

Meris spoke into Mark's silence. "No, Tad, its nothing you've done—" She took him outside, ostensibly to help bring in wood to fill the woodbox and filled him in on the events. When they returned, loaded down with firewood, he dumped his armload into the box and looked at Mark.

"Gee whiz, Mr. Edwards. Uh;—uh—gee whiz!" He gathered up his magazine and his hat and, shuffling his feet for a

moment said, "Well, 'bye now," and left, grimacing back at Meris, wordless.

Lala was still staring out the window. She hadn't moved or made a sound while Tad was there. Meris was frightened.

"Mark!" She shook his arm gently. "Look at Lala. She's been like that for almost an hour. She pays no attention to me at all. Mark!"

Mark's attention came slowly back to the cabin and to Meris.

"Thank goodness!" she cried. "I was beginning to feel that I was the one that was missing!"

At that moment, Lala plopped down from the chair and trotted off to the bathroom, a round red spot marking her forehead where she had leaned so long.

"Well!" Meris was pleased. "It must be supper time. Everyone's gathering around again." And she began the bustle of supper-getting. Lala trotted around with her, getting in the way, hindering with her help.

"No, Lala!" said Meris, "I told you once already. Only three plates. Here, put the other one over there." Lala took the plate, waited patiently until Meris turned to the stove, then, lifting both feet from the floor, put the plate back on the table. The soft click of the flatware as she patterned it around the plate, caught Meris' attention. "Oh, Lala!" she cried, half-laughing, half-exasperated. "Well, all right. If you can't count, okay. Four it will be." She started convulsively and dropped a fork as a knock at the door roused even Mark. "Hungry guest coming," she laughed nervously as she picked up the fork. "Well, stew stretches."

She started for the door, fear, bred of senseless violence, crisping along her spine, but Lala was ahead of her, fluttering like a bird, with excited bird-cries, against the door panels, her hands fumbling at the knob and the night chain Meris had insisted on installing. Meris unfastened and unlocked and opened the door.

It was Johannan, anxious-eyed and worried, that slipped in and gathered up a shrieking Lala. When he had finally unEnglished her to a quiet, contented clinging, he turned to Meris. "Lala called me back," he said. "I've found my Group. She told me Mark was sick—that bad things had happened."

"Yes," said Meris, stirring the stew and moving it to the

back of the stove. "The boys came while we were gone and ruined Mark's manuscript beyond salvage. And Mark—Mark is crushed. He lost all those months of labor through senseless, vindictive—" she turned away from Johannan's questioning face and stirred the stew again, blindly.

"But," protested Johannan. "If once it was written, he has it still. He can do it again."

"Time is the factor." Mark's voice, rusty and harsh, broke in on Johannan. "And to re-write from my notes— He shook his head and sagged again.

"But—but!" cried Johannan, still puzzled, putting Lala to one side where she hovered, sitting on air, crooning to Deeko, until she drifted slowly down to the floor. "It's all there!. It's been written! It's a whole thing! All you have to do is put it again on paper. Your wordscriber—"

"I don't have total recall," said Mark. "Even if I did, just to put it on paper again—come see our 'wordscriber'." He smiled a small bent smile as Johannan poked fingers into the mechanism of the typewriter and clucked unhappily, sounding so like Lala that Meris almost laughed. "Such slowness! Such complications!"

Johannan looked at Mark. "If you want, my People can help you get your manuscript back again."

"It's finished," said Mark. "Why agonize over it any more?" He turned to the dark window.

"Was it worth the effort of writing?" asked Johannan.

"I thought so," said Mark. "And others did, too."

"Would it have served a useful purpose?" asked Johannan.

"Of course it would have!" Mark swung angrily from the window. "It covered an area that needs to be covered. It was new—the first book in the field!" He turned again to the window.

"Then," said Johannan simply, "we will make it again. Have you paper enough?"

Mark swung back, his eyes glittering. Meris stepped between his glare and Johannan. "This summer I have come back from the dead," she reminded. "And you caught a baby for me, pulling her down from the sky by one ankle. Johannan went looking for his people through the tree-tops. And a three-year-old called him back by leaning against the window. If all these things could happen, why can't Johannan bring your manuscript back?"

"But if he tries and can't—" Mark began.

"*Then* we can let the dead past bury the dead," said Meris sharply. "Which little item you have not been letting happen so far!"

Mark stared at her then flushed a deep, painful flush. "Okay, then," he said. "Stir the bones again! Let him put meat back on them if he can!"

The next four hours were busy with patterned confusion. Mark roared off through the gathering darkness to persuade Chip to open the store for typing paper. And people arrived. Just arrived, smiling at the door, familiar friends before they spoke, and Meris, glancing out to see if the heavens themselves had split open from astonishment saw, hovering tree-top-high, a truly vintage car, an old pickup that clanked softly to itself, spinning a wheel against a branch as it waited. "If Tad could see that!" she thought, with a bubble of laughter nudging her throat.

She hurried back indoors to further make welcome the newcomers—Valancy, Karen, Davy, Jemmy. The women gathered Lala in with soft cries and shining eyes and she wept briefly upon them in response to their emotions, then leaped upon the fellows and nearly strangled them with her hugs.

Johannan briefed the four in what had happened and what was needed. They discussed the situation, glanced at the few salvaged pages on the desk and sent, eyes closed briefly, for someone else. His name was Remy and he had a special "Gift" for plans and diagrams. He arrived just before Mark got back, so the whole group of them confronted him when he flung the door open and stood there with his bundle of paper.

He blinked, glanced at Meris, then, shifting his burden to one arm, held out a welcoming hand. "I hadn't expected an invasion," he smiled. "To tell the truth, I didn't know what to expect." He thumped the package down on the table and grinned at Meris. "Chip's sure now that writers are psychos," he said. "Any normal person could wait till morning for paper or use flattened grocery bags!" He shrugged out of his jacket. "Now."

Jemmy said, "It's really quite simple. Since you wrote your book and have read it through several times, the thing

exists as a whole in your memory, just as it was on paper. So all we have to do is put it on paper again." He gestured.

"That's *all?*" Mark's hands went back through his hair. "That's *all?* Man, that's all I had to do after my notes were organized, months ago! Maybe I should have settled for flattened grocery bags! Why, the sheer physical—" The light was draining out of his face.

"Wait—wait!" Jemmy's hand closed warmly over his sagging shoulder. "Let me finish.

"Davy, here, is our gadgeteer. He dreams up all kinds of knickknacks and among other things, he has come forth with a wordscriber. Even better—" he glanced at Johannan, "than the ones brought from the New Home. All you have to do is think and the scriber writes down your thoughts. Here—try it—" he said into Mark's very evident skepticism.

Davy put a piece of paper on the table in front of Mark and, on it, a small gadget that looked vaguely like a small sanding block in that it was curved across the top and flat on the bottom. "Go on," urged Davy, "think something. You don't even have to vocalize. I've keyed it to you. Karen sorted your setting for me."

Mark looked around at the interested, watching faces, at Meris' eyes, blurred with hesitant hope and then down at the scriber. The scriber stirred, then slid swiftly across the paper, snapping back to the beginning of a line again, as quick as thought. Davy picked up the paper and handed it to Mark. Meris crowded to peer over his shoulder.

Of all the darn-fool things! As if it were possible—Look at the son-of-a-gun go!

All neatly typed, neatly spaced, appropriately punctuated. Hope flamed up in Mark's eyes. "Maybe so," he said, turning to Jemmy. "What do I do, now?"

"Well," said Jemmy. "You have your whole book in your mind, but a mass of other things, too. It'd be almost impossible for you to think through your book without any digressions or side thoughts, so Karen will blanket your mind for you except for your book—"

"Hypnotism—" Mark's withdrawal was visible.

"No," said Karen. "Just screening out interference. Think how much time was taken up in your original draft by distractions—"

Meris clenched her hands and gulped, remembering all

the hours Mark had had to—to *baby-sit* her while she was still rocking her grief like a rag doll with all the stuffings pulled out. She felt an arm across her shoulders and turned to Valancy's comforting smile. "All over," said her eyes, kindly, "all past."

"How about all the diagrams—" suggested Mark, "I can't verbalise—"

"That's where Remy comes in," said Jemmy. "All you have to do is visualize each one. He'll have his own scriber right here and he'll take it from there."

The cot was pulled up near the table and Mark disposed himself comfortably on it. The paper was unwrapped and stacked all ready. Remy and Davy arranged themselves strategically. Surround by briefly bowed heads, Jemmy said, "We are met together in Thy name." Then Karen touched Mark gently on the forehead with one finger tip.

Mark suddenly lifted himself on one elbow. "Wait," he said, "things are going too fast. Why—why are you doing this for us, anyway. We're strangers. No concern of yours. Is it to pay us for taking care of Lala? In that case—"

Karen smiled. "Why *did* you take care of Lala? You could have turned her over to the authorities. A strange child, no relation, no concern of yours."

"That's a foolish question," said Mark. "She needed help. She was cold and wet and lost. Anyone—"

"You did it for the same reason we are doing this for you," said Karen. "Just because we originated on a different world, doesn't make us of different flesh. There are no strangers in God's universe. You found an unhappy situation that you could do something about, so you did it. Without stopping to figure out the whys and wherefores. You did it just because that's what love does."

Mark lay back on the narrow pillow. "Thank you," he said. Then he turned his face to Meris. "Okay?"

"Okay." Her voice jerked a little past her emotion. "*Love* you, Mark!"

"*Love* you, Meris!"

Karen's finger tip went to Mark's forehead again. "I need contact," she said a little apologetically, "especially with an Outsider."

Meris fell asleep, propped up on the bunk, eyes lulled

by the silent *sli-i-iide, flip! sli-i-i-ide, flip!* of the scriber, and the brisk flutter of finishing pages from the tall pile of paper to the short one. She opened drowsy eyes to a murmur of voices and saw that the two piles of paper were almost balanced. She sat up to ease her neck where it had been bent against the cabin wall.

"But it's wrong, I tell you!" Remy was waving the paper. "Look, this line, here, where it goes—"

"Remy," said Jemmy, "are you sure it's wrong or is it just another earlier version of what we know now?"

"No!" said Remy. "This time it's not that. This is a real mistake. He couldn't possibly have meant it to be like that—"

"Okay," Jemmy nodded to Karen and she touched Mark's forehead. He opened his eyes and half sat up. The scriber flipped across the paper and Karen stilled it with a touch. "What is it?" he asked. "Something go wrong?"

"No, it's this diagram." Remy brought it to him. "I think you have an error here. Look where this goes—"

The two bent over the paper. Meris looked around the cabin. Valancy was rocking a sleeping Lala in her arms. Davy was sound asleep in the upper bunk. At least his dangling leg looked very asleep. Johannan was absorbed in two books simultaneously. He seemed to be making a comparison of some sort. Meris lay back again, sliding down to a more comfortable position. For the first time in months and months the cabin was lapped from side to side with peace and relaxation. Even the animated discussion going on was no ruffling of the comfortable calmness. She heard, on the edge of her ebbing consciousness—

"Why no! That's not right at all!" Mark was astonished. "Hoo boy! If I'd sent that in with an error like that! Thanks, fella—" And sleep flowed over Meris.

She awoke later to the light chatter of Lala's voice and opened drowsy eyes to see her trailing back from the bathroom, her feet tucked up under her gown away from the chilly floor as she drifted back to Valancy's arms. The leg above Meris' head swung violently and withdrew, to be replaced by Davy's dangling head. He said something to Lala. She laughed and lifted herself up to his outstretched arms. There was a stirring around above Meris' head before sleeping silence returned.

Valancy stood and stretched.

She moved over to the table and thumbed the stack of paper.

"Going well," she said softly.

"Yes," said Jemmy, "I feel a little like a mid-wife, snatching something new-born in the middle of the night."

"Darn shame to stop here, though," said Remy. "With such a good beginning—oh, barring a few excursions down dead-ends—if we could only tack on a few more chapters."

"Uh-uh!" Jemmy stood and stretched, letting his arms fall around Valancy's shoulders. "You know better than that—"

"Not even one little hint?"

"Not even." Jemmy was firm.

Sleep flowed over Meris again until pushed back by Davy's sliding over the edge of the upper bunk.

"Right in the stomach!" he moaned as he dropped to the floor. "Such a kicking kid I never met. How'd *you* survive?" he asked Valancy.

"Nary a kick," she laughed. "Technique—that's what it takes."

"I was just wondering," said Davy, opening the stove and probing the coals before he put in another chunk of oak. "That kid Johannan was talking about—the one that's got interested in vintage cars. What about that place up in Bearcat Flat? You know, that little box canyon where we put all our old jalopies when we discarded them. Engines practically unused. Lifting's cheaper and faster. Of course the seats and the trunk beds are kinda beat up, and the paint. Trees scratch the daylights out of paint. How many are there there? Let's see. The first one was about 19-ought-something—"

Johannan looked up from his books. "He said something about selling parts or cars to get money for college—"

"Or restoring them!" Davy cried. "Hey, that could be fun! If he's the kind that would—"

"He is," said Johannan and went back to his reading.

"It's almost daylight." Davy went to the window and parted the curtains. "Wonder how early a riser he is?"

Meris turned her back to the light and slid back under sleep again.

Noise and bustle filled the cabin.

Coffee was perking fragrantly, eggs cracking, bacon spit-

ting itself to crispness. Remy was cheerfully mashing slices of bread down on the hot stove lid and prying up the resultant toast. Lala was flicking around the table, putting two forks at half the places and two knives at the others, then giggling her way back around with redistribution after Johannan pointed out her error.

Meris, reaching for a jar of peach marmalade on the top shelf of the cupboard, wondered how a day could feel so new and so wonderful. Mark sat at his desk opening and closing the box wherein lay the finished manuscript. He opened it again and fingered the top edge of the stack. He caught Jemmy's sympathetic grin and grinned back.

"Just making sure it's really there," he explained. "Magic put it in there. Magic might take it out again."

"Not this magic. I'll even ride shotgun for you into town and see that it gets sent off okay," said Jemmy.

"Magic or nor," said Mark, sobering. "Once more I can say, Thank God! Thank God it's done!"

Tad was an early riser. He was standing under the hovering pickup, gaping upwards in admiring astonishment.

"Oops!" said Davy, with a sidewise glance at Jemmy. Tad was swept up in a round of introductions during which the pickup lowered slowly to the ground.

Tad turned from the group back to the pickup. "Look at it!" he said. "It must be at least 40 years old!" His voice pushed its genesis back beyond the pyramids.

"At least that," said Davy. "Wanta see the motor?"

"Do I!" He stood by impatiently as Davy wrestled with the hood. Then he blinked. "Hey! How did it get way up there? I mean, how'd it get down—"

"Look," said Davy hastily. "See this goes to the spark—"

The others, laughing, piled into Mark's car and drove away from the two absorbed buffs-in-embryo.

The car pulled over onto a pine flat halfway back from town and the triumphantal mailing of the manuscript. This was the parting place. Davy would follow later with the pickup.

"It's over," said Meris, her shoulders sagging a little as she put Lala's small bundle of belongings into Valancy's hands.

"Only this little episode," comforted Valancy. "It's really only begun." She put Lala into Meris' arms. "Tell her goodbye, Lala."

"It's just that she filled up the empty places so wonderfully well," she explained to Valancy.

"Yes," said Valancy softly, her eyes tender and compassionate. "But, you know," she went on. "You *are* pregnant again!"

Before Meris could produce an intelligible thought, goodbyes were finished and the whole group was losing itself in the tangle of creekside vegetation. Lala's vigorous waving of Deeko was the last sign of them before the leaves closed behind them.

Meris and Mark stood there, Meris' head pressed to Mark's shoulder, both too drained for any emotion. Then Meris stirred and moved towards the car, her eyes suddenly shining. "I don't think I can wait," she said, "I don't think—"

"Wait for what?" asked Mark, following her.

"To tell Dr. Hilf—" She covered her mouth, dismayed. "Oh, Mark! We never did find out that Doctor's name!"

"Not that Hilf is drooling to know," said Mark, starting the car. "But next time—"

"Oh, yes." Meris sat back, her mouth curving happily. "Next time, next time!"

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